

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 3 March 2005

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

CRIMINAL APPEAL AMENDMENT (JURY VERDICTS) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 9 December 2004.

Mr ANDREW TINK (Epping) [10.00 a.m.]: When debate concluded on the last occasion I was quoting my old friend the Director of Public Prosecutions. Contrary to what some people may think, there are many occasions on which I agree with him and strongly support his point of view. This is one such occasion. The Director of Public Prosecutions said, "I think that juries are quite robust and intelligent and they are not given the credit." I agree with him on that point. This bill gives jurors the credit for having in general a high degree of commonsense that allows them to differentiate between what they see, read and hear in the media, and what they see and hear, and on occasions read, during the course of a trial.

I believe jurors can distinguish between what is in the media and what is before them in a trial, with the one proviso that they are properly instructed by the judge. In my view it is axiomatic that once a jury has been selected and empanelled, the onus is very much on the judge and the system to ensure that jurors are properly directed. If for some reason jurors with an honest intention misunderstand what is required of them, then, so far as I am concerned, by definition something is wrong with the system that instructs them. That may not be the fault of the judge; it may be the constraints of the law of this State under which the judge has to work. Nevertheless, it is the system that is at fault if a juror, acting honestly and with goodwill—and, overwhelmingly, in my opinion they do just that—does something wrong.

So far as directions to be given to juries are concerned, we need to ensure that they are capable of being understood by ordinary people of good commonsense. I have mentioned in the past a program that was run in the Supreme Court of Queensland. Every judge, when conducting a trial, has bench books that provide directions for the jury, from which the judge reads out. In the Queensland example, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court arranged for all directions contained in the bench books to be crafted in plain English. I could not imagine a more important project than that and it has been of great benefit in Queensland. What needs to be done in this State is a complete revision of all bench books in every jurisdiction in which a jury is likely to be empanelled.

All instructions that the judges are required to give to juries should be rendered into plain English so that ordinary people of commonsense can understand them, free of legalese, special terms and so forth which may be intelligible only to lawyers. That is a key component in ensuring that the decision making process is accessible to ordinary people. The bill is designed to get around the decision that the Court of Criminal Appeal [CCA] reached in one particular case, and therefore one assumes potentially in many other cases, that the CCA can, of its own opinion only, decide that the media has been so overwhelming in one prejudicial direction that it is unsafe for a jury verdict to stand because the inference is that the jury must have been affected by what was in the media report.

I simply do not accept that proposition. I do not believe that, in the absence of evidence, judges should be able to impose that opinion on jurors. There must be evidence, objectively measured, of some failing, impropriety or influence on a juror by a media report before the Court of Criminal Appeal can step in and say, "This decision of the jury is unsound. Go back and start again." Since this bill was last before the House we have had the example of a complainant refusing to give evidence again at a retrial in a very serious rape case. And who could blame her?

As a result, the Parliament is legislating to allow the use of transcript evidence in lieu of the complainant giving evidence again. But it is most unsatisfactory that, through no fault of the complainant—

whose views were clearly understandable—a retrial cannot occur in that case. The more serious the offence and the charge, the more difficult and complex the business of retrying the matter from start to finish. That is why we must have rules in place that keep retrials to a minimum, while ensuring that justice is done. I do not believe that the idea of requiring actual evidence of influence on a jury by the media cuts across the principle of delivering justice in a particular case. On the contrary, the idea that judges can impose their opinions about whether juries can be influenced by the media—free from any evidence that that is the case—is wrong in this day and age.

The idea that jurors can be quarantined from the media is equally wrong, as is the belief that the media can be censored in some way. A judge recently considered putting a block on the Internet to prevent jurors accessing media press clippings of past events. It is not possible to take that approach. Given the openness of the community these days and the wide interest in court proceedings, it is not desirable that past reports of events should be blocked in the future. As a matter of principle, that is not a good policy. But even if it were, it would be dangerous for Parliament to introduce a law that is impossible to enforce. There is nothing worse than the Parliament passing a law that is not possible to carry out. I do not think the technical arrangements for blocking the Internet are such that one could be 100 per cent certain of preventing juries access to every relevant press clipping. If we make the rule and it is breached, the case must be retried. I think that is putting the cart before the horse. It is the wrong approach.

The right approach is to accept that we have open and informed media, particularly with regard to matters of public record. We must accept that fact in the twenty-first century and devote our efforts to ensuring that juries receive proper instructions. Rather than judges fashioning orders or Parliament passing laws to block access to information in the public domain, effort must be made to instruct juries to take account of the evidence before them in court and not what might be in their minds as a consequence of what they have read, heard or seen on television.

There is another regrettable development—which I do not claim represents more than a tiny proportion of the bench; certainly, to my knowledge, no-one on the bench in the Court of Criminal Appeal. This week we had another case of a judge, who apparently suffers a medical condition, being asleep on the bench. I think that is deeply troubling to ordinary people of commonsense. It is expected that a judge in a serious criminal trial will pay full attention to everything that is said and done in court. Ordinary people understand that an inattentive judge—in the case I have mentioned it appears that the judge was asleep for up to 45 minutes—opens the door to the taking of appeal points that will result in a retrial. An unfortunate headline appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on 2 March 2005—it is unfortunate not because it appeared but because it is a fair reflection of what many people think about the judiciary these days. It identified three judges, whom it labelled "Drunk, Drowsy, Depressed", and then continued, "And that's just the judges."

I do not mean to turn this into a jihad on the judiciary: I make it clear that such behaviour is not representative of the overwhelming number of people who sit on the bench. However, I think these issues are fairly raised. They are of the utmost importance to people. When such issues are put in the public domain in this manner many more people who may serve on juries ask: Who are the judges—some of whom have a range of difficulties—to say that in their opinion, and their opinion alone, we cannot possibly be trusted to put out of our minds what is in the media and to focus solely on the evidence put before us in court? There is a rising tide of resistance in the public mind to judges imposing on juries their opinions outside of matters of law—legal matters are obviously totally different—and claiming that all that has been said and done in the media prevents juries from considering objectively the evidence before the court. People are starting to resist strongly judicial opinions of that type. Such opinions are not helpful to the partnership between the judiciary and juries in serious criminal trials.

I conclude where I ended my previous contribution. In proposing this bill to Parliament I believe the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Cowdery, is spot on. We must give juries credit for being robust and intelligent. The onus is on Parliament to craft rules that make it clear to jurors what their responsibilities are. The onus is on the judiciary to ensure that those rules and the law that develops around them are explained to jurors in such a way that honest, reasonable, conscientious jurors of ordinary ability understand exactly what they have to do, what they have to consider and what they have to put out of their minds. That is where we must focus our attention. It is important to give juries the benefit of the doubt regarding media comment and that a jury's verdict be overturned only if there is actual evidence of inappropriate media influence on jurors. The Court of Criminal Appeal should step in only in that circumstance. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Kerry Hickey.

CROWN LANDS AMENDMENT (ACCESS TO PROPERTY) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [10.20 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Crown Lands Amendment (Access to Property) Bill is extremely important in ensuring equity. The object of it is to amend the Crown Lands Act 1989 to require that when determining or redetermining rent under that Act with respect to a lease, licence or enclosure permit that provides water access to the lease, licence or permit holder's residential property, regard is had as to whether the lease, licence or permit provides the only reasonable means of access to that property.

Put simply, the bill amends the Crown Lands Act to add the definition of "water access only properties" so a distinction can be made between properties with water access only and properties with both road and water access. Under changes announced by the Government last year, all Crown land lessees now have to pay a minimum rent of \$350 per year or market value, whichever is higher. The changes will severely affect people who can only access their property via a Crown land lease over a water site. Whereas previously those people paid a minimum fee, they will now be forced to pay market rent, which could be extremely high, just for access to their property. The bill requires that when the market value of the Crown land is being determined, in such a case there is regard for the fact that the Crown lease provides the only reasonable access to that property.

Free access rights exist for all other citizens in New South Wales who live in a primary residence that is entered via a road and driveway. Residents who live in water access only properties need to utilise Crown land to gain access to their properties via a pontoon and/or jetty. The residents already pay \$400 per boat for mooring rights, and, of course, the bigger the family the more boats it owns, and therefore the more cost involved. Access to one's home is seen as an equity issue in its simplest form. Access to a water access only property is seen as a right. Should land access be made available to the property, the definition of the property would then alter, with a subsequent increase in cost for the water access component. It is most important that the Government give serious consideration to the changes set out in the bill.

A distinction should be made not only between water access only properties and properties serviced by roads, but also between water access only properties and farms where Crown land enclosures occur. The issue has generated much public activity amongst the people who are affected by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal report into rentals for waterfront domestic tenancies on Crown land. The first public meeting on the issue was held on 19 June last year. The meeting, which I attended, was held at Mooney Mooney Workers Club and was attended by more than 150 people. A further protest meeting with significant numbers attending was held at the Berowra Community Centre on 24 October last year, and there have been many other small gatherings to address the issue.

In addition, many representations have been made to the relevant Ministers and officers of the Department of Lands. Some of those representations have been met with a brick wall, and on occasions meetings with relevant officers have been cancelled. I can assure the House that the people affected by this water access only imposition are extremely disappointed in the Minister, some local members, for example the honourable member for Peats, and departmental officers. One of the water access only residents affected is Piers Akerman, who wrote to the Premier. When he did not receive a response, Piers Akerman wrote an article in the *Daily Telegraph* of 28 June last year. He said:

How would you feel if you learned that from Thursday, the Carr Labor Government was to slug you, and every other homeowner in NSW, with a new land tax?

And what if that tax was to be based on a formula that took into account the area of your home's driveway, the value of your property, adjusted in line with market values, and a set rate of return of 3.05 per cent which would also be periodically reviewed.

Well, the good news is that the Government is not going to hit you with a tax on your driveway, but the bad news is that it intends to slam the 1000 or so homeowners who have water access only to their properties with this inequitable tax from July 1.

That is, those people who live along the Hawkesbury and around Pittwater and have no road access are going to be unjustly financially punished by the Government for their decision to live a slightly alternative lifestyle.

They already pay rates to their local councils, just as people who can drive their cars to their doorways do. They pay the usual range of State charges (though they don't—for the most part—have access to water or sewerage services).

Now the Government wants to hit them with a punitive tax on their jetties, the only means they have of getting home at night, for reasons which can only be ascribed to the meanest of character deformities, envy.

I will return to that article in a moment. I attended the public meeting held on 24 October as a representative of the Coalition, and I read to those in attendance a letter from the Leader of the Opposition, John Brogden. That letter, which is dated 22 October 2004, read:

Thank you for the invitation to be with you today. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend. However, I am delighted my Parliamentary Secretary, the member for Hornsby, Judy Hopwood MP, is representing the Liberal Party.

I strongly oppose the Carr Government's plan for dramatic increases in leases for Water Access Only residents. Residents whose properties can only be accessed by water should not be discriminated against.

I believe that no one should be taxed for the right to access their property. A lease fee on a "cost recovery only" basis would be a much fairer option.

That Labor Government's decision to increase waterfront tenancy fees to Water Access Only residents is another blatant attempt to raise revenue. Labor's record on State taxation is appalling under Bob Carr, NSW is the highest taxed State in Australia.

The economic management of this Government is so poor that despite raking in more revenue than ever before, Bob Carr and Michael Egan have driven the State into deficit this year. New South Wales is forecast to be \$379 million in the red.

When the Liberal/Nationals Coalition is elected in 2007 I will work with you to introduce a fair and non-discriminatory leasing arrangement.

I can assure the House that the letter was received with a great deal of applause. The group that has been most interested in this issue, and has really led the charge, is Waterfront Environment Action Reform, known as WEAR Inc. For ease of understanding the group has changed its name to the Home Owners Access Association. Carol Joy, the secretary of the group, who is a resident of Little Wobby, has done a great amount of work to address the issue. On 21 June 2004 Denis Nobbs, the chairman of WEAR Inc., or the Home Owners Access Association, wrote to the Minister for Lands, the Hon. Tony Kelly, MLC, as follows:

The owners of water access only properties reject the recommendations of the recent IPART report into Rentals for Waterfront Domestic Tenancies on Crown Land in NSW. We are a small group of approximately 1,100 people living in the Hawkesbury River, Berowra Creek and Pittwater areas of Sydney with no other practical means of reaching our homes except by boat.

Current administration of the Crown Lands Act unfairly discriminates against our minority group in the matter of access to our homes. We expect equity with all other citizens of NSW who have normal road access to their homes.

Denis Nobbs summarised the group's request of the Government as follows:

1. Establish a separate Water Access Only entity
2. Establish dialogue with WEAR Inc. [Home Owners Access Association]
3. Establish equity with mainland home owners
4. Guarantee right of access
5. Instruct Dept of Lands/Waterways to authorise specific safety access structures on Crown Land for Water Access Only properties
6. Guarantee tenure at nominal fees
7. Observe transparency and consistency

The Crown Lands Amendment (Access to Property) Bill goes some way to address a couple of the requests to the Government. I believe that these people do have an equity issue. It is very unfair that they are lumped in with homeowners who have not only a water access but a road access. The Crown Lands Act is silent in relation to these homeowners and this amending bill would insert a definition into the Act that will in some way establish some sort of equity for these people.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

POLICE AMENDMENT (CRIME REDUCTION AND REPORTING) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 28 October 2004.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [10.30 a.m.]: The Police Amendment (Crime Reduction and Reporting) Bill proposes amendments to the contract of the Commissioner of Police and to the Police Act to emphasise the reduction of crime and the active encouragement of the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder. This State has low reporting rates at the moment. In New South Wales a high percentage of

crime is not reported to police. For example, 61 per cent of robberies, 70 per cent of assaults, 84 per cent of sexual assault, 69 per cent of attempted break-in and 32 per cent of break-ins are not reported, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] in 2001-02. We need to encourage everyone to report every crime and incident of public disorder to ensure police resources are appropriately allocated. The Government's current obsession is with media strategies.

The changes will also encourage the Government to simplify the use of multiple telephone numbers currently used to report crime. The Government's Police Assistance Line contributes to the disconnection between local communities and local police. Also we need to encourage local reporting of crime and disorder and re-establish strong connections between police and communities. The community has a fear of crime simply because there is a high level of crime in New South Wales and, regrettably, much of that the crime is unreported. We have the results from the ABS that New South Wales has a high level of crime, a high level of community concern about crime and a low level of reporting of crime.

The lack of confidence in the reporting of crime is brought home to me everywhere I go in the electorate of Lismore. I have called community meetings of late with leaders and residents alike both in Lismore and Casino about the number of break-ins in particular areas. People are reluctant to report crimes because they believe they are wasting their time as no action will be taken. The Richmond Local Area Command that is based in Lismore faces a problem that if the long-term stress and sick leave caused by the workload at that command is not addressed there will be exacerbated stress for the remaining police officers who do not want to work in such an environment. The police do a tremendous job and their resources are stretched to the limit.

In the lead-up to the State election Lismore police were over strength because of probationary constables, but in the past 12 months that strength has dwindled away and the police are well and truly under strength mainly because of long-term stress leave and sick leave. That matter needs to be addressed especially in country and regional areas. Richmond Local Area Command covers a large area that absorbs a lot of time and energy of the police. Nimbin needs additional police to those already in the Richmond Local Area Command. Last year, together with the mayor of Lismore, education representatives and Superintendent Bruce Lyons, I led a delegation to the Minister for Police in relation to the problems at Nimbin. None of the mayors who attended the Police Accountability Community Team [PACT] meetings in the area would agree to lose police from their town in order to solve the problems at Nimbin. I draw this matter to the attention of the current Minister for Police and I ask him to follow it up because it is of major concern to the residents of Nimbin and Lismore. I am pleased that the honourable member for Ballina is in the Chamber as his electorate is in the Richmond Local Area Command.

I have been advised that a meeting will be held in Nimbin next Tuesday, which unfortunately I cannot attend due to other commitments. I am sure that the case will be put strongly to the people representing NSW Police to convince them that more police are needed in Nimbin to solve the community problems. I would be remiss if I did not highlight the need for a new police station in Lismore. The former Minister for Police has well and truly recognised that urgent need and I have already had discussions with the current Minister for Police about it. We need to provide the personnel of NSW Police with facilities to enable them to carry out their everyday work in a professional and co-ordinated manner. I again draw that urgent need to the attention of the House.

I want to highlight problems experienced in both the Goonellabah area in Lismore and the north Casino Housing Estate on which the police, residents and councils have been working together. I compliment all organisations and government departments on their involvement because again it is not just a police problem but a community problem that we have to continually work on. A recent tragedy highlighted the need for more resources in country and regional areas. The suspected murder of a German tourist who was in Lismore for a night brought that home to Lismore residents. Simone Strobel was found dead about 120 to 130 metres from where she went missing. It was as if a blanket was dropped on the community: it shattered the community to think that something like that could happen in Lismore.

Simone Strobel was a 25-year-old schoolteacher who had been touring Australia with her boyfriend, Tobias Suckfuell. Tobias is devastated and has since flown back to Germany with family members and Simone's body. The Lismore community at large has extended its sympathy to the families. The site where Simone's body was found is now just like a shrine, and there are moves afoot to try to establish a permanent memorial there for her. The community collected money to provide Simone's boyfriend, Tobias, with an air ticket to fly home and to help the family take Simone's body home.

In country areas people have to depend on police coming from Sydney and that takes time. Police in the Lismore area have done a mighty job and they have worked around the clock. We need full police strength in our local area command, because anything less only puts more pressure on the officers already working there. Police were called from everywhere to take part in the search for Simone and in the investigations, and they have done a tremendous job. That put a lot of strain on the whole Richmond area command but I compliment all those officers on the way they handled the matter.

I would like to highlight my concerns about the Richmond area command, and I am sure the honourable member for Ballina will support me because the Richmond area command also covers his electorate. As members of the local PACT organisation we have an opportunity to highlight our concerns once a month. The mayors attend the meetings and make representations, but on each and every occasion when we voice our concerns we are told that there is a lack of police on the ground in the area command. I ask the Minister to address those problems.

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [10.42 a.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Vacluse for introducing this legislation, which seeks:

- (a) to amend the *Police Act 1990* to include as part of the functions of NSW Police the reduction of crime and the active encouragement of the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder in New South Wales, and
- (b) to include those matters in the performance criteria contained in the contract of employment or any associated performance agreement between the Commissioner of Police and the Minister for Police.

Essentially, the legislation is about changing the focus of the commissioner's contract from reducing crime and reducing the perception of crime to requiring the commissioner to both reduce crime and encourage the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder in New South Wales. The honourable member for Vacluse has raised a very important point. The perception of crime in the community is of a secondary nature and should not be included as a primary objective in the commissioner's contract. The Commissioner of Police has the responsibility to, first, reduce crime and, second to ensure that what crime is occurring is reported. The reason it is so important that people report crime is that in all cases the allocation of police resources is targeted to those areas that are deemed to have a high level of reported crime. If people are not reporting crimes, they will be disadvantaged in the allocation of resources.

A classic example of that problem has been occurring at Alstonville, in my electorate, for a decade or so. People there know that a lot of relatively low-level crime, such as blowing up letterboxes, and minor break and enters, is committed. The problem is that we have had difficulty in securing a sufficiently strong permanent police presence to give the community confidence that the police will respond if a crime is reported. Quite often people say, "I am not going to bother to report the crime because there is nobody at the police station and the police regard it as a low priority. They tell us when we ring up that we will have to wait for quite a long time before there will be a response because they have other higher priorities."

Generally, over the past decade Alstonville has had one police officer. Now, supposedly, it has two permanent police officers, but in many cases those two officers are deployed to Wardell, to Ballina or to Lismore, so often they are not at Alstonville. A community of 12,000 people has a maximum of two police officers, which is very different to the normal ratio of police to population in this State. The problem is that if people in Alstonville say they need more police resources, the police can respond, "But the level of crime is relatively low." People will then say, "Hang on, the reason it is low is because most times we do not bother reporting crimes, and the reason we do not report crimes is because we do not get any action as you regard it as being low-level". So it is a Catch-22 situation. I applaud the move in this legislation to make the reporting of crime a much higher priority than it is at present.

I turn to police resources and numbers. The honourable member for Lismore spoke about needs in his electorate. He is correct in what he said. We do have issues in relation to police resourcing. The new police commander, Superintendent Bluey Lyons, is a fantastic commander. He is doing a great job and he is doing everything he can with the resources that he has. The Pact meetings that we have with the honourable member for Lismore and the local mayors in the Richmond area command are very, very good meetings. I want to take this opportunity to commend Bluey Lyons for the way in which he runs those meetings and for his openness in providing information that is of interest to us as community representatives. But he can only work with what he has got, and in many cases we, as local members, feel very sorry that he has to work with such limited resources.

I also mention the highway patrol. The Pacific Highway on the North Coast is being upgraded—all too slowly, unfortunately. Nevertheless, about a third of the highway between Newcastle and the border has been

upgraded—and that has brought a huge increase in the number of vehicles, including heavy vehicles, travelling on the road. Many heavy vehicles come across from the New England Highway to the Pacific Highway. It is of great concern to me that the highway patrol in the past decade has not had any increase in resourcing, despite the increase in the number of cars and trucks using the Pacific Highway—I think the figures have almost doubled in that time, but there has been no increase in the highway patrol. Also, quite a few highway patrol police have been diverted away from their primary function of highway patrol to general duties policing because of resourcing issues, where local commanders have felt that was necessary.

But the essence of the bill is about making sure, as part of the Commissioner's contract, that the crime rate goes down, that people are actively encouraged to report crime, and that the Commissioner's accountability is much higher than at present. I commend the honourable member for Vacluse for introducing this bill. Right at the beginning of his speech the honourable member made a very important point. Talking about the current situation of the commissioner being responsible for perception of crime, as well as reducing the rate of crime, the honourable member said:

This has led to a media-driven policing model in New South Wales that encourages high visibility of policing—that is, policing that is friendly to television cameras with the aim of reducing the community's perception of crime. This is classical Michael Costa strategy and politics—lights, cameras, action—anything for the television cameras to give the appearance of change and the appearance of progress, but that is all it gives.

At the heart of this bill is reducing crime, rather than public relations exercises that are politically driven and designed to give the impression that the rate of crime is actually being reduced. People want to know that the level of crime is falling; they want to be encouraged to report crime. As I said before, the Alstonville case is a classic case of people not reporting crime and as a consequence being disadvantaged because police say, "Well, your crime rate is relatively low." So I support the bill and I commend the honourable member for Vacluse for introducing it.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [10.51 a.m.]: I support the Police Amendment (Crime Reduction and Reporting) Bill 2004. This type of legislation is long overdue. As much as police are working their backsides off trying to control antisocial behaviour and deal with crime in our local areas, they are doing so in extreme circumstances. It has got to the stage where, in my area alone, they are doing single-officer policing. Although this is basically against policing guidelines, police have to do it. Their choice is either single-officer policing, or sitting in the police station while crime goes unchecked.

The Clarence electorate has lost many police positions to Coffs Harbour—mainly to address restricted police numbers in that area, but also to save money. In 2001 a forensic officer was moved from Grafton to Coffs Harbour. In 2004 the scene-of-crime officers were moved from Grafton to Coffs Harbour. Also in 2004 the rural crimes officer—a position created by this Government—who had been stationed at Grafton because it has saleyards and is a major cattle area, also was moved to Coffs Harbour, which has no saleyards. I am sure that officer's duties there are far more limited than they were in the Clarence. In that same year we lost one of the two duty officers who had been stationed at Grafton to cover that area as well as the lower Clarence. When that officer retired his position in the area became redundant and was redeployed to Coffs Harbour. The second duty officer basically has been on standby to move to Coffs Harbour.

Until the last few weeks, the duty officer in charge of the lower Clarence had been stationed at Coffs Harbour. This meant the officer had to travel 160 kilometres both to and from the area just to carry out his functions as duty officer. In the past few weeks that position has changed; the duty officer is to remain in Grafton for the time being, in control of the lower river area. Our intelligence officers are now based at Coffs Harbour. There are eight intelligence officers stationed at Coffs Harbour, which has a population of 70,000, but only two are stationed in the Grafton-Clarence command to cover 55,000 people. That is iniquitous. Once again, it comes down to saving dollars: putting everyone in the same building saves money. We have to look past the dollar signs and look more at resolving crime and keeping communities safe. To rub salt into the wound, even the chaplain in the Grafton-Clarence area—an unpaid position—has been moved to Coffs Harbour. That is somewhat ironic.

When these issues are brought to the fore, the response from the Government is that the level of reported crime does not sustain the established number of police for the area. But it must be realised that many people just do not report crime. They throw their hands up and say, "What's the point of reporting crime?" As an example, a house in Grafton was broken into on 8 January, but it was 13 January before the fingerprint officers could come up from Coffs Harbour to take fingerprints from the house that was the scene of the crime.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: By then, the evidence is gone.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: Yes; it was five days later. The occupants of the house had to move into an in-law's holiday home for the five days that they waited for police to turn up to check fingerprints. This is not the fault of the police; they are snowed under. They had been stationed at Grafton, but when they were moved to Coffs Harbour understandably they had to concentrate on their new local area. More resources are needed in that area. If these residents had known that it would take five days for police to come and take fingerprints, they would have had to consider whether it was worth reporting the crime.

Many people in the lower river area have called the local police number, only to be diverted to Grafton and told they would have to wait till an officer is available. Once again, if it is not anything major, their feeling is, "What's the point of reporting it?" The consequence is much more antisocial behaviour. It is the same in most country towns, with youth violence being on the increase. We need police on the streets. I know that police in the lower river area are working hard, and putting themselves at risk, to try at least to give some perception of enforcement of law and order in the area. On Tuesday we will have a law and order forum at Yamba to deal with the concerns of the people of the lower river—MacLean, Yamba, Iluka, et cetera. The forum will be attended by youth workers, council representatives, local police, drug and alcohol counsellors and members of the community. The forum will allow people to raise issues and try to come up with some solutions.

The police have been frustrated to the point that recently a front-page headline indicated that police had threatened strike action unless something was done. This is not scare-mongering by the Opposition; the police themselves are so concerned that they are said to be threatening strike action. Another of their concerns is that if police are off on stress leave, after the inquiry into the reasons those police are off on stress leave they are more often than not moved out of the stressful positions and relocated elsewhere, and as a result they have to sell their houses and move away. Consequently, many of the officers who do not feel well, are struggling to do their jobs because of stresses placed upon them, and would otherwise be on stress leave, do not take stress leave because they know they will be moved away. Also, they know that no police will take their place. This often happens. An officer goes on stress leave, and no-one takes their place, putting more stress on their relationships and the officers who work with them.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: What about small businesses reporting?

Mr STEVE CANSDELL: The same thing applies to small business. People who have small businesses often will not report a broken window because their insurance premiums will go through the roof. It costs more to report such offences because they virtually have to close their businesses until the forensic and fingerprint officers have undertaken their investigations and windows are replaced. More police and better resources are needed, and police generally need more support. I commend the bill.

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [11.00 a.m.], in reply: I acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues, including the honourable member for Clarence, who, in the name of productivity, tried to speak on two bills at once. I thank him for his contribution. Although the bill has been before the House for just over a year, it is sad that only one Labor member has spoken to it. That goes to the heart of the problem in New South Wales: the arrogance of the Carr Government and the fact that Labor members of Parliament are only interested in their factional climb up the totem pole. Government members believe they are on a salary forever, with revenue flowing forever from taxpayers, so they are no longer required—

Mr Kerry Hickey: Point of order: The member is not speaking to the bill. I ask you to bring him back to the leave of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Vaucluse will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The leave of the bill is the fact that Labor members of Parliament betray their communities. That is exactly what I am talking about and why the bill has been introduced. I know this is a sore point for all Government members, including the honourable member for Swansea, who, at various times, has been an outspoken critic of the Carr Government, but, unfortunately, he has not been an outspoken critic of the Carr Government on law and order in New South Wales nor on the reporting of crime in New South Wales. It is the major issue and why, as shadow Minister for Police, I have to spend so much time in Labor electorates.

