

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 5 March 2009

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

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

CHILDREN LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WOOD INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS) BILL 2009

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Linda Burney.

Agreement in Principle

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury—Minister for Community Services) [10.06 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

I am very proud to bring before the House the Children Legislation Amendment (Wood Inquiry Recommendations) Bill 2009. This legislation gives effect to recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in New South Wales. As honourable members of the House would be aware, Justice Wood recently carried out a very thorough and comprehensive investigation of the State's child protection system and delivered a substantial report containing 111 recommendations. The commission's report has provided the Government with an invaluable blueprint for the next stage of child protection reform in this State. In response, the Government has developed its action plan—Keep Them Safe: a shared approach to child wellbeing. The action plan radically changes the way the Government and community address child safety and wellbeing, so that together we are able to build a stronger, more effective child protection system. The bill implements the actions that require changes to the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and other relevant legislation.

The bill provides the necessary platform to roll out the reform agenda for child protection. While the action plan establishes the broader plan, I want to concentrate at this time on the legislative changes that were recommended. In summary, the three key objectives of the bill are: first, to improve the statutory child protection system by focusing on children and young people at greatest risk, making court processes more user friendly for children and families, concentrating the efforts of the specialist Children's Court on where it is imperative to have a judicial decision, and clarifying regulation of out-of-home care to focus the Department of Community Services on working with children and young people in need of care and protection; second, to share the responsibility for child protection by creating a new system for accessing information, facilitating better interagency cooperation, and obliging agencies to take steps to coordinate with other agencies; and, third, to streamline and improve oversight arrangements of the child protection system by making some minor miscellaneous amendments to the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and related Acts.

I turn now to explaining these elements of the bill in more detail. The special commission found that New South Wales has one of the lowest thresholds for making a report on a child or young person suspected of being at risk of harm, and that too many of the reports that are made do not warrant the exercise of the Government's considerable statutory powers. For instance, last year there were over 300,000 reports—four times the number of reports received in 2000. In order to align New South Wales with other Australian States and Territories, this bill will raise the reporting threshold to risk of significant harm. This will allow the department to focus on its core responsibility—that is, those children who require statutory intervention.

However, children who require assistance but who are not at risk of significant harm will not be ignored. Their needs will be met through the other changes to the child protection system, such as expanding

early intervention programs and the new referral structure in organisations such as Health, Police and Education introduced by this bill. These measures aim to improve outcomes for these children by referring them directly to the services they need. Commissioner Wood made an important and clear statement about something that has somehow become obscured in the debate about child welfare. In paragraph 10.4 he said:

Child protection is the collective responsibility of the whole of Government and of the community.

The bill sets up a new framework. The general public and some mandatory reporters such as a local general practitioner or a teacher at an independent school will continue to report any concerns through the Community Services Helpline. Mandatory reporters in the main human services and justice agencies will have an alternative in some situations. If they have concerns but are unsure whether the child is at risk of imminent significant harm, they may report through specialised Child Wellbeing Units. Referrals to the units will need to be made in accordance with processes and standards set out in a documented arrangement with the Department of Community Services.

Agencies entering into such arrangements include the Children's Hospital at Westmead, area health services, the New South Wales Police Force, Housing New South Wales and government departments such as the Department of Education and Training, Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care. Once the arrangements are in place individuals within these organisations will be able to refer matters to an assessment officer located in a Child Wellbeing Unit, who will appraise the matter to decide what action should be taken. Where concerns indicate a risk that an imminent response to significant harm is required, then these matters will go directly to the Helpline.

This new alternative mandatory reporting system will be able to more quickly and efficiently link families with the right services and will also improve the time taken to respond to children who do not require statutory intervention. It will make better use of whole-of-government and community resources. If circumstances require it, any mandatory reporter will still be able to access the Helpline. The advantages of this new system, proposed in the report of the special commission, are outlined in paragraph 6.66:

Children at risk of significant harm [will] receive the attention of DoCS and its NGO partners while families in need of assistance are directed to services. Further, that those outside DoCS working in child protection, [will] be encouraged to improve the quality of their reports, [and] more frequently exercise their professional judgement.

In accordance with the commission's recommendations we have removed the statutory penalty regime for mandatory reporters. The commission found that these were counterproductive. What have not been removed are the disciplinary, professional or civil liability penalties, which arise from breaches of statutory duties. The mandatory nature of reporting in this State has therefore been retained. We have also retained the protection for persons who make reports, and have extended this to cover mandatory reporters who refer through the intra-agency structure facilitated by this bill.

This protection exists not just for those who report directly to the Department of Community Services; it is also for those who, in accordance with arrangements entered into with the department, refer matters to Child Wellbeing Units and others, such as teachers, who might first report to a school principal. In order to assist people who wish to make a report in relation to a particular child, this bill makes two important additions to the list of grounds that indicate a child is at risk of significant harm. The first is that the failure of parents or caregivers to make proper arrangements about their child receiving an education is expressly noted as an indicator that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm.

The second seeks to clarify a very difficult issue in child protection, which is neglect. The inquiry found that neglect is the second most common reason for reporting a child, after domestic violence. Neglect is also present as a secondary issue in many other cases. The bill has expressly included a provision that risk of significant harm may be constituted by a single incident or it may be constituted by a series of incidents which of themselves may seem inconsequential, but when seen as a whole establish a pattern of significant harm. A number of recommendations for improving the Children's Court systems and processes were made by the inquiry. As part of this, the following legislative reforms are being made.

First, to improve the quality of court documents, and to allow for closer inquiry on whether a case requires the intervention of the court, the timing for filing an application where there has been an emergency removal or assumption of care responsibility by the Department of Community Services is to be extended from less than 24 hours to no more than 72 hours. Second, to get information before the court in a way that can be readily understood by families, the initial care application will be accompanied by a report that summarises why

the department considers that the child is in need of care and protection. This is instead of a formal affidavit setting out all of the information upon which the department might seek to rely. Third, to enable the court to receive the best information possible when making a decision about a child's long-term needs for care and protection, sections 78A and 83 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 will be amended to clarify that the details in a permanency plan should be sufficiently clear and specific so that everybody involved in the future care of the child will know what needs to be done once the plan has been approved by the court.

The court's role will be to examine whether the plan is what the child needs, not to examine the detail of how the plan is to be implemented. The latter is rightly the role of the designated agency supervising the placement. The intention of this change is to achieve a balance between the alignment of judicial and oversight functions. The Government has also adopted the recommendation to include in the legislation the substance of the judgement given by the Senior Children's Magistrate in *Re Rhett* and subsequent judgements on this point. To allow for greater participation in court decision making, and as a matter of equity, children and young people will be given the right to apply to the court to rescind or vary care orders.

The procedure for the court to seek expert evidence has also been clarified, by enabling the court to order additional expert evidence from the Children's Court Clinic or other court-appointed persons to supplement what might have been provided in an assessment report. The bill also allows for the future transfer of the Children's Court Clinic to another prescribed public sector agency. In relation to the court's powers to monitor and review a care order under section 82 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 the commission noted that there has been some uncertainty whether the court can, of its own motion, rescind or vary a care order. To put this matter beyond doubt, the bill will confer the power for the court to re-list the matter if it is not satisfied that proper arrangements have been made. However, it will be up to the parties to the proceedings to seek to vary the orders.

Consistent with the commission's recommendations, the court will not be both the applicant for new orders and the judge in the same proceedings. The commission said that the court should not use this, or other means, to extend its remit and assume an oversight role for the provision of out-of-home care. The bill provides that the power of review in section 82 allows for a single report, close in time to the making of final orders, which will be an aid to the court in expeditiously making final orders. A key area examined by the commission was whether child protection work would benefit from more extensive alternative dispute resolution. One area concerned long-term arrangements for children who have been removed from their families to have contact with significant people in the child's life.

The report acknowledged that long-term arrangements for contact are difficult to resolve through court processes. This is because of the need for flexibility, with sometimes even daily changes, and because it is important to recognise that needs and circumstances especially those of the child change over time. The recommendation of the commission to remove the Children's Court powers to make long-term contact orders has been adopted. In making this recommendation, the commission affirmed the important role of the Children's Court in making contact orders during the period prior to the making of final orders, or where the court has found on the evidence that a child should be restored to the care of his or her parents.

The commission suggested that use might be made of guidelines on what are appropriate contact arrangements. It further recognised that disputes over the suitability of contact arrangements are still likely to occur and, where this happens, alternative dispute resolution processes best handle these. The Government believes that a dispute resolution process is fundamental to the proper working of any new contact arrangement. Consequently, these contact order provisions will not be proclaimed until these supporting mechanisms are in place. They will involve a flexible and accessible non-court dispute resolution process as envisaged by the inquiry. The Attorney General will seek advice from an expert reference panel to help guide decision-making about how these alternative dispute resolution models might work. The panel will look at international experience in this area. The Government recognises that resolving disputes quickly, efficiently and fairly is an essential element of making contact between children and their family's work.

Beyond these changes, the Government will recognise the importance of the Children's Court by appointing a District Court judge as President of the Children's Court, replacing the role of the Senior Children's Magistrate. As with similar arrangements in other courts, the president will have tenure for one or more terms of up to five years. This change will enhance the standing of the Children's Court and will ensure that there is a pool of expertise in children's appeal matters in the District Court, of which the president will be part after the expiration of her or his tenure as President of the Children's Court.

The important role played by the Children's Court Registrars has been acknowledged by the acceptance that Children's Court Registrars need to be legally trained to have the appropriate skills for the functions they are to perform. The court will be put on a surer legal footing by clarifying the court's rule-making processes, and allowing the president to issue practice notes to govern the court's proceedings in relation to matters not covered by the rules. This will overcome any concerns raised in *KF v Parramatta Children's Court* about the power of the court to issue practice directions and notes.

The law reforms introduced by this bill will also enhance and strengthen the regulatory framework for the provision of out-of-home care. As we are all aware, the number of children and young people in out-of-home care is on the rise. Irrespective of the arrangements by which a child or young person enters care, this Government is committed to providing a first rate out-of-home care system. To this end, the bill strengthens the legislative framework for the provision of out-of-home care, by clarifying the legislative definitions and service classifications of statutory, supported and voluntary out-of-home care.

Unlike the existing arrangements, the bill focuses the work of the Department of Community Services on those children in out-of-home care as a result of court orders or who might otherwise be in need of care and protection. It allows children in private arrangements made by their families without the knowledge, involvement or support of the department to continue with as little State interference as possible. The only involvement of the department will be as a safety net to stop children in voluntary arrangements being forgotten and to ensure their futures are properly planned. The bill achieves these goals by creating schemes for those placements supported by the department and also for voluntary arrangements by families.

Statutory out-of-home care will consist of placements that are made following a court order where a family member no longer has parental responsibility. There are also placements which have been agreed to by family members but which are assisted by the department, because alternative approaches to court action are being taken to address the needs of the children for care and protection. These will be called supported out-of-home care. The support provided by the department could include a range of things such as the provision of services, arranging parenting courses or providing financial assistance.

Despite the different ways in which a child may enter supported out-of-home care, because the child is in need of care and protection, the commission recommended that these placements should also have the benefit of a care plan, which is to be prepared within 28 days of the department making the finding that the child is in need of care and protection; and a placement review upon a change of placement or, in any event, at least once in every 12 months. The reviews will focus on whether the support being provided is achieving its goal of the child no longer needing care and protection from the State and moving towards living with his or her family.

Another type of out-of-home care arrangement is a voluntary placement arranged by the family without State intervention. There are several points to make about these. Firstly, short-term care arrangements of less than three months duration will only be provided by agencies registered with the Office of Children's Guardian. Secondly, for placements over three months, care will be provided under the supervision of a designated agency accredited by the Children's Guardian. This is the same requirement as for supported out-of-home care. Accreditation will be more rigorous than registration. Thirdly, every child who is in voluntary care for more than three months in any 12-month period must have a voluntary plan prepared and implemented by the designated agency. The plan will address how the needs of the child or young person will be met in the placement and must be prepared no later than six months after placement.

Staff of registered and designated agencies are mandatory reporters. Failure of their agencies to prepare care plans in time will engage the statutory child protection system because these children will then be considered to be at risk of significant harm. The benefits of this revised scheme are that it will give agencies that provide voluntary out of home care a framework and time frame for assessing the need for care services, and it will provide parents with clarity and certainty about expectations regarding voluntary care arrangements. But above all else, and most importantly, the changes ensure that children in voluntary placements are not forgotten within the system and will focus the agencies on addressing their needs. The commission clearly identified information sharing as a central issue for all agencies whose work involves caring for and protecting children and young people. The commission was very clear about the significance of information exchange, and I quote from paragraph 24.107:

The key message of this report is the need for a strong interagency response to child protection, which includes both the government and non-government sectors. Therefore it is essential that the current problem in relation to the sharing of information between agencies be resolved.

The commission found that the complex relationship between privacy legislation, agency privacy codes of practice and access to information under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, does not encourage information sharing.

This bill enacts the recommendations of the special commission with respect to information sharing and will provide clarity for all whose work involves child protection—including non-government organisations. Under the current provisions, the Department of Community Services effectively acts as a clearing house for all information concerning the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a child or young person. This bill inserts a new chapter into the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998. New chapter 16A will enable greater exchange of information directly between agencies involved in the safety, welfare and wellbeing of those children or young people. This will balance issues of care and protection while at the same time guarding the confidentiality of that information.

The principles governing this new chapter make clear that, firstly, all agencies with responsibilities related to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people should be able to share information to promote that purpose and should work collaboratively with other agencies; and, secondly, in sharing information, the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child or young person takes precedence over the protection of confidentiality or an individual's right to privacy.

Under the proposed amendments, information sought by an agency must relate directly to that agency's work in relation to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a particular child or young person or class of children or young people. Where there are inconsistencies between these provisions and other legislation governing privacy, the new chapter 16A will take precedence. A prescribed agency will be required to comply with a request for information when it believes this will assist the requesting agency in providing for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child and/or young person to whom the information relates.

The bill places a number of limitations on the obligation to provide information: for example, an agency is not required to disclose information if the agency believes it would prejudice a criminal investigation or coronial inquest, endanger a person's life or is not in the public interest. Importantly, the amendments allow for the protection of those providing information where it is given in good faith. These changes have been discussed with the Privacy Commissioner and His Honour Justice Taylor has given them his support.

The bill amends the child-related employment provisions of the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 to broaden the classes of employees in high risk groups who must undergo background checks prior to commencing employment in child-related positions. It also brings greater clarity to the circumstances in which a working with children check should be undertaken. New positions requiring checks include: staff of the child wellbeing units; contractors engaged by prescribed agencies to undertake work which involves direct unsupervised contact with children; students working with the Department of Community Services having direct unsupervised contact with children; children's services licensees and authorised children's supervisors of prescribed children's services; the principal officers of designated agencies providing out-of-home care or adoption services, members of authorised carer or family day care families over the age of 18 years; and volunteers who mentor children who are disadvantaged or provide personal care to children with a disability.

The commission recognised the important role of community visitors. These are the independent witnesses and advocates for children and young people living in residential out-of-home care as well as children, young people and adults with a disability living in accommodation operated, funded or licensed by the Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care. Community visitors work with service providers to resolve issues of concern to residents and where no adequate resolution is possible. Community visitors may also report the issue to the Ombudsman for further investigation and possible action.

The bill proposes to expand this role to enable community visitors to provide specified information to the Children's Guardian concerning residential out-of-home care agencies they visit in the course of their work, which may be of sufficient significance to be relevant to their accreditation. This additional information will better enable the Children's Guardian to monitor and accredit out-of-home care service providers. The commission confirmed that currently unproclaimed provisions are unworkable. These are based upon the proposition that the Children's Guardian could exercise the Minister's delegation of parental responsibility. Accordingly, these will be repealed by the bill.

The bill includes an amendment recommended by the special commission to assist law enforcement agencies in their investigations of a serious offence alleged to have been committed against a child or young

person. The amendment allows for the disclosure of reporter details to a law enforcement agency in specified circumstances. The aim of this amendment is to achieve a balance between the need for reporters to have confidence when making reports about children at risk of significant harm, and the need for the police to have access to all necessary information for investigating serious crimes against children.

As is the case with a number of the bill's provisions, the amendment strengthens the primacy of the best interests of a child or young person. That is because it limits the disclosure of a reporter's identity to cases where this is necessary for the purposes of safeguarding or protecting a child or young person's safety, welfare and wellbeing. The amendment will also strengthen the partnership between Community Services, Health and Police as they work collaboratively on serious child protection offences. The bill builds in protections so that the provision is not misused to jeopardise the confidentiality of reporters and thereby harm the flow of information in the first place. Reporters will have to be notified of a disclosure unless this is not reasonably practicable or it would prejudice an investigation.

I have no doubt that the reforms introduced by this bill and set out in the Government's Keep Them Safe action plan will lead the way for fundamental change in the protection of children in New South Wales. I thank all the officers who were involved in the development and construction of the bill. The Government trusts and hopes that this bill will receive the full support of all members of Parliament. I commend this bill to the House.

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

VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

Condolence Motion

Debate resumed from 4 March 2009.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [10.35 a.m.]: In supporting this condolence motion for the victims of the Victorian bushfires I also place on the record my very sincere sympathy to people who lost loved ones, colleagues and friends during the terrible events that unfolded almost a month ago. I commend also all those involved in the emergency services response to the Victorian bushfires in recent weeks, both in Victoria and of course from our own State—police officers, members of the Australian Defence Force, ambulance officers, medical officers, Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service volunteers, and countless others who showed enormous courage on the fire fields. I also express my sincere thanks to all the voluntary organisations who rallied for almost a month to raise the incredible sum of \$200 million in the wake of enormous personal and community loss in Victoria.

In the Shoalhaven we are by no means immune to bushfire, to say the least, having experienced devastating events such as the one that occurred over the 2000-01 Christmas-New Year period for approximately three weeks when we lost 30 homes. Fortunately, no lives were lost but whole villages were blacked out for weeks, and access to homes and villages was cut due to the fire events. It was a really dreadful and terrifying time. Fortunately, no lives were lost; but for the residents of the Shoalhaven the memories of those fires were certainly reignited recently during the Victorian bushfires. We in the Shoalhaven have all been talking about those 2000-01 fires, as the memories come flooding back.

We in the Shoalhaven have experienced bushfires over decades and centuries and we know very well how our volunteer and emergency services personnel carry us through those times, giving no thought to their own personal safety, and how the community rallies behind those who are affected. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to forget the potential for lessons following these types of tragedies. As a former history teacher I am able to confirm that the lesson of history really is that we never learn the lessons of history! In relation to hazard reduction and the management of fuel in bushfire-prone areas, I would have to say that we have not really learned from past fire events.

Now is probably not the time to discuss such issues in this place but it is certainly a subject for future debate. I know that many members of the House will watch with interest the investigation into the Victorian bushfires. I can only personally hope that the royal commission into the Victorian bushfires will provide recommendations that will be enacted and provide greater safety for communities, both in Victoria and in New South Wales, in the future. I am concerned, and have expressed my concern, that in the past applications for

hazard reduction by our local Rural Fire Service volunteers in the Shoalhaven either have been refused or have been wound up in so much red tape that currently villages and towns in the Shoalhaven remain surrounded by areas of bushland where fuel loads have built up over many years, resulting in an unacceptable level of protection for residents. In the past few weeks since the emergence of the bushfires in Victoria countless residents have contacted me concerned about fire hazards in their own areas. As I mentioned earlier, their fears certainly will have been reignited. I can only hope that the authorities will allay the fears that are widespread in my community and in other communities, and take appropriate action.

The lesson we need to heed and the examples we need to follow are those provided by the traditional custodians of this country, our indigenous people. They were not only the custodians of the land but also the caretakers of the land and they used effective fire management in this country for 40,000 years before white settlement. The events of the past weeks have shocked and saddened us all, but they have also united us to assist those in need now and in the future. Residents in the Shoalhaven—as in every other community throughout Australia, I suspect—have rallied, as they always do, to support the victims of the bushfires. They continue to organise fundraisers in many and varied forms, too many to mention here. People, who are not wealthy themselves, in the towns and villages of the Shoalhaven have donated large amounts of money and worked to raise funds. They have come together in these tragic times to help others, as they always do. Local clubs, pubs, community service organisations, businesses, workers, pensioners, students and schools have rallied to organise bushfire fundraising events. Our own radio station had the one buck fire truck going around to the schools and villages to raise money. The money coming in has been incredible.

As I am a member of the Vincentia branch of the Red Cross and the Parliamentary Friends of the Red Cross, my office became a centre for donations for the Red Cross. I pay tribute to the Australian Red Cross, which has provided incredible support for the bushfire events in Victoria. Volunteers from the Shoalhaven Rural Fire Service, comprising 30 brigades, travelled to Victoria to assist in the dangerous mop-up procedures and are on call for the possibly dangerous times ahead. I spoke to a number of the volunteers upon their return to the Shoalhaven. Many of them, who have also fought devastating bushfires in the Shoalhaven, recount stories of images that, sadly, they will never forget. They all have been emotionally moved by what they have seen. We all have been moved by the overwhelming display of generosity and courage of Australians, beyond that which we have ever seen before in this country. I commend all those who have helped, worked, volunteered and given so much to assist the victims of the terrible tragedy. I again express my personal condolences to the individuals who have lost so much in this devastating fire event.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.41 a.m.]: Together with all other members on both sides of the House and on behalf of my family and constituents, I express my sincere condolences to all those families who have lost their loved ones and friends during this extraordinary Australian tragedy, the greatest natural disaster Australia has experienced in its history. I read in Wikipedia this morning that it is now confirmed that more than 250 people have been killed by the fires, including one firefighter from the Australian Capital Territory. The death toll is tragic, and the Victoria Police have estimated that more than 30 people are still missing. A report from the University of Melbourne indicates that at some stages during the bushfires the temperature reached an estimated 1,200 degrees Celsius. As a result, the remains of some of those caught in the fires may have been obliterated. The 30 missing people may never be found and we will never really know the exact death toll.

It is a tragedy of unprecedented proportions in Australia. The people of Victoria have been very saddened by this disaster, but also people throughout Australia have been moved and have rallied around to offer support. It is probably the most successful voluntary fundraising venture that has ever been undertaken in Australia's history. In excess of \$160 million has been raised on behalf of the bushfire victims. I hope that all the money is put to good use on behalf of those who have lost family members and their homes. More than 2,000 homes have been destroyed and more than 500 people hurt. The figures go on and on. The incredible enormity of this tragedy will continue to be a nightmare for Australians for many decades to come. Besides financial contributions, Australians have made other contributions.

On a recent visit to the Hawkesbury part of my electorate I dropped in at the Hawkesbury Showground, after hearing a radio announcement. The Minister for Gaming and Racing, the Hon. Kevin Greene, was with me in the electorate at the time. We walked into one of the large sheds at Hawkesbury Showground, where we saw a group of people who had come to volunteer their support. People donated all sorts of stuff. One person had driven down from Bathurst with a truckload of hay. People had bought food from their local supermarkets and brought boxes of foodstuffs. People had bought clothes and donated those new clothes. People spontaneously gave truckloads of stuff to the bushfire victims. There was no proper organisation or coordination; people just

came off the streets, said they were there to help and asked what could they do. Others who had heard about it on the radio and through the local media turned up with boot loads or truckloads of material. The huge warehouse at the Hawkesbury Showground was packed with donations.

These people had very little themselves. In many cases they donated their weekly or monthly family meal supply or new clothes that their family were in need of. I know many of these people and they do not come from wealthy areas. They were moved in a unique way and made these outstanding contributions to the sufferers in Victoria. In the condolence motion debate previous speakers have commented that hopefully we will learn from this tragedy. I do not believe at this stage we are ready to concentrate on that. The Victorian Government has commissioned a royal commission to look into the bushfires. It will be an appropriate time to consider the way forward and averting circumstances of similar enormity when we are separated from the grief and stress. At present, our attention should be focused on the grief, the hurt, the concerns and the problems confronting the survivors and those without homes.

I have looked at a breakdown of the fatalities from various towns. I will not go into the details; they are readily available. I note that not only people from Australia have been caught up in this tragedy. Foreign nationals were also killed: two people from Greece, two people from the Philippines, one person from Chile, one person from the New Zealand and one person from the United Kingdom. That is why the bushfires have attracted the attention of everyone around the world. It is commonly known in the Chamber that I am of Maltese heritage, of which I am very proud. I was born in Malta, and often refer to it. The media in Malta focused on the bushfires almost on a daily basis and continue to do so. Malta is a small country and the people have no concept of distance and space in Australia. I have received phone calls from people in Malta asking me if everything is all right. They heard there were fires in New South Wales as well, and they asked whether the fires were near my family or me. They asked what can they do, and I know they are undertaking all sorts of activities to help the people in Victoria.

A number of people of Maltese heritage have been caught up in the Victorian fires. Many people of Maltese background migrated to Victoria as well as New South Wales. The *Maltese Herald*, which is the weekly newspaper—it is almost the gospel for the Maltese community residing in Australia—featured on its front page and in a double spread in the centre page on 17 February and in last week's edition details about the number of people with a Maltese background living in Victoria who lost their homes. Thankfully, as far as I am aware, no-one of Maltese background was killed, although a couple of people have been hurt. A number of people, some of whom are personally known to me, have suffered. For example, Lou Drofenik, nee Zammit, whom I have met on past occasions, Mark Dimech, Melissa Falzon, and Steve and Carmen Spiteri lost their homes and belongings, and have all suffered tragically as a result of the fires.

Bringing the matter close to home once again, I take this opportunity to congratulate and extend on behalf of the Parliament and everyone thanks to those people from New South Wales who left their jobs, sometimes at their expense, and travelled to Victoria to help with the firefighting efforts. The Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said that the New South Wales commitment to Victoria's bushfire disaster had been more than 3,000 firefighters and that more than 200 volunteers were deployed statewide as recently as last Monday. One volunteer was the member for Heathcote, who took a group, of which he is leader, from the Bundeena area to fight the bushfires in Victoria for a week. We heard about that from the Premier earlier this week.

I commend those people in particular for going out of their way to such a degree, leaving their homes and, at much expense, travelling to Victoria to help those who are suffering. Again, bringing the matter a bit closer to home, I commend four of my local firefighters from the Marsden Park Rural Fire Service, who joined three of their Blacktown colleagues in comforting the Victorians affected by the bushfires. This week's *Blacktown Advocate* has a picture of Captain David Brown from the Marsden Park Rural Fire Service who, along with his colleagues, went to Victoria to help out. I extend my congratulations and thanks on behalf of the whole community for the selfless way these people have responded. Last week they spent five days in Warburton in Victoria helping out and providing comfort and assistance to the firefighters down there and the people affected by the fires.

This tremendous effort has attracted the attention and the sympathy of everyone around the world. Many people around the world have seen Australians galvanised in a way that only Australians can be galvanised. Whenever there is adversity facing this country, everyone comes to the fore and helps out. On this occasion Australians have again shown why Australians are noted worldwide for their mateship, their comradeship and the way they rally around to help those in great need. Our Victorian brothers and sisters have

experienced a great tragedy, great sadness and great loss. They will always be remembered for what they have suffered. But Australians and Australia will also be remembered for the way they have responded, for the way they have rallied around, provided assistance in inestimable proportions and have provided the mateship, help and support these people need and deserve. Once again, to all those who have suffered death, to their families and friends, I offer sincere condolences from me, my family, and my constituents. I send our very best wishes, hopes and, indeed, prayers that their situation will improve in the future and that they will overcome the current sadness they are experiencing.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde) [10.54 a.m.]: I have listened to the many moving stories and great speeches that have been made in this House and across Australia in relation to the tragic consequences of the Victorian bushfires. I prepared a speech, which I read several times, where I tried to extract meaning from the words that appeared on the page. The more I read, the more I realised that there are not enough words that are adequate in this time of personal and national suffering. Strangely, when I read my speech over and over I found comfort in the empty spaces between the words. For that reason I will deliberately keep my speech brief. On behalf of the people of Ryde, I offer my deepest condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives in the Black Saturday bushfires. I draw strength and inspiration from, and I give honour to, the many Australians, including the people of Ryde, who have so courageously and generously given towards their fellow Australians in their time of need. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [10.56 a.m.]: Bushfires are an unfortunate part of the Australian landscape. Within numerous poems, songs and literature of Australia, bushfires play a constant role, and their effects, devastation and unforgiving ways are highlighted as part of the Australian way of life. The Victorian bushfires that occurred on Black Saturday, 7 February, show just how devastating bushfires within our country can be. As the fires continue to burn in our country, the community and the world come to terms with the enormous amount of devastation that the fires have left behind. Those left behind continue to comprehend the loss of life that is beyond that of the Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1983. The loss of wives, mothers, husbands, fathers, brothers, sisters, children, grandparents, friends, and workmates will now be permanently chiselled into the nation's memory.

On behalf of the Cabramatta electorate and myself, I send our thoughts, prayers and condolences to our Victorian neighbours. The death toll now stands at some 250. However, the search for the people still unaccounted for continues. Our thoughts are with the families that are at this moment enduring an awful wait, as police and army officers continue the grim identification of those who are still missing. To the thousands of people who are now left homeless, without possessions and even day-to-day necessity items, our thoughts are with you as you now begin to rebuild your lives. The offer of support and assistance given by the Cabramatta community still stands and will do so for as long as this process takes.

So far, the generosity within the Cabramatta community has been overwhelming. Local schools and community groups delivered ongoing support to the Red Cross Victorian Bushfire Appeal and even held various local fundraising events of their own. The Lions Club of Cabramatta-Cabravale and the Leos Club of Cabramatta High School raised \$7,000 for the victims of the Victorian bushfires. Students and staff of Cabramatta High School are continuing to donate blood for the Victorian bushfire survivors. The campaign, called Vampire Day, aims to get as many staff and students to donate blood over five days until 12 March. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre has collected donations from members of the public and centre clients, and more than \$1,000 was collected over two weeks.

Tania Huynk and the We Can-vas youth group held a charity dinner for 600 guests. Local community groups that supported this event were the Federation of Vietnamese Women's Association in Australia, the Indochinese Senior Citizens Association of New South Wales, the Second Bankstown Scout Group, Vietnamese Artists in Australia Incorporated, the Australasian Dragon Business Association and the Vietnamese Australian Medical Association. I had the pleasure of attending this event along with my fellow colleagues within this place the member for Smithfield and the member for Fairfield, and the Federal member for Blaxland, Jason Clare. The event raised more than \$42,000. During the night I was asked to donate my tie for auction, which I gladly did. It was an extreme surprise for me when they sold that tie for \$3,000.

