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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday 19 March 2013

The President (The Hon. Donald Thomas Harwin) took the chair at 2.30 p.m.

The President read the Prayers.

The PRESIDENT: I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation and its elders and thank them for their custodianship of this land.

CRIMES (SENTENCING PROCEDURE) AMENDMENT (PROVISIONAL SENTENCING FOR CHILDREN) BILL 2013

Bill received from the Legislative Assembly, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Michael Gallacher.

Motion by the Hon. Michael Gallacher agreed to:

That standing orders be suspended to allow the passing of the bill through all its remaining stages during the present or any one sitting of the House.

Second reading set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

SOLOMON ISLANDS EARTHQUAKE

The PRESIDENT: I report the receipt of the following communication from Sir Allan Kemakeza, KBE, the Speaker of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands:

Dear Honourable Harwin,

I write to respectfully acknowledge receipt of your letter D13/02676 dated 11 February 2013, in which you have expressed the sympathies and condolences of yourself and Members of the Legislative Council of New South Wales to the relatives and friends of the people of Temotu Province who have suffered the loss of loved ones during the recent earthquake and tsunami.

On behalf of our people, I humbly thank you and Members of the Legislative Council of NSW for your heartfelt condolences and thoughts shared with the affected families.

Please be assured of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Allan Kemakeza KBE
Speaker of National Parliament

Pursuant to sessional orders Formal Business Notices of Motions proceeded with.

CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Motion by the Hon. JAN BARHAM agreed to:

1. That this House notes that:
 - (a) the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012 was passed by the Commonwealth House of Representatives on 13 February 2013 and passed by the Senate on 12 March 2013,
 - (b) the bill provides parliamentary recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first occupants of Australia, and acknowledges their continuing relationship with their traditional lands and waters and their continuing cultures, languages and heritage,
 - (c) the bill establishes a process of review of support for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution, and
 - (d) the bill was passed with multiparty support.

2. That this House:
 - (a) recognises that the continent and the islands now known as Australia were first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,
 - (b) acknowledges the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their traditional lands and waters, and
 - (c) acknowledges and respects the continuing cultures, languages and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
3. That this House acknowledges the work of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians and community organisations such as Recognise in establishing the path toward a Referendum on Constitutional Recognition.
4. That this House expresses its support for constitutional change for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's Constitution.

POPE FRANCIS

Motion by the Hon. DAVID CLARKE agreed to:

That this House notes:

- (a) the election of a new Pope, His Holiness Pope Francis I,
- (b) that this is a time for celebration for Catholics and the Catholic faith worldwide, and
- (c) acknowledges the contribution of the Catholic Church to community life in New South Wales.

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 4

Extension of Reporting Date

Motion by the Hon. Sarah Mitchell agreed to:

That the reporting date for the reference to General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 relating to an inquiry into the use of cannabis for medical purposes be extended to Friday 17 May 2013.

NEW SOUTH WALES RUGBY LEAGUE INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Motion by the Hon. MARIE FICARRA agreed to:

1. That this House acknowledges that the NSW Rugby League Indigenous Department conducts a range of programs to encourage social inclusion, reconciliation, healthy lifestyles and excellence in sport, including:
 - (a) the KARI Aboriginal Resources Development Program, in which:
 - (i) KARI and the NSW Rugby League conduct an annual U/16's Indigenous Schoolboys Seven a Side Competition to support reconciliation,
 - (ii) schools are encouraged to select a number of non-Indigenous players in their squads,
 - (iii) KARI Aboriginal Resources sponsor this competition to assist the two finalist schools with information technology equipment,
 - (iv) in 2012, four girls teams competed against each other for the first time,
 - (v) the Wests Tigers also assist with the final being played at their National Rugby League Close the Gap round match,
 - (b) the Indigenous Development Programs, in which:
 - (i) NSW Rugby League has one elite Indigenous Program where a team is selected to play against Queensland U/16s as part of the National Rugby League All Stars Program,
 - (ii) there are currently 20 players who have graduated to the National Rugby League from this program including Jamal Idris, Ben Barba, Chris Sandow, Tyrone Roberts and Ryan James,
 - (c) the New South Wales Rugby League Indigenous Department hosts a range of events throughout the year including the Ronny Gibbs 7's at Bourke and the Ricky Walford Shield at Walgett,

- (d) ISP Indigenous Referees Camp in which 30 Indigenous Referees are invited annually to attend a three-day camp at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Redfern where they are instructed in all areas of refereeing by New South Wales, Country Rugby League and National Rugby League referees with three selected to attend the National Rugby League All Stars match to gain further experience, and
 - (e) 40 young U/16 Indigenous players from all over New South Wales will embark on a tour to France and England in November 2013, and the players will visit Barcelona, Perpignan, Paris, Lille, being the Somme Battlefields, and London on the 17-day, self-funded trip.
2. That this House congratulates and commends the following on their work in encouraging social inclusion, reconciliation, healthy lifestyles and excellence in sport:
- (a) Geoff Carr, NSW Rugby League General Manager,
 - (b) Ricky Walford, NSW Indigenous Rugby League Manager, and Steve Hall, Indigenous Rugby League Development Officer,
 - (c) Terry Quinn, General Manager, NSW Country Rugby League,
 - (d) Paul Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, KARI Aboriginal Resources, and
 - (e) John Pearson, Brad Latham and Billy Chalk, and Sydney Markets.

FATHER ATANASIO GONELLI CHARITABLE FUND

Motion by the Hon. MARIE FICARRA agreed to:

1. That this House notes that:
- (a) on Sunday 3 March 2013, the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund held a charity lunch to:
 - (i) honour that 12 months after his Father Atanasio Gonelli's death, he is continuing to be a unifying figure for the Italian community of New South Wales,
 - (ii) acknowledge Father Atanasio Gonelli as an inspiring hero, great community leader and an icon of the Italian community, who the New South Wales community benefitted greatly from due to his outstanding community service,
 - (iii) honour 26,000 days of Father Atanasio Gonelli's apostolate in aid of the Italian community of New South Wales,
 - (iv) acknowledge the inclusion of Father Atanasio Gonelli in the NSW Premier's Multicultural Honour Roll,
 - (v) acknowledge the proposal of the Mayor of Leichhardt Council, Councillor Darcy Byrne, to establish a memorial garden in Norton Street, Leichhardt, in honour of Father Atanasio Gonelli and the Italian migrant community he served, and
 - (b) dignitaries that attended the event:
 - (i) the Hon. Marie Ficarra, MLC, Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, representing the Premier, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, MP,
 - (ii) Mr Guy Zangari, MP, shadow Minister for Citizenship and Communities, representing the Leader of the New South Wales Opposition, the Hon. John Robertson, MP,
 - (iii) Councillor Darcy Byrne, Mayor of Leichhardt,
 - (iv) Councillor Morris Mansour, Mayor of Ashfield,
 - (v) Councillor Victor Macri, Mayor of Marrickville,
 - (vi) Councillor Tony Mustaca, OAM, Willoughby City Council,
 - (vii) Councillor Vincent De Luca, OAM, Warringah Council,
 - (viii) Councillor Tony Costantino, Leichhardt Council,
 - (ix) Councillor Tony Fasanella, Canada Bay Council,
 - (x) Dr Sergio Martes, Consul General for Italy, Sydney,
 - (xi) Mr Luca Ferarri, Honorary Consul General for Italy in Wollongong,

- (xii) Commendatore Joe Fin, OAM, Foundation Patron of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund,
 - (xiii) Father John Cooper,
 - (xiv) Father Paul Hanbridge,
 - (xv) Brother Peter Toulis,
 - (xvi) Mr Vince Foti, President of Club Marconi,
 - (xvii) Mr John Caputo, OAM, President Italian National Day Celebration Committee Inc,
 - (xviii) Cav. Nicola Caré and the Board of the Italian Chamber of Commerce,
 - (xix) Mr Frank Chigment and Ms Linda Restuccia, CO.AS.IT.,
 - (xx) Mr George Aziz, President of the Canada Bay Club and its Board,
 - (xxi) Mr Michael Cantali and the Board of the Mamma Lena Foundation
2. That this House congratulates and commends the Board of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund for its outstanding work and for raising over \$40,000 at the event that shall be spent on helping the disadvantaged, the board being:
- (a) Felice Montrone, President,
 - (b) Rosa Peronace, Vice President,
 - (c) Bruno Buttini, Secretary,
 - (d) Gianni Carelli, Treasurer,
 - (e) Filippo Navarra, OAM,
 - (f) Nat Zanardo, OAM,
 - (g) Domenica Riggio,
 - (h) Peter Ciani,
 - (i) John Williams,
 - (j) Lucho De Nicola,
 - (k) Susi Schio,
 - (l) Michele Salamone,
 - (m) Giuseppe Fin, OAM, foundation patron, and
 - (n) Father John Cooper, spiritual leader.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ART EXHIBITION

Motion by the Hon. MARIE FICARRA agreed to:

1. That this House notes that the Hong Kong and Trade Office and Way In Network held an opening for an art exhibition, "Women in Arts Expression—2013" for International Women's Day between 7 and 9 March 2013.
2. That this House acknowledges:
 - (a) that the exhibition brings women from different areas of the world together to show their personal works of art including oil paintings, Chinese paintings, photographic works, calligraphy, porcelain and ikebana, and
 - (b) the major sponsors: Macquarie Private Wealth, Virgin Atlantic, Bvlgari and the Corporate Sponsors: Zilver Restaurant, East Ocean Restaurant, E Smart Finance Pty Ltd, Landcross Real Estate, Shum's Watch and Jewellery, Uni Sushi + Udon and Acurancy Financial and Insurance Services.
3. That this House commends for their contribution to 2013 International Women's Day the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Sydney and The Way in Network and Committee, including President, Councillor Annie Tang; Senior Vice President, Elsa Shum; Vice President (External), Linda Tang; Vice President (Admin), Linda McGarry; and members Rosalyn Thockloth-Fong, Rosanna Ng, Susanna Lau, Lisa Harris, Vicki Ouyang, Anny Chan, Shinta Taylor, Eugenia Lieu, Floris Lam, Gabby Kwok, Jessie Xiao, Sally You, Lucy Shun, Stella So and Hedy Yeung.

NEW SOUTH WALES RUGBY LEAGUE FUNDRAISING EVENT**Motion by the Hon. MARIE FICARRA agreed to:**

1. That this House acknowledges that:
 - (a) on Wednesday 6 March 2013 the NSW Rugby League held the True Blue Meet the Coaches Lunch in the Parliament of New South Wales Strangers Dining Room with Australian Rugby League coach Tim Sheens and NSW Blues State of Origin Coach Laurie Daley AM, with all funds raised going to the NSW Rugby League's U/16 Indigenous Program run by former New South Wales player, Ricky Walford, and
 - (b) dignitaries that attended the event included:
 - (i) the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, MP, Premier of New South Wales and Patron of the NSW Blues,
 - (ii) the Hon. Graham Annesley, MP, Minister for Sport,
 - (iii) Mr John Robertson, MP, Leader of the Opposition,
 - (iv) the Hon. Marie Ficarra, MLC, Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier,
 - (v) the Hon. John Ajaka, MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport,
 - (vi) Ms Linda Burney, MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition,
 - (vii) Mr John Sidoti, MP, member for Drummoyne,
 - (viii) Councillor John Chedid, Lord Mayor of Parramatta,
 - (ix) Councillor Vincent De Luca, OAM, Warringah Council,
 - (x) Mr John Chalk, Chairman, NSW Rugby League,
 - (xi) Mr Geoff Carr, General Manager, NSW Rugby League,
 - (xii) Mr David Smith, Chief Executive, National Rugby League,
 - (xiii) NSW Rugby League Board Members: Mr Ray Dib, Mr George Peponis, OAM, Mr Bob Millward, OAM, Mr Geoff Gerard and Mr David Trodden,
 - (xiv) Mr Bob Fulton, AM, NSW National Rugby League Advisor and Immortal,
 - (xv) Mr John Raper, MBE, NSW National Rugby League Immortal,
 - (xvi) Mr Graeme Langlands, MBE, NSW National Rugby League Immortal,
 - (xvii) Mr Steve Mortimer, OAM, former Australian Rugby League player,
 - (xviii) Mr Colin Love, AM, Chairman, Rugby League International Federation,
 - (xix) Mr Daryl Kerry, Managing Director, ANZ Stadium,
 - (xx) Mr Steve Edge, Master of Ceremonies,
 - (xxi) Mr Paul Langmack, organiser of the event.
2. That this House congratulates and commends NSW Rugby League on its fundraising for the NSW Rugby League's U/16 Indigenous Program, Mr Ricky Walford, Mr Tim Sheens and Mr Laurie Daley, AM, on their presentations at the event.

TABLING OF PAPERS

The Hon. Greg Pearce tabled the following paper:

Sydney Water Catchment Management Act 1998—The Sydney Catchment Authority Statement of Financial Framework for the period commencing 1 July 2012.

Ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Greg Pearce.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Report**

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps tabled the report of the Legislation Review Committee entitled "Legislation Review Digest No. 33/55", dated 19 March 2013.

Ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Routine of Business**

[During the giving of notices of motions.]

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Point of order: I draw attention to Standing Order 94 (1), which states, in part, "tedious repetition of a matter already presented".

The Hon. Amanda Fazio: To the point of order: The standing order to which the Hon. Duncan Gay refers pertains to debate within the Chamber, not to the giving of notices of motions. I believe the notice of motion of the Hon. Penny Sharpe is in order. The Hon. Duncan Gay is attempting to censor Opposition members from giving their notices of motions.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member should not stray into making debating points, regardless of the merit of her response to the point of order. I do not need any further assistance from members. There is no point of order. The Hon. Penny Sharpe may proceed with her notice of motion.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Withdrawal of Business**

Private Members' Business item No. 1090 outside the Order of Preference withdrawn by the Hon. Amanda Fazio.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Routine of Business**

[During the giving of notices of motions.]

The Hon. Amanda Fazio: Point of order: It is inappropriate and outside the standing orders for the Hon. Melinda Pavey to make imputations about the character of a member of this Chamber. I ask you to remind her that she should not do so.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Do other members want to contribute to the Hon. Amanda Fazio's point of order? I will give the matter consideration and advise the House of my ruling later.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Postponement of Business**

Government Business Notice of Motion No. 1 postponed on motion by the Hon. Duncan Gay.

Committee Reports Order of the Day No. 4 postponed on motion by the Hon. Robert Borsak.

PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE**Membership**

The PRESIDENT: I inform the House that the Clerk has received advice from the Leader of the Opposition that on 18 March 2013 the Hon. Greg Donnelly replaced the Hon. Peter Primrose as a member of the Privileges Committee.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Routine of Business****Motion by the Hon. Duncan Gay agreed to:**

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the standing or sessional orders, on Monday 25 March 2013, Tuesday 26 March 2013 and Wednesday 27 March 2013 the times for meeting for the despatch of business and the precedence of business will be as follows:

- (a) the House will meet for the despatch of business on Monday at 2.30 p.m., Tuesday at 11.00 a.m. and Wednesday at 9.30 a.m.,
- (b) questions are to commence at 4.00 p.m. on Monday and at 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday,
- (c) proceedings must be interrupted at 7.00 p.m. on Monday, 10.00 p.m. on Tuesday and 3.30 p.m. on Wednesday to permit a motion for adjournment to be moved to terminate the sitting if a Minister thinks fit,
- (d) Government Business is to take precedence of General Business on Monday, Tuesday and after 3.30 p.m. on Wednesday and General Business is to take precedence until 3.30 p.m. on Wednesday,
- (e) debate on committee reports is to take precedence after questions on Monday until 6.30 p.m., and
- (f) debate on the motion to take note of the budget estimates for 2012-2013 is to take precedence after debate on committee reports on Monday.

INTOXICATED PERSONS (SOBERING UP CENTRES TRIAL) BILL 2013

Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon Michael Gallacher.

Second Reading

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Hunter, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) [3.10 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill supports a key initiative of the Government's plans to address alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour in public places. Through the trial of three sobering-up centres it is the Government's intention to test whether providing safe environments for individuals who are noticeably intoxicated to sober up has a positive flow-on effect for public amenity and public safety. As members may be aware, sobering-up centres are not a new phenomenon in Australia and are already operating in a number of locations. For instance, in developing the model for the New South Wales trial, the Government has considered in some detail the operation of Canberra's sobering-up shelter as well as the legislation which supports it. I think we would all agree that people have the right to go out at night and enjoy a few drinks—no question about it—but it is the Government's view that similarly people have the right to enjoy a night out without the intrusion and safety concerns caused by rowdy, violent drunks. The trial of sobering-up centres will test two different approaches: mandatory and non-mandatory.

I will now provide some detail as to the plans for the centres. The centres will operate on Friday and Saturday nights with the flexibility of including other nights of the week where major events might warrant this. The mandatory centre referred to in the bill as the Sydney city centre will be operated by the NSW Police Force and will be located in Sydney's central business district. The two non-mandatory centres referred to in the bill as accredited centres will be located within the eastern beaches and Wollongong local area commands and will be operated by non-government providers under contract to and accredited by the Department of Family and Community Services. I understand a procurement process to locate an operator or operators for these centres is currently underway.

The key difference between the two approaches will be that with the accredited centres intoxicated persons will be referred to the centre by police but may choose to leave at any time. However, should they still be considered to pose a risk to either themselves or the public police will be notified and may take further steps to ensure their safety. With the mandatory centre intoxicated persons will be required to remain at the centre either until they are no longer assessed as being intoxicated or they arrange for a responsible person to come to the centre to take responsibility for them. Intoxicated persons detained at the mandatory centre will also be liable for a cost-recovery fee in addition to any penalty notice they may receive.

The service model for both types of centre will also provide for health checks, regular monitoring and the provision of food and drink whilst either detained or housed. This highlights that the safety and security of intoxicated persons admitted or detained at the centres has been a central consideration in the planning and design of the trial. The eligibility criteria for entry into the Sydney city sobering-up centre will be threefold. Either an intoxicated person must have refused or failed to comply with a move-on direction and persisted in engaging in the relevant conduct that gave rise to the direction or any relevant conduct or be found by police to have been behaving in a disorderly manner or a manner likely to cause injury to the person or another person or damage to property or be considered to be in need of physical protection because of their intoxication, as is currently provided for under existing legislation.

In the case of the two accredited centres, entry is to be via police referral and where either of the following criteria is met: a police officer believes the intoxicated person is a public nuisance as defined in the Act or the intoxicated person is in need of physical protection because of their level of intoxication. The bill provides for additional entry criteria for the accredited centres to be prescribed via regulation. To be clear, vulnerable groups such as Aboriginal people and what are commonly known as "rough sleepers" will not be targeted under this trial. Intoxicated juveniles under the age of 18 years will be ineligible for admission to a sobering-up centre. Police officers will continue to exercise discretion in such matters and already have power under the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act to detain intoxicated persons.

The definition of "intoxicated" provided in section 198 of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act will be used to determine eligibility for entry into the sobering-up centres. This provides that a person is intoxicated if the person's speech, balance, coordination or behaviour is noticeably affected and it is reasonable in the circumstances to believe that the affected speech, balance, coordination or behaviour is the result of the consumption of alcohol or any drug. This definition will apply to those individuals detained following a refusal or failure to comply with a move-on direction. Part 16 of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act provides for a separate definition of "intoxicated", and that definition will apply for assessing detention under that part.

I will now turn to the provisions in detail. Part 1 of the bill outlines the objects of the Act and defines key terms. Part 2 sets out the circumstances under which intoxicated persons may be detained and transported to sobering-up centres. Proposed section 7, for example, makes it clear that if an intoxicated person has committed an offence other than those listed as exceptions in this provision he or she is not to be detained for transport to a sobering-up centre but instead dealt with for the offence in the normal manner. Proposed section 8 provides that a police officer may require a person detained for the purpose of being transported to a sobering-up centre to disclose his or her identity.

Offences and penalties are also provided for failure or refusal to comply with such a request without reasonable excuse and providing a false name or address to a police officer. This is important. Police officers need to be able to establish identity in a timely manner when someone is in their custody, particularly so where an individual may be in a vulnerable state or be in need of medical treatment. Proposed section 10 outlines the information which must be conveyed to an intoxicated person who is either being detained or admitted to a sobering-up centre. This includes, for example, in the case of the Sydney city sobering-up centre that admission is compulsory, that they will be searched on entry, and the conditions and statutory time frames for detention. In the case of the accredited centres, intoxicated persons are informed that admission is voluntary but should they wish to seek admission they must consent to being assessed by a health practitioner, being monitored by staff at the centre and having their person and belongings searched.

Again, the health and safety of intoxicated persons is of paramount concern in the design and conduct of this trial. Searching intoxicated persons being admitted to a centre will help to minimise the risk of anyone overdosing whilst there or bringing in weapons. It is also important to note that where an intoxicated person is deemed medically unfit to enter or remain at a sobering-up centre, arrangements will be made to transport them to an emergency department or other arrangements will be made as appropriate. Also, where an intoxicated person is deemed violent or likely to become violent, such behaviour will render them ineligible for admission to an accredited sobering-up centre. Instead, intoxicated persons exhibiting such behaviour will be managed by police as would normally be the case under existing legislation. Proposed section 12 outlines the procedures and conditions for release from a sobering-up centre.

It provides that in the case of all three centres an intoxicated person is not to remain admitted or detained for longer than eight hours. Should an intoxicated person be able to quickly find a responsible person able and willing to come and take responsibility for them they could spend very little time at all at a centre. But if they are later found by police to have resumed their prior behaviour—for example, being rowdy and violent in a public place due to intoxication—they may find themselves back for a repeat visit to a sobering-up centre. In

the case of the Sydney city centre, that could end up being very costly indeed as they may receive both a penalty notice and a notice to pay a cost-recovery charge each time, not to mention perhaps a bill for an ambulance ride to a hospital emergency department.

Prior to an intoxicated person exiting a sobering-up centre, efforts will be made by health assessment officers to discuss their drinking habits with them and they will provide advice and referral information to treatment services if requested. Division 3 of part 2 of the bill makes provision for an escalating cost-recovery charge to be levied on intoxicated persons detained in the Sydney city sobering-up centre. The fee schedule, prescribed manner and time frame for payment of the cost-recovery charge will be included in a supporting regulation that will be in place prior to the commencement of the trial on 1 July 2013.

