



**New South Wales**

# **Legislative Council**

## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD)**

**Fifty-Seventh Parliament  
First Session**

**Wednesday, 26 February 2020**

Authorised by the Parliament of New South Wales



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# LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Wednesday, 26 February 2020

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT AND CHAIR OF COMMITTEES (The Hon. Trevor Khan)**, in the absence of the President, took the chair at 11:00.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD** read the prayers.

## *Announcements*

### **BUSHFIRES**

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan)**: I report receipt of a message of condolence from Senator Toni G. Atkins, President pro Tempore of the California State Senate. It states:

February 25, 2020

The Hon John Ajaka MLC  
President  
New South Wales Legislative Council  
Parliament House, Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP  
Speaker  
New South Wales Legislative Assembly

Dear President Ajaka and Speaker O'Dea,

On behalf of the entire California Senate family, I send our deepest sympathy and heartfelt concern for all those impacted by the terrible record heat, raging wildfires and resultant smoke that relentlessly afflicted New South Wales this summer season. We watched with hope and happiness as the recent rain began to bring closure to this frightening episode, only to give way to another trial in the form of floods.

Our regions share so many positive economic and cultural ties, in addition to a close and valued friendship, but we also share the unfortunate challenge of increasingly devastating natural disasters, exacerbated by human action, affecting our land and people. We understand acutely the difficulties that you and your colleagues, as leaders and legislators, face during these times as you work to keep your communities, wildlife and resources safe from harm and rebuild after the worst ravages of drought and fire.

The exchange of our fire personnel and experts is crucial in the immediacy of the events, but we do believe our continuing policy dialogues are important long-term in coping with this common problem, from improving emergency response to mitigating environmental factors contributing to the intensity of the incidences.

May the thoughts and support of your countless friends in your sister state of California provide added strength to your own resiliency as the great State of New South Wales manages this ongoing and unprecedented situation.

Sincerely,

TONI G. ATKINS  
President pro Tempore  
Senator, 39th Senate District

## *Committees*

### **REGULATION COMMITTEE**

#### **Reference**

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH (11:04:46)**: I move:

- (1) That the Regulation Committee inquire into and report on the making of delegated legislation in New South Wales, and in particular:
  - (a) the extent to which the Parliament has delegated power to make delegated legislation to the executive government, including through the passage of so-called "shell" legislation and "Henry VIII clauses";
  - (b) the use of delegated legislation making power, including any instances of executive government overreach, which might include:
    - (i) the amendment of primary legislation by delegated instruments;
    - (ii) the adoption of certain laws by means of delegated rather than primary legislation; and
  - (c) any other related matter.
- (2) That the committee report by the last sitting day in June 2020.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions***DISASTER RESPONSE LEGAL SERVICE NSW**

**The Hon. NATALIE WARD (11:05:28):** I move:

- (1) That this House notes that:
  - (a) in January 2020, a new free legal service for bushfire victims, the Disaster Response Legal Service NSW, was established;
  - (b) the service will be operated by Legal Aid NSW, building on the disaster response service that has been operating since 2010, and will be available via Legal Aid's helpline 1800 801 529; and
  - (c) this service has provided legal assistance throughout the bushfire season for people navigating insurance claims, tenancy issues, financial hardship, social security entitlements and employment issues.
- (2) That this House acknowledges:
  - (a) Legal Aid NSW for its hard work in support of victims of natural disasters; and
  - (b) the Law Society of NSW and the NSW Bar Association for partnering with Legal Aid and providing invaluable help to people impacted by the bushfires.

**Motion agreed to.**

**GEORGES RIVER REFUGE**

**The Hon. NATALIE WARD (11:06:01):** I move:

- (1) That this House notes that:
  - (a) families fleeing domestic violence will soon have a safe place to seek refuge in the Georges River area, with the Government investing \$40,000 to support crisis accommodation;
  - (b) the grant for Kingsway Community Care will help to open a refuge in the Georges River area;
  - (c) the funds will also support repairs and maintenance for the new premises, including bathroom renovations, driveway construction, as well as painting and electrical services to ensure the building is safe and fit-for-purpose; and
  - (d) the refuge is set to open its doors in the first half of 2020.
- (2) That this House thanks Kingsway Community Care General Manager, Brook Stewart, for his tireless advocacy to help victims of domestic violence.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees***SELECT COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL CRUELTY LAWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES****Extension of Reporting Date**