Mr Peter Black: Like Broken Hill.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: Including Broken Hill. The honourable member for Murray-Darling refers to my recent visit to his electorate specifically to discuss the level of crime.

Mr Peter Black: But it's a great place.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: It is a fantastic place. I actually lived and went to school in Broken Hill. I have discussed that on air.

Mr Kerry Hickey: Did Blackie teach you?

Mr PETER DEBNAM: No, I can confirm to the House that the honourable member for Murray-Darling did not teach me when I went to school at Broken Hill, to the best of my knowledge. It is a fantastic place, the same as Macquarie Fields. This week I have made the point time and again with the local member, Craig Knowles, that Macquarie Fields is a fantastic place. It is not the suburb, the people living there, or the nature of the facilities that are the problem; it is the thugs and the criminals and the fact that the Carr Government refuses to lock them up. The Government and I agree on one thing with this bill: that Broken Hill and Macquarie Fields are great places.

The heart of the bill is simply about whether Labor members of Parliament have betrayed their communities over the past 10 years by not encouraging them to report crime. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that year after year Bob Carr—that hack journalist, as the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday—has led a Government that has discouraged the reporting of crime. The Government introduced the glorified filing cabinet—the police assistance line—that has made it incredibly difficult for people to report crime. Police numbers have been cut; there simply are not enough officers to deal with crime and interact with the community. The chances of the police actually attending when someone does report a crime are becoming increasingly fewer every year. Within the first minute people are encouraged to call the police assistance line, yet they hang on, minute by minute, trying to outlast the queue so they can report the crime.

Mr Anthony Roberts: It's a challenge.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: It is a challenge in New South Wales to report a crime. It is a problem that the Government has built up a number of disincentives to reporting crime. Indeed, I have made the point in many communities across the State that only 50 per cent of crime is reported in New South Wales. It is unbelievable that 62 per cent of robberies are not reported to the police. The Carr Government seems to be very proud of that. The police force is currently totally overloaded with investigating the number of robberies that are reported. But it only investigates one-third of them; two-thirds are not reported.

Mr Alan Ashton: How do you know that 62 per cent are not reported, if they are not reported? You cannot answer that question because it is such a great question. How can you possibly have a figure on what is not reported?

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The honourable member for East Hills has raised a critical issue and I hope all those comments are recorded in *Hansard*, because I started my reply by stating that it is really sad that Labor members have not contributed to debate on this bill. The heart of this bill, which was introduced and debated in the House one year and one week ago, is that the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] publishes statistics every single year on the reporting levels of crime.

Mr Alan Ashton: Yes, but non-reporting cannot ever be accurately predicted.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: If you want to disagree with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, take it up with them.

Mr Alan Ashton: I am not saying that some are not reported, but you cannot just pluck a figure out of the air for what is not reported.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: I am not plucking figures. I thank the honourable member for East Hills for being the second Labor member to contribute to this debate. I congratulate him, even though he has no understanding of the bill, crime statistics, or the concerns of his constituents. Indeed, in my previous shadow portfolio I had to meet with his constituents about transport concerns in his electorate, but I am pleased that he is now contributing to the bill and I congratulate him on that. I hope he will remain in the Chamber to learn over the next 22 minutes all about this bill, crime in New South Wales, reporting of crime, and the ABS report.

The heart of the bill is about reporting crime and changing the commissioner's contract to say that instead of having the two key objectives of reducing crime and reducing the perception of crime, two new objectives should be introduced. To reduce crime and to encourage the highest possible reporting of crime. What I said when the honourable member for East Hills was not present in the Chamber was that the Carr Government has instead put in place disincentives to the reporting of crime, the most notable being the police assistance line. Before I was rudely interrupted I said that people have simply refrained from reporting crime. Two years ago the Auditor-General calculated that 37,000 people hung up because they could not get through in a reasonable time using the police assistance line.

Mr Anthony Roberts: They had to eat some time.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: I agree. This bill seeks to make it easier to report crime and encourages people to do so. It was two years ago that the Auditor-General noted that 37,000 people simply gave up on reporting crime. The Government said, "That is a reasonable number. It is entirely reasonable in the context of call centres. It is a good performance." That call centre, the Police Assistance Line, is not for ordering groceries; it is for reporting crime. Those calls represented 37,000 crimes that were not reported or included in the statistics for New South Wales. What has happened since then? The Government has tried desperately to improve the performance of the Police Assistance Line so that fewer people hang up before reporting crime. I encourage members opposite to look at the police web site if they have not done so.

Ms Linda Burney: I have my PACT meetings.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The honourable member for Canterbury should forget about Police Accountability Community Teams [PACT] meetings, which are a political exercise to keep community critics on side.

Mr Alan Ashton: So you do not support PACT meetings in your area.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: Let me tell honourable members what I have said publicly a number of times. The PACT meetings were simply a public relations stunt by Michael Costa in the run-up to the election. He said to all Labor members, "Protect your seat."

Mr Alan Ashton: I learnt that 62 per cent of crimes are not reported.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: Do not interrupt—the Minister is trying to write this down. The PACT meetings were simply a public relations pre-election stunt by Michael Costa. Basically, he told Labor members, "We want to protect Labor seats, especially marginal seats. We will invite every community critic concerned about crime to this new animal we call a PACT meeting. We will be totally open in these PACT meetings but you must treat them as confidential." For three years I have been telling everyone that the PACT meetings are a joke. What a political exercise on the part of the Carr Government! The community has started to see through them. Even a member of Parliament managed to twist the arm of Government and do a trial of public PACT meetings.

Mr Alan Ashton: Was that the honourable member for Lismore?

Mr PETER DEBNAM: No, it was not my good friend the honourable member for Lismore; it was the honourable member for Bligh. She managed to twist the Government's arm and get public PACT meetings. I understand that the Government has backed away from those meetings because it does not want that information made public. And it does not want the information made public because New South Wales is a high crime State. Since the Premier took office almost every category of serious crime has increased significantly. The Government does not want those statistics made public, and that is why it does not want public meetings on crime. That is a major problem. Senior police often say, "We are proud that we have reduced crime in our area." I tell them that that is fantastic, and that we applaud what they are doing, but they should understand that the base line of crime in New South Wales is very high compared with other western democracies.

Only one country has worse figures than New South Wales and that is the United Kingdom, where the situation is totally out of control because of socialist influence through the Government on policing campaigns and strategies. The real problem in New South Wales is getting people to report crimes. I return to the statistic for robberies that I was talking about before I was rudely interrupted. Let us forget about all other crimes and concentrate on robberies. In New South Wales—and the honourable member for East Hills is now better

educated on this issue than when I started talking about this—the Australian Bureau of Statistics undertakes annual surveys on whether people report crime, and 62 per cent of people—

Mr Alan Ashton: Don't report their robbery.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: —do not report robberies. Thank you. That is it exactly.

Mr Alan Ashton: Where did you get that figure from?

Mr PETER DEBNAM: Staff in my office are listening to this debate and I will ask them to bring me a copy of the statistics.

Mr Alan Ashton: Does the honourable member know that 50 per cent of people who engage in heterosexual sex are men and 50 per cent of people who engage in heterosexual sex are women? The honourable member can put that statistic in *Hansard*. He has invented the statistic that 62 per cent of people do not report robberies. My figures are reliable; I stand by them.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: Again, I thank the honourable member for East Hills for his contribution to this debate. I encourage him to stay in the Chamber as long as possible because this is an educational exercise about what is important to the Carr Labor Government, not only for the honourable member but for the people of New South Wales.

Mr Alan Ashton: I reckon I should give an interview to *Stateline* for that.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: I think the honourable member will feature on *Stateline* for that.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! If the honourable member for Vacluse ceased responding to interjections we may be able to return to the leave of the bill and conclude the debate.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: I do not know why I would do that. The heart of the matter is the reporting of crime. When I was rudely interrupted a third time I was saying that 62 per cent of robberies in New South Wales are not reported to police. When crimes are not reported to police, clearly they are not recorded and they do not appear in the statistics. Therefore, the police are unable to respond to individual crimes. Also, importantly, the Government will not allocate resources to the areas where unreported robberies take place.

I turn now to the number of reported robberies that are cleared up by police. This might be news to the honourable member for East Hills, but 13.5 per cent of robberies reported to the police are cleared up to the satisfaction of police, according to their statistics, which are reported annually. That is a resources issue. On that subject, since the Carr Government came to office it has totally decimated the ranks of criminal investigators in New South Wales to the point that it is a State secret. To the best of our ability, we understand that there is a deficiency of about 600 detectives.

New South Wales had a deficiency of about 600 detectives in the late 1990s and into 2001-02. We have never been able to pin down that figure because the Carr Government considers it to be a State secret. That is a sad indictment on transparency, accountability and honesty in the New South Wales public sector. We should be able to talk in this Parliament about how many detectives or criminal investigators we had every year since the Carr Government came to office. However, we cannot do so because we do not know; it is a State secret. The Government panicked, and is trying to get more detectives. Indeed, I understand that hundreds of detectives will graduate later this month. However, for 10 years criminals have run rings around our community simply because the Carr Government ran down—

Mr Alan Ashton: It may be because the Leader of the Opposition has been tipping off people about procedural matters relating to how to catch criminals.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The Government has simply run down the number of detectives and has not provided police with the resources to pursue crime. That is why the clear-up rate is only 13.5 per cent. Everyone acknowledges that that is terrible. However, when we apply that 13.5 per cent to the number of crimes reported we realise that it is only the tip of the iceberg because two-thirds of robberies are not reported.

[Interruption]

The honourable member for East Hills should move on to another topic.

Mr Alan Ashton: The honourable member does not want to respond to my interjection. Did he support his leader yesterday —

Mr PETER DEBNAM: I want to move on to the Minister's response. The Minister replied on 13 May last year. We are back to the Premier's circus of having a new Minister for Police. Sadly, the new Minister did not even want to talk on this bill. I stress that, because I have dealt with this Minister before. He has form. I dealt with him on public transport issues after I took over the public transport shadow portfolio in early 2002, in the run-up to the election. I warned Minister Scully about fundamentals in the public transport portfolio every week during 2002. I moved a motion of no confidence in that Minister on the last sitting day of June 2002 on the basis of rail safety. When Parliament resumed in September that year I again raised the sequence of accidents on the rail system and in November I again spoke at length about rail safety. And the Minister did exactly what he is going to do on police issues.

Speaking on the motion of no confidence in June 2002 and on the rail safety bill in November 2002, he arrogantly told the House and the public how many roads he had built. The former Minister for Roads was very proud about the kilometres of bitumen he has laid down but he ignored fundamental rail safety issues in his portfolio, despite being warned in this House every week in the run-up to the 2003 election. The series of accidents in 2002 literally built up to the one that killed people in January 2003, despite all the warnings in the world.

This is a terrible start to his new portfolio. This is key legislation that the Opposition moved a year ago. The former Minister replied to it, and I am going to go through some of his comments in a moment. But I say to the new Minister for Police that this is a terrible start to his new role. He has ignored the fundamentals. There is nothing more fundamental than the commissioner's contract. It forms the basis on which he does his job. He is aware of what the Government wants from him. This contract is specific. It not only says "reduce crime", it also says "reduce the perception of crime".

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: What about reporting?

Mr PETER DEBNAM: Reporting is not mentioned in the contract. Domestic violence is one of the key issues for police and takes up about 50 per cent of their time, but the reporting level is low. The Government's response to sexual assault is to ask whether it involves high profile personalities, and, if so, to call a press conference. The result of that is to discourage, especially women, from reporting sexual assault. Nothing could be more obvious; it is cause and effect. Whenever somebody reports a sexual assault that involves high-profile people, the Government tells senior police to hold a press conference. To the layman, the effect of that is to tell anyone contemplating reporting a sexual assault that they are going to end up in front of a television camera. It is the last thing we want but it is an example of the modus operandi of the Carr Government, which actively discourages the reporting of crime. We need to turn that around.

The two requirements in the commissioner's contract are to reduce crime and to reduce the perception of crime. There are two ways to reduce the perception of crime. One is to get crime down to a level where everybody agrees it is not an issue. Currently it is a major issue in just about every electorate in New South Wales. As a result, the only way to reduce the perception of crime is to use the marketing approach. That is what the Government does—with spin, with press conferences, and even with advertising. Drunk driving is an example. The Government cuts back on resources for the police and the highway patrol to get out and do their job and, instead, pours money into advertising. There are signs on the sides of buses in Sydney saying there were never more police doing random breath testing. That is not true.

There is enormous pressure on the police to get those statistics up. The easiest way to do that is to set up random breath testing [RBT] on major highways, on freeways, on major regional roads. That will get the statistics up. Thousands of motorists will drive through those sites. As the honourable member for Wagga Wagga correctly says, the honourable member for Blacktown has been one of the few members of the Government, as well as the honourable member for Swansea, who has been an honest critic of the Carr Government. That Labor member of Parliament, as chairman of the Staysafe committee, has honestly raised a number of issues of major concern to the people of New South Wales. One of them is RBT.

Police do not have the resources to conduct RBT on side roads. They will find more drunk drivers on the major roads but, more importantly, they will amass huge testing statistics on major roads. That has been the aim of the exercise, not to get the drunk drivers off the roads. The police want the resources to do the side roads, the rat runs, but they do not have them. I acknowledge that the honourable member for Blacktown has done a

good job in raising the issue. Drunk drivers are not going to use the main roads or regional roads, they will drive home through a neighbourhood they know using small roads. The police know that and want to put resources into the side roads but they are not supported by the Government.

Coming back to the reporting of crime, it is not that difficult to change the contract. The Government might like to do what it did when in 1996 I introduced a bill to impound the cars of hoons who were terrorising the community. The Government said it was rubbish and dismissed it. Thankfully, the community went berserk for the next six weeks and put so much pressure on the Government that it came back in November 1996, changed a word in my bill and called it its own bill. We supported it and it became law before Christmas 1996.

The Government can vote for this bill. It should not embarrass itself by voting against it. Or it could change a word in it and bring it back as its own bill and vote for it. The Government should change its spots. Here is an opportunity for it to change its strategy. When I take this bill to a vote in the next week or so—or the next month—we want the Government to agree with us that this is a problem, that we need to increase the reporting of crime, and that the former Minister was wrong in his reply. Let us see some bipartisan support for communities that are in real strife, communities that have resigned themselves to not reporting crime. Let us see some real support for all those Labor-held electorates that are suffering in silence.

Ms Linda Burney: So crime only happens in Labor electorates?

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The honourable member's electorate is really suffering with armed robberies, and I cannot remember the honourable member talking in this House about that.

Ms Linda Burney: The police in my area are driving the crime rate down.

Mr PETER DEBNAM: The honourable member for Canterbury interjects that the police in her electorate are driving crime rates down. That is true, police are fighting crime in her electorate. But the honourable member missed the first half of my speech—I will send her a tape of it—in which I said that members who defend the current level of crime, especially the honourable member for Canterbury, whose electorate is suffering from robberies and armed robbers, are betraying their communities. If the honourable member for Canterbury believes that the current level of crime is acceptable, she is betraying her constituents, her residents and her businesses.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FUNDING

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [11.30 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes New South Wales is consistently at or near the bottom of the list in interstate comparisons on funding and services in mental health;
- (2) calls on the State Government to address the mental health crisis in New South Wales, especially in relation to acute beds and community-based mental health facilities.

There is no doubt that New South Wales is in the midst of a mental health crisis. At this moment patients are being turned away from community-based mental health clinics, and hospital emergency wards are unable to admit mental health patients due to a lack of beds. Community organisations are struggling to meet increasing demand for mental health services without adequate support from the State Government, and our prisons and homeless shelters are full of the mentally ill. As a community we can no longer allow lip service to become the dominant public policy response. According to Productivity Commission figures released only in the last month, New South Wales is consistently at or near the bottom of the list in statewide comparisons on funding and services in mental health. New South Wales spends \$96 per annum per person in real terms on mental health, much less than the amount expended in Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

Notwithstanding the rehashed announcements by the Minister for Health, who is not present in the Chamber whenever the Coalition raises mental health issues, about the State Government's expenditure on mental health, in relative terms we are far behind the other States. Regrettably, the Carr Government lacks the will to give mental health issues the attention they deserve, whether by way of resources or priority within the

monolith that is the New South Wales Department of Health. Whilst in relative terms resources in mental health are declining, the demand for services is increasing. One in five people in New South Wales will require treatment for mental illness this year alone and 40 per cent will suffer a form of mental illness during the course of their lives.

Compounding the problem of declining resources and greater caseloads, New South Wales has only 81 full-time equivalent direct care staff employed in specialised mental health services per 100,000 people. That is the worst ratio of all the mainland States. Much has been said about the large-scale deinstitutionalisation of mental health care following the Richmond report. Regrettably, the deinstitutionalisation occurred before sufficient mental health support services were provided in the community. New South Wales faces both a deficiency in acute psychiatric beds and an enormous deficiency in community-based mental health facilities. The Government is not getting either end of the equation right. According to 2005 Productivity Commission figures, New South Wales has 14.3 mental health beds in public hospitals per 100,000 people, the worst ratio of any Australian State or Territory bar one.

Although I have been the shadow Minister for Mental Health for only a short time, in the past few weeks I have been overwhelmed with cases presented by families of patients and hospital staff who are concerned about the lack of voluntary and scheduled beds for the mentally ill. In Sydney it is commonplace for mental health patients to be prematurely released following presentation to hospital emergency wards because of a lack of beds. Only last week a mother told me of the tragic circumstances surrounding her son, who suffers from schizophrenia. Following his release from an emergency ward 10 minutes after he was examined, his condition deteriorated and he now awaits trial for assault.

In country New South Wales it is commonplace for police and hospital staff to transport mental health patients hundreds of kilometres because of a lack of scheduled beds. It is also disturbing that there are insufficient beds for adolescents and children, who are often inappropriately placed in the same wards as adults. The head of the Department of Health recently admitted to more than 540 reported cases last year of children with mental illness being placed in the same wards as mentally ill adults. That is why the New South Wales Coalition has already made a commitment to provide 60 additional adolescent beds when in government. In their contributions to this debate Government members will undoubtedly attempt to bamboozle us with facts and figures on what the Government has done in mental health in the last decade. The reality is that every day mentally ill patients and consumers who present to hospital wards or seek access to community-based facilities, whether in the city or the country, struggle to obtain the services. Not only must families and carers cope with the trauma of mental illness and the associated stigma, they must fight their way through the bureaucratic red tape to access the services they desperately need.

For example, last week the Minister for Health made an announcement about the location of mental health beds. Unfortunately, it was a rehash of a previous announcement following the budget process last year. As highlighted by the honourable member for Gosford, who I know is very concerned about the appalling state of mental health services available on the Central Coast, the State Government continues to skive that it has provided 30 mental health beds in Wyong. However, Wyong hospital and unit staff continue to be disappointed that all 30 beds have not been opened, despite the official opening attended by the Minister. Even if mental health patients are fortunate enough to receive adequate care in the hospital system, they and their families then face the difficult struggle of obtaining any community-based support.

The non-government sector in New South Wales does an outstanding job in providing essential community-based mental health facilities. The State Government does not give them enough support. I pay tribute to all those who give of their time unstintingly, often on a voluntary basis, to assist community organisations to provide services for the mentally ill. Their work, which is often difficult and heart-wrenching, is necessary because the State government services only go so far. It is outrageous that funding to non-government organisations is only 2.4 per cent of funding for mental health services in New South Wales, the second lowest of all the States and Territories and well below the national average of 5.5 per cent as recorded in the National Mental Health Report 2004.

Lifeline, a non-government organisation that offers a 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week counselling service at 16 centres across New South Wales, takes more than 180,000 calls per year. Whilst Telstra has backed down and committed to continue its support for the essential services provided by Lifeline, the State Government refuses to match the New South Wales Coalition's guarantee of \$1.5 million annual recurrent funding for the Lifeline counselling service. The greatest irony is that NSW Health and other State Government agencies refer thousands of patients to Lifeline each year and formally list Lifeline in their information

brochures. Lifeline is but one example of a community organisation that carries out essential work because the State Government services simply do not go far enough.

It is of great concern that in New South Wales the State Government is in the process of ripping out many community-based mental health facilities. That action is contrary to the advice of leading clinicians and to the cries of help from families and carers. For example, when the doors of the Chatswood Community Mental Health Centre were slammed shut in November last year, I witnessed first-hand the devastating impact the closure had and continues to have on sufferers, their families and the dedicated staff. The honourable member for North Shore and I have been fighting for many months to keep the Cremorne mental health facility open and to reinstate the Chatswood facility. The honourable member for North Shore will have more to say on this issue in her contribution to the debate.

My office has been receiving calls about community-based facilities in other parts of Sydney that are also under threat. It is outrageous that the Government is turning its back on what is regarded as best practice care and reverting to outdated models. It is taking our mental health system back to the dark ages, rather than providing an environment conducive to compassionate treatment and care. The Pezzutti upper House report into mental health care provided the New South Wales Parliament and the broader community with an excellent appraisal of the complexity of issues that exist in this vitally critical area and the gross deficiency in services. The Government has given a lot of lip-service to the report, but we have yet to see the tangible implementation of many of its key recommendations. As members of Parliament we are all too aware of the extent of suffering in the community due to a lack of mental health services and a lack of commitment by the State Government, even if the Government members are not willing to admit that fact publicly.

From a public policy perspective, mental health issues cut across many portfolio areas, including Housing, Community Services, Ageing, Youth Affairs, Disability Services, Corrective Services, Juvenile Justice and, of course, Health. The New South Wales Government must immediately act to provide a holistic approach to this critical policy area, and it must commit to greater resources. Mental illness can strike any of us at any time. The residents of New South Wales have every reason to ask why this State is consistently at or near the bottom of the list in interstate comparisons on funding and services in mental health. As I have said, the figures are based on independent assessments. As the shadow Minister for Mental Health I give an unequivocal commitment that the New South Wales Coalition, when elected to office, will give mental health the priority it deserves in this State. As members of this House it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the mentally ill, their families and carers, have the standard of care and quality of life to which we are all entitled. I commend the motion.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Minister for Health) [11.40 a.m.]: That was an interesting contribution, the first from the honourable member for Willoughby as shadow Minister. I have to say that the predictions made at the time of the announcements that the Opposition would have a stand-alone spokesperson for mental health are coming true. There has been lots of shrill shrieking, but little in the way of detailed plans or policies. For example, there was a reference to Lifeline, and I will come to that in a moment. Let me deal with the first point: the suggestion that the Government's announcement was a rehash of previous announcements. Last week's announcement related to the details of the next phase in the provision of additional subacute beds; it was a flagging by the Government of a move to implement the next phase of subacute beds.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Willoughby was heard in silence. I ask her to extend the same courtesy to the Minister.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Last week the details were announced, something the Opposition is short on.

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: What about the 30 beds for Wyong? They're still not open.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The honourable member should go to Wyong and have a look for herself. She should not fall into the honourable member for Gosford's trap. I will come to Wyong in a second. Last year the Government announced, as part of the mini-budget, a \$241 million four-year plan for additional mental health funding. Those enhancements will lift per capita expenditure on mental health by \$14.30 per capita. The commitments made by the honourable member for Willoughby on behalf of the Opposition will lift per capita spending by 25c.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Watch this space!

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: Watch this space!

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The clock is ticking and we are still waiting. In 2002-03 the per capita expenditure on mental health was \$96.20, which was closer to the Australian average of \$100.50 than at any time since the implementation of the mental health strategy in 1992. The last time the Coalition was in office it had three years to lift expenditure above the average but failed to do so. That deals with per capita expenditure, the first point, which occupied so much of the honourable member for Willoughby's speech.

Unless other jurisdictions match or exceed the New South Wales investment, by 2007 New South Wales will exceed the Australian average expenditure for the first time. That was the point of the enhancement announced in April 2004. The Opposition's foreshadowed increase will lift per capita expenditure by 25c. That is how the Opposition rates the importance of mental health: an announcement that it will increase the per capita expenditure by 25c! The Opposition has paraded that commitment as a great initiative in mental health; it has dismissed as a rehashed announcement a \$241 million four-year plan which will lift per capita spending by \$14.30. By 2007 New South Wales will exceed the Australian figure, on which the Opposition placed so much importance. The fact is that the Government is making a substantial investment in expenditure on mental health and the expansion of mental health services.

Ms Gladys Berejiklian: What about Chatswood and Cremorne?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I will come to Cremorne and Chatswood shortly. It is apt that the honourable member should refer to clinicians' concerns. What is happening at Cremorne and Chatswood relates to a philosophical debate in the mental health community about mainstreaming and co-location versus the sustainability of stand-alone community health facilities. It is not about finances. It relates to a debate that has been going on for a long time about the model of care, mainstreaming, co-location and integration versus stand-alone—and in some instances isolated—mental health services which are located away from a range of support services. The clinicians the honourable member spoke to quite rightly say, "We have a concern about this issue." They are on one side of the philosophical divide. On the other side of the philosophical divide is an even larger number of clinicians, who say, "This is the way to go." They will point to places such as Ryde, which has integrated co-located mental health facilities, as the model of care that ought to be provided. We have not completed the community consultation process in relation to Chatswood and Cremorne,

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Why? Because you didn't like the last outcome?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: The honourable member for North Shore interjected that we did not like the outcome on the last occasion. That is not correct. It has not been completed because the consultation has been broadened and lengthened to tease out all the issues. The honourable member well knows the reasons some services have moved from Chatswood and are located temporarily at Royal North Shore Hospital. She is conveniently ignoring the WorkCover issues involved. The honourable member would rather have the staff and the clients remain in a building that WorkCover says they should not be in rather than move them to the site at Royal North Shore Hospital. I certainly look forward to the results of the community consultation. As indicated, I will have plenty to say about Cremorne and Chatswood at another time.

The Government has provided 291 additional beds since 2002, and another 385 are planned and coming on line over the next four years. Compare those figures with the 750 beds that were ripped out when the Coalition was last in office! That is phase 2. During phase 1, 2000-04, 291 beds were opened. The additional beds that are planned over the next four years are part of phase 2. The Government has plans to add even more beds, rather than just quoting figures about beds. The Government is concerned with the various levels of care and beds that are required, both in our acute hospitals and in community support facilities.

In relation to community support the latest phase is the partnership between the Department of Housing and non-government organisations, in respect of which we went to tender late last year, to provide an additional 400 places. That will build on the successful provision in round one of 118 supported accommodation places that resulted from a partnership between the Department of Housing and non-government organisations. These comprehensive partnership plans with housing providers—it does not necessarily have to be the Department of Housing; there are other non-government organisations—provide community housing accommodation and support for those clients who require it. In round one 118 were provided, another 400 are out to tender and being assessed right now, and the Government will continue to negotiate with the Department of Housing during a third phase.

In relation to emergency responses, a successful pilot program is in place at Nepean and Liverpool relating to standalone psychiatric assessment service centres in emergency departments. Those centres will reduce the length of stay in emergency departments for people suffering mental illness and move them on to more appropriate care. Those pilot schemes have been very successful and will be rolled out in other hospitals. The next two hospitals will be St George and St Vincent's. I certainly look forward to budget night and to giving the House the detailed report on the next phase of the Government's plans to improve mental health services. Again I say to the honourable member for Willoughby, "Go up to Wyong and have a look."

