

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday 10 March 2009

The President (The Hon. Peter Thomas Primrose) 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.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Withdrawal of Business

Private Members' Business item No. 32 outside the Order of Precedence withdrawn by the Hon. Rick Colless.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Order of Business

Motion by the Hon. Michael Veitch agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow a motion to be moved forthwith that Private Members' Business item No. 153 outside the Order of Precedence, relating to bushfires in Victoria, be called on forthwith.

Order of Business

Motion by the Hon. Mick Veitch agreed to:

That Private Members' Business item No. 153 outside the Order of Precedence be called on forthwith.

VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH [2.39 p.m.]: I move:

1. That this House:
 - (a) notes the devastation caused by the Victorian bushfires of Black Saturday,
 - (b) notes the tragic loss of more than 200 lives and the destruction of thousands of homes and properties,
 - (c) recognises the heroic efforts of both Victorian and New South Wales emergency service personnel in fighting the bushfires and providing other support to those affected by the disaster, and
 - (d) extends its condolences to all those who have lost family, friends, homes and possessions in this terrible tragedy.
2. That this resolution be communicated by the President to the President of the Legislative Council of Victoria.

The Victorian Black Saturday bushfires were an unprecedented tragedy for our nation. I am sure all members join with me in expressing sincere condolences to those who were caught in the ferocious path of the fires. The profound loss of life has had a profound effect on us all. We are left in a state of shock. It is a reminder of the fragility of life, of how quickly we can lose those nearest to us—family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. It is perhaps an overworked cliché to talk of people being left with nothing but the clothes they are standing in, but for many of the victims of these fires this is the literal truth. We feel deeply for the thousands who have lost their homes and physical mementos held within the walls of those homes, along with the countless small markers of everyday life—the favourite books, the splodgy but loved finger paintings, the trophies and prizes, and the plastic cards and official papers on which we all rely to prove our identity and existence to the world.

It is no surprise that in the wake of this disaster there has been a national outpouring of assistance, from the community and authorities alike. Schools across the State have raised funds and donated schoolbooks, pencils, erasers and school clothing in what can only be described as a united effort of support for Victorians. The images displayed on television affected all who saw them. I recall watching television news footage of the fires with my children and explaining to my youngest, with a great deal of sadness, what had transpired in the lead-up to and during that sad day. I had difficulty finding the right words to explain exactly what had happened and what it meant to the affected individuals and communities of Victoria, so one can understand how much more difficult it is for my children and children generally to comprehend the death and despair caused by this tragedy, not just in the short term but also in the long term. We will get on with our lives and with our everyday activities, but for the people of Victoria the effects of this bushfire will be felt for decades.

On behalf of the New South Wales Government the Premier was quick to offer assistance to Victoria in the form of support, resources and personnel. Our first crews headed south on the evening of Black Saturday. There were crews and personnel from all over the State. I know personally a number of individuals from Young who quickly put up their hands and headed off to the areas affected in Victoria. I am reminded of the tragic news of the passing of a volunteer from the Australian Capital Territory and the injuries caused to two volunteers from Wagga Wagga. New South Wales has provided the biggest interstate deployment, with thousands of members of our emergency services giving their time and putting in a huge effort to help their interstate colleagues. This has been a sustained emergency, with fires burning for more than three weeks. It is important to note that it was not just a one-day event. These fires have continued to rage for more than three weeks.

Over this time New South Wales deployed more than 4,600 volunteers and staff from the emergency services. They included more than 3,600 members of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. Members from 932 brigades across the State joined the contingent. Each member of this House would know of someone who volunteered his or her time and heroically went to Victoria. Also included were a further 392 members of the New South Wales Fire Brigade; 337 personnel from the Department of Environment and Climate Change; 116 from Forest New South Wales; 26 from the State Emergency Service; and 136 from the New South Wales Ambulance Service. I am sure I echo the sentiments of us all when I thank all those New South Wales personnel for their hard work and professionalism over this time. This was a tour of duty that I am sure took a heavy physical and emotional toll on all who took part.

I recall the images of a brigade returning to Sydney airport to be met by the Minister and the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service. The tragedy was etched on their faces. I am sure the emotion welled up in them as they walked through the airport and received a spontaneous round of applause from everyone in that terminal—applause that, I suggest, conveyed the appreciation of every citizen of New South Wales and Australia.

Firefighting is tough, dirty and inherently risky work. Crews working in the worst affected areas would have witnessed devastation and suffering that none of us would ever wish to see. By definition, firefighters are courageous and committed. They stand in the face of flames that every natural instinct would tell them to flee, and they do this to protect the lives and property of the community. I commend them for their tenacity and dedication, for their training and their camaraderie. Thankfully, with conditions easing in Victoria the New South Wales commitment has been wound down, allowing our people to return home to the comfort of their families, homes and regular duties, but certainly never to forget.

I thank also the volunteers from the State Emergency Service, the Volunteer Rescue Association and the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol, who along with personnel from the New South Wales Police Force, the Department of Community Services and the Department of Primary Industries staffed the Government's donations hotline. The New South Wales bushfires support operation involved a great deal of hard work and coordination, and the contribution of our emergency service volunteers and staff, their families and employers cannot be overestimated. I thank them all for their efforts and again extend the condolences of this House to those who have lost so much in what has been one of the most terrible of tragedies.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER (Leader of the Opposition) [2.46 p.m.]: My contribution to this debate will be as an individual member of this Chamber, and not as a member on behalf of the Opposition. I suspect that a number of Opposition members will also take the opportunity to say a few words about this terrible event. Those who caught the images displayed on televisions and heard the radio reports broadcast across the world on 7 February 2009 were absolutely stunned. A relatively short distance from southern New

South Wales devastating fires had taken a foothold in country and regional Victoria and had a devastating effect on many communities. The country came together as one in response to these terrible circumstances.

In my contribution I wish to recognise the contribution that members of the New South Wales Police Force made to this event and to pay tribute to Commissioner Scipione and his team for their immediate response to the call for help. I indicate to the Hon. Michael Veitch that I will seek to make a minor amendment to the motion to recognise the contribution made by the 300 New South Wales police who travelled to Victoria to assist in the investigation and who provided support to their Victorian counterparts; whose resources were severely tested assisting victims and protecting life and property.

It is important because the contribution was quite unique. On 7 February the Victorian Commissioner of Police, Christine Nixon, contacted Commissioner Andrew Scipione and asked for assistance. When the call went out to the New South Wales Police Force I am told that more than 2,000 police officers put up their hands to volunteer to assist their Victorian counterparts at a time when the fire was the greatest threat to devastated communities and people.

The first deployment, which comprised 150 New South Wales police officers, left on 19 February and returned on 25 February. On 26 February a further 150 police officers left New South Wales to travel to Victoria to assist. Those New South Wales officers were sworn in as special constables, a unique but effective situation as both police forces were prepared to work together. It must have been bedlam in the control centre, where officers had to deal with the fire, with victim identification and with persuading people to leave their homes and to move to safer areas as well as with the task of deploying police from New South Wales.

I pay tribute to the local area commander of Campbelltown, Superintendent Stuart Smith, who was in charge of the New South Wales deployment, which saw New South Wales police sent to the worst affected areas, including Kinglake, Marysville and Whittlesea. Their jobs varied depending on the requirements as set out by Victoria Police. They were involved in manning roadblocks, working at stations, handling general duties inquiries, participating in roving patrols and working in the incident control rooms. They gave of their experience and demonstrated a preparedness to roll up their sleeves and assist their Victorian counterparts, whose morale would have been low and who were working around the clock, well beyond their normal hours of duty; indeed, giving more than any human being would be asked to contribute in any other workplace. I suspect they would have given a large sigh of relief when the New South Wales police came south to offer assistance.

I draw attention to the contribution of some areas in this State, in particular metropolitan areas and western Sydney. Thirteen police volunteered from the Blue Mountains and Penrith Local Area Command. This command has a heavy workload but the remaining officers carried the workload while 13 of their colleagues travelled down to Victoria to assist, and for that they should be congratulated. On the Central Coast, the Tuggerah Lakes and Brisbane Water local area commands between them allowed 12 police officers to travel to Victoria. Nineteen officers from the Wollongong and Lake Illawarra local area commands travelled down to Victoria to assist. It is seen as a two-way street because there but for the grace of God goes each and every one of us. One day it may well be that New South Wales calls for assistance from another State—and it may not be Victoria; it could be Queensland or South Australia—to fight a bushfire or other catastrophic event that impacts on our ability to manage with our available resources.

This experience has shown that police forces around this country can work together to achieve a common goal: to do whatever it takes to look after all the people of this country, to provide the best care and protection to victims and to look after their workmates. I have the utmost respect for the officers who went down to Victoria. They had no idea what they were flying into. They saw the footage of the wildfires, which depicted their ferocity and unpredictability. The New South Wales officers put their own lives at risk to protect the people of Victoria, and it is important that the House recognises them for that. Therefore, I move:

That the motion be amended by inserting after paragraph (c):

- (d) in particular recognises the contribution made by the 300 New South Wales police who travelled to Victoria to assist in the investigation and provide support to their Victorian counterparts whose resources were severely tested, assisting victims as well as protecting life and property,

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [2.55 p.m.]: I support the motion and congratulate the Hon. Michael Veitch on moving it. Just as many recall where they were when man landed on the moon and the World Trade Center was destroyed, many of us will remember where we were on Black Saturday. For me, it was one of those rare weekends when I was at home with my wife, relaxing on our farm at Crookwell.

Unlike most of southern New South Wales, this season we have been blessed with reasonable rain and an abundance of feed. In fact, we have dry feed up around our fences. Just over 30 years ago we experienced a grass fire that started at Cowra as a result of a fire caused by Southwest Slopes County Council powerlines. It came right through our area and caused significant destruction. Thankfully no lives were lost, but it was devastating. The fire came over the hill towards our homestead and was stopped at our boundary. We were very lucky. When my wife and I heard about the extent of the conditions in Victoria that Saturday we said, "Aren't we lucky these days that we have such great equipment and good communications, and that we have been able to learn lessons from the past. Thankfully we will never have anything like Ash Wednesday." How wrong we were. However, out of every bad thing there is good—a fact I was reminded of when I watched *Landline* last Sunday. If members have the opportunity to watch the repeat of that fabulous program, I urge them to do so. It indicated from a farming point of view what happened to people in the vineyards, on trout farms and in orchards in the Yarra Valley and how they are surviving.

After the fire many farmers in New South Wales contacted me wanting to donate fodder to Victoria. As we know, things have not been that flash in New South Wales in that regard and the fact that farmers contacted me immediately to offer assistance says heaps about them and the way farming communities across this nation pull together. I contacted the Minister about this offer of assistance. Even though the Minister and I often take to each other across the Chamber and argue about many things, I am proud to say that we quickly agreed on this occasion that we needed to work together on this project. To his great credit, after I spoke to him he issued a joint press release telling people how they could donate. Indeed, that type communication and camaraderie was demonstrated right across the country, and that is the way it should be. Sadly, in the early stages not a lot of feed was needed because tragically a great number of stock was lost, but that feed has now become essential for people in that area.

We can only wish them our very best and send our thoughts to them. Importantly, motions such as this indicate that someone else cares. With regard to the drought in regional New South Wales, one of the things that bolster people's spirits more than anything else is for them to know that people in the city still care about them. Sometimes they say, "No-one cares about us." Then they see a collection or words of encouragement, and they say, "People really do care." That is the importance of a motion such as this, and that is why I will be adding my support to it.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI [3.00 p.m.]: On behalf of my wife and my family, I too offer our most sincere and profound condolences to all those so gravely affected by the fires that swept through Victoria during the first week of February this year. I do not want to refer to any figures for the dead and injured in this fire, simply because these figures are yet to be finalised. Simply stated in terms of loss of life, these fires are the worst we have ever experienced. One of the worst droughts in our history, supporting an intense heatwave that struck the southern Australian landmass, conspired with the hand of fate to deliver this loss of life. The spark from a machine, a lightning strike, a carelessly discarded cigarette, branches rubbing in the wind, or the deranged minds of arsonists in these conditions unleash an incredible torrent of flames.

Some 400 fires raged across a great expanse of Victoria, forever changing the lives of huge numbers of people. As I understand it, some of these fires are still burning. Entire communities have been disrupted and, sadly, a number of communities have been destroyed. Through the profound devastation brought upon them by these fires, some communities have had their names scorched into the history of Australia: Kinglake, Marysville and Narbethong. Thousands of square kilometres of bushland and pasture have been burnt, and in the process towns, villages, hamlets, farms and homes have suffered from their proximity to the flames.

We have yet to finalise, I believe, a number for the houses lost. But the figure is over 2,000 houses lost and thousands more damaged—houses that contained the memories of families, the memories of generations, the photos, artefacts and trinkets that mark our lives. How many of these reminders have been lost in the ashes, whether they be the photos of weddings, the photos of babies' first steps, or grandmother's old tarnished brooch passed through the generations? The mementos we all collect have, for so many people, been lost. Yet, while these things have been burnt, and amongst the profound suffering and loss, the resilience of the Australian spirit flourishes.

Firefighters and emergency workers, family, friends, neighbours and volunteers all around this country rushed into action to protect and assist those who found themselves in harm's way. The first New South Wales fire crews rushed across the border on Saturday 7 February, with many thousands of New South Wales emergency workers following. Other States, and indeed other nations, have also sent emergency services staff and forensic experts to assist the people of Victoria. The Australian resilience is also evident in the survivors'

wish to return to what remains of their homes and to rebuild. This has always been the way in Australia, and should always be the way. What should not remain the same, however, is the way these fires took so many unaware of and unprepared for their ferocity. Kinglake, for example, has been threatened by fire time and again, and indeed was all but destroyed in 1939 when the post office was the sole building left standing on Black Friday. Narbethong, likewise, was all but destroyed on Black Friday.

Stories with startling similarities have emerged from both fires. In 1939 whole communities of loggers and millers deep in the forests fled to dugouts where, protected by little more than shallow earth and canvas, they cowered from the storm of flames outside. Some refuges that saved many were little more than ditches in the ground. So too in this latest fire, a family took refuge in a purpose-built shelter while another took refuge in the gutter outside their home. In a structure little more than tens of centimetres high and under nothing more than canvas, they too survived. The Black Friday fires resulted in the Stretton royal commission, and I find these passages in Mr Stretton's findings important:

Water storages were depleted. Provincial towns were facing the probability of cessation of water supply. In Melbourne, inhabitants were subjected to restrictions upon the use of water.