Proposed section 17 deals with the application of the Fines Act 1996 to this scheme, including the processes for enforcement of unpaid cost-recovery charges. Section 18 outlines the prescribed arrangements for applying to the Local Court to have a cost-recovery charge waived or reduced, including the factors the Local Court is to take note of when considering such an application. These include any attendance by the applicant at a drug or alcohol treatment program. Part 3 of the bill provides for an accreditation scheme for accredited sobering-up centres. Proposed section 22 provides, for example, that the Director General of the Department of Family and Community Services may suspend or cancel a centre's accreditation, and the section sets out the conditions under which this can occur. This will help to ensure that the centres continue to be operated as they were intended and to a high standard.

Turning to part 4 of the bill, proposed section 23 exempts the first two accredited sobering-up centres from certain requirements under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, including the need to obtain development consent. This is necessary to ensure that the two accredited centres are able to be established and ready for operation by the start of the trial period on 1 July 2013. Proposed section 24 exempts police officers, authorised officers, health practitioners or any other person from liability in respect of anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in the execution or purported execution of the legislation. It also provides that both health assessments and searches of intoxicated persons and their belongings undertaken under the provisions of this Act are deemed to have occurred with the consent of the person. This is necessary given that individuals in such circumstances will be intoxicated and may be unable to give informed consent. Not assessing their physical state or checking them for drugs, weapons or anything else may expose them, as well as those around them, to further risk.

Proposed section 25 ensures that agencies involved with the trial as well as a body accredited to operate a sobering-up centre may exchange information collected during the trial, but only for defined purposes and provided that this is supported by a formal arrangement negotiated between the agencies. Proposed sections 29 and 30 provide for repeal and review of the legislation. Proposed section 29 provides that the Act is repealed on 1 July 2014 or a later date prescribed by regulation. Proposed section 30 provides that if repeal of the Act is postponed to a date after 1 July 2016, a ministerial review must take place to determine whether the policy objectives of the Act remain valid and whether the terms of the Act remain appropriate for securing those objectives.

The trial of three sobering-up centres is further evidence of the Government's ongoing commitment to addressing alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour on our streets. The trial has been designed to provide benefits for intoxicated persons—by removing them from harm, for example—as well as for the general public by helping to make public spaces safer and more welcoming at night. At the conclusion of the trial a substantive evaluation will be conducted to analyse the outcomes of the two different approaches and a decision on the future of the centres will be made at that time. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by the Hon. Amanda Fazio and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

ROAD TRANSPORT BILL 2013

ROAD TRANSPORT LEGISLATION (REPEAL AND AMENDMENT) BILL 2013

ROAD TRANSPORT (STATUTORY RULES) BILL 2013

Second Reading

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY (Minister for Roads and Ports) [3.25 p.m.]: I move:

That these bills be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Road Transport Bill 2013, the Road Transport (Repeal and Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013. These bills consolidate New South

Wales road transport legislation and prepare for the eventual adoption of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in this State. The consolidation of road transport legislation is an important step in realising the New South Wales Liberals and Nationals Government's commitment to reducing red tape by cutting the number of principal regulatory instruments. These bills not only cut the number and reduce the volume of statutes but also remove anomalies, inconsistency and a degree of complexity in the legislation that impact on every citizen in New South Wales.

Before 1999, road transport legislation in New South Wales was primarily located in the former Traffic Act 1909, which began as a simple statute to identify vehicles and licensed drivers and prevent "furious" or "reckless" driving. With the growth in vehicle usage, the volume of traffic and the impact of technology, road transport legislation exploded in breadth and detail in each jurisdiction. It was also parochial and consequently inefficient, and even unsafe. As early as 1933 the president of the NRMA had complained:

At the moment a motorist passing from one State into another has to unlearn much of what he has learned in his own State and to learn a lot that is strange to him. This produces irritation—or worse—in the motor owner and motor driver, and tends to unnecessary costs of traffic administration (which the motorist usually has to pay for). It also adds to traffic dangers through ignorance or unfamiliarity with local conditions or practices on the part of drivers.

It was not until the 1990s that the newly formed National Transport Commission developed a series of modules for national model road transport legislation to create a consistent and uniform regulatory environment, including heavy vehicle charges, driver licensing, vehicle registration and compliance and enforcement. These modules were progressively adopted by enacting the following new Acts in New South Wales: the Road Transport (Heavy Vehicle Registration Charges) Act 1995, the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act 1997, the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act 1998, the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999 and the Road Transport (General) Act 2005.

Members will be aware that road transport legislation impacts on all citizens, either directly or indirectly. There are 5.5 million licence holders in New South Wales and 5.7 million registered vehicles. These drivers and their vehicles—mostly cars—travelled 66 billion kilometres on New South Wales roads in 2011-12. The legislation which regulates road transport is complex, regulating all aspects of the road environment from licensing drivers and registering vehicles to road rules, vehicle standards, traffic management, drug and alcohol testing, motorcycle rider training, compliance and enforcement, and "chain of responsibility" for heavy vehicles. That complexity was unintentionally magnified by the creation of five new Acts and 10 regulations. For example, provisions relating to alcohol breath interlock devices are found in three Acts and two regulations. Provisions relating to demerit points are similarly scattered, and it is difficult for road users to understand what applies to them.

Moreover, there are areas of duplication, repetition and extensive cross-referencing. There are different definitions for "drive", "driver", "vehicle", "traffic", "garage address", "heavy motor vehicle", and "foreign driver licence". Some of the key terms remain undefined. Over time the number of Acts and regulations has declined slightly. Two regulations relating to New South Wales and Australian road rules were merged to make a single set of road rules in 2008. In 2009 the Road Transport (Heavy Vehicle Registration Charges) Act, and its regulation, were repealed and its provisions were included in vehicle registration legislation. However, much more remains to be done.

There are three bills before the House today: the Road Transport Bill 2013, the Road Transport (Repeal and Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013. The first, the Road Transport Bill, represents a simplification of the structure of legislation without major changes in policy. It amalgamates into one Act the Road Transport Driver Licensing, Vehicle Registration, Safety and Traffic Management Acts and the compliance and enforcement provisions of the Road Transport (General) Act applicable to road transport legislation generally. It is intended to enhance New South Wales road users' understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities.

The changes include the removal of inconsistency, repetition, anomalies and redundancy. In addition, the bill provides for advances in technology, such as traffic management devices, and standardisation of processes for drug and alcohol testing. In addition, some provisions that are currently found in regulations, such as those relating to appeals, have been elevated to the Act for consistency and ease of navigation. There are also some modifications. For example, an unrestricted driver licence is defined to mean a driver licence other than a learner licence or provisional licence. The term "threshold number of demerit points" is defined in relation to the accumulation of a certain number of points by learner, provisional P1 or P2 licence holders.

The definition of "special category driver" in part 5.1 makes it clear that the holder of an expired learner or provisional licence will be treated as a special category of driver for alcohol and other drug use regardless of how long the licence has been expired. However, a person who holds any other kind of expired licence will not be treated as a special category driver unless the licence has expired for more than six months. This is to prevent higher blood alcohol limits prevailing. The bill adds to the definition of "approved traffic enforcement devices" to cover a variety of equipment including that used for speed measurement, photographing vehicles speeding or running red lights or driving on a public vehicle lane. This allows for standardisation of approval processes for changes in technology and for combinations of devices.

Members will appreciate that these modifications will assist in the smoother operation of road transport law. Importantly, in line with the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government commitment to red tape reduction, drafting of the Road Transport Bill has cut down the number of sections in the Act by about 30 per cent. In addition, the total number of regulations has been reduced with the repeal of the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation and the inclusion of those provisions in a new Road Transport (General) Regulation. This does not represent the culmination of the reform process but it is an enabler of further reform. There may be some more opportunities for consolidation in the near future.

The second bill, the Road Transport (Repeal and Amendment) Bill, provides for the repeal of existing Acts and makes amendments to certain other Acts and statutory rules. In addition, it prepares for the eventual adoption of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in New South Wales by renaming the Road Transport (General) Act as the Road Transport (Vehicle and Driver Management) Act and confining its operation to mass, dimension and load restraint requirements for heavy vehicles and to the regulation of other matters relating to heavy vehicles such as driver fatigue management.

Members may be aware that on 19 August 2011 the Commonwealth and States and Territories signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on Heavy Vehicle Regulatory Reform. The adoption of Heavy Vehicle National Law and a heavy vehicle regulator is the latest initiative in the reform process and will place regulation of vehicles over 4.5 tonnes for matters relating to registrations, compliance and enforcement, access permits, vehicle standards, et cetera, under a national body. This decision was made in response to industry concerns that, despite a decade of reform, difficulties remain in doing business across State and Territory borders. In addition, the Productivity Commission report in 2006 identified potential net gains of \$7.5 billion from a national approach to heavy vehicle regulation. The regulatory impact statement released with the draft Heavy Vehicle National Law in February 2011 projects potential gains of between \$5.6 billion and \$12.4 billion over 20 years.

Because of jurisdictional variations in the adoption of previous national model laws, the Heavy Vehicle National Law is template legislation which will be hosted by the Queensland Parliament and then applied or adopted in other jurisdictions. Queensland passed the first bill in August 2012 and this has allowed the establishment of the Office of the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator in Brisbane, effective from 21 January 2013 with some limited administrative function. Following the passage of the second bill through the Queensland Parliament later this year the Heavy Vehicle National Law will be progressively adopted by other States and Territories. The separation of heavy vehicle road transport provisions in the Road Transport (Driver and Vehicle Management) Act paves the way for the application of Heavy Vehicle National Law in New South Wales. This Act and its two regulations will be repealed later in 2013. There will be no major amendments to the new Road Transport Act when that happens.

The third bill, the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013, makes amendments to certain regulations under existing road transport legislation that will continue under the new Road Transport Act 2013. It also sets out the terms of the proposed Road Transport (General) Regulation 2013, which will be a regulation made under the new Act and, among other things, will replace the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation 1999. The bill also creates the Road Transport (Vehicle and Driver Management) Regulation 2005 under the Road Transport (Vehicle and Driver Management) Act as outlined above and confines its operation to heavy vehicle matters.

Road transport legislation regulates all aspects of driver behaviour and vehicle use on our roads. It is important that, despite its complexity and breadth, the law should be able to be accessed and understood by road users in order that they understand their rights and obligations. It is also important that the law should be logically organised and easy to reference by those who use it professionally, such as transport operators, police officers, lawyers, judges, magistrates, road safety experts, health professionals, public servants and politicians. The consolidation of road transport legislation, as provided for in these bills, achieves those aims.

The bills also reduce the number of pieces of road transport law, cut red tape and prepare for the introduction of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in New South Wales, which will be another important piece of regulatory reform.

I also advise that the Government will seek an amendment in Committee to clause 9 of the bill. Clause 9 determines how an offence is to be treated for the purpose of whether the first offence penalty or the second or subsequent offence penalty is to apply. Since the passing of the bill unopposed in the other place, it has been identified that the wording in clause 9 may have the unintended consequence of introducing a harsher penalty regime in some cases. This was not the intent of the bill and the amendment that will be moved will clarify that the new provisions will continue the penalty structures found in the current provisions. The opportunity is also being taken through this amendment to correct two legislative references. Transport for NSW has spoken with the Chief Magistrate and the Law Society of New South Wales in relation to this amendment. I am advised that they are satisfied with the change. I thank them for their valuable assistance in progressing this matter. I trust that members will lend their support to the New South Wales Government's proposals. I commend the bills to the House.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH [3.42 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in debate on the Road Transport Bill 2013, the Road Transport Legislation (Repeal and Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013. The purpose of these bills is to consolidate New South Wales road transport legislation and prepare for the adoption of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in this State. During the 1990s the National Transport Commission developed a series of modules for national road legislation which in turn the States used to adopt various Acts. As the Minister stated in his speech, the Acts included the Road Transport (Heavy Vehicle Registration Charges) Act 1995, the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act 1997, the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act 1998, the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999 and the Road Transport (General) Act 2005. Although well intentioned, the separation of the bills has caused problems for police, administrators, the legal profession and the courts as well as, of course, motorists. The Minister explained in her contribution:

That complexity was unintentionally magnified by the creation of five Acts and 10 regulations. Provisions relating to demerit points are similarly scattered and it is difficult for a road user to understand what applies to them. Moreover, there are areas of duplication, repetition and extensive cross-referencing. There are different definitions for "drive", "driver", "vehicle", "traffic", "garage address", "heavy motor vehicle" and "foreign driver licence". Some key terms remain undefined.

Drafting mistakes and errors of interpretation resulted in a high number of complaints regarding this confusing legislation. The Road Transport Bill amalgamates those five Acts into one Act applicable to road transport legislation generally. The Government has said that the removal of inconsistency, repetition, anomalies and redundancy is intended to enhance the understanding of New South Wales road users of their legal rights and responsibilities. It is the Opposition's understanding that there are no policy changes with the consolidation of the bills.

The Road Transport Bill also provides for advances in technology, such as traffic management devices, and standardisation of processes for drug and alcohol testing. The separation of heavy vehicle road transport provisions in the Road Transport (Driver and Vehicle Management) Act prepares for the application of Heavy Vehicle National Law in New South Wales and a national regulator that will place heavy vehicles and their regulation under a national body with national template legislation. The Heavy Vehicle National Law is template legislation that will be hosted by the Queensland Parliament and then applied or adopted in other jurisdictions. Following the passage of the second bill through the Queensland Parliament later this year, the Heavy Vehicle National Law will be adopted progressively by other States and Territories.

The Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013 makes amendments to certain regulations under existing road transport legislation that will continue under the new Road Transport Act 2013. It is my understanding that Parliamentary Counsel has been working since 2003 to simplify and consolidate this legislation to make it easier for road users to understand. As I indicated earlier, the Opposition will support the legislation and the Government's amendment, which we believe is intended to clear up some unintended consequences in the original drafting.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE [3.45 p.m.]: The Christian Democratic Party is pleased to support the Road Transport Bill 2013, the Road Transport Legislation (Repeal and Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013. These bills seek to consolidate the road transport legislation largely into one Act, reduce the number of regulations and prepare for the adoption of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in New South Wales. As has been stated already in this debate, currently there are five applicable Acts,

10 regulations and other instruments that make this legislation very complicated for both people involved in the road transport industry and those concerned with legal work associated with convictions, et cetera. This bill will make the legislation far simpler.

There is no doubt that the heavy vehicle industry is now a very important part of our nation's economy and provides for the transportation of large quantities of fresh food—for Woolworths, Coles and other companies—and heavy industrial items. However, there remains a need for the development of an adequate rail transport system so that heavy containers can be taken off our roads and carried by rail. That should be a priority for the Government. Before 1999 road transport legislation in New South Wales was primarily in the former Traffic Act 1909. In the 1990s the National Transport Commission developed a series of modules for national model road transport legislation, heavy vehicle charges, driver licensing, vehicle registration, compliance and enforcements. The modules progressively were enacted to become the following Acts in New South Wales: the Road Transport (Heavy Vehicle Registration Charges) Act 1995, the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act 1997, the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act 1998, the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999 and the Road Transport (General) Act 2005. Those five Acts will be consolidated in one Act as a result of this bill being passed.

Though well intentioned, splitting road transport legislation into five modules created a great number of problems for the police, administrators, the legal profession, the courts and the general public. There were many complaints. When this bill is passed, it will provide much-needed simplification and reduce errors of misinterpretation that have occurred in the past. In conjunction with this legislation, the adoption of the Heavy Vehicle National Law and a heavy vehicle regulator will be the latest initiative in the national reform process. This will place the regulation of heavy vehicles in relation to such matters as registration, compliance and enforcement, access permits, and vehicle standards under a national body that will be supported by national template legislation. Therefore in October 2011 the New South Wales Cabinet adopted and approved the drafting provisions to apply the Heavy Vehicle National Law being enacted in Queensland and consolidation of the remainder of New South Wales road transport legislation into one Act.

A similar process is being adopted in a number of areas of government. The State Government will take the initiative and enact model legislation, and in due course the other States will adopt the law. Members should remember that as a principle when good propositions are advanced in this Parliament. On some occasions the Government argues that we should await action being taken by the Federal Government, so we wait for extended periods but nothing ever happens. In some areas, the States should take the initiative, produce model legislation, encourage other States to adopt it and then it will become national law.

The first bill relating to the Heavy Vehicle National Law passed through the Queensland Parliament and began operation in Queensland on 23 January, with limited functions. Following the passage of the second bill through the Queensland Parliament in 2013 the Heavy Vehicle National Law will be applied progressively in other States and Territories. The Christian Democratic Party supports the three bills that are now being debated—the Road Transport Bill 2013, the Road Transport Legislation (Repeal and Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013. The New South Wales Law Society proposed a number of amendments mainly to clear up what appear to be some areas of confusion in the legislation. The Government has distributed 10 amendments to the Road Transport Bill 2013 which will be debated in Committee.

Some of those amendments appear to be in direct response to the Law Society's proposition in a letter to all members dated 8 March 2013. The intention of one amendment is to change the emphasis in terminology relating to whether or not a person has been convicted or found guilty. The amendment will remove the words "found guilty" and replace them with the word "convicted", which will give individuals a clearer legal interpretation as to where they stand. I am pleased that the Government responded to some of the propositions from the Law Society and that these proposed amendments will make the legislation more workable and efficient. The Christian Democratic Party supports the legislation and the Government's foreshadowed amendments.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN [3.51 p.m.]: I speak on behalf of The Greens in debate on the Road Transport Bill 2013, the Road Transport Legislation (Repeal and Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013. The Greens will be supporting this legislation. The object of the principal bill is to consolidate in one Act most of the provisions of the existing Acts dealing with road transport in New South Wales as well as prepare for the adoption of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in New South Wales. Currently, four separate road transport Acts deal with different aspects of the road transport law in New South Wales.

These are the Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Act 1998, which provides for the licensing of drivers and regulation of interstate and foreign drivers; the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act 1997, which provides for the registration of vehicles and the management of written-off vehicles; the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999, which provides for rules and other requirements concerning the safe use of roads by road users and vehicles, including provisions regulating drivers who are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs; and the Road Transport (General) Act 2005, which provides for compliance and enforcement provisions in connection with road transport legislation generally. It also deals with the management of heavy vehicles, their mass, dimensions and loads, and their drivers.

This legislation also provides for the existing Road Rules 2008, Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Regulation 2008 and the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Regulation 2007 to continue in force as rules or regulations made under the proposed Act. Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile mentioned the concerns expressed by the Law Society in a letter to all members relating to clause 9 of the bill. Clause 9 determines how an offence is to be treated for the purpose of whether the first offence penalty or the second or subsequent offence penalty is to apply. I understand that the Government proposes to move amendments in Committee to correct what the Law Society has identified as an anomaly. We have been assured by the Government that these bills are purely a consolidation process so some of the other recommendations of the Law Society will not be taken up at this time as they relate to policy changes rather than to consolidation. However, I hope that the Government responds in due course to some of the Law Society's recommendations relating to sentencing provisions and the duration of sentences. I understand that it has been proposing some of these changes for some time.

The Greens believe it is common sense to have uniformity of heavy vehicle laws across the country as that will make it easier for operators and drivers. We can see the benefits of national consistency in laws in this area. Therefore, The Greens support these bills but note the contribution of Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile relating to the number of trucks on the road. The Greens suggest that the Government is not doing enough to move freight onto rail and to give industry as much incentive as possible to move its freight by rail. We seem to be doing everything we can to build bigger and better roads thus ensuring that we do everything for the trucking industry. People who drive B-doubles and B-triples on the Pacific Highway and on other roads every day are crying out for some kind of support so that they no longer have to share the road with additional vehicles. However, as we are dealing today only with the consolidation of legislation, The Greens support these bills.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.55 p.m.]: I support the Road Transport Bill 2013, the Road Transport Legislation (Repeal and Amendment) Bill 2013 and the Road Transport (Statutory Rules) Bill 2013. The Minister for Roads and Ports clearly set out the provisions in these bills and gave members excellent examples as to why this legislation was required. While no-one expects to return to the good old days of one traffic Act and one motor traffic regulation, the current collection of statutes for the administration of road transport is confusing not only for lawyers, enforcement officers and administrators but also—and more importantly—for the general public. Many benefits will be derived from one Road Transport Act that is confined principally to the use of light vehicles and to driver licensing. The second Road Transport (Vehicle and Driver Management) Act will confine its operation to the regulation of heavy vehicles until the commencement of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in New South Wales.

The Road Transport Bill 2013 has chapters concerning driver licensing, vehicle registration, safety and traffic management, road transportation and compliance and enforcement, which will be easier to access rather than trawling through four Acts and numerous regulations. I am advised that the regulations will remain separate but will be reduced to four specific areas—driver licensing, vehicle registration, road rules and a new general regulation. While some of the content of the legislation is complex, reflecting the nature of the modern road transport environment, there is no reason why that complexity should be compounded by a complicated structure. Currently provisions relating to appeals and applications to a Local Court are found in the Road Transport (General) Act as well as the general regulation and refer to decisions made under three other Acts. In this proposed new Act they will now be found in one place and they refer to sections of that Act.

The plain language trend in legislation and the removal of legalese and so on has been in force in New South Wales for some time. In recent years the growing number of statutes has led drafters and administrators to seek amalgamation and simplification wherever possible. The Government was elected, among other things, to reduce red tape and to replace an array of old statutory instruments with fewer and newer statutory instruments. The O'Farrell Government maintains the one-on, two-off position. Understanding the laws that govern us is a basic tenet of democracy. Anything that increases and assists that understanding is commendable. For this reason alone these bills deserve our support and should be supported by the whole House. As indicated by the

Minister, the Government will be moving an amendment in Committee to clause 9 of the bill, which will determine how an offence is to be treated for the purpose of whether the first offence penalty or the second or subsequent offence penalty is to apply. The Minister noted in his second reading speech:

Since the passing of the bill unopposed in the other place, it has been identified that the wording in the proposed clause 9 may have the unintended consequence of introducing a harsher penalty regime in some cases.

The Minister went on to say:

This was not the intent of the bill and the amendment that will be sought will clarify that the new provisions will continue the penalty structures found in the current provisions.