The Wat Khemarangsaram Cambodian Buddhist temple in Bonnyrigg raised \$3,272 over two weekends for the appeal. The Asian community is always quick to respond in times of crisis, whether it is local, national or international. In addition to a \$50,000 donation the Mounties Group raised more than \$16,000

through donation tins. The Mounties Group then matched this amount dollar for dollar, bringing the grand total to more than \$83,000. These are just examples of how, even in the face of loss and destruction, local communities have shown an overwhelming amount of compassion. I can proudly say that this is the case with the Cabramatta community. Dr Lieu, the President of the Australian Medical Association, summed it up when he presented a cheque to Jennifer Savage from the Red Cross at a fundraising event last week by saying:

I am only a drop of water but together our drops of water become a stream.

The immense generosity of the Cabramatta community is a reflection of what Australian people across the nation and the world have contributed—more than \$200 million for the victims of this disaster. I also acknowledge other local community groups from the Sydney West Chinese Association, which raised \$52,755. Those groups include Chee Seng Khor Uplifting Society Incorporated, Lucky Dragon Home Loans Pty Ltd, Local Care Pharmacy Cabramatta, A.N.G. Optical Pty Ltd, Australia Nan An Association Incorporated, Galaxy Import and Export Company Pty Ltd, Chinese Ginsengs and Herbs Company, Sunny S.D., Jan Ly, the Chinese Associations of Great Western Sydney, Silver Pearl Seafood Restaurant, Tuan Vi Lam, Vincent Lee and Kim Bao Golden Joss Paper Company. The staff of ABC Tissue Products Pty Ltd gave \$10,100 and the owner, Henry Ni, gave \$10,000. I also acknowledge the Australian Chinese Buddhist Association of Bonnyrigg—its president is James Chan—which donated \$60,000. Cabramatta has a great Chinese community.

I apologise if I have missed any local organisation or person within my electorate that has supported the appeal. I thank everyone for giving their time, money and service to this cause. I thank all the firefighters, police and SES volunteers who have assisted and continue to help with the aftermath of this tragedy. Men and women like them are truly an asset to our community. It is beyond comprehension what they have faced and endured; they truly are everyday heroes. As Australia, New South Wales and the world continue to support the huge operation in rebuilding, so too will the community of Cabramatta. On behalf of the community of Cabramatta I extend my sincere and heartfelt sympathies.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [11.03 a.m.]: I join with other members of this House in giving my sincere and heartfelt sympathies to the many victims of the tragic Victorian bushfires that have taken more than 200 lives and have wreaked such devastation on the people in those rural areas of Victoria. It might be poignant also to extend the same sympathies to the people in our other neighbouring State of Queensland who have suffered because of the floods. It is ironic that in this great country severe floods and bushfires can affect people in different parts of the country at the same time, which gives people around the world some idea of the size and enormity of this great country.

What can we say about the amazing outpouring of generosity from people from around this country? Hundreds of millions of dollars in aid have been donated. As other members have said, there is no end to the generosity that people from every race and every religion in this country have extended to those who have suffered from the extraordinary and devastating effects of bushfires in Victoria. Several members have spoken of their experiences with bushfire. For people like me who grew up in a rural area—I still live on a farm—being an active member of the rural fire service, or fire brigades as they were known, was part and parcel of life: you were the odd one out if you lived in the bush or on a rural property and you did not belong to a fire brigade. So in 1973, at the age of 13 and with my good mates Ron and Gavin, I joined the Box Hill-Nelson Bush Fire Brigade. They are still dedicated members of the rural fire service and also members of the ambulance service.

It was not long after 1973—the summer of 1975—that I saw the effects of bushfire ravage Glenorie, Annangrove and Kenthurst. My family was away on the Saturday, and on the Sunday morning I joined my brigade in what was to be a small mopping-up operation. The strong north-westerly winds whipped up the bushfire and on the following Tuesday morning—some four days later—we were still fighting the fire and we had lost a couple of homes. For a mere 14-year-old boy, as I was then, the dangers faced by a person fighting extraordinary bushfires certainly hit home.

In those days the equipment was not quite as good as what we have today, and as a burly 14-year-old boy I was given the duty of carrying a knapsack and a Macleod tool to do my duty if mopping up and putting out spot fires. When I returned home that evening to tell dad how sore I was from carrying this knapsack of water around on my back he said, "Gee, it's marvellous the new technology they've got today", and he reminded me of the 1939 Black Friday bushfires that burnt from the Blue Mountains to Parramatta, which his father—my grandfather Doug—fought with nothing more than chaff bags and buckets of water. The 1939 fire burnt down the home on the property where I still live today. The home, which was an original land grant to the Skinner

family, was lost, as were many, many others. The Hawkesbury has been ravaged by bushfires, as this country will be ravaged by bushfires well into the future. They are just part and parcel of our unique bushland, and in those areas we always live in danger.

Last Thursday I welcomed home 18 of Hawkesbury's finest rural fire service members along with Karen Hodges, the senior officer for the Hawkesbury rural fire area. Those 18 brave rural fire service members gave up their time to travel to Victoria to help fight the fires. It was an absolute privilege to be able to welcome them home and to listen to the tales of what they saw and what they experienced. It would be fair to say that while they are very, very experienced and dedicated people, they have probably never witnessed anything quite as horrific. They mentioned the trees that virtually exploded in the heat and the hundreds and hundreds of acres where all you could see was nothing but ash and burnt ground. They said it was quite devastating. In 2002 I experienced perhaps one of the saddest moments of my life when a friend I had worked with for 20 years lost her home in the bushfires. A fire that raged through the Maroota State Forest and destroyed several homes ravaged the property of Dale and Ross Lithgow, both members of the Glenorie Rural Fire Service.

Dale was sent home from work that afternoon and Ross, her husband, was protecting property and homes with the Glenorie Rural Fire Service unit in another area. Dale had to go home and start the firefighting equipment that Ross had installed around their home. They lived on a ridge backing onto what was then the Maroota State Forest, an area that is always prone to bushfire. Ross had installed the latest fire-protection equipment and had tanks of water available for firefighting. Dale, who was in a panic, could not start the pumps to spray water on the house so she resorted to using buckets. In an absolute panic, she rang her husband who was out fighting the fires, who told her to get in the car and leave, which she did. They lost everything they owned, including a beautiful old Ford Rodeo, which was a collector's item. Another mate of mine, Howard Gair, had an original 1970s Holden Monaro—a collector's item—stored in a garage on the property and it was also lost. The greatest sadness for Dale was not the loss of those items but the loss of Christmas gifts that she had intended to give her grandchildren two weeks later. However, we did not notice how devastated she was until some days later.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of victims of the Victorian bushfires would feel that same devastation. I witnessed it first-hand and I certainly would not wish it on anyone. Although we cannot do a great deal about it, it sheets home the message about this type of loss. As the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday, we cannot hold back the climate or reduce 40-degree temperatures. However, we can reduce fuel loads, especially in national parks. Even though this is a condolence motion, we must ram that message home. We cannot allow these people to die in vain. Exactly the same type of tragedy devastated the people of Canberra four or five years ago when lives and property were lost.

There were reports, committees and an endless paper trail about the changes that would be made, but to this day not one change has been made. As a matter of fact, it is fair to say that the bureaucracy surrounding the Rural Fire Service and the restrictions on it undertaking appropriate and sensible hazard reduction have not changed one iota, and they must. We have some of the strictest environmental restrictions on removing native vegetation and protected species in the country. Despite all its good intentions in reviewing the events in Canberra, the Federal Government at that time had to deal with Labor State governments around Australia. I firmly believe that it would have been too hard to wind back local environmental plans to allow Rural Fire Service members to undertake appropriate hazard reduction.

My electorate of Hawkesbury covers 3,000 square kilometres, more than 75 per cent of which is State and national parks. Many thousands of people live in very close proximity to the rural areas bordering those parks. As I said, the majority of those people are members of the Rural Fire Service. I have had an endless stream of them coming into my office, ringing and emailing saying that they are not permitted to remove trees in close proximity to their property or to do vital hazard reduction on the borders of these national parks and State recreation areas. One person will remain vividly in the mind of every rural resident who has just witnessed the Victorian tragedy. I refer to the man who was fined for removing trees around his property to make it safe. His fine and legal fees amounted to \$100,000. He was condemned and dragged through court and fined; yet his was the only house left standing when the fire swept through his neighbourhood.

It stands to reason that we cannot sterilise this land and not have people living on it, but we cannot permit people to live in these areas when they cannot reduce the fuel load or allow the Rural Fire Service to access it. It is commonsense to allow such things. I cannot make the point strongly enough that we must not let

this opportunity for change to pass us by. We cannot allow hundreds of people—children, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters—to be devastated, as has the community of Victoria. We have abrogated our responsibility as members of Parliament by not changing these draconian and outdated laws that prevent us from undertaking appropriate and commonsense hazard reduction. Appropriate and sensible hazard reduction undertaken under the guidance of the Rural Fire Service gives every native species that lives in the bush the opportunity to relocate temporarily and then return once the hazard reduction is completed. That strategy gives animals the best opportunity to survive.

As we have just seen, bushfires kill everything in their path, including people. It has been estimated that one million native animals died in the Victorian fires. Hazard reduction would have allowed them to relocate temporarily and then move back once the danger had abated. In days gone by the Rural Fire Service did hazard reduction in a mosaic pattern, which enabled affected animals to move a short distance and be given the opportunity to survive. Would it not be better to lose the fuel load on the borders of forests and parks where people live and to do sensible hazard reduction rather than to live with the possibility that thousands of people will lose their homes?

Scheyville National Park is the State's smallest national park and it is less than two kilometres from my home. The Wiese family's home, which is in that area, was lost to a bushfire in moments. The National Parks and Wildlife Service requested the Rural Fire Service not to undertake hazard reduction there because it might damage a protected animal, plant or grub. We have lost more than a protected species in Victoria—we have lost hundreds of lives. We have lost approximately one million animals and we have cost this country millions if not billions of dollars; people are devastated as a result of the Victorian fires. We owe it to those affected and to every person who lives in the rural areas of our State to remove the regulations and restrictions that the Department of Environment and Climate Change has put in place. We must wind back those restrictions so that we do not continue to place lives at risk. It is our responsibility to do that: every member of this House has that obligation. The situation must change and it must change now.

Ms DIANE BEAMER (Mulgoa) [11.09 a.m.]: Like other members I express my condolences and those of my family and my constituents to the victims of Black Saturday. Drought and dangerous weather conditions are a reality of life in Australia and at times they result in devastation. We have just witnessed the worst natural disaster in our history. A commission has been established to investigate the Victorian bushfires and hopefully we can all learn from this catastrophe.

I live in an electorate that has been touched by fire—the 2002 Christmas Day fires. My electorate lost quite a few homes and businesses but, fortunately, no lives. It was a ravaging that my electorate will not forget. I live in a rural setting, and nothing is more frightening than waking to that obvious smell of bushfire that is heading in your direction. While children played that Christmas morning unaware of what was going on, the whole community rallied to help. I went to the Mulgoa Reserve to find firefighting trucks from all over Sydney ready to help to save houses in the Mulgoa area. At one stage they were leapfrogging six houses to save the next, and fortunately the plans they had in place saved many homes in my electorate.

Those same Rural Fire Service volunteers have planned to go to Victoria to help with the fires there. We should pay respect to all the emergency service volunteers—and all those who have gone to Victoria in a professional capacity as well—for the way in which they have rallied behind the people of rural Victoria as events have unfolded. With the death toll continuing to rise, the number of houses lost in the thousands and more than 400,000 hectares of land burned we will not come to terms with the enormity of what has occurred for some time.

One thing we can comment on is the magnificent way all of our communities have rallied in response to what has occurred in Victoria. Member after member has talked about the outstanding efforts in their electorates to raise money—through primary schools, high schools and the local Red Cross. I do not think I have gone into a business in my electorate that does not have some form of tin or container into which one can put a donation. Across Australia and, indeed, from across the world we have seen a rallying point. Australia should reflect on its ability to give to those who are in need, as so many are in Victoria.

It is premature to talk about the things we can learn from this fire until the royal commission has handed down its findings. I welcome the fact that we will participate in that process. Of course, the Victorian and Federal governments will be keen to see what can be done. We have heard a lot about clearing, and I have listened to a lot of what former fire commissioner Phil Koperberg said about some of the things that can and cannot be done to the places in which people live. We have seen firsthand the devastation, such as a paddock

with no trees or a business going up in flames, but then a house that is saved, so we know how different climatic conditions—one of them being drought—can lead to disaster.

People are now talking more about housing design. After our last bushfires a number of changes were made to housing design in areas categorised as bushfire prone. My daughter, who has just built a home in an area that could be described as bushfire prone, had to build a number of things into her house before she could live in such an area. But when one considers the extraordinary heat that is generated, as it was in the Victorian bushfires, one wonders how successful building standards would be in improving safe housing design or, indeed, how successful litter reduction would be. I trust we will give those who are better at this than we are the opportunity to provide solutions, because people like the idea of the bush change on a block that is surrounded by a lot of native trees.

I reiterate the condolences from my electorate. I am proud of the way people in my electorate have rallied behind the bushfire victims. I pray for those who have lost loved ones, that they will see a way forward. This must be an extremely difficult time for them. I look for an outcome that enables them to understand not just the generosity of spirit but the lengths to which people have been prepared to go to show that generosity. I sincerely commend this motion to the House.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [11.24 a.m.]: I support this condolence motion moved by the Premier for the Victorian bushfire victims. My wife, Victoria, and I moved to Medowie in 1985. Medowie was then very much a village with a population of around 1,600 people. Our then neighbour, Lou Cassar, was and still is captain of the Medowie brigade of the Rural Fire Service [RFS], leading a dedicated team of volunteers. Medowie is surrounded by dense native bush—State forest to the north, Hunter Water Corporation land to the west and south and Moffatt's swamp to the east. The skill and bravery of Lou and his team have saved many properties from the ravages of fire over the years.

In 1993, in weather conditions similar to what Victoria experienced just four weeks ago—high temperatures, high wind speeds and low humidity—Medowie found itself under threat. Fire broke out in Hunter Water Corporation land to the west and rapidly approached the rear of my house and those of my neighbours, all of us on five-acre blocks. Unlike the areas devastated in Victoria, Medowie is reasonably flat and although the fire raced through our properties it did so at ground level without moving into the canopy. We were also fortunate enough to have an RFS tanker in each property manned by those brave and dedicated volunteer firefighters. All the local houses were saved, but spot fires continued to burn. A log pile in my back paddock burned for days, despite the Oshkosh based at Williamtown RAAF base—an appliance designed to put out aircraft fires—emptying its tank of water and foam onto that pile. It gave me some insight into how intense bushfires can be. Trees smouldered for days and town water pressure dropped dramatically. Volunteers from around the State as well as interstate units joined our brigades, and when it was all over no lives were lost and only one house at Salt Ash was destroyed.

When my wife and I initially heard the news that seven lives had been lost in the Victorian bushfires and that the total would probably rise, we were horrified. The latest toll of 210 men, women and children is still beyond belief and I know I speak for all of my community when I offer our sincerest condolences to all who were injured, suffered the loss of loved ones or lost their possessions. As we have heard in the media and in the House this week, there have been endless stories of tragedy and despair both during and after the Black Saturday bushfires—many stories too horrific and distressing to recount. Most of us could not even begin to imagine the dreadful and terrifying experiences of the emergency services, particularly the firefighters who bravely faced those raging fires almost one month ago. There are not enough words to express their courage and selflessness. I pay tribute to the RFS and CFA firefighters who fought the blazes in Victoria, as well as the local RFS volunteers from brigades at Medowie, Karuah, Salt Ash, Tanilba, Lemon Tree Passage, Soldier's Point and Anna Bay in my electorate who have saved bushland, homes and even lives in the region over the many years I have been in Port Stephens, as well as our two State Emergency Service units—all volunteers, all ready to risk their lives for their community and other communities under threat.

When I was elected to Port Stephens Shire Council in 1987 I immediately did what I could to support our bushfire volunteers. I am proud to say that 22 years later Port Stephens council continues to support our brigades generously. When section 94 policy changed two or three years ago Port Stephens council found itself with unallocated developer contributions. The bulk of these funds were directed towards replacing or renovating our RFS brigade stations—I can think of no worthier recipient of public funding. In 2004, when I was mayor of Port Stephens, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service produced a publication, "Building in Bush Fire Prone areas", for councils determining subdivision development applications. Whilst I thought the restrictions were far

too severe, and had numerous conversations on the subject with RFS Assistant Commissioner Rob Rogers, I now acknowledge that, had the provisions of this code been adhered to in Victoria, perhaps the death toll would have been much less. I encourage all members to examine this document, which is on the New South Wales RFS website. However, I remind all members of this House that these provisions have only been introduced for relatively recent subdivisions—many dwellings in New South Wales are still under threat.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the three factors that can affect a bushfire—weather conditions, topography and fuel load—and emphasised that although we cannot change the weather conditions or the topography, we can monitor and reduce fuel load. There is a serious need for hazard reduction burns and we need to re-empower local brigades and let them plan for and defend against extreme fire risks in weather conditions that suit them, not nature. We must never forget the circumstances nor the victims of this terrible tragedy. The poet and philosopher George Santayana wrote:

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [11.30 a.m.]: On behalf of the people of my electorate of Wyong I join with other members in paying respect and offering condolences to the people of Victoria and all those affected by the tragic events of 7 February 2009. There can be no doubt that our Australian landscape is one of extremes, a country that can be in flood and drought at the same time. We love our country and the Australian bush. It can be so beautiful and peaceful and then so horrific and tragic when fires strike. Each year as the fire season approaches residents and the respective rural fire services and emergency services check their equipment and hope that it will be a good season, one in which they are not required. It is one of the few sectors where no business is a blessing.

Volunteers put their lives on the line each time they respond to the fire call. They are true Australian heroes. They seek no fame, often shy away from recognition and just do their job. These men and women are committed to keeping their community safe. But, despite their best efforts, fire is unpredictable and deadly. History has tragically demonstrated that fact: on Black Friday in 1939 when 71 people died in Victoria; in 1967 when 62 people died in Tasmanian bushfires; on Ash Wednesday 1983 when 47 lives were lost in Victoria and 28 in South Australia; in 1984 in New South Wales, around Sydney, when four people died; in 1997 in Victoria when three people died; in January 2003 when fires in Canberra killed four people; and in January 2005 in South Australia when eight people died. Now, tragically, 7 February 2009 will be added to that list.

The horrific pictures on television as this event unfolded did not remotely capture the incredible panic, disbelief and despair people must have felt as the fires overtook them. Yet people everywhere are reduced to tears when listening to the stories and seeing the pictures, trying to comprehend the scale of the destruction and the loss of life—mainly I think because it could have happened to you or me. As a community, it is difficult to know what to do in situations such as this. You want to help but at the same time you feel helpless. People have spoken at length about the great Australian spirit, so I will not venture there again, but I take this opportunity to recognise the contributions made from my area; not because people seek recognition but because it demonstrates the great sense of feeling and sympathy in the community for the victims of this tragedy.

I acknowledge some people from my region who have been able to assist as an example of the whole community's commitment to helping the Victorian community recover from this tragedy. Internationally recognised forensic dentist Dr Jane Taylor from the University of Newcastle went to Victoria to provide her expert assistance in disaster victim identification. Dr Taylor is a leader in her field of dental identification who volunteered her expertise in Bali after the 2002 bombing and in Thailand following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. Dr Taylor said that the Australian Society of Forensic Odontology had asked her to be part of the massive medical effort underway in Victoria. She said:

The bushfires in Victoria represent for Australia the single greatest loss of human life during peacetime, and from a natural disaster.

This deployment will be challenging and heartbreaking, but nothing compared to what these people have been through. I hope my work can assist the many grieving families as they try to recover.

Dr Taylor has been a dentist for 25 years and is currently a senior lecturer in oral health at the Central Coast campus of the University of Newcastle. The university is supporting her over the coming months while she assists the recovery effort. The Minister for Defence, the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon, MP, who toured the bushfire-ravaged areas, welcomed Dr Taylor's contribution and thanked the University of Newcastle for

supporting her participation. I spoke with Dr Taylor recently. The words she used in relation to her involvement were that it was a "moving experience. We go and do what we can, try our best and hope that we can make a contribution". She also commented that it was truly a team effort and that we are lucky to have so many great team volunteers.

Two other great people in my electorate are Rob Sterling and Brendan Kenny. They own Colway Express, a transport and distribution company at Berkeley Vale. They made all their company's transport vehicles available at their own cost to carry goods to the fire stricken area in Victoria. Local Radio Station 2GO announced the intention of Colway Express and the community responded in a way that would never have been imagined. As well as the wonderful citizens getting behind the request, local companies such as Masterfoods, Coastal Springs bottled water, and Scholastic Australia. With such an overwhelming response Rob and Brendan realised that they needed more help so they called out to the Lions Club of Toukley, which immediately came to their aid. Over the next week they coordinated a massive relief drive. Goods for fire victims, firefighters and the affected animals were collected, loaded and delivered. One semi-trailer carried an entire load of hay. Lions clubs all the way from Toukley to the fire-affected area pitched in and helped with accommodation and unloading and distribution. Paul Mutton, from the Lions Club of Toukley, said:

The lives that have been lost in this tragedy are irreplaceable and families who lost loved ones will grieve for years to come. Re-building lost homes and businesses will take months, if not years, and refurbishing and refurbishing them even longer.

But a toothbrush and toothpaste, soap and towels, food and water, toilet paper, clothing and somewhere to sleep are immediate human necessities following tragedies and disasters. Rob and Brendan recognised this immediately and focused all their energies in getting such relief to the victims as quickly as possible.

They succeeded in a way they could never have foreseen. After all, this was their first time in setting out to help others on such a massive scale. Their endeavours are inspirational but they also act as an example of what can be done when time is the critical factor. Their minds conceived and believed and, with their efforts, they achieved!

Cindy Meadows of Hamlyn Terrace, and Leonie Wiggins of Wyong collected horse-related items including rugs and first-aid equipment to help horse owners affected by the Victorian fires. Wyong Council will donate \$10,000, along with an extra dollar-for-dollar donation in conjunction with money raised through staff appeals, to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal. Mayor Bob Graham also encouraged councillors to donate money from the councillors' Community Improvement Grant Scheme and pledged \$1,000 to get the ball rolling. He encouraged residents and ratepayers to donate money and items to the appeal as well as give blood. Local primary schools held collections raising thousands of dollars. As people drove around the Wyong area, information boards at local schools including Warnervale and Toukley primary school showed them that students and teachers had dug deep to raise important funds to help with the rebuilding process.

I pay tribute also to our local Rural Fire Service members from Charmhaven, Dooralong, Lake Munmorah, Mannering Park, Ourimbah, Warnervale and Yarramalong who travelled to Victoria to lend a hand. I also acknowledge Inspector Shane Geerin, Superintendent Steve Sowter, Kathy Burn and Melissa Baker who lent their expertise from the Lakes Team Staff at Arizona Road Fire Command Centre. The work of local Australian Red Cross workers, Lions club and Rotary club members, shopping centres and countless other individuals who contributed in some way must also be acknowledged. I finish with this short poem by Oliver Thomas entitled *Bushfire*:

Flickering flames of frenzied fury
Fanned by a freshening breeze.
Terrible tortuous tongues of fire
Hunggrily lick at the trees.

With a roaring rush, the raging inferno
Famishes forest and farm,
'Til the land is blackened, barren and bare
And the world once wild is calm.

And the stillness settles on silent soil
Which once was the place of trees,
While the animals dead, or long since gone
Are merely memories.

But the green grass grows as time goes by,
And sinewy saplings soar;
For Nature nourishes new grown trees
'Til the bush is there once more.

With the goodwill of the Australian people those communities will be rebuilt and the people will return. But the memories of those 250 souls lost so tragically will forever remain in the hearts of this nation. Our prayers and best wishes are with the people from those Victoria communities so devastated and our condolences are offered to those families that have lost so much.

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [11.39 a.m.]: When Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet sailed into Botany Bay in 1788 and later surveyed the beauty of Sydney Harbour and the surrounding landscape little did they realise the volatility and inherent dangers and challenges this new country was to present. On Black Saturday, 7 February this year, more than 200 years later, this was shown when part of rural Victoria erupted and experienced the most tragic fires in Australia's history. Over 200 people lost their lives in the most appalling and cruel circumstances. Over 500 others suffered injuries, and over 2,000 homes are now gone. Those who have survived in the fire-ravaged area, whether they be family members or friends, will live the rest of their lives with the horrific memory of the enormity of the tragedy indelibly imprinted in their minds.

Today I offer condolences from the people in the Baulkham Hills electorate. I pay tribute to the many firefighters, paramedics and volunteers who put their own lives on the line to help their fellow Australians. I also applaud the work that was undertaken by many residents of The Hills district. I have been advised that 61 members of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service from the Baulkham Hills district travelled with five vehicles from The Hills to help their mates in Victoria. And I understand that nine of those members remain in the fire-ravaged area. I also commend the actions taken by The Hills Shire Council, which offered council staff and town planners to assist in the work that is required to rebuild shattered lives. The council also made a cash donation of \$10,000 to the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Fund. Members of the community also made donations to the Red Cross appeal and the Salvation Army through the council's customer service centre.

I also congratulate Castle Hill RSL Club and *The Hills Shire Times*, which organised a bushfire benefit concert assisted by sponsorship from Castle Towers shopping centre. Many other Hills locals worked tirelessly to raise funds for the Victorian bushfire appeal. State Emergency Service volunteer Chris Cleary and 40 others collected more than five containers full of donated goods, which were sold in a giant outdoor market to raise funds for the bushfire appeal. The Rotary Club of Baulkham Hills set up a desk for five days at Stockland Mall shopping centre and raised \$15,000 for the appeal. Our local Lions clubs were also actively involved working in our community and with other Lions clubs throughout New South Wales and Victoria. Students from our local schools, including Matthew Pearce Public, Model Farms High, Northmead High, William Clarke College, Kellyville High, Crestwood High and Excelsior Public School, and no doubt many others, organised various fundraising activities.

The students raised almost \$30,000 for the appeal. Students, staff and parents of Gilroy College planned an event to assist the many victims, who included a year 10 Gilroy student who lost family members in Kinglake and a former Gilroy student who lost her home. Hills businesses, many of which are already finding it difficult to survive in the vicious recession, gave generously. Many of them donated goods, many donated transport, and many simply donated their time, energy and enthusiasm for a cause that was to unite Australia.

Castle Hill police also did their bit, with officers such as Senior Constable Travis Evans and Sergeant Paul Van Dyke volunteering their services. I commend Parramatta City Council for the organisation of the Lady Mayoress bushfire relief concert, which will be held this Friday evening at the Riverside Theatres. This looks to be a great night, commencing at 6.00 p.m. with a cocktail reception and a silent charity auction followed by the relief concert and a star-studded line-up of entertainment including Richard Glover, Grahame Bond and Rory O'Donoghue, Zooo Superbande, Pacific Opera, Naisda Aboriginal Dreamtime Dance College and the Sydney Chinese Dance Group.

The role of organisations such as the Salvation Army and the Red Cross must never be forgotten. These organisations have worked tirelessly, both on the ground and in the collection of money for the cause. Collectively they have raised in excess of \$240 million to assist victims. However, nothing can take the place of the tragic losses suffered by the Victorian folk on that Black Saturday. These are our fellow Australians, the people who share our country. We live in a land that is fraught with difficulties relating to climate and nature. Many other speakers have said it is ironic that at the very time we had the terrible fires in Victoria there were floods in the northern part of Australia. Such is the challenge of the wide brown land.

I am proud of the efforts of the people of north-western Sydney who have dug deep to help the families affected by this appalling tragedy, which really is beyond words. At the end of the day—I do not think now is the time to analyse it—we must look clearly at what could have been done to avoid the tragedy that occurred.

Nature is a mighty force and once again it has been proved that nature will run its own race. But the race was restricted by the firefighting efforts of Australians. Many people died. Professional and volunteer firefighters united and stood side by side to protect life and property in the most appalling conditions nature could impose upon our land.

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

LAKE MACQUARIE LOCAL AREA COMMAND ACCOMMODATION

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [11.47 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that Lake Macquarie Local Area Command police stations in Toronto and Boolaroo are in a state of disrepair and inadequate for the purpose of modern policing;
- (2) calls on the Minister to upgrade these dilapidated facilities immediately; and
- (3) calls on the Minister to provide a plan for an upgraded Local Area Command headquarters within six months.

The Lake Macquarie Area Command is responsible for a geographic area of some 644 square kilometres in which there are some 193,000 residents. Central to the command area is the largest saltwater lake in Australia, creating added logistical difficulties in servicing the area. With one of the lowest police to resident ratios in the State, our command is stretched to service our residents' needs. So let us add one more problem: the woefully inadequate station facilities that our police are expected to work out of. While there are problems with stations throughout the command, I call on the Government to do something quickly to improve conditions at Boolaroo and Toronto, within my electorate.

Throughout 2007 the New South Wales Police Association ran a campaign for more officers to be deployed to Lake Macquarie. I was very happy to support the campaign, as the community is well aware of the problems faced with such a poor ratio of police to residents. The outcome of the campaign was that the Minister for Police, the Hon. David Campbell, and the Commissioner of Police agreed to provision of an additional 20 general duties officers and three detectives. I note that this still leaves the command with one of the lowest ratios of police to residents in the State, but the additional resources were welcome as an interim measure. While the extra officers are welcome, it is obvious that the accommodation of additional officers exacerbates the problems caused by the present inadequate station facilities.

Toronto police station consists of a small office building, approximately 50-years old, and one demountable building. The police prosecutors operate out of a converted garage, whereas a separate house is used as a locker room by the 50 staff. There is one shower for all staff and only one toilet for use by 20 female staff. There are no facilities for the public and anyone needing a toilet is referred to the service station next door. There is no disability access to the building. The main electrical switchboard is on one wall of the foyer and this is open to interference and accidental switching of circuit breakers by the public. Staff have placed an office divider in front of the switchboard to prevent access.