The rich plains, denied their beneficent rains, lay bare and baking; and the forests, from the foothills to the alpine heights, were tinder. The soft carpet of the forest floor was gone; the bone-dry litter crackled underfoot; dry heat and hot dry winds worked upon a land already dry, to suck from it the last, least drop of moisture.

Men who had lived their lives in the bush went their ways in the shadow of dread expectancy. But though they felt the imminence of danger they could not tell that it was to be far greater than they could imagine. They had not lived long enough. The experience of the past could not guide them to an understanding of what might, and did, happen.

Looking at the loss of forest and the loss of property, both of which pale into insignificance when compared with the loss of life, we should dwell on those words: "The experience of the past could not guide them to an understanding of what might, and did, happen." I fear that when the inquiry into this disaster is finalised, a major finding will echo Stretton's words: "But though they felt the imminence of danger they could not tell that it was to be far greater than they could imagine."

I put this on record because I am concerned that there have been calls for people not to inhabit these places ever again. The media has inflamed these calls with reportage of talks of fireballs, fire tornados, and "the perfect fire storm". Dispassionate reportage, extending rational advice to residents, was the last thing in the minds of the media. Once again, evidence that houses, property and life can be saved in such situations was simply brushed aside with descriptions of surviving houses and surviving people being miracles, evidence only that bushfire is unpredictable and wild.

I did not see once in all of the hundreds of hours of media coverage a single example of advice for people to wear appropriate clothing in the firegrounds. Instead I watched horrified as people stood at the fire front in thongs, shorts and t-shirts. Reportage such as this leads to people believing that these places cannot be defended and so should not be inhabited. Further, this talk demands that if people do return, they should flee when the next fires hit. I believe that people should be allowed to live in these wonderful places. It is clear from the words and actions of the survivors that they found their place in great communities throughout the towns and hamlets within these mountain forests.

Of those whose houses have been burnt out, most wish to return, to rebuild, and to continue their lives there. I know that many others, who like myself have watched from the sidelines, cannot understand this. Many think such a desire is madness. I do not think it is, and I support those who want to return. I support their expressions of hope and desire. But it would be wrong for us not to remember the dead. It would be wrong of us not to learn the lessons from their deaths, and it would be wrong for us not to prepare these communities for the next time the flames arrive. For the flames have been there before, and they will return again.

As a tribute and lasting memorial to those who perished, these towns must be rebuilt. They should be allowed to flourish, and they should become once again the great communities that attracted so many but they must be protected. Everyone who elects to live there must be trained, prepared, and resourced. Efforts must be pursued so that when the next great fires come along, the emergency services personnel are not standing in front of the flames fighting the fires by themselves, but are fighting fires that the entire community were already fighting long before they were lit.

These efforts include more prescribed burning, improved firebreaks, and fire trails, more strategic emergency water reserves, and cleared refuges in forests and towns. These efforts must be prescribed and

enforced in statute and, as with many planning controls, they must underwrite fire plans that can only be changed by gazettal. I have no doubt that Mr Bernard Teague, AO and his assisting commissioners will find that there are ways to make such communities safe and, as importantly, protect the lives of those who fight the flames to protect others.

I know of the great deeds of men and women who do things others insist cannot be done. I know of people who turned deserts into food bowls, who made civilisations in the shadows of volcanoes, and I know that the people in the mountains and forests of Victoria should, and can, rebuild their communities. With proper training, resources and preparation, they can also make their homes, their families, and their communities safe in the face of the seemingly impossible.

Just as we train children to save lives on our beaches, we must ensure that children who live in fire-prone places are taught evacuation and first aid skills, and are prepared so that, should the unthinkable occur, they too are familiar with fire fighting appliances and have the skills necessary to use them. Just as nippers progress to fully qualified surf lifesavers, so too can young people in the bush be made familiar with the dangers that surround their own communities. Training young people in this way will no doubt also address the dwindling of volunteer numbers that plagues so many volunteer bush fire and emergency services organisations across this country.

These measures are not just required to protect the lives and homes of the residents; they are indispensable in protecting and honouring the lives of the emergency workers who give so much to protect others. While I join with everyone in my expression of remorse, and offer my condolences, I also want to join with those who have lost their homes and want to rebuild. I join with you in your expression of hope, and congratulate you on your resilience, your strength and your courage.

Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES [3.13 p.m.]: I join with other members of this House in this motion. My old school song began:

By Box Hill town where the roads wind down, from the hills where the timber men labour—

Box Hill is in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges and the Victorian Alps leading up to the high country and snowfields. Surrounding Box Hill was a circle of rural towns embedded in glorious forests of Australian ash trees. In the deep valley were crystal clear streams, the home of platypus, lyrebirds and plenty of native flora and fauna. The roads wound round the valleys to picturesque towns like Healesville, the Mystic Mountains, the Black Spur, Narbethong, Marysville, Buxton and Lake Mountain, and on the ridges from our place were Kinglake, Warburton, Eildon and Mount Macedon, where my grandfather had his farm until it was burnt out in the bushfires of 1939, including his grand old farmhouse. Many of my cousins and friends have their properties in these areas to this day. On the weekend of the fires of 2009 a quick telephone call was made to ascertain that all of those relatives were safe.

Totally burnt out in the fires of 2009 were Narbethong, Marysville, Buxton and Kinglake. Hundreds of homes, guesthouses, church properties, schools, police stations, post offices, and many community buildings were burnt to the ground. Although many still own the ground upon which their property stood, it is doubtful that some of those communities will ever be rebuilt, despite what the Prime Minister and the Premier might say. People went to live in these areas because of the magnificence of the bush, the tall trees and the deep valleys, and it will take decades for the bush to regenerate enough to attract tourists or residents.

I know all of these areas well. During the first 25 years of my life I visited them scores of times for picnics, bushwalking, youth club hikes, church conferences, Sunday school picnics and Sunday afternoon drives to the hills. Even in fairly recent times we visited to meet with family members in the same area that the fire swept through. The descriptions of some roads and of assembly areas for firefighting trucks are very easy for us to picture. The corner of a road near Kinglake, where fleeing cars crashed and a dozen lives were lost as their cars were incinerated, is quite vivid in my mind given the number of times I have driven round that corner.

More than 70 people died on Black Friday in the fires of 1939, and 75 on Ash Wednesday in 1983—47 of them Victorians. But the official death list for this weekend has now topped well over the 200 mark, with many bodies never likely to be found. Some authorities are estimating 300 as the final toll, with more than 2,000 homes, cars, 10,000 stock and the like lost. In 1939 this whole area was ablaze in the worst bushfires in the history of European settlement. I was exactly two weeks old, and a mile away from me my wife was one week younger than me. Both of our mothers were desperate in the 110°-plus Fahrenheit heat to keep both babies cool and hydrated. My mother told me she put me in a large saucepan, with half an inch of water in the bottom, and

covered me with a wet towel to try to keep me hydrated and cool. Outside the skies rained ash and burning embers, and thick smoke filled every eye. That was my introduction to bushfires.

Every three years for the last 30 years or so since then we have been involved, through our ministry, in organising volunteer firefighters, distributing semitrailer loads of clothes and blankets to victims, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to those who have lost their homes and property, visiting burns victims in hospital and conducting funerals for those who died. Sometimes the support and counselling has gone on for years as people have fought to recover. This Christmas we had our usual Christmas card from one family who were heroes in the 1983 fires. Three of that family were burnt to death and the other one was totally blackened and has been an invalid ever since.

For the last 25 years, Wesley Mission has been involved with bushfires. Only a few years ago, during the bushfires in the Southern Highlands, two of our staff and their sons fought to save their houses and those of two neighbours; rescuing two trapped elderly ladies, one of whom could hardly walk. Now, in 2009, Marysville, Narbethong, Buxton and Kinglake were razed to the ground, with 800 homes destroyed, over 180 men, women and children killed, and scores more placed into the burns unit in Melbourne hospitals, many of whom will never recover.

Victoria has witnessed this country's greatest natural disaster—worse than Black Friday and worse than Ash Wednesday. It is the grim sum of the catastrophe that exceeds all others, and threatens to grow worse. More people have died in Victoria than in any previous natural catastrophe; one so lethal that authorities are treating it like a major terrorist attack. The fires destroyed Narbethong, then Marysville, then Kinglake house-by-house, street-by-street—as the Leader of our country described it—and within an hour Marysville was no more. Every public building, including the police station, post office, telephone exchange and much-loved guesthouses and a hotel were destroyed.

I lay on the history of the nation that a great number of churches and church youth camps, conferences and retreat centres were in the bushfire areas. Many of these buildings have been destroyed. The total number destroyed is yet unknown. Reports have been received from the Evangelisation Society Association [ESA] that the large camp centre at Marysville was wiped out. Fortunately, all the staff and campers were evacuated safely. The Christian Venues Association reported that also lost were Camp Narbethong at Narbethong; the ESA camping and conference centre; and a place where I have stayed many times, El Kanah at Marysville, a centre for training people in marriage renewal and spiritual retreat. The Breakaway camps at Taggerty have been lost. At Marysville the Anglican Christ Church and vicarage were lost. St Peter's Anglican Church at Kinglake was almost obliterated. The Roman Catholic Church lost its churches at Kinglake and Marysville. At Whittlesea the Mobile Mission Maintenance Australia, a huge conference centre and administration centre, where recently I addressed a huge crowd for its twenty-fifth anniversary, was destroyed almost completely. Three housing blocks, which housed at least 12 families, were destroyed, vehicles were destroyed, 30 cattle lost, and 12 small housing units destroyed. However, one housing block remains, which now houses three families and provides staff with ongoing administration space.

I want to refer, as have previous speakers, to the remarkable work of firefighters and police. I particularly want to mention chaplains who were there within the first hour to provide counselling and comfort, to conduct funerals and to give ongoing pastoral care. What can we do in these situations? Pray for the survivors. Last week I heard from some of the people we supported after the disastrous South Australian bushfires three years ago. We are in contact with them, and they have still not recovered. Farms are not yet back in production and houses are still to be rebuilt. Survivors have seared memories that will take a long time to recover. A week or two ago I was in Canberra and passed the areas where houses were burnt in 2003. The streets are full of vacant blocks where houses once stood. We can and should donate money. Many of us responded immediately first thing Monday morning when the banks and donation lines opened. Many of us will receive money from the Federal Government, which is encouraging the nation to spend its way out of recession. We should at least tithe the unexpected money and send it to the bushfire relief.

People should give away any belief that there is no such thing as climate change. Our world is going to have rising temperatures, hotter summers, more bushfires and a dry continent. Ideological views that this is not happening should be shut away for good. Climate change increases the intensity of fires and lengthens the bushfire seasons. Scientists and environmentalists are all at one in warning us. Research by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO has found that bushfire seasons will start earlier, end later and become more intense in the coming decades. By 2020 the days of extreme fire danger are forecast to increase from 5 to

25 per cent if climate change is low, and from 15 to 65 per cent if it is high. I conclude with a poem sent to me by a friend. Paul Buttigieg, after the fires in 2006, wrote these simple words:

My last saucepan
Amid the ashes
A last possession
Bent
But never enough to stop me
Boiling the water
Whilst
I lost everything
We're not losing our cup of tea
We're not giving up
Still
There is hope
Even if my house has gone
Others
Are hanging on
And I must help
I'll build again
There is no time for feeling sorry
Only for pouring the tea
For heroes

I commend the motion to the House.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY [3.23 p.m.]: I join members of the House in supporting the motion moved by the Hon. Michael Veitch. As a bushy and someone who understands the Australian landscape and its ferociousness, I thank him for bringing it forward. Last week, as the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, I was given the privilege to respond to the ministerial statement made by the Leader of the House, the Hon. John Della Bosca, on the Victorian bushfires. I particularly note today the contribution by the Hon. Tony Catanzariti. He gave a very fine speech in which he delivered some very important sentiments. The point he made that people have a right to return to their communities must be honoured and respected. It was put to me yesterday at a high level meeting of the business community that people should not be allowed back. I do not agree. People should be allowed to return to their communities.

We must finally learn the lessons, and I emphasise the word "finally". The Hon. Tony Catanzariti referred to the 1939 Stretton royal commission inquiry. I remind members that when those fires in 1939 began, there were 45-degree days and northerly winds. Victoria is renowned for 45-degree days and northerly winds, and the two make a firestorm. That fact is worth remembering. I do not disagree at all with the sentiments of Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes that we must accept climate change. But those climate conditions have visited the nation before in the Ash Wednesday fires in Victoria, which nearly took the lives of two very close family friends. They were saved by having the brains to douse their sheepskin car seat covers in a tank of water. That was the difference between life and death. As the Hon. Michael Veitch, a former shearer, would know, there is nothing more protective than wet wool. We also must learn the lessons of 2003, when more than one million hectares of land in Victoria and New South Wales was destroyed. Miraculously, the fires resulted in the loss of only four lives in Canberra. The 2003 bushfires nearly took out the whole of Canberra. Following those fires, a report was handed down in the Federal Parliament. The report had cross-party support. Liberal, National and Labor members of Parliament supported the inquiry of the Hon. Gary Nairn, the Federal member for Eden-Monaro. By and large, many of the fine recommendations in that report have not been adopted by government. As was so well put by the Hon. Tony Catanzariti, in honouring the lives of those that have been lost in Victoria we must act.

I make this plea: This is not a position of Greens versus farmers or Left versus Right. Let us move to the middle and have a proper discussion. Let commonsense take over the debate so that we can protect the lives of humans and our native fauna, the beautiful mountains, national parks, Crown land reserves, council areas and farming areas. We must learn that hazard reduction has a major part to play. I have a notice of motion on the Legislative Council *Notice Paper* in relation to a ridiculous situation in the Blue Mountains. Currently, the Blue Mountains Region carries fuel loads of 30 to 40 tonnes per hectare. Anyone who understands fire management knows that that is incredibly dangerous. The Shipley Rural Fire Service in the Blue Mountains has been closed down because a tree fell on the Shipley fire station. The Blue Mountains City Council sent an arborist to investigate whether further trees in the area were dangerous. Of the 85 trees singled out around the fire station, it was decided that 15 needed to go. Blue Mountains City Council said no. The result is that the Shipley Rural Fire Service, which has the largest record of hazard reduction in the Blue Mountains and is staffed by 40 committed

members with 400 years' experience between them, has been told to pack up and go because it no longer has a fire station. I understand that moves are afoot to break that stranglehold. That is the type of nonsense that goes on, which the Victorian bushfires of Black Saturday have given us the opportunity to bring to light. People are interested in this issue. We must use that interest to fix the situation.