Again, this confirms that the purpose of these bills was to consolidate many existing bills. I congratulate the Minister on bringing this amendment to the House whilst we are dealing with the bills. Sadly, as happened on previous occasions with the former Government, matters brought to its attention were not dealt with when the bills were being debated, and that would have been more appropriate. The opportunity is being taken also through these amendments to correct a number of legislative amendments as outlined by the Minister. The Minister has, and rightly so, thanked the Chief Magistrate and the Law Society for their valuable assistance in bringing these proposed anomalies to his attention in order for the amendment to proceed. I commend the bills to the House.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted at 4.00 p.m. for questions.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

WORKERS COMPENSATION SCHEME RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. In light of QBE's announcement that it plans to send 700 jobs offshore, including more than 40 that currently process WorkCover claims, what steps will the Minister take to stop private medical records of injured workers being sent offshore?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Are they not predictable? One knows from what one reads in the morning papers what questions the Opposition will ask. I am aware of recent media reports concerning plans by WorkCover scheme agent QBE to move its workers compensation claims management offshore. That is incorrect. I have been advised by WorkCover that no workers compensation claims will be managed offshore. WorkCover also advises that no case manager roles will be located offshore. The media reported also that some non-front-line positions at QBE may be relocated to the Philippines. However, WorkCover advises that these positions are not workers compensation claims officer positions.

I take this opportunity to remind the House that decisions made by businesses are properly a matter for those businesses, not for the Government. But if we are talking about jobs, we should talk about this Government's record for creating jobs. In New South Wales, 96,600 new jobs have been created since we came to government, with 22,000 new jobs being created last month alone. The New South Wales unemployment rate has now been below the national average for the past 13 months. For the last five years under Labor in New South Wales the State's unemployment rate was an average 4.4 per cent higher than the national rate.

The Hon. Luke Foley: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The question was specific about the actions of a particular company and its impact on the medical records of workers. The Minister is not being generally relevant in speaking about another matter entirely.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I apologise to the House for being a little late to question time. I did not hear the question. I am sure the Minister was trying to be generally relevant and I encourage him to be so.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The question was about an article in a newspaper. Luckily, I actually read all of the newspapers, not just the selective ones that those opposite want to read. I applaud that wonderful

Sydney Morning Herald journalist, Sean Nicholls. Does anyone know Sean Nicholls? No? He is an excellent journalist, and today he wrote a story under the headline, "Changes to WorkCover applauded by business". I will have to quote from it because it is today's really good news.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Is there a photo of you with it?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: No, there was no photo of me with it, for a change. But there is a beautiful photo of me on the electronic version of today's *Australian* because I was named in the top 50 most influential people in Australia—number 19. It is a great photo. My wife is really proud of it. She enjoyed it. We have blown it up to display in the office and to have it circulated.

The Hon. Luke Foley: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The Minister's never-ending self-aggrandisement has nothing whatsoever to do with the question about the risk to private medical records of injured workers.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I think the Leader of the Opposition's reflection on the Minister was probably disorderly. Therefore, it is a debating point. Nevertheless, it beggars belief that photos of the Minister in his ministerial office are relevant to the question asked. I ask the Minister to conclude his answer.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: But they are good. Sean Nichols wrote:

The contentious overhaul of the NSW workers' compensation scheme has been singled out for praise by the NSW Business Chamber, which handed the O'Farrell government a mark of 8/10 in its midterm report card.

The group has praised the NSW government for "returning stability and confidence to the NSW—

[*Time expired.*]

DELROY FIRE STATION

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Will the Minister inform the House about the recent opening of the newly refurbished Delroy fire station at Dubbo?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: I thank the member for his very important question. On Friday 15 March 2013 Troy Grant, the member for Dubbo, Fire and Rescue NSW Commissioner, Greg Mullins, and representatives of other emergency services and government agencies attended the official opening of the \$840,000 refurbishment of the fire station and new regional west area and zone office. Troy Grant is a great local member. He is a new member of The Nationals. I must pay due credit to the man sitting beside me, the Hon. Duncan Gay, for encouraging Troy Grant to be a candidate for the seat of Dubbo. As members would know, Troy was an outstanding local police officer who was prepared to step away from his career to stand for Parliament. Whilst talking about the Hon. Duncan Gay, I advise that today is a day of great celebration for him as it is for the Parliament. Today the Hon. Duncan Gay celebrates 25 years as a member of this Chamber—that is 25 years representing not just country New South Wales but all of New South Wales. He and The Nationals are doing an absolutely excellent job. What a great class there was 25 years ago. It included, of course, Don Page—

The Hon. Greg Pearce: What about a photo?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: If he is lucky, he will have a photograph taken next to the Hon. Greg Pearce. Of course, that class also included Chris Hartcher and George Souris. They are outstanding representatives and longstanding fighters for the people of New South Wales. It is an honour to have the Hon. Duncan Gay as the Deputy Leader of the Government in this Chamber. The renovation of Delroy fire station provides a bigger and better base for the 22 retained or on-call firefighters who help protect the Dubbo community. The fire station contains two fire engines, a breathing apparatus cleaning facility, and separate men's and women's facilities, as well as new kitchen facilities, a new operations room and station commander's office, an improved training room and a personal protective equipment storage room. This represents vastly improved facilities for the 30-year-old station and will serve the region well into the future.

Delroy firefighters are a vital cog in the western New South Wales fire and emergency service network. In the past financial year Delroy firefighters responded to 480 fire and emergency incidents and undertook 12 community safety education and engagement activities. In January those firefighters also were involved in the

response team that saved the valuable telescopes of the Siding Springs Observatory at Coonabarabran. Three firefighters from Delroy fire station and one from Dubbo were part of a 13-strong team that protected the observatory and property after the Wambelong inferno swept through the area. The small team saved what it could of the many burning buildings using three tankers and water supplies from the observatory to douse the flames.

As a result of their actions, Commissioner Mullins presented a Unit Commendation for Courageous Action to firefighters Cammeron Harris, John Cleary and Andrew Steel from Delroy and Paul Schroder from Dubbo. These commendations are additional to commendations presented a few weeks ago at Coonabarabran by Commissioner Mullins to other firefighters from Coonabarabran, Narrabri and Gunnedah who helped save the observatory. I also send my thanks to those involved in protecting the community from this fire. It has been an honour to recently visit Delroy and Dubbo and to meet the firefighters from those fantastic fire stations. They do a great job protecting their community.

HUNTER WATER PRICING STRUCTURE

The Hon. WALT SECORD: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services, and Minister for the Illawarra. Did the State Government approve the Hunter Water Corporation's submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal for a new pricing structure that was publicly released last week?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal has released its draft prices for water and sewerage for residents living in the Hunter region from 1 July 2013 and these prices, if accepted, will run for the next four years. For residential houses the draft pricing determination will see water and sewerage bills fall by 3.9 per cent, or \$40 over the next four years. The community will compare that fall of 3.9 per cent to the massive rise of 31 per cent four years ago under Labor. The news is even better for pensioners. The price of water will fall by almost 14 per cent, or \$73 in real terms. Four years ago pensioners were hit with a 39 per cent increase in water and sewerage bills.

Small business owners are undoubtedly the greatest beneficiaries of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's draft pricing determination. In real terms the average water and sewerage bill for Hunter Water small business customers is likely to fall by 26.7 per cent or about \$360 over four years. This fall in cost is due to a reduction in the sewerage service charge. Small business customers will now be on a par with residential customers. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's draft pricing determination has also given the tick of approval to Hunter Water Corporation's \$299 million four-year infrastructure plan.

I congratulate Hunter Water Corporation on its contribution to the draft pricing determination. Hunter Water Corporation undertook its most extensive community consultation in its 120-year history, involving face-to-face meetings with the community, telephone surveys and online feedback. As this Government instructed all the utilities, Hunter Water Corporation took into account the affordability challenges faced by customers. This Government is concerned about the massive price increases that occurred under Labor and it also—

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps: Slugging those who can least afford it.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Yes, slugging those who can least afford it is what Labor used to do. Hunter Water took into account the affordability challenges being faced by its customers, the need to improve the ongoing financial position of the organisation and an investment in capital works that ensures ongoing compliance with regulatory obligations.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I call the Hon. Sophie Cotsis to order for the first time. I call the Hon. Peter Phelps to order for the first time.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal will provide its final determination in June 2013 with new prices to apply from 1 July 2013. I look forward to updating the House at the time of final determination. I congratulate Hunter Water Corporation on listening to the Government, applying government policies to put downward pressure on prices to cut the gold-plating under the previous Government and for better managing its assets for the community going into the future.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: I have a supplementary question. Would the Minister elucidate his answer as to how the Government expects pensioners living in residential flats and units in the Hunter to pay the 15.6 per cent increase, the equivalent of \$113—

The PRESIDENT: Order! The question is not a supplementary question; it is clearly a new question. Therefore, it is out of order.

WORKERS COMPENSATION SCHEME CASE MANAGER POSITIONS

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services, and Minister for the Illawarra. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that no case managers for New South Wales workers compensation matters are moved offshore given that all their wages are paid for by statutory funds contributed to by New South Wales employees?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I thank the member for his question. I am not sure if he was in the House when I answered an identical question earlier from the Leader of the Opposition. As I said in answer to the Leader of the Opposition, I was pleased to—

The Hon. Duncan Gay: They must have read the same paper.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: They probably did. I thought that Mr David Shoebridge had a strong relationship with the journalist Sean Nicholls because he is often quoted by Sean Nicholls—always wrong but very often quoted. Compare that to the New South Wales Business Chamber.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Bad quote or a bad comment?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Both. As I said earlier, there was a really nice photo in the paper today along with an article reporting that I was named in the top 50 most influential people in Australia in relation to technology.

The Hon. Steve Whan: Point of order: I draw attention to the Minister's use of props—which include pictures of himself—over and over again.

The PRESIDENT: Order! There is no point of order. Does the Minister have anything else to add?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I will conclude by reading today's article, which reported—

The Hon. Walt Secord: Will you table the photo?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I would love to table the photo. The New South Wales Business Chamber Chief Executive, Stephen Cartwright, stated:

The public should be "very pleased" with the achievements of the government in the past two years. The report card highlights the changes introduced to workers' compensation, which included the removal of journey to work claims and caps on medical expenses for some injuries in a bid to reduce a \$4 billion deficit in the scheme.

I accept Mr David Shoebridge's further endorsement of the excellent job the O'Farrell Government has done in relation to workers compensation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have a supplementary question: Could the Minister elucidate his illuminating answer by advising what, if any, steps he is personally taking to ensure that these jobs are not off-shored in the future?

The PRESIDENT: Order! That was restatement of the original question; it did not seek for an aspect of the answer to be elucidated. Therefore, I rule it out of order.

STATE WATER BOARD APPOINTMENTS

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. Given that the Minister is a shareholding Minister in the State Water Corporation did the Minister for Primary Industries inform him that Mr Nick Di Girolamo was the major shareholder in a company who made a \$10,000 donation to her own campaign before he signed off the appointment to the State Water Corporation?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: It is Dorothy-Dixer day. The Government has adopted a skills-based director selection process to ensure appropriately skilled commercial State-owned corporations board appointments. Candidates appointed to boards of State-owned corporations have been appointed based on skills and merit and have been approved by Cabinet. Mr Di Girolamo's appointment to the board of State Water was a

merit-based approach. Further details of the Government's approach to director selection are confidential to Cabinet. I am advised that Mr Di Girolamo was appointed as a non-executive director of State Water Corporation on—

The Hon. Steve Whan: Shame on The Nationals; no irrigator representative on the board.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I call the Hon. Steve Whan to order for the first time.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: He was appointed as a non-executive director of State Water Corporation for a three-year term commencing 1 July 2012. The position attracts base remuneration of \$34,300 a year. I am also advised that he has a legal and water sector background. He is a director of Australian Water Holdings and is chairman of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Sydney, an excellent organisation that serves a wonderful lunch with its speakers. I am further advised that Mr Di Girolamo was interviewed on 15 March 2012 by a board selection committee with independent members, convened to consider candidates for the board of the Sydney Ports Corporation. The committee considered that Mr Di Girolamo—

The Hon. Steve Whan: We are talking about State Water.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Yes, listen to the answer. The committee considered that Mr Di Girolamo would be likely to be suitable for smaller boards such as the State Water Corporation and the appointment papers—

The Hon. Steve Whan: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The question was very specific about whether the Minister as a shareholder Minister had been informed about this person's contributions to election campaign funds. The Minister has gone nowhere near answering the question. I ask you to draw him back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Minister was clearly being generally relevant.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: In accordance with the appropriate process the appointment papers were signed by the Treasurer and me and the appointment was endorsed by Cabinet.

The Hon. LUKE FOLEY: I wish to ask a supplementary question. I thank the Minister for his answer and ask him to elucidate his answer with particular reference to what information, if any, was provided to him by the portfolio Minister before he signed off on that appointment?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I think I was pretty good and took the question reasonably seriously. In fact, I took it very seriously and gave the member a serious answer. He wants to know about the directors of State Water. I will tell him about a director of State Water—Michael Williamson. Does that name ring a bell? He was appointed by the former Treasurer on 22 March 2011.

The Hon. Luke Foley: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. I asked a specific question about a specific appointment to the board of a State-owned corporation that this Minister signed off on. To go to previous appointments is not generally relevant. If the Minister wants to talk on that matter, he should arrange a Dorothy Dixier.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The purpose of a supplementary question is to elucidate an aspect of an answer and it is necessary for the Minister to be generally relevant to the material that has been asked. The Minister has some latitude but should not stray too far. Is there any further information from the Minister?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: No.

WESTCONNEX MOTORWAY

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My question is addressed to the Minister for Roads and Ports. Will the Minister provide a further update on the progress towards building WestConnex?

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I have been in Parliament for 25 years and the Hon. John Ajaka is the best Parliamentary Secretary I have ever had. Infrastructure NSW recommended WestConnex as one of the highest priority projects for New South Wales. We accepted that recommendation immediately and it is not hard to see

why. The population in the combined M4-M5 corridors is forecast to grow by around 235,000 people, with 160,000 more people employed in the area by 2031, thanks to our good government. This represents almost one-third of all of Sydney's forecast new jobs and about one-quarter of forecast population growth. Sydney itself is expected to have 5.6 million residents by 2031, an additional 1.3 million on what we have now. Action was needed a long time ago but despite knowing this, those opposite did nothing about it. We are now acting. We have committed \$1.8 billion to get WestConnex started.

The Hon. Steve Whan: You certainly are acting; there's no doubt about that.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: That is something the Hon. Steve Whan would not have done when he was on the case with Eddie, spending his time paying homage to get his seat on the front bench.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: And a ministry.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Yes, and a ministry. We are acting. We have committed \$1.8 billion to get WestConnex started. Tony Abbott has come on board with a promise of \$1.5 billion and that is already committed. We think that even Anthony Albanese—we are not sure—might have committed \$1 billion because the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* suggest that he had, but the words in the article were not quite certain. We are hoping there is at least \$1 billion but there will be a change of government federally so we will get the \$1.5 billion anyway. The business case for WestConnex is in full flight and will be ready in time for the budget. This week we are kicking off a series of forums with peak groups, business and freight stakeholders, councils and industry.

We want to hear as many different perspectives as possible. We are particularly interested in the views of councils, inviting general managers and senior executives from across greater Sydney to a forum on 28 March. We were disappointed that on the eve of the forum when councils could represent the views of their people, contribute to the development of the proposal and hear what it was about, Marrickville Council moved a motion to condemn and oppose WestConnex. How is that good for its community? We are trying to talk to people.

[*Interruption*]

I know The Greens control Marrickville Council and we will come to The Greens in a moment. We will also be encouraging the community to contribute throughout the planning and approval process. This is how good government is supposed to work. But while we are getting on with it, it is the same old Labor on the other side. On a daily basis John Robertson, when he is not scaremongering on police, is scaremongering about our commitment to delivering the roads that New South Wales deserves. I was interested to read about a snap protest—that is how it was described—last Tuesday in Ashfield Park by a small group of "mostly Greens politicians". [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: I ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister elucidate his answer?

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I would have finished my answer if it had not been for interjections from The Greens. I was interested to read in the newspaper about a snap protest last Tuesday in Ashfield Park by a small group of "mostly Greens politicians" railing against WestConnex and bagging their own partners in the Federal Government—that is the Labor Party—for backing it. What an embarrassment. There must be a message in this for John Robertson and State Labor: no more games. They have wasted enough of New South Wales's time.

The Hon. Luke Foley: Point of order: Mr President, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Hon. Duncan Gay I refer you to the ruling of a distinguished former Deputy-President, the Hon. Duncan Gay, when in 1993 he ruled that members who wish to make charges against any member of either House should do so by way of substantive motion. I submit that in making these reflections on the member for Blacktown in the other place the Leader of the Government is contradicting and in breach of his own learned ruling when he occupied the Chair.

The PRESIDENT: Order! While the Minister's answer was robust, I do not think the Minister needs to be called to order. The Minister has the call.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I do not think there is sufficient time remaining to conclude my answer.

URBAN ACTIVATION PRECINCTS PROGRAM

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. Does the Government have a strategy for meeting the ongoing social housing needs in its planned urban activation precincts, including Macquarie Park and Randwick? Can the Minister advise what existing social housing stock is to be sold for redevelopment and what is being done to ensure that the current tenants of affected social housing estates will have appropriate housing and remain within their longstanding communities?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I congratulate the Hon. Jan Barham on reading the press release of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and on taking such a great interest in the work that the Government is currently undertaking to activate urban development. Her question relates to issues that we are addressing as part of developing those policies. The member will hear a great deal about every aspect as we continue to work on the estates.

SYDNEY WATER COOKS RIVER AND POWELLS CREEK PROJECTS

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. Will the Minister update the House on Sydney Water's work to improve the Cooks River and Powells Creek?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I thank the Hon. Catherine Cusack for her question and I congratulate her on her adjournment speech last week. It made interesting reading. I am pleased that Labor members gave her the opportunity to complete her speech. I am pleased to inform the House that Sydney Water is undertaking work on some of Sydney's rivers and creeks as part of a five-year maintenance program to improve the stormwater system and protect public health and the environment. Earlier this year Sydney Water completed a \$6 million project to improve the Cooks River, which saw 10,000 tonnes of sediments removed from the riverbed.

In April last year Sydney Water and its partner Veolia Water Network Services undertook work to improve the flow of water to reduce the risk of local flooding and to enhance the river's health. The sediment removal was carried out using earthmoving trucks and excavators to dig sediment from the channel at low tide. This involved the setting up of a worksite near Tasker and Little Tasker parks in Canterbury. All equipment has since been removed and I commend Sydney Water for its efforts to ensure that both parks were fully restored for community use.

For more than a century the Cooks River has experienced the impact of industry and urbanisation within its catchment. Added to this was the decision in the 1930s to improve and formalise the river by aligning it with concrete. Despite these slights, the Cooks River remains an important part of Sydney's heritage and continues to provide recreational areas for local residents. Many people may not realise that in 1770 Captain Cook noted that the river was a "very fine stream of water which makes settlement a possibility". On behalf of Sydney Water I thank local residents, Canterbury council and NSW Fisheries for their cooperation and patience during this important project. However, this is just part of Sydney Water's ongoing investment in its stormwater assets.

In late January Sydney Water awarded a contract to naturalise more than one kilometre of riverbank along the Cooks River. The multimillion dollar project will improve stormwater management in the area as well as improve the river environment for plants and animals. The project was developed in partnership with the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority, local councils and other land and water managers. Naturalisation creates a softer landscape feel and can greatly improve the riverbank habitat for native birds and animals by replacing the deteriorated steep concrete channel banks and creating a more gently sloping bank that will be stabilised with native plants, trees and rocks.

Sydney Water anticipates another \$9 million will be spent towards the Powells Creek naturalisation project. The deteriorated concrete banks of the creek will be replaced with sandstone and native vegetation. This will improve the aesthetic qualities of the creek as well as its ecological health. Powells Creek is located in North Strathfield, adjacent to Mason Park Wetlands and Powells Creek Reserve. An 800-metre section of the creek's banks between Pomeroy Street and Homebush Bay Drive will be renewed and, of this, around 600 metres will be naturalised. I am advised that community consultation has been undertaken and the project has been very well received by locals.

FIREARMS AMMUNITION LEGISLATION

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police and is in relation to the recent shooting death at Greenacre. Following the implementation of the Ammunition Control

Bill, will NSW Police Force use the ammunition registers to determine who the shooter was and whether the shooter bought the ammunition from a licensed dealer? If not, why not? If the police are not going to use the information or if the information proves to be ineffectual, will the Government seek to repeal the legislation?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: I thank the Hon. Robert Borsak for his reflection on my performance in the House recently, giving me a zero out of 10. It is a badge of honour and I thank him very much indeed for that. I have sent a copy to Mr David Shoebridge. In relation to the ongoing investigation, it would be highly inappropriate for me to talk about steps the police will take in relation to an ongoing investigation. Of course, if the Hon. Robert Borsak has suggestions that may be of assistance to the police, based on his intimate knowledge of firearms both here and internationally, I am more than happy to receive any correspondence from him, which I will pass on to the Commissioner of Police to ensure that investigators take full advantage of his understanding of firearms.

SYDNEY WATER BOARD NOMINATIONS

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. Was the Department of Premier and Cabinet advised before the Minister nominated Mr Nick Di Girolamo for the board of the State Water Corporation that Mr Di Girolamo had donated more than \$100,000 to the Coalition?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I do not represent the Premier in this Chamber.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I ask the Minister for Finance and Services a supplementary question. Given that the Minister did not listen to the question because he was being so rudely interrupted by the Hon. Marie Ficarra, the question is about—

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: Point of order: The Hon. Penny Sharpe is being argumentative and is out of order.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am seeking an elucidation of the Minister's answer.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member has been a member of this place long enough to know that she should not give a preamble to her question.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I still have a supplementary question.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Hon. Penny Sharpe may ask her question in the 23 seconds remaining. I will then rule on whether it is within the standing orders.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I ask the Minister to elucidate his answer in relation to what information he provided the Department of Premier and Cabinet in relation to the appointment of Mr Nick Di Girolamo.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: That was not the original question.