I want to correct something the honourable member for Hornsby said in a media release following a statement I made to the House last week in relation to child and adolescent beds and units. The statement I made to the House was that in 1995 there was one child and adolescent unit and today there are four such units. The honourable member for Hornsby issued a press release saying we have gone from one bed to four beds. That is the latest instalment of the Opposition, through inexperience, getting the facts wrong—whether it is the shadow Minister for Health, the honourable member for Hornsby, or the honourable member for Gosford in relation to the Wyong redevelopment. The Opposition is wrong on Wyong, it is wrong on bed numbers, and it is wrong on child and adolescent mental health units. [*Time expired.*]

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [11.50 a.m.]: It gives me a great deal of pleasure to support the motion moved by the shadow Minister for Mental Health, who will make tremendous inroads into the management of mental health in this State. The Minister has just spoken a whole lot of rhetoric. I challenge him to repeat what he has said in this place to those suffering mental illness and to their parents and carers, when they are turned away from places at which they should be able to access care because there are not enough beds. There are not enough acute-care beds or subacute beds. There are not enough community resources for mental health, but the Government is threatening to shut down those community resources.

The Government's announcement is too little, too late. The Government should have been thinking about improving mental health services 10 years ago. The people of New South Wales are not served well with mental health services. I wish to refer to a couple of articles published in the media recently. The first is an editorial in the *Sun-Herald* of 13 February under the heading "Time to end sorry history of neglect on mental health", and it reads:

The plight of the mentally ill seems to drift on and off the community's radar screen. Despite an estimated one in five people suffering some form of mental illness—from mild and occasional depression to severe schizophrenia that often leads to self-harm—it is hard to get a constant commitment from governments to improve treatment and services.

The argument becomes even more pressing when we realise that, at some stage in our lives, 40 per cent of us will be affected by a psychological condition.

The editorial also states:

The NSW Government is also obstructing the national effort to tackle mental illness by being the one State to refuse to sign up to the beyondblue initiative.

It is unbelievable that New South Wales is the last State to sign up to the beyondblue initiative. It is probably because the headquarters of the beyondblue organisation are in Melbourne and the Government does not want to give money to Victoria. The editorial continues:

This State trails in other mental health indicators, devoting only 2.5 per cent of its mental health budget to funding the community organisations that support sufferers and their families. Now, more than ever, we must bolster the people on the frontlines of this effort.

It's about 20 years since the Richmond Report recommended removing mentally ill people from institutions. The report was well-intentioned but poorly implemented. It did not take account of the burden that such deinstitutionalisation would place on families and the sufferers themselves.

We are not suggesting a return to the era of asylums and incarceration, but we do expect our governments to make mental illness a top health priority and not a policy afterthought.

Obviously, we on this side of the House have made mental illness a top health priority. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* weekend edition of 12-13 February this year Ruth Pollard wrote:

Decent care for most mentally ill people is still little more than a utopian dream ...

Chronic poor funding means services are always struggling and supported accommodation is rarely available ...

A study of homeless people in refuges and hostels in Sydney's inner city in 1998 found 75 per cent had experienced one or more mental disorders in the previous year, including 29 per cent with schizophrenia and 33 per cent with a major mood disorder.

The state's prisons are now de facto psychiatric institutions. Government figures indicate that 78 per cent of male prisoners and 90 per cent of female prisoners experienced a psychiatric disorder in the year before they went to jail.

Another survey, examining the experiences of more than 500 health and emergency workers, found some police were spending up to 30 hours a week transporting mentally ill people in police cars.

In hospitals, 60 per cent of doctors said they felt pressured to prematurely discharge those with a mental illness because of bed shortages, and almost 70 per cent had been unable to get a bed for a patient with a mental illness in the previous three months.

Recently I heard a horror story about a patient who was sedated and intubated in a leading hospital in Sydney and then transported via air ambulance to a regional area because no bed was available in the Sydney metropolitan area. That is absolutely disgusting. We need more beds, and we need appropriate beds. I have already referred to anorexia nervosa, which the Minister chose to ignore. There are few places in the metropolitan area that people with anorexia nervosa, or any eating disorder, can access. I was visited by the mother of a person suffering anorexia nervosa who received so little care that she finally decided to commit suicide by pouring petrol over herself. She died of severe burns in a metropolitan hospital in which no beds were available for involuntary patients. The Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary ought to take a cold, hard look at their claims about mental health services. They simply pay lip-service to the issue, rather than providing adequate services for people with mental illness, and their parents and carers.

Miss CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.55 a.m.]: For the record I state plainly that the Wyong Mental Health Unit is a fully funded and fully commissioned 50-bed unit, and not a 30-bed unit, as the ill-informed members opposite would have the House believe. The staged opening of the unit was fully completed on 2 February. Prior to that, the unit operated with 45 beds between December and February and 40 beds from September.

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and the Premier, one of the first jobs assigned to me by the Premier was to make some changes in mental health. I can assure the House that I have lived and breathed mental health for the last two years. The Government's commitment to mental health cannot be questioned. In contrast to the 711 mental health beds that the Coalition closed when it was last in government, this Government has a strong plan for mental health. We opened just under 300 beds between June 2000 and July 2004, and we are on track to reach our target of a further 385 through to 2008. Mental health spending is at record levels—\$783 million this financial year—for a complete range of care across the mental health spectrum, from acute and crisis care needs to community management of a chronic illness.

I would like to take some time to correct some myths about mental illness before they become truths. First, it has often been claimed by the Opposition that 40 per cent of us will suffer from a mental illness. The research simply does not support that claim. The Commonwealth's Mental Health and Wellbeing web site has some information brochures available for the general education of the public. The web site states clearly that the official statistic is that one in five people will suffer from a mental illness at some stage of their lives. In other words, 20 per cent of the population may suffer from a broad range of possible mental disorders, ranging from mild anxiety disorders and depression to the more severe bipolar disorders and schizophrenia, which make up 2.5 per cent of mental illnesses. The Mental Health Council of Australia concurs with those statistics.

It is important for both sides of politics to avoid using mental health as a means for political point scoring. It is our responsibility to advocate accurately for the community. It is simply irresponsible to tell the community that almost half of us will suffer from a mental illness. Indeed, only 3 per cent or 4 per cent of Australians will suffer from a severe mental disorder that will significantly interfere with their capacity to participate fully in community life. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing has said that the States have increased mental health funding by only 40 per cent since 1993. We all know that New South Wales has increased its mental health spending by 121 per cent since 1995, something the Opposition cannot boast. Indeed, when the Government announced in April last year additional funding of \$241 million for mental health over the four years, Dr Grace Groom from the Mental Health Council of Australia commented as follows:

We see these new investments, particularly those dealing with acute care, forensic services and child services as an appropriate and genuine response to the priorities that have been repeatedly expressed both by those who provide and those who use mental health services in New South Wales.

Over the next three years 385 new mental health beds will be opened. That figure includes acute beds, 100 subacute beds to provide a step back into the community, child and adolescent beds, and an older persons unit in

Wollongong. This is in addition to the brand new, state-of-the-art 174-bed mental health facilities at Concord Hospital. The Carr Government is providing leadership on new ways of doing things. I refer, for example, to the successful Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative between Health, Housing and the non-government sector.

The fact is that 45 per cent of the mental health budget is currently spent on community mental health service provision. Our community mental health teams do an extraordinarily effective job. The low suicide rates in New South Wales reflect this. Changes in mental health are happening at all levels. The review of the Mental Health Act will make a significant difference to mental health service provision, particularly in relation to families and carers having a greater say in the treatment of their loved ones. A draft exposure bill for further public consultation will be tabled this year. The area health services restructure will reinforce community expectations that area directors of mental health will be responsible for quarantined mental health budgets as well as service provision. The Government has been open about its approach to improving mental health service provision. I pay special tribute to Dr Brian Pezzutti, who continues to support us in all our initiatives to continue to improve mental health services in New South Wales. [*Time expired.*]

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore) [12.00 p.m.]: I also congratulate Dr Brian Pezzutti on his wonderful report and his particular interest in mental health. He was at my house a couple of weeks ago and he expressed his strong support for the retention of community-based mental health services both at Chatswood and Cremorne. I look forward to the Parliamentary Secretary supporting the outcome of the community consultation, the last consultation having been held in December last year, which made a very clear recommendation that both of these services be retained on their community-based sites at Chatswood and Cremorne.

I look forward to the Parliamentary Secretary, who admires Dr Brian Pezzutti so much, accepting his view and that of the community. However, I was very disturbed to hear the Minister say that community consultation was not finished. People are very worried about that attitude because it was very clear at the December consultation that this view was held by carers, by the users of community-based services, and also by those who provide the services—the clinicians and the non-government organisations. That view was expressed at a meeting that was dominated by bureaucrats and clinicians, and it was, frankly, quite a stunning outcome. How the Government and the Minister can say, "We need to go back to the drawing board and have more consultation" is a matter of grave concern.

The Minister's histrionic outburst, and the most insincere claims that the proposed closure is based on clinical advice rather than budgetary reasons, was laughable. All one needs to do is read Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 2, for 2002-03, which states, in relation to the proposed redevelopment of Royal North Shore Hospital:

The redevelopment will free up extensive land along the Herbert Street frontage of the Royal North Shore Campus as well as the current health facilities at Chatswood, Cremorne and Potts Point. Revenue from the future sale, or lease, of these properties will support the redevelopment strategy.

There it is, in black and white: proof that the Government intends selling these properties so the money can be put into the capital works at Royal North Shore Hospital. It is a most insincere attempt by the Minister to say that any decision to close these centres will be based on clinical advice.

I refer particularly to the 50 doctors who have signed petitions—another one will be tabled today—in support of the retention of the Cremorne mental health service in Cremorne. That drive was led by a retired general practitioner, Dr Ian Fitzpatrick. Dr Martine Walker, another local general practitioner, and Dr Fitzpatrick were in Parliament House last week saying that they feared that if these community-based health services were lost, the patients whom they saw as general practitioners would not access the services based in a hospital. The doctors said that these patients associate the hospital with the trauma in their lives, and they would refuse to attend to get the treatment that keeps them so well and living so independently through the support provided by community-based mental health services.

The Minister also needs to look at clinical advice that comes from people as eminent as Dr Alan Rosen, who is Director of Clinical Services at Royal North Shore Hospital and the area health service. He has quite categorically stated in correspondence that the proposal to close down these community-based mental health services is financially driven. He says:

This retreat to a "fortress" hospital mentality is ostensibly due to administrative staff OH&S concerns. However, it is really due to Health Executives' "land hunger".

There is one of the most senior clinicians, appointed by the Government, saying to the Minister that this is not a good move, that it is being driven by financial reasons and is not in the best interests of their patients.

I will finish my contribution by telling the House about a woman I have known for many, many years—she has given permission for me to use her name but I will refer to her as "Joan"—who is a user of the Cremorne mental health service. She was one of a delegation who came to see the Minister. The Minister, I must say, was moved by her plight. She told him that she would not go to Royal North Shore Hospital, that she feared going to that hospital because of the memories it brought back. I ask the Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary to not force these people to go without the treatment they need. [*Time expired.*]

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [12.05 p.m.]: The Opposition's record in mental health will be best remembered by the closure of 711 mental health beds across New South Wales when it was last in government. By contrast, this Government has been working towards improving mental health services long before the Commonwealth struck trouble with the treatment of Cornelia Rau at the Baxter Detention Centre. The New South Wales Government has listened to the recommendations of various inquiries, including those of Brian Pezzutti's upper House inquiry. I note that in an interview recently Dr Pezzutti remarked that the Government had responded to every one of his 120 recommendations for mental health service provision arising from his inquiry.

The mental health budget for New South Wales now stands at \$783 million—this is a \$68 million increase on last year and a 121 per cent increase on the budget since 1994-95. Last April a further investment of \$241 million was announced for additional mental health services over the next four years. The capital works plan is expansive. This financial year we have already seen, or will soon see, the opening of additional acute psychiatric beds at Wyong Hospital, Westmead Hospital, Nepean Hospital, Cumberland Hospital, Westmead Children's Hospital, Broken Hill Hospital and Wagga Wagga Hospital. Later this year new beds will also come on line at Dubbo and Liverpool hospitals, in addition to the 296 beds opened between June 2000 and July 2004.

I also note that as the State member for Drummoyne I am very happy to announce that we have a \$43,000, 174 acute bed facility being built at Concord hospital, which will be completed by 2007. I also note that the Government committed \$2.8 million for a magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] machine, which will arrive in May. The room where the MRI will be used is currently under construction and I will be going out there next week to view that work. I also note that after a 2½ year campaign by the Federal member for Lowe, John Murphy, and me as the State member for Drummoyne, we finally secured an MRI licence.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: What has that got to do with mental health?

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE: Let me finish. I have spoken to clinicians at Concord hospital; the new MRI machine that we will be getting, the diagnostic tool, will allow clinicians to diagnose mental illness. While this does not replace a psychologist, what it does is look at the abnormalities in the brain; it looks at the blood flows and how the brain responds. So not only must we continue to open beds but we must continue to give our clinicians the diagnostic tools they need to diagnose mental illness. I know that the honourable member for Gosford at this stage has not secured an MRI licence even though his Liberal government is in power. But the honourable member for Lismore, the member for Drummoyne and the Federal member for Lowe have secured MRI licences. So I remind the shadow spokesperson of that.

I also note that when we talk about beds we can only open mental health beds if we have enough mental health nurses to staff those beds. One thing we have not heard from the shadow spokesperson here is how a Federal Government shut the Faculty of Nursing at Sydney University where we get our mental health nurses from. Mental health is a very difficult area of nursing. So if the Opposition is serious about mental health, it should give us back the hundreds of positions that we lost at Sydney University because in order to open mental health beds we need a good ratio of nurses; we need registered nurses, and they come out of universities. I also note that in total the New South Wales Government spends \$81 million on child and adolescent mental health care, and I note that Concord hospital had a special adolescents unit employing around 570 staff providing care for 10,000 children and their families.

I note also that the New South Wales Government is looking outside the square by introducing dedicated psychiatric emergency care centres [PECC] to commence earlier referral and specialist treatment for the mentally ill. Two of these four beds have commenced operation in the emergency departments at Nepean and Liverpool hospitals. I note also that the shadow spokeswoman did not refer to the crisis teams, which members of communities can contact at any stage if they have concerns. These community health teams do an extraordinarily effective job and New South Wales has the lowest suicide rates to reflect this. Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that suicide rates in New South Wales have declined from 15.1 per cent per 100,000 persons in 1997 to 9.6 per cent per 100,000 persons in 2002. A comprehensive review of the Mental Health Act

is being undertaken also. These measures are by no means exhaustive of the enormous work that goes on in the care of our mentally ill every day in New South Wales. [*Time expired.*]

Mr DAVID BARR (Manly) [12.10 p.m.], by leave: Former American Vice-President Hubert Humphrey once said:

The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life—the sick, the needy, the handicapped.

As a nation we are clearly failing that moral test when it comes to helping people with mental illness. The recent case of Cornelia Rau, who slipped between the cracks in various jurisdictions, in three States and federally, highlights the plight of people with a mental illness and what can become of them. Cornelia Rau was incarcerated for a long time without a proper evaluation. Mental health is a serious issue that affects many families. Basically, everyone is touched by it, yet over the years State governments have not done nearly enough. I welcome the Government's allocation of \$241 million over four years, which will make inroads, but it is not enough. The Government cannot rest on its laurels because we have a long way to go.

In March last year at Harbord I held a forum on mental health, resulting in the formation of a working party, which met several times. The working party put a submission to the Minister requesting funds for the northern beaches. The first request was for the establishment of a pilot case management-care co-ordination program, which will involve comprehensive care co-ordination, utilising a self-help model, to ensure that mental health consumers of high need are directed to appropriate treatment. There is a model for this type of program in New York, which has had considerable success. More than 80 per cent of consumers involved in that program were able to exit the revolving-door syndrome.

The second request was for the appointment of an additional two full-time equivalent consumer support workers. The concept is for consumers to help other consumers in a network. Manly District Hospital presently only has a tiny network. A request was also made for increased funding for the extended hours team. This specialist unit provides outreach and emergency department liaison services for people on the northern beaches who are suffering an acute episode. That team is on call from 8.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m., but can provide no service outside those hours. Indeed, the workload of the team has increased by approximately 75 per cent and the team is finding it difficult to cope with the higher demand. It has 9.5 staff, comprising eight clinicians, two part-time doctors and a part-time administration staff member for the entire northern beaches, an area of 280 square kilometres. Our request was for a minimum of four additional staff.

In recent times acute patients have been parked in the emergency department of Manly District Hospital because beds have not been available for them in the east wing. As a result, last year security officers had to be employed at a cost of \$200,000 to watch over the patients. The provision of better acute facilities would mean that that money could be used much more effectively elsewhere. This is a complex problem and we have a long way to go. Every generation has been responsible for not doing enough but the ball is in our court now and we should do more about it. As a consequence, the honourable member for Hornsby, the honourable member for Strathfield, the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans and I formed the Parliamentary Friends of People with a Mental Illness to educate and sensitise members with the issue and obtain further funding to deal more effectively with this serious problem.

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Bligh) [12.15 p.m.], by leave: The 1988 Barclay report, the 1993 Burdekin report and the 2002 Legislative Council inquiry called for revolutionary improvement in long-neglected mental health services. The last inquiry recommended sweeping measures to improve transparency, accountability and co-ordination, and drastic funding increases to expand services, particularly supported accommodation. Psychiatric institutions were dismantled following Richmond's recommendations in 1983, without comprehensive community care to replace them. Administrative streamlining and tinkering at the edges since has not fixed a system in crisis. I spoke on this matter in Parliament in November 2003 and several times in 2004, decrying the chronic underfunding, the aborted implementation, the poor co-ordination and the failed accountability that have left mental health services in disarray.

There has been a gross lack of supported accommodation, preventing recovery for people with mental illness. Mental health teams in the community and prisons cannot meet the rising demand, and clinical services have declined as costs have increased. High demand for scarce in-patient beds means more people are discharged from hospital before they are stable, without support, into crisis accommodation or onto the street, where they then gravitate into the city. Few people get access to rehabilitation programs, leaving more than three-quarters of people with a mental illness unemployed. Mental health services cannot attract trained and skilled staff because of a national shortage and the State needs to work with the Commonwealth to turn this around.

New South Wales is the most poorly funded State and although the new Minister has recently increased funds for mental health, we still have a dismal record. The rest of Australia cannot be proud either. Mental illness represents 30 per cent of non-fatal disease burden in Australia, but only 7 per cent of health spending goes to mental health, while most developed countries spend 10 per cent to 14 per cent. The national increase in funding over recent years barely covers increased population and costs. The Mental Health Council's 2002 national mental health report showed that acute mental health beds have remained static but non-acute beds have fallen. We have not yet received badly needed new funds and reports of suicides, assaults and community distress have not been heeded.

At the same time I commend the Minister for Health, who has met with me several times to discuss concerns about an inner city very much under stress and has responded to those concerns. He is investigating whether to fast-track the redevelopment of the Caritas facility to expand it from 27 beds to 40 beds. I welcome his commitment to improving the current facility, which has been inadequate and dangerous for both patients and staff, and has impeded good patient care. From July a new psychiatric emergency department will be set up adjacent to the existing emergency department to speed access to help.

I am also pleased that the Minister has supported requests for two new clinical nurse consultant positions at St Vincent's Hospital, one working with non-government organisations and the other with general practitioners. These will help the 38 per cent of people with mental illness who do not use mental health services and the 80 per cent of homelessness service provider clients who have a mental illness. The Minister is also committed to ensuring that people with serious mental illness in Department of Housing accommodation receive appropriate supported accommodation. This is critical, as many people are caught in the vicious cycle of going from crisis accommodation to the streets, to prison, to hospital. Nearly one-quarter of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program [SAAP] refuge clients are caught in this revolving door, and the Government must ensure that the SAAP is funded to provide this help. I eagerly await new places in the Housing and Supported Initiative, which the Minister has assured me will include inner-city beds for people with low support needs from April and for people with high support needs from July.

People who are mentally ill need somewhere to live, treatment and support to become part of the community. Yet mentally ill people are discharged into crisis refuges or boarding houses, and they end up on the streets or in prison, where three-quarters of inmates have at least one mental illness. Hospitals, prisons and acute psychiatric facilities are forced to cover for the lack of accommodation and community support. This is a disgrace in twenty-first century, sophisticated, affluent Australia, and it is a shocking indictment upon us as a society.

In conclusion, I commend the Minister's recent response to urgent needs in the inner city. However, there is an ongoing need to immediately expand crisis mental health service beds, long-term supported accommodation similar to the Housing and Supported Initiative and rehabilitation programs to help people with a mental illness to reintegrate into the community. There is no excuse for inaction in our society. It is important that we continue to raise this issue and to push for action from both the Federal and State governments.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [12.20 p.m.], by leave: It is important that the regional perspective on mental health services in this State be part of this debate, particularly in terms of where we are locally, and I point to the South Coast as a prime example. Bega hospital has two mental health beds, which is the total number of acute beds for mental health patients on the South Coast. Daily, patients are transported to Chisholm Ross at Goulburn, which is hundreds of kilometres away from coastal communities. Typically, patients are transported in the back of a paddy wagon or in a community health vehicle. The reality is that every week police must be relieved of their regular duties to assist community health nurses with mental health patients.

The tragedy is that nine times out of 10, patients are in a revolving door out of Chisholm Ross, and often they are back in their local communities before the police and the community health nurses. That situation is unacceptable. In some ways I believe it is a breach of human rights and human dignity not to have appropriate acute beds in place in regional areas. Under the old Southern Area Health Service boundaries, there were 21 vacancies for mental health nurses in south-east New South Wales. So we do not have the nurses or the beds but we have the patients. We have people who are desperately in need of care, and their families are at their wits' end. It is important for the Government to start focusing on acute care centres, sanctuaries, in coastal areas because there has been an enormous jump in suicide rates not only among young people but also in older age groups.

Nine times out of 10, drugs and alcohol are contributing factors. To that end, we have a lack of community health support in the form of alcohol and drug counselling. In the Bega Valley alone there is only one councillor to deal with drug and alcohol matters. Most of the time mental health patients turn to illicit substances and substance abuse to deal with their mental health problems. Broadly, the Coalition has made it clear that the State's prisons have become de facto mental health institutions in the new millennium. How does New South Wales stack up against the other States? New South Wales has only 14.3 mental health beds in public hospitals per 100,000 people. In comparison, Victoria has 18.6; Queensland, 18.1; Western Australia, 20.5; Tasmania, 16.5; the Australian Capital Territory, 17.1; and the Northern Territory, 16.2. New South Wales spends \$96 per annum per person less than Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia.

As Brian Pezzutti pointed out in his report, the Mental Health Act must be amended to help families of mental health patients. It is important that we consider amending the Mental Health Act to provide greater support to patients and their families. For instance, it is amazing to think that it is not mandatory for patients who have attempted suicide to undertake a compulsory consultation after they are discharged from a mental health institution. Many families are also concerned about the level of information they receive. Such information should be limited, but guardians, families and carers should be able to obtain information about a loved one. The Act should be amended to enable patients and their families to receive information about the state, health and wellbeing of the patients.

Two weeks ago I received a phone call from a mother whose son is in a psychiatric bed in Sydney. When she rang the nurse and asked about her son the response was, "I can't tell you that because of the Mental Health Act." That is not good enough. All she wanted to know was whether he was okay. We must look closely at the limited information that nurses should provide to patients, families and guardians. The Government and this House must consider that matter at a later hour. I call on the Government to look closely at the level of resources provided to country New South Wales for mental health services in particular, because too many people are hurting. [*Time expired.*]

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [12.25 p.m.], in reply: I thank all those who contributed to this debate. In particular, I thank the honourable member for Hornsby, who has been a strong mental health advocate for many years. She has brought to this place and this debate her medical background and expertise and has done an outstanding job in highlighting the deficiencies in mental health services in her community. I thank the honourable member for North Shore, who has also been a long-time mental health advocate. She and I have been working closely together to retain Chatswood and community mental health facilities, and we will continue to do so until the Government decides, rightly, to retain both Cremorne and Chatswood as best practice mental health care facilities.

I thank also the honourable member for Manly and the honourable member for Bligh for their contributions. They are also strong mental health advocates. I note that the honourable member for Manly was instrumental, together with the honourable member for Hornsby and other members, in establishing the Parliamentary Friends of People with a Mental Illness. Similarly, the honourable member for Bligh has been vocal in this place on many mental health issues. I thank the honourable member for Bega for highlighting the plight of mental health patients in his community and, notably, the special circumstances of people in country New South Wales who have enormous difficulties obtaining mental health facilities, given the distance.

It is no surprise to honourable members that I am extremely disappointed about the Government's response today. The Minister for Health and the Parliamentary Secretary told us how important they regarded mental health in New South Wales, yet neither of them bothered to remain for the entire debate to listen to members' concerns about mental health. If that is not a demonstration of their lack of care for mental health patients and their carers and families, I do not know what is. The Minister for Health failed to explain why New South Wales is lagging behind the other States in terms of mental health services. Why is New South Wales going backwards in relative terms? When demand on mental health services is increasing, when people are suffering, when families and carers are under increasing pressure to find alternative treatments because the public system is letting them down, the Minister for Health should explain why New South Wales is going backwards in relative terms.

The Minister clouded the picture by announcing plans for phase one and phase two, which will not be in place for years. However, as honourable members know, accessing mental health care in this State is difficult, if not impossible. Getting adequate care is difficult, and people are suffering. While the incidence and severity of cases are increasing, we are going backwards. Similarly, the Parliamentary Secretary regurgitated speeches she has made before. She highlighted her interest in mental health and what she has been doing as the Parliamentary Secretary, but she could not be bothered to stay for the remainder of the debate. That is an outrageous state of affairs. If the Government cannot participate in debate in this place, how can we trust it to do the right thing by the community?

Clearly, the honourable member for Drummoyne has not spoken to any of her constituents who suffer from mental illness or their families. The honourable member for Drummoyne presented a rosy picture about accessing mental health services. It was sad, because it demonstrated to me that she has not spoken to anyone in the community. She has not been in touch with any of the community groups in her electorate. If she had, she would realise the pain and suffering of people. We need to highlight this pain and suffering and put pressure on the Government to act. For the past 10 years all it has given us is lip service.

The fact that the Minister for Health and the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Health are not present during this debate confirms that all they do is give lip service. If they were really concerned for the plight of the mentally ill they would have listened to the contributions of many honourable members on both sides of the House. They have neglected to do so. This morning the Minister failed to address why New South Wales spends less per capita on mental health than other States; why New South Wales has fewer mental health beds than any other State or Territory bar one; why New South Wales, of all the mainland States, spends the least—2.4 per cent—on supporting community groups who provide mental health services to the community; why New South Wales people cannot leave hospital and successfully find sufficient community services; why Cremorne, Chatswood and other community-based mental health facilities are under threat and have no assurance of their future.

I raise this issue today because mental health is a critical issue. It deserves the highest priority. The Government pays lip service but does not act. The fact that the Minister for Health and the Parliamentary Secretary have not stayed for the debate shows they do not care. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 33

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

Noes, 47

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

Pair

Mr Pringle

Ms Gadiel

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Debate resumed from 24 February.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro) [12.40 p.m.]: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion, and I indicate that the Government will oppose it. If The Nationals bothered to read last year's budget papers they would see in Budget Paper No. 3 Volume 2 that the Soil Conservation Service is still in existence. The motion to call upon the Government to re-establish the Soil Conservation Service is redundant, given that the service is still in operation, as listed in the budget papers, and running well.