I have highlighted the contribution of Rural Fire Service volunteers, members of the New South Wales Fire Brigades and State Emergency Service workers who have gone to Victoria to relieve their colleagues, their mates and their friends. It is interesting to note that four members of this Chamber hail from Victoria: Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, the Hon. Jenny Gardiner and me. When I was a young girl I spent my Christmases around Kilmore, which is where the first lot of fires went through. The reaction from Australians all over our nation who have responded in such a powerful way to our greatest natural disaster has been inspirational.

In excess of \$200 million has been raised, and the Sound Relief concert, featuring Coldplay, is still to come. On my estimation that is around \$10 for every man, woman and child, which says a lot for the Australian spirit. But let us not go down the track of how that money is going to be distributed, and I note some concerns raised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Saturday about that process. It is going to be difficult because there is genuine concern about how to distribute that money evenly and equitably. How to deal with that process is not going to be an easy job for anyone. I join every member in remembering those who have gone to Victoria to do their best to fight the fires. I also remember those whose lives have been lost and their families that will be affected forever.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN [3.31 p.m.]: I join with colleagues in extending my deepest sympathies to those affected by the devastation caused by the Victorian bushfires last month. The sheer scale of the disaster is difficult to comprehend, let alone express in words. I cannot begin to imagine the enormity of the suffering in those communities nor the horror witnessed by survivors. Images on television and the stories reported in the media were heartbreaking and at times surreal. The devastation of property in the affected areas—homes, businesses, churches and schools—as well as the surrounding bushland is overwhelming. However, the deaths of more than 200 people, and the suffering of people who have lost family and friends and everything that they own and treasure, defy belief.

These fires came upon the community at frightening speed, leaving many unprepared for their unprecedented ferocity. As news filtered through about the severity of the disaster the country could only look on with disbelief as the death toll mounted. The public outpouring of grief and generosity in the wake of this disaster is a reflection of how this tragedy has touched the entire nation—I hope that this has provided some small measure of comfort to the victims of this disaster. The terrible sight of the devastation has touched people from all over the world. The messages of support and offers of aid have shown people's support in a tangible way.

Many stories of heroic acts have been reported in detail throughout the media, but many heroic instances will go unreported. The hard work and sacrifice of the firefighters, emergency services workers and other people working in the aftermath of Black Saturday will never be forgotten. Many of us who were not directly impacted by the fires know people who were. I heard from some friends who had been evacuated when their home was threatened by the Churchill fire, but, due to an unexpected wind change, properties in their locality remained safe. These fires did not discriminate between young or old, prepared or unprepared, visitors or residents. Other friends of mine have family who live in the area. I know of one instance in which the father had to stay and protect his property and, when he knew the property was safe, he then had to drive by a very circuitous route to get away from other fires to support his son at his property. Luckily, both those properties were safe. That is a story that so many people will know but about which perhaps not a great deal has been said—trying to be in so many places at the same time: to protect one's own property and family as well as support other family and friends.

Thousands of native animals were killed or injured and their habitats destroyed. Farm animals, livestock and pets also suffered greatly. Some of the most moving images on television were of families who had lost everything but who were ecstatic at being reunited with missing pets—some much-needed consolation despite the enormity of their loss. The courage and commitment of those working to battle the fires were remarkable. It is difficult to convey the praise, admiration and support that we owe these men and women.

The Country Fire Authority's volunteers and the numerous agencies and individuals assisting them have faced the fiercest fires ever seen in Australia. The Country Fire Authority in Victoria has more than 50,000

volunteer members, and is supported by 400 full-time firefighters and around 700 administrative staff. During this emergency resources were being stretched to the limit. This firefighting operation has been prolonged and on many occasions there appeared to be no end in sight. Once the fire emergency is over it will be a difficult path ahead while people reflect and look at rebuilding their lives. The physical and emotional toll on victims and on the emergency services workers and volunteers cannot be underestimated.

The eyewitness accounts of the fires of Black Saturday have a common theme: these fires had a ferocity and speed never before witnessed in Australia. Accounts of close calls and survival against the odds counter heartbreaking stories of loss. Veteran firefighters described the heat, speed and intensity of the fires as being without precedent and used terms such as "hell on earth" or "Armageddon" to describe the scenes witnessed. We heard of firefighters losing their own homes while defending the lives and property of others. Stories have emerged of people risking their own safety to assist neighbours and often strangers in danger.

The national response to the disaster has been overwhelming, with New South Wales providing the biggest interstate deployment. More than 3,000 Rural Fire Service volunteers from more than 900 brigades across New South Wales have been deployed since 7 February 2009 to work alongside Victorian firefighters. Representatives from other New South Wales agencies who have volunteered to assist in Victoria include contingents from New South Wales Fire Brigades, Forests NSW, the State Emergency Service, the New South Wales Ambulance Service and the New South Wales Police Force. We know also that a number of people from New South Wales have been assisting in forensic work and victim identification.

Front-line firefighters, investigation crews, support teams and paramedics have been working alongside crews from Victoria and other parts of Australia. Facing terrible conditions and heartbreaking scenes, our emergency services continued to display the professionalism, courage and commitment we see from them time and time again. The generosity of New South Wales has been evident, with numerous financial donations and many people wanting to donate food, clothing and other items. I understand the New South Wales Government's hotline coordinating non-cash donations was inundated with offers of help from individuals and businesses around the State eager to provide whatever assistance was appropriate.

Business owners such as hairdressers, tradesmen, lawyers, veterinarians and shopkeepers have offered their goods and services free of charge. It is wonderful to see such generosity from across Australia. I understand that volunteers from a range of agencies staffed the hotline, with the State Emergency Service, the Volunteer Rescue Association, the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol, the New South Wales Police Force, the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Community Services personnel giving their time to man the phones.

The bushfire support operation in New South Wales was a massive commitment requiring enormous organisation and logistical planning. This was only possible thanks to the support of emergency service volunteers and staff. I place on record my thanks to the New South Wales volunteers for their hard work and professionalism in supporting their Victorian counterparts. This could not have occurred without the support of their families and employers.

Fortunately, conditions have eased in Victoria and the New South Wales commitment is winding down. However, some teams remain in Victoria to assist with the recovery effort. Support and assistance from New South Wales will be ongoing. Affected communities will need continued support in the weeks, months and years to come as people try to regain some sense of normalcy and look towards the future. I doubt that life will ever be the same for them again, and the task of rebuilding their lives could take many years. Our support will be needed in the months and years to come.

I commend the firefighters, volunteers and emergency service workers for their dedication and bravery: they have worked tirelessly throughout this emergency. Many are still working to fully contain and secure the fire-affected areas. So much work is still to be done. Once again I extend my deepest sympathy to everyone affected by this tragedy, in particular those who have lost loved ones and friends, and all those who now face the added hardships of trying to rebuild their lives, homes and communities.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS [3.40 p.m.]: I also support the motion moved by the Hon. Michael Veitch. I do not believe that we can begin to comprehend the horror that families and communities experienced on Black Saturday. It is difficult to believe that more than 200 lives and thousands of houses were lost. Nor do I believe we can begin to appreciate the effort made on that day by emergency service officers, police personnel and others. Having been involved in firefighting—in particular, as a section 44 controller in a major fire—I fully

understand the stress and pressure that those people confronted not only from a fire management perspective but also from a fire ground perspective. I recall the stress and pressure I was under as the controller when a report was received that the panels on one of our fire tankers had melted because the fire was so close. I also recall the pressure that I was under on the day when a fire was heading for a small village a few kilometres away and we had to decide whether to commence evacuation. The pressure on the firefighters in Victoria on Black Saturday must have been 1,000 times worse than that. We cannot begin to comprehend the stress those people faced. I offer my condolences to the people who lost families, friends and possessions. Again, we cannot begin to comprehend the long-term consequences of such losses.

In acknowledging this devastation, we must also take account of some of the issues surrounding the Black Saturday fires. I will make a few comments about fire management generally, fire processes and so on. Three elements in a bushfire contribute to its developing into a crown fire, which occurs in the top of trees rather than on the forest floor. Those three elements are fuel, air and heat—or the fire triangle. A crown fire requires a great deal of fuel, heat and air. If one side of the fire triangle is shorter than the other two, it is unlikely that a wildfire like the one that occurred in Victoria will develop. Of course, we can control only one side of that triangle; that is, the fuel level. Conditions in Victoria that week were dreadful. A run of days over 40 degrees dried the fuel to create a tinderbox and heated the forest; winds in excess of 100 kilometres an hour ensured that plenty of air was available to enable the fire to rage. The third side of the triangle is the amount of fuel available. A fire will not develop into a crown fire if very little fuel is available. However, with very high fuel levels—for example, in excess of 25 tonnes per hectare—a crown fire can develop at a much lower temperature and with much slower winds.

The CSIRO has developed a fire danger index. At one, a fire will burn so slowly that it is easily controlled or it will not burn at all. At 100, the fire will burn so rapidly and so hot that control is virtually impossible. It is unlikely that a crown fire will develop at fuel levels of less than 10 tonnes per hectare of combustible material less than six millimetres in diameter. I am not talking about logs on the forest floor but about leaf litter, fine bark particles and organic material on the forest floor. At a fire danger index of 100, 10 tonnes of fuel per hectare will result in a crown fire. However, at 20 tonnes of fuel per hectare, a crown fire will develop at a fire danger index of just 40. That is, it is much more likely to develop. It has been reported that fuel levels in the Victorian forests were in excess of 30 tonnes per hectare. With a fire danger index of 100—which it was at the time—the fires would have been expected to send burning embers to start spot fires in excess of 10 kilometres ahead of the fire front, and that is what occurred.

I was a member of the Joint Select Committee on Bushfires, which inquired into the 2001-02 bushfires in Sydney and on the South Coast. Evidence taken in 2002 indicated that fuel levels in some of the affected areas were in the vicinity of 60 tonnes to 80 tonnes per hectare. The committee was told that hazard reduction should commence at 10 tonnes per hectare to keep fire out of the crown. The committee took evidence from Kurt Lance, a retired firefighter from the Blue Mountains who had done a lot of bushwalking in the Kosciuszko National Park. Mr Lance stated:

...there is no way he could possibly risk any hazard reduction in the wilderness area of Kosciuszko, because fuel loads are armpit deep, and he has not got any fire trails to cut the fire off with, the trails are overgrown...the Kosciuszko area is a disaster waiting to happen, like the Yellowstone fires in America, and it will not stop until it gets to Canberra.

How prophetic were those words? That very thing happened in Canberra a couple of years later. As the Hon. Melinda Pavey pointed out, fuel levels in some of the forests around Sydney are again getting up to 20 tonnes or 30 tonnes per hectare. We must be very wary because it will be only a matter of time before similar fires occur again in forests around Sydney. It is imperative that we reduce fire hazards. Following the 2001-02 bushfires, the Joint Select Committee on Bushfires recommended that all public and private landowners and/or managers of land in bushfire-prone areas be made aware of their responsibilities to protect their own and neighbouring properties from bushfire through active implementation of appropriate hazard reduction regimes and the application of appropriate standards in building, construction and maintenance.

I question whether that has been done. I do not believe it has. It is now time for a complete review of those issues, including how much hazard reduction has been done in New South Wales. We have approximately six million hectares of national parks in New South Wales and fuel accumulates at a rate of one tonne per hectare per year. Therefore, after 10 years we will have 10 tonnes of fuel per hectare. Hazard reduction should commence when that point is reached. That means that 10 per cent of our national parks should be subjected to hazard reduction every year. If we have six million hectares of national parks, one does not need to be a rocket scientist to work out how much we should be doing, but nothing is being done at the moment.

What are the other options for managing bushfires besides hazard reduction? There has been much talk about installation of, and the requirement for, safe areas or bunkers in fire-prone residential areas. However, some have expressed concern about the availability of oxygen. Everyone who knows anything about fires knows that they pass very quickly. Even in Victoria the fires passed through in a matter of minutes. A bunker would be the safest place to be in such circumstances. The bunker occupants would not need to worry about the amount of air available because the fire would pass before the oxygen ran out. We are talking about staying in a bunker for about 10 minutes, not hours. That is all that is required.

During the inquiry into Sydney's 2001-02 bushfires the application of sprinkler systems on the roofs of houses was raised. Fire trucks already use such technology: they have shrouding sprinklers. If they are caught in a fire a shroud of water vapour automatically surrounds the truck. Although this does not ultimately stop the truck from burning, it protects the occupants of the truck long enough for the fire to pass. Occupants of the truck can get out of the truck, and that is when the truck is more likely to burn. These types of sprinkler systems should be installed on all houses in fire-prone areas.

We must also reconsider areas that have only one road in and one road out, and develop better exit routes. Many fire-prone areas around Sydney have only one road in and one road out. If that road is cut off by a fire, people have no way of getting out. Fire-prone areas must have more than one exit route. Another recommendation that resulted from the inquiry was the maintaining of good fire trails through all public and private land that is forested. I was talking with one of the New South Wales firefighters who went to Victoria, and he said that most of the affected areas had very good fire trails. The same thing does not apply to New South Wales. Many national parks, particularly those that were previously part of State forests, had good fire trails, but NSW National Parks has cut them off. It has placed logs and rocks over them to prevent entry. If a fire were to start in one of those areas there would be no chance of getting in to fight it.

However, the bottom line is hazard reduction. A fire will not burn in the crown if it has no fuel under it. The key message we must get across to all land management agencies in New South Wales is: make sure that the level of hazard reduction on public land is appropriate each year. I congratulate the Hon. Michael Veitch on moving this most commendable motion. We should learn a lot of lessons—we need to learn them very quickly—from the Victorian bushfires.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.51 p.m.]: I join with my parliamentary colleagues in placing on record my sympathy to all those who have suffered as a result of this bushfire disaster, the worst in our nation's history. It has had a devastating impact. As a result of this tragedy 210 people have lost their lives and many people are still missing. The destruction of more than 1,000 homes has left more than 7,000 people homeless. Up to 400,000 hectares of land has been burnt, with crops destroyed and animals displaced.

In response to this national crisis, the Premier of New South Wales, Nathan Rees, deployed a major task force to assist Victorian authorities. The task force comprises firefighters and other specialist personnel from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, the Fire Brigades, the Police Force and the Ambulance Service. These include urban search and rescue personnel, police officers trained in disaster victim identification, and paramedics. I pay tribute to the thousands of emergency workers and volunteers who have helped save lives and property. We should acknowledge their contribution as they work in difficult weather conditions in a dangerous environment. The Premier also announced a \$1 million contribution from the New South Wales Government to the Victorian bushfire appeal through the Australian Red Cross, the establishment of a New South Wales Government hotline to handle offers of non-cash assistance to victims of the Victorian disaster, and the placing of a condolence book in the Fountain Court at New South Wales Parliament House. As the Premier noted:

This \$1 million contribution is another way the people of New South Wales can reach out to those who have lost everything in Victoria. This is a time of national crisis and New South Wales stands ready to help our Victorian neighbours however we can.