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON (11:07:15):** I move:

That the reporting date for the Select Committee on Animal Cruelty Laws in New South Wales be extended to Thursday 4 June 2020.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions***SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE (11:08:00):** I move:

- (1) That this House notes that:
  - (a) school libraries are at the heart of teaching and learning in schools; and
  - (b) they are also places where a love of reading can be sparked and nurtured, often with the guidance of the school teacher librarian.
- (2) That this House recognises that:
  - (a) connected learning spaces serve an important role in schools and they should be complemented by physical libraries where students can browse, study, read and receive assistance from a qualified teacher librarian; and
  - (b) investment in school libraries helps students achieve educational goals, develop a love of reading, advance digital literacy skills, provide access to diverse ideas and improve cultural and social awareness.
- (3) That this House affirms that we love our libraries, and we want public school students to have libraries they can love too.

- (4) That this House calls on the Government to ensure every public school student in New South Wales has access to a quality school library and a qualified teacher librarian.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Documents*

**UNPROCLAIMED LEGISLATION**

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** According to standing order, I table a list detailing all legislation unproclaimed 90 calendar days after assent as at 25 February 2020. **Bushfire Area Development**

*Petitions*

**PETITIONS RECEIVED**

Petition noting the impact of the recent bushfires and calling on the Government to declare an immediate moratorium on all clearing for development in bushfire-affected areas and to review all planned subdivisions in light of recent bushfire destruction and community safety concerns, received from **Mr David Shoebridge**.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** According to the resolution of the House of 25 February 2020, the debate on the condolence motion relating to the 2019-2020 bushfires will take precedence of all other business on the *Notice Paper* for today until concluded or interrupted by the adjournment of the House.

*Motions*

**BUSHFIRES**

**Debate resumed from 25 February 2020.**

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH (11:31:10):** I associate myself with the motion moved by the Leader of the Government and with all comments that were made yesterday evening in regard to it. I particularly extend my condolences to the families of Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul, who were Rural Fire Service volunteers who tragically lost their lives. I also extend my condolences to the friends and families of the American firefighters Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, who were employed by Coulson Aviation. It is an absolute tragedy that they lost their lives when they were here to help.

Summer certainly did not pan out the way I thought it would for myself and a whole lot of other families and friends. I thank everyone who was involved in helping in any way during this past summer. There is always a risk that I will miss people as I shine a spotlight on a few people and organisations in my contribution, but at the outset I thank everyone who was involved in whatever capacity. Not all of us can hold a hose, but we all contributed in different ways—whether it was serving up a sandwich, making a cup of tea or dropping in to see people—and I thank everyone for doing that.

I will look at a few things in my contribution to the debate on this condolence motion. One is the role, both good and bad, of social media during the disasters. My dear old mum, who is in her mid-seventies, spent a fair bit of time on Facebook trying to keep an eye on things for my brothers and sisters, who were in other parts of the State, and making sure that they were okay. The problem was that being on social media increased her anxiety levels a bit as the bushfires went on, so there is good and bad in that scenario. Social media does play a role; it is a way of keeping track of what is going on. I will talk a bit more about the Dunns Road fire, but the use of social media to keep up with that fire was probably inappropriate in some cases.

I think for a while I was the biggest user of the Fires Near Me app—certainly I was in the top 10. I learned from following the Dunns Road fire that once the smoke gets to a certain point and the RFS cannot determine where the fire front is, the service does not update the Fires Near Me app for that fire because of the risk of putting out incorrect information. For hours on end it looked like the Dunns Road fire had not moved when, in fact, it had moved at great speed. The Fires Near Me app, whilst good, has some limitations that people need to be aware of when using it.

The Dunns Road fire near Tumut was pretty personal for me. I grew up near Dunns Road—in fact, my early years were spent in the Yaven Creek and Ellerslie valley area. The Dunns Road fire was started by a dry lightning strike on the Hume Forest softwood plantation at Takajo. I lived in the house there as a young fellow because Dad was managing the property that was then Takajo. I saw a Facebook image of the fire roaring down the hill with the house at Takajo in the foreground and the flames about three times as high as the house. To look at the photo you would have thought that there was no way that house could have survived, but it did. That is the miraculous nature of bushfires. In my last years before I left home Dad was managing Boraig Station at Talbingo. That is a fair distance from Takajo and Ellerslie valley—it is about 100 kilometres or so as the crow flies. That

house at Talbingo burnt in the same Dunns Road fire. I cannot believe how much territory was burned by that fire and how much damage it did in that area.