In years gone by the Soil Conservation Service has proven to be successful, and the Government and Country Labor work hard to make sure it continues to be a success. For many years the service has managed natural resources in New South Wales, and particularly land degradation. It is timely that the House focus on the history and achievements of the Soil Conservation Service. Sir William McKell, a Labor Premier in the 1940s, was a major supporter of the formation of the service and the expansion of its operations. The service continues to provide those essential services today. The Nationals have called for the re-establishment of an organisation that is still in existence and has never been disbanded. The service exists as a separate and successful division of the Department of Lands, as confirmed in the budget papers. The budget papers highlight the service's objectives as:

To achieve the protection and conservation of farm water supplies, soil and related resources

To facilitate the development of sustainable rural communities

To provide a specialist consulting service in environmental protection and rehabilitation, resource planning and assessment, environmental engineering and training in soil conservation.

The Soil Conservation Service web site describes a healthy operation in action around New South Wales. The service provides advice to farmers and undertakes project management, conservation earthwork and education and training. It carries out soil and water testing and offers a range of services to assist people in rural New South Wales. The work of the Soil Conservation Service is particularly important to the Monaro area, where it has worked very hard for many years. Kosciuszko National Park, which is in the Monaro electorate, was a factor in the original formation of the service.

In 1938, when the service was originally formed, one of the first tasks of the service was to visit the Snowy River catchment area—now known as Kosciuszko National Park—and address the serious degradation issues that had occurred from overgrazing on the snow leases. At that time Sir William McKell, who became Premier in 1941, together with the local member, Jack Seiffert, undertook a week-long tour, much of it on horseback, of the Kosciuszko National Park. He was appalled to discover that thousands of tonnes of topsoil was being washed off the mountains, down into the waterways and silting up the catchments.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! I call the Minister for Energy and Utilities to order. If he wants to have a private conversation he should do so outside the Chamber.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Much of the original work of the Soil Conservation Service was aimed at repairing the degradation that had occurred in the high country from overgrazing. The Soil Conservation Act 1938 constituted the Snowy River and its tributaries as an erosion hazard and established the Soil Conservation Service to address the problem. It is interesting to note The Nationals' attitude to the Soil Conservation Service because the establishment of the service in 1938 was against the vehement opposition of the then Country Party. They could not accept that such a service was necessary.

Mr Carter, the then member for Liverpool Plains, said that by establishing the service the Government was "doing something that is contrary to the best traditions of a Government of British-thinking races". The service was to go onto private lands and assist landholders. Mr Carter also said that continued "soil erosion has been going on in Great Britain for thousands of years"—and they had never needed a soil erosion service. Mr Carter gave us an insight into the Country Party's, now The Nationals', philosophy on the conservation of our rural areas when he lectured the Parliament in 1938 on soil conservation. He said, "Ring-barking also is a great preventative of erosion, as it permits grass to grow." I admit that The Nationals have moved on a little since those days.

Another member at that time reflected the vehemence of the Coalition's opposition to any initiative that would restrict cattle grazing in the high country of the Snowy Mountains. His speech reminds me of the words

we constantly hear from The Nationals nowadays. Some of The Nationals still believe they should be allowed to take back their snow leases and regrazed with hoofed animals in the Snowy Mountains high country. However, The Nationals have moved forward. They have been dragged kicking and screaming into this century and we occasionally see some advances in their attitude.

The speeches I highlighted sum up the attitude of the Country Party in 1938, and in 2005 The Nationals are still behind the times in many areas of land management, soil conservation and environmental protection. Often they resort to misrepresenting the real position—as they have done in this motion. They should take a positive attitude to the protection of our grazing lands and environmentally precious country to ensure a productive rural New South Wales.

The Soil Conservation Service is a diverse enterprise that undertakes the conservation and management of natural resources in rural areas of New South Wales. Its strengths include a balanced approach to natural resource management, a demonstrated capacity to implement cost-effective programs and achieve client and government conservation outcomes, a credible history of practical achievement in working in partnership with clients and the community, and maintaining the respect and admiration of the rural sector. In recent years the service has been working on environmental consultancies and operations in flood mitigation, walking track maintenance and foreshore maintenance.

In my electorate the service has been heavily involved in rehabilitating land following the bushfires that occurred in our region in January 2003. The service was engaged to assess and repair erosion sites and damaged fire trails. Over eight weeks the service repaired 532 kilometres of track and assisted 78 landowners with property repairs. Also, it made a number of recommendations to avoid a repeat of the extensive damage that was sustained during the 2003 bushfires. Following the Cabinet meeting held at Jindabyne not long after the last election, I accompanied the Minister for Lands to inspect the work of the service in the rehabilitation of the area and the grading of firebreaks. They were doing an excellent job. The service continues its link with the Snowy Mountains and the Monaro area that it has had for so many years.

The Soil Conservation Service performs work such as erosion and sediment works on various highways and rural lands in other parts of the State. The Government is committed to maintaining the Soil Conservation Service in the future, and the service is an integral part of Country Labor policy in rural areas. The Minister for Lands has always been a strong advocate of the service, and it also receives strong departmental support. When I was elected to this place one of my first conversations with the Minister related to the importance of the Soil Conservation Service as a government service. So long as the Hon. Tony Kelly is the Minister for Lands and Country Labor has a strong presence in rural New South Wales, the Soil Conservation Service and the important work it performs will be safe. The Government will ensure that the historical and practical significance of the service lives on and continues to be a valued part of government services.

Effective examples of that are to be seen all around New South Wales. The motion is redundant. The Soil Conservation Service was not abolished and therefore there is no need for a motion to reinstate it. However, the motion has allowed us to examine the important role played by the Soil Conservation Service, and the irrelevance of The Nationals when it comes to practical measures for rural New South Wales. The Nationals have been opposed to the Soil Conservation Service every step of the way since its establishment and at the time of its expansion in the 1940s under the McKell Government.

The Nationals have continued to oppose important initiatives for rural New South Wales. The catchment management authorities were established with the support of farmers throughout New South Wales, but they were opposed by The Nationals in this place because they believe that opposition is better than practical work. The Nationals believe that opposing important measures for conservation in New South Wales will win them cheap votes. The reality is that that is proof of the irrelevance of The Nationals.

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [12.50 p.m.]: I strongly support the motion moved by the honourable member for Upper Hunter and commend him for his efforts to reinstate the Soil Conservation Service. I might also mention that, as Minister for Land and Water Conservation in 1993, he reintroduced that service, which lasted until the change of government in 1995. I pay tribute to his tenacity in supporting the Soil Conservation Service, knowing, as he and I both know, that it is a very important organisation and has been so for many years. Nothing the honourable member for Monaro said today convinces me that the Soil Conservation Service should not be reintroduced. I suspect that Sir William McKell would be rolling in his grave today on hearing that the Labor Party proposes to vote against a motion to reintroduce the Soil Conservation Service, a service he instituted.

Mr Steve Whan: A service that still exists.

Mr DONALD PAGE: The service does not exist in the form in which it once existed. It is but a shadow of its former self. The service has lost a great deal of expertise and, despite what the honourable member for Monaro said when he mentioned a number of projects that are on a relatively small scale, it is not engaged today in any large-scale conservation projects of any note. That is the important point: in recent times the Soil Conservation Service has not fulfilled its former role.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Paul Lynch): Order! Members on both sides of the House will come to order so the honourable member for Ballina can be heard.

Mr DONALD PAGE: That is of particular concern because, increasingly, the scientific community are saying that soil management has probably never been more important than it is today. Recent scientific information has been to the effect that the soil balance in particular, and soil conservation in general, is a very important part of managing our landscape so that we will have a sustainable future. As a former shadow Minister for Land and Water Conservation, I have a strong interest in soil conservation and catchment management issues, and in the development of projects to tackle dryland salinity.

The protection of the State's soil resources and the preservation of its native flora and fauna is of paramount importance. We should always work towards policies that match sustainable development with responsible conservation. The protection of the environment and the sustainable use of its resources are vital for today's society and for future generations. The Soil Conservation Service was, without doubt, one of the most important agencies in upholding these principles through the fight against soil degradation in New South Wales. The Soil Conservation Service was established in 1938 and played a very useful role until the mid-1990s. Since then we have experienced the problem of a vacuum in soil conservation, despite scientific evidence that balancing the soil and getting soil conservation right are now more important than ever.

One of the big issues confronting Australia is dryland salinity, and whilst we have a national action plan and a national dryland salinity program, they are essentially involved in research and holistic catchment management. That is important, but managing soil at the local level in a practical way is equally important. If the Soil Conservation Service were present in a more substantive form it would be able to target soil management issues that have been identified in various salinity management strategies. I am not talking here about the duplication of effort; I am talking about complementation, with a specialist focus on soil conservation.

That was the intention of the honourable member for Upper Hunter in moving this motion. It is not about duplication or things that already exist; we are talking about targeting soil conservation programs that are generally of a broad scale and which, if addressed in a specific way, would have a beneficial impact on the catchment. I recall that when I was a member of the salinity committee Professor Parnell, from Western Australia, expressed the view about catchment management that if you can identify and address the local problem there will be flow-on benefits throughout the catchment. If the Soil Conservation Service were fully operational, as it was formerly—and as the honourable member for Upper Hunter envisages—it would be able to fulfil that role. *[Time expired.]*

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [12.55 p.m.]: The demise of the Soil Conservation Service in Gunnedah in particular has been compared to a death from a thousand cuts. Through a series of departmental restructures over the years and the resultant attrition of staff, the service has been slowly bled of a purpose in the role it once held. Today it is merely a division of the Department of Lands, with an area office in Tamworth known as Soil Services.

The beginning of the end for the Soil Conservation Service has been identified as occurring in 1991, when the then Coalition Government incorporated the New South Wales Soil Conservation Service into the Department of Conservation and Land Management [CALM]. This department was then amalgamated with the Department of Water Resources and part of the Department of Public Works to become the Department of Land and Water Conservation [DLWC]. The extension work undertaken by the Soil Conservation Service was scaled down and taken over by the DLWC, while the service continued to carry out structural works and soil consultancies including environmental project management.

The result was that the Soil Conservation Service's extension work of giving advice to landholders on soil issues was reduced to a minor role. The last election saw the DLWC restructured into the super Ministry of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, and the newly termed "Soil Services" was relegated as a

business division of the Department of Lands. While Soil Services staff seem content to be within the Department of Lands, the Soil Conservation Act was retained under the authority of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources [DIPNR] which has made it difficult for the division to operate successfully as an entity unto itself. The division has limited operational effectiveness because decisions regarding the Act and its assets are not within its control. I note that moves are under way to have the Act transferred.

On 10 April 1992 my predecessor, Tony Windsor, introduced a bill whose purpose was to re-establish the Soil Conservation Service as an administration office and to separate it from the Department of Conservation and Land Management. The bill passed through the lower House but was opposed by the Coalition. I looked at a copy of *Hansard* for the appropriate day and noted the names of members who voted against it. Among them were the honourable member for Lachlan, the honourable member for Coffs Harbour and the honourable member for Upper Hunter. So, there is a fair amount of hypocrisy around this place, George. We all agree that the Soil Conservation Service needs to be re-established as something that resembles its former entity.

Gunnedah has suffered as a result of having lost that service. For many decades Gunnedah led the way in the effective management of natural resources, with severe soil erosion issues being the catalyst for the establishment of the Soil Conservation Research Centre in 1946. Gunnedah became home to a regional office of the Soil Conservation Service, with a demonstration site of what could be done to control erosion located at the Gunnedah Research Centre and a regional workshop employing 8 to 10 staff to repair and service plant, including a team of eight bulldozers.

The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources [DIPNR] now runs the Gunnedah Research Centre and, while the workshop has closed, Soil Services still has a plant working out of Gunnedah. A staff of around 20 people once worked for the Soil Conservation Service in Gunnedah, compared with the 30 staff now employed by its reincarnation, Soils Services, across the northern area of the State. Today one Soil Services operations manager has an office at the Gunnedah Research Centre and two staff operate the plant in the Gunnedah area. The general emphasis has drifted away from the science of soil and, while limited research is still being conducted at Soils Services' Scone laboratories, it is basic and the focus is no longer on soil conservation.

The fear is that the expertise that still exists in a fragmented form will be lost once the long-term staff who remain around the traps approach retirement age. The staff who belonged to the Soil Conservation Service are either employed by the DIPNR in compliance roles, by the Department of Lands in Soils Services, or have already retired. In its heyday in the seventies and early eighties the Soil Conservation Service in Gunnedah was an extremely efficient unit with an emphasis on rural lands and looking after its soil resources. Today, with the service operating out of Tamworth, the emphasis is on project management rehabilitation of soil erosion and soil control on all land areas. Much of the work is done for government departments, and not so much for the rural landholder. Soils Services is contracted by the likes of the Roads and Traffic Authority and the Department of Mineral Resources in relation to the rehabilitation of derelict mines. The authority still does work for landholders, mostly in earthmoving for soil erosion. Across the State the fleet of bulldozers has reduced from 100 to 45, which perform structural soil conservation earthworks.

Today, around 155 people are employed in the Soils Services Division across the State. According to the Department of Lands web site, Soil Services is "the leading authority in the planning, design and construction of soil conservation earthworks, assisting farmers and organisations alike in the effective management of natural resources". Unfortunately for Gunnedah, the mutation has meant a loss of employment and economic benefits. For the sake of the decentralisation of services from city areas to regional centres, I support any move to reinstate the Soil Conservation Service as an entity unto itself. Whether that is realistic, however, given the attrition of staff and the dumbing down of the service, is a matter that must be taken into account. [*Time expired.*]

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Russell Turner.

[*Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Lynch) left the chair at 1.00 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.*]

ANZAC DAY DAWN SERVICE

Ministerial Statement

Mr BOB CARR (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.15 p.m.]: There is nothing more moving than to stand quietly in the autumn chill as Anzac Day dawns and as Australians march at the traditional dawn service to commemorate something very significant in our history. One of the great privileges any of us has in public life is to play a role in these commemorations. For my part, I have been very happy to be associated with restoring and reinforcing the role of Gallipoli and the Anzac legend in our schools. One gratifying result of this work has been the increase year by year in the numbers attending the dawn service. I see young children there, and I see teenagers who would be the same age as many of those Diggers who stormed the beaches of Gallipoli that fateful morning.

This year, the ninetieth anniversary of Anzac, record crowds are expected. A consequence of the expected size of the crowds is that many people will struggle to gain a glimpse of the ceremony from the further reaches of the eastern end of Martin Place. Members will be pleased to hear that the Government will provide a 20-square metre screen near Pitt Street where the Olympics Live site was located, so more of those who come to pay their respects can share in this moving ceremony. The last of the original Anzacs have passed from our midst. It is up to us, the Anzacs' heirs and beneficiaries of their sacrifice, to keep the flame of honour and remembrance alive. No tribute is more important to the life of this city than the annual Anzac Day pilgrimage to the Cenotaph, now made more accessible by this prudent measure, which I commend to the House.

Mr JOHN BROGDEN (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [2.18 p.m.]: Australia and New Zealand are unique in the world, commemorating as they do their remembrance day with a dawn service. The dawn service reflects the dawn raid at Gallipoli some 90 years ago. Standing at the Cenotaph as the misty dawn breaks at the beginning of a chilly morning in Sydney is an experience that is shared by increasing numbers of citizens of our State. It is a magnificent and humbling ceremony. The words on the Cenotaph—"To Our Glorious Dead"—mean so much to those who fought and to their families, but their significance relates particularly to those who did not return.

As a young boy and as a scout I was a custodian of the Cenotaph. Scouts are the custodians of the Cenotaph, and as a young man it was with great excitement that I and other scouts travelled to Martin Place on Anzac Day to stand on that Cenotaph. The overwhelming majority of the members of this place are not ex-service men or women and for us, as elected officials, to be given leading roles in Anzac Day dawn services and ceremonies around the State is a matter of great humility. We hold dear to our hearts the fact that our war veterans provide us with a special place at their ceremonies. To increase the capacity of those who attend the dawn service in Martin Place to celebrate and commemorate Anzac Day is a good move.

TRIBUTE TO MR JOHN RIXON

Ministerial Statement

Mr BOB CARR (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.21 p.m.]: I am grateful for the opportunity to place on record the debt many of us in Parliament owe to John Rixon, whose retirement brings to an end 40 remarkable years of service to this State and its elected representatives. John Rixon commenced duty as a driver in the New South Wales public service on 26 July 1965. They were the days of Ford Galaxies—and a Mercedes for Bob Askin. For the next 23 years John drove Ministers from both sides of politics, including the late and fondly remembered Syd Einfeld, as well as VIPs and overseas guests. As a task of supreme importance in the Wran years he drove Gerry Gleeson.

John's integrity, performance and diligence eventually took him from behind the steering wheel to the position of supervisor of the Premier's Department motor services branch in June 1988—the very model, some might say, of a supervisor of the Premier's Department motor services branch. He has held that position under various title and descriptions ever since, serving four Governors and three Premiers with loyalty and distinction. He retires as Director of Transport Services with an encyclopaedic knowledge of VIP fleets and their operation, leaving an impressive record of official visits successfully managed, including visits by the Queen, the Presidents of the United States of America and China, and heads of state and government from across the world, each of those trips winning praise for John's expertise from the foreign governments concerned.

John also leaves an impressive record as an expert on the use of vehicles for police surveillance, counter-terrorism measures for official vehicles and fleet management. Perhaps his biggest test came during the

Olympics, with an enormous transportation and security challenge presented by the presence not only of Juan Antonio Samaranch and the International Olympic Committee, but of heads of state and government and other high-level representatives, including the daughter of the President of the United States and my good friend Henry Kissinger—I thought I would test the honourable member for Liverpool; it is a game of anticipating the response!

As head of the New South Wales transport team, John delivered a flawless result, as any observer of the Olympics would confirm. It was one of the many quiet success stories of those memorable spring days. John Rixon is entitled to look back on his 40 years of service with great pride in a job well done. It is a complex exercise to put a car fleet together, secure it, maintain it, and recruit and train the drivers—a job he has handled with calm assurance and professionalism and which has now come to an honourable end. I am sure the whole House joins me in wishing John and his wife, Rosemary, a long, happy and healthy retirement.

Mr JOHN BROGDEN (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [2.25 p.m.]: With the retirement of John Rixon I predict the imminent collapse of Cabinet government in New South Wales! For many years John has headed the second cabinet in New South Wales. Those in this Chamber who think we run New South Wales, have another think coming. For the past 20 or more years John has performed a critical role, as many of my colleagues would know. I join the Premier in praising his outstanding professionalism. John served the Liberal Party and The Nationals in a professional manner during their many years in government. On their behalf I thank him for those many years of service and wish him and Rosemary a wonderful retirement. In this time of people enjoying shorter careers in the public sector, John's service of more than 40 years is to be acknowledged and admired. I join the Premier in noting his outstanding achievements, congratulating him on them, and wishing him and Rosemary a wonderful retirement.

AVIAN INFLUENZA

Ministerial Statement

Mr MORRIS IEMMA (Lakemba—Minister for Health) [2.27 p.m.]: News reports from Vietnam this morning have advised that a further two people from the country's northern region have been hospitalised with suspected avian influenza, or bird flu as it more commonly known. According to official reports from the Vietnam Health Ministry, 21 people have now been detected as having contracted bird flu since the latest outbreak in December 2004, with 12 fatalities recorded. According to the latest update from the World Health Organization [WHO] 55 cases have been detected and 42 people have died since February 2004 as a result of contracting the virus.

Influenza viruses that infect birds are called avian influenza viruses. It is understood that exposure to infected poultry and their faeces or dust or soil contaminated with faeces can result in human infection. However, the WHO advises that eating cooked chicken or eggs does not result in infection. In the past year more than 1.5 million fowls have been culled in an effort to prevent the spread of the disease, but the remaining threat of potential outbreaks is being acknowledged across the world. In an article in *The Scotsman* newspaper today, the country's chief medical officer, Dr Mac Armstrong, warned that the number of deaths in the United Kingdom resulting from a flu pandemic could range anywhere from 50,000 to 500,000.

A human vaccine has not yet been developed for the new avian influenza strain and, although work on this has commenced, it is likely to take several months for a vaccine to be produced. I can assure members of the House that New South Wales is actively contributing to the national surveillance measures and our infectious disease and public health experts stand ready to respond to any threat of a potential outbreak in New South Wales, and, indeed, to work with the Commonwealth. In April 2003, the Government established the severe acute respiratory syndrome [SARS] task force, chaired by the eminent clinician Professor Ron Penny. The task force set a new benchmark in contingency planning, education and general preparedness for a potential infectious disease outbreak. It brought together clinical expertise in the areas of infectious disease, public health, virology, intensive care and respiratory medicine. It combined that with the logistical expertise of our emergency service and counter-disaster unit personnel.

The SARS task force surveyed health facilities across New South Wales and identified around 1,000 beds, 460 isolation beds and almost 600 acute beds that could be quarantined for patients in the event of a major disease outbreak. New South Wales stands ready to invoke the recommendations and plans of that task force and reconvene an expert advisory panel in the event of a serious threat from avian influenza. I will advise the House further of any further developments in this matter.

PETITIONS

Alstonville Bypass

Petition requesting that the Alstonville Bypass be completed by the end of 2006, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

Gaming Machine Tax

Petitions opposing the decision to increase poker machine tax, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock, Mrs Judy Hopwood, Mr Malcolm Kerr, Mr Steven Pringle and Mr Andrew Tink**.

Kurnell Sandmining

Petition opposing sandmining on the Kurnell Peninsula, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

Lake Wollumboola Recreational Use

Petition opposing any restriction of the recreational use of Lake Wollumboola, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Crime Sentencing

Petition requesting changes in legislation to allow for tougher sentences for crime, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Jervis Bay Marine Park Fishing Competitions

Petition requesting a zoning policy amendment to preclude fishing competitions, by both spear and line, in the Jervis Bay Marine Park, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Breast Screening Funding

Petition requesting effective breast screening for women and maintenance of funding to BreastScreen NSW, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Fairfield Hospital Men's Health Unit

Petition requesting a men's health unit for Fairfield Hospital, received from **Mr Carl Scully**.

Hospital Red Code Protocol

Petition requesting changes to the hospital red code protocol to allow patients to receive urgent medical attention, received from **Mr Carl Scully**.

Cremorne Community Mental Health Centre

Petition requesting the retention of the Cremorne Community Mental Health Centre, and the upgrading of the facilities at Chatswood, received from **Mrs Jillian Skinner**.

Nowra Bypass

Petition requesting an appropriate bypass for Nowra, after community consultation, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Oxford Street Clearway

Petition requesting removal of the Oxford Street clearway and imposition of a 40 kilometres-per-hour speed limit in Oxford Street, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Forster-Tuncurry Cycleways

Petition requesting the building of cycleways in the Forster-Tuncurry area, received from **Mr John Turner**.

Newcastle Rail Services

Petitions requesting the retention and improvement of Newcastle rail services, received from **Mr Bryce Gaudry, Mr Jeff Hunter, Mr John Mills, Mr Milton Orkopoulos and Mr John Price.**

South Coast Rail Services

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

Southern Tablelands Rail Services

Petition opposing any reduction in rail services on the Southern Tablelands line, received from **Ms Katrina Hodgkinson.**

Pets on Public Transport

Petition requesting that pets be allowed on public transport, received from **Ms Clover Moore.**

Murwillumbah to Casino Rail Service

Petitions requesting the retention of all CountryLink rail services from Murwillumbah to Casino, received from **Mr Neville Newell and Mr Donald Page.**

CountryLink Rail Services

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

Mid North Coast Airconditioned Buses

Petition requesting that the new airconditioned buses assigned to the mid North Coast not be removed, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner.**

Milton-Ulladulla Public School Infrastructure

Petition requesting community consultation in the planning, funding and building of appropriate public school infrastructure in the Milton-Ulladulla area and surrounding districts, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock.**

Adult Training, Learning and Support Program

Petition opposing changes the Adult Training, Learning and Support Program, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood.**

Skilled Migrant Placement Program

Petition requesting that the Skilled Migrant Placement Program be restored, received from **Ms Clover Moore.**

Mature Workers Program

Petition requesting that the Mature Workers Program be restored, received from **Ms Clover Moore.**

Shoalhaven River Water Extraction

Petition opposing the extraction of water from the Shoalhaven River to support Sydney's water supply, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock.**

Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme

Petition objecting to the criteria for country cancer patients to qualify for the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, received from **Mr Andrew Stoner.**

Tweed Shire Council Inquiry

Petition requesting the immediate cessation of the public inquiry into the Tweed Shire Council, received from **Mr Andrew Fraser**.

Water-Access-Only Property Policy

Petition requesting a review of the water-access-only property policy, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

MACQUARIE FIELDS RIOTS

Mr JOHN BROGDEN: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Can the Premier confirm that there was a communications breakdown between listening device technicians and frontline police, allowing Jesse Kelly to walk free from Macquarie Fields Police Station last Saturday?

Mr BOB CARR: My advice from the police is that there is no basis whatsoever for that assertion. Let me say this: The release of information yesterday has compromised what was a very promising investigation—

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

Mr BOB CARR: The release of information yesterday has compromised what was a very promising investigation into offenders who were believed responsible for violent crimes. Those investigations were going well until the Leader of the Opposition blundered in and announced to the world what was going on.

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

Mr BOB CARR: His one defence yesterday was: "a media commentator said it first". As if an office holder in this Parliament has no responsibility to back the police!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order. I call the honourable member for North Shore to order.

Mr BOB CARR: What a contrast with the responsible attitude—surely a model for any conservative leader—taken this morning by the Prime Minister of Australia, who said about the police, "They have my 150 per cent support. I think it's a very tough job. I think there are too many people in our community who are only too ready to condemn the police." Those words came from the Prime Minister of Australia today. He said what the Minister for Police and I have said, that is, in tough circumstances we have an obligation to support the police because it is important for their morale and makes their job easier. The police did have an operation. It was an undercover operation to garner information not just about this character but also about his associates and associations. To have the Leader of the Opposition stand up yesterday and blab it to the world—to the media, to the entire Parliament and to the entire community—was a monumental error of judgment by him. If he cannot handle the responsibilities of his job he ought to give his job to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr BOB CARR: His juvenile recklessness compromised a police operation.

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

Mr BOB CARR: His juvenile recklessness, his brash display of inexperience, compromised a police operation, and the police operation was serious.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much interjection and calling out. A number of members have been called to order. Those members are now deemed to be on three calls to order. The Premier will be heard in silence.

Mr BOB CARR: The Commissioner of Police said about the police officers, "I support the decisions that they have made over each of the days that the events in Macquarie Fields have been occurring. I believe the approach by the police has been appropriate. Command line officers have got to make decisions there and then on the spot." Peter Renfrey, Secretary of the New South Wales Police Association, said, "We've had people out there every night to ensure that the proper resources are being provided to police and we're satisfied that that is so." Bob Pritchard, President of the Police Association, said yesterday that the Leader of the Opposition should "keep out of our business and let the police get on with their job". That is the view of the secretary and the president of the police union. They are telling the Leader of the Opposition to keep out of it. "Keep out of our business", say the police, "and let frontline police get on with the job."

Last year, when the Leader of the Opposition was critical of investigators working on a major investigation into child abuse, Bob Pritchard said, "These are the same committed police officers who worked for years to smash this ring of child abusers and protect the community. To suggest these officers should all of them be stood down because of what one was found to have done was an insult." He said also, "I call on Mr Brogden to withdraw his comments and put his support for the child protection team on the public record." Would anyone believe that the Opposition has more wisdom to apply to the problems in Macquarie Fields than experienced police officers? I doubt if anyone would subscribe to that. The Leader of the Opposition blundered into it yesterday. He was acutely embarrassed. He caused distress to the police on the front line. He should apologise and get out of police business. I thank the House for its attention.