The response from the people of New South Wales to the Victorian bushfire emergency has been inspiring and extremely generous. People have donated large amounts of money to the Australian Red Cross, and have offered a wide array of services, equipment and goods, including food, clothes, blankets and tents, through the New South Wales Government hotline. The Premier called on the people of our State to open their hearts and wallets to give generously to the Victorian bushfire appeal. I am glad to report that the Australian Chinese community responded immediately to the Premier's call. On Wednesday 11 February, I was pleased to host with Frank Chou, honorary Chairman of the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, a media conference to launch donations in support of the Victorian bushfire appeal, through the Australian Red Cross. The media conference was attended by His Excellency Hu Shan, Consul General of the People's Republic

of China in Sydney; Mr Lewis Kaplan, Executive Director New South Wales, Australian Red Cross; Dr Tony Goh, Chairman of the Australian Council of Chinese Organisations, and Chinese community leaders.

I am pleased to report that as a result of the Australian Chinese community's support, \$225,000 was donated to the Victorian bushfire appeal through the Australian Red Cross. Some 72 organisations participated, including the following major ones: the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, Australian Council of Chinese Organisations, Australian Association of All Nationalities of China, the Australian Traditional Chinese Medicine Association, Golden Century Seafood Restaurant, Shum's Watches and Jewellery, Australian Chao Shan Association of Commerce, Australian Hokien Huay Kuan Association, Australian Chinese Senior's Club, and Oceania Property Corp. Pty Ltd. The Premier acknowledged the support of members of the Australian Chinese community at the reception he hosted for the Premier's Chinese Community Service awards on Monday 16 February, at which he presented certificates of appreciation to those who had given generously to the Victorian bushfire appeal.

As the Premier noted, we have witnessed not only the tragedy of the Victorian bushfires but also the inspiration of communities that rally together for each other. The community values of New South Wales have prospered thanks to the community spirit of Chinese Australians, and the Chinese community is an important contributor to the whole community. What better display of community spirit and a sign of commitment to Australia than to help fellow Australians in times of need, standing shoulder to shoulder with those who have lost their family and friends, their homes, their livelihoods.

Following the launch of donations in support of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal through the Australian Red Cross on Wednesday 11 February, a number of other organisations from the Australian Chinese community also raised money in support of the appeal. The Sydney Chinese Opera Singers and Performers fundraising dinner for the Victorian bushfire appeal on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 February raised \$80,000. Some 26 organisations participated, including the following major ones: the Way-In Network, the Australian Chinese Charity Foundation, the Palace Restaurant, and groups of performers and opera singers. The Sydney West Chinese Victorian bushfires appeal held on Thursday 19 February raised \$50,000. Some 22 organisations participated, including: the Indo-Chinese Elderly Hostel, the Australian Federation of Chinese Language Schools, the Australian Chinese and Descendants Mutual Association Inc., and the Australian Cambodian Chinese Association. The Victorian bushfire appeal run by the Australian Chinese Charity Foundation chaired by Dr Peter Wong, which was held on Thursday 19 February, raised more than \$300,000. Councillor Ernest Wong of Burwood council raised almost \$40,000 for the bushfire appeal at a function held at Burwood RSL club. The Australian Red Cross informs me that the Chinese community has raised well over \$1 million in total for the Victorian bushfire appeal.

I also draw members' attention to the assistance given by the Chinese Government to fight the Victorian bushfires and provide assistance in rescuing the victims. Immediately after the bushfire disaster, the Australian Space Information Cooperation and Research Centre made an emergency request to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Australia to provide satellite information and images to accurately keep abreast of the bushfire situation and assist Australian authorities in the rescue of victims. Chinese Government departments immediately agreed to provide assistance to Australia. Scientists from the China National Earthquake Reduction Centre, China Science Academy's Earth Survey and Digital Globe Science Centre, and China Resource Satellite Statistics Appliance Centre accordingly readjusted China's satellite position. They provided Australia with a large amount of high definition and up-to-date satellite images, and data of the bushfire sites, which provided important support in rescuing of victims.

On 17 February, His Excellency Zhang Junsai, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Australia, visited the Australian Space Information Cooperation and Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. The Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor Fred Hilmer, warmly received the ambassador and expressed appreciation at the Chinese Government's assistance. Vice-Chancellor Hilmer said Australia and China have maintained long-term exchanges and cooperation in science and technology. He noted that the satellite images and data provided by China were complete, timely, clear and accurate, and they have become reference data for rescue at the bushfire sites. Professor Hilmer said that China's provision to Australia of satellite images and data of the bushfires is one of the most successful examples of Australia-China science and technology cooperation.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

POLICE TASER USE

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. Can the Minister inform the House why there continues to be confusion at senior levels within government relating to the deployment of tasers? Is the Premier's admission that there are strong views within his Government concerning the expected rollout of tasers the reason why a decision on the matter has been deferred?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: I find it very interesting that the member is asking me yet another question on tasers, even after his outrageous press release last week where he completely missed the point and then went on to belittle this important issue as a political football. His comments today suggest he does not have a position on this issue but is guided by the latest media speculation. In fact, his position on this issue has flip-flopped over the years. First he was against them. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 8 February 2006 the Leader of the Opposition described tasers as "stunt guns". He said:

God help you if you had too many drinks and you're stumbling home, you might get a couple of shots in the back.

Now he says—and I agree with this comment:

When used as a less-than-lethal alternative to firearms, and with the right training and policies in place, Tasers are a lifesaving tool in the Police arsenal.

My position on tasers has been clear. As I have said repeatedly in the House and elsewhere in the public forum, it is important that we get the right sorts of decisions and are not rushed into a decision before all due diligence has been undertaken. I have had discussions with Commissioner Scipione regarding the review but no decision has been taken. Preliminary Cabinet discussions have been held but the Government has not reached any decision on the future rollout of tasers by the New South Wales Police Force.

SURGERY WAITING LISTS

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Health. What action is the Government taking to manage the demand for planned surgery across the State?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: While members opposite, their leader and their health spokesperson continue to use our public hospitals as a political football, undermining our hardworking doctors, nurses and other health professionals, the New South Wales Government is getting on with the job of improving health services. The Opposition's latest ill-conceived and irresponsible tactic involves spreading misinformation about elective surgery waiting times, which only serves to cause distress among families. The reality, of course, is very different.

One of the great success stories in New South Wales health in recent years is the improvement in the way public hospitals manage and deliver elective surgery and the State's significant investment in that area. Between 2004 and 2008 New South Wales invested an extra \$228.5 million to increase elective surgery. Average waiting time for urgent category patients has fallen from 62 days in January 2005 to just 12 days in June 2008, keeping in mind the maximum recommended time to be treated in this category is 30 days. Across all public hospitals in the June 2008 quarter, 92 per cent of urgent patients were seen within the benchmark time compared to 77 per cent in the June 2006 quarter.

Overall our hospitals performed 268,000 operations in 2008 and catered to an additional 24,185 more in-patients. This has been a remarkable turnaround. In 2005, there were 10,000 people waiting longer than a year for their surgery. That figure was only 40 in June 2008. How was this achieved? By implementing the waiting time and elective patient management policy to ensure patients are treated in a clinically appropriate and timely fashion. We introduced the 10-point predictable surgery plan for booked patients, which included extra funding and beds for booked surgery.

Key strategies include clearing the long wait and overdue waiting list and providing improved choices for booked patients to reduce waiting times. Reduced waiting times, greater certainty for booked patients and flexible options all demonstrate the New South Wales Government's strong commitment to enhancing health

service delivery. There have also been inaccurate reports, fuelled by members opposite, about elective surgery at Westmead Hospital. Elective surgery has not and will not be suspended at the largest and busiest hospital in the State. Westmead Hospital continues to undertake both emergency and elective surgery and, as at the end of February, met all performance targets of NSW Health, and in some cases exceeded them. Despite rising demand, more patients and more emergency surgery, the hospital also reduced its waiting list by about 11 per cent.

Given a reduction in demand during holiday periods, public hospitals across the State take the opportunity to give their staff a break so they can spend time with their families, and give management an opportunity to organise equipment and theatre maintenance work. This is an effective way to manage hospital resources. Reductions in demand are built into the way elective surgery waiting times are managed and do not affect emergency surgery or urgent surgery. A simple analogy here may appeal to both the Hon. Charlie Lynn and Ms Lee Rhiannon. It is similar to the environmental qualities being built into new motor vehicle engines. A modern Holden V8 can operate on four cylinders when its full power is not needed. When well managed, our hospitals also change their configurations to meet conditions. This flexible way of operating is a necessity to ensure we use our health resources wisely, deliver more services and treat as many patients as possible. *[Time expired.]*

ORANGE AND WOLLONGBAR VETERINARY LABORATORIES CLOSURE

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries. Is the Minister aware that regional veterinary laboratories play an important role in the early detection of diseases like equine influenza? Does he recall that recommendation 58 of the Beale report advised that to manage exotic pests and diseases, the States must work together to improve the quality of regional laboratories? In light of events such as the horse flu outbreak, can the Minister give a guarantee that the move to close regional laboratories like Orange and Wollongbar will not put the country at greater risk of potential disease threats?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: Yes, I will give the member that commitment and that agreement. The Government is committed to ensuring a better and more economical model of service delivery for the farming sector. As I have previously said in this House, the diagnostic and analytic services of the Department of Primary Industries recommended the closure of regional veterinary laboratories at Orange and Wollongbar. They will cease operating by 30 June 2009. Currently only 17 per cent of veterinary samples submitted in a typical year are received at the Orange and Wollongbar veterinary laboratories combined. The cost of delivering such a small number of results in both the laboratories is in the order of \$500,000 annually. Orange regional veterinary laboratory has 13 staff affected, 5 permanent and 8 temporary. Wollongbar veterinary laboratory has 5 staff affected, 3 permanent and 2 temporary.

As new research and development projects are identified, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries will be working with the temporary staff affected by these closures to find new temporary contracts. Permanent staff at Orange and Wollongbar laboratories will be offered the opportunity to relocate to Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, or other possible roles in their hometown, so that current expertise and skills are maintained. The Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute is a world-class diagnostic institute whose expertise was critical in defeating the equine influenza outbreak in 2007-08. The institute has state-of-the-art laboratory equipment, a critical mass of scientific experts, and is accredited to international standards. Modern transport networks can provide sample delivery to Menangle in order to maintain short turnaround times.

The New South Wales Government is committed to biosecurity, and that is why we are investing \$43 million in upgrading the facilities at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute. These improved facilities will provide world-class biosecurity containment and will further enhance our capacity to respond to emergency animal disease outbreaks. Members must remember that throughout the equine influenza crisis, to which the Deputy Leader of the Opposition referred in his question, the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute processed samples much faster than the national organisation at Geelong processed its samples. Given the current global financial crisis, it is crucial that we develop better and more cost-effective ways of doing business. I believe that the systems that are in place will adequately address the demand for these analytical services and will ensure that we can keep on top of any potential biosecurity threat.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: I ask a supplementary question. In light of the Minister's guarantees and his comments regarding Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, how does he equate the statement of Mr Nigel Scott, the New South Wales Division President of the Australian Veterinary Association, and his

concerns expressed last week that the veterinary laboratory at Menangle will not have the immediate capacity to manage the additional workload after the closure of facilities at Orange and Wollongbar?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I disagree with him.

PADRAIC GIBSON PAYMENT

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I address my question to the Minister for Police. I refer to media reports that Padraic Gibson received a substantial payment from the New South Wales Police Force after being unlawfully detained during the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation protest. How much was Mr Gibson paid by the New South Wales Police Force?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: Obviously I do not have the answer to that question at hand, so I will take the question on notice and get back to the member with an appropriate answer.

WOMEN IN POLICING

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police. Can the Minister inform the House what action the Government is taking to advance opportunities for women in the New South Wales Police Force?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: The New South Wales Police Force has a long and proud tradition of supporting women who choose to protect and serve their community. In 1915 two female police officers, Lillian Armfield and Maude Rhodes, were sworn in as probationary special constables as part of the wartime effort to boost numbers across the force. They were the first women employed for police duties in the Commonwealth. Since then women have continued to make their mark within the New South Wales Police Force, and 94 years later they make up almost 35 per cent of police employees.

It is important to note that the New South Wales Police Force employs the highest number and proportion of women of any police force in the country. Back in 1997, 15.5 per cent of officers were women, with 88 women holding the rank of sergeant. Women now make up 26.4 per cent of officer positions, with almost 500 women at the rank of sergeant. There are now also 71 women at the rank of inspector and 11 at the rank of superintendent. In December 2008, 103 women graduated from the Police Academy in Goulburn, making up 26 per cent of the graduating class.

I wish to highlight some of the distinguished female officers in the New South Wales Police Force. Inspector Irene Juergens, who I think some members may know, commenced her policing career in 1966 and now heads the Volunteers in Policing Program. I am told that Inspector Juergens is the longest-serving police officer, male or female, currently in the New South Wales Police Force and the longest-serving female police officer in the country. I commend her dedication and commitment to the New South Wales Police Force and to the people of New South Wales.

Female police officers are still forging new ground. In January this year Assistant Commissioners Catherine Burn and Carlene York acted simultaneously in the two deputy commissioner roles, following in the footsteps of the late Bev Lawson, the first and only woman to hold a deputy commissioner's position on a permanent basis. Another police officer worthy of recognition in this context is Superintendent Helen Begg, Commander of the St George Local Area Command. A local service station manager recently wrote to the Premier commending Superintendent Begg and her officers for coming to his aid on Australia Day. I am advised that Superintendent Begg and her officers, including Constable Sarah Alexander and Probationary Constable Daniel Oliver, promptly attended to a call for assistance and quickly diffused a heated situation involving a large crowd of youths. On behalf of the Government and the House I take this opportunity to thank Superintendent Begg and commend her for showing the sort of leadership in her local community that proves an inspiration to her staff and instils public confidence in the New South Wales Police Force.

The example these women set is significant to the future recruitment, development and retention of women in the New South Wales Police Force. I am pleased that the New South Wales Police Force is recognised as an employer of choice for women. The numbers of women both seeking and achieving promotion within the New South Wales Police Force continues to grow. I am encouraged by the significant role of women in the force. The Government fully supports the proud traditions and ongoing contributions of women in the New South Wales Police Force. I know every member of the House supports that.