At the height of the bushfires my mum decamped to Bathurst to get away from the smoke, because people with breathing difficulties were really struggling. There has been some conjecture about whether loss of life due to bushfire smoke should be included in the loss of life figures for the summer. I tend to think that it should be included. It is hard to quantify accurately, but a number of people were severely impacted by the smoke. To get a picture of the effect of the bushfires, I draw attention to the contribution to this debate by Mr Justin Field. Members who have not had an opportunity to read it should do so. It is an outstanding contribution that really paints a picture of what it was like to be there during the fires. It highlights the loss of control for those who were caught up in the fires and how it feel when the fires are happening all around you. It highlights what can go wrong and how humankind interacts at such times. Mr Justin Field spoke about there being no traffic lights. We probably do not get things right at traffic lights when there is no bushfire emergency, but when there is an emergency we can all work out who should have the right of way and how the traffic should flow.

The smoke at Tumut was pretty thick for a few days before it became really bad. I am not an RFS volunteer and I do not hold a hose to fight bushfires; I make no bones about that. I take my hat off to those volunteers, but I am not trained and so there is no way I would turn up. A bit has been said about the role of the member for Prospect, Dr Hugh McDermott. He was at the Dunns Road fire with the Horsley Park fire brigade, which spent some time at that fireground. I do not think the communities of Adelong, Batlow, Tumbarumba and Talbingo expected what happened. I stayed in touch with some of my schoolmates, some of whom lost their houses. The Hon. Bronnie Taylor, in answer to a question yesterday, mentioned that her husband had fought the fires at their place and that they lost 98 per cent of their property in that fire. I was in contact with one of my friends several days after he had fought a fire. I said to him, "What was it like?" He said that it was one big, mean, ugly fire. He had seen nothing like it before. It was pretty bad and it ran really quickly.

My sister Loretta resides at Valmar Support Services, an accommodation provider for people with special needs. Once I knew Mum was okay I checked in on my sister. In her contribution the Hon. Penny Sharpe spoke about disability service providers. Some of them did very well. I must put on record that Valmar Support Services did an outstanding job in looking after residents. They moved people to Gundagai in a timely fashion. They had what could be called "calming" officers walking around and making sure that not just the residents but also the staff were okay. They spoke with family members to make sure that they knew their loved ones were in a good place—they were in air conditioning in Gundagai. The decision was that they would stay there until they knew the impact. If they then needed to move elsewhere, such as Yass, that is what they would do. I put on record my appreciation of Valmar Support Services and all the staff there. They did an outstanding job but their role is often forgotten.

I was talking to Margot Bulger, who runs Riding for the Disabled [RDA] in Tumut, which is another organisation that is often forgotten. It has lovely old horses that everyone gets quite attached to. The volunteers had to get them out of Tumut in really thick smoke. At that time there was only one road in and out, which was Gocup Road. Not long after I had the conversation about it, Gocup Road was shut not because of fire but because of smoke. The visibility was about three metres—you literally could not see—so they closed the road for safety reasons, and that affected the people of Tumut who were not near the fire. A lot of the older generation in town could not believe that a fire could have an impact on Tumut, but it was travelling so fast that I do not think anyone knew where it was going or what it was going to do. As I said, Riding for the Disabled is often forgotten. It would have been the same up and down the coast; the RDA volunteers would have been moving horses to safe ground and doing an outstanding job. They often do not get mentioned in the thankyou's.

Also in Tumut the communication dropped out. Mobile phones did not work because the mobile phone towers were down in what was already a patchy coverage area. The commercial radio stations dropped out, the apps were not working, there was really thick smoke and people did not know what was happening. It was pretty hot and stifling as well. But the local community radio station somehow maintained its service. Sounds of the Mountains with David Eisenhauer became the go-to radio station. Everyone was listening while it was playing a vital role in informing everyone in all those communities. It goes out to Talbingo, Tumbarumba and Batlow.

**The Hon. Bronnie Taylor:** He never had so many listeners.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** That's right. I don't think the station had ever had so many listeners in all its time, but it was the only way of understanding what was going on. The RFS acknowledged that and started making 15-minute updates using the community radio station as the mechanism to get messages out to people about what was happening. I give a special shout-out to Dave Eisenhauer and Margaret Black at Sounds of the Mountains. They played a critical role. A couple of weeks ago the shadow Cabinet visited Tumut at the invitation of the Mayor of Snowy Valleys Council, James Hayes. One issue raised was the importance of Tumut's aerodrome, which they

were looking at closing a couple of years ago because there are no commercial flights in and out. It played such a critical role during the Dunns Road fire that the council now wants it elevated to emergency runway status.