The Hon. Penny Sharpe: If you were listening you would have heard it.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The supplementary question is clearly out of order.

SYDNEY WATER YOUNG WATER PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. Will the Minister update the House on Sydney Water's Young Water Professional of the Year?

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: Is that you?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: No, I'm an old professional. This is an important matter. I am pleased to inform the House that Sally Rewell from Sydney Water was awarded the Australian Water Association's NSW Young Water Professional of the Year on Thursday 21 February 2013 as part of the Australian Water Association's NSW Water Industry Awards. I welcome Sally, who joins us in the public gallery today. I know everyone in the House will join me in commending her for her great achievement. The award was recognition of the significant contribution that Sally has provided—

The PRESIDENT: Order! I call the Hon. Greg Donnelly to order for the first time.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: —to both the New South Wales Young Water Professionals group and the New South Wales Branch Committee of the Australian Water Association. The award recognises the engineering skills, knowledge and leadership she has developed while working at Sydney Water. The award is given to professionals who have had outstanding career achievements to date and who have the potential to play a large influential role in the water industry in the future. I congratulate Sally on winning this prestigious award. I wish her the best of luck for the national award, the Australian Young Water Professional of the Year, which will be presented at the Australian Water Association's Ozwater'13 international water conference in Perth in May.

Sally commenced work at Sydney Water in January 2010 as a graduate engineer in the Policy, Standards and Materials Group in Strategic Asset Management. Graduates are highly valued at Sydney Water. Last month 16 graduates from Sydney and the Illawarra joined Sydney Waters' 2013 graduate program. The award-winning program employs graduates in a range of fields, including engineering, science, commerce and communications. The graduate program offers on-the-job experience and high-quality training to university leavers, including a two-week induction period to ease the adjustment from university to full-time work. Opportunities for graduates include field-based roles, construction activities, maintenance of assets and office-based roles.

As part of its strategy to build skills for the future, Sydney Water also conducts trainee and industry experience programs. Trainees are given opportunities to gain qualifications and experience in the water industry by working in a range of areas, including building and construction, customer service, business administration and water operations. The industry experience program provides three-month to 12-month work experience opportunities to potential employees while they are studying at university or TAFE and potential employees whose ideals and skills could contribute to the future of the organisation. The program provides potential candidates to Sydney Water with the opportunity to fill other entry-level program or business positions once a qualification is gained. It also provides students with an opportunity to gain skills on short-term projects and assist students in identifying possible career paths. Sydney Water has a corporate goal of building a capable and committed workforce. Entry-level programs are major initiatives to bring new generations of talented employees into the organisation. Sydney Water currently has 51 graduates and 16 trainees and I am sure the House joins with me in wishing them all well in their futures.

NSW POLICE FORCE CRIME SCENE UNIT MERGERS

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. What consultation was there before the decision was made to merge the Bass Hill and Penrith crime scene examiner teams and move them into one office at Pemulwuy? Is the new building big enough to fit all of the proposed staff and equipment? Was any consideration given to upgrading the current facilities? Is the Bass Hill facility not ideally placed to be close to the majority of major incidents? What impact in respect of time taken to get to an area will the move from Penrith have on the investigation of crimes in the Blue Mountains?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: I thank the honourable member for his question, which contained what I suspect are some fairly confidential matters. He would not necessarily want this information—

The Hon. Robert Brown: Probably not many.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: But I will seek an answer from the commissioner in relation to his decision, if such a decision has been made, and provide the honourable member with a suitable response.

TWEED-BYRON POLICE NUMBERS

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Official figures released by the NSW Police Force confirm that in February 2012 the Tweed-Byron local area command had a policing strength of 198 officers. Twelve months later police numbers on the far North Coast have dropped to just 164. In light of recent incidents in the regions, particularly in Byron Bay and the Tweed, when will the State Government restore the 34 police officers who were removed from the Tweed-Byron local area command in the last year?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: I thank the honourable member for her question. I must say that the member for Tweed, my Parliamentary Secretary, is doing an outstanding job and enjoys a great relationship with New South Wales police. We have ongoing discussions with police officers from the North Coast and they are very supportive of the Government's decisions in relation to the death and disability reforms and the resultant focus on ensuring that training and assistance is provided to long-term injured police officers so that they can regain their positions in the workforce. That is a clear indication that the NSW Police Force and front-line police have never had it better in terms of State Government support.

I suspect that in her question the honourable member is referring to the numbers of the Tweed highway patrol officers. I intend to look at that matter as she has requested me to but let me assure members of the House and, more importantly, members of the Tweed-Byron community, that the highway patrol personnel who were there two, three or four years ago are still there today. They are still performing their job but we have given those highway patrol personnel the ability to determine where their expertise needs to be deployed throughout the Tweed-Byron community to save lives on our roads. At the same time we are working to ensure that officers can return from long-term sick leave, which members opposite ignored for years. They ignored hundreds of police on the North Coast for years and did nothing about it. We are ensuring that they have a pathway back to their careers to restore their lives as officers—

The Hon. Charlie Lynn: And dignity.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: —and their dignity, as the Hon. Charlie Lynn says. We have respect for those officers and will ensure that they can continue with their careers in the NSW Police Force pursuant to their abilities. We are proud of our record so far. I will examine the numbers that the honourable member has referred to in her question but I suspect she is referring to the highway patrol issues.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I ask a supplementary question: Would the Minister elucidate his answering by advising the House of the timetable for the restoration of the number of police officers in the Tweed-Byron local area command?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: The fact is that in December 2011 the Government took an unprecedented step which saw more than 300 probationary constables coming out of a graduating class at the academy transferred to country and regional areas. The likes of that have never been seen before. Seeing fresh young faces turning up to work on a Monday was a much-needed shot in the arm for the police, who had endured 16 years of neglect from members opposite.

The Hon. Amanda Fazio: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. I sought elucidation from the Minister with respect to the timetable for the restoration of the police numbers. I did not ask him about the matters about which he is now informing the House.

The PRESIDENT: Order! There is no point of order.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: As I said, we saw fresh young faces turning up to start their police careers. As I said to the Police Association recently when I called in unannounced to visit its executive, we will continue to work with the North Coast. It was great to be back with my old comrades. They welcomed me back and I must say I was very embarrassed by the applause that I received from the executive members of the association when I spoke with them.

The Hon. Melinda Pavey: Applause. That is wonderful.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: I received applause from the Police Association. They raised this with me in relation to the North Coast and I indicated to those members of the executive that, unlike those opposite, we will continue to work not just with the officers on the North Coast but indeed throughout New South Wales as we continue to build the numbers of police in our wonderful State.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Roads and Ports. Will the Minister update the House on the enormous progress that has been made towards completing the upgrade of the Pacific Highway?

The Hon. Amanda Fazio: Point of order: The question is out of order because it contains argument and I seek your ruling that way.

The PRESIDENT: Order! While the word "enormous" was argumentative I will not rule the question out of order because of one word. The Minister may answer the parts of the question that were not argumentative.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I thank the honourable member, who uses the Pacific Highway, for her question. Leaving aside for the moment the ongoing funding debate with the Gillard Government, I am pleased to say that 52 per cent, or 346 kilometres, of the Pacific Highway between Hexham and Queensland is now a four-lane divided road, which is pretty damned good. Construction is progressing well despite significant wet weather and flooding on the North Coast since January. We all know that this year and last year have not been great years for building roads.

On the current project, some substantial work is under way to prepare the next round of projects for construction. In fact, approximately 73 kilometres are currently under construction and about 105 kilometres have received planning approval. There are three key priority areas for the Pacific Highway upgrade. Priority one is to complete a four-lane divided highway between Hexham and Port Macquarie. Priority two is to complete a four-lane divided highway between Port Macquarie and Raleigh, which is a small town south of Coffs Harbour—

The Hon. Amanda Fazio: We all know where that is. You don't.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: Some do not. Priority three is to complete a four-lane divided highway between Woolgoolga and Ballina. Currently more than 1,200 workers are actively working on six major construction sites between Bulahdelah and Byron Bay. Pleasingly, approximately 8 per cent of the workforce on site comprises Aboriginal employees. In relation to priority one projects, weather permitting, the Bulahdelah bypass is expected to be opened in June this year. Importantly, coming up to the Easter break, a partial opening of the bypass, by utilising two lanes, is scheduled for later this month—just in time for the Easter school holidays. We will open two lanes going north at the beginning of the holidays, and half-way through the holidays we will reverse the process and have two lanes for traffic travelling south.

The Hon. Melinda Pavey: That will be good.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I think it is pretty damned sensible. It is the sort of common sense approach that this Government adopts. Despite The Greens warning of global warming, it was pretty wet last year and this year, so I do not know why they are critical. Likewise, the Herons Creek to Stills Road upgrade is expected to be open to traffic in the second half of this year. The Sapphire to Woolgoolga upgrade is forecast to be open to traffic in 2014. This project suffered 210 days, or about eight months, of lost construction work due to wet weather and flooding. Consequently, there was a blowout in time and costs, but other savings made along the highway have more than covered the extra cost, and time is currently coming down.

Finally, the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade is expected to be open to traffic in the second half of 2014. In relation to priority two upgrade projects, weather permitting, the Kempsey bypass will open to traffic next week. Late last year a contract was awarded for the design and construction of the Frederickton to Eungai upgrade, with building expected to start in the middle of this year. In the forthcoming months tenders are expected to be invited for the Oxley Highway to Kempsey upgrade. Finally, late last year a preferred tenderer was selected to design and build the Nambucca Heads to Urunga section of the Warrell Creek to Urunga upgrade with major work, which will start later this year. [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister elucidate his answer?

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: For priority three projects, the environmental impact statement for the 155-kilometre upgrade was placed on display for public comment in December last year and closed on 18 February. Comments and submissions will be considered by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. Advice about planning approval is expected later this year. So, overall, pretty damned good.

COLO HEIGHTS FIREFIGHTING OPERATIONS

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: In directing my question to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, I refer to numerous members of the public contacting me in relation to an incident that occurred during firefighting operations in the Colo Heights area in mid January, to reports that firefighters were doused by a helicopter that was using water from a dam at a local licensed waste facility, and to the fact that subsequently the firefighters developed health complaints.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: What date did it happen?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: It was 14 January. Will the Minister confirm whether an investigation into this incident was launched? Will he inform the House of the results of that investigation?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: I am shocked that the member has not sought to raise this very important issue with me earlier. He has been sitting on this.

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham: We have been ringing the department and it has been stonewalling us.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: You have been sitting on this.

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham: We phoned the department and put in a request under the Government Information (Public Access) Act [GIPA], you goose.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: Just apologise now for not raising this earlier.

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham: Yeah, yeah.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: You are behind the game. Mr President, as you would have seen, The Greens are behind the game.

Dr John Kaye: Point of order: The Minister clearly is debating the question. He should answer the question, not debate it.

The PRESIDENT: Order! There is no point of order.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: I understand that health checks were performed on the personnel some months ago.

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham: Oh?

The Hon. Helen Westwood: It was reported in the news, Jeremy.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: Yes, I know. Poor old Jeremy.

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham: No, you've denied it.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham has asked his question and he should wait for the answer.

The Hon. Greg Pearce: Instead of howling like a wolf.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: He occupies Richard Jones' old office. That is what is causing it.

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps: He's found the stash.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I call the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps to order for the second time.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: It is a very important question. Sadly, it was answered about three months ago by our Emergency Services personnel. I am grateful that at least the member has become aware of this issue, but he may rest assured that treatment was given. I understand that there was an internal investigation in relation to the incident.

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham: Was there?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: The Hon. Walt Secord asked for it. I knew somebody insignificant asked for it. I could not remember who it was. I will raise the issue again with the commissioner to find out whether anything that may have happened might interest the Hon. Jeremy Buckingham, and I will report back to the House if there is some new information.

WINMALEE WASTEWATER SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance and Services. Given that it has been almost six months since Sydney Water announced the preferred option for the Blue Mountains sewer tunnel in Springwood and Winmalee, when will construction begin?

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I was up in the Blue Mountains just a few weeks ago. I can confirm that great sections of the road up there that was left by St Hilliers have now been completed.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Yes.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: My colleague the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, has done a fantastic job.

The Hon. Walt Secord: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The Minister is referring to a Federal highway project, whereas the question relates to the Blue Mountain sewer tunnel.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I encourage the Minister to be generally relevant.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I am less than 40 seconds into the answer and Opposition members are taking points of order. They do not like the good news that this Government has been delivering in the nearly two years since we were elected. Sydney Water announced the preferred solution for the Winmalee Wastewater System Improvement Project in November last year. This will relieve pressure on some narrow sections of the Blue Mountains sewer tunnel, thereby reducing the risk of wastewater overflows into the environment. The news was received with resounding applause by the community working group, and I was not even there when the announcement was made. A review of environmental factors has been prepared to assess the potential environmental impacts of the project. This will come as news to the ignoramuses of the Opposition: An environmental assessment has to be done before construction can commence.

The Hon. Marie Ficarra: They bypassed a few of those.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: Unlike the former Labor Government, the Coalition Government is transparent, so the environmental assessment has been placed on the website. It will remain there until 22 March. If the Hon. Helen Westwood is really interested, she now has the opportunity to whip up to her office and have a look at the Sydney Water website, where she will see the environmental assessment. If she wants to, she can even provide some feedback on the project by sending a submission. I assure her that Sydney Water will consider all the submissions. In addition, details of the project and the program have been on permanent display at the Springwood library. Sydney Water is continuing to consult with residents. I thank the member for her question and encourage her to learn something about the way the Government works and something about the way projects proceed. Certainly I suggest she consults the Sydney Water website as she will get all the information she wants.

NORTH-WEST SYDNEY CRIME INITIATIVES

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Will the Minister inform the House of the work the NSW Police Force has been doing to reduce break and enter offences in north-west Sydney?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: The NSW Police Force North West Metropolitan Region has recently achieved some very impressive reductions in relation to break and enter offences. Police advise me that the incidence of break, enter and steal in the North West Metropolitan Region has fallen by 20 per cent since

April 2012. The reason for this sharp decrease is some clever police work. Intelligence officers were able to link forensic evidence from a number of persons of interest living in Mount Druitt to break, enter and steal offences committed across 41 local area commands in New South Wales. In addition, vehicles stolen from 48 different local area commands were recovered by police in the Mount Druitt area. It became apparent that persons of interest residing in Mount Druitt were reaching well beyond their local area and committing crimes across the State.

Police formed Strike Force Focus as a geographically targeted operation focused on Mount Druitt. The main objective of Strike Force Focus was to reduce property offences, both within the Mount Druitt area and throughout the State. Strike Force Focus included a team of both uniformed and plainclothes officers. The uniformed arm of the strike force attended all break and enter offences, obtained statements and canvassed neighbours of victims. They also visited persons of interest known to be at high risk of committing property offences as part of the NSW Police Force's Suspect Targeting Management Plan. Monitoring of high-risk offenders also involved visits to recently released persons. Where offenders were arrested for property-related crime, police conducted debriefs with the offenders.

Uniformed police also conducted bail compliance checks and went after offenders wanted on warrants and for property-related crimes. Plainclothes police carried out proactive patrols of hotspot locations where break and enters were known to have occurred. They also investigated all forensic identifications, targeted wanted persons, performed bail compliance and investigated pawnbroking offences. Priorities of Strike Force Focus were the collection of forensic evidence and increased intelligence gathering. Officers of the strike force worked on a backlog of forensic identifications from Mount Druitt and other local area commands where persons of interest resided. The results of the strike force speak for themselves: 281 people arrested and 635 charges laid; 45 of those arrests were the result of forensic identifications. Police are doing a fantastic job, not just in this area but right around the State. They are enthusiastically awaiting support from the New South Wales Labor Opposition for the proposal the Attorney General raised recently to make some reforms to pre-trial disclosure—a very important reform indeed.

Police attached to Strike Force Focus conducted eight search warrants and 274 person searches. A pawnbroking operation resulted in \$16,000 in fines being issued. Break and enter offences have since declined not only in Mount Druitt but, as I said earlier, across the North West Metropolitan Region, particularly in Quakers Hill, St Marys and Blacktown. As a former resident of Lethbridge Park as a young boy, I know this is an important part of our State. I congratulate the officers of Strike Force Focus on these excellent results in restoring confidence to a community that had been suffering under Labor's neglect for far too long. This shows what one can do when one has the support of the Government.

The time for questions has expired. If members have any further questions, I ask that they put them on notice.

PENSIONER REBATE ASSISTANCE

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: On 20 February 2013 the Hon. Paul Green asked me a question about council rebates for pensioners. The Minister for Local Government has provided the following response:

The council rates and charges rebate scheme applies to all eligible pensioners in New South Wales. The pensioner concession scheme is funded by the New South Wales Government (50 per cent), local councils (45 per cent) and the Federal Government (5 per cent). In 2011-12, the total cost of the scheme was approximately \$139 million. This cost is increasing each year as a result of the ageing of the population.

Unfortunately, the New South Wales Government has been left with a challenging budget position by the former state Labor Government and by Federal revenue cuts which have affected the New South Wales budget significantly.

It is important to note that the previous concession increase occurred under a State Coalition Government.

Although expanding the current concession may be desirable, the New South Wales Government has to take into account the budgetary implications of any change to current funding arrangements. Any increase would affect the capacity of the New South Wales Government and councils to provide other programs and services to the community.

I can assure you that the New South Wales Government appreciates the concerns of pensioners and will continue to keep this issue under consideration. In this light, the Minister sees no need to meet with the association at this time.

Questions without notice concluded.

TABLING OF PAPERS

The Hon. Greg Pearce tabled the following papers:

1. Legal Profession Act 2004—Erratum to the report of Law Society of New South Wales Professional Standards Department for the year ended 30 June 2012.
2. Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994—Report of Public Interest Disclosure Steering Committee for the year ended 30 June 2012.

Ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Greg Pearce.

Pursuant to sessional orders debate on committee reports proceeded with.

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3**Report: Budget Estimates 2012-2013**

Debate resumed from 19 February 2013.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES [5.05 p.m.]: I present to the House committee report No. 27 of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 entitled “Budget Estimates 2012-2013”. Before I refer to some of the portfolios examined by the committee, I begin by thanking members of the Legislative Council who participated in the hearings and the committee staff for their valuable support and assistance. I also thank the Ministers and departmental officials for appearing and answering the committee's questions, and I note the role their staff played in the process. As per the guidelines, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 was required to examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of Trade and Investment, and Regional Infrastructure and Services; The Legislature; Transport; Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing and the Arts; and Roads and Ports. The committee held five public hearings over two days and received nearly 14 hours of evidence.

The first hearing dealt with the portfolio of the Deputy Premier, Minister for Trade and Investment, and Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services, the Hon. Andrew Stoner. I compliment the Deputy Premier on the emphasis he has placed on rebuilding regional communities. He is delivering on our election commitment to regional New South Wales, spending a record \$61.8 billion on infrastructure investment programs. Commitments to infrastructure in regional New South Wales will be funded from a special infrastructure fund called Restart NSW and will include \$403 million for the Pacific Highway, \$170 million for the Princes Highway and \$135 million for the new Bridges for the Bush program.

The Bridges for the Bush program will deliver improvements in road freight productivity across regional areas by replacing or upgrading existing bridges at 17 key locations over the next five years. The Bridges for the Bush program will remove a number of significant freight pinch points and bottlenecks, by replacing or upgrading five key critical higher mass limit deficient bridges on State Government-managed roads and 12 timber bridges on State, regional and local roads. It is estimated that upgrading the higher mass limit deficient bridges alone will save up to 8,000 heavy vehicle trips each year. Currently, half of Australia's road freight and three-quarters of all interstate road freight journeys are made using our State roads.

This program improves road safety, creates thousands of construction jobs across regional New South Wales and will be a real boost to communities around regional New South Wales, including Wagga Wagga, Gunnedah, Wee Waa, Cooma and Echuca, which is where the five key priority bridges are located. Roads and Maritime Services anticipates that once these bridges have been replaced or upgraded there will be a significant reduction in annual maintenance costs across the network in regional New South Wales. Furthermore, over the next 30 years it is estimated it will generate savings of more than \$200 million in economic, social and environmental costs.

One of the key commitments of the Government's Strategic Plan NSW 2021 is to restore economic growth, particularly to regional areas. During the hearing the Deputy Premier outlined the work being done to promote trade and investment, locally and internationally, including the establishment of Small Biz Connect. Small Biz Connect offers high-quality support and advisory services for small businesses across the State, with greater focus on those based in regional areas. The budget has provided \$3.5 million for services within regional

areas—nearly twice that provided previously to the Business Advisory Service. More than 30 full-time equivalent Small Biz Connect advisers deliver practical support to small business owners and managers to meet their particular local needs.

During The Legislature estimates hearing the President outlined the existing twinning program with the parliaments of Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. The twinning project is part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's twinning program that was established in June 2007. New South Wales has been leading the way and other jurisdictions are following. It is worth noting also the recent communication upgrades to the Legislative Council. The \$1.7 million upgrades are long overdue; they provide improvements in Chamber broadcasting together with migration to the Microsoft exchange server and the introduction of Windows 7 and Outlook 2011 across all parliamentary computers.

I shall now focus on transport. The Minister for Transport, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, highlighted the massive \$13.2 billion injection into public transport and roads by the Government. Under Labor railway services were cut, including 416 daily services, which is around 2,000 a week. The Coalition has reintroduced 61 new railway services. The Minister gave an overview of the Transport Master Plan, which is a whole-of-government plan and includes public transport, roads, freight and active transport. In preparing the plan, the Minister visited the 14 different regions being considered for use as new and future transport corridors. The Minister highlighted the need to plan for the future to ensure that mistakes are not repeated. The Transport Master Plan recognises the importance of corridor preservation and the need to plan ahead. Furthermore, the Transport Master Plan uses an evidence-based approach to look at quickly growing New South Wales regions. This offers a great advantage in allowing corridors to be used as road or railway or even a combination to enable future governments multiple transport infrastructure options, depending on our State's needs. After reviewing Sydney's pinch points, 19 future corridors have been identified.