Conditions are cramped and uncomfortable. There is not enough room for desks and filing cabinets for the number of staff. It is difficult for officers to work under these conditions, and this has to affect morale. The problem will become worse as staff numbers increase in line with population growth. This is a Third World-quality police station in an area that the New South Wales Government has targeted for the largest part of projected population growth under the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy.

The Lake Macquarie local area command at Boolaroo is also housed in old houses and a demountable building. The buildings are cramped, poorly laid out and, in my view, well below what they should be as a police station, let alone the headquarters of the local area command. The command headquarters at Boolaroo and the Toronto police station are hopelessly inadequate for the function they were meant to serve. There is a compelling need for modern and functional buildings across the Lake Macquarie local area command. The Toronto station should be a priority for upgrading, along with the provision of suitable premises for a command headquarters.

I gave notice of this motion one year ago today and circumstances have changed since then. The 2008-09 budget included an amount of \$250,000 for commencement, within the year, of a new local area

command police station for Lake Macquarie. The total project has been costed at \$17,343,000. The members for Cessnock, Charlestown, Swansea and Wallsend all share an interest in this matter as the local area command covers their electorates, as well as most of the Lake Macquarie electorate. The member for Charlestown is in the Chamber and I do not wish to speak for him—I cannot—but the member for Wallsend also has a keen interest as the proposed new local area command will be within her electorate, in Glendale.

In my role as the mayor of Lake Macquarie I had discussions with former Local Area Commander Alan Clarke regarding the inadequacy of facilities and the plans to develop a new local area command headquarters. It was following those discussions that Commander Clarke advanced the Glendale option. While this proposal would see the headquarters moved from my electorate to Wallsend, I would be very happy about that if it provided better facilities for officers and better service for constituents. Worryingly, last year's mini-budget referred to a saving of \$5 million per annum by reprioritising police building works. Clearly, I have not been privy to the detail of how and where these cuts are to be applied, but I feel that facilities for the police in Lake Macquarie should stand as a priority.

I am also aware that there is a police building code and one of its functions is to provide a benchmark against which existing accommodation can be measured. The code sets standards for the comfort and safety of all staff. It has requirements concerning the working space for each officer as well as requirements relating to lighting, acoustics, furniture and fittings. The code refers to a single meal room to promote group interaction outside the work environment. I understand that Toronto's meal room will accommodate only half of the 10 to 15 staff typically rostered on to a shift. There is seating for six and squeezing two more chairs against the front of the sink can stretch this to eight. The code also refers to community access and facilities, with the provision of access ramps, automatic sliding entry doors, toilets, waiting and interview facilities. It describes how a police station should be laid out to allow for functional interaction between the various groups of staff.

All of these points identify ways in which the Toronto police station and the local area command at Boolaroo are inadequate for the job they must do. Both of these facilities have grown without the benefit of adequate planning and, consequently, a number of important criteria have not been considered. The space and facilities for the number of officers there are inadequate and there are no facilities for the public. These police stations are becoming further and further out of date.

My motion calls on this House to note that the Lake Macquarie local area command police stations in Toronto and Boolaroo are in a state of disrepair and inadequate for the purpose of modern policing. The truth of this is beyond doubt for anyone who has visited either police station. They are not fit as workplaces or as facilities for serving the public. Secondly, the motion calls on the Minister to upgrade the dilapidated facilities immediately. There is an urgent need for action on the substandard facilities. Boolaroo was acknowledged in last year's budget with allocations for commencement of the new local area command building—a timely and valid decision—but there is a pressing need for the Toronto police station. Thirdly, my motion calls on the Minister to provide a plan for an upgraded local area command headquarters within six months.

There has been much discussion on the local area's policing needs. The issues I have raised are not unique to my electorate and there are many other examples in other local area commands. The present Local Area Commander, Craig Rae, has indicated that he would like to look at the future deployment of stations. While I believe it is appropriate for him to do this, I do not believe that there is any doubt that a station at Toronto will be part of policing for the future—there has been no suggestion otherwise. To the contrary, Commander Rae has indicated that under the scenarios discussed Toronto will remain a key police station.

I do understand that the Government has many responsibilities and many calls on its resources. In my other role as mayor—which has much less responsibility but a similar responsibility in setting a budget each year in response to community demands—along with other councillors I also have to make tough decisions on an annual basis. I respect the Government's need to be mindful of the budgetary situation it has across all State electorates. However, the situations at Toronto and Boolaroo police stations are intolerable. I seek the support of the House in sending a realistic and achievable deadline for providing adequate and purpose-built facilities.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [11.57 a.m.]: I acknowledge the comments of the member for Lake Macquarie—who shares the boundary of the western border of my electorate—in expressing the concern of his constituents, but the Government is working hard to provide front-line police officers with modern and safe police stations. Whilst buildings themselves do not drive down crime, the Government appreciates that the standard of police accommodation is critical in supporting the services provided by the New South Wales Police Force.

The member for Lake Macquarie moved his motion 12 months ago today, but I cannot support the motion because the Government is carrying out major maintenance and capital works on police stations across New South Wales. The Government is investing more than \$385 million to improve police stations across the State in the next four years. It is building new police stations and upgrading existing facilities. In December the Minister for Police, along with the Commissioner of Police, opened the new \$13.9 million station at Lismore, as well as the new \$13.3 million station at Fairfield. Further, the new \$20.4 million station at Dubbo and the new \$9.4 million station at Orange were officially opened in February this year. That demonstrates that the Government has a rolling plan to build new police stations and it is delivering for communities across the State.

The Government also recognises the need for ongoing maintenance of police stations already in commission across the State. The Government notes the concerns outlined in the motion moved by the member for Lake Macquarie regarding police stations at Toronto and Boolaroo. I am advised that program works have been undertaken at both stations over the last year or so with ceiling and electrical work and attention to wall and floor finishes. In 2007-08 minor works to the value of \$85,000 were carried out at Toronto police station. I am further advised that there are no significant occupational health and safety issues associated with either of these sites.

Both properties are converted brick houses, not being similar to many other stations throughout the State, which, at the time of first occupation, were more than adequate for policing. However, due to the passing of time, the stations now could be considered by some to be outdated. That is why we have a capital works program that it was committed to ensuring officers are provided with accommodation in which to work. I am pleased to advise the House that a new police station, as acknowledged by the member for Lake Macquarie, will be built at Glendale for the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command. Master planning for this new facility will commence in 2008-09, with a completion date anticipated for 2011-12. A business case for Lake Macquarie, which was prepared in early 2008, identified Glendale as the preferred site for the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command.

I have seen the results of the planning and the Government's capital works program. I take the opportunity to thank the Minister for Police, the Hon. Tony Kelly, and the staff for the support they have given me and the people of the Wyong electorate—more generally, the Wyong shire and Tuggerah Lakes area—in securing funding for the new Wyong police station. The police station will replace the demountable building that is located at The Entrance. It will enable detectives, highway patrol, friendly, local area command administrative staff and general duties police to relocate to a new facility behind Wyong courthouse. That is good planning because the new police centre will include cells. Prisoners will be held overnight and easily transported to the courthouse the following morning. That is a great improvement on the current situation. I know that our front-line police will appreciate it. It will also be welcomed by the community because in policing the Tuggerah Lakes command will be able to concentrate on its main duty, that is, apprehending people breaking the law and locking them up.

As to the new police station at Glendale in the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command, the purchase of land is scheduled for 2009-10 with construction anticipated in 2010-11. The Government is committed to ensuring that our hardworking front-line police officers are provided with modern and safe police stations to work in and has in place a capital works program to achieve this. I acknowledge that the member for Lake Macquarie understands there are budgetary constraints. These are difficult times and all government departments had to reprioritise. As I said earlier, the Government is rolling out these new facilities and communities right across the State are benefiting. Everyone everywhere wants everything to happen yesterday. But in government we have to prioritise and provide for communities with high priority needs. Obviously, Lake Macquarie has been identified as a high priority area. That is why we have planned a new police centre at Glendale. The new facility will assist police to better undertake their duties throughout the Lake Macquarie electorate and other electorates referred to by the member in his speech.

The Government will deliver on its election commitment for record police numbers. We have seen that throughout the commands. The member for Lake Macquarie acknowledged that more police were delivered. It has happened in Wyong and in many other commands. Mobile police stations are being rolled out across the State at a cost of approximately \$100,000 each to assist police to undertake their work. Most importantly, 30 new police stations will be delivered. The Government is delivering on its commitments. It may not be happening as fast as some communities want. But governments must prioritise and ensure that services are delivered with the maximum effect for police. The New South Wales Police Force sets those priorities and the Government supports them with its massive capital works program.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [12.04 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Lake Macquarie. I have long campaigned for better policing services in the Hunter region, particularly in my electorate of Port Stephens. Like Lake Macquarie, policing in the Port Stephens electorate is suffering from the neglect of the New South Wales Labor Government. Communities are fed up with a lack of police presence, but hardworking and dedicated local police officers are fighting an uphill battle trying to look after the vast electorate of Port Stephens. It must be noted that the New South Wales Labor Government finally listened to the needs of my community last year and established a Port Stephens Local Area Command. This was a great win for the community, but the elation is wearing off as the Government fails to follow through with its promises.

Almost one year on from that announcement, the Port Stephens Local Area Command is still operating out of Beresfield, which is outside my electorate, while the Government dillydallies over a new police station in Raymond Terrace. There are no concrete plans for the new police station, and it appears the turning of the first sod on the development is a long way off. Draft after draft continues to go back and forth to the local council, some of them hugely unpopular with both the community and some councillors. All the while, the good local police officers are travelling long distances to various areas trying to do their job against the odds and the people of Port Stephens suffer with rising youth crime and antisocial behaviour. Residents of the Tilligerry peninsula, in particular, are living in fear, with youths terrorising residents, with break and enters and home invasions a frequent event. The community there recently established an action group, taking matters into their own hands and holding public meetings advising residents how to protect themselves and their homes against crime and vandalism. The community strongly believes more funding and support for local police from the New South Wales Labor Government, in particular, honouring the promise to build a new police station in Raymond Terrace, would lead to a reduction in crime in their area.

Beyond the Tilligerry peninsula, the wider Port Stephens community is crying out for more resources and funding for police in Port Stephens. Policing and law and order are the biggest issues in my electorate, if a recent survey of my constituents is anything to go by. In the survey, which was mailed out across the electorate, I asked constituents to nominate five topics from a list of State issues which they believed to be the greatest priority, numbering with one the highest priority down to five for lesser priority. Completed surveys have been filling up my post box every day, and they are still coming. So far, policing, youth crime and antisocial behaviour is of the highest priority for the people of Port Stephens. On the Tomaree peninsula, the community is desperately crying out for improvements to the Tomaree Community Hospital, which, incidentally, operates with just two locum doctors to serve a population of more than 25,000. This population triples between Christmas and Easter. Even that community has nominated crime and the need for a new police station in Raymond Terrace, three-quarters of an hour away, as important as upgrading the hospital. Even as far away as Tea Gardens-Hawks Nest, the need for a new police station in Raymond Terrace is considered as important as protecting the environment.

Police need support from this Government to do their incredibly difficult and admirable job. The New South Wales Labor Government is always quick to point the finger at anyone else to blame for crime and antisocial behaviour in places like Port Stephens, but essentially it is up to the Government to ensure the New South Wales Police Force has enough resources, funding, equipment and facilities to its job properly. It is undoubtedly one of the most important jobs in our society. So, while I support the motion moved by the member for Lake Macquarie calling for a commitment from the Government to improve resources and funding for police in Lake Macquarie, I want to see more support for police right across the Port Stephens, the Hunter region and the State.

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [12.08 p.m.]: I speak in opposition to the motion moved by member for Lake Macquarie. The member has a particular interest in the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command and has been working with all the Hunter members to help deliver a better outcome for police and, more importantly, for our communities around the lake. As at 1 January 2009 the authorised strength of the New South Wales Police Force was increased by 70 officers, taking total strength to 15,306. This expansion in authorised strength means that police numbers have increased by 2,399 officers, or more than 18.6 per cent since the Labor Government was elected. By December 2011 an additional 650 police officers will be brought on line, bringing the total authorised strength of the police force to 15,956.

In keeping up with these unprecedented numbers, the Government has committed to a capital works program to ensure that the men and women of the New South Wales Police Force are provided with modern and safe police stations. It has been a real eye opener to work with the local command, spending time on the job with officers and experiencing exactly what they do, day in day out. This provides much greater appreciation of their

needs and the sorts of issues they face on a daily basis. Whilst the Government has a sound commitment to progress the new headquarters at Glendale, the issue still remains that local police deserve adequate facilities and amenities to function.

This motion is somewhat outdated because work has been undertaken, particularly at Toronto station. I would be the first one to put up my hand and make reference to problems at Charlestown station. Money was spent upgrading the building to make it more reflective of police needs, but more needs to be done. The Government is committed to the new headquarters that has been mentioned and works already undertaken in supporting our local police. Only a few short weeks ago the local area commander alluded to revisiting the way the command is structured, including stations, the placement of officers and from where they will work, policing arrangements in the command are yet to be finalised. Nevertheless, we recognise the importance of new headquarters for our local police. That has been in the pipeline for some time; in fact, it goes back prior to the member for Lake Macquarie entering this place and is a reflection of the dedication of a number of Hunter members, both current and past, who were very committed to supporting local police and, in fact, sponsored equipment for our local police.

The ultimate issue for policing is response times. It is not always about accommodation and where they sit but how well they service our community; that is where the focus should be. Building new headquarters makes sense and will prove to be extremely beneficial for the command and the way the officers are structured to effectively service the community. Unfortunately, things of this nature take time. We have committed significant funds to get on with the planning work. We are committed to a timetable for the new headquarters at Glendale. We have put additional officers into the local area command—all good things, and I am sure the member for Lake Macquarie would not disagree with that sentiment. But, nevertheless, it is going to take some time before the new headquarters are up and running and supporting local police.

In relation to where we go from here, we will have the new headquarters and additional police will roll out eventually into the command. I have had a number of discussions with officers on the job and there appears to be a level of comfort about their authorised strength at this point; the number seems adequate at this time. The focus, as I said, needs to be on response time; it is not always about buildings and infrastructure. Whilst they are important, the community is more interested in how well they are serviced.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [12.13 p.m.], in reply: I thank my neighbouring colleagues the member for Wyong and the member for Charlestown for their contributions. I particularly thank the member for Port Stephens for his support for the motion. I have acknowledged that it has been 12 months since this motion was placed on the business paper, and whilst I acknowledge that some things have moved on, including a commitment to start a capital project at Glendale for a new local area command centre, I do not believe it negates the overall intention of the motion. Therefore, I strongly seek to have this motion supported.

The member for Wyong outlined a number of capital projects that have been carried out, including new stations across the State—Lismore, Orange, Dubbo and Fairfield were some that he named, as well as others that are on a program. I support those programs. I do not suggest that the State Government has not responded to the needs of policing throughout the State. The question is the allocation and prioritisation of resources. I note comments from the member for Charlestown, who also talked about improvements in the local area command. I acknowledge that local members—and I think the member for Charlestown will agree—that we do work together very well on these issues.

I note that a number of other areas within the local area command are probably of interest to other members as well. The member for Swansea would have a very strong interest in this, in particular. I seek to promote the interests of those who are working and servicing the constituents of the electorate of Lake Macquarie, in concert with the desire for the overall upgrade of the local area command, which would service constituents in other areas as well.

I acknowledge the provision of about \$85,000 for maintenance for the station at Toronto, but it is really clutching at straws to use that as an argument to talk about a capital investment in the welfare and the ability for staff to work adequately out of that facility. It is an atrocious facility. I acknowledge that other stations are in a similar condition, and if other members want to bring to the attention of the House facilities within their local area, I will support them, and that includes members of the Government. There is no doubt that Lake Macquarie will continue to use Toronto station. It is so well placed; it is an area that historically is appropriate and provides good access to growth areas in southern Lake Macquarie. It will remain an important part of that command. No indication has been given of any change to that.

I call on the Government to reconsider its position and support this motion. I acknowledge the areas that have been superseded or put in train. This motion does not set those aside; it does not affect those actions or decisions. I believe there is a compelling case for the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command to be given further recognition. I believe it has been ignored for too long. The nature of Lake Macquarie electorate and its geographic area, with some 90 dispersed villages throughout, major centres requiring significant extra police resources, together with one of the lowest police to resident ratios in the State, dictates that Lake Macquarie needs additional attention. I call on the Government to support this motion.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 40

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

Noes, 42

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

Pair

Mr Piccoli

Mr McLeay

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

SYDNEY COCHLEAR IMPLANT CENTRE

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove) [12.25 p.m.]: I move:

That this House calls upon the Government to increase the funding to the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre to cover the current shortfall of funds to provide hearing for those who cannot afford it.

The cost of cochlear implant surgery and rehabilitation for a child is about \$50,000. Alternatively, the cost of supporting a deaf child through social services is more than \$400,000 by the time the child reaches year 12. In economic terms, this motion should be a no-brainer for this House and the Government. My argument is not merely about economics; it is also about quality of life.

By way of background, the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre was founded in 1984 as a result of the vision and drive of Professor William Gibson, AM. The centre is run by a not-for-profit organisation whose sole purpose is to give the gift of hearing to deaf children, adolescents and adults. Thanks to a tiny Australian invention, a cochlear implant—or bionic ear as it is sometimes called—thousands of people have been given the gift of hearing. As a result, the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre is now a world leader in the field of cochlear implant technology. I am proud to say that the centre is based in my electorate on the site of the old Gladesville Hospital. Its success has led to new centres being opened in Newcastle and Canberra servicing more than 500 new clients in those regions.

I place on the record some of the centre's success stories. In 1984 Samantha was the first person to receive a cochlear implant in New South Wales. At the age of 22, Samantha contracted meningococcal meningitis and after being unconscious for four days awoke to find her life changed forever. She had come very close to dying, had lost 10 kilograms, her left eye was palsied and she had totally and permanently lost her hearing. She found it difficult to adjust to the world and said that she felt as though she was in a bubble. Just four months later, Professor Gibson performed surgery. When all was done and the cochlear implant was turned on, she could hear again. She said:

The bubble had burst ... my lifeline restored. I felt like I was connected to humanity again. It was even good to hear traffic noise! One of the first things I did when I got home was to pick up the phone and listen to the dial tone. Then I rang my mother and to be able to hear someone answer at the other end of the line and have a two-sided conversation was just amazing. So my life began again.

Jeremy's story is another touching one. Born profoundly deaf, he was implanted with a cochlear device at the age of 17 months. On 23 March 2003, at the age of 11, Jeremy attended the Cochlear gala dinner and gave a speech, which read as follows:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen—

remember, this is an 11-year-old—

My name is Jeremy. As some of you might know, I was born with no hearing.

I had my cochlear implant at 17 months and since then it has changed my life.

Two years ago I got my new processor and things are even better.

But they've not always been good.

Mum tells me that when I was little (about two) I put my processor in the toilet.

She wasn't very happy!

Last year my dad took me on a ride called the spider at Nelson Bay, Port Stephens.

It spun so fast my processor flew off and got lost.

We spent hours looking but no luck.

We went back the next day but no luck either.

Five days later, when they dismantled the ride, guess what?

They found it stuck to the machinery by its magnet.

The worst thing is I can't wear my processor swimming. If anyone wants to invent a waterproof processor, I'll be the first to volunteer to try it out.

There are plenty more bad stories that would take forever.

He continues:

Now for the good things.

Well basically I can hear. I go to normal school (sort of) and I make normal friends (sort of).

You know Professor Gibson, the guy who implanted me, well guess what?

He told mum that I may not like music, but I like to sing and I play the trumpet.

Have you heard of the "The Sound of Music".

Well, guess what?

I love the sound of music ...

I love to chat—my dad calls me "have a chat" and my mum says I talk too much.

Talking about my dad, when I had my implant he said on national TV that the most important word I'd learn would be "golf".

I hate golf!

I love to go to the theatre and to the movies. My brother Rob often takes me to the movies.

What makes it even better is that I can hear without any problems—except batteries.

The most dreaded thing in my life is the battery going flat.

I hate batteries

I love to talk on the phone but it is quite hard.

What I will get some day is a mobile phone so I can text message my friends.

Last year I was in the school play and had one of the main parts.

I really enjoy acting and would like to do more in the future.

I'm glad I have a cochlear implant.

I love hearing.

But the best thing is when my mum yells at me or school gets too boring,

I can just turn it off and use my imagination!

Thanks and good night.

That is from an 11-year-old. Last year I visited the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre's facilities. The team consists of surgeons, audiologists, speech pathologists, educators, social workers and psychologists who all participate in the coordinated management of each client, allowing for best results. I have mentioned this in the House before but I would just like to briefly recount my experience. While touring the facility, I was lucky enough to witness the staff tune a cochlear implant in a two-year-old girl. It was a wonderful moment. It is miracles like this that make me so passionate about this issue. I thank again Robert McLeod, client relations director, for his time on the day, and thank all the staff who, day in and day out, make these miracles happen.

Each year, more than 200 people are accepted into the Sydney Cochlear program. While public funding is available for about 50 per cent of cases and private health insurance covers a further 25 per cent, this still leaves a quarter of cases requiring other methods of funding, and Sydney Cochlear works hard to raise donations from corporations and private donors. The cost of implants for 50 children is roughly \$2.5 million, while the cost to government, if these children were to remain deaf, would exceed \$20 million by the time they reached year 12. Added to that are the ongoing costs, not just economic, but social costs to individuals and to government. We have an opportunity here, for a small amount of money, to make sure we give every young child who is born profoundly deaf the ability to communicate, to be part of the hearing world, to participate as taxpaying citizens, to participate in the things we take for granted. This may be one of those speeches during which my colleagues, if they had a cochlear implant, would not turn it off because it is for such a good cause, but at times in this House I am sure some people would like to turn me off.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: We are all ears.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: The member for Burrinjuck is a great supporter of Sydney Cochlear. In these tough economic times any saving we can effect on the public purse must surely be appreciated. Through this motion we have an opportunity to do just that. But not only that—this motion allows us to do what is right. It will improve the quality of life for those born deaf or who, through tragedy, have become deaf at some point in their lives. Compare \$50,000, the cost of restoring hearing, to the hundreds of thousands of dollars required

for government to support a deaf child. A life of deafness or the gift of hearing? I do not think anyone in this place would disagree that it is not a difficult choice. I urge the Government to support this motion and I commend it to House.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.35 p.m.]: This is an important issue and I thank members opposite for raising it. I commence by paying tribute to Professor Gibson for his contribution to the welfare of our people. I was at Camperdown in 1984 when he gave his initial speech about a revolution in the way we practice ear, nose and throat surgery in Sydney. It was one of those switch moments for the health of children in New South Wales. As a customer of the Sydney Cochlear implant service, I agree it provides a magnificent service, and its staff are to be commended.

Each year 86 cochlear implants are performed in New South Wales, 54 for children and 32 for adults. These implants are performed at three centres—the Children's Hospital Westmead, Sydney Children's Hospital and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Each cochlear implant is valued at about \$35,000, with hospital costs estimated at approximately \$10,000. That means about \$3 million a year is already paid by New South Wales Health. About one or two in every 1,000 babies has significant hearing loss. The Labor Government announced the SWISH program, the Statewide Infant Screening Hearing Program, in 2002. This world-leading program has revolutionised the way we deal with hearing in childhood. It ensures that all babies born in New South Wales are offered free and extremely accurate hearing assessment early in life.

The aim of the program is to identify babies born with significant hearing loss and introduce them to appropriate services as soon as possible after birth. Under the old system only about half the babies were picked up by newborn screening programs because only about half the babies who are born profoundly deaf have the risk factors often associated with hearing loss. This early intervention gives a child with hearing loss a greatly increased quality of life. If hearing loss is not diagnosed until age two, catch up becomes extremely difficult. Having a child's implant activated is only the start of the work. It takes about a year to make the implant work because it is a very complicated process of habilitating the child to new sound. For this, about 10 full-time equivalent positions are already funded in New South Wales Health, costing about \$738,000 per year.

As part of the ongoing planning for cochlear implant services, an independent review was undertaken in 2005 by the Centre for Health Service Development. This review indicated that additional capacity was required for cochlear implantation in children, that is, those who would gain the greatest benefit. However, the adult demand appeared constant. Based on this review and to meet the expected demand for cochlear implantation and the projected increased demand that the SWISH Program uncovered, an additional 15 cochlear implants were allocated to the Children's Hospital Westmead for 2006-07 and 2007-08. As well, in 2006-07, more than \$1.5 million of funding was provided for an additional 44 cochlear implants to improve access to the service. That is, 22 extra adults and 22 extra children received cochlear implants.

New South Wales Health is aware of a recent increase in demand for adult cochlear implants due mainly to more people meeting the criteria for implant, changing hearing thresholds, people with moderate hearing loss requiring access and possibly changes in private insurance uptake. Following advice from Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre, New South Wales Health is currently investigating strategies to provide additional capacity within the program. The Sydney cochlear implant program is a non-government organisation that provides assessment for cochlear implantation and habilitation services for people following cochlear implantation. New South Wales Health provides ongoing support to the centre that enables it to provide this critical service for people with hearing impairment.

I am advised that the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre has made no application to New South Wales Health for funding enhancement. The Rees Government has a proud record regarding the hearing needs of the people of New South Wales, and New South Wales is a world leader in the introduction of universal hearing screening. This centre will identify and treat babies with hearing loss because the earlier a cochlear implant is implanted the better the development and educational opportunities for those children will be. Further, fewer hearing tests will be required in early childhood, because if a child passes the newborn hearing screening the chance of hearing loss being discovered at a later time is lessened.

The support for cochlear implantation has grown over recent years to meet the identified demand as demonstrated by an increase of 15 implants in children from 2006. In addition, the one-off enhancement of 44 more implants has made a significant impact on the period that people wait for an implant. New South Wales

Health is already responding to the increased demand for cochlear implants, especially for those children who will benefit most. I again pay tribute to Professor William Gibson and the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre, and advise that the Government does not support the motion.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.40 p.m.]: It is with great delight that I contribute briefly to the motion moved by the member for Lane Cove, which states:

That this House calls upon the Government to increase the funding to the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre to cover the current shortfall of funds to provide hearing for those who cannot afford it.

I am really sorry that the Government does not support this important motion, as stated by the member for Macquarie Fields. The member for Lane Cove said that every year more than 200 people are accepted into the Sydney cochlear program and that although private health insurance may cover 25 per cent of those, and public funding may cover another 50 per cent, 25 per cent of cases require other methods of funding. Obviously, donations to the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre are vital to ensuring that people who cannot afford the procedure, or who are not covered by private health insurance and do not receive public funding, can have this important work performed. In our everyday society we all know the value of hearing. The cost of implants for 50 children is approximately \$2.5 million. If that cost were to remain with the Government, and those 50 children were to remain deaf, the cost overall would exceed \$20 million by the time those 50 children reached the age of 12. That is a significant impost on the New South Wales public.

In my electorate deafness is as prevalent as it is in other electorates. I have known several children in the Burrinjuck electorate who have been profoundly deaf and I have assisted their parents and made representations on their behalf to get them the facilities they needed. The cost of a cochlear device, surgery and rehabilitation for a deaf child comes to about \$50,000. However, as I said previously, the cost to the public would exceed \$20 million by the time those children reach 12 years of age and that equates to about \$400,000 per child in social services costs. I need not utilise the emotive argument in this debate, I can argue it purely in economic terms. I am sure that the Treasurer, if he knew of this debate taking place now, would be swayed by that statement.

I acknowledge the work of Professor William Gibson, AM. Under his leadership the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre program began in 1984. There is no doubt that Professor Gibson had incredible vision and drive and, obviously, has made an enormous contribution to society. Sydney Cochlear is a not-for-profit organisation; its sole aim is to give the gift of hearing to deaf children, adolescents and adults. Last year I travelled to the electorate of the hardworking member for Lane Cove to visit Sydney Cochlear. We all recognise that Sydney Cochlear is a world leader in the field of cochlear implant technology, and it has established an amazing facility. The professional staff and other personnel working in that busy centre are second to none. The centre is well worth this very small additional funding called for by the member for Lane Cove in his motion. It does not involve a lot of money—\$2.5 million—but it would have a net benefit for the New South Wales public, for the New South Wales taxpayer, of \$17.5 million per year.

As my friend the member for Lane Cove said, this is a no-brainer. The Government could spend \$2.5 million and would save \$17.5 million; but that is not the way this Government operates when it comes to fiscal responsibility and economic policy. Why save \$100 when it could spend \$1,000? That is the way the Government appears to operate. I do not know if it is for bureaucratic reasons that it operates in that way, but it is certainly not being responsible to the taxpayers of the State, nor is it being fair to people who require those very valuable bionic ears. This world-class facility in Sydney is able to provide that service. On behalf of all my country kids who need bionic ears but cannot afford to pay for them, I implore the Government to reconsider its stance on this very important motion and to support it.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [12.45 p.m.]: I pay a personal tribute to Professor William Gibson. I had not planned to speak to this motion, but when I heard his name mentioned I decided to advise the House that I was under his watchful hand for six years. As a child I had a mastoid and was treated by three specialists—two died, and one retired—then by Professor Gibson. I know of the great work that Professor Gibson has done for children and for cochlear implantation for both children and adults and the great work that he does throughout the world by lecturing, a lot of times at his own expense. Many times when I endeavoured to make an appointment to see Professor Gibson I was informed that he was overseas doing cochlear implants and lecturing.

The Government has increased the number of cochlear implants this year—42 children—and has allocated \$3 million for the procedures. No-one would deny that a child who is born profoundly deaf needs to undergo that procedure as early as possible, as indicated by other members. Professor Gibson is one of the best ear, nose and throat specialists in this country.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove) [12.48 p.m.], in reply: As my colleague the member for Burrinjuck advised, earlier I said that this motion is a no-brainer. On behalf of the Opposition, my motion called on the Government to provide an additional \$2.5 million to the wonderful Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre. There is no disagreement from either side of the House that the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre does a wonderful job or that Professor William Gibson and his team perform a wonderful service. It is very interesting, however, that although no argument has been put up against the provision of the additional \$2.5 million, the Government opposes that allocation. As stated by the member for Burrinjuck, this is a no-brainer. Do we spend \$2.5 million to save \$17.5 million, and while doing that deny people—who, by the grace of God could be any of us—access to a fundamental right, given the available technology, to live to their best ability by being able to hear? It is a gift that we as members of this House have within ourselves to give.