To put that in context, it was not used just for the Dunns Road fire. Later on, when the fire on the western side of the Australian Capital Territory [ACT] was of concern to everyone, they could not use the runways and aerodromes in the ACT region so they used the Tumut aerodrome to provide the air support for that fire. It is a critical aerodrome. All of us have to work on a way of making sure that it plays a role in future. During the snow season the runways at Tumut and Cooma are the only ones that can be used for people who are injured, so I think there is a real case for Tumut Airport. There was a phenomenal amount of traffic in and out of it when the smoke allowed during the Dunns Road fire.

I thank the RFS, the SES, the police, Forestry Corporation, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Snowy Valleys Council. The council staff were trying to keep water up to communities. At Adelong the water stopped and the water crew from the Tumut depot of the Snowy Valleys Council was there trying to get water back into Tumut. As the fire was going, all of this was taking place: all these people were doing their jobs under extreme difficulty, trying to maintain some sort of normality to communities that may not have been right in the fire but were on the periphery of it. I thank all of those people.

One group is always forgotten when it comes to thanking people for their roles, particularly around fires, and that is Local Land Services. The staff of Local Land Services have a horrific job. Those who live on the land would understand and appreciate how that works. After a fire has razed an area, often the first people there—while the RFS is still trying to put out the smouldering embers—are from Local Land Services. They have the terrible task of assessing the burnt animals, wildlife and livestock, and working out whether they can save them or whether they should be put down for humane reasons. They then decide what to do with them. That has to be a terrible job, but the staff of Local Land Services do it. They are often forgotten and they should not be. I extend my appreciation to the staff of Local Land Services who had to undertake that duty. It would be a terrible thing to do.

One thing that staggered me about the Dunns Road exercise was that for the first time I encountered a community that was deemed "undefendable". The people of Batlow say that 24 hours prior to the fire impacting their community there was a public meeting at which they were told, "The community is undefendable. You need to leave." That puts in context the magnitude and intensity of the Dunns Road fire. Some people stayed. Some school students from Tumut and Batlow addressed the shadow Cabinet meeting in Tumut. A school captain from Batlow Technology School talked about how he stayed with his dad and they saved five houses as the flames roared towards them. It must have been quite scary for that young fellow. His bravery and that of his father should be acknowledged. They did a sterling job in very trying and difficult times.

On Facebook there is some footage of Talbingo that shows flames coming across the top of the hill range with the shopping centre in the foreground. In the next photo, taken literally two minutes later, the flames are at the shopping centre because the fire moved so fast. You could not outrun this fire. People say, "Wait, then get in your car and go when you make the decision," but the fire was so intense people should have gone the day before. Hence that is why the "undefendable" status was attributed to Batlow, I would suggest. For places like Batlow and Talbingo—and I acknowledge the presence of the mental health Minister in the Chamber—it is not just the mental health of individuals that is a concern. I am concerned about community mental health. We talk about resilient communities. They have been through adversity before, but this is something they have never experienced.

I am concerned about community wellbeing as people come together to recover and then, as some are now doing, to attribute blame and anger before they eventually move on into the short-term and long-term recovery stage. I am not sure, but I am pretty certain that the experience of Batlow and Talbingo would be similar to that of other communities up and down the coast that were impacted by fires during the summer. Collectively we must work out how to assist those communities in moving forward, including the aged populations and people with disabilities who would not have known what was going on in a lot of cases but were in the hands of people who were doing the right thing for them. We have to do a bit more about community mental health.

It was pretty harrowing. Thankfully, I did not lose my house. There is a photo on Facebook of my sister's place at Forster where three cars were alight in their front yard. They saved their house too. At that time I had no idea what things were going to be like, because the Dunns Road fire had not even started. Having family in other parts of the State impacted so early on made it easy to understand and appreciate my mum's anxiety. I now drive through the Yaven Creek and Ellerslie areas and see burnt rubble where houses that I played in as a young fella used to be. Many of the people who lived in those houses inherited them from their family. To come to terms with what has happened takes a bit of effort.