Mr Andrew Tink: Point of order: According to yesterday's *Hansard* it was the Premier who revealed that the listening device was in the home of the criminal. It was not the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition did not say it was in the criminal's home. The Premier was the one who said, "The listening device is in the criminal's home." He blew it, not the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Epping will resume his seat. I place him on three calls to order.

GUIDELINES FOR END-OF-LIFE CARE AND DECISION-MAKING

Ms NOREEN HAY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health. What is the Government's response to a report on the issue of end-of-life care?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: Every day in public hospitals across New South Wales, health care professionals work under great pressure to provide outstanding care and comfort to the dying. As medical researchers continue to develop new cures and therapies, the provision of health care at the end of a patient's life remains one of the most difficult issues confronting clinical staff. Clinicians make life and death decisions on a daily basis. The complex moral legal and ethical issues confronted at the end of a patient's life have recently been highlighted in cases of patients who have suffered severe brain injuries being the subject of legal disputes over the ultimate decision to discontinue treatment. These cases were ultimately tested in the courts and received prominent media attention.

Honourable members will recall the unprecedented attack on the professionalism of St George Hospital Intensive Care Unit staff, which caused considerable anxiety for the experienced and hardworking staff of that unit, both medical and nursing. The difficult decision-making process that families and loved ones undertake when terminally ill patients approach the end of their life often arise at a time when families and carers are least equipped to handle them. The Government has developed a new set of guidelines that encompass the rights and roles of those involved in the care of those patients. The best end-of-life care decisions are made with open and early communication in an environment of compassion and trust. The new Guidelines for End-of-Life Care and Decision-Making seek to make this possible by providing a framework for shared decision approach between health professionals and families.

The new guidelines recognise that a patient's wishes and values are central to appropriate end-of-life decisions, and uphold the rights of competent patients to make their own decisions about their treatment. They also recognise the ability of treating health professionals, in consultation with the patient's families, to withhold or withdraw certain life-prolonging treatments where expert opinion determines that treatment has no real therapeutic benefit. The guidelines aim to end confusion between both the public and health professionals about what is morally and legally permissible, and contrast that against the illegal practices of euthanasia or assisted suicide. The focus of these guidelines is on building a consensus between the patient, family, carers and health professionals, particularly in cases where patients have no capacity to decide for themselves about life sustaining treatment.

The guidelines are built upon seven foundation principles. They are respect for life and care in dying; the right to know and to choose; appropriate decision making about the provision of life sustaining treatment, a collaborative approach to care; transparency and accountability; non-discriminatory care; and the rights and obligations of healthcare professionals. The new guidelines have been developed following extensive consultation with a range of community and professional stakeholder groups and the wider community. In the past four years during the public consultation more than 1,000 responses were received from health professionals, service providers, religious leaders, and members of the public.

Amendments were made to the guidelines in response to submissions received from 31 organisations. The groups that participated and assisted in the drawing-up of these guidelines include the Australian Medical Association, the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, the Australian Health Ethics Committee, the Office of the Public Guardian, and the Plunkett Centre for Ethics in Health Care, the Palliative Care Association, and the New South Wales College of Nursing. In most situations where a patient is dying, the patient, family and treating team readily come to an agreement on appropriate medical management. However, as the St George Hospital case and other cases have highlighted, disagreements can arise regarding treatment decisions, or about other aspects of end-of-life care.

It is not uncommon to have disagreements between members of the health care team, or between the patient and the patient's family. In these cases the wishes of the patient must always be paramount. The guidelines contain recommendations for resolving disputes, including giving families the time to seek further discussion or support, obtaining a second medical opinion, the use of a time-limited treatment trial, the use of a third-party facilitator, or, perhaps, the transfer of the patient. Another important issue covered by these new guidelines involves requests for continuing treatment. Sometimes families of patients without decision-making capacity may seek continued treatment in situations where they might have an unrealistic expectation about what can be achieved.

The situation can be exacerbated when the family is not engaged early in treatment planning. Care of terminally ill patients that is lawful never involves an intention to end a patient's life. The distinction between euthanasia, assisted suicide and lawful decisions about end-of-life care is absolutely clear. Both euthanasia and assisted suicide are crimes in New South Wales. End-of-life care is difficult, and fraught with emotional, ethical and moral complexities. These issues were well summarised by intensive care specialist Professor Malcolm Fischer, who said about his profession,

The thing that people who work in intensive care like doing most is to make people better. You should judge an intensive care unit perhaps by not just the survival, but by the quality of dying in those whose best interests it is to die.

The guidelines I am releasing today will help patients, families and health care professionals to embark on a process of decision making that respects patient's wishes. It allows terminally ill patients to die with as much comfort and dignity as possible.

MR BOB MACKENZIE MEDICAL TREATMENT

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Why has a quadriplegic in Coffs Harbour, Bob Mackenzie, been left to languish on the Minister's public hospital waiting list, confined to bed for three years after developing a bedsore, including the past 12 months waiting for further surgery to fix an open wound?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I will obtain a report.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr BARRY COLLIER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Community Services. What is the latest information on child protection in New South Wales, and related matters?

Ms REBA MEAGHER: The Government has committed an additional \$1.2 billion to reform child protection in New South Wales. We will recruit an additional 875 caseworkers as part of this plan. This morning I met with 78 of the most recent caseworkers to have completed their training. The decision to increase funding to Community Services came after a staggering 461 per cent increase in child protection reports over seven years. Last year there were more than 185,000 reports about child protection concerns. That is more than 500 reports a day. Our new workers are needed more now than ever and the Government is determined to ensure they have the best skills and knowledge to do their jobs.

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: More than half of the new caseworkers we have recruited will focus on early intervention programs for families. We know that supporting families early prevents situations reaching a crisis, and the whole community benefits. Despite being only 18 months into a 5-year reform process, the Government is making progress. The first year of our reforms saw an additional 173 caseworkers on the ground, delivering frontline services. In addition, 17 new caseworkers have been recruited to joint investigative response teams to work with police.

These people work alongside police to investigate serious physical and sexual assault of children and young people. Honourable members may recall that in December 2004 the New South Wales Ombudsman released a report into reviewable child deaths. The report was tabled in Parliament and focused on the deaths of 83 children who died in circumstances relating to abuse or neglect, or in suspicious situations.

The report reviewed deaths that occurred between 1 December 2002 and 31 December 2003. Of the 83 children, 53 were either known to the DOCS or had a sibling known to the DOCS in the three years prior to their death. The report contained 18 recommendations directed at the Department of Community Services. At the time the report was released, the former Minister announced that the Government accepted each of the report's recommendations. In the main, the recommendations are generally consistent with the reforms already under way. This week the department has provided its initial detailed response to the Ombudsman on action taken, or proposed to be taken, on the recommendations. Over the coming weeks ongoing discussions will be held with the Ombudsman to refine both the recommendations and the initial response, to ensure that our efforts are targeted to gain the greatest improvements possible.

The recommendations are aimed at improving the systems and procedures that support staff in undertaking the important work of child protection, ensuring Community Services staff have the capacity to respond effectively to the needs of children at risk of harm, and ensuring Community Services works effectively with police, health professionals and teachers to respond to child abuse. A number of community service centres are also trialling new procedures for better managing high-risk cases to ensure that the most vulnerable children receive appropriate child protection intervention. A great deal has been done since 2002 and 2003 when the child deaths referred to in the Ombudsman's report occurred and the reform program commenced.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will come to order.

[Interruption]

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

Ms REBA MEAGHER: Community Services is helping more families than ever before and is better able to respond to cases of abuse and neglect. Much work is being done, but there is much more to be done. The achievements and initiatives I have outlined would not be possible without a firm commitment from the Government. The Carr Government is fully committed to improving the child protection system in New South Wales, building better communities and keeping children safe.

HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR STRATHFIELD CORRUPTION ALLEGATION

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Given that it cost corrupt developer Michael Saklaoui only \$2,500 to bribe Alfred Tsang for a rezoning, what did corrupt developer Saklaoui, corrupt former mayor John Abi-Saab and discredited developer Anne Bechara get when they gave the honourable member for Strathfield \$7,000?

Mr BOB CARR: Question time provides an opportunity for members to talk to the government of the day about all the great matters of state, the great policy issues. Just three questions into question time today, Opposition members are into the gutter, with a question that might have been referred to the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC], which is completing its inquiry into Strathfield council. If the Opposition believed there was one grain of an allegation to be directed at our trusted colleague the honourable member for Strathfield, it would have referred the allegation straight to the ICAC. But the Opposition did not do that. Opposition members did not believe in their material. So, running out of material on Macquarie Fields—with no policies, no plans, and no ideas—they dredge up this pathetic question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Southern Highlands to order

Mr BOB CARR: The answer is very simple. If members opposite want to make an allegation of corruption against any colleague on this side of the House about a matter that is currently before the ICAC, they should immediately direct the allegation to the ICAC. The commission is currently conducting an inquiry into Strathfield council. If members opposite think they have something to add to that inquiry, they should take it there. I cannot believe that two weeks after the resumption of the Parliament the Opposition's question time larder is empty and its members are making a second attempt at something they tried to inflate last week or earlier this week. I cannot believe it. Why are they not working away at their policy areas? Opposition members have not come up with one policy.

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

Mr BOB CARR: Yesterday when I mentioned John Valder's letter in the *Sydney Morning Herald* about a canal from northern New South Wales spanning 12 rivers to bring water to Sydney, members opposite got rather excited; they thought it was something they could get their teeth into. But we have not had a policy from them. We have not had an idea; we have had not had an alternative approach to running the State. The Opposition does not have a plan. The councillors who resigned the other day would have been sacked by us as soon as we got the tick-off from the ICAC. Under the legislation—the legislation that we passed—enabling the dismissal of particular councillors—

[Interruption]

Because the legislation requires that the ICAC request or approve it, you fool! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee was in this place when we amended the Act, yet he does not know how it works. In the long history of sad and sorry Coalition Oppositions in this Parliament, none is worse led, more incompetent, lazier, or more lacking in ideas, policies or plans than the mob opposite.

NEW SOUTH WALES CANCER COUNCIL REVIEW

Ms MARIE ANDREWS: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer). What is the latest information on the New South Wales Cancer Council and related matters?

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I thank the honourable member for Peats for her question and her ongoing interest in cancer services and cancer control in this State. New South Wales is in the enviable position of having two peak bodies driving the cancer control effort across the State. We have the Cancer Council, which has done a terrific job, and the Cancer Institute. The Cancer Council remains our leading philanthropic body; it has a very strong brand. I will say more about that in a moment. The Cancer Institute, which was established in 2003 following the passage of legislation through both Houses of this Parliament after receiving unanimous support, has a different role. It was established as a conduit between the Government, the health system, cancer professionals and researchers in the implementation of programs and initiatives inside and outside the health system.

The aim of the Cancer Institute is to reduce the incidence of cancer and increase survival rates, improve the quality of life of cancer patients, and provide expertise and advice on cancer control. Since its establishment the institute has produced a statewide cancer plan, a comprehensive plan that involved the State's hospitals, area health services and research bodies, as well as the Cancer Council, in determining the way forward and where the biggest gains will be in cancer control in this State. Two days ago I announced that the Cancer Institute has not only consolidated the registers, the survival register and the pap smear register, but also is developing a new register for cancer services. The Government recently established Screening NSW, which will enhance breast screening and cervical cancer screening, and develop a bowel screening program and prostate screening program.

Unfortunately, there is substantial overlap in the Cancer Council Act and Cancer Institute Act. The Cancer Council Act contains a section that provides for establishment of a Cancer Institute. That Act also provides that some of the Cancer Institute's functions relate to co-ordinating the cancer control effort amongst the State's hospitals, a function that is clearly now being carried out by the Cancer Institute.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Mineral Resources to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: In order to ensure that we have complementarity and a unified fight against cancer, I wish to inform the House that I have established a review panel to examine the future role of the Cancer Council in New South Wales, including its most effective role in the context of also having a Cancer Institute. The Cancer Institute is unique. In this State, unlike the situation in any other State, we have a body co-ordinating clinical enhancements, the effort against cancer, and where the biggest gains are. In fact, only last week I met with Tony Abbott to discuss this. We discussed the fact that the Federal Government is considering where to spend its cancer funding. I pointed out to Tony Abbott that New South Wales has an overview of the system that other States do not have.

In fact, yesterday the Premier announced a \$3.7 million 5-year research project for prostate cancer, which involves six bodies: the Garvan, the CSIRO, St Vincent's, Royal Prince Alfred, Prince of Wales and Westmead. That is the sort of thing we can now do because we have got a co-ordinated effort on cancer. But I think it is important now to look at and strengthen the role of the Cancer Council. I am a great supporter of the Cancer Council so I have created this review, which will be chaired by Professor Kerry Phelps, the former President of the Australian Medical Association, who has a detailed knowledge of the medical system in this State and an understanding of governance of these organisations.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will come to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: We have also appointed, with Professor Phelps, Professor Rob Sutherland from the Garvan, and Ms Kate Harrison, a senior partner of Gilbert and Tobin, who also is a cancer survivor and understands a great deal about the governance of these sorts of bodies, having served on other medical research bodies. I have discussed this review at length with the board of the Cancer Council and the council resolved to welcome the review.

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

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The review is about looking at what the role of the Cancer Council should be and what the particular governance model should be. I have said and made it quite clear to the Cancer Council and to the review panel that I think it is very important we preserve the independent advocacy role of the Cancer Council, whatever form it takes. It is important that the council has a determining role over the grant that it gives and I think it is important that we strengthen the brand of the Cancer Council and its philanthropic capacity. In fact, the terms of reference are as follows:

To consider and advise on:

1. The most effective role of the Cancer Council NSW in contributing to cancer control;
2. Collaborative and complementary process and programs between the Cancer Council NSW and the Cancer Institute NSW, to optimise cancer control and philanthropy;
3. The best legislative basis for the Cancer Council NSW to perform its role;
4. Governance structures for the Cancer Council NSW; and
5. Related matters.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: This is about the Minister trying to pick winners.

Mr SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

Mr Brad Hazzard: This should be bipartisan. The Minister should have approached us about an issue like this because we would have let him know exactly what people think about the Cancer Council.

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

Mr Brad Hazzard: The Minister is not backing the Cancer Council; he never has since the day he arrived as Minister.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat or I will direct the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms to remove him from the Chamber.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: I have a responsibility to work to ensure that the vehicles we have to beat cancer in this State are the most effective possible.

Mr Brad Hazzard: You are going to destroy the Cancer Council.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: Not at all. The Cancer Council is a vital part of the war against cancer.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind the honourable member for Wakehurst that he is on three calls to order.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: But when it is seen that some of the council's functions have been completely superseded, it is about time someone independently reviewed it. For example, their Act says that they should create a cancer institute. That has been done. Their Act says that they should co-ordinate cancer services between hospitals. That has been done by the institute. It is time we reviewed these functions, and that is what the Cancer Council has agreed to. The Cancer Council raises \$18 million annually from donations in New South Wales. We want to strengthen its ability to raise money in New South Wales. Its total budget is about \$36 million and it has a very important role. As I have said to the Cancer Council, and I have said it to others, the council should remain in charge of deciding where specific grants go; it should continue to have a determinative role in relation to its own grants.

This is about role focus and a unified cancer control effort. I have discussed the panel and the whole concept with the chair of the board, and there is a consensus that it is time to reform the process. The Opposition wants to create havoc because it would like to see the brand of the Cancer Council weakened. I do not want to see that; I want to see it strengthened. I want to see a complementary role that overall has a marriage value with the Cancer Institute so we maximise the war against cancer. But the Opposition does not care; it will do anything for a cheap political point. After the stupid things the honourable member for Wakehurst said earlier, he might be a nice bloke but he is a dill.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The Minister is lying. He knows that we support the Cancer Council. He cannot stand there and call us liars.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. I again warn him that he is already on three calls to order. A repetition of that behaviour will result in his removal from the Chamber. At the conclusion of today's proceedings the House will adjourn for two weeks, and I remind the honourable member for Wakehurst that any order I make may exclude him from the precincts of the House for that period.

Mr FRANK SARTOR: The Cancer Council runs a lot of programs, such as the accommodation program—I mentioned Lillier Lodge in Wagga Wagga, which the council has part funded—the Cancer Helpline, and Cancer Council Connect. There are myriad programs which do very well and which we might even be able to strengthen. There are a whole lot of other potential programs the council may have a role in and I think its independent advocacy role is absolutely vital. I think this is an important next step in this continuing war against cancer. I would ask the Opposition to be constructive about this because it is about enhancing the total effort.

DESIGNER OUTLETS CENTRE, LIVERPOOL, CLOSURE

Mr ANDREW TINK: My question without notice is directed to the Assistant Minister for Planning. Given the Minister said on Tuesday that there is no conflict between her and Bob Carr's chief of staff, Graeme Wedderburn, on whether she was told to "stick to the rules" over Orange Grove, did the Minister lie to the public on 25 August 2004 when she said, "He never gave that directive to me", or did Wedderburn lie to the Orange Grove committee on 17 August 2004 when he said he told the Minister to "stick to the rules"? Who is telling the truth, the Minister or Graeme Wedderburn?

Ms DIANE BEAMER: It is a well-established convention not to provide running commentaries on matters before the Independent Commission against Corruption.

INTEREST RATES

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Small Business. What is the Government's response to community concerns about the impact of the interest rate rise on small business in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The Government has debated the issue of families in New South Wales and mortgage interest increases. We note the Premier and the Minister for Housing have spoken about this issue this week, but, of course, this question relates to another important section of our community in New South Wales—the small business sector—which employs about a million people and, indeed, talks about a double whammy in relation to interest rate increases. Those people will bear the increased cost in regard to their mortgages and those people will bear the increased cost in regard to their borrowings as small businesses.

News that the Federal Government's promises on interest rates were all lies is no surprise. But the rise in interest rates is a blow to our hardworking small business people. Half the borrowings of our small business people are at variable interest rates, and those people will be hit hard by this week's rise and future rises in interest rates. Businesses with borrowings of \$200,000 will pay an additional \$500 per year. Businesses with borrowings of \$500,000 will pay an additional \$1,250 per year—money they would rather put into growing their business. Businesses have been hit doubly hard by the Federal Government, despite its wild election promises on interest rates. Not only are interest rates on the rise, but the economy is slowing drastically, particularly in the housing industry. A critical issue for the small business sector is consumer confidence.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Consumers will tighten their belts, increasing the impact of this Federal Government's interest rate rise on the business sector. This will have an especially profound impact on business, particularly those industries heavily reliant on the housing construction industry. The Housing Industry Association's chief economist, Simon Tennent, said that higher interest rates at this stage of the new building cycle will be a major blow for Australia's home builders, materials manufacturers and suppliers.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Just about every member in this place will know a chippie, a sparkie or a plumber—in home-based businesses particularly—who works in the building sector, and just about every member in this place knows that that chippie, that sparkie or that plumber will know the impact it will have on home-based business operators throughout the State. When consumers wind back their spending, business has to respond by winding back investment. This will exacerbate the slowdown.

The members of the Liberal Party-National Coalition are no friends of small business. They have no plans, no ideas, no policies, and they are no friends of the small business sector. This is a kick in the guts for one of the hardest working sectors of our economy. Yesterday's interest rate rise should be a matter of shame to the Coalition. Indeed, the level of interjection indicates embarrassment and shame that their mates in Canberra have put all this pressure not only on families through their mortgages, but on small business operators as well.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: John Howard said that he never made any promises about interest rates. That is not what the voters remember. Our small business people are resilient and intelligent. I encourage them to continue to tap into the assistance programs offered by this Government through its strong and detailed plans to help small business grow and prosper in New South Wales. As the honourable member for Camden and many Government members know, the Government is working very hard to encourage and support small business in New South Wales.

GUNNEDAH AMBULANCE STATION

Mr PETER DRAPER: My question is to the Minister for Health. As the Minister has now received over 2,300 letters of support for the construction of a new ambulance station in Gunnedah, will he advise the Gunnedah community of whether their efforts to secure the new station have been successful?

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: I thank the honourable member for Tamworth for his efforts on behalf of his constituents in Gunnedah in relation to the ambulance station and note the more than 2,000 letters in response to his efforts to have the ambulance station upgraded.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: We have 2,000 signatures on our mental health petition.

Mr MORRIS IEMMA: You might want to use the telephone as well. I can advise the House that Gunnedah has first-rate staff, with seven highly qualified and trained Ambulance Service professionals and two

very modern vehicles, which enable those officers to provide a first-rate service to the community of Gunnedah. What is not adequate is the ambulance station, and I appreciate the efforts of the honourable member for Tamworth, who has taken a constructive approach to upgrading the ambulance station. The message has been received loud and clear. I have seen Gunnedah ambulance station and he can report back to his constituents that I am taking the upgrade of the station very seriously. There is clear and overwhelming support in the community for the upgrade of that station and I give the honourable member for Tamworth a commitment that I will be in a position in the very near future to give him advice on the results of his efforts to have the station upgraded.

I can add further to my report and give him a progress report on the Gunnedah Medical Service, which I opened a few months ago in his presence. This is a \$320,000 addition to health services for Gunnedah. For the first time in many years outreach specialist obstetric and gynaecological services will be provided in clinics at that medical centre. Tamworth hospital is the principal referral hospital, which provides support to Gunnedah District Hospital. As part of the Government's strong and detailed plan to attract specialist doctors to rural New South Wales, for the first time in many years an outreach service in obstetrics will be provided in clinics at the Gunnedah Medical Centre, collocated with Gunnedah District Hospital. I also inform the House that Aboriginal medical services have taken up residence in the Gunnedah Medical Centre and have commenced providing additional services from that centre. I will be happy to report back to the honourable member for Tamworth in the not too distant future on the results of his efforts to upgrade Gunnedah ambulance station.

REGIONAL TOURISM

Mr JOHN BARTLETT: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Tourism and Sport and Recreation. What is the latest information on efforts to promote regional tourism?

Ms SANDRA NORI: Less than a month ago we launched a suite of five advertisements for regional New South Wales. It was the first time that the five advertisements were put to air as a suite, although one had been to air last year for a short time, that is, Heart of Country. Over the next 12 months those advertisements will be rolled out on an individual basis, promoting their individual regions. The next one going to air for a three-week period will be the advertisement for the North Coast. The purpose of the advertisements and the timing of them on television will be to extend the shoulder season, which is why the advertisement for the North Coast will be aired in April.

This is not just a series of television advertisements. The advertisements accompany a suite of activity, including web-based activity, web marketing and print, which industry can join. It is a \$4 million strategic campaign about long-term growth. These advertisements are a piece of marketing infrastructure. We feel that they will last a minimum of three years, if not five to seven years, which is a hefty investment into the future. We took footage all over New South Wales and 7,200 kilometres were traversed to get footage that can be used to tweak and manipulate the advertisements over time. We completely replenished our stills collection for regional New South Wales—necessary revamping, involving 20 days on the road.

The television campaign also reflects a change in strategy, brought about by the instability in tourism over the past couple of years. September 11 created a lack of propensity for people to travel overseas or, indeed, visit Australia. More important, the collapse of Ansett meant that people were much more inclined to get in their cars and holiday within Australia and New South Wales. After that came the arrival of true competition between the low-cost carriers, which also influences travel patterns. Destinations like Ballina and Coffs Harbour will do extremely well with competition between low-cost carriers. These factors have not necessarily played themselves out completely in the marketplace.

The challenge for New South Wales has always been that it is a very large State, with many diverse experiences, which are hard to encapsulate in one brand or one marketing message. In the past we have concentrated on Queensland and Victoria and, although we shall continue to do that, this campaign is firmly aimed at the largest market in the country, that is, Sydney—the largest population base in this country. This is about getting Sydney out to the bush. The other change is that many regions want to promote themselves as individual regions. We have done a clean sweep of the State and reduced it down to five quintessential consumer experiences that make intuitive sense to the consumer—the North Coast, the South Coast, High Country, Heart of Country and, of course, The Outback. We have used locals as narrators. In particular, I thank Felicity Urquhart, who is the narrator for Heart of Country. Her talent as a well-known country music singer has added great prestige and coverage for the advertisement.

I also thank Paul Brown from The Outback, Sol Ramana-Clarke from the South Coast, Bobbie Hodge from the North Coast, and Mark Troha from the High Country. While the advertisements refer to, and show

footage of, specific country towns, they are about exciting interest in the quintessential experience that can be had in the regions. We have received some promising feedback about the first part of the campaign.

[Interruption]

I point out that the Heart of Country essentially covers seats of The Nationals, except for the two Independents. I am hardly doing the Labor Party a favour. The Heart of Country television campaign [TVC] lifted interest in a country New South Wales holiday for 75 per cent of respondents; after seeing the TVC, two in three surveyed considered a holiday in New South Wales very or reasonably appealing; and all respondents recognised it as country New South Wales within two viewings of the TVC. In other words, the advertisement worked well in strongly branding that territory. Of course, it is too early to do similar research on the advertisements that went to air a couple of weeks ago, but we will be following through on that.

We have received some positive feedback from consumers, who said things like, "When I see the ad it gives me a yearning for the rural lifestyle", "It awakens the urge to travel there", and "Fun, relaxing and adventurous". We have received very positive feedback from the industry. In particular, Mr Andrew Burns, who is on Tourism Australia and is the wholesaler for New South Wales holidays, talked about his business improving and growing. We received a cute response from someone who wants to buy the compendium DVD of the advertisement—and we will give it to them for free. I will talk to members in rural New South Wales about the next part of the strategy.

We created the product, did the research, and paid for the crew to go out and get the footage and produce the advertisements. As I said, that is a piece of infrastructure. We have the logos and the tag lines, and we now have the opportunities. We have 45-second advertisements for the cinema, 30-second advertisements for television, and 15-second advertisements. There is nothing stopping industry and local government getting together and creating something that is bigger than the sum of their parts and, if they like, buying a 15-second advertisement for what we used to call the mid North Coast, the Sapphire Coast or whatever. One alternative is for local government to show support, as it does on the South Coast. I commend local government on the South Coast for handing over some money, which allows us to buy more air time on television.

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

Ms SANDRA NORI: In the past the various regions and local government have behaved in a sibling rivalry kind of way, which meant that many resources were diluted and fragmented rather than aligned and magnified. I started yesterday with a discussion with the honourable member for Port Macquarie about this issue, and I will be talking with the honourable member for Myall Lakes, the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, the honourable member for Ballina and the honourable member for the Tweed about getting all local government and industry on the North Coast under this umbrella. We have done the hard yards. Let us get out there, co-operate, put more dollars into the kitty, and extend the life and value of these advertisements for everyone's region.

Questions without notice concluded.

HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR STRATHFIELD CORRUPTION ALLEGATION

Personal Explanation

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE, by leave: Earlier today in question time the Deputy Leader of the Opposition made a personal reference to my name. I treat with absolute contempt, and I reject, the assertion of any improper conduct on my part. I believe that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has impugned my good name and character. The ICAC is currently investigating—

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: You have ruled consistently that when members make a personal explanation they can simply say that their character has been impugned, why it has been impugned, and that they reject it. According to your rulings over the past two years, they cannot debate the subject matter.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Gosford will resume his seat. The honourable member for Strathfield has said she believes her character has been impugned. She was about to give reasons why she believes that is so when the honourable member for Gosford took a point of order. At this stage I do not uphold the point of order. The honourable member for Strathfield has the call.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: As I said, I believe that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has impugned my reputation and good name, and I totally reject the assertions he made. Not only has he impugned my good name and character, but by doing so he has impugned the character of the people who elected me, that is, the people of Strathfield. As honourable members know, the ICAC is investigating Strathfield council. As the Premier said earlier, if the Opposition has any evidence whatsoever it should take allegations of that nature to the ICAC. I am not aware of any evidence to that inquiry that includes any improper reference to me. Clearly the Opposition is frustrated, and obviously this is a fishing expedition. I demand a retraction and an immediate apology.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I would like to know what the honourable member for Strathfield did with the \$7,000.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr Carl Scully agreed to:

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Tuesday 22 March 2005 at 2.15 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr CARL SCULLY (Smithfield—Minister for Police) [3.46 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the introduction forthwith of the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Evidence) Bill, up to and including the Minister's second reading speech..