The committee heard also about the \$124 million allocated for the electronic ticketing system, known as the Opal Card, for which New South Wales has been waiting 13 years. The card was rolled out at Neutral Bay ferry wharf and over the coming months will expand across the ferry network. Although very simple, the new ticketing system will make a huge difference in commuter travel. The budget allocates also \$397 million to the South West Rail Link, another project we heard a lot about from members opposite but saw no action when they were in government—a bit like the North West Rail Link, which received \$360 million this year and was allocated \$3.3 billion over the next four years. Where Labor failed to deliver in transport, we are building and delivering. Furthermore, we are delivering new buses and trains: \$127 million has been allocated for more than 260 new buses and \$32 million for the purchase of 99 new Oscar carriages. This is particularly good news for members representing the Hunter, the Central Coast, Blue Mountains and Illawarra.

During the examination of the Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality, Racing and the Arts portfolios the Hon. George Souris outlined the Government's commitment to combat problem gambling by providing a range of education and support services designed to address the harm caused by irresponsible gambling, encourage responsible gambling and increase community resilience. The Minister told the hearing that most people gamble responsibly, but for others it can be a problem for themselves, their families and the community. Over four years from July \$48.1 million will be committed to provide counselling services to address problem gambling. Evidence has shown that early intervention initiatives can prevent people from becoming problem gamblers. Early intervention includes prevention, community awareness, harm minimisation and treatment strategies. The Government allocated \$15.4 million through the Responsible Gambling Fund, which includes more than \$12 million towards front-line counselling and support services to help problem gamblers and their families. A further \$10.6 million has been set aside for face-to-face counselling and support at the 46 Gambling Help services operating at more than 200 locations across New South Wales.

An additional \$4 million over the next three years has been allocated to the Gambling and Aboriginal People Strategy to target problem gambling in Aboriginal communities. The strategy focuses on community engagement, education and awareness, screening for problem gambling, and counselling and support services along with training. Over three years \$1.5 million will be spent to establish the Aboriginal Problem Gambling Counsellor Cadetship Program. Under the cadetship program \$500,000 a year will be allocated for training, mentoring and placement of Aboriginal workers within Gambling Help counselling services to deliver education and support services to the community.

Under the Roads and Ports portfolio, the Hon. Duncan Gay outlined the Government's investment of \$61.8 billion in infrastructure over the next four years. This represents an average increase of \$1 billion per year for the previous four years. Furthermore, the New South Wales Government has made a \$17 million

commitment to roll out more flashing lights over the next three years to complement existing measures that increase school zones visibility, such as dragon's teeth road markings and high visibility signage. Ensuring road safety is a key priority for the Government and \$140 million has been allocated to deliver road safety upgrades, including highway and local government route safety reviews, the installation of rumble strips, wire rope barriers and the widening of road shoulders in high crash areas.

The Central Coast remains one of the fastest growing areas in the State. Therefore, \$96 million will be invested in Central Coast roads to ensure delivery of needed infrastructure. Funding includes \$18 million for the continued four-lane widening of the Central Coast Highway between Matcham Road, Erina Heights, and Ocean View Drive, Wamberal, as well as \$17 million for the planning and preconstruction of the Central Coast Highway upgrade at the Brisbane Water Drive and Manns Road intersection, West Gosford, and \$8.5 million to complete the upgrade of the intersection of the Central Coast Highway and Wisemans Ferry Road, Kariiong. I have spoken previously about the Transport Master Plan, but I shall touch on the Government's commitments to improve traffic flow at congestion points on major arterial road corridors. As part of the \$125 million Pinch Point strategy, \$17.5 million has been allocated to be rolled out over the next five years. The program targets peak-hour traffic hot spots in key corridors in Sydney and develops measures to maintain and improve travel speeds, and provide better information for motorists.

Projects being funded include upgrades to the Concord Road and Parramatta Road intersection; widening of the F3-Pacific Highway off-ramp; upgrades to the Hume Highway and Hoxton Park Road intersection; upgrades to the Hume Highway and Liverpool Street intersection; widening of Powers Road at its intersection with Old Windsor Road; widening work on the Cumberland Highway between Great Western Highway and the M4 motorway; widening Boundary Street between the Pacific Highway and Archer Street; and the development of future Pinch Point projects, including investigations along Pennant Hills Road, James Ruse Drive, Canterbury Road, Henry Lawson Drive, Woodville Road, Taren Point Road and Epping Road. In conclusion, I again thank the committee staff for their assistance. I commend the report to the House.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE [5.17 p.m.]: I contribute to the debate on budget estimates, particularly the report of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3. At the outset, I thank the secretariat staff for their professionalism and efficiency in making what often are quite tense meetings operate smoothly. I similarly thank the Hansard staff for their outstanding effort under often very difficult circumstances. As we have been discussing the budget estimates process more generally over the past few weeks, other members have canvassed the glaring hole in the budget uncovered by the Auditor-General of at least a \$1 billion mistake—I wish we could find that down the back of the couch—on top of more than 1,000 errors in the State budget. Billions of dollars have not been accounted for adequately—much more work needs to be done in this area. These errors add salt to the wounds endured particularly by groups, organisations and workers suffering under cuts to education, health and workers compensation. The incompetence is simply breathtaking.

Today I will focus in particular on the performance of the Minister for Transport and the contempt with which she treated the budget estimates process. This year there was little for public transport in the budget. As members would be aware, there was little in the way of detail in the budget papers. For all their talk in opposition about open and transparent government this Government is not willing to put that into practice. Anyone who has tried to work their way through the budget papers will have seen that. There are many issues relating to public transport. Commuters know that trains are late and getting later, graffiti complaints are up by 10 per cent, the number of general complaints is rising and there are fewer people providing security on our trains than ever before. The budget documents provided little in the way of forward estimates over the next cycle for individual projects.

Given the lack of detail in the budget papers, I had hoped that the estimates process would be a chance to garner some information about the Government's plans and how it intends to implement them. I was sadly mistaken. The Minister took a number of different approaches to not answering questions in the estimates hearings. During the estimates process the committees go through the familiar process of discussing whether the Government is going to take Dorothy Dix questions from its members. During the estimates process the Minister for Transport asked that Government members waive their time for questions. It was a request that the committee agreed to on the proviso that the Minister be aware that in doing so questions from the Opposition and the crossbench were not to be treated like Dorothy Dixers. In other words, it was not an opportunity for the Minister to talk ad nauseum around a range of issues rather than answer the questions put forward by the committee members.

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps: You should have seen her in Young Liberals.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I acknowledge Dr Phelps' experience of the Minister for Transport and the Young Liberals movement and his comments on the Minister's performance. Within moments of the hearing opening, and in response to my first question, the Minister was giving the committee a Dorothy Dixier response rather than a simple answer to a question about the time it would take for commuters to get to the city from Cherrybrook when the North West Rail Link is completed. Instead of answering my question, the Minister wanted to provide me with a full explanation of the Government's plans in relation to the North West Rail Link. The Minister has announced this project over 40 times; I think members are quite familiar with it. Ultimately the Minister was, and still is, unable to provide a start date, a completion date or a costing for the project. The Minister's approach displayed contempt for the process as she tried to mark time rather than provide the Parliament with answers.

Eventually the Minister did answer my question, acknowledging that it will be quicker for commuters to get to the central business district by bus than via the Hills to Chatswood shuttle. Furthermore, the Government has now acknowledged that express buses from The Hills district to the central business district will not all run all the way to the city once the North West Rail Link is opened. In relation to funding for public transport in western Sydney, the Minister could not give me an answer on whether she was consulted before the Premier welcomed the announcement that an Abbott-Truss Government would rip \$2.1 billion of Federal funds for public transport out of western Sydney and put it into the Pacific Highway instead. Given the outcome I suspect the Minister was not consulted but we do not know for sure because the Minister would not answer the question.

I asked the Minister about Government guidelines in relation to public-private partnerships and providing up to \$10 million of taxpayers' money to pay each unsuccessful shortlisted tenderer for the North West Rail Link. Again no answer has been forthcoming. I note however that tenders for the North West Rail Link are, in some instances, running more than six times over what they originally tendered, which will result in cost blowouts before the project has started. I also asked the Minister whether the review of ferry services will be made publicly available. All I was told was that the Minister would perhaps selectively release some information. We are still waiting for that information, which is nowhere to be seen.

On the critical safety issue of overcrowding on Town Hall and Wynyard stations the response I received was that the Government's plan is to stop people getting onto the platform or the train. The Government's solution to overcrowding is to station marshals at the door to stop people from getting on the train. The Government was forced to admit that trains without air-conditioning will be on the network for many years to come, and there will be lots of talk, but no action or any real plan, to improve on-time running. I note that the Minister visited the South West Rail Link with the cameras yesterday. The Opposition welcomes that project, which was started under the previous Labor Government. The Minister failed to inform people that there will be a brand new shiny rail link but the public will be travelling on 30-year-old carriages without air-conditioning—I am sure they will be delighted about that. Trains are late, and will get later, and commuters are paying more for their fares. Since the O'Farrell Government came to office commuters pay on average 10 per cent more for their fares, well above the consumer price index.

Of particular concern to me was the contempt with which the Minister treated the questions on notice process. Yes, there is limited time in our estimates process, we all know that. The Opposition and, I suspect, the crossbenchers, always want more time with the Minister physically present to answer questions. There is a good process that Ministers should treat properly and that is the ability to take questions on notice and for members of the committee to put a range of questions to the Minister after the hearing to get some proper answers. The reality is that the responses from the Minister for Transport to questions on notice were laughable. I sent approximately 60 questions to the Minister. This is just one example: I asked the Minister about the \$5 million paid in contracts for recruitment services—\$5 million in recruitment represents a lot of jobs—yet even on notice all the Minister provided by way of an answer was that, "All recruitment contracts have been disclosed as appropriate."

I asked the Minister about specific contracts awarded and what those contracts were for and the Minister directed me to the NSW eTendering website. I am perfectly capable of reading that website but it does not actually tell anyone, let alone the taxpayers of New South Wales, how many people have been recruited for \$5 million and what they are doing—\$5 million is not an amount to be laughed at. This is one example out of a number of problems in relation to questions on notice. I now stand before the Parliament drawing attention to the dissenting statement made by my colleague the Hon. Mick Veitch and me in relation to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 report.

The Hon. Mick Veitch and I moved a dissenting statement in relation to this report because the Opposition members of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 sought to have a call-back for the following portfolios: Regional Infrastructure and Services, Transport and Roads and Ports. These Ministers were requested to come back as a result of the poor approach taken to answering questions on notice during the hearings and questions asked after the committee meeting. To use the Minister for Transport as an example, the answers provided to the committee by the Minister were in many cases flippant, deliberately omitted detail requested in the question and a deliberate misinterpretation of the question asked. The role of the budget estimates process is outlined on the parliamentary website and it states:

Each year Government ministers and senior public servants attend an annual budget estimates inquiry to answer questions about the expenditure, performance and effectiveness of their departments. Budget estimates is a key process for Government accountability and transparency. The Government estimates inquiries involve hours of detailed questioning by members of the Legislative Council on the decisions, actions and advice of Ministers and public servants.

The answers given by Ministers in 2012 made a mockery of the budget estimates process. I stood by those words then and I stand by them now. We still do not have any clear answers concerning a range of public transport issues impacting on people not just in Sydney but up and down the coast and in western New South Wales. The Minister chose to treat the process with contempt. The budget estimates process is an important part of democracy in the State. It is about accountability not just to the Opposition but to the people of New South Wales. The role of the Opposition is to ask these questions and the Government should have respect for the people of New South Wales and see fit to answer them. In this respect the Minister for Transport failed dismally.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH [5.27 p.m.]: I speak to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 budget estimates inquiry report, in particular with regard to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Trade and Investment, and Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services. There were a number of matters that were raised during the session in which the committee had the Deputy Premier in attendance.

I want to clarify something I said in a speech last week regarding the disallowance motion for the pay rise for the Deputy Premier. I inadvertently misled the House when I quoted from the transcript and I said that the Deputy Premier had said at budget estimates in response to a question regarding Mr Chow's restaurant, "A man has got to eat." I will correct the record by reading from the transcript. I said, "How was Mr Chow's in Los Angeles?" The Deputy Premier responded, "I would not classify it as fine dining. It is a Chinese restaurant. You have got to eat." He did not say "A man has got to eat." Apparently Mr Chow's is not fine dining—when you are overseas you do have to eat.

I will now go through some of the matters raised in budget estimates. There was considerable discussion about the Regional Relocation Grants scheme. This scheme, from the outset, was a dud. I said that at the start and it continues to be a dud: Members have only to read the answers to my questions on notice in this place. The Regional Relocation Grant is not succeeding and there appear to be unspent funds. The scheme was granted a budget of \$49 million in the 2011-12 financial year and a significant amount of that \$49 million was left unspent. There were 7,000 relocation places budgeted and only 1,300 places were achieved for the full financial year.

By anyone's standard that is not a good performance. I asked the Deputy Premier what happened to the unspent funds. Deep within the budget papers—in fact, in the executive summary of the budget papers—we find that money budgeted to stimulate economies in regional New South Wales, a good initiative, was reallocated to offset GST payments for The Star casino. I challenge the wisdom of that decision because people from regional New South Wales would not be pleased with it. We examined the advertising campaign to see what action the Government was taking to promote the Regional Relocation Grant scheme. We found that of the \$1 million budgeted for the advertising campaign for the scheme, only \$750,000 was spent on that campaign. I have been told that it was a poor advertising campaign. Indeed, I do not know whether there will be another advertising campaign this year to try to promote the scheme. I know that a decentralisation task force has been travelling around the State trying to ascertain what is wrong with that scheme. One need only ask Opposition members because we can tell Government members what is wrong with the scheme.

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps: What is wrong with it?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am glad that the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps asked. This Government restricted the scheme to people who own a house in Sydney. Anyone renting in south-western Sydney or western Sydney who wants to move to country New South Wales cannot access the scheme. People have to own

real estate in Sydney, sell it and move. The Government has excluded a whole raft of people. If the Government were keen to stimulate rural economies it would expand the criteria for the scheme. I thank the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps for asking that question. A number of country members of Parliament would have been told that the advertising campaign was restricted to advertising 30 communities. I am not parochial but Young was not included and the Hon. Steve Whan tells me that Cooma also was not included. I want to know why those communities were not included and why others were included as some are outstanding places in which to live. Why has the Government sought to pick winners and losers by creating a scenario in which some communities are deemed better than others? It is a terrible thing to have done and this Government should not have done it.

I then explored with the Deputy Premier the Resources for Regions scheme, which is doing extremely well. That scheme involved a funding allocation of \$160 million over four years but in two years the Government allocated only \$9 million. How much of that money has been spent? People in Muswellbrook would say not a lot or probably none. That money was diverted to the emergency department of Muswellbrook District Hospital. Muswellbrook Shire Council is not happy because the council nominated its sewage treatment plant. That plant is at full capacity because the mines have attracted many people to the area. I thought this program was about resources for the regions but somehow the emergency department received priority over the sewage treatment plant and got some funding. We spoke at length with the Deputy Premier to ascertain how that could have happened. I thought the member for Upper Hunter may have nominated it but in answer to questions on notice I understand that is not the case.

The Hon. Dr Peter Phelps: What is the case?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It appears as though the member had no involvement at all; he had nothing at all to say about any of the projects. I would have thought a local member of Parliament would say something about such a program but he did not. The scheme was the subject of an audit because, like the Regional Relocation Grant scheme, it was not working well. The audit was released in February 2013 and eligibility for the scheme has been expanded to include not-for-profit organisations and local councils. Apparently last year Singleton and Muswellbrook were the only two affected communities but this year truck movements will be used as the criteria to determine a mining-affected community which will also bring in Newcastle. The document has a table showing the number of truck movements in affected communities. I am a bit perplexed by the inclusion of Sutherland in the group.

Dr John Kaye: It is infinity; you don't understand. It is like Mosman.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: It is not Mosman. When one reads the table in the report one realises that the communities that are affected have the number of truck movements recorded beside their names. However, in relation to Sutherland the report states "no truck movements recorded". Somehow Sutherland has jumped into the funding mix for a \$160 million program of which only \$9 million has been spent. I dare say that a lot of money from this program will be spent, probably not this year but in the next financial year. I am not sure why that would be—maybe 2015 will be the year when the money is spent.

The Hon. Steve Whan: The rest of the \$160 million.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Yes, the rest of the \$160 million might be spent on projects and it might all be fully expended.

The Hon. Steve Whan: But not in Cessnock or Maitland.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: But not in Cessnock or Maitland. Lake Macquarie missed out as well; it did not get considered. I thought that was a mining-affected community. We spoke with the Premier about the Decade of Decentralisation, particularly as to any key performance indicators that would determine whether this had been a success. We found out later that a lower House task force was travelling around the State inquiring into the Decade of Decentralisation because apparently that initiative is not going so well. Comment was made earlier about the former Government's failings but this Government's projects are not going as swimmingly as it would have us think. I will continue to talk in this place about those things.

We spoke also about changed management plans. The Hon. Steve Whan asked a number of questions about those plans to which he may refer in his contribution. As I conclude my contribution I extend my appreciation to Hansard because the committee did its utmost to make it easy for them. I extend my appreciation to the secretariat staff because I often forget to do that. I look forward to the next round of budget estimates with the Deputy Premier.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN [5.37 p.m.]: I speak in debate on report No. 27 of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 entitled, "Budget Estimates 2012-2013" and thank the committee. It is amazing that the committee secretariat was able to make sense of some of the issues that were discussed. I acknowledge my colleagues on the committee also. The comments of the Hon. Mick Veitch were spot on with respect to the Regional Relocation Grant questions that he put to the Deputy Premier, and I followed up on those questions. The scheme has been disappointing; indeed the Deputy Premier noted that the scheme was not as successful as the Government had anticipated in that only 1,300 of the 7,000 grants had been taken up. I found this of concern because although Shoalhaven City Council manages its finances and budget fairly well, many councils are struggling and are financially unsustainable. I put that matter to the Deputy Premier.

The Hon. Robert Brown: Those in mining areas.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That is right, particularly in mining areas where there is an increase in infrastructure, where people fly in and fly out so that populations increase overnight and then decrease, where there are sewage treatment plants and roads have to increase in capacity at the drop of a hat. In addition, there is the ongoing maintenance associated with a mobile workforce, not to mention schoolchildren and relatives trying to stay close to their parents who are on the go. There are many complications in regional areas. It was extremely disappointing to hear that that money went to offset GST payments for The Star casino. As I have suggested to the Deputy Premier, it would have been better to have used that money for equal grants throughout New South Wales councils to enable them to continue different initiatives to encourage people to relocate—initiatives such as evocities, which I noted in the news recently is to get further Federal funding, to draw people to regional areas.

I encourage the New South Wales Government to invest in evocity programs so that local councils can do everything they can to reinvent themselves to ensure they have sustainable populations with the skilled workforces that are required to enable them to grow, to give people an opportunity to live the dream and not pack up the family and move to a central city location to get a job or to find opportunities to enable them to pay the mortgage. The spirit of the relocation grants program was to encourage people to relocate. It was disappointing to find that that did not happen.

It was disappointing also to note that the Government used only \$9 million of its \$160 million Resources for Regions fund. This Government promised to make New South Wales number one again but it is hard to see that happening if it is leaving \$151 million in the kitty when many local governments could do with that funding to generate further income and create more jobs or fix up infrastructure that will bring connectivity to different communities and ensure vibrant towns and villages throughout our State. After a couple of budget estimates we are learning that money is simply not the answer. We need effective strategies in these areas so that people at the grassroots who know the system are receiving adequate funding to ensure that people relocate to rural and regional areas. There are too many hurdles with this sort of approach. The money is not going to where it is needed to make decentralisation work.

I was keen to get an answer from the Minister for Transport about the installation of an elevator at Redfern, which is a priority. We spoke at budget estimates about tourism, about the expansion of the airport, or the building of a second airport, and how the Minister could achieve a 7 per cent increase in tourism by 2020 when the capacity of the airport is compromised and Port Botany will have more truck movements. Currently about two million containers come into Port Botany. In a few short years those truck movements will increase to around 8 to 10 million containers—all around the hub of the airport. Tourism is one of our major opportunities to make New South Wales number one again. We must think seriously about expanding the airport or building a second airport. We must be more aggressive in our thinking about a fast train to ensure we move tourists and other people throughout New South Wales, particularly to Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane. The Government should be thinking about how to build the necessary infrastructure sooner rather than later.

We get a lot of feedback in budget estimates, but the information we get is not always as comprehensive as we would like. However, at the end of the day Ministers have only a short amount of time. I believe it is more productive to get Ministers fixing the problems and being part of the solution rather than tying them down with more questions. We expect answers to our questions. If Ministers give us those answers we do not require them to come back a second time. The general public expects us to keep Ministers accountable and to ensure that the information they give us is open and transparent and that taxpayers' money is expended in the right way to achieve the right results—connectivity for jobs and the prosperity of New South Wales.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN [5.45 p.m.]: On behalf of The Greens I speak in debate on report No. 27 of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 entitled, "Budget Estimates 2012-2013". I thank committee secretariat staff and Hansard for the good work they always do at budget estimates hearings. The Minister for Transport and the Minister for Roads and Ports did their best to avoid answering some questions about their relationship with Infrastructure NSW. The hearings took place soon after the transport master plan was released and quite soon after Infrastructure NSW released the State Infrastructure Strategy. I was one of the committee members who tried to establish how much the Minister for Transport and her officials liaised with Infrastructure NSW on various aspects of its strategy. At one stage I asked the Minister for Transport what her department knew about the underground central business district bus tunnel that Infrastructure NSW promoted when it released its strategy.

I asked whether the department had done any work on an underground central business district bus tunnel and I was informed that it had not done any work. It appeared that Transport for NSW had no discussions with Infrastructure NSW about an underground central business district bus tunnel. I asked the Minister for Transport and I directed questions to various senior officers as to whether they had discussions with Infrastructure NSW about that issue. Every one of those senior officers shook their heads; nobody had had any discussions with Infrastructure NSW. It is extraordinary that Infrastructure NSW—a body that purports to be an independent voice that proposes infrastructure solutions and transport for roads—does not make any approaches to Transport for NSW to establish whether it had done any work on something as significant as an underground central business district bus tunnel.