A few other things need to happen as part of the recovery. We have got to sort out the road signs. We have lifted the 80-kilometre zone on the Snowy Mountains Highway, but the road signs are still black. There are some pretty dangerous bends on that highway. As a matter of urgency we need to make sure those road signs are replaced because someone is going to have a bingle if they do not know the road. I understand why the roads have been reopened, but maybe before we lift the 80-kilometre limit for safety reasons we should make sure that the road signs are replaced.

Also a conversation has to be had with the community of Tumut about what is going to happen there and about the economic impact. Aside from everything else, they lost between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of their softwood plantation. Those numbers roll easily off the tongue but, to put it in context, for the community 40 per cent to 50 per cent of the softwood plantation represents \$800 million a year, every year for the next 20 years. That will be the economic impact on Tumut; softwood is its biggest industry. About 5,000 jobs are directly and indirectly associated with the softwood industry in the Snowy Valleys. The Snowy Valleys Council and the Softwoods Working Group have openly said that in the next 12 months about 2,000 jobs will disappear from those economies. In Batlow people not only have to rebuild but most of them will not have jobs unless we do something. They will struggle with what has just happened and with their personal short-term recovery, but what will they do in the longer term? We have to work out the economic recovery for that community. It is not right that they do not have a degree of certainty about what is going to happen to them.

My colleagues know that I talk a lot about weeds, probably because I am a bushie. I have been saying to members on all sides of the Chamber that if you were to drive through a lot of that country now you would see that the first thing that grows back is the weeds, the blackberries in particular. When people talk about fuel load I get really annoyed, because they do not understand the make-up of fuel load. One of the biggest contributors to fuel load in the Dunns Road fire was blackberries.

**The Hon. Bronnie Taylor:** In the pines.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** In the pine plantations. We do not spend enough money getting rid of those weeds to limit the fuel load. The blackberries are as high as this Chamber; they are 10 metres high. The flames get into them and feed up into the trees. They take off and away they go because the blackberries create more fuel. If you talk to anyone down our way they will say that one of the biggest contributors to that fire was the fuel load, and the fuel load was the weeds. We have to do more about weeds. We have an opportunity now, because everything else has been taken away and the first thing that comes back is the weeds. We can get in and do some work on that right now—and we should. Why can we not redeploy those people who are going to lose their jobs and tell them now, "You are going to have a job. This is what it is going to be"? We are not having those conversations with communities, but we should.

I will speak about fencing and betterment. The Hon. Bronnie Taylor has probably been down to inspect the horrific fireground. We lose the powerlines because the power poles are timber and they burn. Because of a silly arrangement, in my view, around not being able to apply betterment—that is, to improve an asset from what it was—what do we do? Rather than putting in steel or concrete power poles, we put in timber power poles. What will happen in the next fire?

**The Hon. Adam Searle:** They will burn down.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH:** They will burn down. Common sense says that we have the opportunity now so let's fix this. We should do that, and the communities there will tell you that. Those are the sorts of things we should have conversations about. They are job-creating exercises as well, so I think it is really important to talk to those communities about them. I have now started to venture to the other firegrounds. I intentionally stayed off Facebook and Twitter. There was so much going on in my life and in the community that I felt I should stay away. I also saw the impact it was having on the older generation in town. They were getting quite anxious about what was on Facebook. By the way, some of it was incorrect and should not have been put up there. Facebook might not want to accept it, but it does have some responsibility for those things. Inaccurate information does not help when people are being told to stay in situ or when they have received a text message telling them to go. After this tragic summer we have to sort out the problem of conflicting messages.

I intentionally stayed away from social media so that I could focus on other things. Some of my colleagues sent me text messages that I did not respond to because we did not have communication. I know that people get worried when people do not respond, but they do not respond because they do not receive the messages. On the fireground you just do not get them. The people of Tumbarumba had the unique situation of two substantial fire fronts coming towards them from different angles, one from the south and one from the north. Again, what could that community do? You know that you are going to be on the battleground at some stage. It requires great psychological capacity to work through all of that.

Another thing I will touch on briefly is people's plans to go and when to leave. I did a little bit of work with some older residents. I will tell their story not to make fun of what happened but to highlight the seriousness of it. When I spoke to a particular couple a few days before the fire I said, "If you have to go, are you ready to go?" They said, "Yes, we are ready to go." I asked if they had a plan and they said, "Yes, we have a plan." When we got the text message that said we had to go I thought, "I have to drop in and see them." They were then packing their photos and grabbing their important personal effects; they actually did not have a plan. They said they did, but they did not have a plan because they did not think that they would actually have to do it. We have to do a lot more to educate our communities about what it means to have a plan to leave because a lot of residents do not take it seriously. The view is that it will not happen to us. There is nothing like getting a text message that says you have to go to bring front and centre what things you need to put in the car to go.