Debate on the bill will be adjourned after the Attorney General has delivered his second reading speech.

Mr ANDREW TINK (Epping) [3.47 p.m.]: This motion relates to an important bill and as such the Coalition does not oppose it. However, I hope and trust that during his second reading speech the Attorney General will explain the relevance of the bill and the debate that lead up to it. In May last year the Coalition proposed the very same solution—to assist in preventing the victims of rape from having to give evidence in retrials—that the Attorney General is now putting before the House. In May last year I asked the Attorney General a question without notice on this point. I put it to him that transcripts and videos of the rape victim's evidence at the trial should be allowed in a retrial to prevent a rape victim from having to give evidence a second time. When I put that to the Attorney General he attacked the Opposition for having the temerity to have a policy idea.

That is ironic because this afternoon we copped a spray from the Premier, who said we have no policy ideas. As *Hansard* clearly shows, we had this policy idea on 11 May last year. Not only did the Attorney General say at that time that it was a silly idea—the idea he is now putting before the Parliament—he said his view was based on advice he had received from the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP]. Only a few weeks ago, in the difficult circumstances of a victim of a pack rape saying, understandably, that she could not and would not give evidence again, the Attorney General suddenly and finally realised he had to do something to make transcripts admissible in retrials. The DPP said on radio that he and his department had been advocating just this change for years. In other words, for years the DPP and his office had been advocating that the transcript evidence of victims of a rape ought to be able to be given on retrial. That had gone before the criminal law review committee of the Attorney General's Department, and nothing had happened.

So, the Attorney General is in trouble on two issues as he seeks to introduce this bill. The first is that last year he lied to the House, misled the House, on the vital policy issue of relieving rape victims of having to give evidence a second time. I trust that in his second reading speech this afternoon he will deliver a good personal explanation for why what he is doing now was not only impossible last year when the Opposition proposed it but was a silly idea, and why he said last year, when he tried to make that argument, that it was based on advice from the DPP. It was said on radio just a few weeks ago that the advice from the DPP was to the contrary. The DPP said his office had been advocating this change for years.

The second matter I hope the Attorney General will acknowledge and do something about is that transcript evidence alone is not enough on a retrial. He cannot expect jurors to read through a pile of transcript that might be 10 times the size of the pile of papers on the table. A rape trial, especially a complex one involving multiple perpetrators, can go for weeks. This pile of papers would be a small fraction of the transcript of evidence that might need to be read of victims giving evidence and being cross-examined over a number of days. I do not think a jury could get the full sense—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House has moved a motion to suspend standing and sessional orders. The honourable member for Epping is now debating the substance of the matter that is foreshadowed to proceed as a result of the suspension motion. That places the Attorney General in great difficulty because in delivering the second reading speech he will not be able to respond to what the honourable member for Epping has said. These matters go beyond the suspension motion. They relate to debate on a bill that is not before the House.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Thirty seconds wasted. Forty seconds wasted.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I take exception to what the honourable member for Wakehurst has said. I remind him that he is on three calls to order. The honourable member for Epping knows that my remarks are relevant to the present debate. He will have the opportunity to debate the matters to which he has referred during the debate on the legislation.

Mr ANDREW TINK: This motion seeks to suspend the ordinary business of the House, including an urgency motion to be moved by the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. In other words, the Attorney General, through the Leader of the House, seeks to interpose this matter to head off an urgency motion of which due notice has been given. I daresay that will take up the rest of the time of the House this afternoon. I believe I am within my rights to raise matters that I expect the Attorney General to cover in his speech. I am totally within my rights—and it is not lost on me that before you made that ruling the Attorney General had words with you.

Mr SPEAKER: Not at all.

Mr ANDREW TINK: It is a sad day when something like that happens.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Epping knows that his assertion is incorrect. When the Leader of the House moved that standing and sessional orders be suspended, he said that the Attorney General would deliver only the second reading speech. The claims by the honourable member for Epping about an unwarranted delay are not factual, and I am sure *Hansard* will confirm that.

Mr ANDREW TINK: As the Attorney General gives his second reading speech the clock is ticking on the rest of the time available to members to raise other matters in the House. This is an imposition. We can expect that he will deal with relevant matters on the basis that we agree to the suspension, which we do. We agree to the suspension on the basis that he will cover the matters I am talking about in my suspension speech. That is the point of this. It is entirely in order and we will do it again.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Epping knows that his claims are not made in accordance with the standing orders. I rule him out of order.

Motion agreed to.

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE AMENDMENT (EVIDENCE) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BOB DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, and Minister for the Environment) [3.55 p.m.]:
I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Evidence) Bill. I indicate at the outset that I do not intend to canvass the issues raised by the honourable member for Epping in his just

completed series of interventions in the House. They are matters I will be more than happy to deal with in the second reading debate later in this session.

Sexual assault in New South Wales—indeed in Australia—is a grossly underreported crime. Victim surveys reveal that more than half the sexual assaults that occur each year are perpetrated by the partner, boyfriend or former partner of the victim, and in a further 34 per cent of cases by a person known to the victim. These assaults occur every day. They do not get headlines. Victims do not report their former partners or husbands, or people they thought were their friends. The Government is determined to provide support and assistance to victims of sexual assault at every stage of the process. As such, in recognition of the low reporting and conviction rates, the Government is introducing a number of reforms designed to assist complainants in the difficult task of giving evidence, thereby encouraging them to come forward and report sexual assault crimes.

This bill is part of the on-going process of reform to improve the process surrounding sexual assault prosecutions for complainants. There will be a further bill with more reforms in this area later in this session—more reforms that I have already announced, including provisions that will allow the closing of the court while a complainant in a sexual assault matter is giving evidence; aspects that go to the access of sensitive material that will be possible by those in and around the court; and the strengthening of the responsibility of judges to intervene to prevent inappropriate cross-examination. This bill amends the Criminal Procedure Act 1986 to permit the record of evidence given by the complainant in a sexual assault trial to be admitted as the evidence in any new trial ordered following an appeal. Honourable members will be aware that on 3 February the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] announced that the retrial of two accused would not proceed because the complainant was unwilling to testify again and the case was not strong enough to proceed without her evidence.

The advice of every experienced prosecutor is that in a jury trial it is infinitely preferable to have the direct evidence of the complainant before the court. No other form of evidence has the clear impact of personal testimony. But that option is no longer available in the matter to which the DPP referred. The Government respects the decision of the young woman in that case. In certain circumstances under the current law the evidence of complainants from previous trials is now admissible on subsequent retrial. However, unless an exception to the hearsay rule applies, the record of the original proceedings is inadmissible. The rule against hearsay, as found at section 59 of the Evidence Act 1995, currently prevents the admission of representations made by a complainant in a previous trial to prove the facts upon which the prosecution seeks to rely in a subsequent retrial.

The rule against hearsay, as found in section 59 of the Evidence Act 1995, currently prevents the admission of representations made by a complainant in a previous trial to prove the facts upon which the prosecution seeks to rely in a subsequent retrial. This rule against hearsay is subject to a number of exceptions. Section 65 of the Evidence Act creates an exception to the hearsay rule where a witness is not available and they have given evidence in prior proceedings and the accused cross-examined them or had a reasonable opportunity to cross-examine them.

A person is not available if they are dead or if all reasonable steps have been taken to locate them and get them to come to court, but without success. In such circumstances, a recording or transcript of their evidence may be adduced in evidence. The Evidence Act does not provide for the admission of the record of the original evidence of a complainant on a retrial ordered by an appeal court where the complainant is available but unwilling to give further evidence. The Government considers that the record of the original evidence should be admitted in such circumstances and that the rule against hearsay evidence should not prevent this.

Sexual assault has a devastating effect on its victims. While sexual violence does not always result in physical injury, the emotional impact can be extensive. The Australian Institute of Criminology 2001 report on Sexual Violence in Australia found that "regardless of the age, sex, occupation or marital status of the victim, the consequences of sexual assault can include massive and potentially long-lasting trauma, both for the victim and their immediate family or social network". Not surprisingly, some complainants who have given evidence that resulted in a conviction decide they simply cannot return to give evidence again if a new trial is ordered on appeal. Significant time will have passed and the complainant will have tried as best as possible to put the matter out of their mind.

The proposed new division 3 of part 5 of chapter 6 of the Criminal Procedure Act permits the admission of a record of evidence given by a complainant in a prescribed sexual offence proceeding in any new trial that is ordered following an appeal. Under proposed section 306B the record of the original evidence will be admissible only if the prosecutor gives the court and the accused notice of the prosecutor's intention to tender

the record. The form of the notice is prescribed by the regulations. Proposed section 306B (4) provides that the hearsay rule under the Evidence Act will not prevent the admission or use of the record as evidence. Under proposed section 306B (5) the court does not have discretion to decline to admit the record where proper notice has been given by the prosecution.

However, proposed section 306B (6) and (7) do allow the record to be edited to remove inadmissible statements. An example of where the transcript will need to be edited is where the appeal court has indicated that a part of the complainant's evidence was placed before the original jury in breach of the rules of evidence or the law. That the complainant is not giving evidence orally in the new trial proceedings is not a basis for rejecting the record of evidence. The new trial court must approach issues of admissibility as if the evidence of the complainant were being given orally. Proposed section 306B (7) provides that editing may also occur on the basis of agreement between the prosecution and the accused or his or her counsel.

The bill does not require the record of the original evidence to be admitted in evidence on all retrials. Some complainants will choose to give all their evidence again in person. It is important that complainants can choose to give evidence on a retrial. It empowers complainants and allows them a decision-making role in the court process. The prosecutor will no doubt advise complainants that the case will be stronger if they can manage to give all their evidence again in front of a new jury. Where the complainant does choose to give all their evidence again on a retrial, no notice need be served by the prosecution. The complainant will have a choice about whether to give no further evidence, give limited further evidence, or give all their evidence afresh.

Proposed sections 306C and 306D provide that if a record of the evidence of a complainant is admitted in the new trial proceedings, the complainant will not be compelled to provide any further evidence, but may elect to do so with the leave of the court hearing the new trial proceedings. A complainant who chooses to give further evidence will not be exposed to further questioning "at large" on all matters. Section 306D (3) requires the court to ensure that only questions that are necessary to clarify the record of the original proceedings or to canvas new material that has become available since the original proceedings, or are necessary in the interests of justice are asked of the complainant. Proposed section 306D (4) compels a complainant who commences to give further evidence to remain to answer such limited further questions as the court allows from both the prosecution and the defence.

Proposed section 306E also makes provision for the form in which a record of the original evidence given by a complainant is to be tendered in new trial proceedings. The best available record must be tendered. A recording will be tendered where one is available, and where a recording is not available a transcript may be tendered. The proposed provisions extend to new trials ordered before the commencement of these provisions. In this way, the procedure of tendering the record of the original proceedings will be available for the matter that received publicity on 3 February 2005 if the Director of Public Prosecutions chooses to proceed to trial against the two accused.

The bill also amends the Criminal Procedure Regulation 2000 consequentially to make provision for the matters to be specified in the notice required to be given by the prosecutor before tendering a record of the original evidence of a complainant, and for the arrangements that are to be made for giving an accused person access to that record if it is an audio-visual recording or audio recording. As I foreshadowed, this is not the end of the reforms the Government will introduce in this area. More amendments aimed at supporting the victims of sexual assault will be introduced into the House in the very near future. I look forward to the continued support from all members of the House on these issues. I commend the bill to the House.

Debated adjourned on motion by Mr Andrew Fraser.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Goods and Services Tax Revenue Expenditure

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro) [4.06 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because Federal Treasurer Peter Costello has put forward a proposal for the greatest centralisation of power since income-tax was transferred to the Federal Government during the Second World War. That major proposal for centralisation of power in Australia is a threat to the democratic rights of the electors of New South Wales. The Federal Government, through John Howard, has often waved the financial stick at New South Wales. Now it wants to further impose on the States by exploiting the Senate majority it will have after July this year.

This matter is urgent because Peter Costello has indicated that the States pay too much in salaries. The Federal Treasurer thinks we should pay less or have fewer employees in New South Wales. He said on an ABC program that he believes we pay too much in salaries to unionised workers. Those unionised workers are police, nurses and teachers. Peter Costello and the Federal Government obviously consider that the 3,000 additional nurses employed by the Government since 2002 are excessive or cost too much. The Coalition in Canberra obviously considers that the 14,450 police—a record number of police officers in New South Wales—are excessive or are paid too much. The Coalition in Canberra obviously considers that the \$462 million we will spend in the next four years on employing extra teachers to reduce class sizes is too much.

This matter should be urgently debated because the Labor Government believes that those positions are needed. Our community needs those people to deliver essential services. The money we spend on those salaries is not wasted. That money should not be diverted at the whim of the Federal Treasurer and the Federal Government. This motion is urgent because New South Wales is sick of being squeezed by the goods and services tax [GST] arrangements. This year every man, woman and child in New South Wales will receive Federal Government funding for the GST of \$1,466.33.

The Federal Government claims that is a big increase, but in 2001-02 the return from the GST was \$1,461 for every man, woman and child in New South Wales. In other words, over that four-year period there has been a \$5 increase per head in the funds that this State receives from the goods and services tax. If one takes inflation into account, that represents a reduction of 7 per cent. At the same time government expenditure on infrastructure in New South Wales has increased by \$838 per head. This motion is urgent because Labor rejects the attempt by the Federal Treasurer and the Federal Government to cut back expenditure on essential services in this State. The New South Wales Government rejects their proposal to instruct State governments on what to do with their own money.

The matter is particularly urgent because we have heard nothing from the Opposition about this issue. There has been overwhelming silence! When I gave notice of my urgent motion earlier today, the Opposition suggested it was not a State issue. How crazy is that? In New South Wales we have an Opposition that believes a blatant attempt by the Federal Government to control how this State spends the funds allocated to it is not a State issue to be debated in this House. This is probably one of the most critical matters ever to come before the New South Wales Parliament. It is related to centralisation. Only recently Laurie Oakes suggested that Peter Costello was even more centralist than Gough Whitlam, a man greatly admired in the Labor Party. Costello protested only slightly, but did not argue about it because he knows that this is a massive grab for power by the Federal Government.

The New South Wales Opposition has said absolutely nothing. It is disgraceful that the Leader of the Opposition, a person who has suggested he would like to lead this State, would simply sit back and allow this Federal Government grab for power. He apparently believes, no doubt at the direction of the Federal Government, that it is okay for people to have their salaries slashed or their jobs taken from them. The silence on the part of honourable members opposite can mean only one thing: either the Opposition is happy to acquiesce and allow the Federal Government to snatch these democratic powers from New South Wales or it believes it will never come to office in this State—or both—and so does not give a damn about what the Federal Liberals do to New South Wales. One thing is clear: the Opposition is unwilling to stand up for the people of New South Wales. Labor is not.

Strathfield Municipal Council Corruption Allegation

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.11 p.m.]: My motion is urgent and deserves priority because of the damning comments by Michael King, SC, in his closing submission following the Independent Commission against Corruption [ICAC] investigation into Strathfield Municipal Council, when he said of former Labor Mayor of Strathfield John Abi-Saab, that he is "devoid of integrity, an unscrupulous manipulator and a serial liar". The motion is urgent and deserves priority because the people of Strathfield and the wider public of New South Wales have a right to know why the Hon. Eddie Obeid stated in the other place on 18 November last:

It has been brought to my attention that the [ICAC] investigation was instigated as a result of video evidence of a corrupt act by a councillor of Strathfield Municipal Council.

Why did Eddie Obeid know of the Alfred Tsang video prior to its existence becoming public knowledge? Had he been shown the video by corrupt Labor councillor John Abi-Saab? The motion is urgent and deserves priority because this House has a right to know what the former Mayor of Strathfield, Virginia Judge, did in return for \$5,000 in donations—

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: I am not questioning the fact that the honourable member for Coffs Harbour used the word "urgent" three times. I am questioning the fact that a personal explanation was given this afternoon by the honourable member for Strathfield which I believe covers everything that the honourable member for Coffs Harbour is going to talk about.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour may continue.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: —from corrupt Labor Mayor John Abi-Saab and corrupt developer Michael Saklaoui, as shown in official returns furnished to the State Electoral Office. The motion is urgent and deserves priority because the people of New South Wales need to know what favours were done by the honourable member for Strathfield and other Labor councillors in return for political donations to their campaigns. The motion is urgent and deserves priority because this House is entitled to know the full details of Michael Saklaoui's evidence at the ICAC—

Mr Steve Whan: Point of order: The member opposite has implied a very serious allegation about the honourable member for Strathfield, which is unsubstantiated. He has used the cowardly forum of parliamentary privilege and I suggest that you should rule him out of order for this abuse of parliamentary privilege.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! Bearing in mind the ruling of Mr Speaker this week, I cannot rule the honourable member for Coffs Harbour out of order.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: —when he advised that the honourable member for Strathfield would "invite you on a dinner or something". This House needs to know how many dinners, what was discussed and how much was paid. The motion is urgent and deserves priority because the Opposition is entitled to know whether the honourable member for Strathfield acted as a referee for former general manager, Keating Government staffer and Labor hack, Kerry Keough, to a position on the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and National Resources Parramatta Road task force.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: A question was asked of the Premier earlier this afternoon about Strathfield and the ICAC inquiry. The Premier indicated that if there was anything the Opposition believed it had on any member of this House, the appropriate course would be to approach the ICAC. The allegations being made here should be referred to the ICAC. If the honourable member for Coffs Harbour has got something, he should take it there.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I cannot uphold the point of order because of the way the Premier answered a question this afternoon. There is no point of order.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: The motion is urgent and deserves priority because the honourable member for Strathfield should explain to the House why she would not make public the details of Kerry Keough's contract with Strathfield council.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CAPITAL COAST STEEL WORKERS COMPENSATION INSURANCE PREMIUM

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [4.18 p.m.]: Honourable members are aware of the difficulties employers face when hit with workers compensations claims against their businesses. Some claims brought against employers are legitimate. However, unfortunately, some claims are fraudulent. Today I wish to bring to the attention of this House, as a further reminder to the Minister of the importance of looking after small and medium-size business in this State, the difficulty that some employers face, both in respect of their insurers and the conduct of their employees. I draw the attention of the House to a business in Batemans Bay, Capital Coast Steel, and a workers compensation claim with Allianz Insurance Group.

This story highlights the complexities that small and medium-size businesses have to face, their vulnerability and the pressures brought to bear as a result of insurance companies protecting their bottom line. I

want to place on record my disgust at the way in which Allianz has responded to repeated calls for assistance from Capital Coast Steel and to a request from me for a full audit and investigation of this claim. The claim requires investigation, first, because of a disputed journey claim by the claimant and, second, because of the lack of openness and transparency on the part of Allianz about a medical assessment of the claimant.

Capital Coast Steel is a successful Batemans Bay company that employs 17 people in full-time work. Due to a reclassification of the company's workers compensation premium instalments resulting from this claim, the business now faces significant difficulties. The issue regarding this reputable company is not that it is trying to dispute or shy away from its responsibilities to its employees. The issue is the way in which Allianz Insurance has handled the claim. Allianz Insurance has displayed a complete lack of understanding of its client's problem and has not guided the company through the intricacies and complications that workers compensation claims entail.

Capital Coast Steel had its premiums reclassified without notice. They have been increased by 2.46 per cent, which, based on an estimated wage bill of \$517, 000 and after the various Allianz coded formulas have been applied to claims lodged during the past three years, amounts to a \$44,000 premium for annual insurance and an additional \$58,000 in penalties for having claimed on its insurance policy. The result is a total renewable premium of close to \$102,000. The penalty surcharge results from one particular claim.

I am advised by Capital Coast Steel that the compensation claimant, Mr Ricardo Arquero, injured himself at work on 21 November 2002 when walking past a piece of steel which fell on to his shoulder. According to the company, there is much doubt about the validity of the claim and that fact was made clear to Allianz, but Allianz failed to seek clarification or query the validity of the claim. After the incident in question all workers compensation paperwork had been completed and the worker had one week off work before being cleared fit to return to work. Following this initial claim, the business had a downturn and the company was forced to lay off some of its workers. I have also been advised by Capital Coast Steel that in May 2003, after three days with no work, Mr Arquero telephoned to see if work was available on that particular day. Two hours after being told there was not, he arrived at the company's premises with a doctor's certificate giving him time off work because of a shoulder injury.

The story is complex. Capital Coast Steel advised me that Allianz had indicated that the claimant was no longer on its policy as at 20 January 2004. However, that turned out not to be the case. Last year the claimant made additional claims on the company for a second shoulder operation after apparently being assaulted. I questioned this with the insurer, and I was appalled to learn that no police report was ever lodged following an assault. The company was told it was responsible for the ongoing payment of the claim as the claimant was on a journey to the medical doctor. Once it was explained to Allianz that a journey claim does not reflect on the premium calculations under the Workers Compensation Act, Allianz then stated that there was no way of knowing whether Mr Arquero would have required the second surgery had he not been mugged and, therefore, Capital Coast Steel had to wear it.

I question whether this is classified as a journey claim and why Capital Coast Steel has had further changes made to its premium as a result. I also want to know what injuries were sustained. In my view any medical assessment on this incident should be made available immediately to Capital Coast Steel. In any event this whole process has been extremely stressful for the business. Incorrect advice and unreturned phone calls from Allianz have only added to the complexity of issues, which are in desperate need of resolution. This local company is facing tough times as a result of the claim. No doubt many questions are running through the minds of the owners, Doug and Tracey Denning. I call on the Minister to fully investigate the matter, and I look forward to the outcome of the WorkCover insurance appeals branch investigation. It is an unacceptable situation for the company to find itself in, and I hope the Government will look into the matter further.

NATIONAL COURSING ASSOCIATION GREYHOUND OF THE YEAR AWARD

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [4.23 p.m.]: Last Sunday I had the pleasure of presenting the National Coursing Association's Greyhound of the Year Award on behalf of the Minister for Gaming and Racing. This is the fortieth year the awards presentation has been held. It was a tremendous occasion. The event, which was held in one of the function rooms at Star City Casino, was attended by 300 to 400 guests and, eventually, three greyhounds. Paul Ambrosoli, the great voice of greyhound racing, was the master of ceremonies. Many of us would recall having heard Paul Ambrosoli call the greyhound races on 2KY in the old days, referring to names like Zoom Top. Tremendous greyhounds have won the Greyhound of the Year Award, including National Lass, a great greyhound which won the award in the mid-1980s.

Obviously, the Minister would have liked to attend the function. However, the Director- General of the Department of Gaming and Racing, Mr Ken Brown, attended on the Minister's behalf. Jeff Collerson of the *Daily Telegraph*, who has been involved in predicting the winners of greyhound races for around 40 years, was also in attendance, along with representatives of the *Greyhound Recorder*. The greyhound racing industry and other smaller racing industries such as harness racing need all the publicity they can get, and I was pleased to see those media representatives in attendance.

Also in attendance were Richard Zammit, the President of the National Coursing Association; the Hon. George Souris, the shadow Minister for Gaming and Racing; Professor Percy Allan, the Chairman of Greyhound Racing NSW; and the Hon. Kevin Rozzoli, a former Speaker of this House. There was plenty of good entertainment for everyone. What captivated my interest on the day was how much these people truly love the support of greyhound racing. I know that many years ago when people saw greyhounds on their leashes with their muzzles on to protect the public from them, they regarded them as a threat of some kind.

Mr Neville Newell: A dangerous dog.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: As the Parliamentary Secretary said, they appeared to be dangerous dogs. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Greyhounds are wonderful pets and animals. It just so happens that they run very fast and chase things, and that has become a sport that is many hundreds of years old. Indeed, greyhound racing and the National Coursing Association began as long ago as the 1920s. Since that time famous billionaires in this country have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on football teams of virtually every code, and some of those teams have lasted for less than a couple of years. It is, therefore, an outstanding achievement that greyhound racing has now been celebrated for 40 years.

The three nominees for the award of Greyhound of the Year were Classy Customer, a black dog by Token Prince out of Classy Clara, owned by Bob Douglas and Partners and trained by Jason Mackay; Eiffella, a black dog by Token Prince out of Miss Eiffel; and Irinka Barbie, a black bitch by History Lesson out of Jackie Rooster. The winner of the award was Irinka Barbie. When the greyhounds were acknowledged as nominees for the award it was fantastic to hear that the female dog, which is the smallest of them all, was the fastest and the best stayer. To choose three nominees for the award the association looks at hundreds of greyhounds. It was a great event, and I congratulate all those involved, particularly Richard Zammit, the President of the National Coursing Association.

NATIONAL LIVESTOCK IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM TAG PRICING

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [4.28 p.m.]: On behalf of the producers of the electorate of Lismore I express their disappointment and disgust at the implementation of the National Livestock Identification Scheme [NLIS] in this State. I acknowledge that the scheme is a crucial component in the ongoing efforts to protect the marketability, integrity and reputation of our \$4 billion cattle and dairy industries. The first stage of the scheme was implemented on 1 July last year, despite the Opposition's concerns about it. Last year the Opposition called on the Government to delay the introduction of the scheme for 12 months to allow a number of issues regarding costs and practicalities to be addressed.

Last year the shadow Minister for Primary Industries in the other place, the Hon. Duncan Gay, called on the Minister for Primary Industries to negotiate a plan to allow producers to purchase National Livestock Identification Scheme tags. In the past couple of weeks a plan has been negotiated, and as a result producers are now able to purchase ear tags at a discounted price of \$2.60. Recently my office has received many phone calls from producers who, in seeking to do the right thing by complying with the regulations introduced in July last year, purchased 400, 500 or 600 tags at up to \$4 each. The rural stores in the Lismore electorate have received many orders for tags. I would like to place on record a letter from the Rural Buying Service, which is based at Lismore but has offices throughout the area. I am sure the service also has an office in the electorate of the honourable member for Tweed, who is at the table. The letter reads:

On the 21st February, 2005 the Minister for Primary Industries in New South Wales announced that the above tags would be available to all producers at a discounted price of \$2.60 through local P.P. Boards.

Whilst this is a great thing for the producers, it, in our view, has unfairly discriminated against the proactive producers who have bought their tags earlier to comply with the regulations paying between \$3.35 & \$4.00. This move is rewarding producers with an attitude problem toward complying with the regulations.

The NSW Government were adamant at the start of the NLIS rollout that there would be no discount whatsoever, similar to Victoria & have now back-flipped & as stated before, rewarding producers that have "don't care" attitude.

We ourselves have processed approximately 250,000 tags with some thousands waiting to be collected. With this announcement, producers are wanting to send these tags back ...

But Allflex is the same company that is supported by this Minister through the rural lands protection boards. If the Minister had listened to The Nationals he would not have implemented the introduction of the NLIS until this year and the problem would have been resolved. I could not tell the House the number of producers in my electorate. However, I can quote the Minister's own figures from his press release, which stated that already 13,000 producers in this State have purchased 1.3 million tags.