HURLSTONE AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL FARM LAND SALE

Dr JOHN KAYE: My question is directed to the Minister representing the Minister for Education and Training. What evidence does the Minister have that any of the farmland at Hurlstone Agricultural High School is surplus? What evidence does the Minister have that a successful modern agricultural high school can survive off less farmland and continue to provide practical, hands-on education in sustainable land management practices? Would the Minister be prepared to table that evidence?

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: I will refer the question to the Minister for Education and Training.

SUPREME COURT OFFICERS INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA: My question without notice is directed to the Attorney General. How does the Attorney explain his answer to the House last Thursday when he stated, "I am advised that the Government has not received notification of the dispute before the Industrial Relations Commission in relation to the positions of five Supreme Court officers", in light of the fact that notice of this dispute was lodged with the Industrial Relations Commission on 11 December 2008, in matter number 08/2298, and negotiations between the parties had already commenced? Given that the Industrial Relations Commission has told the Attorney General's Department to negotiate the issue of permanency for both casual and temporary court officers who have been employed by the department for lengthy periods, why did the Director General of the Attorney General's Department direct the Chief Executive Officer of the Supreme Court to terminate the services of the five temporary casual court officers during these negotiations?

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: No dispute notification has been received in relation to casual court officers at the Supreme Court. The matter before the Industrial Relations Commission relates to the issue of permanency being sought for long-term temporary and casual officers engaged under the Crown Employees (Court Officers Attorney General's Department) Award. The Supreme Court has recently reduced its reliance on casual court officers. Five casual court officers have been impacted. The officers have been advised that the Supreme Court intends to call upon them from time to time as and when required.

The nature of casual employment is that an ongoing employment obligation does not exist. Casual court officers are utilised by the Supreme Court as and when required. Any casual court officer who believes the Supreme Court owes them an ongoing employment obligation is invited to contact the department so their circumstances can be reviewed and considered.

FIRST HOME OWNER ASSISTANCE

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I address my question to the Treasurer. What action is the Government taking to support first homeowners in western Sydney?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I thank the honourable member for her interest in this question. The New South Wales Government is committed to helping the residents of New South Wales to purchase their first home. Benefits of up to \$41,990 are available for first homebuyers who purchase a newly constructed home and up to \$31,990 for an existing home. Last November, the New South Wales Government announced the NSW New Home Buyers Supplement, giving eligible first homebuyers an extra \$3,000 to build or buy a newly constructed home. This is in addition to the \$7,000 grant already offered by the New South Wales Government and the First Home Owner Boost of up to \$14,000 funded by the Australian Government, and, under the First Home Plus scheme, the New South Wales Government provides generous stamp duty concessions of up to \$17,990 to help families and young people afford their first home.

The scheme provides eligible purchasers with exemptions on stamp duty for homes valued up to \$500,000 and concessions for homes valued between \$500,000 and \$600,000. For example, a first homebuyer purchasing a \$500,000 dwelling in New South Wales would pay no transfer duty in New South Wales, but would pay stamp duty of \$18,970 in Victoria, \$21,330 in South Australia, and \$20,500 in the Australian Capital Territory.

In western Sydney the great Australian dream of owning one's own home is within reach of more families than ever before. Low interest rates and major government grants and stamp duty exceptions are helping families achieve their dreams. The latest figures from the Office of State Revenue are very encouraging

for the period 1 November 2008 to 28 February 2009. In Campbelltown there was a 14 per cent increase in property sales and a 22 per cent increase in first homebuyers. That means 48 per cent of all homebuyers in the Campbelltown region are first homebuyers.

In the Liverpool-Fairfield area there was a 12 per cent increase in property sales and an 18 per cent increase in first homebuyers. That means 51 per cent of all homebuyers in this region are first homebuyers. In the outer western suburbs there was an 18 per cent increase in property sales and an 18 per cent increase in first homebuyers. That means 50 per cent of all homebuyers in this region are first homebuyers. Across New South Wales we have seen a 42 per cent increase in first homebuyers since the grants were boosted by the New South Wales and Federal governments. That means 34 per cent of all homebuyers are now first homebuyers, compared to 24 per cent a year earlier.

The New South Wales Government waived stamp duty payments for 41,231 first homebuyers, worth \$405.2 million in 2008. In New South Wales, 44,359 first homebuyers shared \$355.4 million in grants in 2008. The New South Wales and Federal governments injected more than \$760 million into the housing sector last year to boost the New South Wales economy. Since July 2000, the New South Wales Government has provided more than \$5 billion in grants and exemptions to first homebuyers.

I note a survey yesterday by Mortgage Choice about first homebuyers. According to media reports, the 2009 Mortgage Choice survey shows 76 per cent of respondents currently want to purchase a house, up from 54 per cent the year before. Mortgage Choice senior corporate affairs manager Kristy Shephard was quoted as saying falling interest rates, stable house prices, the First Home Owner Boost and stamp duty exemptions have made property more affordable for buyers. I am pleased to report to the House that the State and Federal governments boosts to first homebuyers are providing a major economic stimulus to the people of New South Wales.

LOCAL COUNCIL CHRISTMAS SPENDING

Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES: I direct my question to the Hon. Tony Kelly, representing the Minister for Local Government. Is the Minister aware of extravagant spending on Christmas celebrations by Sydney councils? For instance, the City of Sydney Council spent over \$90,000 on a Christmas party for its councillors and staff and the Randwick City Council spent more than \$40,000. Of the \$25,000 spent by the Warringah Council, \$17,000 went on gift hampers for its councillors and staff. Waverley and Ku-ring-gai councils spent over \$17,000 and \$18,000 respectively. Camden Council spent \$8,500 on two parties with an additional \$9,000 spent on hampers for its councillors and staff. As the global economic crisis started in 2008, why were local councils allowed to spend such gross amounts of public money when it could have been used for the State's ailing health and education systems?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: I will pass the question on to the Minister concerned. Some of those figures sound alarming but from my experience in local government there is a reason to support staff at Christmas time. The council I was involved with supported the outdoor staff with a Christmas function but not quite as lavish as alluded to by Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes. I can remember placing the beer order of one kilderken and one firkin—an 18-gallon keg and a 9-gallon keg.

SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I direct my question to the Special Minister of State. Will he please outline his responsibilities as Special Minister of State, given that under the allocation of the administration of Acts, he is not allocated any legislation to administer in that portfolio?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: My role as Special Minister of State is one that has been identified by the Premier to look into the better delivery of services for the people of New South Wales. I am developing that agenda. In due course I will be speaking to the Premier and advising the House on those matters.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I ask a supplementary question. Will the Special Minister of State please elucidate his answer and identify how many staff he has been allocated to discharge his responsibilities as Special Minister of State?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: In departments, none. In my office, I have a staff of eight and a number of those officers are dealing with those matters.

RURAL INDUSTRIES RESEARCH CORPORATION RURAL WOMEN'S AWARD

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I direct my question to the Minister for Primary Industry. What action is the Government taking to promote the contribution of rural women to New South Wales?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I thank the honourable member for her question and for the chance to speak about an important initiative that supports our innovative and inspirational women in this State. Last night I hosted the annual New South Wales Rural Industries Research Corporation Rural Women's award here at Parliament House. This event attracted 100 people, including the Premier and a number of my parliamentary colleagues but not some of the members on the other side of the Chamber. Now in its tenth year, the award aims to recognise the important contribution being made by rural women of all ages, backgrounds and professions. I am pleased to say Kim Currie of Orange, a passionate advocate of food and wine promotion for the Central West, is the winner of this year's New South Wales award. Kim's energy and enthusiasm for the promotion of food and wine promotion in the Central West is well known.

The Hon. Melinda Pavey: What are you laughing about, Della?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: Della, you are meant to be supportive.

The Hon. John Della Bosca: I am supportive.

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: Importantly, her efforts and ideas have the potential to be applied in similar rural communities across the State to better promote their products. Kim is a strong advocate for primary industries. She is about bridging the knowledge gap for consumers as to the origins of the fine food products of the Central West. Currently as the executive officer for Brand Orange, Kim is striving to create more opportunities for local wine and food producers through an industry development strategy that links regional food and tourism. With her winner's bursary of \$10,000, she plans to undertake an international study tour. The aim is to gain more knowledge of successful farmer's market models, and how these contribute to regional food marketing and how they support regional communities and agritourism.

I also acknowledge this year's runner-up, Gillian Hogendyk of Warren. Gillian is a passionate advocate of wetland conservation, with an impressive track record of involving community members in her efforts, including local cotton growers in the north-west. She is the author of a book on the Macquarie marshes, and helped form a community trust to purchase a wetland in the area, which is managed for conservation and education purposes. Gillian also is actively involved in leading tours through local wetlands and sharing her rehabilitation experiences with the broader community and university and school students. Both this year's finalists will undertake a company directors course in Canberra, and Kim will represent New South Wales at the national Rural Women's Awards in May. I add that last night's event saw one of the largest and most diverse range of applicants in recent times, and that indicates the depth of talent in our rural sector. Despite more than half the State remaining in drought, these women are busy developing new initiatives and projects that benefit their communities.

What stands out about these incredible women is that they have achieved so much in their respective fields as individuals. At the same time, they have provided leadership and the chance for fellow regional community members to be involved. The Department of Primary Industries Rural Women's Network, which coordinates the New South Wales award, is also supported by our State sponsors: the New South Wales Farmers Association, the Department of State and Regional Development, the Department of the Environment and Climate Change, and the Office for Women's Policy. Another notable aspect about this award is that it brings together past New South Wales winners and finalists. All these women have used their awards experiences to achieve change, highlight rural community issues and contribute to the increased presence of female representation on boards. Our past finalists actively mentor other applicants, winners and finalists and form an integral part of what is becoming known as the New South Wales Rural Women's Award family. The State Government is proud to support the rural women of this State and will continue to work through the Rural Women's Network to identify opportunities to help them achieve the recognition they deserve. I am sure this year's winner and runner-up, Kim and Gillian, will go on to achieve significant outcomes for our primary industries and rural communities.

PACIFIC BRANDS LIMITED FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I ask the Treasurer a question without notice. Is it a fact that Pacific Brands Limited, the maker of Bonds, has received over \$17 million from the Federal Government in the past two years? Is it a fact that Pacific Brands has suddenly closed its Australian factories and sacked nearly 2,000 employees so that it can move overseas? In view of this disgraceful action, will the Treasurer introduce a policy

that all companies in New South Wales that receive any State or Federal financial assistance agree to remain in New South Wales for at least 10 years otherwise they will be required to refund any financial assistance, grants, tax concessions and so on that they have received over the agreed period?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am advised that on 25 February 2009 Pacific Brands Limited announced a corporate restructure that would see up to 1,850 redundancies across Australia. Most of these redundancies relate to Pacific Brands manufacturing activities. Four of the Pacific Brands sites in New South Wales are to be closed—at Cessnock, Bellambi, Wentworthville and Unanderra. My office has been in contact with the chief executive officer of Pacific Brands, Ms Sue Morphet. Ms Morphet has assured the Government that all employees who are made redundant will receive full entitlements. The global financial crisis has resulted in deteriorating market conditions for many businesses across Australia. This is why the Government has committed itself to protecting jobs and encouraging investment in the State. Our record infrastructure spend of almost \$14 billion in 2008-09 is more than double the level in the 1990s. As to the issue raised by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, I will pass his concerns on to the Minister for Commerce for her consideration.

MURWILLUMBAH POLICE STATION STAFFING

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. Further to my recent question about the Minister's impending visit to the New South Wales and Queensland border area, can the Minister confirm that his visit to Murwillumbah police station was met with a closed door? Is it not a fact that due to under-resourcing Murwillumbah and Kingscliff police stations are often closed, with local people not able to speak to the police when they attend those stations? Does he now know how they feel? Did he leave his business card to let the local police know they had received a ministerial visit? When was the last time a police Minister visited a police station to discover that no police were available to discuss local policing issues? Will he endeavour to have a face-to-face meeting with the Murwillumbah police about resourcing issues on his next visit?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: I thank the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner for my question.

[*Interruption*]

I thank the member for her question, which was almost like a Dorothy Dixier. Only a few moments ago I was telling the two Shooters Party members about my trip and the real reason I visited Murwillumbah. Unlike the suggestion that was made in this place last week by the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner that I was going there to talk to a Queensland candidate in an upcoming election, the real reason for my trip was to visit the Firearms Registry in Murwillumbah, where 94 people are employed to process firearms licences and guns registrations. It is a perfect example of the Government's decentralisation policy. While I was in Murwillumbah I decided to drop in to the local police station, as I do when I visit towns across New South Wales—quite often unannounced. On this occasion the station was unattended. As a matter of courtesy I left my card to let the officers know that I had called. It is not unexpected that police would be out on operational duties. I will explain what they were doing. I refer to an article that was published in the *Tweed Daily News* on Monday 9 March 2009, which quoted the member for Tweed, Geoff Provest. I wonder if the member for Tweed checked with the local member, Thomas George, the member for Lismore, before making comment about his electorate to the newspaper.

The Hon. Melinda Pavey: We're not into turf wars.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: They ask the question, but they do not want to hear the answer. The article reported:

The three officers staffing the station that afternoon are understood to have been out on an operation when Mr Kelly made the visit.

It seems unbelievable to Mr Provest that our police would be out policing the streets of their local community. In fact, the news article quoted Mr Provest as saying:

I just shake my head in disbelief.

What is unbelievable is that the Opposition completely and consistently misses the point and continues to talk down the efforts of our hardworking police, who are supporting their local communities. I understand that the Tweed-Byron local area command is currently operating above its authorised strength of 159, with 187 officers

working in the area. The Government is committed to increasing police numbers in the Tweed-Byron area. The command received two probationary constables from the graduating class in December, two from the August class and two from the May 2008 allocation. The latest data from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reflects the outstanding work being undertaken by police in the Tweed-Byron local area command. Break and enter offences to buildings other than houses are down by 15.9 per cent, offences involving stealing from motor vehicles have decreased by 19.7 per cent and non-domestic assaults have fallen by 11.6 per cent. These crime statistics show that Tweed-Byron police are doing a fine job controlling crime; they are not just sitting in the station at their desks. I understand at the time of my visit the Murwillumbah police were out destroying a huge drug crop. I advise the House also that that afternoon I also met with the local superintendent, Mike Kenny.

PRISONER REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Corrective Services. What action is the Government taking to rehabilitate prison inmates through educational programs?