We can spend more than \$30 million on a V8 Supercar race, which might go for a week, or we can spend a small portion of that, \$2.5 million, to give people, particularly young children, an experience and a gift for life. At the same time, we can save the taxpayers of this State a large amount of money. I recommend that members who have not visited Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre do so. The member for Cabramatta said he has been under the watchful hand of the wonderful Professor Gibson. The audiologists and psychologists at the centre do a magnificent job. It is wonderful to visit the centre and see a child that has been born profoundly deaf playing with toys, focussing on those toys, and then when the first beep goes on and the audiologists get the device to a certain level the child suddenly stops, the eyes light up, and the child looks around with a huge grin. One cannot visit the centre and not be moved. When you see that wonderful expression on the child's face, you experience an absolute miracle. You cannot leave the centre not in tears. It is not good enough to say that for various reasons we are not going to assist people who cannot afford such a device for their child or who will miss out because of a lack of funding. As I said, economically it is a no-brainer.

I became a member of this House, as I think all members did, to make a difference. Regardless of what side of the House we are on, in our various ways we all strive to make a difference. We should not have to have such organisations coming to us begging for such funding when we as a House can identify that there is a need and we can do something about it. The purpose of this motion is to merely say that we as parliamentarians, supposedly representing a caring community, are going to give these children the gift of hearing—a gift that they will remember for their entire lives. When we turn on the radio and listen to music or make a telephone call we take our hearing very much for granted, and we forget that many young children and older people are not able to do those things.

I would love this motion to receive joint recognition from both sides of this House. I am incredibly disappointed that the Government will not support the motion. As I said, a relatively small increase in funding would not only provide children and older people with access to a lifestyle that they would otherwise not have, but would also save the Government money. The Government's lack of support for the motion is a profound disappointment to me. I ask the Government to perhaps reconsider its position and support the Opposition in supporting the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 39

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

Noes, 45

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

Pair

Mr McLeay

Mr O'Farrell

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****BURRINJUCK ELECTORATE FESTIVALS****Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON** (Burrinjuck) [1.00 p.m.]: I move:

That this House congratulates the many organisers of local festivals in the Burrinjuck electorate for their hard work and commitment to the betterment of the local communities.

Almost a year ago to the day I moved a motion congratulating the organisers of local festivals in the Burrinjuck electorate on their hard work and commitment to the betterment of the local communities. I am sure that all members of the House will join me in expressing similar sentiments about the festivals in their electorates. Festivals are fun. They highlight the unique flavour and character of individual areas, and they give residents a chance to show off their towns, of which they are quite rightly very proud. Burrinjuck is a very large electorate and as a result has many festivals. I will touch on a few—I will not get through them all—to highlight the hard work done by the organisers and the benefits that the festivals bring to their local communities.

Whilst festivals are fun, they are also hard work for the dedicated band of volunteers who run them. Organisers have myriad problems to face: public indemnity insurance, fundraising, advertising, liaising with police and the Roads and Traffic Authority over traffic closures, organising first aid, obtaining council approval, organising volunteers, arranging liquor licences—which becomes harder and harder each time—arranging the media, finding guests of honour, seating, marquees, sideshows, and the list goes on. It is amazing that, year after year, country people are willing to put up their hands to work hard to do the underpaid, and often unrecognised, job of organising an annual festival. They truly deserve our praise and commendation.

I am delighted to see that the Minister for Tourism is at the table. I acknowledge that the Minister has just approved funding for the Gold Trail, and I thank her. May she fund many festivals in the Burrinjuck electorate! Boorowa Irish Woolfest is to be held on 4 October this year—I make a point of attending each year. Now in its twelfth year, Woolfest attracts more than 15,000 visitors to the town of Boorowa. I am sure Mr Acting-Speaker has heard of the running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain. In Boorowa, we have the running of the sheep. While the sheep are significantly less dangerous than Spanish bulls, the running of the sheep is immensely popular. Boorowa is a major breeding area of beautiful superfine merino sheep, and regularly attracts thousands of visitors for the fun. The rampaging sheep down the main street are followed by a colourful street parade and a lot of popular repeat events, such as the dog flyball competition, the blessing of the fleece by the local clergy, Irish dances, pipe bands, Irish singers and a growers market. The festival has won several tourism awards and has been featured on the television program *Getaway*.

At the other end of the electorate, that great observer and recorder of the Australian character Henry Lawson was born on the goldfields of Grenfell in 1867. It is appropriate that a literary festival is held every year to celebrate his achievements and to foster and promote his contribution to our heritage. This year will see the fifty-first annual Henry Lawson Festival of Arts, to be held on the June long weekend because of its close proximity to Henry Lawson's birthday on 17 June. The aim of the festival is to promote and attain recognition for aspiring Australians in various fields of the arts, such as verse, short story, art photography and television. Children's various artistic endeavours are catered for especially.

The first Henry Lawson Festival of Arts was held in 1958 and has continued every year since. It is organised by a committee of volunteers with assistance from local organisations in Grenfell and the Weddin Shire Council employees, with Mayor Morris Simpson being a prominent figure every year. Throughout its history the Grenfell festival has welcomed many distinguished guests, and this year's special guest is Max Cullen. The guests come to officially open the festival as judges, as performers or as recipients of awards. The festival has had many special guests over the years. In fact, Henry Lawson's daughter Bertha opened the festival in 1967 and his grand nephew Peter Lawson opened it in 1985. This festival has done a lot to perpetuate the memory of one of Australia's illustrious sons. I hope that the Minister for Tourism will see fit to agree to the funding request we made for the festival last year when a different Minister was in the portfolio. Last year I had the honour of attending the opening as one of the official guests, and I also presented the Country Music Awards, as part of the festival.

From sheep rampaging down streets and the celebration of one of Australia's literary icons, the festivals in Burrinjuck then move on to pumpkins. The Collector Village Pumpkin Festival will be held this year on Sunday 3 May 2009. It is an annual event that celebrates the village of Collector through pumpkins. The festival weekend kicks off with a pumpkin ball on Friday night. Of course during a pumpkin festival there are competitions for the biggest pumpkin and the best scarecrow, among others, and Saturday is mainly taken up admitting competitors. Stall holders of craft, wine and fine foods arrive early Sunday morning and set up their wares for the festival day, with exhibitions, events, competitions and demonstrations occurring at different times during the day, amusing, entertaining and delighting adults and children alike.

Young is a major population centre in the Burrinjuck electorate. It is also known as the cherry capital of Australia because of the fantastic cherries that are produced in the area. I should note, however, that that does not detract from the excellence of the other orchard produce from this area, which is also of the highest quality. Cherries and Young are synonymous so Young hosts the national Cherry Festival over two weekends—the last in November and the first in December. The festival began as recognition of the importance of cherries to the district, with a carnival committee organising a Blossom Carnival from 3 to 10 December 1949. The Blossom Carnival grew quickly and it was decided that holding the festival during the cherry harvest would be more beneficial for the district's growers, with fruit sold on the roadside to festival visitors.

Cootamundra often has its name shortened to "Coota"—a play on the name's similarity to Kuta Beach in Bali. The locals at Cootamundra have been running the Coota Beach Volleyball Festival since 2001. This year it was held on the last weekend in February and attracted 84 teams from across New South Wales—twice as many as attended in 2007. A mass of sand, up to 260 tonnes, is imported to construct two full-size beach volleyball courts in the main street of Cootamundra. The festival attracts teams from Sydney, Canberra, Wagga Wagga and the surrounding district. This year about 800 athletes competed—not including those who entered the Coota Beach Triathlon, which is a spin-off event that has also grown in popularity since its inception in 2004.

Cowra has strong links with its history and the breakout of Japanese prisoners of war, with the subsequent large loss of life. It has two major festivals and holds other events throughout the year. This year the Cowra Festival of International Understanding will be held from 12 to 15 March, showcasing the nation of Portugal. Cowra also celebrates the Sakur Matsuri, or Cherry Blossom Festival, from 23 to 27 September. The festival is a Japanese celebration held to herald the arrival of spring every year, when the cherry blossoms are at their absolute best. The festival, which is held at the magnificent Cowra Japanese Gardens, is based on the traditional Japanese festival of the same name.

Gundagai has the Snake Gully Cup—country bush racing at its finest—and Gundaroo in my electorate also holds bush races. If the Minister for Tourism is in Gundaroo at the time of the bush races, she will see that it is a magnificent event to behold. Gundagai hosts the Turning Wave Festival, which is a celebration of Irish and Australian music and the arts. It will be held this year from 16 to 20 September. The Crookwell Country Festival is being held this weekend. The main street will be turned into a market, and clowns, bands and other

performers will join local residents and thousands of visitors from the region to celebrate the beginning of autumn. The Yass River Festival—which was previously held in November but now is held in February—is a wonderful weekend. St Edmunds Anglican Church in Gunning holds a walkathon every year. The events held throughout the Burrinjuck electorate are far too numerous to mention in the limited time available this morning. I hope that all members will join me in thanking the hardworking volunteers who support these major events, held every year rain, hail, sleet or shine.

Mr MATT BROWN (Kiama) [1.10 p.m.]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of individuals and groups who organise arts and community activities throughout the State. Our community life is greatly enhanced by the cultural festivals, the performing arts, galleries and museums. As members will be aware, many great arts and cultural activities are organised at a grassroots level by passionate and committed citizens working for the benefit of their neighbours and friends. The Government is proud to support them through grants that provide for project and activity funding, for infrastructure construction and facilities improvement projects, and for community development. In 2009 the Government has committed more than \$37 million to arts funding, including \$16.1 million in Arts Funding Program grants that were announced by the Premier on 8 January. These grants support all art forms, including music, theatre, dance, literature, museums, history, and visual arts and crafts. Applications for the 2009 Arts Funding Program were very competitive, with more than 360 organisations applying for funding.

The Government is committed to policies that support the arts in a targeted way that builds communities and enhances social cohesion and the sharing of ideas and experiences. This most recent round of grants to support the arts comes as a result of a review of the cultural grants programs administered by Arts New South Wales to simplify and streamline the application and approval processes. On 13 September 2007 the former Minister for the Arts announced a review of the State's cultural grants program. The review was established to assess the program's effectiveness and identify opportunities to make it more strategic and effective. The review was undertaken by Mr Michael Collins and Ms Sandra Yates. I place on record our thanks for their hard work in undertaking the review. The report was released on 31 March 2008 and is available on the website of Arts New South Wales at www.arts.nsw.gov.au. On 28 August 2008 the new Arts Funding Program was announced and released on the same website. Funding decisions were announced on 8 January 2009.

The wide range of applications demonstrated the breadth of creative thinking across New South Wales and indicated the level of community engagement with arts and culture of all types and forms. One of the highlights of the Government's arts and cultural strategy is the provision of more than \$5 million for regional arts initiatives across New South Wales through the Arts Funding Program. Funding to regional arts activities in 2009 includes: \$18,400 for the Mungindi Music Festival in the electorate of Barwon, and \$82,000 to the Bathurst Regional Council for the Chifley Home Interpretation Centre. This very exciting development will expand access to the Chifley Home, its collection and the Ben Chifley story. It has been promoted by the local member, Gerard Martin, not only in Parliament but everywhere I hear him speak.

Another regional arts activity to be funded is the Lady Denham Heritage Complex in Huskisson, which will receive \$147,150, including \$95,000 for a heritage complex that will provide a permanent exhibition space for natural environment displays from the Jervis Bay region, and a collection management area for acquisitions cataloguing and conservation work. I have a strong affection for this complex as it is just south of Kiama and helps to promote the beautiful South Coast. Further funding of \$50,000 is provided for the Arts Northern Rivers Inc.'s Regional Museum Development project, which will enable museums and volunteers in the Northern Rivers area to collaborate and engage with local artists and schools and to promote local tourism. This project will benefit the towns of Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Nimbin. In my electorate of Kiama, I welcome the Government's grant of \$9,600 in support of the Kangaroo Valley Arts Festival, which combines classical and fine contemporary music with visual arts. I am very appreciative of the great work the organisers do to stage this event every couple of years. I look forward to attending another festival.

The Government recognises the importance of local festivals as drivers of regional tourism. As the former Minister for Tourism I took a great deal of interest in the Regional Flagship Events Program, and I know from talking with the current Minister for Tourism that she is also excited about it. That is why the Government has supported the Gold Trail launch, in the electorate of the member for Burrinjuck, with a grant. At the launch, which was held this month, the Gold Trail was presented to the district's council and community members. Tourism New South Wales markets and promotes our regions and products both within Australia and internationally with year-round campaigns. The Regional Flagship Events Program has funded over 186 events to a total value of more than \$3.9 million since 1996. These are spectacular events. I am sure that members have heard of events such as the Deniliquin Ute Muster, the Byron Bay Writers Festival, the Australian Celtic

Festival and the Parkes Elvis Festival. Events and festivals help the local community by boosting local economies. The latest figures for the year ending September 2008 show that regional areas received 17.1 million domestic visitors and more than 618,000 international visitors. These significant funding commitments will assist artists and their communities to develop skills and reach out to wider audiences. They will encourage everyone to participate in art on their doorstep or further afield. The Government is committed to continuing its strong support for these activities.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [1.18 p.m.]: I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to the motion moved by the hardworking member for Burrinjuck to recognise the festivals of Burrinjuck and, following the speech of the member for Kiama, festivals throughout New South Wales. Festivals may be related to the arts or they may be cultural. Industry and commerce may play a role. People with common interests get together and create a festival. It is interesting to examine the source and history of festivals and events in my electorate. Often, it is the idea of an individual who is passionate about a particular aspect of life or activity in the area. Consequently, a festival begins as a small event with the support of the community—and festivals need community support. Most of the work is done by volunteers and people who are prepared to support the festivals—predominantly institutions like Rotary and Lions clubs and others in the community. When we visit a festival we can appreciate the amount of volunteering involved and the importance of volunteers.

It is important for people in small communities to get together and perhaps meet others from their area whom they have not seen for some time. Festivals can provide an opportunity for fundraising not only for the community but for charities important to a particular area, as well as the entire State. Festivals provide a huge economic benefit to the communities in which they take place. We commonly hear from motel owners and shop proprietors that a one-day, weekend, one-week or two-week event has a huge impact on their takings. It is very important that small businesses in such communities enjoy the economic benefits that can be derived from those types of functions.

An event in my electorate that illustrates the ingenuity of people and their desire to bring the community together is the Booligal Sheep Races. Booligal is a very small community situated between Ivanhoe and Hay in my electorate. The families in the area decided they needed an event to put Booligal on the map. As a consequence, the community holds annual sheep races—which are probably primarily about people getting together in one spot to enjoy the fun of seeing children attempting to ride sheep, to enjoy each other's company and to raise money for charities. Last year I opened the art show in Urana and the next day there was a tractor pull event. Tractor pulls are now held throughout most of the region and are an opportunity for service clubs to raise funds and get people together.

A couple of other major events in my electorate are the St Pat's Day races—interestingly, the event resulted from a discussion about 28 years ago between a Catholic priest and a bookmaker about raising money for local Catholic schools—and the Deniliquin Ute Muster. Who would think 10 years ago that a collection of utes out on a flat would create the spectacle that took place last year? It was a massive event: two days of solid entertainment and an opportunity for young people with common interests to get together in a relaxed environment. It was also a great opportunity for the service clubs to raise money and it provided a massive economic benefit to the community of Deniliquin. Such events come from the ideas of individuals. They will continue to be rolled out and they need to be encouraged continually by this Government in order to be successful.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [1.23 p.m.]: As a member of Country Labor I am pleased to put on record my thanks for the terrific work done by organisers of community-based cultural activities and festivals around the State. As well as the arts grants program mentioned by the member for Kiama, I draw the attention of the House to a government program that has been very successful in enhancing cultural life and community participation by people in regional areas. Regional Arts New South Wales is the peak body for regional arts activity in this State. It provides a range of services across the State for advocacy, capacity building, communications and management support for the arts. The great work of Regional Arts New South Wales helps to build positive futures for regional, rural and remote communities through the arts and cultural development.

There are 13 regional arts boards [RABs] around New South Wales. The board in our area is Arts Out West, and it is one of the oldest, having been operating for more than 30 years. Some years ago when I was Mayor of Lithgow I was a member of that board. It has had some wonderful regional arts development officers [RADOs]. Hannah Semmler, who has just left the board after seven or eight years to go to a similar job in the arts in Canberra, was a fantastic organiser. Arts Out West covers areas from Lithgow in the east through the central west to Forbes and Parkes. Dubbo dropped out of the board and formed another group.

Each regional arts development board serves an area of the State made up of a group of local government areas. The local councils in each area, together with the State Government, contribute financially to each regional arts board to employ a regional arts development officer and other support staff. The Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, which provides lodging and accommodation for the administration, also supports Arts Out West. Regional arts boards enable people who live in the regions to manage arts and cultural priorities for their own region, which I believe is very important. Regional Arts New South Wales services a network of more than 100 local government areas, covering more than 662,000 square kilometres and 1.7 million people. In 2008 Regional Arts New South Wales managed or developed funding programs on behalf of Arts New South Wales and the Commonwealth Government totalling \$634,000.

I will give some examples of the very practical way in which the Government, through regional arts, is supporting local events and festivals in regional New South Wales. It is delivering funding programs and initiatives including the Country Arts Support Program, the Regional Arts Fund, quick-response grants and prop-up grants. It is conducting professional development and training programs, providing information services and knowledge development to ensure that good ideas and best practice are shared freely for the benefit of everyone around the State, and undertaking and supporting research into audience and market development—all important tools that will make these initiatives viable in local communities.

In Lithgow, for instance, Ironfest is a very important festival that has developed over the past few years. Ironfest is based on fire and steel, reflecting Lithgow's history as the cradle of heavy industry in Australia and the most significant industrial site in Australia, where the first steel was produced. Many of our great and heavy industries originated in the valley of Lithgow. Ironfest, which is the brainchild of Macgregor Ross, is a celebration of that history. In a few short years, the festival has developed a tremendous following. One of the events at Ironfest is mediaeval jousting. It is quite a spectacle, as the Lithgow Tony Luchetti sportsground goes back in time with knights in full armour, a re-enactment of mediaeval battles, blacksmiths and artisans making things from steel, and music and cultural activities associated with mediaeval times. Tourism New South Wales helps to fund Ironfest, and the event was also the recipient of flagship funding that helped to get it established. I invite everyone to come to Lithgow on 26 April to be part of the celebration of Ironfest. It is run by a wonderful group of volunteers—who sound very similar to the volunteers that members opposite mentioned—and it gives local organisations the opportunity to get together and to raise money.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [1.28 p.m.]: I am absolutely delighted to support the motion moved by the member for Burrinjuck, which recognises the enormous contribution made by volunteers who put together festivals throughout her electorate, and throughout New South Wales. I commend the member for Burrinjuck, who I know works very hard on behalf of her electorate. She mentioned a number of festivals that have been, and are to be, held in her electorate. The electorate of Wagga Wagga was fortunate in the last electoral redistribution to be awarded areas that were once in the electorate of Burrinjuck, including the shire of Tumut.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: My loss, your gain.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: As the member says that is her loss and my gain. The Tumut area also has festivals, as the member for Burrinjuck will recall. One of them is the Festival of the Falling Leaf. The festival is held regularly and presents a wonderful opportunity for communities to come together. This year's festival will be held from Friday 1 May to Sunday 3 May. An enormous program has been put together. People can enjoy fine food and wine at the official gala dinner, bluegrass music and events with Ausgrass 2009, a family fun day at Bila Park, a gala day with children's activities, bush poetry, market stalls and fireworks. There will certainly be lots to do in the Tumut region.

There are many places to visit and a program is available on the Internet for the information of those who want to travel to the mountains to enjoy our hospitality and to immerse themselves in the colourful autumn leaves at Tumut's Festival of the Falling Leaf. The long-running Batlow Apple Blossom Festival celebrates the diversity of the region, but, more importantly, the fact that Batlow is a premier apple-growing area. We have many hundreds of acres of apple orchards in the area and the produce is marketed throughout the world. We are proud of that and it is celebrated at the Apple Blossom Festival. Members have referred to recognising the work done by volunteers in organising these festivals. I am pleased to tell the House that at this year's Australia Day ceremony the Batlow organising committee was awarded for its efforts. James Jones, a terrific young man, accepted that award on behalf of the community. I was delighted to see that recognition.

Many festivals are held in the electorate of Wagga Wagga, including the annual Uranquinty Folk Festival, which attracts people from throughout Australia who are interested in folk music, and the highly

successful Spirit of the Land Festival at Lockhart, which is supported by wonderful sponsors. I am sure the member for Burrinjuck will agree that it would be virtually impossible to hold these festivals if it were not for the great support offered by sponsors. The town of Adelong organises an antiques fair and auction. The main street is closed to traffic and a wonderful time is had by all. Although it is not called a festival, it has a festival atmosphere. These events put those towns on the map. Tumbarumba—which is now in the electorate of the member for Albury rather than in mine—has the Tumbafest, which is held in February each year. As always, this year's event was wonderful and included terrific entertainment, including a performance by James Morrison.

The arts, including music, are vital to communities across the world. They are part of the social fabric that weaves our communities together. A previous speaker referred to government funding. The 19 rural and regional conservatoriums of music in New South Wales are struggling to get government funding. They have been appealing for funds for many months without success. Unless the Government provides about \$3 million to these institutions they will begin to close because of financial hardship. While we recognise volunteers and the contribution they make, we must appreciate that many musicians will be hampered because of the lack of funding provided to our conservatoriums. I urge members to support increased funding so that we can keep educating these wonderful musicians.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [1.33 p.m.], in reply: I thank the members for Kiama, Murray-Darling, Bathurst and Wagga Wagga for their contributions. This motion is important to me because it is about congratulating the many organisers of local festivals in the Burrinjuck electorate on their hard work and commitment to the betterment of their communities. The members who made a contribution to this debate did not necessarily keep within the strict parameters of the motion, but I hoped that the debate would range more broadly. I thank the House for its tolerance because members did cover a wide range of issues.

The member for Kiama spoke about his time as Minister for Tourism and mentioned funding that I have been successful in obtaining for my electorate. I thank the Hon. Jodi McKay, the Minister for Tourism, for that funding, which will be spent promoting the Gold Trail. The Young and District Chamber of Commerce came up with the idea for this project. Joanne Johnson, the secretary-treasurer of the chamber, sent me a letter about the project in January. I obviously made the appropriate very strong representations on behalf of the chamber and I am excited that the project will now be formally presented. It will be fantastic if we can get the Gold Trail up and running because it is a great tourism initiative for the Young district. I hope it will be a great success.

The member for Murray-Darling mentioned the Booligal Sheep Races. The Burrinjuck electorate's answer to that is the Caragabal Sheep Races. Members should do themselves a favour and make the effort to attend the races. The member for Bathurst referred to Regional Arts New South Wales. Elizabeth Rogers, the chief executive officer of that organisation, is a remarkable and formidable woman. She certainly knows her own mind. If anyone knows arts in this State, she does. Regional Arts New South Wales has been pleading for additional funding so that it can transport some of the fabulous art exhibitions that are enjoyed by city residents into the regions so that country people can enjoy them also. I congratulate Elizabeth Rogers and everybody else involved with Regional Arts New South Wales on the amazing job they are doing despite seriously restricted funding. I will continue to push on their behalf for more funding whenever I can. The member for Wagga Wagga referred to Tumut's Festival of the Falling Leaf, the Batlow Apple Blossom Festival, the Tumbafest, the Adelong Antique Fair and Auction—

Mr Daryl Maguire: And the Spirit of the Land Festival at Lockhart.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): He dealt with many subjects.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON: He also talked about the 19 regional conservatoriums of music in this State that are desperately seeking \$3 million in funding. That is a miniscule amount given the funds available to this Government. That funding would be a huge boost to the many wonderful music students around this State. I have had many long conversations and cups of coffee with Stephen O'Connell, the Director of the Goulburn Regional Conservatorium, who does a fantastic job with regional music conservatoriums. He is a very highly skilled and professional musician and a brilliant teacher, but he is at his wit's end. This funding must be provided to regional conservatoriums. Many students travel to Sydney every year to perform at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. I believe that the Carr Government spent \$60 million refurbishing that building to Sydney standards. We are asking for a paltry \$3 million, which would be of enormous benefit to hundreds of country kids who otherwise would not get a music education. I implore the Government to address the issue.

I have a motion on the notice paper about that funding. I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for raising the issue. Festivals are imperative to the Burrinjuck electorate and I thank every volunteer who has had anything to do with them. I also thank the members who contributed to the debate.

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

Motion agreed to.

[The Acting-Speaker (Mr Wayne Merton) left the chair at 1.38 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ministerial Statement

Mr NATHAN REES (Toongabbie—Premier, and Minister for the Arts) [2.15 p.m.]: International Women's Day will be observed around the world on Sunday. This evening I will be hosting a Government reception to announce the winner of the 2009 New South Wales Woman of the Year Award. The award celebrates the achievements of outstanding women and their contributions to the economic, social and political status of women in the community. There were no fewer than 87 nominations for this year's award—eloquent testimony of itself to the range and quality of women's work for a better and fairer society. Among the 10 finalists are women distinguished by their contributions to medicine, sport, filmmaking, teaching and advocacy, and to the health and education of indigenous women in rural New South Wales. The winner will be known tonight. But it is appropriate that I mention now that the presentation will also include a Special Recognition Award, to be presented for the first time. That honour goes to Jane McGrath.

Jane's courage and determination, as well as her fundraising efforts for breast cancer sufferers through the establishment of the McGrath Foundation, are worthy of special recognition on this International Women's Day. All of us have been inspired by Jane's example. All of us were saddened by her death last year. Breast cancer remains one of the three leading killers of Australian women. One in eight New South Wales women will develop the disease. If courage alone determined the chances of survival, Jane would surely have lived to be 100. This disease can strike anyone, even the most determined and best prepared of fighters. Great progress is being made against breast cancer. Today in New South Wales around 88 per cent of all breast cancer cases are cured. And, when detected early, some 97 per cent of cases are cured.

The importance of early detection cannot be overstated. Until we reach that 100 per cent figure Jane's death will serve as an inspiration to all of us to give more, to work harder, so that children like James and Holly McGrath will not be left without their mothers, or partners like Glenn without their soul mates. Jane McGrath's passing touched us all. She faced her struggle with dignity and courage. To the end, she made every minute count, not just for her own family but for thousands of women she would never know, women who will have longer and better lives because of the McGrath Foundation. Jane's work will live on. I ask honourable members to join me today in honouring her memory on International Women's Day and as we congratulate the other distinguished women nominated for the New South Wales Woman of the Year Award.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [2.17 p.m.]: On behalf of the Opposition I acknowledge International Women's Day. We welcome the special award to be given to Jane McGrath this evening. Our best wishes go to the McGrath family and the McGrath Foundation that she fought so hard for. It is my pleasure to acknowledge International Women's Day today. The idea was born in a working women's conference in Copenhagen 99 years ago, and the day began to be celebrated by unions, working women's groups and socialist parties around the world from the following year, on 19 March 1911. From its beginnings as an obscure Marxist-inspired day on which to demand rights for working women, it has become instead a very mainstream day in 2009. In our State it is celebrated by Soroptimists, the Young Women's Christian Association, Zonta and the Australian Businesswomen's Network, to say nothing of hundreds of local events put together by local women's groups. These range from breakfasts to seminars on human trafficking and activities for schoolgirls. Just about everyone goes. We are now even happy to say, "Happy International Women's Day", just as we do for Christmas and birthdays.

It is an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of women, to acknowledge the inequalities that still exist and the importance of keeping the women's movement going. It is one of the oldest movements for social change left in the world—one of the most persistent and one of the most successful. It is important to acknowledge the benefits of the emancipation of women and the benefits it has brought to men as well as

women—such as universal education, including access to universities. Young men and women today are incredulous to learn that just a short time ago domestic violence was viewed to be a private family matter in which neither the State nor the church saw any need to intervene. Similarly, sexual harassment, equal pay and access to services are now recognised to be important elements of public policy where once they were nobody's business. The Opposition is happy to support International Women's Day.

QUESTION TIME

CHILD PROTECTION LAWS

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. How can the Premier claim to be protecting children at risk when, despite too many deaths of children who had been notified to the Department of Community Services as being at risk of harm, his proposed new legislative reforms to child protection laws, contrary to Commissioner Wood's recommendations, will strip the Ombudsman of any ability to investigate the deaths of children such as Dean Shillingworth? Why does the Premier hate independent scrutiny?

Mr NATHAN REES: I remind the House that the Opposition is the outfit that was going to get rid of the Department of Community Services.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier this week Minister Burney and I announced the Government's response to the Wood inquiry. We accepted 106 of 111 recommendations. One that we did not accept was the one to which the Leader of the Opposition refers—and there is a very good reason for that. The Commissioner for Children and Young People does a very good job assessing child deaths and it is not the Government's role to get in the way of that. Some \$230 million—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order is under Standing Order 129, relevance. The Premier, with respect, is mistaken. He has just referred to a recommendation that did concern the Ombudsman.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

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

[Interruption]

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

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the third time. The Leader of the Opposition is on his final warning.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms to remove the Leader of the Opposition from the Chamber.

[The Leader of the Opposition left the Chamber, accompanied by the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms.]

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not cop the Speaker's ruling being completely rejected. No-one has the right to abuse the rulings of the Chair.

Mr NATHAN REES: For the record—I trust this will be relayed to the Leader of the Opposition—the research undertaken by the New South Wales Child Death Review Team over the past 10 years has helped professionals working in many areas of policy and service delivery to reduce child deaths in New South Wales. Over the period 1996 to 2005 the likelihood of a child's death has declined by 38 per cent.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The report entitled "Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing" and released by the Minister and me earlier this week has been welcomed by the Benevolent Society. It responded that the report "shows a commitment to improved child welfare assistance".

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Goulburn will cease calling out.