At a later date, when the Minister for Roads and Ports was asked whether he had met with Infrastructure NSW in relation to WestConnex, the Minister said that he had had many meetings with Infrastructure NSW about the infrastructure strategy and throughout this period the working relationship with Infrastructure NSW had been terrific. How could two Ministers—one tasked with transport and the other with roads and ports—have such varying responses to a question about their relationship with Infrastructure NSW? Throughout the budget estimates process it was revealed that Infrastructure NSW was all about motorways and tolls and not about public transport. In some ways Infrastructure NSW did not take seriously the issue of light rail. George Street light rail is one of the projects that the Minister for Transport has been promoting. Did Infrastructure NSW discuss anything relating to transport before the State Infrastructure Strategy was released?

I will also mention the lifting of the container cap at Port Botany. When questioned, the Minister for Roads and Ports was hesitant to suggest that the cap was lifted to make privatising the port more desirable. In fact, we know that on 27 July in a joint media release the Hon. Duncan Gay and Mike Baird said that they would use the money from the privatisation or lease of the port, whatever they are calling it, to fund infrastructure projects across New South Wales. In a *Sydney Morning Herald* article dated 14 June 2012 Brian Robins reported:

The adviser to the state government on the port sale, investment bank Morgan Stanley, is believed to have told the government that unless it can indicate to the buyer that the planning cap of 3.2 million containers can be raised, this will significantly limit the potential sale price.

The Minister did not give a satisfactory response about the lifting of the cap, although he could tell me container movements from now until 2030 are projected to increase to up to seven million containers. As part of the privatisation agreement the Government has not set a cap and has also lifted the cap of 3.2 million containers. Imagine the increase in trucks on the road if container movements increase to the Government's prediction of seven million containers by 2030. Lifting the cap will cause a huge increase in trucks on the road. The Government immediately committed \$1.8 billion to building WestConnex, much of the reason for which is probably to deal with the increased truck movements.

During the hearings I questioned the roads Minister about WestConnex and whether he had seen any traffic modelling that had been undertaken. He had not seen any traffic modelling at that time. He assured me that the infrastructure subcommittee of Cabinet may have seen traffic modelling but, as he was not on that subcommittee, he was not privy to that modelling. That is extraordinary, because throughout the inquiry the roads Minister promoted the WestConnex as something that would do incredible things for traffic congestion in Sydney. He said it would lead to increased road capacity, reduced traffic congestion and more reliable travel times. That was not based on any traffic modelling, as we found out after questioning the Minister, and after more questioning we found out that the Government had also not undertaken any decent or substantial cost-benefit analyses. The roads Minister was talking up a \$1.8 billion commitment by the Government with no cost-benefit analysis whatsoever and no traffic modelling.

We understand that the Government has undertaken a lot of cost-benefit analyses for its other big infrastructure commitment, the North West Rail Link, but it is unbelievable that no such work has been undertaken for its second big commitment, WestConnex. No cost-benefit analysis or traffic modelling has been undertaken for a toll road that will be used to carry potentially millions of B-doubles and B-triples out of the port because the Government had to lift the container cap to privatise the port. In 10 years or so when the people of New South Wales look back at the infrastructure projects that this Government has promised and remember its commitment to free up roads and congestion they will see roads upon which they cannot even move. When they see B-double and B-triples they will ask what happened to that promise to ease congestion that was based on absolutely no traffic modelling and no cost-benefit analysis. Gee, once more these budget estimates hearings covered an infrastructure promise by a State Government for its private sector mates; not for the people of New South Wales.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN [5.55 p.m.]: During the budget estimates hearings the Hon. Mick Veitch and I participated in the Trade, Investment and Regional Infrastructure and Services committee and also the Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality, Racing and the Arts committee. I will briefly address both those areas. As the Hon. Mick Veitch has said, during the session with the Deputy Premier we asked a number of questions about the regional relocation grants and the Resources for Regions program. I fully endorse the comments of the Hon. Mick Veitch in that regard. The Regional Relocation Grants program is a major failure.

The Hon. Mick Veitch: It's a dud.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: It is a dud. The program has funded sea-changers to retire to the coast and not families to move to inland New South Wales. Over and over again the Opposition pointed out the failures of this program and said that this money could be better spent. It is outrageous that, for instance, the Government will not even consider assisting renters to move out of the city and into country New South Wales, let alone the better use of those funds that the Leader of the Opposition has recommended on a number of occasions.

One of the key problems during estimates hearings last year was that the Deputy Premier was unable to give us any information about how he would measure the success or otherwise of the program. There were no performance indicators or anything else to see how it was going and whether the money was being adequately used. The Regional Relocation Grants program is a back-of-the-envelope election promise which has completely failed. It is symbolic of the chaos in this Government's regional development policy. That policy is driven only by headlines in newspapers and slogans before the election and not by properly considered programs to develop regional and rural New South Wales.

We are seeing the same thing in relation to the Resources for Regions program. Before the election I attended a forum at which the then shadow Minister promised that a Coalition government would implement this program with the mining-related councils. Those councils were of course very keen to know how it would work and the shadow Minister essentially said that he was waiting for the shadow Treasurer to tell him. He said that at that moment they were not consulting him on how it was going. In the end the Government promised up to \$160 million. That caused the people of rural and regional New South Wales to believe that there would be \$160 million over four years, which is a long way off 10 per cent of royalties even though that is the figure the Government has bandied around. The program has delivered only \$9.6 million of that \$160 million. As the Hon. Mick Veitch said, when we questioned the Deputy Premier about how the Government decided on some of those priorities his answer was vague indeed, although we eventually got a hastily handwritten note that told us about the funding applications one council had submitted.

We also asked about change management in the Department of Trade and Investment, which related particularly to the massive cuts to jobs and staff that was happening at the department. That is another example of the information being very limited. It was difficult to obtain answers from the Minister or the head of the department in relation to how many staff were being targeted overall, what sections they were in, and in the long term the location to which the change management plans referred. I would have to say that it was disappointing all round when it came to the provision of government information.

As the shadow Minister I also attended the estimates hearing on the Tourism portfolio because a number of important questions relating to tourism needed to be pursued. Credit is due to Minister Souris because he and his staff made a better effort to answer questions than all those in the other estimates committees I attended. I am sure that during subsequent debates on committee reports I will be able to deal with some of the non-answers I received from other Ministers, particularly the Minister for Primary Industries. In contrast to that, Minister Souris made an effort to answer questions when he could. For example, he was asked about the new

convention facilities at Darling Harbour, but all too often the committee and I were told that those matters were being handled by other agencies. Upgrading the Convention Centre is an absolutely critical development for the future of tourism in New South Wales. The Minister certainly displayed a limited knowledge of what was going on with that, which was very disappointing.

I am particularly concerned about the planning for what will happen in the interim while the new convention facilities are developed at Darling Harbour. At the same time as a tender process was under way for the convention facilities at Darling Harbour, two alternative venues were to be used as convention facilities. One venue was discussed at the estimates hearing, and that was White Bay where I understand the proposal is to erect a large marquee. The Government suggests that will enable a number of the conventions that normally would be held at Darling Harbour—including events such as the Sydney International Boat Show, CeBIT and a number of other conventions—to continue to be held.

The problem is that the committee received very little detail on what would be provided as a venue. Subsequently it emerged that there will be no provision for people to walk or bicycle to the site. They will have to get onto buses and be transported to White Bay. That is a planning flaw and it is a problem with building a convention centre in an area that hosts ongoing industrial use. The problem could be overcome by forward planning and perhaps investment in another access point across to White Bay. Unfortunately, those matters do not seem to be receiving much consideration. I am worried that inevitably we will see a bit of a slump in the conventions business while the facilities are rebuilt, and I am worried that the slump may prove to be permanently damaging to our industry, especially considering the huge efforts being made in neighbouring countries to snap up this business from New South Wales.

The other matter I wish to discuss is the whole purpose of estimates hearings—accountability. I have to say that I was seriously disappointed in the lack of accountability when I questioned the department and the Minister about the Regional Tourism Development Program, streams one and two. The program has a bit of history. I submitted questions upon notice in the period leading up to the estimates hearings to find out exactly which organisations had received grants under the programs and how they had been acquitted. Indeed, I was interested in finding out information such as the organisation's Australian business number and who its directors are. Information in response to my questions upon notice was not forthcoming. Essentially the responses to my questions upon notice amounted to, "We have printed a list of names of people who got them, but the grants, particularly stream one, all went out through regional tourism organisations. We are unable to give you the information on how the money has been spent."

I questioned the department on that, but I was unable to obtain further information during estimates on accountability and the effectiveness of expenditure on stream one. I was told that tourism bodies ensured that facilities were built if they had promised to do that, and that basically the organisations had to sign off and say they were built. But there is a distinct lack of accountability in this process. I support the fact that regional tourism organisations understand the needs of their area, but I do not believe it is appropriate for government to hand over funds to be distributed by another party, without having established accountability mechanisms. A recent report by the Independent Commission Against Corruption, which referred to funding for community service organisations, stated that the Auditor-General should be given power to examine the destination of grants to third party and non-government organisations, and that should be the case in relation to regional tourism operators as well.

In relation to stream two, I was able to obtain information on Australian business numbers and names of recipients when that information was provided on notice. That is useful, but it is important for the Opposition to be able to track the disbursement of funds to find out whether the money is being effectively spent. For example, were the two grants, provided for Bessie the cow in the Hunter Valley under streams one and two, well spent? The funds probably were well spent, but how would we know if we do not ask questions like that? The information was not provided and it is not stated in annual reports.

Was it appropriate for a grant for the improvement of infrastructure to be given to a body that did not own the infrastructure? That actually happened in one of the cases we examined. I want to see an accounting for that, but I still have not seen it. Incidentally, that was an important project. I question why the local council, which owned the asset, did not apply for the grant to obtain the funding. Although there were a number of questions related to that project, it was a one-off program. In the longer term I have serious concerns about funding for regional tourism organisations. It appears that this Government is moving to a situation in which regional tourism organisations will no longer receive funding to assist with their operations. They will have to

engage in an open process that will involve other organisations. I am concerned that that may result in the disappearance of some regional tourism organisations in New South Wales. I am also concerned that from the big pre-election boost in funding, we will see a drop right back in future years.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR [6.05 p.m.]: I join in debate on the report entitled, "Budget Estimates 2012-2013" of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3. Last October I was acting chair in place of the chair, the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones, and I thank her for running a cohesive body throughout the year. I also thank my fellow committee members. I thank the secretariat for their fantastic work and Hansard for their fantastic reporting. The committee posed a wide range of questions to Government Ministers and their departmental representatives. I participated in all the budget estimates hearings as chair of the committee.

I particularly mention the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, who outlined some of the key highlights from his first term as a Minister thus far. Time for this debate is short and I will not be able to list all his achievements, but I may have sufficient time to single out a couple of them. The Minister outlined his spending commitment to the Pacific Highway and the frustrations of dealing with the Federal Government, which has withdrawn from an existing 80:20 funding split. The Minister outlined plans to simplify road signage for New South Wales to more closely resemble systems used overseas and to eliminate confusion for tourists and local residents. As I have stated, there are many other achievements upon which I could elaborate, but time will not permit.

The committee inquired into the expenditure of the portfolios of Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality, Racing and the Arts. Despite having such a large encompassing portfolio, Minister Souris is doing a fantastic job. I take particular interest in the initiatives undertaken to address problem gambling in New South Wales. The Responsible Gambling Fund is providing \$1.019 million for early intervention, prevention, and a community engagement strategy for problem gambling in New South Wales. This ongoing program supports self-help initiatives, develops social media and targets community groups that are at risk of problem gambling.

The Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing's Counsellor Sam blog provides readers with more detailed responses to questions on problem gambling, and in 2011-12 it attracted 10,925 unique visitors who accessed that service. In addition, the Responsible Gambling Fund provided money to deliver a range of early intervention initiatives, including working with schools and other educational institutions, promoting responsible gambling through local media, and collaborating with health services and community groups to promote their services. The fund also provided \$475,200 to support a strategy for culturally diverse communities. In addition to print and online materials and advertising, a DVD entitled, "What's Gambling really costing you?" has been produced in six community languages.

Finally, in 2012 the Minister launched the \$2.79 million Aboriginal awareness raising program as part of the gambling and Aboriginal people strategy. This aims to engage Aboriginal communities on the issue of problem gambling and provide culturally appropriate resources. The Minister detailed the ongoing commitment to ensuring the responsible service of alcohol, something for which he must be commended. It was an interesting estimates hearing. As always, we covered a wide spectrum of subjects. I thank all the Ministers who participated. I know other members of the committee will highlight some of those areas later in debate. I look forward to budget estimates this year.

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ [6.10 p.m.]: I sat on the committee for the Arts and Tourism section of the hearing. One of my big concerns about these types of committees is that for portfolios such as the Arts the Opposition gets 15 minutes in which to ask questions. Quite often Ministers are willing to give long answers that do not necessarily go directly to the question they have been asked. It is difficult to ascertain information. In regard to the Arts portfolio, I was concerned about a couple of issues in particular. One such issue is the \$5 million in funding that seems to have disappeared from Screen NSW. This funding had been given to the film industry in consecutive budgets under the Labor Government, yet the Minister did not appear to know where this funding had disappeared to.

While the Minister gave an assurance that New South Wales is at the hub of the film industry in Australia, I suggest that taking \$5 million out of Screen NSW funding—funding that is intended to attract the film industry to New South Wales—would do precisely the opposite. Indeed, when I asked the Minister about the funding he did not appear to be able to elucidate. Eventually, Mr Paterson from the department pointed out that it was a time-limited program that was not funded out of the Arts program but out of the strategic investment program and basically it concluded on 30 June. That was quite surprising given that consecutive Labor Governments had given that \$5 million to Screen NSW.

The State Government was quite big about winding up its contribution to the *Wolverine* project, but when we asked the explicit question of how much the State Government had contributed it was unable to tell us. This was despite the fact that the Federal Government was quite explicit that it contributed \$12.8 million to the film industry. It is good that the Deputy Premier is always in Hollywood talking up his contributions to the film industry, but I am not sure that those who work in the film industry would see taking money out of Screen NSW as being a great contribution by this Government within its first two years.

The other area of specific concern to me was the TAFE fine arts courses, which were part of the Government's Arts strategy when it came to office. However, the Great Lakes TAFE campus in Forster-Tuncurry had just built and opened a new section for its fine arts course, only to find out that within a year the State Government had withdrawn the fine arts courses from TAFE. The Hon. Jan Barham asked when a broad industry report on the Aboriginal arts and culture area, which had \$1 million allocated to it, would be delivered. We were informed that it would be delivered at the end of last year or early this year. It was delivered last week and specifically cited the cutting of the fine arts course as a significant impact on the creative arts industry, particularly on the North Coast of New South Wales.

When the Hon. Jan Barham asked the Minister whether the arts community could rely on him as an advocate, he replied, "The arts community is enjoying the best advocate they have had since 1995." If the best advocate we have ever seen since 1995 takes \$5 million from the film industry and does not say a word when the fine arts courses are cut from TAFE, I feel really sorry for the arts industry because that is the calibre of the Minister it has representing it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL [6.14 p.m.]: I am happy to make a contribution to this debate given that I had the pleasure of being a substitute member for all of the budget estimates sessions of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3. I congratulate the acting chair, the Hon. Niall Blair, who spoke a little earlier. He did a great job in that position and I am sure other members of the committee would agree. The committee covers a lengthy portfolio area and many of these areas are of interest to me. They include Trade, Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services, The Legislature, Transport, Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, as well as the Arts, Roads and Ports. It is important to thank all of the respective Ministers and departmental staff who appeared before us for their time and for answering our questions. As always, I thank Hansard and the committee staff, who do such an excellent job.

I begin by discussing the Trade, Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services portfolio and the various initiatives that were reported to the committee by the Deputy Premier and Leader of The Nationals, the Hon. Andrew Stoner. It was pleasing to hear that regional New South Wales is getting its fair share of funding from the budget. I was particularly pleased to hear what was happening with Restart NSW and the money that has been included there. This includes \$403 million for the Pacific Highway, \$170 million for the Princes Highway and \$135 million for the new Bridges for the Bush program. It is this initiative I would like to focus on and relay how important this is to regional communities, particularly my home town of Gunnedah.

Bridges for the Bush delivers five key priority high-mass limit bridges on State-managed roads and 12 timber truss bridges on regional and local roads. This program will not only replace ageing bridges but also create jobs in regional New South Wales. It is estimated that the replacement of the five major bridges at Wagga Wagga, Wee Waa, Cooma, Echuca and Gunnedah have the potential to remove 8,000 trucks per year from regional roads and, over the next 30 years, to generate \$200 million in economic and social benefits due to increased productivity.

In Gunnedah alone there are around 30,000 truck movements across the railway bridge that will be replaced, so replacing this bridge can open up an additional 660 kilometres for heavy vehicles operating at higher mass limit to meet the demands of the local agricultural sector. This program has been very well received by local communities. I was fortunate to be with the Minister for Roads and Ports on the day the initiative was announced in Gunnedah, along with the mayor, Owen Hasler. The whole community of Gunnedah, along with the other communities that will benefit from this program, would be pleased with the Government's commitment to this important issue.

The Government has created various initiatives to encourage jobs and investment in regional New South Wales. In September 2011 the Regional Industries Investment Fund was launched to provide assistance to support expanding populations and help retain an increase in job opportunities. This has flow-on effects to bolster local businesses and local industries to enhance the investment potential for our regional areas. Since April 2011 more than \$10 million has been committed under the Regional Industries Investment Fund to support

regional centres. This includes a new heavy vehicle bypass at Broken Hill, the establishment of a cotton ginning facility at Whitton and the expansion of the steel fabrication operations at Young. It is fantastic to see this Government focusing on expanding the investment possibilities of regional New South Wales.

I turn now to the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, and his portfolio. I have already alluded to the Bridges for the Bush program. What a fantastic initiative that is. However, that is just one of the many commitments and achievements in the Roads and Ports portfolio. Other fantastic initiatives include the money to be invested on the Pacific Highway to improve travel times, road safety, freight efficiency and traffic conditions. This is great news for the North Coast region and we hope the Federal Government will get on board and deliver on its commitment to assist in the completion of the Pacific Highway upgrade.

I move now to the portfolio areas covered by the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, and Minister for the Arts. In particular, I will focus on the Arts. I am sure members will agree that our State's film and television industry is vitally important. These investments create an atmosphere that promotes New South Wales as an attractive location for the international film industry. Last year the Government committed \$6.5 million towards attracting 32 new screen productions to New South Wales. These productions are estimated to generate \$99 million in investment and create 4,300 jobs. In the 2012-13 budget the Government provided almost \$10 million in recurrent and capital funding for Screen NSW. This funding includes the construction of a new database to support location images in order to attract international and national film and television productions. This is in addition to one-off funding made available for major films, such as *The Great Gatsby* and *Wolverine*, both of which I look forward to seeing.

The quality of New South Wales screen productions continues to rise. The Minister spoke in some detail at the estimates hearing about *The Sapphires*, which opened to critical and commercial acclaim in Australia and internationally. Members of this House who have seen it would agree that it is a wonderful movie. New screen productions will bring more than \$20 million in direct production expenditure to New South Wales and create 1,000 jobs. It is crucial that we continue to support strong investment in our screen industry so that our State expands its level of attractiveness for national and international investment.

I was pleased to hear of the international success of the State-funded arts companies. Lilyfield-based Legs on the Wall presented *The Voyage*, a free outdoor theatre production that attracted audiences of 15,000 in Birmingham as part of the United Kingdom's Cultural Olympiad. The show tells the story of passengers aboard the HMS *Olympia*, a 15-metre passenger liner, combining aerial acrobatics with spectacular projections and musical performances. The Sydney Theatre Company toured with its production of *Uncle Vanya* to the Lincoln Centre in New York and received critical acclaim. International performances of New South Wales based companies can never be underestimated; they act as beacons to the world, showcasing our vibrant and high-calibre productions.

Many members would be aware that Vivid Sydney has become an international success story for our State and has even ranked as one of the world's top 10 ideas festivals in the United Kingdom's *Guardian*. Whether it is the illumination of the Opera House sails or the 3D graphics that turn Customs House into a train station, Vivid continues to wow audiences and showcase Sydney as the creative hub of the Asia Pacific. In 2012 Vivid Live featured 29 events, including 11 Australian and two world premieres, with a music program attracting more than 32,000 people and generating \$2.4 million at the box office. Vivid Sydney has had a major increase in visitors, from 300,000 in 2010, 400,000 in 2011, and up to more than half a million people last year. This represents a 25 per cent per year increase, which is a wonderful achievement. Congratulations should go to the organisers of Vivid on a fantastic year. I am sure the numbers this year will be even better.

Finally, the committee heard from the President of this Chamber, the Hon. Don Harwin, on a number of matters pertaining to the operations of Parliament House. As members would be aware, the parliamentary email system recently was shifted from GroupWise to Outlook and we upgraded to Windows 7. This is a welcome step. I congratulate the President, the senior staff of the Parliament and the Information Technology department on their diligence and hard work. The committee was advised about the upgrade to the Chamber broadcasting system and the installation of the new high-definition cameras and microphones. We were told that the twinning project between this Parliament and the national parliaments of the Solomon Islands and Bougainville is progressing extremely well. I enjoyed being a part of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 for the estimates hearings and look forward to seeing what they bring this year.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM [6.23 p.m.]: I shall make a brief contribution to this debate because my role with General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 was brief. I sat in on only some hearings, but

they were illuminating. When I first came to this House I thought the Deputy Premier would be an impressive character—that one could not become the Deputy Premier without being across his brief and all issues. The budget estimates process highlighted that the Deputy Premier had no idea. From my first question, the Deputy Premier floundered. He had no idea on a range of programs his Government was purporting to deliver. He had no idea of some critical elements, especially around trade and investment in New South Wales. No better example was that the Leader of The Nationals in this State, the Deputy Premier, the man responsible for holding the Trade and Investment portfolio had to have a stab in the dark as to the most valuable agricultural commodity produced in New South Wales. He said, "I'll have a stab in the dark and guess wheat." What a joke.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: Was he right?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: He was right, but he had to guess it. From there it only got worse. The Hon. Mick Veitch and the Hon. Steve Whan referred to the debacle of regional relocation grants. I have never met anyone who has moved to Orange after taking up this relocation grant.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: You should be relocated.