I take my hat off to the people who operate the evacuation centres. I congratulate them. They have done a great job. I was talking to a volunteer at an evacuation centre who said that they underestimated how many pets would be brought to the centre. Cars were turning up with the kids in the back, the dogs and cats in the front and someone holding the bird or the fish. The evacuation centre workers had underestimated how many pets would come up, so they did not have provisions or arrangements to accommodate them. That is a lesson we should learn, because people's pets are their loved possessions and they will bring however many they can with them. We need to make sure that next time the evacuation centres have made the necessary arrangements.

In closing, I again extend my appreciation to everyone who was involved. There are wonderful stories of people who turned up to make a cup of tea, people who assisted with sandwiches and people who dropped in to see neighbours and make sure that they were okay. They all made worthy contributions during a horrific summer. I pass on my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives. Those people are heroes. I extend my appreciation to everyone who was involved over the summer. We have a lot of lessons to learn, we have a lot of work to do and we should heed those lessons.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** Order! According to sessional order, proceedings are now interrupted for questions.

*Questions Without Notice*

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION**

**The Hon. ADAM SEARLE (11:59:54):** My question is directed to the Leader of the Government, the Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts. What was the Minister's personal involvement in the selection of the new Chief Commissioner of the Industrial Relations Commission, Nichola Constant, appointed last week, and did the Minister make any disclosures to the Cabinet when the appointment was under consideration?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:00:23):** In relation to the second part of the question—yes, I did. In relation to the first part, I offer the following: The Industrial Relations Commission resolves industrial disputes and settles employment conditions and remuneration for employees, primarily in the New South Wales public sector and local government. Appointment of the Chief Commissioner is made by the Governor under the Industrial Relations Act on the recommendation of the Minister, following approval by Cabinet.

In October 2019 a national expression of interest [EOI] was called for suitably qualified and interested candidates for the position of Chief Commissioner. This followed the retirement of former Chief Commissioner Peter Kite, SC, who reached the statutory age of retirement in late 2019. An executive recruitment firm was engaged to assist with the expression of interest process and to identify suitable candidates. Following the conclusion of the EOI process, a number of suitably qualified candidates were identified for interview. This was a competitive recruitment and a merit-based process.

Nichola Constant was the successful candidate. She is the first woman to be permanently appointed as head of the Industrial Relations Commission. I am delighted that she has been appointed and I have no doubt that she will perform the role with distinction. Ms Constant has nearly 20 years of experience in the field of workplace relations in both the private and public sector, including as Director of the Employment Law and Industrial Relations Practice Group in the New South Wales Crown Solicitor's Office. Ms Constant was then appointed to the commission in 2018. I am disappointed that there has been some criticism levelled at Ms Constant by those opposite. In my view, the comments by the Leader of the Opposition were both unwarranted and graceless.

**The Hon. ADAM SEARLE (12:02:37):** I ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister elucidate that part of his answer where he confirmed that he made a disclosure when the appointment was under consideration and inform the House what that disclosure was?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:02:53):** From recollection, my disclosure was that I knew her husband.

#### HYDE PARK BARRACKS

**The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD (12:03:30):** My question is addressed to the arts Minister. Will the Minister update the House on the renewal of the UNESCO World Heritage listed Hyde Park Barracks museum?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:03:42):** I was thrilled to reopen the Hyde Park Barracks to the public on 21 February after a 12 month closure for a landmark renewal project. Years in the making, this bold new reinterpretation of the site is the first major upgrade since Hyde Park Barracks opened as a "museum of itself" in 1991. The renewed Hyde Park Barracks brings to life the convict origins of colonial Australia and its impact on Aboriginal nations, free immigration and the beginnings of institutional care. From the one in five Australians believed to have a convict ancestor to the stories of Aboriginal resilience and free immigration, Hyde Park Barracks connects all of us to the story of Australia's modern beginnings.