Mr NATHAN REES: In a joint statement, child wellbeing experts Gillian Calvert, the New South Wales Commissioner for Children and Young People, Professor Dorothy Scott, the Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection, and Associate Professor Judy Cashmore of the University of Sydney's Law School, said, "The New South Wales Government's substantial and far-reaching changes are an opportunity to re-do the way child abuse and risk of harm is reported and acted on in this State." I also said that the community needs to support the Government making vulnerable children a priority in these tough economic times. The chief executive officer of the Association of Child Welfare Agencies has commended the Government's decision to channel a significant proportion of money—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. It is lovely to hear all these testimonials from organisations about what the Government has done, but the question was very specific.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease calling out. What is the point of order?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The question was very specific: it asked the Premier to explain why he has removed the power of the Ombudsman to oversee decisions made by child protection authorities. There can be nothing more important than that question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will not debate the point.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: The Premier makes a mockery of this Parliament by refusing to answer the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will not debate the point. I will hear further from the Premier.

Mr NATHAN REES: The short answer is: We did not. I will continue to quote from the experts in child protection. Bill Pritchard, the executive officer of AbSEC, the peak body for Aboriginal out-of-home care, has congratulated the Government on the collaborative approach we have taken. He said: "The focus on building on existing Aboriginal community capacity and strengths is to be applauded." The child protection system took years to recover from the cuts and neglect under the former Coalition Government's watch. We have backed the Wood inquiry with a comprehensive response—

Ms Pru Goward: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, which deals with relevance. My point of order is that the Ombudsman's power that has been lost is the right to review the deaths of children notified to the Department of Community Services. That has nothing to do with the review team; it has to do with the Ombudsman's powers.

The SPEAKER: Order! The point has been well made.

Mrs Dawn Fardell: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. Where is the Opposition's submission to establish—

The SPEAKER: Order! That is clearly not a point of order, and the member for Dubbo has been here long enough to know that. The Premier's answer is relevant to the question asked.

Mr NATHAN REES: In conclusion, a comprehensive response to the Wood inquiry has been backed by nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in funding in stage one, with more to come.

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY REFORM

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN: My question is addressed to the Premier. What action is the Government taking to stimulate the State's economy through reform to the energy sector in New South Wales?

Mr NATHAN REES: I am pleased to advise the House that today the New South Wales Government commenced the next phase of its reforms for the State's electricity industry.

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

[Interruption]

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

Mr NATHAN REES: As I said, I am pleased to advise the House that today the New South Wales Government commenced the next phase of its reforms for the State's electricity industry.

[Interruption]

There is only one joke to laugh at, and that is the Coalition's energy policy. Earlier today the Minister and I released the New South Wales Energy Reform Strategy. Today is an important milestone. Today is about driving investment in the future of New South Wales. As we know, the global financial crisis is impacting families, businesses and governments around the world. Governments, in turn, are responding with urgency, by driving investment in infrastructure and investment in jobs.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Upper Hunter will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: Our electricity supply fundamentally underpins our economy. Ensuring we have a secure supply of electricity is critical for households, critical for businesses, and critical when it comes to attracting investment within our State. That is why the New South Wales Government is delivering on energy reforms that reinforce our economy over the long term. We have formulated plans that meet the community's legitimate expectations and deliver an important policy objective: to secure the reliable supply of electricity in this State for the long term.

We are focused on the outcomes we want: securing new generation capacity in the private sector, strong protection for workers and families, and a good financial outcome for taxpayers. It is appropriate that I briefly recap on the three major components of the strategy announced late last year. Firstly, the Government will sell to the private sector the right to trade electricity generated by government-owned power stations. Until now the Government has performed that task. Trading electricity is a risky business and not one that the Government wants or needs to be in. This model transfers this trading risk from taxpayers to the private sector—where it more appropriately belongs. In exchange the Government will receive a predictable and stable flow of income from its electricity-generating businesses.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Secondly, we will sell to the private sector the electricity retailing operations of Energy Australia, Integral Energy and Country Energy. The infrastructure components—the poles and wires elements of these businesses—will remain in public ownership, as will the generators themselves. I repeat: The generators will remain in public hands. Finally, we will also sell to the private sector the Government's potential new power station sites, some of which have already commenced the development application process for new plants.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: Sites will be sold with development approvals that will allow for both coal and gas in line with the Government's fuel neutral policy.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The Government will also require the best available technology, including carbon capture readiness, to be used on these sites. This package strikes the right balance. It takes into account the wishes of the community, the needs of employees, and the requirement for New South Wales to attract private sector investment in our electricity industry. The next phase of the Government's electricity reforms began today with the publication of the Energy Reform Strategy Framework. It provides a detailed explanation of the "Gen-trader" model and answers many of the questions of interest to industry. It sets out in detail contractual parameters to generation trading. It also provides an overview of development sites and discusses implementation issues in bringing the reforms to market.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I will come to the Coalition's position shortly. We will consult with the private sector to sound out its preferences, and to further discuss and refine the industry's new framework and our strategy for reform. That process will formally commence with a major industry briefing next week, which I am pleased to report has already generated much interest.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: We will also be undertaking further targeted discussions with other stakeholder groups, including staff and consumer organisations, and unions, as we transition to the new structure.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Our package presents a sizeable, attractive investment with strategic value. Our plans also ensure the strongest possible regime of consumer protection measures. The Government's proposals will unleash new competitive forces in the marketplace. This means families will have access to greater product diversity, service and choice. The Government also understands the reassurance that consumers feel from having prices set independently. That is why the New South Wales Government is also committed to preserving the power of the independent pricing regulator to set regulated retail electricity prices in New South Wales until at least 2013.

As we commence the next phase of this important process, we do so with confidence that we have a well thought out reform package, which will be delivered in a competitive sale process and will deliver strong outcomes for taxpayers. The package will deliver fundamental reforms for our economy by supporting jobs today and investing in future jobs and thereby ensuring a better future for our State. The contrast between the Government and the Opposition could not be clearer. The Government is acting on energy reform, while the Opposition remains a policy-free zone. The Opposition is incapable of taking a stand on critical issues that will invest in our future. The best attempt by the Leader of the Opposition at taking a policy position on energy reform was in August last year, when he said in a radio interview:

We said all along that we wanted certain things and on the basis of that we would then sit down and consider our position. That was the position from the moment we outlined our position.

If the Leader of the Opposition were in the Chamber I would say to him: You have had a long time to sit down. You have had a long time to come up with a policy alternative.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: In fact, the closest the Coalition got—the member for Vacluse knows this is coming—was when the member for Vacluse told the *Daily Telegraph* on 12 May last year:

I disagree with what our party has done.

It is untenable for me to stay on the front bench and keep my mouth shut.

And then on 2UE he said:

I disagree with the policy position taken by the Party and where I am the shadow spokesperson for it, it is clearly not viable for me to continue in that on the front bench.

A man of principle! He was applauded by the South Coast. The member for Vaucluse is a man of principle, and look what happened to him.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Leader of The Nationals will cease interjecting. The Premier will make his contribution through the Chair. I remind the member for Murrumbidgee that he is on two calls to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: The reward of the member for Vaucluse for taking a position of principle was a shift to the back bench.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The contrast on infrastructure and jobs is equally clear. The Government is spending \$56 billion over the next four years, supporting 150,000 jobs each year. That is \$1.6 million every hour of every day.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: It is the largest infrastructure investment of any State in Australia. We will create 6,000 new government apprenticeships and 2,000 new cadetships.

Mr Daryl Maguire: We heard that yesterday.

Mr NATHAN REES: And you will keep hearing it because it is important to the future of New South Wales.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: In partnership with the Rudd Government, there will be an extra 28,000 apprenticeship training places over the next four years. We have cut developer levies by up to \$64,000 per lot and we have brought \$220 million of Department of Housing maintenance work forward, generating work for 2,500 people across the State. We have boosted the first home buyer's allowance by \$3,000—taking total support to \$24,000, and we are improving public transport. As a consequence of government funding there will be 150 new bendy buses and there will be a new bus factory at Tomago, which will generate 250 jobs for the Hunter—that is good news for the Hunter.

The Planning Minister has approved 64 new major projects, worth around \$9 million and creating 20,000 jobs—none of which would have proceeded under the Opposition; not a single job, not a single proposal. A new major project has been approved every two working days. Recent approvals include the redevelopment of the casino at Darling Harbour, with more than 1,700 jobs; the Queensland-Hunter gas pipeline, with more than 600 jobs; and the Illawarra Business Park, with more than 1,600 jobs.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr NATHAN REES: Every one of these projects was opposed; every single one of these projects would have stalled on the Opposition's watch.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier today I joined the Deputy Prime Minister at Penrith.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Ten minutes late!

Mr NATHAN REES: You would need a hurricane lamp and a cut lunch to find your way to Penrith.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier today I joined the Deputy Prime Minister as she announced \$94 million for trade training centres in 86 schools across New South Wales, coming on top of our changes to the school leaving age. The minimum qualification for students in New South Wales from next year is year 10 and a school certificate and, in addition to that, education in one form or another to the age of 17 years, setting up New South Wales for the future.

Yesterday in this House the Opposition opposed the \$42 billion stimulus package prepared by the Federal Government. The Shadow Treasurer called it reckless and a debt binge. He said:

It will have a negative impact on every family in this country.

The member for Ryde called it economic vandalism and said—you will like this:

There must be a limit to this drunken splurge.

The Leader of the Opposition, of course, tried to have it both ways. He has previously said:

Kevin Rudd supported a Federal stimulus package, Malcolm Turnbull supported a Federal stimulus package, and I support a Federal stimulus package.

Let the record show that in this House yesterday the Opposition voted to oppose the Federal Government's \$42 billion infrastructure stimulus package.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: Firstly, my point order is based on standing order 129 regarding relevance. The question was about electricity generation and the Government's plans in relation to that. Secondly, the Premier is abusing the forms of the House in that there was no vote on the priority motion per se, there was a vote on priority. The Premier is misleading the House. The Opposition did not oppose the package.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat. The House will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: Let the record show that in this House yesterday the Opposition voted to oppose the stimulus package. Let the record also show that there was one Opposition member who did not vote; one Opposition member absolutely desperate to avoid taking a position and who *Hansard* records did not exercise a vote in this Chamber—and he will not do it again today because he has been dismissed. He is the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Barry O'Farrell. The Opposition is lazy. They are a policy embarrassment. The business community knows it, you all know it and the people of New South Wales know it.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Point of order: The Premier is misleading the House. The Leader of the Opposition was paired yesterday at the Government's request.

[Interruption]

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

ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the Premier claimed fiscal responsibility would be the cornerstone of his premiership, and he has produced a disastrous mini-budget, failed to produce a stimulus package, lost the confidence of business, and presided over the lowest annual growth rate in the nation—

Mr John Aquilina: Point of order: The question of the Leader of The Nationals is clearly out of order. The Speaker ruled on this yesterday. The Leader of The Nationals is not entitled to give his opinion of what happened merely by asking a question that is seeking facts.

The SPEAKER: Order! Questions should not be abused. I advise the Leader of the Nationals that I will apply the same standards to members from both sides of the Chamber.

Mr ANDREW STONER: To the point of order: The word was an opinion and it was an opinion shared by many journalists, economists and people in business but I will change the wording of the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! Thank you. I ask the Leader of The Nationals to restate his question.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I will use the word used by the Government. Given that the Premier claimed fiscal responsibility would be the cornerstone of his premiership, and he has produced an unsuccessful mini-budget, failed to produce a stimulus package, lost the confidence of business and presided over the lowest annual growth rate in the nation, how can anyone draw any other conclusion than that the first six months of his premiership have been a complete failure?

Mr NATHAN REES: There are challenging circumstances for every government in Australia, challenging circumstances for the Federal Government, indeed challenging circumstances for every government around the developed world. You do not deal with it by doing things like announcing additional billions of dollars in spending, unfunded. You do not deal with it by announcing billions of dollars in tax cuts, unfunded. You do not deal with it by talking the State down. Instead, you devise a \$56 billion plan to underpin 150,000 jobs each year in New South Wales. You devise a plan where you work in partnership with the Federal Government to put together the biggest infrastructure spend in Australian history—bigger than the Olympics—to generate investment and jobs. You put in place a plan that trains the workforce of the future. You put in place a plan that is fiscally responsible and, only a few weeks ago, was confirmed as such when Moody's reconfirmed the State's triple-A rating.

The alternative is billions of dollars in unfunded expenditure—in cheap populism—and billions of dollars in unfunded tax cuts. It is a recipe for fiscal disaster that would destroy New South Wales if the Opposition were ever on the Treasury bench. During a period of difficult economic circumstances we need people who know what they are doing, not people who will be swayed or addicted to the short-term populism of popular appeal and the sort of dross that the Opposition tosses across the Chamber—the intellectual dross that it masquerades as policy.

Even a group that would normally be expected to back them had this to say yesterday on the Opposition's approach to the Government's planning reforms. Again, more than 60 projects, \$8.5 billion worth of infrastructure and nearly 20,000 jobs, all approved in recent months at the rate of one every two working days, as this Government gets New South Wales back on track. The New South Wales Property Council said on planning reform yesterday:

The Opposition is plain wrong on this issue. Slowing down project assessment and abolishing major project assessment capacity would cost jobs at the very time the country's economy is contracting.

Even its own constituency knows the Opposition is policy free.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY INITIATIVES

Mr PAUL PEARCE: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Climate Change and the Environment. Will the Minister update the House on the Government's energy efficiency initiatives and efforts to create green jobs?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Government understands the impacts of the global economic crisis. We understand it is a global economic crisis that is being felt in jurisdictions right around the world.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members, including the member for Upper Hunter, will cease interjecting.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We also understand that it has a very real impact on our own State and that our job is to try to lessen the effect of that impact on the hardworking families and businesses in New South Wales. It is simply not good enough in these challenging economic times to make throwaway platitudes and not try to grapple with the complexities that we are facing as we respond to the global financial crisis. The lack of leadership shown by the Opposition on this issue is reminiscent of the lack of leadership the Opposition shows on so many issues.

Mr Greg Smith: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129, relevance. The Deputy Premier has not said one word in answer to the question. She has purely abused the Opposition. They are flouting the instructions of the House. I ask you, Mr Speaker, to be fair in your ruling.

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I look forward to updating the House in relation to our plans for energy efficiency and how they will protect and create jobs in New South Wales. We must do all we can to protect existing jobs and all we can to take advantage of opportunities in new sectors. The Government understands that climate change presents opportunities for new jobs in new areas. As I have already indicated to the House, we are determined to make sure that New South Wales capitalises on those opportunities.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The member for Hawkesbury seems to be conducting a meeting at the back of the Chamber. The House will come to order.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: Our \$150 million Energy Efficiency Strategy will boost investment and employment opportunities for a range of industries—companies that carry out energy efficiency audits, businesses that provide household retrofits to enable homes to reduce their energy costs, and people who install solar hot water systems, rainwater tanks and insulation. Our strategy will provide an ongoing basis for future growth in these areas. We are also intent on lowering energy costs for small, medium and large businesses to help them weather the current economic conditions they face.

The New South Wales Government is leading the nation on energy efficiency and working hand in hand with the Rudd Government. On 3 February, as part of the Commonwealth's stimulus package, Prime Minister Rudd announced major national projects for insulating homes and incentives for low carbon water heating. I remind the House that those initiatives would not go ahead if the Opposition had its way. Like its Federal counterpart, it does not support the economic stimulus package, the jobs that come with it or the improvements that families in New South Wales would benefit from—improvements to our schools, public and social housing and energy efficiency. The Opposition opposes all those initiatives. Unlike the Opposition, the Government understands that we can address climate change and we can also address the global financial challenges. For example, \$63 million has been allocated so that 220,000 low-income families can receive door-to-door home energy advice and free energy savings kits. This will help cut the average annual household power bill by up to 10 per cent. We have allocated \$15 million to provide advice to 6,000 small- and medium-size businesses, which is expected to save the average small business \$7,850 on its power bills over 10 years.

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Energy Efficiency Strategy includes the expansion of the very successful Sustainability Advantage Program, which has already helped 230 organisations save close to 6,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases and \$1.6 million on their electricity bills. We know from experience that these types of initiatives help stimulate jobs and free up productive capacity and finance to go into other areas. The more we can assist small, medium and large businesses to reduce their spending on energy bills, the far greater their capacity to survive the economic downturn. It is only through the foresight of the New South Wales Government that New South Wales has a thriving energy efficiency industry. Back in the late 1990s, before climate change had become a household expression, this Government established the world's first carbon trading scheme for electricity retailers. It is still the second-largest carbon market in the world. If we had not done so, we would not have this thriving energy efficiency industry in New South Wales. We would not have had the stimulus to that industry.

When the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme commences, while most components of the Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme [GGAS] are being picked up, energy efficiency measures will not be. We are making sure that those businesses that are providing energy efficiency services under GGAS will continue to have an underpinning regulatory framework. That is why we have announced our new Energy Saving Scheme. This scheme will make sure that those businesses have continued impetus to provide energy efficiency measures to households and businesses right across New South Wales. The scheme, which will come into effect from 1 July this year, will help families reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and save money on their power bills. Initially, energy retailers will be required to make energy savings equivalent to 0.4 per cent in energy sales each year. This target will steadily increase to 4 per cent for 2014 and continue at that level until 2020.

Setting a mandatory energy savings target not only will help families and businesses reduce their electricity bills, it also will promote jobs. Independent economic modelling shows that the introduction of the Energy Savings Scheme will create or protect about 1,000 more jobs in New South Wales by 2020. These jobs will come from using energy more efficiently as we free up capital and improve productivity, enabling the economy to grow at a faster rate than if we had not introduced such a scheme. It also will provide a stimulus for jobs in the short term. All those companies that are gearing up to deliver new energy efficiency products—

retrofitting households and businesses with energy efficient lighting and cooling, new energy efficient appliances—will involve jobs for designers, engineers, electricians, sales staff and installation workers. The Government understands that people in New South Wales are doing it tough. We understand that we need to do all that we can to protect jobs and to promote new jobs in emerging sectors of the economy. We intend to do just that.

FEDERAL STIMULUS PACKAGE

HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the Federal Government gave the New South Wales Government more than \$43 million to cut waiting lists in 2008 but according to the State Government's own figures nearly 57,000 people were waiting for surgery at the end of the year—the highest December figure for four years—why would anyone trust that the State Government could manage the Federal stimulus package money?

Mr NATHAN REES: I remind the Opposition that our hospitals perform more than a quarter of a million surgical procedures and see more than 2.3 million people in emergency departments every single year. That is 700 surgical procedures each day. Waiting times for urgent surgery is down to 10 days, well below the nationally agreed benchmark of 30 days.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Ten days?

Mr NATHAN REES: Put together by experts, not you. Our emergency departments outperform every other State in meeting waiting time and triage benchmarks. There are 2,000 more beds in our hospitals than in 2005 and 9,000 more nurses and midwives—the best paid in Australia—since 1992.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Every day we spend \$36 million on health services in New South Wales.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: That is twice what we spent a decade ago. Every year, on average, we spend around \$4,200 on the health care of every person in New South Wales. We have introduced the predictable surgery program.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance under Standing Order 129. It was a really simple question: Why have waiting lists gone up when the Government was given more than \$40 million to make them go down?

The SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the Premier is aware of the question. I call the member for Bathurst to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I will continue to speak on the strengths of the New South Wales health system—one of the very best in the world.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: As the Opposition seeks to denigrate the work ethic of the 100,000 people who work in the New South Wales system—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: The Premier's comments are disrespectful to every member of Parliament. I do not think any member of Parliament would denigrate the work ethic of emergency services and health workers particularly. I ask you to ask the Premier to withdraw the comment.

The SPEAKER: Order! Would the Premier like to withdraw his comment?

Mr NATHAN REES: It is withdrawn. Every day 700 surgical procedures are delivered in New South Wales: 18 people having appendectomies, 50 people having cataract surgery, 28 people having surgery to repair broken bones, and 25 people having a hip or knee replacement. There is no question that the health system in New South Wales, like everywhere else, faces challenges in light of increasing demand, running at around 8 per cent each year. But we have the best-funded health system of any in Australia: the best nurses, more surgical procedures—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: What did Mr Garling say?

Mr NATHAN REES: Mr Garling, now you mention it, said that the Opposition should not seek to make a political football out of the health system we have.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will cease giving a running commentary.

Mr NATHAN REES: Last time the community trusted the Opposition with a healthcare system 30 hospitals were downgraded or closed. That is the Opposition's legacy, and it speaks volumes.

FEDERAL STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. What action is the Government taking to deliver the Rudd Government's stimulus package, and are there any alternative policies?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: New South Wales is on track to deliver the Rudd Government's Building the Education Revolution stimulus package. The Building the Education Revolution Program will deliver more than \$3 billion for New South Wales public schools and \$1.5 billion for non-government schools. Since the Prime Minister made the announcement just over a month ago we have hit the ground running. Last week, all 2,240 government school principals were asked to consult with their parents and citizens associations and identify priority projects for their schools. As of this morning almost 900 projects have been nominated already. We have already placed orders for 162 modular design buildings, which will replace demountable libraries in schools.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: Expressions of interest for managing contractors to administer the building projects have been received and are being assessed. The Premier has announced changes to the infrastructure State environmental planning policy, which will extend exemptions available for the approval of infrastructure from public schools to non-government schools. This will allow non-government schools to get their infrastructure built within the Commonwealth's deadlines.

The Department of Education and Training has established a Building the Education Revolution Program office to assess nominations and coordinate the delivery of the project. This office draws together the best of both the public and private sectors. Although the first round of projects is not due until 10 April, we have agreed with the Commonwealth to submit our first-round list for funding by 30 March to fast-track approvals for our schools. We are running ahead of the Commonwealth Government's time line. All of this means that as soon as we get the green light from the Commonwealth we will be ready to start construction straightaway. All of the work to be funded by the Commonwealth will be extra money and will not substitute the ongoing work of the New South Wales Government to improve and maintain our schools.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murray-Darling will cease interjecting.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: The Rees Government has a proud record of investing in our schools. We are well on the way to delivering our own landmark \$2 billion Building Better Schools package, made at the last election, with new science labs, security fences and halls. Work has started already on the \$150 million worth of extra maintenance works we funded in the mini-budget in the Principals Priority Building Program. It includes our ongoing commitment to lower class sizes in primary schools under which we have employed 1,800 extra teachers, built 650 extra classrooms and exceeded the targets we set for ourselves.

The State and Federal Labor governments believe in investing in our schools. It is wonderful to have a Federal Government so engaged in education. But what does the New South Wales Opposition believe about all this? Sometimes it is hard to know. We know that yesterday in this House the Opposition voted against a once-in-a-lifetime injection of funding into our schools.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: According to the shadow Treasurer, this package, which will deliver new halls and libraries for our schoolchildren, will "have a negative impact on every family in this country." We know that the member for Ryde thinks that a program that will deliver jobs for the workers of New South Wales and create better learning environments for our kids is a "drunken splurge" and "economic vandalism". But this is not always the Opposition's position.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Ryde will calm down.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I am pleased to say that on some of these issues we are all above politics. I am pleased to say that on 3 February the member for Murrumbidgee issued a press release in which he "welcomed Kevin Rudd's \$14.7 billion investment in school maintenance and minor capital works." The member for Murrumbidgee is obviously closer to the ground than his leader and the shadow Treasurer and has actually spent some time in schools in his electorate.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Minister's support of the member for Murrumbidgee is noted.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: He knows, like we on this side know, that our school communities have needs and aspirations that require State and Commonwealth governments to work together. There has been no funding whatsoever—no real increases in any funding to government schools for 11 years.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: Government members are looking at the most massive injection into schooling in this nation's history, after 11 years of inaction.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: But we do know that we require Commonwealth and State governments to work jointly to resource our schools and take responsibility for capital investment in education. We know that this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver substantial new facilities to every school in the State. We on this side have hit the ground running. I am sure members on the other side also see the opportunity in this package and what it will mean for our kids. We will continue to work with all our partners to get the job done—our principals, parents and citizens associations, and even the New South Wales Opposition if it wants to put politics aside, come on board and support this package for our schools. The Rees Government is well on track to deliver this record project that will provide jobs for the workers of New South Wales.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: It will help to stimulate the State's economy in these very difficult economic times and it will provide an even better learning environment for our kids.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: My question is directed to the Premier. With freedom of information documents showing it cost almost \$20,000 to correct the Government's back-to-school advertising bungle—the dates were wrong—is it any surprise that of all State and Territory governments, this Government has had the lowest level of support from small business for the twentieth consecutive quarter?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members of the Opposition will remain silent.

Mr NATHAN REES: An error was made in the advertisement and it was conceded almost immediately. Members opposite can concentrate on that error or they can talk about the record Education budget of some \$11.8 billion, the 4,000 new apprenticeships, the 2,000 new cadetships or the \$620 million that will deliver 175,000 training places in our education system.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: They could also talk about the computers being delivered to 25,000 secondary schoolteachers or every senior student in New South Wales. They could talk about the changes to the school leaving age policy or the stimulus package that will convert 3,000 school premises into building sites and underpin jobs growth and investment in New South Wales. Instead, they are talking about an administrative error. That is a reflection of the paucity of intellect and policy development—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The question referred to a bungle with the date, but it was also about the lack of confidence small business has in this Government.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier's answer is clearly relevant to the question asked.

Mr NATHAN REES: As the Government puts together the most comprehensive and advanced learning and education system of any State in Australia the member for Murrumbidgee is concentrating on an administrative error. I remind him of the aphorism that an empty vessel makes the loudest noise.

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Mr GERARD MARTIN: My question is directed to the Minister for Regional Development. What action is the Government taking to create jobs in country New South Wales and are there any alternative policies?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: The member has asked two questions.

Ms Linda Burney: What about yours?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Calm down, darling. I have noted that trend this week. The question was about the Government's plans for jobs in regional New South Wales and any alternative policies. I understand why the member for Bathurst asked whether the Government has any alternative policies. It is because the ones it is implementing are not working. However, members are not allowed to ask two questions.

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

Mr John Aquilina: Point of order: My point of order relates to the response of the member for Murrumbidgee to an interjection from the Minister for Community Services. When the Minister interjected he responded, "Calm down, darling." That is totally unparliamentary, disparaging and sexist. He should withdraw.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides of the House will come to order. The House will pay me the courtesy of allowing me to listen to contributions on points of order.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: To the point of order: Like so many other members of the Government, the Leader of the House has it wrong. I did say "darling", but I was referring to the member for Bathurst.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I am not sure that that addresses the question. The community will see the behaviour in the Chamber today as a very poor reflection on this place. It is inappropriate conduct. It is very rare to see a Leader of the Opposition ejected from a parliament. It is also very rare to have continued interjections. It reflects very poorly on this place. I ask members on both sides to consider that when they are arranging their conduct of business in this place. I uphold the point of order of the member for Murrumbidgee. Members may ask only one question, not two. The member for Bathurst will restate the question.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: What action is the Minister for Regional Development taking to create jobs in regional New South Wales and related matters?

The SPEAKER: Order! That question is in order.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: I thank my colleague the member for Bathurst for that deep and probing question. The New South Wales Government is well aware of how the global financial crisis is affecting businesses and industry in our State. We know that times are tough for businesses and that the people who work within them are also doing it tough. Fortunately for New South Wales, our economy is the largest and most

diverse in Australia and it is strong and resilient. New South Wales has the highest level of business investment and research and development expenditure in the nation. It is also a huge exporter. In 2007-08 this State exported \$54.5 billion worth of goods and services. This is a robust economy.

Unfortunately for New South Wales, many of our business and trading partners are now in recession, making it harder for our State. Our job is to build on our strengths, attract new investment and create new jobs throughout New South Wales to help us through these difficult times. Last week, the Premier led a jobs summit with industry leaders to consider how we can help businesses to respond to the global financial crisis. I am confident that the benefits of the job-securing activities and programs that will come out of the summit will flow to regional areas of this State. I was very pleased to participate in that very successful summit. The New South Wales Government is helping country and coastal communities by supporting businesses and helping them to grow by encouraging jobs growth. It is also assisting businesses to relocate to country and coastal areas, bringing new jobs to smaller communities.

From January 2008 to date, the New South Wales Government has helped to secure 311 business projects in regional New South Wales worth more than \$835 million in capital investment, which has generated more than 4,600 jobs. For example, in Tamworth the Government is assisting Peel Valley Exporters Pty Ltd—a lamb export company—with \$9.3 million for an expansion program that will generate 200 new jobs. I recently had the pleasure of inspecting the new development with the owners. This company has confidence in country New South Wales and is investing heavily and creating new jobs, just like the new jobs that will be created by this Government's \$85 million Building the Country package. That money will go straight to our regional areas to drive new businesses and to create jobs.

Clearly, partnerships achieve important outcomes for sustainable economic development. Working with the Federal Government, this Government is setting up Regional Development Australia to guide economic growth across regional New South Wales. That is what responsible governments do in extraordinary times like these—we pull together for the good people of Australia. The Opposition is at times not familiar with that concept. Yesterday, members opposite were given an opportunity to declare their support for the stimulus package, which will drive jobs and investment and improve the infrastructure of New South Wales. Their contributions to the debate were reckless, irresponsible and lazy, as is their response to this unprecedented financial situation. The member for Ryde called it "economic vandalism" and said that there must be a limit to this "drunken splurge". There is only one group of vandals in this place: the Opposition's leadership team. Fortunately for our economy, we have a strong, robust Government. The Rees Government is standing shoulder to shoulder with Prime Minister Rudd—

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

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: The Rees Government is working with Prime Minister Rudd to deliver the stimulus package, the infrastructure and jobs that will flow from it. Regional Development Australia is part of this Government's ongoing commitment to stimulate, strengthen and sustain country and coastal communities. I assure the House that the New South Wales Government is doing all it can to help those people who have lost their jobs to find work and to retrain.

We are working with Commonwealth agencies, local government and non-government organisations to help displaced workers. We are canvassing local employers for employment opportunities and we are looking at ways to take advantage of Commonwealth programs, especially those that support trade apprentices. The best thing we can do is to keep up our efforts to attract investment to support businesses and to keep jobs in country and coastal communities.