The Hon. Scot MacDonald: They know you're there.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Orange is a boom town. It is a fantastic place to live, but people are moving there of their own volition. They certainly are not taking up the relocation grant. I asked questions about the upgrade of Orange airport, which, clearly, is just another subsidy of the mining industry in New South Wales. That upgrade will just enable Cadia-Reece to fly its 747s or Boeing whatever into Orange airport for its fly-in fly-out workers. Behind the scenes the Deputy Premier is secretly dealing with the Chinese Government and Shenhua to open up the Maldon to Dombarton rail line. The Hunter Valley bottleneck cannot be overcome so the Deputy Premier, the Leader of The Nationals, is secretly dealing with Shenhua to open the Maldon to Dombarton rail line to turn Port Kembla into another Newcastle so that the Liverpool Plains can be turned into another upper Hunter Valley. What a disgrace. It was illuminating to hear the Deputy Premier's priorities: He had no idea about wheat but certainly has been jet setting and globetrotting around the world eating at fancy restaurants in Hollywood and Shanghai.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: And Shenhua.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: And Shenhua—Chinese restaurants. It reminded me of the former Labor administration. This Government is repeating the mistakes. The Resources for Regions program is loved so much by the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps that he continually interjects whenever the subject is raised. The Resources for Regions has not delivered. Only \$9 million has been spent. It is another disaster of The Nationals in the critical areas of trade, investment, regional infrastructure and services. The budget estimates process is excellent because it gives the community an opportunity to see what the Government actually is doing, not just what it is saying.

The Deputy Premier is not doing much. He is spending a lot of time travelling the globe selling off the Liverpool Plains to Chinese mining companies, but not doing much delivering. Where is the Decade of Decentralisation? Where have the departments been moved? What department was relocated to Dubbo, Forbes, Parkes or other areas? What have we seen? Absolutely nothing. The program has been a complete failure. Councillors and communities to whom I talk say the Government has failed. They are watching the Government and its programs and think they are a catastrophic failure. I shall conclude with reference to the spectacular success of the strategic regional land use plans. Do members remember those? Where have they gone?

We are waiting for the amendments to the mining State Environmental Planning Policy [SEPP] and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. They have not turned up. The Deputy Premier, the Hon. Andrew Stoner, floundered and flapped his way through the usual rhetoric about the toughest regulations and a new regime but it is clear he was not across the detail and completely unaware that the broader community, the key stakeholders involved in assessment and the reference panel for the Strategic Regional Land Use Policy had completely panned it and walked out on it. The budget estimates was an excellent process for me but it was very disappointing for me and the broader community to see the performance of the Deputy Premier, the Leader of the National Party, who is one of the worst Ministers for Trade and Investment, and Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services that this State has ever seen.

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

Pursuant to sessional orders debate on budget estimates proceeded with.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS**Financial Year 2012-13****Debate resumed from 26 February 2013.**

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY (Parliamentary Secretary) [6.30 p.m.]: I am delighted to continue highlighting the wonderful record and work that the O'Farrell-Stoner Government is doing in the area of health. It is a good story. It is something we should be very proud of. The workforce is one of the biggest challenges and issues facing health, particularly in regional New South Wales. This Government is doing great work in that area. There have been 2,475 nurses and midwives employed in its first term with 1,000 additional nurses now working across rural and regional local health districts. A further \$64 million has been allocated this year to recruit approximately 500 additional nurses at public hospitals. There has been \$4.4 million allocated to employ more clinical nurse/midwife educators and clinical nurse/midwife specialists and a further \$1.9 million will go towards supporting the Health Professional Workforce Plan, which I was involved in developing.

The Minister for Health, and Minister for Medical Research is passionate about medical research. In terms of medical research New South Wales lagged behind the rest of Australia, particularly Queensland and Victoria, during the 16 years of Labor administration. The Minister is devoting a lot of energy to ensuring that New South Wales once again leads Australia in medical research. That will be achieved by consultation and collaboration between our tertiary institutions and the public and private health systems. In response to the NSW Health and Medical Research Strategic Review the New South Wales Government has demonstrated its commitment to quality medical research by establishing an Office of Health and Medical Research and adopting recommendations of a task force, chaired by Peter Wills, to develop a 10-year NSW Health and Medical Research Plan.

The provision of quality, timely and accessible health care to all the people of New South Wales is a fundamental commitment that we have made as a Government. It underpinned the policies that we took to the last election and for which we received such an overwhelming mandate. Quality health care is based upon having a skilled workforce delivering services in the best possible facilities with the best possible equipment and being guided by the best possible evidence and practices that can be obtained. All of those factors are underpinned by quality research, which in turn leads to best practices and best outcomes. In response to the review an additional \$70 million over four years is being committed to health care, with \$35 million committed for this year's budget.

This \$70 million commitment includes annualising an additional \$10 million to the base funding of the Medical Research Support Program to bring the total to \$37.3 million per annum; an investment of \$5 million annually to a medical devices seeding fund which will encourage and promote investment in the design and development of medical devices; establishing a research capacity building program designed specifically to attract and support elite researchers to New South Wales with an emphasis on another of our strengths, bioinformatics; providing \$800,000 annually to support eight research hubs; and providing \$800,000 annually for support of research networks and establishing a clinical trial support team within the Office of Medical Research. In addition to implementing the Wills review, the New South Wales Government is committing \$55 million in partnership with the Commonwealth for the Westmead Millennium Institute and \$28 million for cancer research undertaken by the Cancer Institute NSW headed by Professor David Currow.

Another challenge to health care, and one that is being seized upon by this Government, is information and communication technology. This is particularly relevant to regional and rural facilities where being able to access technology can assist in earlier diagnosis and, with all those communications systems working well, will help to prevent unnecessary trips to Sydney to see specialists. Prior to the last election the New South Wales Government released a series of comprehensive policy statements setting out very clearly what we intended to do to reform NSW Health. Two of our key commitments were to ensure that, where possible, treatments and care are delivered out of hospital in settings that are more appropriate for the patient, and to make use of new technologies, ranging from high-tech procedures to personally controlled electronic health records [PCEHR], both to enhance the quality of medical services and to reduce their costs.

The New South Wales health system boasts one of the largest information and communication technology portfolios of any government agency or corporate organisation in this country. eHealth will drive much of the reforms in our health system and we are proud that we have been able to invest significant funds in those services. In fact, we plan on spending more than \$1.5 billion over the next 10 years on information and

communication technology, with \$125 million allocated this year. Among the current major information technology projects are \$170 million for a new electronic medications management system to prevent errors and reduce adverse drug events, \$85 million on electronic medical records systems to improve patient tracking, clinical documentation, scheduling and reporting across a range of clinical specialties, and \$43 million on new clinical information systems to provide a single point that collates all relevant data to assist clinicians in our intensive care units. This system will also integrate with the electronic patient record and the medications management system.

The Government is also investing over \$90 million to upgrade our corporate systems and to build new networks, data centres and messaging solutions that will allow us to implement Telehealth on a wider scale and allow for a common access email system that will connect all staff in all areas of NSW Health. Reforming NSW Health has been the fundamental principle underpinning the Government's health policies to ensure we deliver better, smarter and more efficient health care and services for the people of New South Wales. With those decisions implemented at a local district level by chief executive officers, supported by a board, the views, opinions and common-sense ideas of people in local district health areas are being listened to and implemented. The 2012-13 budget achieves this, and more, by investing in people, infrastructure and technology to ensure the patient comes first.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL [6.37 p.m.]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the 2012-13 budget. This budget is about delivering on the Government's commitments to the people of New South Wales and making the right decisions during tough economic times. The 2011-12 budget, the first on winning government, put in place a framework to rebuild New South Wales by investment in critical infrastructure and by way of improving our health services, roads and police services. The groundwork has been laid and it is now time to take the next step to build a strong New South Wales.

The 2012-13 budget builds on previous investments but also responds to global economic uncertainty. In such circumstances we must tighten our belt. It is forecast that New South Wales will receive \$5.2 billion less in goods and services tax revenue and the Federal Government is contributing less to New South Wales infrastructure. Despite this, the budget increases infrastructure spending in New South Wales by 17 per cent over the next four years. Things are tight, but there is certainly good news for many areas across New South Wales.

I will now focus on the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Hospitality and Racing, and Minister for the Arts. Despite tough economic conditions, there has been continued strong investment in both the arts and tourism industry with the 2012-13 budget delivering \$125 million each year for Destination NSW to grow the economy through the tourism and events industry, including \$45 million to support major events such as the Bledisloe Cup, Sydney International Art Series and the National Rugby League Grand Final.

In addition, \$57 million has been allocated for the Arts Funding Program to support a wide range of arts and cultural activities, with an emphasis on regional and rural New South Wales. This investment will be well received in the regions. There is also \$122 million for infrastructure upgrades to major cultural institutions, including the Sydney Opera House and the State Library. Both these institutions are close to my heart. I had not been to the State Library before I moved to Sydney to study at university and quite often some friends and I would visit the Mitchell Library to get some inspiration while we were studying. I am not sure if it helped my marks too much but it was a great building, particularly for someone who came from a regional community. Therefore any money invested in the State Library is a worthwhile investment.

The same can be said for the Sydney Opera House. I had the pleasure of attending an event at the Sydney Opera House just last night, along with my colleagues the Hon. Melinda Pavey, the Hon. Catherine Cusack and the Deputy-President, the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner. We went to see Paul Kelly and Neil Finn in the Concert Hall, which was an amazing concert. Again it dawned on me how lucky we are to have such a fantastic cultural institution as the Sydney Opera House. I do not think it could get much higher on a worldwide scale. Just last night it was reaffirmed to me that this ready-to-go investment for an infrastructure upgrade for the Sydney Opera House is certainly money well spent.

The Government has made it clear that it is committed to restoring finances and rebuilding services throughout the State and it has done this by implementing a number of key and important measures. That is particularly true in the area of health. The Government has continued strongly in its commitment to invest in the health sector of our State. In the 2012-2013 budget, we delivered \$64 million for 500 more nurses and over \$4 million for more clinical nurse/midwife educators and specialists. We have also invested in major new hospital works in regional areas such as Bega, Tamworth, Parkes and Forbes.

I am particularly interested in Tamworth Base Hospital as it is the largest in my region and is badly in need of an upgrade. I remember visiting the hospital some six years ago when my sister gave birth to her first child. The staff members were incredible but the facilities in which they had to work were certainly lacking. It is pleasing that the Government has recognised the importance of Tamworth Base Hospital to the north-west region and has provided the money that is so badly needed. I know that my colleague in the other place, local member Kevin Anderson, knows only too well that the hospital has been neglected for many years and I know he is delighted to provide the service at the hospital that the citizens of Tamworth deserve.

The Government has also committed \$45 million for health and medical research and \$40 million over four years for the New South Wales Mental Health Commission to help improve the mental health system and ensure greater accountability. This is a strong undertaking by the Government and is vitally important to advancing mental health practices in this State. As regional members in this place know, suicide rates in rural and remote areas are significantly higher than the national average. Therefore, it is important for people to have access to the best possible care and support so that they can participate fully in the community and lead meaningful lives. Hopefully then those awful statistics that we hear about all too often will one day be a thing of the past.

I am pleased also that in my duty seat of Northern Tablelands, Armidale Hospital will receive a \$5.4 million refurbishment in addition to the \$1 million for improvements committed in last year's budget. This is another large hospital for an important regional centre and the local community has campaigned strongly on this issue. It is great that the funding has now been delivered. More recently, \$10 million in capital funding for the redevelopment was announced by the Deputy Premier, Andrew Stoner, the Minister for Health and the local member, Richard Torbay.. This is a welcome investment from the Government for this essential service to the Armidale community and surrounding district.

This Government was elected to rebuild and renovate the State's infrastructure. The Government has unveiled a comprehensive package to stimulate the housing sector. An additional \$561 million will be invested under a new Building the State package to build infrastructure to help deliver up to 76,000 new housing lots, and \$19,245 in grants and concessions will be available for first homebuyers purchasing new homes. This is the most generous package in the nation for new homes and is aimed at boosting housing construction in both metropolitan and regional New South Wales. Critical infrastructure spending this year includes \$757 million on the North West Rail Link and South West Rail Link and \$1.2 billion on health infrastructure. As part of a \$447 million investment in school infrastructure, six new schools will be built, including a school in Lake Cathie, something which I know the member for Port Macquarie, Leslie Williams, has been fighting for since before she was elected to Parliament.

I will talk briefly about the Roads portfolio and begin by congratulating the Minister on his commitment and diligent work towards improving the conditions and infrastructure along the State's roads and highways. Amongst other fantastic initiatives, \$941 million will be invested on the Pacific Highway to improve travel times, road safety, freight efficiency and traffic conditions. A further combined \$472 million will be invested on the Princes Highway, Great Western Highway and Hume Highway. Once again, I am particularly pleased that the Northern Tablelands is set to receive over \$66 million for investment in roads, bridges and traffic management and a further \$2.5 million to continue planning for the Tenterfield bypass. This is great news that was certainly welcomed by the community.

In the portfolio of Police and Emergency Services, for the past 12 months we have seen treacherous floods devastate regions across the north-west and North Coast of New South Wales. This was particularly true earlier this year with record floodwaters isolating towns and forcing thousands of residents from their homes. I am pleased that \$96 million has been allocated for the State Emergency Service's five-year strategic disaster readiness package to help prepare for and respond to floods and storms. There is also \$178 million in recurrent funding over four years for more police as part of the Government's commitment to increase police numbers by 400 to 16,356 by June 2014.

The 2012-2013 budget has also seen a \$466 million increase in the Education budget, with an additional \$98 million on early childhood education and care. The Government has committed also \$14 million as part of the \$261 million Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan. This funding will help implement the recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Literacy and Numeracy by tailoring a specific program of learning to a child's needs and adopting a more personalised learning and diagnostic assessment process. The budget has committed \$318 million to school maintenance, which represents a rise of over \$20 million from last year and a 22 per cent increase compared to the previous Government's last budget, while \$500,000 has been

contributed towards the community services upgrade at Armidale TAFE. Recently I had the pleasure of visiting the campus and I can say that it is a great facility. The funding was welcomed by staff and it will be well utilised.

The Government remains committed to protecting those people in our community who most sorely need assistance. That is why we have committed \$723 million for out-of-home care services for vulnerable children and young people who cannot live safely at home. We have furthermore invested \$336 million to deliver the second year of the Stronger Together Two plan. This 10-year plan aims to provide greater assistance and solutions through reforms to people with a disability and their families. Stronger Together Two commenced on 1 July 2011. In this stage there will be an additional focus on developing a person-centred approach and also an increased investment in a lifespan approach that will increase certainty by building long-term pathways throughout the service system. Under this recent round of investment, 9,125 new places for people with a disability will be provided.

I am also happy to note that \$4.5 million over four years is to be provided for Volunteering Strategy initiatives to encourage more people to volunteer. This is a great initiative because most members would know that these days not as many people participate in volunteer organisations. I am involved in quite a few local volunteer groups, as are members of my family. We would all recognise the importance that such groups play in local communities. Any money that is invested to encourage more people to volunteer can only be a good thing. That is particularly true in regional communities where so much reliance is placed on people who are willing to give up their time for the greater good of their community.

In conclusion I can state that this budget delivers more infrastructure and better services across the State and it builds on the results delivered in the first year of this Government. I congratulate the Treasurer and the Ministers on their strong and responsible budget and I look forward to seeing this year's budget when it is delivered.

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR [6.49 p.m.]: I speak on the 2012-2013 budget and how it delivers real gains for regional New South Wales. I am pleased to see that for the second State budget in a row the New South Wales Government has delivered record funding for transport, infrastructure and services, including more than \$10 billion for roads, \$277 million over the next five years to maintain and upgrade grain rail lines and an additional \$135 million for the Bridges for the Bush program. This is all great news for regional New South Wales, and we are seeing on-the-ground results already with regrowth in many sectors of the agricultural industry.

These results are coming not simply from injecting huge amounts of money into the region but also from the removal of the excess amounts of red tape strangling many businesses throughout the State. One example that springs to mind is the positive results we saw in Coleambally when the State Government implemented new road limit approvals. This has increased the efficiency of our State's logistical networks in particular, accommodating the innovative truck design by owner Russell Tait. This new design, along with the changes to the road limit regulations, will see a much more efficient movement of containerised rice on approved routes from the mills at Coleambally and Deniliquin through to the railhead at Tocumwal, from where it will be then exported throughout the Pacific region and Papua New Guinea. This improvement will see increased tonnage moved along these transport routes, hence reducing costs in the rice industry.

Such cost reductions obviously increase the viability of the industry, and this has been validated by an investment of \$23 million by SunRice to reactivate the Coleambally rice mill, leading to the creation of nearly 30 new jobs in Coleambally. That is great news for Colly but just a taste of what is intended for the rest of the State. As a result of positive budgets and sensible legislation reform such as we have seen in this case, we expect that an extra 40,000 jobs will be created across regional New South Wales, meaning towns like Coleambally will continue to grow and prosper, and ensuring New South Wales does not become a two-speed economy leaving regional parts of the State behind.

Unfortunately, I believe that there is still a gap in the knowledge of many people in New South Wales regarding the realities of regional New South Wales, including the production of the food and fibre we take for granted. Food security is increasingly becoming a crucial issue for now and the future, both domestically and worldwide. One billion people in the world go to bed hungry each night, sufferers of chronic starvation, and this of course will continue to increase as the population grows. The solution to this problem will come from our own primary producers as they become more efficient and share not just their produce but their knowledge with the rest of the world.

Many other countries have acknowledged Australia's role in providing a solution to this problem. Australia therefore needs to ensure it is in the best possible position to capitalise on what we have and continues to lead the way in food production, contributing to the food security of the nation and the world. As our population ages, particularly our farming population, steps need to be taken to protect and nurture this talent in producing our next generation of farmers to ensure our future decision-makers have a thorough understanding of the issues involved, and that needs to begin at an early stage. Kids need to be taught and understand where our food comes from and the resources and input required for its production. They also need to see the world of opportunities the agricultural industries present to encourage them to go on to further their education in the field.

In the past two years only 173 students have graduated from New South Wales universities with a degree in an agricultural course. Across the State for the past two years only 85 young men and women have entered the workforce each year with a degree in agriculture. Not only is this small number scary, but so too is how far and how quickly the number has dropped. A few years ago, along with my colleague the Hon. Rick Colless, I attended what was then Hawkesbury Agricultural College. We had a thriving population of agricultural students and a thriving culture. As an institution Hawkesbury Agricultural College had a reputation for producing fine young men and women, well-rounded and ready to take the agricultural industry forward and meet the challenges faced. The people I am speaking of have gone on to do amazing things: they are heading up major agribusiness corporations, farmers representative bodies and rural banks and they are researching new agronomy techniques.

Without these people entering the workforce each year—I repeat: only 173 agricultural graduates in the past two years—we will see a massive void in our skilled workforce. These concerns extend not only to university-trained agricultural workers; TAFE and other vocational educators can tell similar stories. The diminishing number of graduates creates a great knowledge imbalance in the future generation of decision-makers and that presents a problem as a global food shortage looms. What is clearly needed is greater education in agriculture. The preservation of agricultural education was severely overlooked by the previous Government.

In efforts to remedy this neglect, I am pleased to be part of a review into agricultural education and training in New South Wales, to be overseen by Emeritus Professor Jim Pratley, and that will involve other high-profile and respected members of the agricultural fraternity and my parliamentary colleague the Hon. Rick Colless. This review will provide recommendations to ensure that agricultural education and training in New South Wales school and tertiary sectors are appropriate to future industry needs; that agricultural education and training is promoted to current and future students as an attractive career; that the agricultural sector is supported by an appropriately educated and trained workforce; and that New South Wales government-owned education and training institutions, research stations and other facilities are best positioned to respond to the future of industry needs.

I look forward to working on this review and implementing the outcomes to deliver the next generation of well-informed, knowledgeable agricultural leaders to take up the challenge of providing New South Wales, Australia and the rest of the world with best-practice agricultural practices and high-quality, efficiently produced food and fibre. To aid in the delivery of this produce I am also pleased to be part of a government committed to improving the infrastructure networks essential to regional New South Wales. At a Federal level, I am sure all rural-based members in the House are especially excited to hear that the Coalition has started the conversation around the building of up to 100 dams across the country, including many in New South Wales. While we wait with great anticipation for detail on this, it shows the kind of visionary thinking needed to ensure the long-term viability of the State.

Closer to home we have seen similar thinking. Acknowledging the role the Government has to play in making New South Wales the premier State once again, the O'Farrell-Stoner Government will be working hard on the Regional Kickstart program, ensuring regional New South Wales receives its fair share of the economic growth and infrastructure investment. This program will see a dedicated fund aimed at developing essential infrastructure, and we are already seeing the results. The commitment of \$145 million to the Bridges for the Bush program, aimed at not only increasing public safety but also reducing pinch points and bottlenecks along key priority supply routes, has also been welcomed. Some of the bridges that will be upgraded throughout this program include replacing the Kapooka Bridge on the Olympic Highway; the construction of the new rail overpass in Gunnedah, which my colleague the Hon. Sarah Mitchell also welcomed; and widening the existing bridge over the Bemboka River at Marons Crossing near Bega. They are just a few of the projects that will be funded under the Bridges for the Bush program.

Just to emphasise the importance of these domestic supply routes, I recently attended an event and heard an address by Roger Fletcher, head of Fletcher International Exports. With plants in Albany in Western Australia and its chief operation here in New South Wales at Dubbo, Fletcher International Exports processes around 90,000 sheep and lambs a week for export to 90 countries across the globe.

The Hon. Rick Colless: Is he participating in Meat Free Week?

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR: He is absolutely not participating in Meat Free Week. I think there are very few people participating in Meat Free Week. Those members who are participating in Meat Free Week are obviously low in iron at the moment and cannot make their way down to the Chamber. They are probably having an afternoon nap to get through the rest of the day. Also, Fletcher International Exports has recently expanded into grain handling, adding another string to its bow. When one thinks of the logistics involved in exporting this product to more than 90 countries, members can imagine how staggered I was when I heard Roger Fletcher say that the cost of these overseas exports is equalled by the cost of transport from plant to port. To put that into perspective: he said it costs him the same amount to get the produce from his production facilities to the port in New South Wales as it does to get it from the port to the other countries to which he delivers.