Importantly, Sydney Living Museums partnered with Aboriginal people from Sydney, Bathurst, Tingha and Inverell to ensure that their stories were told in the words and the spirit in which those communities wanted to present them. Led by groundbreaking audio technology and accompanied by immersive activations, the seamless integration of tradition and technology brings our complex history and stories to life. The renewal included the addition of a passenger lift as well as improved accessibility for vision-impaired and limited-mobility visitors. A new dedicated learning space was created to accommodate more than 30,000 students annually. The new experience features access to 4,000 items from the internationally renowned Hyde Park Barracks archaeological collection, allowing visitors to get up close and personal to items worn, touched and treasured by past residents.

Sydney Living Museums, in partnership with the City of Sydney's Art & About program, commissioned a site-specific artwork by Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones named *untitled (maraong manaóuwi)*. My apologies if I have massacred the Wiradjuri language; I probably have. The work explores two remarkably similar symbols: the Aboriginal emu footprint seen etched in sandstone around Sydney and the English broad arrow insignia embedded into many aspects of convict life. I congratulate the staff of the Sydney Living Museums, in partnership with the State Archives and Records Authority and the City of Sydney, on delivering this important project for the generations to come. I encourage all honourable members to head straight down Macquarie Street and have a look. They will really be impressed, I am sure.

[*Business interrupted.*]

*Visitors*

#### VISITORS

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I welcome to the gallery year 11 students from Bomaderry High School, who are visiting the Parliament today for a legal studies workshop conducted by staff from Parliamentary Education and the Legislative Assembly committees. We are in the midst of question time and you will see us at both our best and our worst.

*Questions Without Notice*

#### ULTIMO TRAMWAYS POWER HOUSE

[*Business resumed.*]

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (12:07:10):** My question is directed to the Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Leader of the Government. How does the Minister reconcile issuing a notice of intention this morning to place the Ultimo Tramways Power House on the State Heritage Register while he will allow Willow Grove at Parramatta to be demolished?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:07:34):** What has happened is that a nomination for the Ultimo tramways museum has come in. The Heritage Council has considered it and decided to have a look at it. I think that is a very good thing too. I have always said that the Ultimo Power Station—or the tramways power station, as I think it was originally called—is an important building that should be retained. I am very pleased that it has been placed into assessment for possible State heritage listing. What started this morning is the 28-day period so that if people have a view on whether it should be listed, they

have a chance to provide those views to the Heritage Council before the council makes its recommendation to me as to whether it should be saved—sorry, I meant listed, not saved. I have always intended saving it.

The fact is that it has never been nominated before, completely unlike Willow Grove, which I think has been previously advanced for assessment and rejected as not being worthy of State heritage listing. I understand equally that St George's Terrace has never been listed either. That was the advice that I have received. In fact, what has happened in relation to all of the buildings mentioned in the honourable member's question is that the statutory processes of the Heritage Act have been applied in a proper way and have, in the case of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace—long before my time as heritage Minister—not been listed. Now, with the issue of Ultimo tramways, Powerhouse is being considered, and that is a good thing.

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (12:09:48):** I ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister elucidate his answer in relation to who put forward the original nomination for consideration by the Heritage Council for this listing?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:10:04):** I will take that on notice.

### ENERGY POLICY

**The Hon. ROD ROBERTS (12:10:12):** My question is directed to the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, the Hon. Don Harwin. Does the Minister agree with Deputy Premier John Barilaro's statement on Sky News on 13 February about the energy and environment Minister's climate policy? The Deputy Premier said:

He talks about net-zero emission targets by 2050, yet that would mean the end of agriculture ... What does that do to regional and rural communities? That is the end of mining.

Why is this Government, in the words of its own Deputy Premier, trying to destroy agriculture and mining in New South Wales?

**The Hon. Don Harwin:** Point of order: The member's question raises important issues but I am afraid it is asking for an opinion from me—"do you agree?"—and is not asking for information.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** Standing Order 65 states:

- (2) Questions must not ask:
  - (a) for an expression of opinion,

The question is out of order.

**The Hon. Mark Latham:** To the point of order: I ask the Acting President to give the honourable member a chance to rephrase the question. I do not agree that asking the Minister if he agrees with one of his colleagues is asking for an opinion; it is a question of government policy. Does he agree with the statement made by the Deputy Premier regarding wiping out agriculture and mining in New South Wales? You could basically say that everything is an opinion in this place. Ministers need to be accountable for policy statements. Does this Minister, who is leading for the Government in this House, agree with the Deputy Premier? It is not a matter of opinion; it is a matter of government policy and intent.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I thank the member. The question is out of order.