Mr Tony Stewart: Point of order: I understand the protocol for photographers in the House is not to use flash photography and not to take photos of anyone other than the member at the lectern.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ruled on this matter yesterday. I grant leave for the media and photographers to be here on the basis of the rules issued. I want to make sure those rules are upheld.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: An important response to an important question is being interrupted. The best thing we can do is to keep up our efforts to support investment, to support businesses and to keep jobs in country and coastal communities. In these tough times the New South Wales Government is committed to helping businesses to be resilient, to stay sustainable and to preserve jobs in New South Wales. While the Government is committed to country New South Wales, it is shameful that we do not have bipartisan support

when it comes to country communities. I refer to the much-trumpeted reshuffle three days after Christmas last year by the Leader of the Opposition that only served as a desperate move by him to save his leadership. Despite all the fanfare of the new shadow Ministers, with new and wonderful responsibilities, where's Wally? There is no shadow Minister for regional development, no Opposition spokesman for regional development—scrapped.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: My point of order is under Standing Order 129 relating to relevance. The question was about country jobs and related matters. The Minister needs to cover what is happening with the Agricultural Research Station at Glen Innes and acknowledge that I am the shadow Minister—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat. I call the member for Kogarah to order. I call the Minister for Finance to order. The Leader of The Nationals is on his final call to order.

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: Boy, did I hit a nerve there! It is proof that the Opposition does not support families or have an interest in New South Wales. At a time when the nation as a whole realises the importance of driving economic activity and creating new job opportunities, The Nationals have turned their back on country New South Wales. All they do is pose for cameras in my electorate of Wollondilly. If members want any more information about that, they should contact Kodak Charlie.

It could have been an oversight in the Opposition's press release of December that it forgot about jobs in country New South Wales. Perhaps it was forgotten in the flurry of the Opposition leadership being rolled by its own party over the shadow Treasurer's spot. However, upon checking the Internet this morning, I found that there is still no shadow regional development Minister. No doubt this is the first step in the Opposition's secret plan to close down regional development offices throughout country New South Wales in a desperate bid to pay for its reckless promises. The Rees Government will keep working hard for country New South Wales, especially regional and rural New South Wales, spending money and supporting people where it is needed, and investing in the future of country New South Wales.

TILLEGRA DAM CONSTRUCTION

Mr GREG PIPER: My question is directed to the Minister for Water, and Minister for Regional Development. Will the Minister guarantee that no preliminary agreements have been made with potential tenderers for the proposed Tillegra Dam?

Mr PHILLIP COSTA: I thank the honourable member for his interest in the project to secure water in his community for future generations. This is what happens when the Government announces major infrastructure—the construction industry takes notice and wants to help. That is the purpose of the stimulus package and the Government's response to it. Tillegra Dam will be one of the largest infrastructure projects ever built in the Hunter. This is a big project—a \$406 million project that will create thousands of jobs, delivering a massive boost to the local economy while securing the Hunter's water supply for the next 50 years. I understand some advertisements have appeared recently in the media for project managers for the Tillegra Dam project. My office contacted the recruitment company and confirmed that the advertisements had been placed by an independent Australian contractor who is gearing up for the construction tenders, which is the next step in the process after planning approval.

A group of expert consultants is finalising the environmental assessment report and the Hunter Water Corporation will lodge this document with the Department of Planning once it is complete. The Department of Commerce is also preparing the detailed design for Hunter Water. It is standard practice, and indeed best practice, for design work to be undertaken at the same time that environmental studies are completed. Accurate design work is needed to enable a proper assessment to be made. A project of this size will lead to many tenders being issued for work, providing tremendous business opportunities and a boost for the Hunter economy. I was extremely pleased to see the job advertisements. It means that the construction industry recognises the importance of this project and the jobs it will create.

The Dungog community is also gearing up to take full advantage of the economic stimulus the Tillegra Dam will provide to it. The *Dungog Chronicle* today contained some very good supportive comments. It states that more than 70 local businesses have registered with the industry capability network to explore future

opportunities for businesses resulting from the preconstruction and construction of the Tillegra Dam. The mayor of Dungog said, "It is great to see businesses being proactive." The Hunter Region Business Enterprise Centre manager, Mr Rod Doherty, said:

The Tillegra Dam proposal will provide local business with the machinery to expand their client base, both locally and regionally.

This is major infrastructure in regional New South Wales, delivering jobs and creating economic activity. I thank the member for Lake Macquarie for his question. No doubt workers in his electorate will also be interested in the opportunities that arise from the Tillegra project.

SMALL BUSINESS INCENTIVES

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Small Business. What action is the Government taking to encourage small businesses to take on apprentices?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I thank the member for Menai for her interest in small business, an interest that is reflected by members on this side of the House, if not by members of the Opposition. Unlike the alternative Leader of the Opposition, the member for Manly—who yesterday in this place defended the indefensible in Malcolm Turnbull's opposition to the \$42 billion Federal stimulus package—her interest is real. In this House yesterday the Opposition voted to oppose that stimulus package. The shadow Treasurer called it "reckless", "a debt binge", and a negative impact on every family in this country. The member for Ryde called it "economic vandalism", stating that there must be a limit to this "drunken splurge".

The Opposition voted against the stimulus package. The Opposition and its Federal colleagues voted against tax breaks for small business in Australia that would allow those businesses to invest in plant and equipment. The best thing we can do for small businesses in New South Wales is to create customers for them. Members of the Opposition and their Federal colleagues voted against measures to create customers for small business.

Mr John Williams: Point of order: Standing Order 129 relates to relevance. I am waiting in anticipation to hear about the opportunities for apprentices in New South Wales. We have not heard that yet.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Minister of the terms of the question.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I thank the member for Murray-Darling for his continued interest in me. This Government is committed to making it easier for small businesses to provide our young people with apprenticeships. For every new apprentice hired between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008 we are providing a full rebate for the cost of registering one work vehicle. This means, no registration fee and no motor vehicle tax for the first year of the apprenticeship. I am advised that this can be worth up to \$1,703.

In the second and third years of an apprenticeship, we will rebate the registration fee for one vehicle per apprentice. The Government is not about making poorly thought through promises such as temporary payroll tax cuts for some businesses. At the start of this year the Rees Government permanently cut payroll tax from 6 per cent to 5.75 per cent, which will save New South Wales businesses \$114 million this financial year. The Rees Labor Government provides employers with a payroll tax offset for the wages of apprentices and trainees. The Government's continued rollout of payroll tax cuts is ultimately the equivalent of injecting nearly \$2 billion into business by 2011. But the fact is that 90 per cent of small business does not pay payroll tax. The Opposition's single policy in response to the economic crisis is one that does not advantage 90 per cent of businesses in New South Wales.

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

Mr STEVE WHAN: Members would be pleased to know that one area that does benefit small business is workers compensation. The Rees Labor Government has made five cuts to workers compensation premiums, totalling 30 percentage points. To make it easier for small businesses to support young staff, we introduced a \$74 million package so that apprentice wages are not used to assess an employer's workers compensation premium. That is another concrete measure to help small business in New South Wales. That measure is forecast to increase the number of apprentices by 5 per cent, or an extra 1,000 apprentices, a year.

As I said earlier, the best thing we can do for small businesses is to give them customers. That is what the Rees State Government and the Rudd Federal Government are doing with their stimulus packages. For every

dollar we spend on constructing a road, for every dollar that the Minister for Housing spends on constructing a new public housing dwelling, for every dollar that the Minister for Education and Training spends on building a new school, \$7 goes into the local economy—money straight into local businesses, creating local jobs. The Opposition and its Federal colleagues oppose those jobs by opposing those packages. The Rees Government is putting its money where its mouth is: \$56 billion in infrastructure investment to help the small businesses in New South Wales.

FEDERAL STIMULUS PACKAGE

HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

Mr NATHAN REES: I am delighted to provide additional information in respect of the question asked earlier by the member for North Shore. As part of the 2008 Commonwealth Government's additional funding for elective surgery, a further \$43 million was allocated for elective surgery in New South Wales to reduce the number of patients overdue for elective surgery. I am happy to advise that for December 2008 all area health services have reported a significant reduction in long waits and overdue patients. Area health services have also achieved significant reductions in overdue surgical patients in the 90-day category. In December 2008, 178 patients were overdue in that category, a staggering reduction of 4,908 from 2007; that is a 96 per cent reduction.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for North Shore will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: That is a 96 per cent reduction of overdue patients in the 90-day category. New South Wales was the best-performing State in Australia, with 12,000 additional patients treated as a result of Commonwealth funding.

Question time concluded.

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Privilege

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [3.33 p.m.]: I wish to raise a matter of privilege. Mr Speaker, do you know who the photographer is in the gallery? Does he have to show some type of identification to you? Is he allowed to stand in the gallery for the duration of question time, unlike other members of the public?

[*Interruption*]

I am happy to have my photo taken while I am at the lectern. Since that occurred, I have been issued with a document that names the photographer as Craig Greenhill, purporting to be from the *Daily Telegraph*. I point out that item 15 of the agreement that he signed today, also under the name of Mr Simon Benson who has something to do with the *Daily Telegraph*, states that the use of flash or other sources of additional light are not permitted. Mr Greenhill, if that is indeed the gentleman—and none of us knows—used a flash when taking a photo of people today. Mr Speaker, in view of your ruling yesterday and of the snide attempt to take a photo of other people in this Chamber at the lectern, all members of this House should take this on board. I ask for a ruling from you—not today, you can think about it—about our privilege in this place. I am quite happy to go outside and to take a photo of that gentleman, or chase him up the street like the *Daily Telegraph* photographer would do.

The SPEAKER: Order! Strict procedures for photographing in the Chamber are in place. I will consider what the member for East Hills has said and advise him of the exact requirements in the circumstances.

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION ABSENCE FROM THE CHAMBER

Personal Explanation

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE, by leave: Earlier in question time the Premier referred to the absence of the Leader of the Opposition during a vote in this House. As Opposition Whip I am responsible for recording divisions and votes, and feel that the Premier has cast aspersions on my reputation. On checking *Hansard*, I see that page 60 of the daily proof for Wednesday 4 March records that the Leader of the Opposition was paired

with the member for Heathcote, Paul McLeay, who was in Victoria fighting fires. The request by the Government Whip was contained in correspondence to me dated 2 March 2009. If the Premier continues to misrepresent pairs and the integrity of Hansard I shall have no option but to deny all pairs in the future. I seek to table the letter of request from the Government Whip.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not allowed under the current rules, but the member has made his point.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE: I will lay it on the table for the edification of members.

PHOTOGRAPH OF LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The SPEAKER: I inform the House that a photograph of the House in session will be taken at 2.15 p.m. next Tuesday 10 March 2009. I request that all members be in the House at that time.

DEATH OF RICHARD MATTHEW LAFFAN

Ministerial Statement

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [3.37 p.m.]: All members of this House would be aware that New South Wales and Australia lost one of its most talented and courageous citizens on the afternoon of Sunday 1 March 2009. Sadly, Matt Laffan passed away at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, aged just 38 years. I note the presence of friends and family in the gallery. Matt was born with a rare genetic disorder of the spine, diastrophic dysplasia. Medical opinion declared that he would not live beyond a week; Matt made a life of defying such odds. In fact, Matt redefined the odds.

In 38 years Matt Laffan's achievements are many. Indeed, in 38 years he lived centuries. He had a successful career as a lawyer in the Office of the New South Wales Director of Public Prosecutions. He was an advocate for the rights of people with a disability; he was ambassador for the Don't DIS my ABILITY campaign; he was a board member of Paraquad New South Wales and the disability advisory committee of Qantas; he was a member of the New South Wales Rugby Union judiciary; and he was a board member of the Disability Council of New South Wales. In those roles, particularly the latter, he was known and well respected by successive Ministers for disability services. Somehow Matt found the time to travel, most recently to Hawaii, and he loved his rugby union.

Matt was also a candidate for Sydney Lord Mayor in 2004. Of course, Matt was much more than a high achiever to those who knew him well. I know that Matt was highly respected and genuinely admired by members of the Disability Council of New South Wales and staff; they feel his loss deeply. He was appointed to the council in 2003 and reappointed in 2007. Andrew Buchanan asked me to say particularly that I should refer to the Disability Council as "Matt Laffan's fan club". Matt was able to draw on rich and diverse experiences in life, which gave him a depth and insight that people remember him for. He was a trailblazer who led by example but never sought praise or commendation for his inspiring leadership.

Matt never allowed himself to be defined, or limited, by his disability. A genuinely good person, Matt Laffan was a witty, friendly, open character with a passionate commitment to social justice and a determination to keep on achieving. He could, in the words of one of his colleagues, charm the birds out of the trees. Matt is an inspiration to us all. In his own words:

And I think the major point of destiny for me, in my own small way, is hopefully the kinetic energy I might pass on to others. So my own story might be a fairly simple one in the end, but if it rubs off on other people—those who've been close to me or those who've just come across me—and they go on to do greater and bigger things, well, that's a destiny in itself, which I believe in. I believe in that.

He will be sadly missed.

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [3.40 p.m.]: I acknowledge the passing of my good friend Matt Laffan. Matt worked at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for many years. I was the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions for five years and before that a Crown prosecutor, and I worked with him in both capacities. Matt was a man with a disability who inspired all who knew him with his courage, his ability, his good humour, and his achievements. I acknowledge the presence in the public gallery today of the chair and members of the Disability Council of New South Wales, to whom Matt was very close.

Matt Laffan grew up in Coffs Harbour and had a brief career in community radio. As a prosecutor Matt was a terrier in court. He fought so hard for the victims of crime. He never took a backward step. Sometimes we had to say to him, "Calm down a bit, Matt. It's great that you've got that passion." He was a charming conversationalist and a true Christian, who did unto others what he would have them do unto him. He was a man who loved rugby, Irish music and St Patrick's Day. It is great that his friends from St John's College have set up a memorial scholarship for university students with a serious physical disability who possess a strength of leadership potential, with possible preference given to law students.

On his website Matt answered some frequently asked questions. One of them was: "Why are you so short?" His answer was: "That is the way I was born with a rare genetic disorder, but fortunately it doesn't matter so much about the size of the dog in the fight as much as the size of the fight in the dog!" Matt made some wonderful statements over the years. As he putted around town in his electric wheelchair, he said:

I am a man of contrasts. I love watching modern ballet and the celebrated mystery of bodies working with light, air and music. Whilst the robust contest of sport thrills me. I am committed to forging a path of my own making as an individual, but I passionately believe in the rights of others to collectively benefit from the opportunities that have been given to or created by me. I live, work and thrive on the CBD, but long for quiet spells in the mountains. I sense that it is all to be had and enjoyed, but I remain aware of the precarious balance that exists between having and not. I am buoyed by companionship but unafraid of solitude.

Matt put up a magnificent fight at the end. For two months he fought for his life, and in the end he went to his maker.

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the House I extend our condolences to the family and friends of Matt Laffan.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places as a mark of respect.

UNPROCLAIMED LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER: Pursuant to Standing Order 117, I table a list detailing all legislation unproclaimed 90 calendar days after assent as at 4 March 2009.

PETITIONS

Drink Container Deposit Levy

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

National Parks Tourism Developments

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

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

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

Tumut Hospital Anaesthetic Services

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

Tumut Hospital and Batlow Multiple Purpose Service

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

Morisset Hospital and Polyclinic

Petition requesting a hospital and polyclinic for the Morisset area, received from **Mr Greg Piper**.

Schofields Railway Station

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

Rural Rail Branch Lines

Petition requesting that the proposed closure of rural rail branch lines be rescinded immediately, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson**.

Bus Service 311

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

Caged Birds Trade

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

Pet Shops

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

Sow Stalls

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

Alstonville Tropical Horticulture Centre

Petition opposing the closure of the Alstonville Tropical Horticulture Centre, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

Coal Exploration Licences

Petition asking the Legislative Council to revoke coal exploration licences 6523, 6524 and 6563 upon their expiration and declare that the area covered by those licences be henceforth exempt from all future coal exploration and mining, received from **Mr George Souris**.

Wagga Wagga Police Communications Centre

Petition requesting the retention of the Police Communications Centre in Wagga Wagga, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Iron Cove Bridge Project

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

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

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.44 p.m.]: My motion should be accorded priority because the Rudd Government has developed, and is committed to, a \$42 billion stimulus package designed to protect our prosperity by investing in infrastructure and the housing sector. This motion should be accorded priority as the Rees Government understands the impact of the global economic crisis on our working families in our communities and has moved quickly to support the Federal Government package. Given the importance of this issue, it is necessary to highlight that the Rees Government is working closely with the Federal Government so that major infrastructure projects in New South Wales are identified and given priority. For these reasons my motion should be accorded priority, and I urge members to support it.

New South Wales Economy

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [3.45 p.m.]: Yesterday the Opposition did not oppose a similar motion moved by the Government in relation to the Federal Government stimulus package. I point that out in terms of the debate about which motion ought to have priority today. Today marks six months since the new Premier of this State, Nathan Rees, has been in the job. Six months ago he promised the people of this State "a red-hot go" at fixing New South Wales. But what we got instead was a dud. Along with the rest of the nation, New South Wales is facing tough economic times.

My motion ought to be given priority because this hapless Labor Government has done nothing—apart from holding a Rudd-style summit—to protect jobs in New South Wales and ensure the economic stability of our State. For six months now Nathan Rees has been the steward of our State. But he has nothing to show for it, except an ever-growing list of ministerial stuff-ups to defend and mistakes to correct. My motion deserves priority because there is a very real possibility that Australia is heading into recession. After recording 0.5 per cent negative growth in the December 2008 quarter, our nation is literally on the brink. In New South Wales the economy contracted by 0.3 per cent in the December 2008 quarter, resulting in an annual rate of just 1.2 per cent, the lowest of any Australian State.

Around 23,000 people in New South Wales have lost their jobs since Nathan Rees became Premier. That is why my motion deserves priority today. New South Wales has the second-highest rate of unemployment of all Australia States at 5.4 per cent, which is well above the national average. Added to this, building approval figures released today show an even bleaker picture. Building approvals in New South Wales dropped 19.1 per cent in January 2009, compared with a fall of just 3.7 per cent nationally. In times like these this State needs strong and decisive economic leadership.

The public deserves to know that everything possible is being done to ensure the economic stability of our State. But, instead, they are being force-fed the very spin the new Premier promised to eliminate six months ago. I instance that last September the Premier trumpeted the appointment of former Reserve Bank governors Bernie Fraser and Ian Macfarlane to inform the Government on a range of issues, including improving business opportunities for investment. In this place the Premier proudly proclaimed, "I will also ask them to identify opportunities for encouraging business investment in New South Wales."

However, in a letter sent in October to the former Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Robyn Kruk, Mr Macfarlane said that he was unable to advise on a range of issues, including business investment. It is important that we debate my motion today because in November the Premier handed down a mini-budget that the Government itself has described as unsuccessful. Others call it disastrous. It was a mini-budget that had no plan to protect the economy. It axed major infrastructure projects, such as the North West and South West Metro lines. It deferred the Pacific Highway upgrade projects. It introduced congestion taxes for road users on the harbour bridge and tunnel, along with new taxes on insurance. The Government even had the audacity to gouge \$205 million from an already stretched Health budget.

This was a mini-budget that delivered a killer blow to a State economy already on its knees, at a time when other governments were injecting investment into their economies. What was needed were measures like the Liberals and Nationals policies to cut payroll tax and halve lead time on vital infrastructure projects. But, sadly, it gets worse. The Sensis Business Index today released figures that confirmed that the economic management of this State has reached new lows. A poll of small to medium businesses found that for the twentieth quarter in succession the New South Wales Government has had the lowest level of support of any State or Territory. Business confidence in this State hit a negative 3 per cent, which is 15 percentage points below the national figure. This is the first State to record a net negative level of business confidence in the 15-year history of the Sensis Business Index.

That is why my motion should be given priority today. The first six months of Nathan Rees' leadership can be aptly characterised by his first decision as Premier. When faced with showing the New South Wales public how serious he was about fixing the State, the Premier failed miserably. On his first day as Premier, Nathan Rees appointed the dodgy brothers as custodians of the economy. Instead of picking the best team he handed the job to Labor's factional warlords and powerbrokers. Rather than appointing the A-team we were given the D-team: Eric Roozendaal and Joe Tripodi, whose only real economic credentials are in shaking down donations for the Labor Party. [*Time expired.*]

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

The House divided.**Ayes, 48**

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

Noes, 40

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.**FEDERAL STIMULUS PACKAGE****Motion Accorded Priority**

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.57 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) welcomes the Federal Government's \$42 billion stimulus package;
- (2) notes that the Opposition refuses to support the stimulus package, which is critical to working families in New South Wales; and
- (3) calls on the Opposition to put politics aside and declare its support for the stimulus package to support jobs and the economy.

The current global economic crisis has had a major impact on economies across the world. Governments around the world are being called upon, like never before, to play their part in attempting to deal with this crisis. No Government, including in Australia, can remain aloof from the threat this crisis poses. The Federal Government has developed a \$42 billion stimulus package designed to keep two of the engines of our prosperity, the infrastructure and housing sectors, engaged and powering on. The Rees Government understands the nature of the crisis facing us all and is moving quickly to support the Federal Government's stimulus package.

The Federal stimulus package includes \$21 billion for the States and Territories for education, social housing, and road and rail infrastructure. In key areas across the whole of Government in New South Wales, we are working quickly to ensure the Rudd Government's stimulus package is able to deliver the most effective results for the State's industries and people. For example, the Commonwealth schools package is some \$14.7 billion, of which this State's share will be almost \$5.2 billion. This money will support the building of new facilities such as science laboratories, school halls, libraries and language learning centres, and the upgrading and repairing of existing buildings—all welcomed by our local communities.

To facilitate this objective the Rees Government has amended legislation to allow the easier approval of works across both the public and the private school systems. The changes will fast-track work and ensure that the stimulus package is delivered. Similarly, the Government has made changes to legislation governing social housing. This is in response to the Federal Government's program to deliver 20,000 new social housing dwellings across Australia. This program is worth \$6.6 billion and it is expected that New South Wales will receive a much-needed more than \$2 billion as part of this funding.

To support this worthwhile initiative we have expanded the areas available for social housing to encompass locations within 800 metres of any Sydney railway station and within 400 metres of the commercial centre of 32 regional centres. This will ensure that social housing will be made available to those in need in the numbers required and in the areas located close to amenities such as shops and transport, and the social services that tenants require. The changes the Rees Government has made will make it easier and faster to gain approval for social housing, fast-tracking its availability while ensuring it meet the strict design guidelines.

In addition to these worthwhile areas, the Federal Government has identified spending on infrastructure to be a major priority and has made available billions of dollars for major infrastructure projects. Infrastructure has a multiplier effect. Not only does it stimulate the economy directly during construction; it provides ongoing benefits to the economy throughout the life of the project. Thus, the Government is working closely with our Federal counterparts to ensure that major infrastructure projects essential to the future prosperity of this State and the nation are identified and given priority. The Government has moved quickly to ensure that New South Wales is both ready and able to fully participate as a strong partner in the Federal Government's stimulus package.

Make no mistake, this is a serious response to a serious situation. The global economy faces one of its greatest tests since the Great Depression, likewise our local families. The newspapers are filled with bad economic news from across Australia and the world. Our major trading partners face the same challenges that we do. We are all faced with a perfect storm of vast economic consequences. These times will define us. When observers look back on our actions in this place at this time they will ask: Did they move decisively to meet this challenge? The answer will be that, indeed, we did move decisively. I urge all members of this House to rise to meet this challenge together.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [4.02 p.m.]: I oppose this motion and I move the following amendment to the motion:

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

"this House condemns the Government for:

- (1) its ongoing failure to manage the New South Wales economy; and
- (2) its failure to properly identify and argue on infrastructure requirements for an appropriate share of the Federal Government's stimulus package.

The member for Drummoyne gave a key reason for the New South Wales Government being in trouble. She said that our actions today will be measured in the years ahead. They certainly will. We only have to look back to the mini-budget that was delivered just a few weeks ago. Its measures will be condemned for years to come. At exactly the wrong time the Government delivered a budget that raised taxes and charges, and cut infrastructure. Today we have seen another reason for the Government being in so much trouble. It has tried to play silly politics with silly motions. I have news for them. The people of New South Wales are sick of it. They are sick of hollow men at the back of Parliament trying to come up with exciting opportunities to look as if the Government is doing something. They think that if the Government moves these types of motion and makes these types of claims that it can convince people that it is doing something. The people of New South Wales are on to them and they will not put up with the sort of nonsense that we saw in this House today.

The member for Drummoyne is right: We are facing some of the most difficult, trying economic circumstances that we are likely to see in our lifetime, in our children's lifetime and in our grandchildren's lifetime. But what do we get from the hollow men? They move these motions to try to connect with the people of New South Wales. They try to convince them that the Opposition does not want our schools upgraded. We do want our schools upgraded because for 13, 14, 15 years—however long it has been; it has been a nightmare—the Government has not delivered the infrastructure. Parts of the Rudd package make sense. We all agree—everyone on this side of the House, everyone around the world—that we need a stimulus package. Economic commentators say we need a stimulus package, but it has to be of the right make-up. Following the announcement of the stimulus package Malcolm Turnbull said:

The Prime Minister yesterday demanded that the House of Representatives approve \$42 billion in expenditure within 48 hours.

Opposition members in the Federal Parliament were given just 48 hours. He continued:

We consider that the package is poorly targeted, ill-thought through and irresponsible in today's economic climate.

At this stage we believe a package of between \$15-20 billion would be more affordable and appropriate.

The objective of any package must be to protect and create jobs, support small business and strengthen our economy. This package will not achieve this ...

We look at this package and we see little evidence that it will underpin the jobs of Australians.

There is no evidence that the Government's \$10.4 billion spending package before Christmas created the 75,000 jobs Mr Rudd promised.

A stimulus package has total support. We need a stimulus package. But the State Government has not been produced a stimulus package. The Federal stimulus package needs proper scrutiny to ensure that the money is spent in the best way. It must be put in assets and infrastructure to develop the economy and provide jobs. But we have to play silly politics with the hollow men. The people of New South Wales are onto them. Mark this day as the day that the people of New South Wales said they have had enough. I have had enough of the garbage that comes from the Government. This matter is too important to play stupid politics. That is what Government members are doing: minimising this debate to stupid politics. They think they are clever, but they are not. The people of New South Wales are sick of the Government, and today businesses provided a reason. A report of the Sensis Business Index on business confidence noted:

It is the first time in the 15-year history of the report that we have seen business confidence at net negative levels in any state or territory or even at the national level.

This is alarming not only for New South Wales, but for the rest of Australia ...

There is a long way to go before New South Wales small businesses regain the confidence to employ and invest in capital. The upcoming quarter will be a defining time for New South Wales small businesses ...

The reasons small businesses do not support the New South Wales Government include view about:

- taxation
- payroll tax; and
- the government having internal problems.

The main reason that businesses does not have confidence to create jobs in this economy is that they have lost confidence in the State Government. The hollow men should talk to people about creating jobs in this economy rather than spinning funny motions. The Government has to do the hard work that is required to turn around this economy. I ask members to imagine what it would have been like if the economy had got to this stage with the statistics of the 1996 Keating Government. Back in 1996 the Federal Government was \$95.8 billion in debt and interest on Government debt was \$8.4 billion. During the Howard years debt was reduced to zero. There were 8.3 million Australians in work in 1996. By the time the Coalition left office there were 10.5 million in work. In 1996 there were 197,000 long-term unemployed—66,000 under the Coalition. Listen to responsible economic management. Do not be suckered into press releases and playing stupid politics. Start doing the work that is required to turn this State around. We have not seen a New South Wales Government stimulus package. Whatever the Government says, it is not taking this matter seriously. Today we saw the Government for what it really is.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.09 p.m.]: Like most members on this side of the House, I am in this place only because of the opportunities given to me by a Federal Labor Government. As our Federal Labor Government has said, and as it says again, it believes in education

investment for everyone. The Federal Government's \$42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan will deliver an incredible bonanza to New South Wales schools. From the package \$14.7 billion has been set aside to build new halls, libraries, classrooms and laboratories. This is known as the Building the Education Revolution package, and New South Wales public schools are set to receive \$4.5 billion—\$3 billion for State schools and \$1.5 billion for non-government schools.

I am sure that this unprecedented investment in school infrastructure, the largest in Australia's history, is welcomed privately by those opposite, if not publicly. This investment will deliver a program of capital works and maintenance in schools across Australia far greater than possible from the resources of any State Government. Compare this with the record of disinvestment of the Howard Government. Because of the need to act immediately, the Commonwealth requires that New South Wales deliver \$220 million worth of projects for the Building the Education Revolution program by 30 June 2009. This is a tight timeline and we need to act now. I am pleased to report that the Government is on track to deliver that number of projects.

Building the Education Revolution will build learning environments to help children, families and communities achieve and develop their potential. Every school in New South Wales will get something from this package. More than 3,000 school sites will become building sites. This is a once-in-a-lifetime injection of funds. Unfortunately, with a package that could and should have received bipartisan support, the New South Wales Opposition has played politics. Yesterday in this House our opponents voted against this package even though it will deliver school halls, libraries and laboratories for our kids. According to those opposite, this package "will have a negative impact on every family in this country" or be "a drunken splurge". I cannot see how investing in education can be seen in that way.

The Government will develop a building plan that will benefit schools with new halls, libraries, and science and technology laboratories. The workers will benefit from extra work that the stimulus package will provide and mums and dads will have the opportunity to be employed. These are the gifts that keep on giving. The Rees Government is committed to our children. We are investing in our future and I urge our opponents to support this expenditure for our future.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [4.12 p.m.]: We have one confused New South Wales Government. Before Christmas we were told we have to save; now we have to spend. This is another example of New South Wales State parliamentarians who think that they are in the Federal sphere, because yet again they do not want to talk about the real problems in New South Wales—and there are plenty of them. Some might say it is like Alice in Wonderland—or Labor in Wonderland—but I see it a little bit more like Groundhog Day. We debated this same motion yesterday and we are debating it again today. Unfortunately for the people of New South Wales, every day for the next two years they will experience Groundhog Day. They want an election. They want the chance to chuck Labor out because they are sick of it, and I am sick of it.