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: It is an unfortunate reality that many inmates enter our prison system with a low level of literacy and numeracy. It is evident that the provision of basic adult education and vocational programs is a key element in rehabilitating offenders within our prison systems. That is why the Government is providing the Department of Corrective Services with the resources it needs to ensure that prison inmates in New South Wales have access to such programs. The Department of Corrective Services is one of only two correctional departments in Australia to have established a registered training organisation for the education and vocational training of inmates.

The Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute is accredited by the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board and provides nationally recognised qualifications. The institute's education staff delivers a range of programs to assist inmates develop basic literacy and numeracy skills. The institute also actively assists inmates in their development of employment skills. It delivers vocational courses on information technology, horticulture, general construction, small business management, art and music.

An average of approximately 32 per cent of all inmates are enrolled in some form of education or training program each year. This means that approximately 3,100 inmates are being exposed to nationally recognised education courses each year. In the year 2007-08 the following qualifications were completed by inmates: 8,185 statements of attainment for completed units of competency; 255 certificates for completed courses; 16 tertiary preparation courses; two diploma level qualifications; six bachelor degrees, one graduate diploma and one doctoral degree. It is important to note, of course, that each inmate is responsible for his or her Higher Education Contribution Scheme debt.

TAFE NSW institutes provide the framework for the vocational education and training courses that are operated inside New South Wales correctional centres. In 2007-08 TAFE NSW teachers provided approximately 17,194 hours of education to prisoners in custody. In addition to education and vocational training, traineeships provide inmates with industry-recognised qualifications—namely, Australian Quality Training Framework certificates II, III or IV—and practical on-the-job training and experience. The department's traineeship is part of the Commonwealth Australian Apprenticeship Program. More than 300 traineeships have been commenced since 2004, with a completion rate of approximately 80 per cent. This compares favourably with the national average for completions of around 50 per cent. In 2007-08 the program expanded from 11 to 13 correctional centres, with 103 trainees commencing that year.

As well as providing offenders with opportunities to participate in education and training programs, the department offers two full-time education programs in intensive learning centres located at John Morony and Wellington correctional centres. To date, students have achieved an overall completion rate of 75 per cent for the six-month intensive program, which leads to a certificate I, II or III qualification in the TAFE NSW Employment Education and Training Framework. The Government will continue to ensure that the department has the resources it needs to deliver effective education programs in order to rehabilitate prisoners in custody,

NORTH COAST BREAST SCREENING CENTRES

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I direct my question to the Minister for Health. Since the mobile breast screening units on the far North Coast ceased operation has there been an increase in the number of women attending Tweed and Lismore screening centres for a breast examination? If so, how many more women are

attending these facilities? How does this compare with the total number of women who used to access the mobile and fixed units? What is the health department doing to ensure that women who previously accessed the mobile breast screening units are now attending Tweed and Lismore screening centres? Considering the lack of public transport in northern New South Wales, will the health department consider organising a community bus to transport women from their homes to the hospital for their examination? Considering mobile breast screening units make it easier for women to access the examination procedure, what is the Minister's justification for abolishing this service and centralising the service in a few major centres?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: One of the great innovations of this Government, the BreastScreen NSW program, which is run by the Cancer Institute, has been a major player in the dramatic 18 per cent drop in breast cancer death rates over the past decade. Thanks in large part to the Cancer Institute's activities, New South Wales is leading the growth of cancer research activity and is one of the global leaders in patient treatment outcomes. I am delighted to say that the Cancer Institute has been well looked after in the recent mini-budget brought down by the Treasurer. The institute has an extra \$1 million this year for its important work, and in large measure its frontline services remain intact. In respect to the specifics of the member's question about the North Coast, I will come back to the House with some specific answers as soon as practicable.

INVERELL NURSERY SALE

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries. When was the decision made to sell the Forests NSW nursery at Inverell and who was involved in that decision? Can the Minister further advise how prospective buyers were sought for the nursery? If this was conducted through a tender process, will the Minister also advise when and where the Inverell nursery was advertised for sale? If this sale was not conducted through a tender process, by which process did the eventual buyers, Best Employment Limited, come to make an offer on the facility?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: As I said the other day, the decision to allow Best Employment Limited to operate the Forests NSW site was made completely within government guidelines: it was negotiated that way and approved appropriately.

EMPLOYER INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS RESPONSIBILITIES

The Hon. IAN WEST: My question is directed to the Minister for Industrial Relations. What action is the Government taking to ensure employers are aware of their obligations under industrial relations laws?

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: The Government is committed to ensuring businesses are competing fairly and complying with their responsibilities as employers. Each year inspectors from the New South Wales Office of Industrial Relations visit workplaces across the State to raise awareness of industrial relations laws among employers and their staff. The first of a planned 13,000 workplace visits this year kicked off in January, targeting a range of businesses in the Illawarra, Cherrybrook, Galston, Westleigh, Dural and Eastwood. Further inspections this month will take place in Port Stephens, Bega, Wagga Wagga, Young, Parkes and Forbes. It is expected that around 50,000 workers will benefit, particularly our most vulnerable employees including apprentices, trainees and young people.

Some employers may not be complying with their obligations and these inspections are necessary to ensure that both businesses and staff know their rights and responsibilities. During these visits inspectors from the New South Wales Office of Industrial Relations provide employers with information and advice on pay rates, conditions of employment, leave entitlements and employment records. Employers are required to let the inspector into their workplace, answer the questions asked and provide any employment records requested.

Final figures from last year show that more than \$3.5 million was recovered in lost wages after 13,600 inspections were conducted across the State. Whilst most businesses were found to be doing the right thing, 13,000 breaches of New South Wales industrial relations laws were detected. These included non-payment of long service leave, underpayment of wages, non-payment of weekend or overtime penalty rates, or not paying the correct pay rate. Some of the repayments to workers were \$87,000 to 81 employees at a catering company in St Marys, \$14,600 to a pastoral employee in New England and \$9,000 to a Bega dairy worker. These are just some of the many examples our inspectors detected during their workplace visits.

In addition to our ongoing compliance campaign, between February and December every year the New South Wales Office of Industrial Relations holds free employment workshops throughout the State. These are

practical workshops designed to help business owners and managers understand their rights and responsibilities in the current industrial relations climate. It is important that they have a thorough comprehension of current industrial relations legislation, particularly with the changes proposed by the Federal Government's Forward with Fairness legislation. Topics covered by the workshops include employee entitlements such as parental and long service leave, legal requirements in relation to employment records, and pay slips. Workshops also provide a valuable opportunity for employers to ask questions in an informal setting and share experiences with other business owners.

During 2008, 159 public workshops were scheduled, with 2,221 participants. A further 29 workshops for 563 attendees were conducted by request. Last month, workshops were held in Sydney, Morisset, Griffith, Goulburn and Mittagong. Between March and June this year the workshop series will be conducted in 28 different suburban and regional locations, and there is a mix of free and low-cost workshops available in each location. These workshops are part of a comprehensive campaign by the New South Wales Office of Industrial Relations to make sure everyone, whether business owners and operators or employees, are aware of their responsibilities and entitlements.

WOOD HEATER EMISSIONS

Mr IAN COHEN: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Would the Minister agree that we have an opportunity to reduce health costs in New South Wales by setting the allowable particle emission limit for wood heater units at 0.7 grams per kilogram of wood burnt as opposed to the current standard of four grams per kilogram? Could and would the Minister ask the Department of Health to work out how much we could save in the NSW Health budget by reducing the allowable particulate matter [PM] emission level to 0.7 grams per kilogram in line with the post 2012 New Zealand standards, considering the present cost of health impacts arising from wood heater particle emissions are conservatively—and I emphasise "conservatively"—estimated at \$190 million per year? Did the Environment Protection Authority Wood Smoke Reduction Program in 2003 reduce the State's health costs by \$9 million?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I thank the member for his interesting theory about the way in which we can tackle preventative health issues. I understand that he is serious in his assertions and I undertake to get the latest information about the health impacts of particle emissions along the lines he has suggested. The Government could take up a range of preventative health issues. Of course, the member is free to make any suggestions about ways in which we can make savings in the Health budget. Those suggestions are always welcome.

MACQUARIE FIELDS POLICE NUMBERS

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. Given that the actual command strength in the Macquarie Fields region has been reduced by 17 officers since 2003—with two officers leaving in November—will the Minister make a commitment to increase police numbers, patrols and vehicles to address concerns expressed by residents regarding the increased incidence of crime in the region?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: The honourable member's interest in police is fascinating, particularly given his undercover activities of recent times. Every Opposition member of Parliament calls for an increase in police numbers. However, we should be concentrating on the quality of work being done by the men and women of the New South Wales Police Force. Police numbers have increased by 2,399 since this Government came to power. That is an 18 per cent increase since members opposite were last in government.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Has there been a population increase since then?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: There has not been an 18 per cent increase in population in that time. That would be an increase of about one-fifth of the population. In addition, 650 more police officers will be on board before December 2011, which will bring our contingent to just shy of 16,000. That confirms the New South Wales Police Force's position as the fourth largest police force in the western world. It has about half the number of personnel in the Australian Army.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: It used to be the largest.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: It was never the largest police force.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: That is what Ted Pickering used to say.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: I will not argue with Ted Pickering's figures. Only the London Metropolitan Police Force, the New York Police Department and the Los Angeles Police Department are bigger than the New South Wales Police Force. Our police officers do a wonderful job. Of course, their allocation is up to the police commissioner. I am proud to serve as Police Minister under a Premier who ensures that our hardworking police officers have the powers and resources that they need to keep our community safe.

On 1 January 2009, the New South Wales Police Force's authorised strength was increased by 70 officers, taking the total to 15,306 officers. The figures I have quoted represent a net increase. One of the reasons for that increase—apart from this Government's dedication to ensuring that we have extra officers—is that the New South Wales Police Force is an employer of choice. New South Wales officers resign in lower numbers than do officers in other States. In fact, South Australia and Western Australia recruit from England and South Africa to bolster their police forces.

The latest Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research figures show what a fantastic job the men and women of the New South Wales Police Force are doing to drive down the incidence of crime across the State. The latest data shows that the incidence of most major offence categories remains stable or is falling. The most recent class of police officers was sworn in December. They increased the central metropolitan region strength by 112, the north west metropolitan region by 107, the south-western metropolitan region by 108 and so on. [*Time expired.*]

AMBULANCE SERVICES

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health. Will the Minister inform the House what action the State Government is taking to ensure that ambulance services are keeping pace with changing community needs?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I thank the member for her question and ongoing interest in health issues. Our paramedics are very hardworking and attend more than one million callouts for emergency and non-emergency incidents each year. The Garling report into acute care services in public hospitals released late last year advised that we need to use ambulance resources and the skills of our paramedics more effectively. In achieving that goal, we must also respond to the changing health needs of the community.

I am pleased to inform the House that the New South Wales Government is trialling a new generation of ambulances that will allow paramedics to treat patients in their own homes. The new mini-ambulances are being trialled in Blacktown, Port Macquarie-Tuncurry and the Nepean area, and 10 of the \$65,000 vehicles will be rolled out across the State this year. These vehicles are a part of New South Wales Ambulance's extended paramedic care initiative and were developed by paramedics for paramedics. They carry much more specialist equipment than standard ambulances and a wider range of medicines. Additional equipment carried by these ambulances includes: wound care kits, including dressings, burns dressings, suture packs and tissue glue; intra gastric tubes; splinting kits for sprains and fractures prior to x-ray and treatment; and an extensive range of drugs not normally used by paramedics in standard care ambulances, including specific antibiotics, advanced asthma drugs and inhalers.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: These are special ambulances to keep people out of the emergency departments.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The Garling report also advised that we need to do more to alleviate the pressure on our emergency departments. Straight to the top of the class, Duncan! Providing treatment on the spot in people's homes is one way of achieving that. It means that patients do not need to be transported to an emergency department where they would have to wait while more seriously ill and injured patients are treated. The officers manning these ambulances attend to patients with minor injuries and illnesses, such as lacerations and wounds, sporting injuries, falls and minor back pain. Officers trialling the ambulance in the Blacktown area have now attended 4,000 cases, and the feedback from the community has been very positive.

In addition to the mini-ambulances, last month I inspected two new mega-lift ambulances designed to meet the needs of increasing numbers of obese people requiring transport to public hospitals. We now have five of these ambulances in service. Two are located in Sydney and the remaining three operate in western, southern

and northern New South Wales. The ambulances—which cost \$280,000 each—are used primarily to transport people who weigh in excess of 180 kilograms, or those whose girth is too large for a normal ambulance stretcher. The new ambulances feature hydraulic access ramps that can weigh patients and a specially designed stretcher fitted with a scissor-like hydraulic lifting system.

While the New South Wales Government is getting on with the job of delivering improved health services to families across the State, members Opposite continue to use our health system, the families it serves and the dedicated doctors and nurses who work within it as a political football. The people of New South Wales will again reject their cynical approach. The New South Wales Opposition has no plan and no vision when it comes to our public hospitals, and nothing positive to contribute to our health system.

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

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The Government allocated \$340 million for ambulance services in the New South Wales budget. That is \$24.2 million more than last year.

KILLALEA STATE PARK TRUST BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I address my question to the Minister for Lands. I refer to the Minister's decision to exclude from the Killalea Park Trust Board the nominated representative of the Kiama council, deputy mayor Ben van der Wijngaart, because Kiama council opposes the handing over of part of the State park for a private resort. Is it now government policy that only those who support the Government are to be appointed to the trust boards of State parks?

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: Point of order: The member would understand that questions should not contain argument. That is precisely what the member's question contains and it should be ruled out of order.

The PRESIDENT: Order! On examination the question does not contain any more argument than would normally be found in any question asked in this House. The inferences that it makes are not such that the question should be ruled out of order.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: Until recently the Killalea State Park Trust Board comprised six community members and two ex-officio members, one each being a councillor representing Kiama Municipal Council and Shellharbour City Council. Following the local government elections of 2008, Kiama council nominated the deputy mayor, Ben van der Wijngaart, for appointment to the trust board. There was no nomination from Shellharbour council as it had already been placed under the control of an administrator. Councillor van der Wijngaart's nomination was unacceptable. His vehement public opposition to the proposed developments and other work by the trust clearly demonstrates a conflict of interest, including interfering with press announcements at various times in the past. Accordingly, I decided to review the composition of the trust board. I decided that Shellharbour's representative should be a nominee of the general manager, and Kiama's representative was no longer required as Killalea State Park is located outside its local government area.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I ask the Minister a supplementary question. Am I to take it from his answer that the Minister agrees that only board members who agree with government policy will in future be appointed to government boards?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: I pointed out to the member, I think, that the councillor is disruptive and would have disrupted the trust meetings.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: If members have further questions, I suggest they place them on notice.