What will happen to all those producers? They paid up to \$1.40 more than they would pay for the tags now. The rural lands protection boards have been doing the right thing. As late as January, Casino Rural Lands Protection Board in its newsletter told people how to buy these tags. Three weeks later the Minister finalised a plan that discounted the tags through the rural lands protection boards. So they did not even know when the plan was to be finalised. The producers who got off their backsides and bought these ear tags find that absolutely disgusting. It has taken a long time for the Minister for Primary Industries to get the plan in operation. It has now been implemented and, using the Minister's own figures, there are 13,000 producers who have been affected. I call on the Carr Government and the Minister for Primary Industries to reimburse all the businesses and producers that have been affected by this decision. [*Time expired.*]

HAWKESBURY VALLEY VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE AND ASSOCIATION

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN (Londonderry) [4.33 p.m.]: Tonight I relate to the House the success of the Hawkesbury Valley Visitor Information Centre and Association. The centre is located at Ham Common, Bicentenary Park, Windsor Road, Clarendon. It has a small, conscientious staff consisting of the manager, Karina Groth, the operational manager, Michael Johnson, and four dedicated casual staff, three of whom have a combined tenure of 35 years. One is a part-time bookkeeper and has brought to the centre business skills and experience from her association with the local chamber of commerce. In addition, the centre has had a mutually beneficial relationship with students from the University of Western Sydney who have acted as ambassadors for the centre while completing workplace experience. I understand they hope to entertain this arrangement again this year. Three weeks have also been put aside for school students involved in hospitality studies to complete work experience.

I am pleased to report that at the 2004 Western Sydney Industry Awards the centre received an award for destination promotion and a further award for general tourism services. That was followed up by the New South Wales Tourism Awards, when Tourism New South Wales presented the General Tourism Services Award to the Hawkesbury Valley Visitor Information Centre. As a consequence, the centre was nominated at the recent Australian Tourism Awards in the category of general tourism services. While the centre was unable to duplicate its earlier success, Hawkesbury Valley can proudly claim to have the best visitor information centre in New South Wales. I commend the Hawkesbury Valley Visitor Information Centre on its State success and for being in the running at the national level against strong competition. I wish the centre better luck for future years.

The centre, which is located opposite the RAAF base at Clarendon, provides comprehensive information and booking services for the Hawkesbury Valley, handling around 30,000 inquiries a year. In the second half of last year the centre also contributed \$89,000 worth of bookings to members, which is a 5 per cent increase on the previous year. Results such as that are indicative of hard work, creative thinking and overcoming challenges. Yesterday I spoke to Michael Johnson, who was most complimentary about the endeavours of the manager, Karina Groth. He was of the opinion that the professionalism of Karina and her network of special relationships with organisations such as the Council of Tourism Association and the Tourism Industry Forum have greatly contributed to the centre's success. Karina is currently on 12 months maternity leave, but she continues a consultancy presence, ensuring that the strategic direction of the centre is maintained.

The main focus of the area has traditionally been the mighty Hawkesbury River, and activities including boating, waterskiing, cruising, fishing, houseboats and sightseeing. The centre has faced the challenge of raising awareness of other wonderful experiences that complement the river, such as the Hawkesbury heritage, national parks, the botanic gardens, food and wine, small farmlands and historic towns such as St Albans, Windsor and Richmond. Tourism Hawkesbury operates from the centre and is working hard to further the development of quality tourism products, experiences and events, and to promote the area as a short-break destination for Sydney, not only in the leisure market but also for the lucrative business tourism sector.

Those efforts are being rewarded with growth in visitor numbers, which brings greater economic and employment benefits for the region. One successful initiative is the Hawkesbury Farmgate Trail, a self-drive tour through the Hawkesbury Valley with stops at orchards, cheese makers, smokehouses, wineries and more.

Visitors can stay a day, a weekend or longer on the trail, touring the region and sampling locally grown food and wine. It is a great example of small business working with the support of Tourism Hawkesbury to offer a unique experience that encourages visitors to turn a day trip into an overnight stay, and a weekend trip into a longer visit—and, hopefully, to return for another visit. Being only an hour from Sydney, the Hawkesbury region offers stressed-out Sydneysiders a chance to relax and enjoy a break. There is something for everyone, with abundant natural and man-made attractions on offer. I wish the Hawkesbury Valley Visitor Information Centre and Association, along with its dedicated staff, all the best with its future activities, and I look forward to the continued growth of tourism for the Hawkesbury.

SHOALHAVEN WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) [4.38 p.m.]: This evening I speak about the Shoalhaven Women's Health Centre, which is situated in Nowra and is in its twenty-first year of operation. I wish to speak about the diversity of services it offers, some of its aims and objectives and some of the challenges it faces in the future because of funding shortfalls. The aims and objectives of the centre include its desire to provide women in the Shoalhaven area with a non-profit primary health care service that is managed by women in a feminist framework. The centre also wishes to prioritise access for women who are living in poverty or who are on low or fixed incomes by providing services at a minimal cost, or no cost, thus ensuring that they are not refused service due to inability to pay.

It also aims to ensure that services reflect the needs of local women, providing educational, preventive and self-help programs which encompass women's life spans and a broad range of health experiences. Its objectives also include the desire to address the differences in health status and objectives that are linked to gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability, geography, race and gender, inequality, sexuality and sexual preference. It also adds to its list of objectives its desire to promote preventive health care strategies, equity of access to appropriate and affordable health care services and a holistic approach to health care that recognises and acknowledges the multiplicity of factors that are specific to women's health and well-being on all levels: emotional, spiritual, physical and socioeconomic. These are laudable aims and objectives.

Some of the services the centre provides, and has provided during its 21 years of operation, are family planning services, counselling, herbalist services, massage, pregnancy testing and counselling, information and referral, workshops, community education and cervical screening, which I will talk about later as it is one of the challenges the centre currently faces. Some of the challenges it faces are due to the fact that its base grant has remained unchanged for the past 20 years, except for annual consumer price index increases and a one-off unspecified grant, I believe of \$10,000, in 2004 from Illawarra Area Health Service.

Currently appointments for all services at the health centre are booked at least four to six weeks in advance and the service has had to close its books on many occasions when advance bookings exceed a 12-week waiting period. Referral to other agencies and service providers is difficult and often not possible due to the overall lack of services in the area, particularly with regard to counselling and, of course, mental health services, about which many members have spoken today. That is all despite the fact that the Shoalhaven has the third-highest rate of growth per capita in this State, and that rate of growth is set to continue.

The Shoalhaven Women's Health Centre is the only centre of its kind between Warilla and the Victorian border that offers these kinds of specific services. While it may seem that many resources are available to the community, most local agencies of its kind operate as part-time services and on very limited budgets. Current funding levels unfortunately prohibit the centre from extending its counselling hours, a matter that the shadow Minister, Catherine Cusack, and I raised on Monday. Residents are concerned that counselling services will be cut back and resources will no longer be available to many young women in particular who are experiencing challenges in their life. The Shoalhaven Women's Health Centre is the only service south of Warilla that specialises in domestic violence and sexual assault counselling. I would be concerned about any further cutbacks in hours for these types of counselling services.

Another issue of great concern to me, and which was the subject of discussions on Monday, was cervical screening. Unfortunately, current statistics show that cervical screening in the Shoalhaven is lower than the State average. Young women have reported difficulty in obtaining an appointment for a Pap smear and, therefore, simply opt not to utilise those services. This is mainly due to the unavailability of services because the centre has preventive screening for only half a day per week. That is insufficient for an area with the growth patterns of the Shoalhaven. Every year the centre has to fight for continuation and renewal of funding, yet it provides a valuable service. Therefore, I call on the Minister for Health to urgently intervene to ensure that the centre does not close and that urgent services, such as cervical screening, continue at the centre.

DRUMMOYNE WHARF REPAIRS

Ms ANGELA D'AMORE (Drummoyne) [4.43 p.m.]: I wish to speak about the upgrades that have been made to wharves in the State seat of Drummoyne. Drummoyne is blessed with an extensive foreshore that provides an important route for ferry commuters both within and outside the electorate of Drummoyne. The State seat of Drummoyne has five wharves: Abbotsford, Birkenhead Point, Cabarita, Chiswick, and Drummoyne. Four wharves—Abbotsford, Birkenhead Point, Cabarita and Chiswick—are the responsibility of the State Government, and the amalgamated council of Canada Bay owns Drummoyne Wharf. The New South Wales Government has spent in excess of \$5 million in capital expenditure on these wharfs since 1995 and this figure does not include additional expenditure by Sydney Ferries or New South Wales Waterways Authority. This included the building of three wharfs.

A brand new wharf was built at Cabarita, known as Cabarita Wharf, following the approval by then Drummoyne council of developments at Breakfast Point and Cabarita. This capital project shows that the State Government is proactive in providing major transport infrastructure for the growing Drummoyne electorate. Abbotsford and Chiswick wharfs received major upgrades to their existing structures. As the State member for Drummoyne I regularly use the services at Cabarita and Abbotsford, which are very pleasant trips into the city. Actual expenditure on the State-run wharfs in 2003-04 was \$58,000 to maintain the three wharfs. This is indicative of the State Government's ongoing funding commitment for these wharfs. The State Government takes full responsibility for every wharf it owns in the State seat of Drummoyne. In 1999 the Government provided a one-off grant of \$60,000 to the then Drummoyne council for the upgrade of Drummoyne Wharf.

Sydney Ferries pays Canada Bay Council \$5,100 per annum to access Drummoyne Wharf and has also paid \$10,000 for the provision of emergency repairs in the past five years. However, I do note that Canada Bay Council, as the owner of Drummoyne Wharf, has the responsibility to maintain Drummoyne Wharf to a serviceable standard. Sydney Ferries expects that the annual berthing fees it pays to wharf owners will be spent on maintenance. I will be seeking from Canada Bay Council a brief detailing where the money has been spent, to ensure it is spent properly on Drummoyne Wharf. I am happy to record in this House that following extensive representations to Canada Bay Council on behalf of my residents, Canada Bay Council undertook urgent repairs to Drummoyne Wharf.

I commend council for actioning these repairs, which were undertaken in January 2005. Throughout 2003-04 I met with Sydney Ferries over some urgent issues with Drummoyne council. This matter received considerable media attention. An audit on 10 September 2004, submitted to Canada Bay Council, outlined that Drummoyne Wharf required urgent work on the piles, mooring bollards, bracing beams, non-skid surfacing, roof structure, hand railings and safety markings. Sydney Ferries had indicated to Canada Bay Council that unless this work was undertaken as a matter of urgency, Sydney Ferries may have to suspend services to the wharf, something we do not want.

While I welcome the council's decision to undertake those repairs classed as urgent, I will continue to work with Canada Bay Council to ensure that appropriate upgrades are undertaken in an appropriate time, to minimise inconvenience to the 200 commuters who use the ferry service from Drummoyne Wharf. There are 17 wharves around the State that are owned by local councils and these councils work very hard to make sure they meet their responsibilities to upgrade. I note also that New South Wales Maritime has 10 wharfs under its jurisdiction, to which it allocates \$1 million a year, but not to Drummoyne Wharf.

I now turn to comments made by the Hon Don Harwin in the upper House on 24 February. I signal my disappointment at the misrepresentations and lies he has chosen to put on record. I know this gentleman very well. I am surprised he did not come and speak to me; perhaps because he knew I would tell him the truth. Commuters use the wharf and the State Government provides the service to commuters. He failed to recognise that Canada Bay Council has responsibility for upgrading the wharf. He failed to acknowledge that council receives a fee from Sydney Ferries to dock ferries there. He failed to acknowledge that the State Government has provided previous funding and he failed to acknowledge that three Liberal councillors on Canada Bay Council did nothing to ensure the upgrades were made, which led to the closure of the wharf in January 2005 for a month to allow for urgent repairs to be undertaken.

Late last year I was notified that during a low tide, passengers had slipped on the wharf, which is why over the past two years I have actively placed pressure on council to upgrade. Not only did the Hon. Don Harwin lie to the House, but the Leader of the Opposition, who took two years to work out there was an issue, despite four media articles depicting my concern, distorted the facts and used local commuters as pawns for a short political gain.

MR BOB MACKENZIE MEDICAL TREATMENT

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.48 p.m.]: I remind honourable members that prior to the 1999 election the then Minister for Health, Dr Andrew Refshauge, promised the people of New South Wales that he would halve waiting lists. I want to raise a matter on behalf of Mr Bob Mackenzie, a constituent of mine, who has been a quadriplegic for the last 43 years. All honourable members would agree that he has probably had a pretty hard life. The easiest way to explain his situation is to read onto the record his letter to me dated 28 February, which states:

Dear Mr Fraser,

I have been a quadriplegic for more than 43 years and during this time I have led a very full and active life. I had a full time job for many years, have provided support for others with disabilities and have enduring hobbies most of which are outdoor activities (voting and gardening).

Almost 4 years ago I developed a small pressure area, which confined me to bed, this being the standard method of care, combined with daily dressings. For the first 2 years the Community Nurses and my local Dr. spent a lot of time and effort attempting to get me admitted to the Spinal Unit at the Prince of Wales Hospital; this being the best place for me due to the specialised nature of the care I would require, both surgically and for post surgical care.

I was finally admitted in mid 2003 for surgery. I then spent close to 6 months in this unit awaiting surgery, the Drs being convinced it would heal without surgery. After this time they realised it would not and went ahead with the operation. Due to circumstances the surgery was not ideal and when I was moved from POW and back to Coffs Harbour Health Campus just prior to Xmas to enable the Spinal Unit to close for Xmas, it was still with an open wound requiring bed rest and daily dressings. After 3 weeks in Coffs Hospital I was discharged home still with an open wound requiring daily dressings and staying in bed 23 out of 24 hrs each day. When I was discharged from POW Spinal Unit the Dr. informed me that if my wound did not heal they would get me back to perform corrective surgery again so it would heal. After all this time I am still waiting.

After months of pressuring from the Community Nurses and local Drs an Outreach Spinal Team came to Coffs Hospital and examined my wound. The Specialist advised me that there would be no healing without more surgery.

This was over 6 months ago and I am still waiting. At this stage I have been confined to my bed for coming up to 4 years. The only time I can get up is for about an hour in the mornings to shower. At times I have been so desperate I get up for a couple of hours in the afternoon just to go outside for short while and look at something other than television. After this there is always a deterioration in my wound and there has been a gradual deterioration over the last few months anyway. Another issue, is with me staying in bed I require extra care time to turn me during the day so I am using extra resources as well.

I find my situation extremely frustrating and unbearably depressing to the point that I have even considered going with a local surgeon even though I am advised that it is a very specialised field and also the local hospital does not have the resources to care for a surgical patient with a spinal cord injury and I could end up even worse.

So I am appealing to you for your assistance to try and get me into a specialist surgical unit as soon as possible. Thank you for your assistance.

That is a heart-rending plea from a man who for 43 years has endured a lifestyle that we would not like for ourselves or our friends. He has spent four years confined to bed and is able to get up for only one hour per day. When he spends more time out of bed his situation worsens. Only surgery at the Prince of Wales Hospital can assist him. I have spoken to him on the phone and I intend to visit him some time tomorrow. I commend him for his bravery in asking me to bring this matter to the Parliament, and in putting up with his situation, which we would find hard to bear, even without being a quadriplegic. I beg the Parliamentary Secretary to raise this matter with the Minister for Health—I have already written to the Minister—and arrange for Bob McKenzie to have his surgery as a matter of urgency. He does not deserve the neglect he has suffered over the past four years under this Government. I make this urgent and heartfelt plea on his behalf so that his situation is relieved.

BURWOOD COLLIERY BOWLING CLUB

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS (Charlestown) [4.53 p.m.]: Today I share with honourable members my concerns about Burwood Colliery Bowling Club. The club, which has a strong history in the Charlestown electorate, is situated on Crown land, and has been for about 30 years under a perpetual lease. Originally, the club was granted access to the land—I consider it to be privileged access—for the purposes of a community-based organisation to service the community. The club's primary funding source was through BHP, which has since ceased operation in Newcastle and obviously no longer makes any contribution to the club. About 18 months ago the club's financial position was close to the wire; indeed, I believe it was probably insolvent. Its current financial position is a little better, although it is still of concern not only to me and the broader community but more particularly its members.

Because of its financial constraints, the club wishes to enter into an agreement with Kingston Properties to purchase the land where the club is situated. While on the surface that might not seem to be too difficult or

something to be concerned about, the fact is that the club wants Kingston to take out a first mortgage on the property to allow the purchase to go ahead, at which time the club will be relocated on the site. Kingston then intends to undertake a major State Environmental Planning Policy No. 5 development on the remainder of the land. The site is on the coast, on top of a ridge line overlooking the ocean, and is surrounded by Glenrock State recreation area. The site, which is majestic, is not appropriate for large-scale development. The land was granted for the purpose of a bowling club, and it should remain only for that purpose.

There are issues about the feasibility of a SEPP 5 development, considering the nature of the land, the land fall and its previous uses. Historically, the site has been built up on a chitter base taken out of local coalmines. The community is concerned that Kingston has no real interest in seeing the bowling club continue and survive in the longer term but that this is merely an opportunity to access land that would not be available in any other circumstances to facilitate a high-profit return for the company. The same issues apply to other sites on the coast. Many sites on the New South Wales coast, on which bowling clubs and caravan parks are situated, have been bought out by large development companies, and redevelopment of those sites is now taking place. Often, these sites are vital for our coastline. Nevertheless, profit-driven developers are happy to challenge legal process and planning policy to ensure that they get the outcome they pursue. The local residents group is endeavouring to ensure that the club does not enter a binding contract arrangement with Kingston until a full proposal has been put before the club's membership.

At this stage several issues have not been tested by the club's membership, including the financial viability of the project, and what will happen if the club is unable to make its repayments on the loan guaranteed by Kingston. A range of matters are still outstanding and need to be addressed before the club should take a final position on this proposal. This is a broader public policy issue about the sale of Crown lands. We could not access the bowling club site. The fact that the bowling club was given privileged access to the site means that we must not only be careful about managing the process of any sale but also ensure that the outcome reflects the public interest. The Kingston organisation is keen to proceed. Indeed, it has asked the club to fast-track its decision-making process; it has given the club one month to accept the offer, although no concept plans for the development are available. I am concerned about that, and in the interests of the broader community I must oppose the proposal.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Mr JOHN TURNER (Myall Lakes) [4.58 p.m.]: My constituents and I are concerned about the number of intersections on the Pacific Highway. The Federal and State governments have entered into an agreement to upgrade the Pacific Highway, and a great deal of work has been done, and is continuing, in my electorate, but there is a problem with the intersections. I specifically mention the intersection of Myall Way and the Pacific Highway, which is the road that links into Hawks Nest-Tea Gardens, and the Failford Road intersection, which is the preferred route into Forster from the Pacific Highway. At the very least, those two intersections should be grade separated. However, the Minister and the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] have elected not to undertake a grade separation in conjunction with the work currently being undertaken. That is wrong economically.

Surely it would be more economical to do the grade separation in conjunction with the upgrade work being undertaken at those two spots at present. There are bulldozers and other plant equipment on the sites but the work will not be done. I have been told that the Roads and Traffic Authority has purchased property sufficient for grade separations to be done and that the work will be undertaken in the future; it will not be done in conjunction with the existing work. That is totally wrong. More than seven people were killed at the Rainbow Flat intersection of Lakes Way near Taree, and a grade separation has now been constructed. It is wrong that we must have body counts before such works take place. Obviously, these intersections will be extremely dangerous, with trucks hurtling along at high speeds. Grade separations must be constructed in conjunction with the existing work. Many constituents have spoken to me about this matter, and the issue has existed for some years. The Hawks Nest-Tea Gardens Progress Association secretary, Mr Seymour, wrote to me in April 2003, noting:

... concern is based on the current usage of the existing turn into Myall Way in that existing turn off is barely adequate and close to being totally unsafe especially at times of peak traffic on the Pacific Highway ...

It is strongly recommended that the RTA reconsider this proposal as it is again thought to be dangerous particularly in view of the current and future increase in population of Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest ...

The association wrote to me again in February 2004, stating:

This Association was made aware recently that the RTA is currently undertaking a survey of the area where an overpass may be cited with the view to prepare preliminary plans for such an overpass.

However the RTA has stated that it has no intention of going ahead with its construction in the forthcoming upgrade of the Pacific Highway as no funds have been allocated.

It seems that the need for an overpass at this juncture is beginning to register with the RTA but the political will on their behalf is lacking.

That sums up the situation. There is no political will to do it. According to RTA estimates, these overpasses will cost about \$6 million. I believe it can be done much cheaper than that, but it is small change in the scheme of things. It would be more practical and economical to do it in conjunction with the existing works, which are part of a \$1.2 billion Federal-State program. Mrs Shaw from Tea Gardens also wrote to me. She observed:

Once a week, in the course of my work with the Salvation Army in visiting hospitals and nursing homes, I must make a right hand turn out of Myall Way onto the highway. It is impossible in a sedan, with a lot of traffic on the highway, to see a smaller car or sedan coming at a great rate of knots UP the rise towards the intersection along with trying to watch the oncoming south bound traffic ...

She goes on to say there should be grade separation. There are also problems with the North Arm Cove intersection. That intersection will be cut completely. I have met with residents from North Arm Cove, Mr Lowe, Mr Schirk, Mr Pegram and Mr Page, and received correspondence from Cheryl Swadling, in relation to that intersection. It is imperative that they be given safe access to the Pacific Highway and that they be given secondary access into Karuah and Tea Gardens without having to access the highway. That is a separate issue but it is of great concern to the people of North Arm Cove Council. Where upgrades have been made, the number of head-on collisions and deaths have been reduced but the road toll has been transferred to the intersections. The problems at those intersections are not being fixed and that is causing bad accidents and deaths. The work must be done economically in conjunction with the existing work on the highway, and that includes at Harrington, where there will be exactly the same problem. We do not want more deaths at these intersections.

GREAT KAI'MIA WAY

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.03 p.m.]: Today I advise the House of what might be termed good news and bad news in my electorate. Honourable members will be aware of an exciting project called the Great Kai'mia Way. The Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and the Georges River Environmental Alliance used funds from the Georges River Foreshore Improvement Program to develop a feasibility study for the Great Kai'mia Way, which is potentially a 200-kilometre network of largely existing routes, both walking and cycling. There are three distinctive proposals—the Georges River Way, the Woronora Way and the Botany Bay Trail. Kai'mia is the Aboriginal dreaming story of Botany Bay and the Georges River catchment. Its symbol is the spectacular Gynea lily.

Early last year I was pleased to join my colleagues the honourable members for Heathcote, Miranda and Georges River as the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources launched the implementation phase of this visionary plan. The Minister also provided funds to kick-start the program. The area has been identified as a significant component of Sydney's future recreational trails network project. The project is being administered by the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre, to whom I referred earlier. The environment centre is an independent, not-for-profit association with a vision for local environmental action in which community, business and government work in partnership to bring about a sustainable environment and a productive, healthy society—a society based on sustainable principles.

The excellent work done by the co-ordinator of the project maintained the interest of the honourable members I mentioned earlier in this project, and they made representations to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources. The good news part of my speech today is that recently the Minister wrote to us—to the honourable members mentioned earlier and me—telling us that as Sutherland Shire Council had applied for funds under the Metropolitan Green Space Program, the Minister was able to make sure that a bridging grant of \$30,000 could be approved to Sutherland Shire Council for the project co-ordinator's salary for six months. He was concerned, as we were, that the initiative and momentum on the project might be lost without the funding of this co-ordination position. The Minister stated in a letter to me dated 1 January:

The intent of the bridging grant would be to encourage the Environment Centre to work in partnership with the Council to undertake the groundwork outlined by the MGP expert panel and with a view to Council making a revised submission to MGP in the next round of funding in April 2005. In providing the grant, the Department will be encouraging the Environment Centre co-ordinator to consider partnerships with other Councils, NPWS, the Department of Primary Industry and funding agencies ... to achieve project outcomes.

That good news will be enjoyed by the people of the Georges and Woronora rivers and also by the former chair of the environment centre, Dr Miriam Verbeek, who only recently moved with her family to Armidale to enjoy, in her own words, "a different life and new challenges". I take the opportunity today to pay tribute to her dedication and effectiveness as the chair of the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre. Many activists in the area are associated with the centre. As she was one of the driving forces in the implementation of this project, I pay tribute to her. The Metropolitan Green Space Program and the Georges River Foreshore Improvement Program have been the springboard for this project and on Friday 11 March I will join the mayor of Rockdale, John Flowers, to celebrate the official opening of another project—the Scott Park salt marsh project. Rockdale council should be commended for instigating that worthwhile project for its constituents.

Although there is good news, there is contrasting bad news for the people around the Woronora River. They are most unhappy with the decision of Sutherland Shire Council to adversely impact on their environment and their general quality of life. Unfortunately, the time allowed today prevents me from recounting the long and complex history of the community debate about the potential rezoning of a fire trail joining Woronora Valley to Woronora Heights. My constituents had been relieved by council's earlier decision to ensure the preservation of this fire trail as an emergency access only. However, the complexion of council has changed and on a casting vote by the mayor it has now decided on a different course of action—that is, to make it a bus-only access way. My constituents see this as the thin end of the wedge, and I intend to return to this matter in the House at another time.

THE HILLS DISTRICT POLICING

Mr WAYNE MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [5.08 p.m.]: I have been asked by Mrs Jeannie Muller to raise in this House her concerns in relation to police numbers within my electorate. Mrs Muller and her husband operate their business, Anglers World, at North Rocks. Early on Wednesday morning their premises were damaged by graffiti. Mrs Muller explained that the shop had just been repainted at the landlady's expense and they were shocked to discover such an attack. She advised that the paint had to cure for a month before an anti-graffiti product could be used. Repainting of the premises is required following this graffiti attack, adding an additional unnecessary cost to the landlady.

Mrs Muller and I are not critical of the police action in this matter. She believes there are just not enough police to deal with the crime in the area. My observation is that police in The Hills area work very hard but they urgently need support from the Government. The territory that the police are responsible for has increased dramatically. Mrs Muller stated that in the North Rocks area in which Anglers World is located, the video shop has been held up two or three times and the chemist, which is two doors along, has been held up twice, the last time only two weeks ago when the culprit menaced the chemist with a syringe.

The real concern for many of us on this side of the House is that police numbers continue to fall. On the other hand, The Hills local area command has increased considerably in size and population. This command used to be based at Baulkham Hills and Castle Hill. Police are now required to cover Northmead, Winston Hills, Carlingford, North Rocks and all the way to Maroota. That is an enormous area. The area is changing dramatically with increasing density of housing and a population growing at a rapid rate. Unfortunately, the urban consolidation program of the State Government has made the population explode dramatically, and police are required to minister to and look after so many more people.

It needs to be emphasised that mindless graffiti attacks are criminal acts. They come under the heading of "malicious damage". The cost to property owners of graffiti removal is considerable and I am constantly approached by residents who believe that graffiti detracts from the appearance of The Hills district. In the local press this week there are details of graffiti attacks on, of all places, The Hills Community Health Centre, which is also located in my electorate. The entrance to the centre, signs, two cars and two buses in the adjoining car park were vandalised with spray paint and marked with black permanent markers. The initial estimate to clean up this attack is upwards of \$25,000. That is a lot of money to come out of the local area health budget.

I call upon the Minister for Police to increase police numbers for The Hills local area police command. I live in one of the fastest growing areas in New South Wales and, for that matter, in Australia. The north-west sector, which is on our doorstep, will be the size of Canberra when completed. Clearly the Government has a responsibility to the people who live in this area and to those in areas adjacent to my electorate to ensure adequate police numbers. It is no good simply extending the police territories, enlarging the boundaries, without providing additional resources and reinforcements. The police do a wonderful job and, from my observations, work under stressful conditions. When I have attended the Police Accountability Community Teams [PACT] meetings I have been impressed with the officers' professionalism, dedication and commitment.