For the dummies, let us go over the Liberal position again. As Malcolm Turnbull has said, and as we on this side of the Chamber have said, we need a responsible stimulus package and every level of government has a role to play. The point that we make is that the stimulus package has to be more balanced in relation to expenditure over time, as Malcolm Turnbull has said. We cannot throw all the money into the poker hand at once. Secondly, the stimulus package has to be more balanced in relation to expenditure between levels of government.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The member for Davidson will direct his comments through the Chair. I have shown great latitude to members in that regard.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: These people do not want to spend the stimulus money. Under New South Wales Labor we have seen a loss of business confidence and the lowest annual growth rate. We have seen an obstructionist government when it comes to intergovernmental reform in areas such as occupational health and safety. We have seen more than \$17 billion wasted over 13 years. Where has the money gone? We have seen Rudd and Swan tell Premier Rees and New South Wales Labor to pick up their act, with good reason. We have seen a government fixated on its triple-A rating when the only rating of a triple-A nature that it does protect is of an appalling, arrogant and amateur performance. We have a government that does not have a plan. The Government has no sensible reason to oppose our proposal for a one-off payroll tax cut of 15 per cent for one year; it just says, ironically, that it will cost too much. We also see a reduction in a whole lot of areas of expenditure and reliance by the State Government on the Federal Government to bail it out. The greatest irony is that having axed the position in November last year the Government has now reappointed a Coordinator General, at the insistence of Rudd, its political master.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) [4.15 p.m.]: I point out to the Opposition that New South Wales is not an island; it exists as part of a commonwealth. For all the years that Howard was in power his Government treated New South Wales as the enemy and starved us of funds to try to somehow demonstrate that the New South Wales Labor Government could not deliver services. People voted Labor back because we can deliver services. Since we were re-elected we have delivered new infrastructure projects one after the other, including, in recent weeks, new rail lines, new schools in my electorate and brand-new hospitals. This same Government delivered World Youth Day and the Olympics.

The Federal Government says now that our job, as part of the Commonwealth, is to deliver this fantastic opportunity in this stimulus package that will do more for our schools and more for our State in infrastructure than has been done in a long time. The Opposition says it supports a stimulus package. We say that the Opposition does not support the Rudd stimulus package. Members of the Opposition keep saying they do but then they stand up in the Chamber and say they do not. They are the confused ones. They are the ones who do not understand where their position is. They say, "Yes, we want this but we do not want that". The Opposition's package does not exist. We have to react to reality. The reality is the Rudd package. It amounts to \$42 billion and New South Wales will deliver it.

The Opposition also does not understand that we have had a plan running: the State Plan. We are consistently delivering on the commitments in that State Plan. The \$56 billion infrastructure package we are currently delivering is our response to what is going on. But also, because we are part of the Commonwealth, there is a massive economic stimulus package from the Federal Government; there have been massive interest cuts and more tax cuts to be made next year; and there has also been a fall in the Australian dollar, which will help exporters. New South Wales does not act alone: it does not do things in isolation. We take into account everything that is happening economically and we react to it.

We are delivering the projects and we are promising to deliver more projects. We now have a tight time frame and we have to put this infrastructure in place. The Opposition is running around saying that it does not approve of the planning laws. Business has condemned the Opposition for that. Business has also condemned the Opposition because it knocked over the electricity legislation, but the Opposition says that business does not like some aspects of what the Government is doing so it is an absolute failure. The Opposition picks and chooses what suits it; it does not look at the total picture. But in government you have to be responsible and you have to look at the total picture, and that is what this Government is doing.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.18 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for their contributions to this debate. I am quite concerned about some of the claims put on record by the member for Manly in view of his being shadow Treasurer. What he has failed to put on record in all his ranting and raving is that the money that we will get from the Federal Government from the stimulus package will go into infrastructure. Anyone who knows anything about recessions knows that that is a time that governments have to take on major infrastructure projects and give contractors work. What I have heard from the Opposition in my electorate alone is that if it were in government it would not proceed with a \$150 million upgrade to Victoria Road—one of the busiest roads in New South Wales—that can be delivered in two years to provide a bus priority lane, tidal flow and a duplication of the Iron Cove Bridge.

Members opposite have said that if they were in government they would not build it. The Opposition has opposed every infrastructure project proposed in my electorate that will deliver jobs not in the long term but now; that is, when people need money in their pocket. The contractors and small business owners in my electorate support this Government and the money that it will spend on infrastructure projects. The shadow Treasurer forgot to tell the House that upgrading our schools will provide a great deal of work for locals. Not only will public school facilities be upgraded but also jobs will be created, which will allow people to pay their mortgages, send their children to school and pay for childcare. The shadow Treasurer has dismissed that. The \$5.2 million that this State will receive from the Federal Government to build and refurbish schools—

Mr Mike Baird: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order No. 129. I said very clearly that the Opposition would support money being spent on schools. However, I questioned the timing, the amount of the package and how it would be spent.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! There is no point of order.

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: Members opposite have argued that New South Wales should tell the Federal Government that it does not want that money. Under the former Federal Government this State was

starved for 11 years in every portfolio area—health, education, transport and so on. The current Federal Government is now providing money for that infrastructure but the Opposition is arguing against it. I thank the members on this side of the House who have highlighted the benefits that will flow to our local communities as a result of this investment in infrastructure. It would appear that we are more in touch with what is happening in our communities than Opposition members. They should support this measure. They talk about cutting payroll tax by 15 per cent for 12 months. However, they fail to point out that this Government cut workers compensation premiums for small business and gave first home buyers more money to get into the real estate market. Their contributions today have been a disgrace.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

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

Noes, 36

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

Division called for and Standing Order 185 applied.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

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

Noes, 38

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

PAEDIATRIC PATIENT OVERSIGHT (VANESSA'S LAW) BILL 2008

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 28 November 2008.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.34 p.m.]: I acknowledge Mr Anderson in this place. His bravery, decency and determination in the face of this tragedy are an inspiration to me and an example to every parent in New South Wales. Vanessa's death will be seen as a switch point in the way we deliver health care in New South Wales. Because of Vanessa's death we have the Garling report and from that report will come sustainable change in New South Wales Health over the next 20 years. All we can do in the face of tragedy is to apologise, learn and ensure that this tragedy is never repeated. For that reason, as the bill is currently drafted, the Government will not support it.

I am the only paediatrician ever elected to Parliament. I, like other stakeholders in childcare, could and should have been consulted prior to the presentation of this bill. It is not just the Labor Party that has raised concerns about the bill; the president of the College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the Royal Australasian College of Physicians have also raised concerns about the bill as it is currently drafted. Prior consultation could have allowed me to achieve one thing that we all want—bipartisan improvement in the safety of health care for every person in New South Wales.

This bill is not supported by the Australian College of Paediatrics because it flies in the face of an important principle—that of the sole responsibility of the admitting doctor. When more than one consultant is responsible the rate of adverse events increases, and that is supported by world literature. I have tried to introduce similar rules to Vanessa's law. One difficulty that I found—remember, I am the only person who has ever tried to do this—is that many paediatricians are not as able as others to treat people between the ages of 16 and 18. For the vast majority of children aged between 16 and 18, the paediatrician is solely an advocate, and that advocate often does not have the expertise required to make the difficult decisions needed. From the age of 14 to 18 years, young people develop adult diseases for which general paediatricians do not have the skills. They can be consulted.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Well, amend the legislation. Change the age. We will accept an amendment.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: I note the shadow Minister has indicated the legislation could be amended. It would have been better if she had thought of that before presenting it. Many hospitals—many large hospitals—are omitted from the list in the bill. However, it is not all beyond improvement. I hope that the aims of this bill will be superseded by the recommendations of the Garling inquiry. The Formation of New South Wales Kids—in practice, if not as a freestanding organisation—may be able to ensure that the principles of Vanessa's law, without the legislation, will ensure that every child in New South Wales, not just those admitted to the larger hospitals, as in this legislation, receive better oversight than before.

One thing I have discovered from my time in Parliament is that significant improvement in health care can occur only with the buy-in of the clinicians. If the clinicians have the will, the buy-in and the opportunity there can be enormous changes and improvements to health care. Those clinicians should have been consulted because they will always be better at improving patient care than legislators. I hope that the Garling changes will ensure better oversight for every child admitted to hospital in New South Wales. Vanessa's legacy is the Garling report and the results of that report will deliver better care for every patient in New South Wales for the next 20 years. It will be seen as the landmark that caused New South Wales Health and the general population to change the way health care is delivered and perceived.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [4.40 p.m.]: I express extreme disappointment at the Government's reasons for not supporting this simple, sensible bill. I support 110 per cent the Paediatric Patient Oversight (Vanessa's Law) Bill 2008. The bill is for an Act to ensure that children who are admitted as patients into adult wards in major hospitals are under the care and supervision of a paediatrician. The overview of the bill states:

The object of this Bill is to impose a duty on the governing body of a major public hospital to ensure that a paediatrician oversees the medical management of any person under the age of 18 who is admitted as a patient in an adult ward of the hospital within 24 hours of the person's admission.

The Paediatric Patient Oversight (Vanessa's Law) Bill 2008 is an exceptionally simple bill. However, it has the power to be exceptionally effective in protecting the wellbeing of children who are admitted into adult wards. It is very disappointing that arrogance appears to be the only reason for opposition to the bill. The Opposition would accept an amendment to lower the age of admission from 18 years to 16 years so that the bill could be enacted and become law. Each year thousands of children are admitted into an adult ward of a New South Wales hospital. The introduction of this bill has been prompted by the death of Vanessa Anderson—and I note the presence in the gallery of Warren Anderson. He has come a long way, along a very narrow and difficult path, to change the health system, which is failing so many people, to make it better for children and others.

Three years ago, 16-year-old Vanessa Anderson died in Royal North Shore Hospital after being hit on the head by a golf ball. The member for North Shore introduced the bill late last year and spoke at some length about it, about its derivation and its intent. Sadly, the bill was stalled unforgivably by the Rees Government and was not debated when it should have been. The Minister for Health, the Department of Health and those who could have made a difference in getting this sensible bill onto the statute books showed absolutely no compassion for the Anderson family by not allowing the bill to see the light of day in the last hours of the 2008 parliamentary session.

At last, members are able to debate the bill. However, today the Government has not come to its senses and does not intend to vote in the affirmative for one of the most compassionate and much-needed bills I have seen. Since Vanessa's death in November 2005, I have been searching for some intervention that could have

altered the course of her stay in the Royal North Shore Hospital. This bill was created with that solution in mind. Vanessa's law would have given surety to families that children admitted into tertiary and major regional hospitals—that is, the sickest children—would have the paediatric expertise they not only deserve but require. As a first step, an interim measure would have been to allow the Garling report to have been considered and responded to. That would have seen Vanessa's law enhanced in the context of improving safety for children in hospitals. Unfortunately, the Government decided to not support making this law a reality before last Christmas, and obviously not now.

Despite many impassioned pleas to the Minister for Health to give a directive, if he could not see his way clear to go down the legislation route, the Minister and his apologists duck-shoved, ignored and swept under the carpet all rational thinking and logical arguments in favour of doing absolutely nothing. How could the Government allow more children to be admitted into hospital, many of them into adult wards, and not enable the enactment of a simple bill that could have gone a long way towards protecting the safety and wellbeing of those vulnerable patients? I draw the attention of the House to two documents relating to standards of care for children in hospital. The first is entitled "NSW Health Department: Guidelines for the Hospitalisation of Children: Revised July 1998". Under the heading "2. Aims and Objectives" it states:

- 2.1 To provide a safe and effective inpatient paediatric service for children.

Under the heading "3. Guidelines" it states:

3.1 General

3.1.4 In cases of unplanned or emergency admissions to hospitals with paediatric medicine or surgery services at levels 1-3, consultation with a specialist paediatrician should occur without delay if there is any degree of concern, especially in a situation where the child is unstable or not improving after 24 hours ...

3.1.5 A hospital admitting children should have at least one registered nurse delivering care or directly supervising the nursing care of children, with skills consistent with the following:

- is able to assess a child's normal parameters, recognise the deviations from the normal and act appropriately on the findings ...
- recognises and challenges management that compromises the child's safety.

3.2 Special Needs of Children in Hospital

3.2.3 A sick child should be able to be seen by an appropriate adult at all times. Structural design of wards and paediatric facilities should enable appropriate observation of sick children (preferably through line of sight contact with the nursing station) ...

3.2.7 A hospital routinely admitting children for elective procedures should, in addition to the above:

- e. have at least one registered nurse delivering care or directly supervising the nursing care of children with skills consistent with a competent paediatric nurse.

That is just one of the guidelines of 1998, and already it can be seen that the Government is in total breach—it is not meeting those needs. The other document was miraculously published on 18 November 2008, the day after the evening on which a news article appeared that introduced the concept of Vanessa's law. The document is titled, "Standards for the Care of Children and Adolescents in Health Services". Under the heading "Introduction" the document states:

The Standards for the care of children and adolescents in health services have been developed for use in the Australian healthcare system. The goal of the standards is to ensure that quality care is provided in an environment that is safe and appropriate for the age and stage of development of the child or adolescent.

The medical and psychosocial needs of children and adolescents differ from those of adults requiring health services and as a result children and adolescents have unique vulnerabilities and patient safety risks ... Consequently, it is critical to provide separate facilities for children and adolescents in all areas of the health service where they are cared for.

Under the heading "Application" the document lists a number of areas, one of which is "Intensive Care Units", which is a reference to the document entitled "NSW Health Policy: Children—Management of Seriously Ill in Adult Intensive Care Units". However, as I could not find it after searching through every single reference, I asked the Deputy Premier, representing the Minister for Health, a question on notice. I asked:

Where can a copy (either paper or electronic) be obtained of the publication "NSW Health: Children—Management of Seriously Ill in Adult Intensive Care Units 2005"?

The answer supplied was:

I am advised by the Hon. John Della Bosca MLC, Minister for Health:

The document "NSW Health: Children—Management of Seriously ILL in adult Intensive Care Units 2005" (originally published in 1983) was made obsolete in 2005 and is no longer publicly available.

Therefore, we have guidelines and standards for the care of children and adolescents in health services utilising a document that is obsolete. That does not lead to faith in the documents. The "Standards for the Care of Children and Adolescents in Health Services" further states:

2. Facilities

- 2.1 Children and adolescents are cared for in a safe and appropriate physical environment ...
- 2.2 Children and adolescents must be cared for on wards that are appropriate for their age and stage of development and must be physically separated from adult patients ...
- 2.2.3 Ideally adolescents should only be admitted to a designated adolescent area. Admission of adolescents must take into account their [history]

The document outlines that history. Further, the document states:

- 2.4.2 Where separate adolescent facilities are not available, adolescents should be grouped together in a paediatric ward.

Under the heading "4. Staff" the document reads:

- 4.1. Children and adolescents are cared for by staff specifically trained to meet their physical, psychosocial, developmental, communication and cultural needs ...
- 4.3 In all areas of the health service where children and adolescents are cared for all clinical staff must be trained in paediatric life support ...
- 4.7 All staff caring for children and adolescents must have access to the following resources:
 - a. Paediatric Pharmacopoeia
 - b. Paediatric clinical practice guidelines
 - c. Poisons helpline
- 4.8 As an absolute minimum, any health service and admitting children/adolescents must have access at all times to a resource person with paediatric clinical experience and expertise which accord with the following staff standards ...

The document goes on to list those standards. The document totally supports the legislation. It is absolutely unbelievable that the Government cannot see its way clear to also support it. As I have pointed out, the 2008 document is flawed. Notwithstanding the obvious error I have referred to, both these documents detail what should have happened during Vanessa's stay in hospital. I reiterate: Warren and Michelle Anderson never lost belief that something positive would come from something so negative—that their beautiful daughter's death could result in a positive action so that no-one else would ever have to endure the loss of a child under the circumstances in which Vanessa died in 2005. They continue to feel gutted and distraught that the Government could not clearly see their concerns and put in place just one policy that would make a huge difference to them and their loss. I ask again: Why else are we in this place if not to meet the needs of the people of New South Wales? Can we not put aside politics, even just once, to pass sensible legislation that was always going to be a first step?

The Anderson family celebrate Christmas by including Vanessa by placing a candle at an empty chair—her chair. Vanessa's life and memory are surely worth more than this Government has shown with its inaction on ensuring the safety of hospitalised children and adolescents in adult wards. The Paediatric Patient Oversight (Vanessa's Law) Bill 2008 must be adopted. Warren Anderson still has some questions, which remained unanswered. He asks: What measures will be put in place to ensure the correct diagnosis of a child is made and to give a guarantee to the New South Wales public that a child being admitted into a New South Wales hospital will not fall victim to current system failures? He also asks: What measures will be undertaken to adequately meet the needs of children who are admitted into an adult ward?

Given the delay in the Government response to the Garling report, we still do not have answers to these questions. Nothing in the discussions and—dare I say it—persuasions Warren has had from bureaucrats and medical personnel over the past three months provides a glimmer of solid reason why this legislation cannot be adopted—except we now hear that the age would be incorrect and that perhaps the egos of some of the doctors

in New South Wales have not been stroked. It is simply unbelievable that this legislation cannot be adopted. One of the last meetings held to attempt to dissuade Warren from his belief in the bill informed him that there has to be "one boss" in charge of the patient. I well know this not to be the case, with many patients managed by teams of doctors and other health practitioners when there are complexities in the illness of a patient. The oversight a paediatrician would adopt in relation to a child in an adult ward of a large hospital would not make that physician the lead doctor. The assessment would be of a consultant type and a sign-off regarding the appropriateness of the care the child was undergoing. I firmly believe that if a paediatrician had assessed Vanessa Anderson on the Monday before her untimely death she would have been alive today. I also believe a paediatrician would have seen that the combination of drugs being given to Vanessa was unsatisfactory for such a young girl.

I repeat: This bill is a first step. I draw the House's attention to the following statement in the Garling report: "Children and young adolescents should not be accommodated in adult wards." I will not refer further to the Garling report, suffice it to say that Commissioner Garling makes numerous references to the way in which children and young adolescents should be managed. However, if there is no choice, and the child is so ill as to require admission to an adult ward in a teaching or referral hospital or a rural hospital, we must have measures in place to ensure the safety of the child. The bill goes a long way towards providing those measures. In conclusion, I repeat the words of the shadow Minister for Health: This bill is important in order to prevent a repetition of what happened to Vanessa. I also pay tribute to the tremendous efforts of Warren, Michelle, Amanda and Nathan Anderson in seeking to improve things for children and adolescents in the New South Wales hospital system. I commend the bill to the House because it is simple, sensible and safe. How can the Government ignore such necessary improvement in our health system?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.54 p.m.], in reply: I cannot express more strongly my disappointment in the Parliamentary Secretary for Health. I believe he does not mean what he says. I believe he has been forced into this situation by the Minister for Health and the Government. I know that other Labor members of this place believe, as I do, that this is good legislation—simple legislation that would make a real difference. The reasons given by the Parliamentary Secretary in opposing the bill are stunning. If he has a problem with the age specified—and that is used as an excuse—he could easily have moved an amendment to the bill. It would simply require an amendment to clause 4 to reduce the age from 18 years to 16 years. If the Parliamentary Secretary wants to entertain such an amendment I am very happy to look at the matter and perhaps have the bill reintroduced in the Legislative Council.

As the member for Hornsby pointed out, existing Government guidelines and documents contain many references to the measures that are covered in this legislation. The document "Standards for the Care of Children and Adolescents in Health Services" was published on 18 November 2008, the day after the Opposition spoke to the media about our intention to introduce the bill. The potential risks arising from colocating children and adolescents with adults in health services include, for example, compromises in quality of care for children and adolescents if care is provided by staff without education and training in the care and treatment of children and young people or if the available equipment is inappropriate in size or design. The document states:

In the event of an unavoidable circumstance when separate accommodation for children/adolescents and adults is not possible, the health service must identify designated areas where children and adolescents can be accommodated. Health service policies, guidelines and risk management strategies that are based on the best available evidence and practice must be in place to specify the requirements for a safe and appropriate physical environment to protect the children/adolescents.

As the member for Hornsby pointed out, under the heading "Staff" the document states that staff with the responsibility of looking after children who have been admitted must have experience and training in the care of children and adolescents. The Parliamentary Secretary suggested that for some reason this is unacceptable because he was not consulted ahead of time. I find that the most arrogant suggestion this Parliament has heard for a very long time. For a member to say in this House, "I am a paediatrician, and therefore you must consult me" is breathtaking arrogance.

I would rather consult my very good friend Warren Anderson and his family, who have now gone through years of trying to consult with doctors, the health Minister and others about what needs to be done. I know that Warren has been talking to a number of specialists—many of whom have contacted me—who said, as I told Warren, that they have never been more impressed with a man and his dedication to a cause that would serve at least to give some sense to Vanessa's death. Those doctors, I believe, feel greatly shamed by the Government's response to this bill and its rejection of a very simple piece of legislation.

We acknowledge that the bill is not the answer to everything, but certainly it is a first step. It would require that any child under the age of 18 who attended a major teaching or base hospital and was admitted

beyond 24 hours would have their treatment oversighted by a paediatrician. There will be paediatricians in those hospitals; that is the nature of major teaching and base hospitals. So it cannot be said that paediatricians will not be available. I think most paediatricians I know would be horrified to learn that the Government thinks that if they had some involvement in the care of a child it would somehow compromise that child's care.

The legislation is highly moral, but the Government is stooping lower than I thought it could stoop. It would have made such a difference not only to Vanessa, had she still been alive, but also to any child or adolescent under the age of 18 years who found themselves in an adult hospital ward being cared for by people who do not understand their needs: people who have not had the training, the education or the practise of looking after a body that has different needs to that of an adult.

When I introduced the bill I quoted my very good friend Professor David Bennett. At that time I made a mistake, which I wish to now correct. David is not a professor of paediatrics but a professor of adolescent care. He has told me that he, among others, is so very impressed with Warren Anderson. In rejecting this legislation the Government is showing its true colours. It is playing politics. It is saying it will not accept the legislation because the Coalition has introduced it. Shame on the Government!

It is not right for the Parliamentary Secretary to sit in this House and suggest that somehow the recommendations of the Garling report about Kids NSW will accommodate this. My feedback is that the Department of Health is advising people that Kids NSW is not involved in one of the recommendations to be endorsed by the Government. I dare say the Government will come up with another flimsy excuse to make it look as though it is picking up some of the recommendations. But I can tell you one thing, the Government will not be picking up Vanessa's law because it is churlish, mean-spirited, playing political games and has snubbed its nose at Warren Anderson, his wife and their family.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 38

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

Noes, 46

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Bill not agreed to in principle.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! It being close to 5.30 p.m. private members' statements will now proceed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

VIETNAMESE TET FESTIVAL

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA (Smithfield) [5.09 p.m.]: The Vietnamese Tet Festival was held from 6 to 8 February 2009 in my electorate of Smithfield. After more than 15 years the Vietnamese Tet Festival, which is one of the largest events in our local community calendar, returned to Fairfield Showground. The event celebrates the lunar new year. Every year thousands of people come together at the festival to join in the celebrations, and this year was no exception. Despite the extremely hot weather, the event attracted more than 40,000 visitors to welcome the Year of the Ox. The lunar new year is a time to join together to celebrate and to pay respect to our elders, friends, family and the greater community. It is a time to welcome new beginnings and opportunities and to bring in good luck and happiness.

It was easy to see that friendship and happiness were clearly the focus of the Tet Festival. The festival promoted a friendly atmosphere and I had the opportunity to meet many people from my community and celebrate the lunar new year with them. A variety of stalls offered visitors an opportunity to experience unique Vietnamese food, clothing and artworks. The food was delicious, the clothing exquisite, and the artwork creative and intriguing. To reinforce the importance of this event, the official ceremony attracted members from all levels of Government. The Premier, the Hon. Nathan Rees, attended, as did Jason Clare, the Federal member for Blaxland, representing the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, many State Ministers and members, Federal members and Fairfield city councillors. They all supported the festival and ensured it received the attention it deserved. Mr Tri Vo, President of the New South Wales Vietnamese Community Association [VCA], the organisation that made the festival a reality, said:

Vietnamese Culture and Heritage has been around for more than 4000 years.

Following this tradition, the VCA has been organising the Vietnamese New Year Tet Festival for more than 20 years and we have found that it continues to grow as each year goes by.

In the past, the Festival has been held at various other locations within South West Sydney.

These locations include Cabra Vale Park, Bass Hill Park, Warwick Farm racecourse, and Fairfield Show Ground.

The festival is about maintaining and promoting our culture and heritage. The event attracts people within our Vietnamese Community and also from the wider community.

This Festival is also important to us, especially for our Vietnamese refugee Community, because we have all risked our lives to escape from Vietnam, leaving everything behind as we made our journey to this great nation.

We could only bring the clothes we were wearing, but we still had our knowledge, faith, culture, heritage and hope.

And that's what we bring to our Festival each year we organise it.

The Vietnamese community has been through some tough times, but through adversity comes hope. I strongly believe this festival not only gives hope to the many thousands of Vietnamese people living within our community, but also promotes friendship amongst the 130 different cultures within Fairfield city and my electorate of Smithfield. I commend the hardwork of the VCA in making the festival a success. I take the opportunity to especially mention Tri Vo, Huy Tran, Anh Linh Pham, Nhan Tran, Than Nguyen, Thuy Huong Nguyen, Giang Nguyen and Thanh Nguyen. However, the event was a team effort, with various other organisations assisting the VCA with the preparation, operation and conclusion of the festival. The local media, including the *Fairfield City Champion*, *Fairfield Advance*, and Vietnamese newspapers such as the *Dan Viet*, *Saigon Times* and the *Viet Luan* promoted the event, which contributed to the strong attendance throughout the festival. Other contributors that deserve recognition include Fairfield City Council, St Johns Ambulance, the

Fairfield State Emergency Service, the Smithfield Fire Brigade and the Fairfield Police local area command. I am certain that the Vietnamese Tet Festival will continue to grow as the years go by. I invite all members of this House and the public to make the trip to Smithfield next year and join in the celebrations.

LEANNE PIMM AND THE OFFICE OF THE PROTECTIVE COMMISSIONER

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [5.13 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to services provided by the Office of the Protective Commissioner. The role of the Protective Commissioner is:

To provide a carefully and professionally planned financial management service designed to meet the lifestyle needs of clients, taking into account their views and available financial resources.

The matter I raise tonight relates to the financial affairs of my constituent Leanne Pimm, whose maiden name is Drennan. I have been informed that Leanne Pimm suffered a psychotic episode on 19 November 2008. She suffers from a mental illness. She was removed from her Baulkham Hills home by police and ambulance officers and taken to Cumberland Hospital. Ms Pimm's brother and sister gained access to Ms Pimm's home to collect and care for her animals. At that time Ms Pimm sister, Sharon Stewart, discovered a demand letter from the National Australia Bank advising that legal action was to be taken against her sister due to arrears in her mortgage repayments on her Baulkham Hills home. Upon discovering this demand letter, Mrs Stewart contacted the National Australia Bank on the same day, 19 November 2008, advising that her sister had been hospitalised. Mrs Stewart has advised me that the National Australia Bank on that day advised her that any further legal action would be postponed.

Mrs Stewart stated that she notified Cumberland Hospital and the relevant social worker there that the National Australia Bank had served this demand letter on Ms Pimm in relation to her home. She also advised me that the social worker informed her that Ms Pimm's finances would be taken care of by the Protective Commissioner. I have been informed that the Protective Commissioner was given this authority on 2 December 2008. Mrs Stewart stated that she was advised that the Office of the Protective Commissioner wrote to the National Australia Bank in December requesting details of the outstanding mortgage arrears. However, it is understood that the Office of the Protective Commissioner incorrectly referred to Ms Pimm by her maiden name. I am told that the National Australia Bank wrote back to the Office of the Protective Commissioner advising that it had no record of a client with this name.

Mrs Stewart advised that she notified the Office of the Protective Commissioner on 16 February 2009 that the National Australia Bank was changing the locks on Ms Pimm's home, despite her personal belongings still being inside. She informed me that the Office of the Protective Commissioner had stated that the National Australia Bank was not prepared to undertake any negotiations for the arrears in the mortgage payments. Following this advice, Mrs Stewart contacted my electorate office seeking advice as to how her sister could keep her home. It is understood that the arrears in the mortgage repayments amount to approximately \$6,000. It is also understood that Ms Pimm could meet this amount out of her superannuation fund. I am informed that there is only \$190,000 owed on the mortgage of this Baulkham Hills property. I am told that the property could be leased at a rental of \$460 per week, which would more than cover future mortgage repayments.

Ms Pimm and her sister visited my electorate office earlier this week. Both were extremely distressed with the current situation. I made urgent representations to the Attorney General about this matter on 27 February. A follow-up call was also made to the Attorney General's Office stressing the urgency of this matter. When making financial decisions, the Office of the Protective Commissioner is supposed to consider the overall best interests of the person. Ms Pimm and her family believe that it is in Ms Pimm's best interests for her to have access to her superannuation based on compassionate grounds. The funds from her superannuation would cover the arrears on the mortgage repayments and the property could be rented, with the rent received more than covering future mortgage repayments until Ms Pimm can resolve her health issues. I call upon the Attorney General to urgently ensure that the Office of the Protective Commissioner immediately negotiate with the National Australia Bank to enable Ms Pimm to maintain her property.

Ms Pimm has two children, aged 14 and 11, who are being cared for by her ex-husband. She believes that it will be approximately two months before she will be considered well enough to leave Cumberland Hospital. It is then her intention to live with her sister until she feels well enough to pick up the threads of her life. To do this, it is essential that she keep her home. Ms Pimm advised me that she built her home in 2003 and she is anxious to ensure that this asset is preserved. I ask the Attorney General to urgently look into this matter, which is of critical importance to my constituent. It is a serious matter that requires immediate attention.

RUSSIAN RELIEF ASSOCIATION

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [5.18 p.m.]: Earlier this year I attended the opening of the new wing of the aged care home for the Russian Relief Association in Cabramatta. This organisation has a long and proud history of caring for our senior citizens in Cabramatta and must be commended for all its sterling work. The Russian culture has a long and proud history in this country dating back to the nineteenth century. Its traditions, which have long endured across Australia, have slowly increased over the last 200 years.

In the 2006 census some 15,500 people claimed to be Russian born, however that is nothing compared with the 67,000 people who claim some form of Russian ancestry, either alone or combined with another culture. This community, however small, has produced many great Australian names and heroes. Sidney Myer and Kostya Tsyu are two such examples of Russian migrants who came to Australia in search of the lucky country.