NORTH COAST BREAST SCREENING CENTRES

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: Earlier in question time Ms Lee Rhiannon asked me about BreastScreen North Coast. In 2004, BreastScreen North Coast offered primarily a mobile service to the women of the North Coast, and there was only one fixed site, located at Lismore. From June 2008, BreastScreen North Coast offered screening at four fixed sites: Tweed Heads, Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie. It was determined that two of the North Coast BreastScreen mobile units were required in localities in other parts of

New South Wales to allow better access for women in remote and rural New South Wales. With only one mobile unit available, BreastScreen North Coast has rationalised the mobile unit capacity so that the mobile service is now offered to remote communities, such as Bowraville. This unit has computerised radiography installed and services the more remote communities, including Bowraville.

Unlike mobile units that visited locations periodically, the fixed sites are available for screening year-round, allowing residents to coordinate screening with other visits to major population centres. Transport can be arranged for eligible women to be transported to and from BreastScreen appointments at the fixed sites by the non-emergency health-related transport service. I am advised that the area health service is responsive to women's needs should they require assistance with transport to access BreastScreen services in Coffs Harbour. Information is provided to new and existing BreastScreen clients about the services of the health and transport unit, which will assist in providing transport to eligible women. The transport unit provides assistance to transport disadvantaged residents who need to access health services. The unit can be contacted on 1300 552 961.

SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Hon. JOHN ROBERTSON: Earlier in question time I made a statement concerning staff in my office. I advise the House that I have five policy advisers, one media adviser and one departmental liaison officer. They work on Department of Corrective Services, public sector reform and Special Minister of State issues.

PADRAIC GIBSON PAYMENT

The Hon. TONY KELLY: Earlier I was asked a question relating to NSW Police and Padraic Gibson. I am advised that NSW Police agreed to a settlement in a civil legal case brought against it by Mr Padraic Gibson. The case related to events that occurred during the protests against the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting held in Sydney in September 2007. I understand the New South Wales Police Force agreed to settle this matter out of court so as to avoid a lengthy and expensive hearing. The details of the settlement are confidential.

HURLSTONE AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL FARM LAND SALE

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: Earlier Dr John Kaye directed a question to me, representing the Minister for Education and Training. I am happy to provide the following answer. The Government is happy to have an open and transparent debate about the future of Hurlstone Agricultural High School. It is for that reason that the Minister for Education and Training has recently announced that an independent inquiry will be tasked with examining the proposed sale of land at the site. The Minister has announced that the inquiry will be headed by an independent person, not a government employee. The Minister has announced the inquiry will run a broad consultation process. The inquiry will be asked to invite submissions from all interested stakeholders, including current students and their parents, former students, residents of the surrounding communities and those with an interest in the agricultural sector.

The Minister has also announced the inquiry will seek expert opinion about the needs of an agricultural high school and the needs of the agriculture industry. The Minister has made public that the view of the Department of Education and Training is that there is currently land on the 160 hectare Hurlstone site that is not being used to maximum effect for the benefit of students. The department's view is that it would benefit the school if some of that land could be sold and the proceeds reinvested in new, more modern facilities for students and teachers at the school to use.

The department believes that agriculture has changed since the school was established in 1907, since it was moved to its present site in the 1920s, and even since its land was last reconfigured in the 1970s. It believes that the agricultural sector today relies as much on the smart, sustainable application of tools and technology as the size of land that an agricultural enterprise enjoys. To furnish the school with the modern tools, technology and equipment that are needed would require a massive new investment in the school, of the type that the resources available to the State Government could not allow without impacting on other schools. It is for this reason that the department recommended to the Minister that some land at Hurlstone be sold.

The Minister has accepted that the department's view was not shared by many in the community. It is for this reason that the Minister has announced the inquiry. The assumptions on which the decision was based

are now going to be scrutinised in an open way by an independent inquiry. The Minister has made it clear that her interest is in delivering the best outcome for the current and future students of the school, for those of neighbouring schools which would also benefit, as well as for the surrounding communities. In regard to documents, the Minister has clearly demonstrated her intention to put relevant information on Hurlstone into the public domain and, indeed, to seek more information and have this debated publicly. In addition, there has already been a successful Standing Order 52 motion in this place, so all relevant documents will be made publicly available.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AND JUSTICE

Government's Response to Report

The Hon. John Della Bosca tabled the Government's response to report No. 36, entitled "Review of the exercise of the functions of the Motor Accidents Authority and the Motor Accidents Council: Ninth Report", tabled on 1 September 2008.

ADJOURNMENT

The Hon. TONY KELLY (Minister for Police, Minister for Lands, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [5.08 p.m.]: I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

DEATH OF LEN WATERS

TOOMELAH WAR MEMORIAL

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON [5.08 p.m.]: Born near Boggabilla in the far north of New South Wales, Len Waters was the first Aboriginal fighter pilot to serve in the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II. Len survived the war, as well as bouts in the boxing ring that saw him undefeated in the RAAF middleweight division between 1944 and 1945. Len passed away in 1993. On Friday 20 February I had the pleasure of representing the Premier, Nathan Rees, at two important functions commemorating the service of Aboriginal men and women in the Australian armed forces.

The first function was a commemoration service for Len Waters, whose service in the No. 78 Kittyhawk Squadron saw him fly more than 103 hours in combat, being involved in 95 operations and 26 sorties against the Japanese. Members of Len's family, including Auntie Gladys Waters, spoke at the ceremony, reflecting on what a special man Len was but also acknowledging his important military service. It is that military service that is especially important as we honour all our veterans. Aboriginal servicemen and servicewomen have not received appropriate recognition in their local communities or even at the national level.

This brings me to the second function that morning, last month, when we moved from the town of Boggabilla out to the mission reserve at Toomelah. The official opening of the Toomelah War Memorial was a very important event for the regions around Boggabilla. The local Goomeroi elder, Uncle Les Lang—himself a veteran—has worked tirelessly with the Moree Returned Services League to establish this memorial. The Department of Veteran Affairs funded the war memorial and Aboriginal roll of honour plaque—and the first time that drill and screws were supplied to put up the plaque was on the opening day.

Toomelah War Memorial was directed to recognise and remember the sacrifice and service of all Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders who have served in the Australian Defence Force since 1901 and to those who are enlisted today. In particular, this memorial recognises the indigenous men and women from Boomi, Old Toomelah, Euraba Mission, Mungindi, St George, Dirranbandi and Augathella. After all, these are Australia's unsung heroes—the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who fought for Australia in overseas conflicts at a time when they were not even considered citizens of their own country.

Some of these service men and women returned home to find their bravery, service and sacrifice barely recognised. Instead, some families and children had been removed and placed in institutions while they were away. Others found their families were denied access to their pay or benefits while they were away. Later, Aboriginal Diggers were not permitted to march with their comrades on Anzac Day or join with them in after-march events. Fortunately times have changed and current indigenous service personnel are recognised as equals but, as I said, past service is only now being properly commemorated.

Every person involved in war has their own trauma and their family has the trauma too. That is why it is extraordinary to think of men like George Cubby, an Aboriginal Australian in the 2/26th Battalion taken prisoner by the Japanese and made butcher to the guards on the Burma-Thailand railway at Songkurai Camp Young. George Cubby did not become a collaborator as expected by the Japanese but instead, at great risk to his life, stole meat scraps to feed his sick mate Private Derrington, who was down to just six stone and could not eat his meagre rice ration. Without George Cubby to help, Derrington would surely have died. While Derrington now lives in Drummole in Scotland, George Cubby never made it home to Toomelah Mission, as he died of cholera in December 1943 and is buried in a war cemetery in Thailand.

Tragic stories like George's are unfortunately typical of war but most have been properly recognised. The dedication of the memorial at Toomelah is a very important part of the process of recognition of Aboriginal war service and sacrifice. It allows further healing and a chance to build on that history. The Boggabilla and Toomelah communities are to be commended for wanting to formally recognise the contribution made by their local Aboriginal service men and women. All who contributed time, effort and resources to this memorial should be gratified by its very existence. Special mention goes to Uncle Audrey Dennison, whose father was an ex-serviceman from the Boggabilla region. He was instrumental in setting up the process of establishing the war memorial. Uncle Les "Bluey" Lang was able to see the project through and deserves most praise, as establishing a war memorial is a very long and involved process, especially for indigenous people.

Others who made significant contributions are the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Tamworth region; the Australian Government through the Indigenous Coordination Centre, Tamworth; the Department of Veteran Affairs; New South Wales TAFE, New England; the Department of Education and Training; Gwydir Border Rivers Catchment Management; Moree Plains Shire Council; Goondiwindi Regional Council; Moree Local Aboriginal Land Council; D and B Welding, Moree; Best Employment, Goondiwindi; and Toomelah Cooperative Ltd. Appreciation should also be given for the assistance provided by Hunter New England Health through the work of Carmel Knox and Glynis McGrady, Toomelah Local Aboriginal Land Council and Dandaloo Gayngil Toomelah Preschool. It was a day of real celebration with very real people. I was incredibly proud to have been involved. I understand that these days proper war memorial celebrations are held at Redfern and that they will be held at Toomelah in the future.

TENTERFIELD STATION HOMESTEAD PRESERVATION

The Hon. RICK COLLESS [5.13 p.m.]: Tonight I read the contents of a very important plaque in the history of New South Wales and Australia. It reads:

Robert Ramsay Mackenzie, son of Sir George Stewart Mackenzie of Coul, Ross-Shire, Scotland, arrived in Australia in 1826, and it is recorded in the NSW Government Gazette of 26th October, 1841 that he was issued with a depasturing licence for the year commencing 1st July 1841, for the Tenterfield Run.

In 1846 he married Louisa, daughter of Richard Jones of Brisbane, later the first member of the Legislative Council for Stanley Boroughs in the NSW Legislative Council and formerly a Sydney merchant from Chirbury, Shropshire, England.

R.R. Mackenzie became the first Colonial Treasurer of Queensland at Separation, in 1859, and Premier in 1867.

The western Queensland town of Aramac was named after him ("R.R.Mac"). In 1868 He succeeded to the Baronetcy of Coul.

Stuart Alexander Donaldson, son of Stuart Donaldson, a London merchant, arrived in Australia in 1834, and took over the Tenterfield Run on 1st July 1844. He is credited with calling it after his Aunts' home, Tenterfield, near Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland.

The name Tenterfield appeared for the first time in the NSW Government Gazette on 10th November, 1845.

He became Premier of NSW in 1856, and was afterwards knighted. His son was the first Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, the Most Reverend St Clair George Alfred Donaldson, D.D.

In 1851 the town of Tenterfield was gazetted, and was part of the Station area. In 1877-8, the Walker family purchased the property, and occupied it until 1907.

On 30th June, 1908, it was transferred to James Rhodes Lomax. On 15th June, 1924, George Edward Smallwood Dean became the owner. His sons, George Leonard Bates Dean and Henry James Bates Dean, became joint owners at his death in 1947.

This plaque was unveiled by his daughter, Lorna Elizabeth Bates Alford of Grafton, on Wednesday 30th March 1966.

It was the gift of the Queensland Women's Historical Association.

These words are contained on a plaque attached to the front wall of the Tenterfield Station homestead, where two of Australia's pioneering early politicians contributed to making Australia what it is today. Robert Ramsay Mackenzie, first Treasurer and second Premier of Queensland, secured Tenterfield Station in 1841 and subsequently sold it to Stuart Alexander Donaldson, first Premier of New South Wales and at that stage the Premier of what is now Australia, as Donaldson became Premier in 1856, three years prior to separation of the States.

In 1851 Donaldson fought in the last known duel in Australia against Surveyor-General Sir Thomas Mitchell. After three shots a draw was called and no-one was injured, though Donaldson's hat was reputedly shot off. Possibly the duel was complicated by Mitchell declaring the township of Tenterfield on Donaldson's station. Henry Dean, known as Harry, died some years ago and is survived by his wife, Beryl, and son, John. George Dean died just over 12 months ago. George was the last member of the family to reside in the Tenterfield Station homestead, and the homestead has been vacant since George's passing.

The historical value of this home cannot be overstated. In addition to being home to two early premiers in Australia, another famous Australian married a daughter of the Walker family, who owned Tenterfield Station between 1877 and 1907. Andrew Barton Paterson, of course known as Banjo Paterson, married Alice Walker on 8 April 1903 at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Tenterfield and the reception was held in the ballroom at Tenterfield Station. I have had the honour of thoroughly inspecting Tenterfield Station homestead and the building is in remarkably good condition considering its age. It has obviously been built in several stages, with the most recent stage containing marble fireplaces and a master bedroom with an ensuite and walk-in robe—something that was virtually unheard of in those days.

There can be no argument that this highly significant building is most worthy of restoration given its history, and the history of Tenterfield as the birthplace of the nation, where Sir Henry Parkes delivered his famous Federation speech on 24 October 1889, which led to the establishment of Australia as a unified nation in 1901. Many other famous Australians have an association with Tenterfield, including Major J. F. Thomas. He defended Breaker Morant and was a native of Tenterfield and, for 16 years, was the owner of the local newspaper, the *Tenterfield Star*.

Tenterfield is also the home of the Tenterfield Saddler and his grandson, Peter Allen, who of course penned one of the unofficial national anthems of Australia, *I Still Call Australia Home*. There needs to be a concerted effort by many people from different walks of life to ensure that Tenterfield Station homestead is restored and preserved for future generations as an important part of our national heritage. I thank Beryl Dean for her untiring enthusiasm and commitment in bringing forward the plight of Tenterfield Station homestead.

DEATH OF ANUDHI WENTWORTH

Mr IAN COHEN [5.18 p.m.]: First, I place on the record and celebrate former Byron shire councillor Anudhi Wentworth, someone to whom we collectively owe a great debt. In the early eighties she challenged all to action, and was an inspiration. There are many who would not know the great debt we owe Anudhi Wentworth. The environment that we enjoy in Byron shire is in a great part due to the awareness raising and relentless lobbying of Anudhi. Anudhi served for 15 years on Byron Shire Council and saw some of the changes that she lobbied for. Byron shire has the honour of being the first council to enact environmental protection zones in New South Wales. The character of Byron today is a legacy from Anudhi.

In recent years Mayor Jan Barham would often receive phone calls from Anudhi informing of the history of an issue because she was always suspicious that history would be lost. She often demanded of Mayor Barham, "Where's the library?" and would be told, "It is on its way." She would tell all what to do and scold them for interrupting her. If a phone rang, she would say, "Turn the mobile off, you are talking to me," but always there was enthusiasm in her voice and caring about the future of our community. A framed picture stood in Anudhi's convalescent room: a stunning Anglo-Singhalese woman, hair swept back Audrey Hepburn style. Her early life was adventurous: travelling dance troupes and steel drum bands. Her image as the Ceylonese tea lady in an advertising campaign—not the one with the trolley—captures her vivacity in earlier years.