The Government owes the hardworking police officers additional forces and resources so they can do their job under reasonable conditions and not have to work under unnecessary stress. I have given two examples of graffiti attacks. Graffiti is the problem. With the changing demographics, crime is on the increase. We need more police in the Baulkham Hills district. I call on the Minister for Police to provide the extra resources.

GOROKAN HIGH SCHOOL HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE RESULTS

Mr PAUL CRITTENDEN (Wyong) [5.13 p.m.]: Last year I drew to the attention of the House the excellent results in the Higher School Certificate achieved by students at Gorokan High School. It was my pleasure on 16 February to attend the school's annual presentation night. I was stunned by the results achieved in 2004, which were better than the outstanding results of the previous year. The Dux of Gorokan High for 2004 was Jodie Lilir, who achieved a university admission index [UAI] of 99.95. Jodie achieved the highest index of any student on the Central Coast, higher than students from Gosford High School, which is a selective school, and higher than students from the private high schools on the Central Coast. Jodie studied Advanced English, and extension one and two. She also studied Legal Studies and came equal first in the State in that subject. Her English teachers were Les Clark and Kerry Howard and her Legal Studies was Lorraine Chaffer.

Jodie also studied Mathematics extension one, an excellent subject, and Modern History. Her Mathematics teacher was Tracey Evans and her Modern History teacher was Jenny Thomas. It was an outstanding result from a very fine young woman. When she received her award she thanked all the teachers. I am sure they were pleased to know that Jodie acknowledged their hard work and collaboration with her. This year Jodie has commenced a combined law degree at the University of Sydney. I wish her well in her studies. No doubt she will be an excellent lawyer of the future.

Jodie's result was only part of the story at Gorokan High School. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of its students who achieved band 5 and band 6 across a range of subjects. The culture that has been created in the school by Allan Arkins, Les Clark, Kim Whealey and all the other teachers in the school is one of excellence, dedication and success. I congratulate the leadership, the teachers and the staff at the school on inculcating that culture of success, which is obviously getting results for the school. Outstanding results were also achieved by Nicolas Harris, who won the citizenship award and the award for consistency and effort. Nicolas Harris, Elisa Chaffer, Jessica Darnborough, Kylie Unicomb and Sarah Matthews, each achieved a UAI in the nineties.

I was impressed on the night by the number of year 12 students who returned to receive their awards not only for academic subjects but also for excellence in vocational education subjects. Almost without exception, the students who came first in each subject were present to receive their award. That shows their school spirit and their appreciation of the efforts of their teachers. The presentation was held in February and they had left school in the previous September or October. Yet they were prepared to come back on the night to congratulate their peers and to recognise the school for the contribution it made to their development.

There was a tinge of sadness because John Hibbard has decided to resume a teaching career in music and will not be devoting himself full time to the school orchestra. The school has had an excellent music program for a considerable time. The school's orchestra is well renowned throughout Wyong shire. It competed internationally in Banff, Canada, several years ago and has played other overseas venues. The musicality of the students is greatly admired. I hope the worthwhile music program at Gorokan High continues in the future. We need to ensure it continues as an important component of creating school spirit.

HORNSBY CONSTITUENT COMMON ASSAULT INFRINGEMENT NOTICE

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [5.18 p.m.]: Today I raise a most concerning situation about a young man who suffers from bipolar disorder, a mental illness. To give some background, the young man's father approached me following a visit to a local solicitor. His son had received a common assault infringement notice. The father had paid the infringement notice, but was now concerned that a conviction had been recorded against his son. I ask the Attorney General and the Minister for Police to look seriously at this matter. I will not mention the names of the people involved because the father of the young man has asked for anonymity.

The circumstances of the case are that the young man was sitting on the steps of the Town Hall when another man allegedly approached him in an aggressive manner, pushed his face into the young man's face and demanded money. Because the young man pushed the approaching person away he was issued with an infringement notice, under a trial for less serious crimes, and charged with common assault. Allegedly he was

taken by two policemen to Town Hall police station, searched and given a ticket. Now the young man cannot get a job. His mental illness has deteriorated markedly. Because of this incident and the event being recorded against his name, he is having difficulties obtaining employment. I sent an urgent representation to the Attorney General's Department at the request of the father and the solicitor. In a letter, the solicitor wrote:

At the time payment was made neither our client nor his father realised that a criminal conviction would be recorded against our client. We note that no reference is made in the penalty notice that a criminal conviction would be recorded automatically following payment of the penalty. Had our client known that a criminal conviction would have been recorded against him, he would have elected to have the matter reviewed by the court. We understand that there were a number of factors involved in the matter which certainly would have had significant effect on whether or not any conviction should have been recorded.

The client allegedly had no prior criminal convictions, and all other personal and objective factors indicated that the client was a person of good character. I believe this is a serious situation. The solicitor had to write twice to the Infringement Processing Bureau before receiving a reply on 17 January to the effect that the bureau was unable to consider the correspondence during the trialling of infringement notices issued for criminal offences. Hence, my constituency is in a huge dilemma here. The common assault charge was not laid in a court and the Infringement Processing Bureau cannot deal with it. I ask the Attorney General and the Minister for Police what this man is supposed to do. He has had to return home to live with his parents within my electorate, thus becoming my constituent once more.

According to the office of the Minister for Police, there is no criminal record but the incident has been noted on the computer operated police system as an "event". That notation is likely to prevent this young man from obtaining employment because if in the course of interviewing him for a job a prospective employer asks him if there has been an "event" he will have to say yes. The fact that this young man has bipolar disease and had been recently discharged from hospital highlights the issue of mental health. I do not make any allegations against any of the police officers concerned, they were merely doing their job, but this man has been placed in a difficult position. There is a query about proof of assault under extenuating circumstances, the ability to appeal the offence, and confusion, stress and alarm that this has happened to someone with a mental illness. I am seeking information on how this charge might be quashed or heard, and an apology for the duress occasioned by my constituent.

FRIENDS OF MYALL CREEK

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury) [5.23 p.m.]: I wish to bring to the attention of the House an extraordinary event that took place in the Jubilee Room yesterday afternoon. I want to place on the record my congratulations to the Friends of Myall Creek and the chairperson of that group, Graeme Cordiner. The group approached me in my capacity as member for Canterbury, and the honourable member for Newcastle, to host the function last night. It was just a wonderful experience. Let me share with honourable members the story of Myall Creek and why it is important, and what happened last night with the public launch of the Friends of Myall Creek.

The fact is that 167 years ago, in 1838, a terrible event took place in the area of the Myall Creek Station, which is near Bingara and Gunnedah. On that occasion 28 old men, women and children from the local Aboriginal tribal group were tied together and murdered, and an attempt was made to burn their bodies. That was not an uncommon incident, of course, in our colonial history. However, what made this event different was the fact for the first time in the colony Governor Gipps' was committed to bringing the perpetrators to justice, and seven of the 12 were hanged. So, it was an important historical event.

For 160 years or so the event was a terrible blight on the history of that part of Australia, but about 10 years ago the people in that area decided they wanted to put things right. They proceeded over a 10-year period to construct a memorial at the site of the massacre. Her Excellency the Governor, Marie Bashir, officiated at last night's function. I interpolate here that the honourable member for Northern Tablelands, who is present, will become the parliamentary representative for that part of the State after the redistribution of electoral boundaries.

Last night there were more than 120 people in the Jubilee Room. In fact, we could not fit everyone in. They came to demonstrate their support for the memorial and the Friends of Myall Creek. The people who spoke were just inspirational. Sue Blacklock, Lyall Munro senior and Darryl French from the Aboriginal community all spoke, as did Senator Aden Ridgeway. Sue Blacklock is the great, great granddaughter of John Munro, a 10-year-old boy who escaped the massacre. Beulah Adams is an amazing woman. Her great uncle, Edward Foley, was one of the perpetrators of the massacre.

Helen Lo Schiavo is the great granddaughter of William Hobbs, the overseer on Myall Creek Station, who would not allow this incident to pass without it being pursued. What a brave man he was in those days. Graeme Cordiner who leads the group, as I said, deserves the highest accolades, together with his group. The thing that most impressed me last night were the words of Beulah and Sue Blacklock. Beulah said, "When I found out that this was part of my history I had to learn the truth." She said that she and Sue are like sisters now. What a wonderful expression 167 years later.

Sue Blacklock said that her people were at peace and that justice had been done. I am sure I have left out important things, but I wanted to place on record this very special event in the New South Wales Parliament last night. It was extremely touching to have senior non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, all of them elders from that part of the world, holding hands despite the roles of their various great, great ancestors, and saying that justice and peace and working together is the way for our nation to see itself. I congratulate all those involved.

BRUDERHOF COMMUNITY, INVERELL

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [5.28 p.m.]: Today I bring to the attention of this House the fact that the Australian Government proposes to evict from Australia a group of people who have set up a thriving businesses and a very good community based in Inverell. The Bruderhof Communities are a religious, Christian-based organisation with groups in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, and a group of around 80 members was established in Inverell in 1999. The Bruderhof community has made an invaluable contribution to the economic and social structure of Inverell and district. I have been involved with them and their leaders from the time they arrived in Inverell, and I assisted them with their submissions to the State Government on local environment planning and other matters.

The community has invested \$9 million in the purchase of 4,300 hectares of land near Inverell comprising two properties, Newstead and Danthonia, and in refurbishing existing buildings and constructing new ones. The group estimates that it spends \$141,000 per month to provide for its residents and its business activities. It is estimated that it will spend a further \$10 million to establish the community and build its numbers to approximately 400. They have established a unique sign writing business, Danthonia Designs, producing high-quality, technologically advanced, handcrafted signs that are sold locally and internationally. In addition, 50 per cent of the products are exported, with the bulk of orders going to the United States of America, and with inquiries from Indonesia and South Korea.

Community leaders have told me that there are many business opportunities in the Pacific rim and they are pursuing these markets with enthusiasm. The company has become recognised as one of the top dimensional sign manufacturers in the world and has won many awards locally and internationally. The development and ongoing maintenance of the Bruderhof community will create new employment opportunities. As well as employing their own members they will create five new full-time jobs for local people within the next five years. Bruderhof community members volunteer as medical technicians and firefighters, serve with local emergency response units, participate in local agricultural and horticultural societies, and visit local retirement villages to offer friendship and support. They also have members in the Inverell Male Choir.

Bruderhof children are home-schooled from kindergarten to year 8 and then go to local schools from year 9 onwards, paying \$6,000 per student per year. The Bruderhof community encourage international visitors and in the past year they have hosted over 80 guests from the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Hungary and Switzerland. They also welcomed ministers and priests from regional Protestant and Catholic churches. When people speak of the decline in rural areas, the example of the Bruderhof community, their commitment, their industry, and their local involvement are a shining example of what can be achieved.

I believe that, with its wonderful lifestyle, the inland offers many opportunities for business. and that people like the Bruderhofs are proving this to be correct. The New South Wales Premier and the Inverell Shire Council, including the Mayor, Councillor Barry Johnston, who is in the Chamber today, have given this community a strong endorsement, as has the State Government for its commitment to bringing people and business to regional New South Wales. Despite this support for the Bruderhof community and their contribution to the economics of rural New South Wales, the Federal Government can find no immigration category to allow these model citizens permanent residency in Australia. The immigration Minister will not even grant the community leaders an interview, despite their trying for several months. As a result, 30 members of the community have had to leave and many others face eviction once their visas run out. Only people in the community aged under 30 have some chance of attaining residency under skills-based immigration schemes.

This is devastating for the Bruderhofs as they will lose their older and more experienced members and leaders, who are the backbone of their community. The really extraordinary thing is that the Bruderhofs have melded into Inverell and district extremely well and have become very popular with the local people. This is in no way a closed community. Its members are skilled and well educated and have not breached Australian laws in any way. They are committed to live in a regional area and they contribute generously. They are model citizens and the Federal Government should be doing everything it can to retain them, not treating them with such shabby and arrogant disregard. If the immigration Minister continues to deny the community an interview and the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, has said he can do nothing to assist, I believe that the Prime Minister, John Howard, should step in and address this as a matter of urgency.

OVARIAN CANCER

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [5.33 p.m.]: In the wake of Ovarian Cancer Awareness Week, held from 20 to 25 February, I would like to share with the House my involvement in local activities and to appeal to honourable members to increase their support for this crucial health campaign. My first real contact with ovarian cancer came in the form of an immensely compassionate and active local constituent by the name of Mary Dias, who had witnessed the horror of her mother losing the battle with ovarian cancer some nine months prior.

It was evident to me that Mary was still suffering the effects of the trauma, as her mother was a gracious and deeply loving woman with whom she was deeply bonded as daughter and best friend. I am to this day in admiration of Mary for the courage and strength she was able to muster in stepping outside the emotional devastation she was experiencing to launch an all-out single-handed effort to begin a local crusade to raise awareness.

To begin with, the Auburn *Review* proved interested, and soon ran the issue complete with photos, facts, and her story to help drive the message home. I soon became involved, but first I decided to do some research, and some disturbing facts came into view. I discovered that ovarian cancer—otherwise known as the silent killer—takes the life of one Australian woman every 10 hours. Day and night, year round, and without discrimination, it goes about its deadly business.

In the case of Mary's mother the cancer proved to be tragically but, characteristically, violent and destructive. It literally ate her alive, organ by organ, as she suffered in unspeakable agony. For members who may not be aware, ovarian cancer has overtaken cervical cancer for the grim prize of being the sixth most common cause of cancer deaths in women. Ongoing research and development will in time develop more reliable early detection tests, but nothing can diminish the importance of simple education and awareness.

For this reason a big part of my effort has gone towards encouraging as many media outlets as possible to join Mary, me and others in embarking on the campaign. I am pleased to inform the House that I received a most positive response from local and metropolitan newspapers. In particular, I was heartened to see the ethnic media respond without hesitation. I included my office contact details in the feature article for Ovarian Cancer Awareness Week and the offer to send out information packs, and I soon received calls from readers across the western Sydney region and beyond. One lady, a reader of the Chinese paper *Sing Tao*, called from Baulkham Hills. My office is working with Mary and Deb Stevens, the Awareness Co-ordinator for the Western Sydney Region of the National Ovarian Cancer Network, who is also a remarkably devoted woman, and to date we have been able to achieve a lot. Yet the job has just begun.

Next year I intend to spread the message still further and heighten media involvement for the duration of awareness week. I encourage honourable members to put their good names behind this important women's health concern and hope that the positive responses I have received thus far will serve to spur us all on to greater efforts. A further piece of encouragement has come in the form of the latest announcement indicating that the National Ovarian Cancer Network and the National Breast Cancer Centre's Ovarian Cancer Program have begun joint efforts with the launch of a new awareness campaign and national guideline.

As important as these initiatives are, it must be remembered that there remain countless women who may still be beyond their reach. So it is imperative that we also wade in and do our part in getting all media, particularly ethnic media and other valuable sources of communication with our constituencies, interested and on side in campaigning along with us. I use this opportunity to honour all those who have been involved thus far, and to extend my deepest condolences to Mary and all others who have lost their loved ones to this most silent and deadly of killers. I close by reading a portion of the poem written by Deb Stevens in memory of Mary's mother:

what was this illness which had such control, such force
"paining daughter"; "paining" said with a smile
this test from God was surely too much
yet her faith graciously accepted it
it was then the monster revealed itself
it had been there in the shadows, waiting
its name, Ovarian Cancer
not like any other women's cancers
all the symptoms, all the signs
but like all the other poor victims
the signs came too late
it wears a mask an evil disguise
December 2003
A time when most of us are preparing for Christmas
Family gatherings, singing, rejoicing
For Hilda's family, there was no preparing for what was to come.

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY (Menai—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.38 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Auburn for raising this very important issue. It is a sobering and frightening statistic that the disease claims one woman every 10 hours. As the honourable member said, awareness is the key to the early detection of this deadly disease and therefore the greater survival of its victims. I join the honourable member for Auburn in paying tribute to her constituent Mary Dias. She is to be commended for her courage and determination, which obviously allowed her to constructively deal with her grief on the loss of her mother. I cannot speak for her, but I suggest that she felt as much grief for her mother while she was suffering on this earth as she did after her mother left it. I hope other honourable members will take the opportunity to promote in their local newspapers and among community groups, greater awareness of what is known as the silent killer but is in fact a disease we must talk about so that other women will be aware and their families will not suffer the tragic loss that Mary and her family have suffered.

THE SPIT BRIDGE WIDENING

Mr DAVID BARR (Manly) [5.40 p.m.]: I wish to speak about transport issues on the northern beaches, specifically in relation to the Spit Bridge. About six months ago the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning requested Manly Council, Mosman Municipal Council and the Maritime Services Board to provide draft conditions of consent for the widening of The Spit Bridge by two lanes. Manly council sought an extension of time to allow it to negotiate with the Department of Infrastructure and Planning regarding consideration of other initiatives, and the council has since suggested an integrated transport package as part of the deal. Negotiations between Manly Council and the department have been going on for months, and I do not think anyone fully understands what is meant by the term "integrated transport package". The measures being considered have not been precisely defined, but obviously they are of a longer-term nature than the widening of the bridge.

Therefore, the idea of holding back on giving conditions of consent as some kind of condition precedent to approving consent conditions for the bridge is putting things the wrong way round. What council should be doing is saying to the planning people, "We will give you our conditions of consent but we would like a memorandum of understanding whereby we continue in dialogue with you to improve outcomes". The Spit Bridge is merely one component of a transport corridor and there are certainly many other measures that can be taken that I have been trying to initiate, including, for instance, a weekend clearway on Spit Road. I spoke to the Minister for Roads about that this week.

There is a chronic traffic problem on the weekends and I have floated the idea of park and ride at the Brookvale bus depot with a multilevel car park being built above the buses. I have also managed to get the former Minister for Roads to agree to a funding contribution towards an investigation into the feasibility of large bikeways along the northern beaches. There are many other issues that can be looked at. Many of these are, by their very nature, long term, and the bridge should not be held hostage to longer-term considerations. We will get a very significant gain that will bring significant improvements to traffic flows on the northern beaches, and that is to be welcomed. I have certainly been proud to be involved in helping to bring this about.

Two weeks ago the shadow Cabinet met at Balgowlah RSL and the Leader of the Opposition made a commitment to a toll tunnel between Manly Vale and Cammeray, which is a distance of 6½ kilometres. At the moment the current cost of tunnels in Sydney is \$390 million per kilometre. If one works out exactly the cost of the proposed tunnel, there is not much change left out of \$2 billion. The toll for that tunnel would be enormous. There is no question that tunnels have their place. The Eastern Distributor, the M5 and others can work well when they bypass congested areas and traffic lights, et cetera. The people in Mosman would obviously like that because a tunnel would bypass Mosman. The only problem is that this tunnel would have its entry and exit

points at Manly, thereby causing many thousands more cars per day to spew out onto the streets of Manly. It would not bypass Manly. That difference is fundamental.

If the Liberal Party goes to the next State election with a proposal to build a tunnel that begins and ends at Manly and does not bypass Manly, thereby flooding Manly with thousands more cars, it will be on a losing script once again. It astounds me that that is what the Liberal Party keeps coming up with. It cannot work out the fundamental: moving traffic freely but not spewing it out onto the streets of an electorate it wants to win. There will also be the issues of ventilation stacks at Balgowlah and Seaforth, and how much the toll will be. The toll would be enormously high and The Spit Bridge would probably have to have a toll as well because people would try to avoid the toll in the tunnel and take Spit Road instead.

There are all sorts of issues that the Liberals have not thought about. In the meantime, The Spit Bridge widening is a practical, pragmatic proposal to improve part of the transport corridor. It should be part of other things that will happen along the way. The council should seek a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources to work through these issues in the medium time frame. In the meantime the council should be welcoming The Spit Bridge widening.

THE SPIT BRIDGE WIDENING

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [5.45 p.m.]: The honourable member for Manly has just given the House his views on northern beaches transport. He has sold out the people of the northern beaches by conspiring with the Carr Labor Government to provide two additional lanes to The Spit Bridge, a bridge that opens, without any commitment to an integrated transport solution. At a northern beaches bus and transport conference two weeks ago Manly mayor Peter Macdonald told the gathering, and I quote his words to the best of my recollection, "I've told David Barr I don't support two extra lanes on the Spit Bridge unless it's part of an integrated transport solution". We have an interesting situation: we have the previous Independent and Residents and Friends member, Mayor Macdonald, telling the current Independent and occasional Residents and Friends member—he almost flies under a flag of convenience on that front—the honourable member for Manly, that he does not agree with his plans for two extra lanes.

Mr David Barr: Point of order: I am not a member of Residents and Friends, and he knows that.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! Those matters cannot be corrected until the House next sits.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: This is what we call a clash of the Independents. I cannot say that it is a clash of the titans because I do not put the honourable member for Manly in that category. On the one hand, someone is trying to get an integrated transport response and, on the other hand, someone is prepared to cop the Carr Government's crumbs simply to make it look like he is achieving something—a very hollow victory indeed! So what has been the response of the honourable member for Manly? He thumbed his nose at the concerns of Mayor McDonald and those of the entire constituency of Mosman and Manly council areas. The honourable member for Manly has confirmed that thumbing of his nose at the concerns about an integrated transport solution required for the northern beaches. Indeed, his interjection a moment ago indicated that he does not seem to have the skill or the intellect to work out what an integrated transport solution is. The honourable member for Manly has never explained to the community of the northern beaches how two extra lanes on a bridge that opens will help traffic flow if the bridge is open. He has never explained how moving the traffic jam down at the bridge 200 metres up the road—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr John Mills): Order! I interrupt the honourable member for Wakehurst to remind him of two Speakers' rulings. The first is that members may not debate one private member's statement against another, and the other is that private members' statements should not be used to make attacks on other members. I suggest to the honourable member for Wakehurst that he can achieve his objective by refraining from doing either of those things and concentrating on the subject matter of his private member's statement.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: My speech, it is typed out; it has nothing to do with what the honourable member for Manly has just said. I note that the honourable member for Menai, who is at the table, has rushed to the Acting-Speaker and tried to do a deal to shore up and protect the honourable member for Manly, which is typical of the Labor Party's close affinity and symbiotic relationship with the honourable member for Manly. He is nothing more than a clone of the Labor Party, and the honourable member for Menai has put evidence right there before the House about that.

Ms Alison Megarrity: That's not true. You have no evidence of that.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The honourable member for Menai should sit there quietly and let this come out. Let democracy take its course. The honourable member for Manly must heed the warning from Dr Macdonald. At the very least, he must support Manly Council's efforts to get an integrated transport solution, even if he does not understand what it means. The Shore Regional Organisation of Councils, the group that represents all of the councils on the north side, wants an integrated transport solution. Unfortunately, the track record of the honourable member for Manly has been one of ineffective flip-flopping and negatives towards real solutions, whether on netball courts, JetCat services or TAFE. On anything to do with the big issues that face the northern beaches, he is the classic flip-flop merchant.

The honourable member for Manly talked about the Liberal and National parties. The Liberal and National parties remain committed to an integrated transport solution for the northern beaches. Our vision is not built around crumbs thrown from the Labor Party, but around a new major transport thoroughfare, a tunnel, a connection that will provide fast and efficient public transport and private vehicle connections to the city from the northern beaches. The honourable member for Manly, of course, opposes the tunnel. He ran his scare campaign before the election, and he ran it again today: toll plazas here, forced payments there, it is all going to be so expensive. What it amounts to is that the honourable member for Manly has no solutions and is not prepared to get behind a fair dinkum solution that is being offered by the Coalition. If the bridge is up I do not care how many extra lanes are on it, the traffic cannot move. The honourable member for Manly has not explained that, nor has the Labor Party, and nor has the pompous Premier, despite his efforts yesterday when he said he would put a few bob, a few crumbs, before the people of the northern beaches. We want a real traffic solution. [*Time expired.*]

SCHIZOPHRENIA FELLOWSHIP COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER FUNDING

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [5.50 p.m.], by leave: In 2001 the Centre for Mental Health established a community development project following an expression of interest submitted by the Schizophrenia Fellowship in 1999-2000. In 2002 the Schizophrenia Fellowship, in partnership with Greater Murray Area Health Service, recruited a community development officer, Christine Huntsdale. Funding for this position was originally from the Centre for Mental Health as a \$50,000 grant, with the Schizophrenia Fellowship being given \$15,000 and the remaining \$35,000 was given to the Greater Murray Area Health Service, which passed it on to the fellowship.

The Greater Murray Area Health Service has advised me that the Centre for Mental Health provides \$35,000 per annum for the position, but is unable to top it up. The budget for the financial year 2004-05 is \$52,480. In June last year the Schizophrenia Fellowship wrote a letter to Greater Murray Area Health Service seeking a grant of \$47,480 and in response was given the annual grant of \$35,000 plus consumer price index increases. This year the grant was \$36,660. I will read onto the record a letter Christine Huntsdale wrote on 25 February to the *Daily Advertiser* illustrating the valuable work that has been done and is still being done. The letter states:

"Mental health inquiry tackles system in crisis" front page headline, *Sydney Morning Herald* (February 18, 2005). Another inquiry is on the way.

We already know what is needed—funds.

Allow me to tell you what is happening in Wagga. We have just taken over the lease of a government building which has remained unoccupied for three years, except for the squatters who smashed it up on a regular basis.

We agitated for a considerable length of time to persuade government departments and ministers to hand over a lease to our service, the Mental Health Fellowship (a branch of the Schizophrenia Fellowship NSW).

We wanted to set up a clubhouse for people with mental illness, which is a place to learn new skills, socialise (some have no friends) and be assisted back into the workforce.

Despite a population of almost 60,000 people, Wagga has no rehabilitation service for those with mental illness. The good news is: TAFE building teachers and their students are doing all the renovations giving us free labour; Wagga Rotary Clubs are helping pay for some materials; community members and groups are donating their expertise, time and money; local businesses are providing discounts and free hiring of equipment; those with mental illness and health professionals are working together on committees, and it is all going along at a rapid and enthusiastic pace. The bad news is: Our submission for State funding to employ staff has yielded no positive results so far.

We had hoped to be training staff during the renovations but cannot even advertise for them.

Here is a community giving its all to help "one of the most chronically disadvantaged groups in Australia" (same article) but only government funds will make our "clubhouse" a reality.

I am so sorry for Cornelia Rau and her family; however, if what they suffered means that more than 6.4 per cent of health funding goes to sorting out the mental health crisis, then their heartache will not have been in vain.

The community has done a remarkable job so far. I thank the Minister responsible for providing the building and staff, who worked through the process to ensure that Sunflower House was made available for mental health needs. I was pleased to be asked to be patron of this wonderful facility. However, I am saddened by the fact that Christine Huntsdale has handed in her resignation. She has put into place a program that has been so successful that she is experiencing mental burnout and is exhausted. She has done a magnificent job for our community. All the activities are in place, their objectives have been reached and their performance indicators have been achieved.

Christine feels that she has sown the seeds for what will be a great program for assisting people with mental health problems. Mental health has featured largely this week and it was noted that one in five people will suffer a mental health illness. However, the good news is that people do get better. I acknowledge the great work of the committee and of Dr Ray King, a driving force behind the development of this project. I also thank the Rotary clubs, the community and all those who are working hard to develop this project. It would not have happened without the Schizophrenia Fellowship and Christine Huntsdale. I place on record my appreciation and that of the community for the work Christine has done. I am disappointed that all her hard work has taken such a toll on her health. It is a shame that the more success one achieves, the more adverse effects it has on a person's wellbeing. I appeal to the Minister to fund this important project.

Private members' statements noted.

The House adjourned at 5.55 p.m. until Tuesday 22 March 2005 at 2.15 p.m.