In Cabramatta, where cultural diversity is seen as mutually beneficial, we have our very own vibrant Russian community. We celebrate their hard work and achievements as we do for any of our other communities. Therefore the Russian community of Sydney has a significant need for the Russian Relief Association Saint Sergius Aged Care complex. The association is committed to recognising the linguistic, cultural and spiritual needs of elderly persons of Russian background or of Christian Orthodox faith. The aged care facilities are wide ranging and fulfil a number of services for seniors. The complex currently contains a nursing home that comprises 96 patients. For the elderly who need current and regular care a staff of 17 is on call to make sure that their needs are constantly catered for, and with room for only 26 residents that certainly occurs.

This aged care complex also has a dementia hostel, which has the capacity to hold 16 residents at any one time and is serviced by 10 staff. This number of staff ensures that the special needs of people with a debilitating disease are well looked after. The association also operates 22 retirement units. These units, which are for the more mobile seniors, have the same accessibility to staff as the other parts of the nursing home as well as activities for the more adventurous.

This is the fiftieth anniversary of the organisation and it is pleasing to see that the Russian Relief Association is looking towards its future as well as celebrating its past. I congratulate Mr Alex Hughes, President, and Mr Adrian Lapardin, Director of Finance and Planning and Vice-President. I also congratulate the staff. Future predictions are that by 2010 more than 100,000 Russians will be living in Australia. An increase of 33,000 people of Russian heritage since 2006 shows that the work of this aged care facility will continue to grow and prosper.

The board is investigating the feasibility of building more independent living units and expanding the association's operations to provide home-care services. I congratulate the Russian Relief Association on its 50 years of looking after the Russian and Christian Orthodox community in my area. I believe that the increasing immigration to Australia from Russia will see this vibrant community grow and prosper. I am certain that it will reach the centenary mark and will continue to support the people of Cabramatta for many years to come.

GLYNNE TOSH

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [5.23 p.m.]: Tonight I recognise a great service to the New South Wales community by a woman named Glynne Tosh. Glynne was born in December 1946 and unfortunately passed away earlier this month. Her funeral was held on 12 February. Eulogies were given at the funeral by Garry Nehl, a past deputy speaker of the Federal parliament and Bronwyn Petrie, and I will read parts of her eulogy today.

Glynne was born at Coutts Crossing, married her husband Angus after they met in Armidale, and had three children, Kerrie, David and Stewart, and a number of grandchildren. She was a breeder of Devon cattle, and I will never forget the day I suggested to her that I could not understand why people would breed cattle for meat that went into sausages only. Did I get a lecture on Devon cattle! But Glynne was more renowned for her community service across the board. She was a longstanding member of the National Party; in fact, she joined the Young Country Party in Armidale, and she was in the St Johns Ambulance. I will read from the eulogy:

She used her nursing skills in the St Johns Ambulance attending multitude of activities from the Show, football, rodeos, pony club etc., and other positions she held included Secretary of Dorrigo Branch of NSW Farmers Association, Secretary of North Dorrigo Pony Club, Rural Fire Service Brigade Member, Chairman of the Dorrigo National Party branch, Chairman of the Dorrigo branch of the Forest Protection Society/Timber Communities Australia, Central Councillor for the National Party, Senior

Vice Chairman of the Cowper Electorate Committee, Senior Vice Chairman of the Coffs Harbour Electorate committee, negotiator for NSW Farmers through the Regional Forest Agreements and representative on the Occupational Permits Grazing taskforce, and a member of the Land Board.

How Glynne found the time to fit into her life what she did on a day-to-day basis was beyond anyone. But she was a woman with a passion. She believed in proper forest management; she believed in equity for farmers and people in rural New South Wales, and wherever there was a cause, be it the demonstration that was held outside this Parliament many years ago on behalf of the timber communities, where she stood alongside all the timber trucks and the timber workers, right through to protecting people's interest in her role on the Land Board, where she would go out and look at dividing fence issues, she was involved. I can guarantee that whilst I am a member of this place I will never support any move to get rid of lands boards, because of the knowledge and depth of understanding I gained from Glynne on issues that lands boards across the State address. They are a great organisation and with Glynne Tosh as a representative on the board you could guarantee that the underdog was always represented.

Glynne was a person who would never take no for an answer if she believed the issue had to be aired and she was in the right. Many a night I stood out on the steps of the town hall in Dorrigo after a meeting—such as when they wanted to change the way the health system was delivered in Dorrigo—in the freezing cold, talking to Glynne on issues that were just not the issue at hand, not just on issues that affected people on the Dorrigo plateau but issues that affected people right across the State. Whether it was New South Wales farmers grazing rights, the lack of fuel load or the lack of control and reduction of fuel load on the forest floor, or something to do with St Johns Ambulance on the plateau, Glynne was there to assist people.

I used to try to ring Glynne but you could almost never get through on the phone, but when you did the first thing she asked about was your family. If she rang me at home she would ask how the children were and she would discuss their lives before she got on to the matter at hand. She was one of those rare people who thought of other people before herself. In the small eulogy I gave at the funeral I said that she had two great loves in life: one was her community and the other one was her family. Her grandchildren were at the funeral. I remember her first grandchild, Charlie. From the day she was born we had photos of her with stickers and little animals and toys. Charlie is now 15 or 16; she is a lovely young lady. I hope all Glynne's children inherit the qualities their mother had. My sympathy goes to Angus and all the family. Angus will probably get the use of his phone back now that Glynne has passed. She was a great woman who will be sorely missed, not just in the Bostobrick and Dorrigo communities but right across New South Wales.

BUS SERVICES 303 AND X03

Mr FRANK SARTOR (Rockdale) [5.28 p.m.]: I will update the House on an important public transport matter in my electorate concerning the 303 and X03 bus services. Prior to the Christmas break I informed the House of proposals by the State Transit Authority to change the route of the 303 from Sans Souci to the City to Sans Souci to Bondi Junction and discontinue the express X03 service. I received some 260 letters of objection, which I conveyed to the Office of the Minister for Transport. When I raised this in the House I was fortunate that the Minister for Transport was at the table and he offered to review the matter. The Minister assured me that there would be no network changes without carefully considering the community's views.

I am pleased to report that last week the Minister visited my electorate to announce that there will be no changes to the 303 bus service and that it will continue to terminate in the City not Bondi Junction as first proposed. In addition, the Minister has also agreed to trial the morning peak X03 service for an eight-month period and also two new additional evening peak X03 services for the same period. These improvements will be implemented on 26 April 2009. Patronage on these services will be closely monitored so I urge all commuters to jump on board and make these services permanent. This is a fantastic result for the Rockdale electorate and a boost in bus services along the foreshore. These adjustments to the network will help to improve the efficiency and reliability of services and will ensure that levels of demand are met.

I take this opportunity to thank the many residents who wrote objecting to the proposal. I also thank the Hon. David Campbell, Minister for Transport, for listening to the community's views and refining the original plans. Although this is a great win for Rockdale, my electorate still has some outstanding transport-related issues. As stated previously, expanding the existing Gieves Avenue car park next to Rockdale station into a multi-deck car park is a priority. The upgrade of Arncliffe station is another matter which is regularly raised by many of my constituents and which needs addressing. Finally, residents who use Wolli Creek station have advised me that the existing temporary car park near the station was permanently closed this week. There is a pressing need for a public commuter car park near this important railway station. Although I realise that will be

difficult because such a facility was not part of the approved Discovery Point development plan, I have raised the issue with the Minister to establish whether it can be addressed. I thank the Minister for the work he has done to assist in my electorate.

The Minister for Water, who is at the table, visited my electorate about a week ago when we celebrated the arrival of the barge from Singapore that will be used to lay the twin desalination pipes across Botany Bay. The Minister took time out on a Sunday morning—which is, of course, very valuable time for anyone with a family—to come to my electorate to speak to my constituents. Micro-tunnelling has been carried out between the shoreline at Botany Bay through Kyeemagh to the Cooks River and beyond as part of the desalination project.

I have received not one complaint about that work, which clearly demonstrates that the project is being well managed and that my constituents have no concerns. I again thank the Minister for attending the event: it was much appreciated. The desalination project is on schedule and, as I understand it, on budget. This project will initially provide Sydney with 15 per cent of its water supply, and potentially 30 per cent if we expand the facility. The inlet and delivery pipes are designed to provide almost one-third of Sydney's water supply. That will be an amazing buffer in the event of a protracted drought. I also again thank the Minister for Transport for his efficient and effective intervention with regard to bus services in my electorate.

MANLY HOSPITAL

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [5.33 p.m.]: I have another sad health story for the House. A local family came to see me out of desperation about the plight of their elderly father. They told me that 89-year-old Reginald Coelli is virtually a hostage in Manly Hospital. He fears that he will spend his final days there because he cannot be transferred anywhere else. Mr Coelli contracted the super bug while in the hospital and his family quite fairly claims that the health system has abandoned him. Hospital staff have told them that there is nothing more that they can do to help him. He can either stay in hospital or go home. However, Mr Coelli needs 24-hour care, which makes the situation much more complicated. I call on the Government to find a solution and to help Mr Coelli and his family—or, indeed, other families—avoid any further suffering. This is not an attack on the staff of Manly Hospital—the community is extremely proud of the work done by the nurses and doctors at the hospital in the current circumstances—rather, it is a broad-ranging health issue.

Mr Coelli was admitted to hospital on 4 February suffering a stroke. He is also suffering from renal failure and leukaemia. On 9 February his family was notified that he was to be moved to Manly Waters Private Hospital for rehabilitation. However, the hospital told the family that other patients—including a patient in the same room as Mr Coelli—had contracted the super bug and that he would need to be tested. The family were informed on 10 February that Mr Coelli had tested positive and that the infection was incurable. His family was not sure what that meant for him.

The nub of the issue is that the health system should take responsibility for Mr Coelli because he was in its care when he contracted the super bug and he has nowhere else to go. He has been abandoned because no other hospital will take him. Even if he could go home, he needs 24-hour care. His 87-year-old wife is confined to a wheelchair. In fact, while visiting her husband she unfortunately had an accident involving a nurse who slipped and she now has trouble with her eye. This is a difficult time and this family needs support. Suzanne Young, Mr Coelli's daughter, is extremely worried about the impact of this situation on her father's health and the quality of the rest of his life. Mr Coelli believes that he will die in Manly Hospital. His family has asked me to raise as a matter of urgency what the hospital intends to do about Mr Coelli contracting the super bug and how the health system can support him.

This is another sad tale about the health system. This 89-year-old man is afraid that he will die in hospital and his family is concerned about his welfare. Members of the family cannot look after him and the health system cannot support him. I ask the health system and the Minister in particular to take on board this family's plight and to see what they can do. We heard this week about cancer sufferers being unable to access treatment. The New South Wales Government must understand these cases and ensure that the health system responds to individuals rather than simply managing crises. I am not pretending to be an expert but I believe this super bug outbreak will have widespread implications. The outbreak has occurred for a reason and we must find out who is responsible. The Government must also provide ongoing support for those affected.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that the Government must expedite the construction of the Northern Beaches hospital. I commend the nurses and doctors at Manly Hospital and I also commend the staff at

Mona Vale Hospital. The nurses, doctors, other clinicians and the community are at one about the need for this new hospital. I understand that the Minister has applied for funding under the Infrastructure Australia program, and I ask him to expedite that application and to personally encourage Kevin Rudd to examine both hospitals. If he did, he would know that this is a priority of the highest order.

RIVERSTONE LAND DEVELOPMENT

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.38 p.m.]: A matter of major concern in my electorate potentially affects several hundred industrialists in the town of Riverstone. Some time ago the Minister for Planning made an announcement about the release of two substantial areas of residential land—the Alex Avenue release in Quakers Hill and the Riverstone precinct release. Together they will accommodate about 16,900 new homes. A substantial amount of open space and some industrial land was included in the development plans, and that concerns me. I have already sent scores of submissions to the Minister for Planning about a range of matters, in some cases about people whose land has been zoned open space and who are obviously concerned about the valuation of their property and about land that has been zoned for drainage purposes despite the fact that there is no evidence to support such a designation. However, I will not raise those issues today. I refer specifically to land at Riverstone in the vicinity of Loftus Street and the surrounding area. For the past 40 years or so the land has been zoned general industrial; that is, capable of accommodating heavy industry.

Many heavy industrial factories have been set up in the area. One example is a concrete batching factory, another factory has a 10-tonne crane on it and, generally speaking, the whole area is overtaken with heavy industrial work. It would appear that, because of a new template the Department of Planning has developed, various areas would be designed for light industry. Up to now that area has been zoned 4 (a), that is general industrial, and is now proposed to be zoned 4 (c), light industrial. So a location with a lot of heavy industry will now be rezoned under this process as light industry. Clearly, a lot of factories already built on the site will be inappropriate. Although they will have existing use rights, this will dramatically affect the valuation of those properties and the capacity of the people who currently own them to resell their land. Other land is currently being developed, and Blacktown council has now stopped all the development in that area pending resolution of the situation. As a result, many people are frustrated by having their development proposals halted.

One person who had been operating a heavy industrial production factory for quite some time wanted to move to larger premises. He bought those larger premises in another council area and was ready to sell the current property. On the day the contract for sale was to be signed this proposal came out and consequently the sale was stopped. He is now paying around \$1,000 a week in interest on the land he has bought and is unable to sell the land he has because the proposed buyer pulled out of the deal, not knowing the type of land he was about to buy—whether it would be heavy industrial land or land zoned for light industry. That is clearly unacceptable.

There are many problems with the timing of these rezonings. Despite working for years towards this—and the Riverstone industrial precinct has been waiting for this rezoning was something like 30 years—the rezoning proposals were put out in late November with submissions to close on 6 February. A one-stop shop was established in Pitt Street at Riverstone for people to see the proposal, but it closed on 23 December and did not reopen until 13 January, and people had to have their submissions in by 6 February. The period before Christmas is a busy time for many people and it is also difficult to get access to lawyers and the like during January. I would like the Minister to reconsider this proposal. It is unacceptable that those people should be handicapped in this way. I ask that the Minister reconsider keeping the general industrial zoning of 4 (a) in this area and not light industrial zoning of 4 (c).

UPPER HUNTER GAS EXPLORATION

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [5.43 p.m.]: I support the constituents in my electorate who are opposed to the exploration for methane gas in the Broke, Milbrodale, Wollombi, Bulga area. In particular I support the Hunter-Bulga Gas Action Group and many other people who have been in touch with me about not only gas exploration but gas exploitation in the immediate area. The Broke, Milbrodale, Wollombi area is very beautiful. It has been developed over many years for agricultural purposes—in particular, dairying originally—but also now for viticulture and the burgeoning tourism industry. I do not mean just homestay, bed and

breakfast, although that is very well catered for, but there are some very substantial wineries. Many have restaurants and cellar door sales and they are well established and attracting many visitors.

In addition to the relatively close residential settlement, the agricultural and tourism areas make it inappropriate for gas exploration and gas exploitation. The Sydney Gas Company, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of AGL, has an exploration licence under the Petroleum Act for some 17,000 square kilometres in the area. To the disappointment of many, including me, it has chosen literally to undertake exploration drilling beneath the village of Broke. What has particularly brought me to the Chamber today is that the company has announced it is going to undertake some exploration drilling in the Broke village to test the impact on water resources, the water table, and the issue of water disposal.

That is an extremely dangerous thing to do. I do not believe there has been an environmental impact statement, or whatever they are now called, and do not think there has been community exposure, yet the company appears quite willing—and is quite entitled, apparently, under the legislation or the fiat of the Government—to carry this out. There are great concerns. The Hunter-Bulga Action Group has informed me:

Sydney Gas has just announced it is about to drill a test well and draw water from coal seams, which extend under the village of Broke, to see if the water tables under Broke, used by the village for domestic use, "drain away into the coal seam".

Sydney Gas also announced that there will be leakage or methane gas from the test well. Methane gas is over 20 times more destructive to the environment than Carbon Dioxide and is highly explosive.

The action group said much more, of course, but that is enough. I make the point that there must be within that petroleum exploration licence many more thousands of available hectares other than the close proximity to the village of Broke and the closely settled rural areas in the immediate area, including extensive viticulture and tourism developments. I urge the Minister for Mineral Resources in another place—and I note that the Minister for Water is at the table and I am sure he is taking note—and the Government to reconsider the approach that has been taken with this resource and ask the company to move away from these closely settled areas. There are more opportunities elsewhere. It may well find it is an easier path and a more successful commercial path if it does.

AL'S PALS JUNIOR FOOTBALL TEAM

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [5.48 p.m.]: Tonight I talk about one of the great football teams of all time. I am not talking about the beloved Tigers or the Bulldogs, or even the Swans, but a team called Al's Pals. Al's Pals play in the East Hills Junior Oztog competition. They play every week in the summer season. I have to declare an interest, because I am the sponsor of that team. As a privilege for my being the sponsor of the team, they wear "Al's Pals" on the back of their jumpers. I encourage all members to take up something like this. The team commenced in October 2005. It is a mixed team of girls and boys. In the first year two of the girls were the best players. They are under eight, most players were only seven years of age. Most of the team was made up of players in the East Hills rugby league's under eights, with a couple of older sisters thrown in. The East Hills Rugby League Club is the oldest junior club in the Canterbury-Bankstown district and they are still known today as the Bulldogs.

The team continued to play in the summer competition of 2006-07, up until yesterday when they played in the grand final. In 2007-08 the team changed dramatically when one of the players changed codes from rugby league to Australian rules, which is what is happening with many young footballers. Their mums and dads are a little less afraid with their children playing a game with a little less, for want of a better word, "aggression". Mums particularly feel that their sons are a little safer playing Australian rules. Nevertheless, rugby league is a great sport.

Some of the new players who were recruited changed their jumpers from the famous lime green to red and black. Players on the side included Daniel Mellars, Blake Kentwell, Aidan Murphy, Dion Compton, Kyle Ford, Aaron Gilbert, Connor Wilkinson, Jonty Moore—his father is now the coach for the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs—and Jayden Chew. At the commencement of the 2008-09 season some of the players left for a number of different reasons and additional players were recruited from all sorts of venues and wherever young kids could be found to make up the team.

Yesterday the grand finalists who played included Daniel Mellars, an original player since 2005. Daniel, who is in year 5 at Panania Public School, has played for four years. Blake Kentwell, who is in year 5 at

Panania Public School, is playing only for his second year. Aidan Murphy, from Panania Public School, is also a second-year player. I am the proud patron of the Panania Public School—my old alma mater—Parents and Citizens Association. I got through my education at that school and I managed to work my way into high school. Jake McDonald from Revesby South Public School is playing for his first year. Jake Capes, from Panania Public School, is playing for his first year, Michael Lemme, from St Therese Public School, is a first-year player, and there are three additional first-year players from Panania Public School—Riley Butler, Cooper Sly and Bill Ryan.

As most players have played for only one year and only a couple of players have played Oztag for two years, the team has done well. There is no formal training per se. As members might expect, many of the mothers and fathers turn up to watch the team play the game, but the players do not have managers, coaches and trainers as is the case with the more organised sports that are played at the weekend. The team, which made it to the grand final, did not expect to beat the famous Redbacks, which comprises a couple of former players from Al's Pals who obviously left to play with the Redbacks because of a better contract! Yesterday I think they lost 10 to 5—I could not attend the game as I was in Parliament—which I believe is very credible.

It was a great thrill for these players and their parents that they made the grand final. The game was played in good spirit. Next year some of those boys will qualify to play in the 10s, but most of them will still be qualified to play in the under-8s. As I said earlier, the team, which comprises boys from year 2 through to year 6, competed against extremely experienced players, and the team members were presented with their runner-up medals.

We deal with some serious matters in the Parliament, which is as it should be, but sometimes it is good to talk about a game such as Oztag, which provides young kids with a weekly activity that is not as formal as other sporting codes. Most of these kids, who play in a competitive atmosphere against schoolmates or friends in the community, create great bonds. If they prove to be good at the game they could play rugby league, soccer or Aussie rules later. One of the advantages of playing touch football—and believe it or not I used to play touch football—was that there was always an odd player who would receive a fair smack and who would say, "You never got me", and later he would score a try. There was always the odd player who denied being touched at all. The beauty of Oztag is that players have to rip off the tag, so it is a very fair game.

PAMBULA HOSPITAL ACTION GROUP

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [5.53 p.m.]: Earlier today I stood on the steps of Parliament House and received a petition from the Pambula Hospital Action Group containing 22,000 signatures that had been collected over the past two months from constituents in the Bega Valley shire. As the population in the Bega Valley is of the order of 33,000 people, it is significant that 22,000 people were willing to sign that petition. It is the largest number of names that I have seen on a petition since becoming the member for Bega, and no doubt it demonstrates a clear majority view about the way in which health services should be managed in Bega Valley shire.

The petition asks the State Government to return services to Pambula hospital; to develop a clinical services plan; to engage and consult nurses and doctors about services at the facility and, in so doing, address the low morale; to overhaul governance at the hospital; to ensure better utilisation of the hospital's operating theatre; to provide additional resources for maintenance; to ensure better coordination between Pambula and Bega hospitals; and to consult with the local community about the future of the facility when a new \$1 billion regional facility is to be built at Bega. I thank all those who dedicated their time over the summer months to collect the names that are on this petition. Every time I attended a community event, whether it was a country show or any other community event, someone was always there to collect names to put on the petition.

I thank Shirley Rixon and Neil Rainbow, who were part of that push, and I thank other members of the Pambula Hospital Action Group, in particular, Sharon Tapscott, who was involved in coordinating the 1,000 kilometre round trip for a number of residents who came to State Parliament today to deliver the petition. It was an almighty job on the part of the Pambula Hospital Action Group. I do not think that the Labor Government, Minister John Della Bosca, and local representatives Mike Kelly and Steve Whan can ignore it. It is not unreasonable for the community to request that services be returned to Pambula hospital.

Recently the health service, in good faith, requested a meeting with the action group to discuss the chief executive officer's plans to reinstate a number of services at Pambula hospital. The meeting took place two weeks ago and was requested by the chief executive officer of the health service. She said at that meeting that a

number of services would be reinstated by the middle of the year, including cardiac monitoring, paediatric services and, hopefully, a number of other surgical procedures. This is some sort of a win for a community that has been fighting for the reinstatement of obstetric services at that hospital.

The decision of the Labor Party to close down that service resulted in the loss of jobs for four rural obstetricians who are now being requested to travel to Bega to commence work there. It is shameful that full maternity services are not available at both Bega and Pambula hospital, as was the case prior to January 2007. The Government said that this service was not feasible due to a shortage of nurses and on-call theatre staff. We do not want to go back to a situation where we had alternating rosters between the two hospitals. It was unacceptable for women who had just had a Caesarean and others who were in labour to be transferred between the two sites.

Over the next few months we will be watching closely to see whether the chief executive officer of the health service delivers on her assurances. We recognise that this will involve the medical staff councils at both hospitals and the nurses working together to achieve a broadening of surgical procedures at Pambula over the next few months, for example, ophthalmology, endoscopy, orthopaedic and general surgery. This petition, which I will table next week, is a significant message to the State Government: People are supportive of a new \$100 million facility but they want the future of Pambula hospital secured. They do not want to see that facility closed as per the plan of the Labor Party. A consultation process must commence between the local community, doctors, nurses and the Government to establish what can be achieved at Pambula hospital in the future. I urge Minister John Della Bosca to consult with the community immediately.

TRAFFIC INFRINGEMENT PENALTY POINTS

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [5.58 p.m.]: There has long been a problem with the way that demerit points and fines are applied for minor traffic offences and this week the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Michael Daley, announced changes to be implemented later this year. Recently this matter has been raised a number of times in my office. Almost 61,000 drivers lost their licences last year for accumulating demerit points. It is fair that someone who breaks the law should pay the penalty, but in many cases the penalties seem disproportionate. More than 80 per cent of those caught last year were exceeding the limit by less than 15 kilometres per hour, often fuelling concern over the severity of penalties. My electorate office has received a number of complaints from constituents who feel that they have been harshly treated in such circumstances.

I state clearly that I am not dismissing the dangers associated with speeding and do not support any driver who would be a habitual speeder or reckless driver, indifferent to the safety of others. The Minister's proposal includes reducing the demerit points for drivers of light vehicles exceeding the speed limit by less than 10 kilometres per hour to one demerit point, which most people would think reasonable. Drivers whose licences are less secure after accumulating demerit points for minor infringements will welcome the change. In this House on 27 November 2008 I asked the Premier whether the Government believes it reasonable that the Roads and Traffic Authority always imposes penalty points, even when a magistrate dismisses a traffic infringement because of exceptional circumstances. I also asked whether the authority to determine this should be returned to the judiciary.

The Premier replied that there will always be exceptional circumstances and, therefore, the law should be flexible. He said that is why, in some cases, defences are available to motorists. He cited an example of a motorist moving into a bus lane to provide a clear path for an ambulance. He said that in such cases a motorist can be found not guilty with no points applied. This seems to be a satisfactory answer—pointing to solutions in exceptional cases where it is sensible and appropriate to review penalty points and fines. The crucial point in the Premier's answer is that the driver must take the matter to court and be found not guilty. There are many cases where this finding cannot be reached, but there is still a compelling case for clemency.

I have constituents who have raised concerns about the inflexibility of the system and I feel that they deserve better treatment than the Roads and Traffic Authority has been able to give them. In one case the court waived fines after it was proved that temporary speed signs for road works had not been displayed properly. In another, a driver who inadvertently used a T-lane in unfamiliar circumstances chose not to take the matter to court, because he knew that the points could not be waived. As recently as 2 February 2009 I was advised that current legislation and procedures are based on an agreed national driver licensing policy, under which allocating points is an administrative action system separate from the court process. The court has jurisdiction to waive the fines, but not the demerit points.

The flexibility espoused by the Premier applies only where a penalty has been challenged in court and the driver has been found not guilty. This process does nothing to help the most deserving cases from among the 61,000 people who lost their licences last year. Without a doubt, that number will include some drivers whose fines were waived by the court because of the trivial nature of their transgressions but who still exceeded the limit on demerit points. New South Wales may be party to a national licensing system that separates court processes from administrative processes, but this should not make it impossible for those administrative processes to show some sensitivity to extenuating circumstances and some compassion for those involved.

The flexibility mentioned by the Premier should apply to people who are technically guilty but who should rightly avoid punishment. It is reasonable that such cases should be resolved without even going to court. The Premier has said that the law should be flexible in exceptional circumstances. It is time for the administration of demerit points to show flexibility and to pay respect to the judiciary's ability to make decisions appropriate to the circumstances. I acknowledge the efforts of Minister Daley to bring some fairness and proportionality to the demerit point system and ask the Minister and the Government to pay due respect to the fact that exceptional circumstances can occur, and that the judiciary is best placed to determine a fair and just outcome in those cases. I ask the Minister to consider returning this authority to the judiciary.

AUSTRALIAN ENERGY REGULATOR DRAFT DETERMINATIONS

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [6.03 p.m.]: A matter of great significance to my constituents and to the State relates to energy provision. Instead of guiding and driving investment in a new green energy future, the new Australian Energy Regulator, known as the AER, established in January 2008, could entrench an unsustainable outdated business as usual model for electricity distribution, while energy bills for the New South Wales community will significantly increase. Monopoly providers, including EnergyAustralia, must obtain approval every five years from the AER for future expenditure forecasts, based on planned augmentation, replacement or expansion of their networks.

This approval process has the potential to ensure the energy sector minimises environmental and financial costs by reducing the drivers behind energy and peak load growth while ensuring the long-term reliability and security of energy supply. Greenhouse gas emissions must decline during the next five years if we are to deliver on greenhouse gas reduction targets, with early investment in low carbon energy infrastructure crucial due to the very long lead times and forward planning involved. However, the AER draft determinations for New South Wales network providers accepts a business as usual model, which will lock Sydney into the existing modes of centralised energy supply and distribution, with unprecedented capital investment and retail electricity price increases.

In the central business district alone, EnergyAustralia has earmarked \$612 million for replacing and upgrading network infrastructure, which is to be funded through steep increases in the network component of consumer electricity prices. Without delivering on sustainability measures, energy bills will more than double for consumers through network tariff increases of up to 172 per cent for domestic customers and 145 per cent for small business. Network distribution charges for street lighting to councils are due to increase by 150 per cent. The City's Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision, through our proposed green transformer network of distributed cogeneration and trigeneration plants, provides an alternative to reduce peak energy demand and reliance on new coal-fired power stations.

EnergyAustralia's plan to invest billions of dollars to provide abundant network capacity would undermine alternative approaches such as trigeneration. Because the AER has not considered non-network approaches in its regulatory ruling, it could close off avenues for the City of Sydney to achieve the critical first phase of its Sustainable Sydney 2030 energy network plans, and hinder the viability of the Green Transformer Strategy. The key driver of EnergyAustralia's planned network investment is a forecast increase in peak electricity demand of about 14 per cent over the period, even though total energy consumption is expected to drop by 10 per cent. While the difference in expected peak demand and total energy consumption strengthens the argument for demand management, demand management is treated as marginal.

The AER's final determination must respond to and report on the stated goals of government and the community to deeply cut greenhouse gas emissions by reducing energy consumption and achieving greater use of alternative energy. It should support open, competitive and transparent processes for identifying, procuring and implementing alternatives to network augmentation. EnergyAustralia particularly should be made to redirect proposed distribution network investment costs into more sustainable and cost-effective means such as demand management, wherever this represents a lower cost than network augmentation.

It is the Australian Energy Regulator's role to create an energy sector that can effectively minimise financial and environmental costs by reducing our reliance on coal-fired power, and fostering options for innovation in electricity demand management necessary to achieve the most economically and environmentally effective outcome. If the AER considers it does not have the authority to demand the needed change in approach, it should defer any decision that could entrench a business as usual approach for the next five years, and seek further action or expanded power from the State and Federal governments. It will be another lost opportunity if the AER rubber stamps major network expansions that will dramatically increase consumer costs without reducing emissions, and prevent new innovations such as green transformers that would transfer the industry to a low-carbon economy.

The Australian Energy Regulator's final determination will be delivered soon and progressive vision is needed for the future. I call upon the State Government to ensure the regulator has the authority and direction to provide a blueprint for a coordinated program of investment in a sustainable twenty-first century network that delivers clean, efficient and reliable power, by reducing energy use and removing the pressure for new coal-fired power stations.

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

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned, pursuant to sessional orders, at 6.07 p.m. until Tuesday 10 March 2009 at 1.00 p.m.