At her first council meeting in the early 1980s Anudhi entered wearing a Balinese ceremonial mask. "I just had to let them know who they were dealing with, darling!" Anudhi fought hard for all and the environment in the 1980s. She was respected by leading lights in the Wran Government. It was the racecourse site, then Club Med, then Becton. Anudhi led the charge. She loved the little terns on the Belongil before Beach Bird Buddies were even thought of. She sat on the track in the Broken Head Nature Reserve, putting a stop to

Shirley MacLaine's plans to bulldoze a road through littoral rainforest and build a secluded mansion, and in the process privatise part of the reserve. Shirley could not handle Anudhi, and the rest is history—from a home to the stars on a private beach, to a quietly spectacular and integral part of the Broken Head Nature Reserve for all to sensitively enjoy.

Anudhi talked of wetland sewage works decades ago. Today's sewage works, a bird spotting tourist attraction, has its roots in Anudhi's heart and mind. Anudhi was a trailblazer. She was a lone voice for the protection of the environment and social justice and a fierce opponent of inappropriate development when she was elected to Byron Shire Council in 1980. She was a founding member of the peak local environment group Beacon. Back then it was difficult to speak out against progress, but she did so at a time when Byron shire was struggling due to the loss of industry and development was seen as a godsend. Anudhi spoke out: a visionary who extolled the responsibility to protect the natural environment. She was formidable. In certain circles and in council it won her many enemies, but she equally gained the respect and admiration of many in the community as she fearlessly spoke against the inappropriate development. As Phil Pollard, who sat next to her from 1983 to 1987, recalls:

Anudhi was incredibly brave. She was absolutely fearless and couldn't give a hoot about what anyone said—she was never intimidated. That included when her car was stolen and burnt out, and her much loved ducks were shot dead next to the house in her driveway. This was a clear warning—that she did not heed for a second. These intimidating tactics by the people who would silence Anudhi only made her more determined.

Anudhi had a deep emotional commitment and drive. She was a warrior, but her failing eyesight meant she needed a reader. Conservative councillors voted down the request. To the streets, and 20 of us wearing sunglasses and carrying white canes snaked our way to the old Byron council chambers to attend the meeting. Anudhi got her reader. In recent years, trapped in declining physical condition, Anudhi yearned to escape. So, on what was her last local government election day I bundled her into my van and took her to the main Byron polling station. With a "Vote Green" poster leaning against her wheelchair, green t-shirt on, she held court, giving supporters an opportunity to pay their respects. When she grew tired she got back into the van. Her spirits now high, as we drove she called again and again, "Save the forests, vote Green," the song of a fragile little bird. "Can they hear me?" she asked. "Yes, they can all hear you. Just keep waving," I replied. Anudhi Wentworth was a Green pioneer, an inspiration. We were very lucky she chose to call Byron home and make a difference. Anudhi, you will not be forgotten.

RELATIONSHIP WITH KOREA AND CHINA

The Hon. HENRY TSANG (Parliamentary Secretary) [5.23 p.m.]: I inform the House about the continued engagement of the New South Wales Government with Korea and China. On Wednesday 4 March I attended a State dinner hosted by the Premier, Nathan Rees, in honour of the President of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Lee Myung-bak. The Premier said that Australia and the Republic of Korea are countries of which it can be truly said that their friendship was forged in peace and war. Australians fought and died alongside the people of South Korea in defence of an independent and prosperous democracy on the Korean peninsula.

A total of 339 young Australians sacrificed their lives in the Korean War of 1950-53. Premier Rees said that a permanent memorial to Australian and Korean veterans of this war is planned to be unveiled in Sydney's Moore Park later this year. The memorial is being built with the financial contribution of the governments of Korea, New South Wales and the Commonwealth. President Lee paid tribute to Australia's participation in the Korean War. President Lee noted the affection that exists in his country for the people of Australia, particularly those who experienced the war and the following generation.

As President Lee noted, Korea has achieved a successful industrialisation and Australia can be proud of the fact that we helped. Korea has transformed itself from being a country that was poor and over-reliant on agriculture at the end of the Korean War into a modern and internationally competitive economy. In 2007 the Republic of Korea was the world's fourteenth-largest economy and represented some 1.9 per cent of total world gross domestic product. Korea is the third-largest export market of New South Wales and is an important destination for our mineral exports and primary production.

Recognising the strong trading partnership, Premier Rees and President Lee reaffirmed their commitment for both sides to work together to overcome the present global economic crisis. As the Premier noted, the friendship between New South Wales and the Republic of Korea is embodied in a sister-State relationship between Sydney and Seoul, both global financial cities and former Olympic hosts. In the present difficult global environment this friendship will continue to be a source of strength and confidence.

The New South Wales Government is also strengthening its partnership with China. On Wednesday 4 March I attended the signing of a memorandum of understanding for a collaborative research program between New South Wales and China, to develop closer scientific and strategic research links. The agreement was signed by Minister Jodi McKay, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Dr Cao Jianlin, Vice Minister for Science and Technology in the Chinese Government. The memorandum of understanding brings together the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Science and Technology of China, and the New South Wales Government's Department of State and Regional Development.

The program will support joint research projects involving both New South Wales and Chinese researchers working in areas including traditional Chinese medicine and biotechnology. The research program will build productive alliances and opportunities for researchers in the two countries, support collaboration on projects that contribute to our economic, social and environmental wellbeing, and increase our capacities to attract research and development investment and stimulate innovation. The signing of the memorandum of understanding offers exciting prospects in areas of research that have enormous potential to benefit the people of New South Wales. Complementary medicine has the potential to make significant advances on the burden of disease in our community, particularly chronic disease, as well as boosting our economy. The complementary medicine sector is already generating expenditure of more than \$2 billion annually in Australia.

Our State is uniquely placed to capitalise on the potential for traditional Chinese medicine to play a more mainstream role in Western medicine, and the New South Wales Government has taken a number of initiatives in this direction. We have facilitated the establishment of a National Institute for Complementary Medicine at the University of Western Sydney. We have also supported the formation of a Joint Academic Chair in Traditional Chinese Medicine co-funded by the New South Wales Government, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Sydney. Also, in 2007 the Government announced the establishment of an Australia-China Centre for Research in Chinese Medicines, a joint collaboration between the University of Sydney and Sun Yat-sen University in China's Guangzhou. As the New South Wales Government engages the business, education and research strengths of our State with China, the New South Wales-China Collaborative Research Program will assist in building even stronger relationships of mutual benefit. [*Time expired.*]

DEATH OF DR KHALIL MOUSTAPHA

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA [5.28 p.m.]: On Sunday 1 March 2009 I attended the memorial for the late Dr Khalil Moustapha, who passed away on Thursday 19 February 2009. The memorial was organised by the Lebanese and Arabic communities in Australia and was held at the Rockdale Town Hall. In attendance was the Consul of Lebanon in Canberra, Mr Maher Kheir, representing the Ambassador of Lebanon, Dr Jean Daniel; the Ambassador of Syria, Mr Tamman Sulaiman; the Consul General of Lebanon in Sydney, Mr Robert Narhoum; the Mayor of Rockdale, Councillor Bill Seravinovski; the former Mayor of Rockdale and current councillor, Councillor Shaoquett Moselmane; Councillor Joe Awada of Rockdale council; Councillor Sam Iskander, Mayor of Marrickville; Councillor Ali Karnib of Liverpool council; and a large number of other dignitaries and community members.

Dr Khalil Moustapha was born on 20 February 1947 and died one day before his sixty-second birthday on 19 February 2009. He was born in the city of Bint Jbeil, in the south of Lebanon. His primary and high school education was in Bint Jbeil and he attended Damascus University between 1970 and 1976, where he obtained his degree in medicine, qualifying as a general practitioner. He subsequently attended university in Bologna between 1976 and 1982 and obtained his qualifications as a psychiatrist.

Dr Khalil Moustapha immigrated to Australia in 1988. In his short period of 21 years in Australia he made enormous contributions to the community. These included being president of the Bint Jbeil Charitable Association for 15 years. He was also president of the St George joint community association for five years. He established, and was a founding member of, the Lebanese Community Council. He established, and was a founding member of, the Christian-Muslim Friendship Society. He established, and was a founding member of, the Doctors Trained Overseas Association. He established, and was a founding member of, the Great Seven.

In the short period of five minutes permitted for an adjournment speech, I do not believe that I am able to do justice to all the great achievements and contributions of Dr Khalil Moustapha to our community. I am honoured to have been a friend of Dr Khalil Moustapha. He was a person who always had a good word of advice for anyone who sought it. I do not recall his ever saying a bad word, or making an adverse comment, in relation to any person or community. He considered that such negative actions only caused harm and in no way assisted to resolve the problem being faced.

Dr Khalil Moustapha was a proud Australian of Lebanese background. He worked tirelessly to build the correct image for Australians from a Lebanese background. He demonstrated the value that the entire Australian community obtained from those who arrived from Lebanon to call Australia home. He was a doctor, a healer in the truest sense. He helped heal and cure people's ills, whether physical or otherwise, which helped mend the bodies and minds of all those in need by his very special touch. He believed not only in the healing of the body and the mind, but also the place of a person within the community and the community as a whole.

Dr Khalil Moustapha is survived by his wife, Mrs Salwa Moustapha, and his five children: his sons Louae, Abraham and Moustapha, and his daughters Oula and Sukna. He will be dearly missed by his family and to them I offer my deepest condolences. I also say to his family that our entire community will miss him. He has left a hole in the lives of the members of our community that cannot be filled. He was one of those unique individuals who contributed to the community far more than he ever wanted to receive in return. I read into *Hansard* the farewell message to Dr Khalil Moustapha that appeared in the Rockdale City Council newsletter:

Farewell to a Community Leader.

He was [a] man of great passion with a determination to build and maintain community values. He was a problem solver and mediator, always looking for a solution. This is the story of the late Dr Khalil Moustapha.

Dr Moustapha, who sadly passed away on Thursday 19 February, was a prominent community leader and role model throughout the St George region and beyond. As a doctor and qualified clinical psychiatrist, he used his skills to hone in on community needs and help break down the barriers of religion and racial tensions.

"His compassion, leadership and expertise will be sadly missed. He was a man who won respect from everyone he met," Councillor Shaoquett Moselmane, said.

Since emigrating from Lebanon in 1990, Dr Mosutapha grew to become a mentor and teacher for so many in the Rockdale community.

"His passing comes with immense sadness and a sense of great loss. But we are profoundly grateful to have been touched by this wonderful man. He has left a lasting legacy with the community," the Mayor of the City of Rockdale, Councillor Bill Saravinovski, said.

CUBAN AID TO EAST TIMOR

KIMBERLEY DEVELOPMENT

Ms LEE RHIANNON [5.33 p.m.]: Cuba, which, unlike Australia, is neither a rich country nor a neighbour of East Timor, gives much greater aid to that country in terms of human capacity building. Cuba currently has 300 health workers in East Timor, including 230 doctors. Cuba has 800 Timorese medical students and offers 1,000 scholarships for such students. Literacy programs and training of local health workers, making it capacity building rather than creating ongoing dependence, accompanies Cuban medical aid throughout the world; it is the key to a successful aid program.

Australia spends hundreds of millions of dollars on military intervention in east Timor and is increasingly unpopular in that country. Even by AusAID's accounting methods, which valued the scholarships at \$90,000 each, this is a drop in the bucket compared with the military intervention that the public is underwriting in East Timor. From 2002 to 2007 the number of university scholarships offered by the Australian Government to students from Timor-Leste declined from 20 per year to 8 per year. From 2003 to 2006 the number of medical training scholarships offered by the Government of Cuba to students from Timor-Leste increased from 50 to 1,000. Cuban health and education programs are recognised and commended by the World Health Organisation and UNESCO.

One specific objective of the Cuban cooperation agreement in Timor-Leste is the reduction of maternal and child mortality rates, especially in rural areas. A recent program evaluation found that in the areas where Cuban doctors work, child mortality is now 27.5 per 1,000, a figure more than 50 per cent lower than elsewhere in the country. Maternal mortality has also steadily declined in the areas in which Cuban medical teams work. Programs active in other areas in the Pacific region include Kiribati, which hosts a Cuban health team of 20 doctors, with more to come in 2009, and the Solomon Islands, which is recruiting Cuban doctors. Other cooperation agreement programs exist between Cuba and Tuvalu, and Cuba and Nauru. More than 126,000 Cubans have completed health commissions in 104 countries, including large-scale missions after natural disasters in Asia, such as the post-Tsunami teams in Aceh and Sri Lanka and a contingent of 1,000 doctors in Pakistani Kashmir after the earthquakes in 2005. Another large-scale mission was the building of hospitals after the 2006 earthquakes in Java.

I congratulate Tim Anderson, who has done a great deal of work, on bringing this story to the world. He has said that it is important to get away from the idea of measuring aid by dollars because this masks the costing and the recycling of aid money into Australian pockets. Last year, along with Tim Anderson, I signed a letter to the Australian Government to begin a large-scale public education program for the East Timorese matching the Cuban offer of 1,000 scholarships. The ordinary people of Timor-Leste deserve nothing less from a rich and powerful neighbour that has so often let them down.

The Kimberley, one of Australia's great wilderness regions, is under threat from mining and heavy industry. Sections of the Western Australian and Federal governments are joining forces to facilitate a regime of heavy industry, ports and mining in the region. This poses a threat to important migratory bird habitats, the green turtle breeding grounds, whale nurseries and many other significant ecosystems. The culture and the future of the traditional owners are also under threat. The traditional owners of the Kimberley have been pressured with the spectre of compulsory land acquisitions in an attempt to use fear to divide them, and undermine their bargaining power and right of veto of these unwanted imposts on their traditional lands. This shows an alarming lack of respect.

We on the East Coast have a responsibility to stand with these people to protect their traditional lands. We will have that opportunity shortly. I congratulate Ricki Coughlan and members of the Save the Kimberley group on the meeting to be held in Sydney on 15 March 2009 at 2.00 p.m. at the Avalon Community Centre on Sydney's northern beaches. On that occasion we will have the opportunity to hear Albert Wiggan, one of the traditional owners, speak about his land and the struggle to ensure that the industrial invasion does not destroy them forever.

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

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 5.38 p.m. until Wednesday 11 March 2009 at 11.00 a.m.