The State Government's Bridges for the Bush program is aimed at increasing the efficiency of the New South Wales transport network, reducing the cost of some of the State's major breadwinners, such as Fletchers International Exports, as well as creating an environment where the next Fletchers might be able to establish itself in regional New South Wales, which obviously will create more jobs and income for the State.

Debate adjourned on motion by the Hon. Niall Blair and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted to permit a motion to adjourn the House if desired.

The House continued to sit.

Pursuant to sessional orders Government business proceeded with.

EVIDENCE AMENDMENT (EVIDENCE OF SILENCE) BILL 2013

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE AMENDMENT (MANDATORY PRE-TRIAL DEFENCE DISCLOSURE) BILL 2013

Bills received from the Legislative Assembly, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, on behalf of the Hon. Michael Gallacher.

Motion by the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox agreed to:

That standing orders be suspended to allow the passing of the bills through all their remaining stages during the present or any one sitting of the House.

Second readings set down as an order of the day for a future day.

ADJOURNMENT

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX (Parliamentary Secretary) [7.02 p.m.]: I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS ELECTORATE EVENTS

TRIBUTE TO IAN REYNOLDS

The Hon. NIALL BLAIR [7.02 p.m.]: This evening I will mention three events from my local area, the Southern Highlands. The first two are cause for celebration; the third, unfortunately, is a tragedy. I refer, first, to the Moss Vale Show. On the weekend of 8, 9 and 10 March I had the privilege of attending the 127th Moss Vale

Show—a traditional three-day country show which involves and engages with the entire community, showcasing a diversity of talent. Events and attractions included the traditional horse, beef cattle and poultry judging and photography, arts and handicrafts, as well as the more unique Canadian lumberjack show and young farmers challenge. The show was officially opened by Commissioner of Police Andrew Scipione, accompanied by the New South Wales Mounted Police, the police band and the NSW Fire and Rescue Band.

Local shows make enormous contributions to their communities. Run entirely by volunteers, they work to unite rural districts and provide a platform for local primary producers, shearers and artisans. This year I had the chance to see my son compete in the show jumping, and I was certainly proud to be a part of such a strong and vibrant community. Last week Premier Barry O'Farrell, Minister Katrina Hodgkinson and local member, Minister Pru Goward, attended the town of Goulburn's celebration of its sesquicentenary. Up to 9,000 people joined in to celebrate, participating in the street parade, viewing the fireworks display and enjoying the twilight carnival and concert.

As Minister Goward mentioned in the other place, Goulburn is a place with a proud history and a bright future. Goulburn's proud history as a community built off the sheep's back cannot be missed by visitors and passers through, with the Big Merino, known as Rambo, dominating the landscape from the Hume Highway. This week I can report that Rambo is decked out for winter in a vibrant woolly scarf, which was knitted by local volunteers to celebrate the sesquicentenary. I have fond memories of representing Goulburn North Public School as vice-captain during the town's 125th anniversary celebrations. I pay tribute to the organisers of this year's event and to those who participated in the parade.

The year 2013 also sees celebrations throughout the Southern Highlands for the sesquicentenary of Bowral and Moss Vale. March, April and May will see many exciting events, including bush dances, the Autumn Festival, Heritage Festival and Jazz Festival. Both Bowral and Moss Vale have grown from small villages that sprung up to service the construction of the Great Southern Railway to become thriving and prosperous communities.

It is unfortunate that I must end my contribution by paying my respects to 57-year-old Ian Reynolds from Moss Vale, a motorcyclist who was killed in a crash on a remote rural road between Nowra and Goulburn last Saturday morning, 16 March 2013. Mr Reynolds was a popular local bus driver for Berrima Buslines, doing the early morning school run from Canyonleigh, which stops at my front gate to pick up my son. I convey my condolences to his family, along with his work colleagues and all the families who relied on his services, particularly the children that we put in his care.

I did not know Ian Reynolds that well. My interaction with him since my son started kindergarten was nothing more than a wave and a good morning as he pulled up at my front gate and I put my son in his care on his bus. I would also see him in the afternoons when I was lucky enough to be home and waiting at the gate to see my son delivered home safely, something that Ian never failed to do. There are not too many people to whom we entrust the safety of our children with absolute confidence but Ian Reynolds was one of those people. On many occasions he would pull up at my front gate and see that neither my wife nor I were there. Although he knew that we would be on our way he would not just drive off and leave a now nine-year-old child on the side of a busy highway. He would always wait until he could see that it was safe for my son to get off the bus and return to our care.

It is a testament to the way in which we trusted Ian not only with the life of my son but with the lives of all the children who caught his bus that his death has had a profound impact on me and my family. The Southern Highlands is a tight-knit community and a fantastic place in which to live and raise a family, which means we celebrate and grieve together. Unfortunately in the past week we have had a reason to do both. Vale Ian Reynolds.

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES FORMER EMPLOYEE PAUL PARKER

The Hon. MICK VEITCH [7.07 p.m.]: Paul Parker is a valued member of the Young community. He was also a well-respected and highly regarded public servant who provided 43 years of service to governments of all persuasions. A number of people have said to me that Mr Parker was a very experienced and distinguished district agronomist. Mr Parker recently retired from his position as the district agronomist based in Young. It is unfortunate that Mr Parker's last months in the employ of the New South Wales Government were not that enjoyable.

As members would know, Mr Parker was the subject of an external investigation into comments he made to the *Young Witness* on or about 18 June 2012. Mr Parker made these statements in response to questions

asked by a journalist at the newspaper. He did not in any way instigate the article or its contents. Mr Parker is of the view that the comments were made in his dual capacity as district agronomist and building manager for the New South Wales government office block in Young. It is my contention that the alleged transgressions were of a minor nature, if indeed they were transgressions at all.

Clearly from some documents obtained into this matter under Standing Order 52 the initial views within the department were the same as mine—that this was a relatively minor matter requiring a suitable response. For some reason the matter was escalated within the department. Not only that, an external investigation company was engaged. I have a number of issues with this, including the way the investigation company was engaged, the conduct of the investigators, and the cost to the taxpayers. The Standing Order 52 return to order does not fully reveal how the company was engaged. It does reveal that the direct cost to taxpayers was in the vicinity of \$7,800. There is no detail on expenses relating to departmental officers' travel, time for the director general's involvement, accommodation and travel for Mr Parker or his time and the time of other departmental staff such as those within the human resources section of the Department of Primary Industries. The conduct of the investigators was the subject of public comment by the editor of the *Young Witness*, Edwina Mason. Edwina even questions the accuracy of the investigation. She states:

They could not even get my name right – I'm apparently Ms Foster now – so that gives you an idea of its accuracy.

The point being – to enlist private investigators to devote large tracts of time investigating a story in a regional newspaper is the sort of thing taxpayers are paying for ... the sort of money the Department of Primary Industry could be using to retain a good agronomist.

Standing Order 52 also reveals that as early as 10 August 2012 both the Minister's electorate office in Burrinjuck and her ministerial office were aware of the investigation. Indeed, one email between the two offices reveals a view that this response from the department was "a heavy reaction". So where do we go to from here? I believe Mr Parker has been treated harshly. The investigation was a waste of money and the costings are not accurate. Mr Parker's issue could well have been dealt with by an internal investigation and maybe a reprimand at best. But instead what has happened is that it has been escalated by someone in the department to engage an external investigation company, which has prepared a report that required Mr Parker to come to Sydney and face up to the director general. All of this is a serious overreach and it has cost the taxpayer quite a significant amount.

Mr Parker deserves much better treatment than this. After 43 years as a distinguished public servant of New South Wales governments of both persuasions, Mr Parker simply deserves an apology. He deserves an apology for the heavy-handed manner in which he was treated. I call on the Minister to do the right thing by Mr Parker and to provide Mr Parker with a written apology. He deserves no less after the outrageous treatment to which he was subjected.

MARINE PARK MANAGEMENT

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN [7.11 p.m.]: Last week the New South Wales Government announced its new approach to marine park management—specifically, that it will open up ocean beaches and headlands in sanctuary zones to recreational line fishing, continue the moratorium on creating any new marine parks, abolish the Marine Parks Authority and establish in its place two new bodies stacked with economic rationalists at the expense of ecological expertise. The Government previously sold out New South Wales's natural environment in return for political deals on other important issues such as national parks by allowing shooting in our national parks. This latest development in our marine parks is equally shameful. It is worth remembering that the Government originally amended the Marine Parks Moratorium Bill so that the moratorium period could be defined in legislation as either five years from the commencement of operation of the amending bill or a shorter period linked to the completion of the scientific audit, whichever occurs sooner. In *Hansard*, the Minister for the Environment said:

The Government considers that this independent scientific audit is necessary to ensure that future decisions we make in relation to marine parks are evidence based and rely on the best possible information. We also include an amendment to prohibit conducting or continuing reviews of zoning plans within the moratorium period.

So in the Government's response there was no acknowledgement that the audit report had recommended that mechanisms be found to enhance and protect biodiversity in the Hawkesbury and Twofold Shelf marine bioregions, which were identified gaps in the marine park system. No, of course not: that would not fit with its anti-marine science ideology. So what did the Government focus on? An amnesty—a free-for-all, an immediate lifting of restrictions on line fishing from ocean beaches and headlands in sanctuary zones which, of course, is a

complete gift to the Shooters and Fishers Party—a gift to the Shooters and Fishers Party that could have significant implications for fish species that already are fully fished or overfished. For example, tailor is an inshore schooling fish and predator. It is classified as fully fished. Tailor live to 10 years and mature to about 10 kilograms. However, they are fished at around one to 1.5 kilograms before the species can reproduce. Older fish are commonly found around rocky headlands.

The estimated recreational catch of tailor in New South Wales is between 150 and 300 tonnes each year more than the commercial catch. So one can see how an influx of recreational fishers into sanctuary zones could be a huge blow to any newly recovered populations of species, such as tailor, in these areas. Mulloway, which is overfished, is even more at risk. Dr Daniel Bucher, who is a senior lecturer in fisheries biology and marine biology at the Southern Cross University, says that that decision is not supported by the science:

I have been scanning that audit with a fine tooth comb and I cannot see anywhere where this is actually part of that recommendation.

In fact quite the opposite. I have found parts of the audit where they believe that no take zones are important in the context of biodiversity conservation and where the aim is to preserve habitats from extracting uses including human impacts including fishing.

The decision to open up all of the coastal sanctuary zones to recreational fishing is not supported by the science.

The science of marine parks would say we need reference areas that are free from all potential human impacts that will serve as the long term reference against which we can measure impacts.

So what is line fishing in sanctuary zones? Surely it is effectively a change in the zoning of the marine park. Surely it is making sanctuary zones a habitat protection zone, or something similar. Remember the Government moved an amendment to the Marine Parks Moratorium Bill to prohibit conducting or continuing reviews of zoning plans within the moratorium period. This is rezoning of a marine park by stealth. Perversely, this free-for-all in the sanctuary zones will occur while a new yet-to-be-formulated expert knowledge panel, which will be headed up by an economist, undertakes a six-month assessment of recreational fishing access to these areas. Why on earth would a government lift the amnesty before the review or assessment has been undertaken? It is disgraceful. Once again, this Government has demonstrated absolute contempt for marine science in New South Wales. In fact, this move makes no sense unless it is yet another move to pander to the Shooters and Fishers Party. Then it makes sense.

Indeed, the Government's response to the audit report is at best ill-informed and at worst just a politically motivated restatement of Coalition prejudice against the protection of the State's marine reserves. But in parallel with this fixing of the findings of the audit report, I draw attention to the Government's progressive dismantling of scientifically credible information sources about the state of our marine environment. One of the recommendations of the audit report was to expand the scope of ongoing assessments of fish stocks and to assess ecological sustainability and management of fisheries rather than just stocks. Yet the body responsible for undertaking regular three-yearly monitoring of the status of fish resources was the Cronulla Fisheries Research Centre of Excellence. The centre of excellence was abolished by the Minister for Fisheries, Katrina Hodgkinson, last year.

Now, apparently, the latest three-year fish stock assessment, which is due out now, has not even been started. The Government says it is delivering on its election commitment for a common sense marine parks policy. Well common sense would tell the Government that we need to conserve fish stocks for future generations. The audit and the review of management practices is just a front behind which the Government is undermining the marine park system, dismantling systematic scientific research, and using our precious marine environment as bargaining chips to please a minority voice within the fishing community, The Nationals, and to maintain the favour of the Shooters and Fishers Party.

EDEN-MONARO FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The Hon. STEVE WHAN [7.16 p.m.]: Last Thursday night I arrived home in Queanbeyan only to find an offensive bit of xenophobic propaganda in my mailbox, courtesy of the Liberal Party and its candidate for Eden-Monaro, Peter Hendy. The pamphlet is headed, "Labor's Illegal boat arrivals." For a start, being a refugee is not illegal, so this pamphlet starts off with a fundamental dishonesty. But unfortunately that is just par for the course for the Liberals candidate for Eden-Monaro. This is the bloke who was Peter Reith's chief of staff during one of the most disgraceful episodes in Australian political history—children overboard. It is one of the

most disgusting dog whistle events in Australia's history. It is a fiction that was perpetrated by Reith, even after he and his staff were told that children had not been thrown overboard and that the pictures he was touting were of people in the water after their boat had sunk.

Reith's chief of staff, who is now responsible for this latest bit of xenophobic campaigning, was, according to reports, the bloke who spoke directly to the Chief of the Navy, David Shackleton, trying to get him to put out a press release on the eve of the election to take the pressure off the Government. He is the same chief of staff who received the Department of Foreign Affairs situation report 59 on HMAS *Adelaide's* dealings with SIEV-4, which does not mention children thrown overboard. And who knows whether he is the staffer to whom Reith said, "Well we had better not see the video", after he was told the video evidence contradicted his claims. So here is Peter Hendy again, running another campaign, and trying to blow the dog whistle of racist xenophobic and dishonest asylum seeker politics. Yes, this is the same Peter Hendy who, speaking again as Peter Reith's staffer, told the *Herald Sun* on 6 September 2009, "I think the waterfront dispute was a political success."

When he moved on to work for the Australian Chamber of Commerce, he became the chief cheer leader for WorkChoices. Hendy, like his mate—the current member for Monaro, John Barilaro—popped up in the photos with John Howard promoting that draconian attempt to destroy the working conditions and job security for millions of working families. So given his history, I suppose I should not have been surprised to see this latest bit of xenophobic propaganda in my mailbox. This bloke has a well-established history of saying anything at all to win votes and being willing to scrape the very bottom of the barrel along the way. This additional piece of xenophobic propaganda in my letterbox headed, "Labor's Illegal boat arrivals", is again blowing the dog whistle in politics in Australia.

Let us compare the person who was willing to put that sort of thing in my letterbox and who was party to Peter Reith's deceit on children overboard and the depriving of people of their working conditions to Mike Kelly, the Labor member that electors are being asked to vote out in Eden-Monaro. Mike Kelly, who served with great distinction in the Australian Army in a number of the world's worst and most dangerous trouble spots, is an army lawyer who helped blow the whistle on the Iraq wheat for cash scandal—a person who represented Eden-Monaro for two terms with dedication, passion and honesty. He delivered on every commitment he made to Eden-Monaro and right now he is delivering the National Broadband Network to the people of Queanbeyan and the people of country New South Wales which will change the way in which we communicate with people in country New South Wales.

That is the choice people have in September in the Eden-Monaro electorate. Peter Hendy has a history of being part of dog whistle politics in Australia. As Reith's staffer he was involved in the children overboard debacle, he sent people into the docks and he was a party to and a cheerleader for WorkChoices in Australia which deprived the people of Australia of proper working conditions and job security. Compare that with the person who served Eden-Monaro with distinction for the past two terms—a person with a history of serving Australia in the world's worst trouble spots. Any thinking voters who received this latest piece of Liberal Party propaganda in their mailbox would have no choice other than to vote for Mike Kelly in September.

LOCAL LAND SERVICES

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM [7.21 p.m.]: This evening I refer to the Government's reforms relating to the creation of local land services. The Government said that local land services will be regionally based, semiautonomous statutory organisations, that will be governed by locally elected and skills-based board members—things that The Greens broadly support. I understand there is broad consensus in the community that this could be progressive reform. In the coming months we will see whether it is implemented in a way in which people will support.

From January 2014 local land services will deliver functions currently provided by catchment management authorities, livestock health and pest authorities and agriculture advisory services of Agriculture NSW, part of the Department of Primary Industries. The new local land services will be operational in January 2014 but in the interim landowners should still be able to access existing services from the Department of Primary Industries, livestock health and pest authorities and catchment management authorities. Landcare NSW is a member of the reference panel designing the governance, functions and boundaries of these local land service bodies. I understand it is generally happy with the direction and shape of these organisations but many in the New South Wales Landcare movement have major concerns about the budget for the transition period, which is the principal focus of my contribution this evening.

Historically, New South Wales catchment management authorities received around \$30 million in recurrent funding for staff and offices and another \$30 million in spending, which funds implementation of the action component through the Catchment Action NSW program and the catchment action plans. This program spending has been matched by \$35 million from the Federal Government. The New South Wales Government has already announced that the recurrent component has been reduced significantly. However, what has not been announced—a matter of grave concern to the tens of thousands of farmers and citizens working in natural resource management and landscape restoration across New South Wales—is that the Government has signalled its intention to discontinue funding the additional \$30 million in operational money for the critical Catchment Action NSW program.

If this occurs it will be a disaster for natural resource management in New South Wales. I am led to believe that catchment management authorities are informing Landcare groups that without Catchment Action NSW they cannot fund Landcare activities. If this funding is discontinued during the transition period it will have serious negative implications and serious consequences for the future of Landcare. When I was studying for my eco-agriculture course at Sydney University one of the great contributions to environmentalism globally that Australia had made was the creation of the Landcare movement. In 1989—the decade of Landcare—that incredibly ambitious movement to restore and preserve the landscape began and flourished across the country. Thousands of Landcare groups, hundreds of thousands of people, volunteered in a coordinated manner and delivered fantastic outcomes in bush care, coast care and land care and on the farm, improving our environment.

The Hon. Rick Colless: Where was the first Landcare group in New South Wales?

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I do not know exactly where it was. But what are the consequences if we cannot fund these bodies? It means that all Landcare support officers in this State will be laid off on 30 June. Landcare groups will have no access to funds from 30 June and they are all considering closing their doors. Millions in Federal funding will be withdrawn from those bodies. The flow-on effects are a failure of local land services through lack of trust, which is critical. If we do not get Landcare people on board we will not have support across the broad environmental movement for local land services. There is likely to be a cost shift to ratepayers if New South Wales still intends to pay incentives to farmers for natural resource management activities, and \$60 million will be taken from rural New South Wales which will have massive flow-on effects on employment, the economy and the delivery of natural resource management.

There will be a discontinuance of off-park biodiversity conservation projects, river health projects, estuary health projects, soil health projects, the management of threatened species, and agricultural sustainability. The broader community and the Landcare community across New South Wales and I seek an assurance from the Government that it values Landcare and that it will commit to the recurrent and operational funding in the upcoming transition period.

AUSTRALIAN ROAD SAFETY AWARDS

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA (Parliamentary Secretary) [7.26 p.m.]: Tonight I refer to the Australian Road Safety Awards Gala Dinner that was held at the Powerhouse Museum on Wednesday 21 November 2012. It was a great opportunity to represent the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay, and to recognise the good work of road safety professionals across Australia. In particular, I recognise the work of Russell White, chairman of the Australian Road Safety Foundation—previously known as Fatality Free Friday. Too often we hear of traffic crashes on our roads leading to serious injuries or death. These tragedies of lost loved ones spread heartache across families and communities.

In a strategic approach the O'Farrell Government has been developing a 10-year road safety strategy for New South Wales. This has seen strong collaboration between road safety partners and the community which has as its main objective a reduction in fatalities and serious injuries on our roads. In New South Wales speeding accounts for 40 per cent of road fatalities. That is why the New South Wales Government announced last year a new speed camera strategy setting clear direction for future programs. Shortly after that the Government released its first annual review of speed cameras in New South Wales. This will ensure that speed cameras are installed at locations that deliver the greatest road safety benefit. The review found that in the first year since the introduction of mobile speed cameras there has been a 19 per cent reduction in fatalities and a 26 per cent reduction at red light speed camera locations. At fixed speed camera locations there has been an 87 per cent decrease in fatalities and a 37 per cent reduction in injuries.

No government can ever be complacent about road safety. We must continue to work to improve the safety and wellbeing of our road users. The O'Farrell Government has been working to deliver a range of road

safety improvements, including the development of a safer drivers course for learner drivers, fast tracking the rollout of flashing lights across school zones, support for the Westmead Hospital B-Streetsmart forum, the announcement of the Community Road Safety Fund, the development of the Safer Roads NSW website and the constant review of feedback received from the New South Wales community. That is why the New South Wales Government was pleased to sponsor the road safety awards. I acknowledge the winners of each award category.

The two winners of the Community Programs Award were Milton Ulladulla Driver Education Group Driver and the Queensland Police Citizens Youth and Welfare Association. The School Programs Award went to the Trauma Service Westmead Hospital. The Indigenous Road Safety Award was won by Playful Beginnings Aboriginal Corporation. The Innovation Award went to Hanson Construction Materials Pty Ltd. The Corporate Fleet Award was won by Energy Resources of Australia. The Media Recognition Award went to ABC Media Watch. The Local Government Award was won by Lismore City Council, and the State Government Award went to the Queensland Police Service. The Caltex Road Safety Improvement Grant, a \$10,000 grant, was split equally between four winners—Hypodrive, the Spinal Injuries Association, Playful Beginnings Aboriginal Corporation and the Queensland Police Citizens Youth and Welfare Association. Finally, the Founders Award for Outstanding Achievement was won by Energy Resources Australia. I congratulate all the road safety finalists and, of course, the winners and commend them for their efforts towards reducing road trauma on our roads. I remind all road users that road safety begins with them.

Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.30 p.m. until Wednesday 20 March at 11.00 a.m.