### BUSHFIRES AND PRESCHOOLS

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX (12:12:32):** My question is addressed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning. Will the Minister please outline to the House what the New South Wales Government is doing to support preschools that have been affected by the bushfires?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:12:54):** I thank the member for his question. As we have spoken about in this House yesterday and today, this summer has been particularly tough for many communities across the State. The whole of the New South Wales Government is working hard to support those communities. I begin by thanking the early childhood centres across New South Wales in the bushfire-affected areas, which took heed of warnings from both the department and the Rural Fire Service to close their doors when it became dangerous. Over the summer bushfire period 580 services reported temporary closures or changes in hours to the department.

In January I had the opportunity to travel down south and meet with the directors of Cobargo, Bermagui and Little Yuin preschools at Cobargo Preschool. I appreciated that time with them. They took that opportunity to express to me how crucial their preschools were to their communities at this time. They provide a safe space

for families to come together and focus on the rebuild effort, while also being assured their children are educated and cared for. For relatively small preschools, the impact of the fires on local families was horrific. Large numbers of the kids who are attending these services were unfortunately among the many who lost their homes.

I also acknowledge that many services have suffered both direct and indirect impacts from the fires, and their families are under a great deal of pressure financially. That is why I am happy to inform the House that more than 200 community preschools and mobile preschools in bushfire-impacted areas will benefit from a one-off payment of \$10,000 to help with the recovery from this summer's devastating fires. Those payments were all finalised at the end of last week and were paid to eligible services automatically. No application was required; we wanted to make it as simple as possible to get that money flowing. It is hoped that those payments will help relieve some of the pressure and allow services to provide fee relief and additional support for their preschool communities. The payments can be used for a range of activities, including fee relief for families, staff wages, counselling support, rectifying fire damage and fire preparedness should they find themselves in a situation such as this one again.

These payments are in addition to existing Start Strong funding that will be maintained at existing levels through the first half of the year, including where a service has been impacted by the bushfires and is required to temporarily close. All early childhood education and care services will also have the opportunity to access a series of emergency preparedness workshops being rolled out across the State in the first half of 2020. I make the point that all types of education and care services are fundamental to the communities they serve and play a critical role in the recovery process. Commonwealth-funded services that are eligible for the Child Care Subsidy, such as long day care, family day care, occasional care and out-of-school-hours care, can apply for grants through the Community Child Care Fund, and families suffering financial hardship can access fee relief through the Additional Child Care Subsidy from the Federal Government. It is important that services and families know that this support is available. If they need help they should ask for it because they will be part of the recovery process to help families return to normal.

#### **BUSHFIRES AND WILDLIFE**

**The Hon. EMMA HURST (12:16:08):** My question is directed to the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, representing the Minister for Energy and Environment. Many native animals that escaped the bushfires are now suffering from severe starvation or dehydration, which are made worse by the ongoing drought. Other than the single round of aerial food drops conducted by the Government in the second week of January, has the Government undertaken any further aerial food drops to deliver food and water for starving animals?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:16:37):** That is a question that I am sure is of interest to many members of this place. I am happy to ask the Minister for Energy and Environment for that information as quickly as he can provide it.

#### **WILLOW GROVE HERITAGE BUILDING**

**The Hon. WALT SECORD (12:17:00):** My question is directed to Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council. Given that Willow Grove is heading for demolition, what will happen to and what is the status of the \$60 million budgeted from the sale of development rights for a commercial and residential tower, as revealed and reported by the Parliamentary Budget Office before the March 2019 State election?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:17:33):** The project has been looked at carefully and it was decided to not proceed with the tower that the honourable member mentioned. From the best of my recollection—although I will check this—there was also another cost that did not need to be incurred to facilitate that. Effectively, it is budget neutral. But just to be fair to the honourable member—that is the best of my recollection—I will take it on notice. If there is any other information that I can provide I will. In fact, I have just been handed some more information.

The business case explored options that included having one or two towers on the site to provide the Government with funding options. As part of the assurance processes, a single tower was determined. The requirement for a residential tower has now been removed. The decision made by Government provides the best museum outcome for western Sydney, utilising the entire riverbank site in the creation of the new Powerhouse in Parramatta to include the new museum, education and research facilities, open space and integration into the public domain. The decision has no impact on the budget previously committed for the project.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD (12:19:37):** I ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister elucidate his answer in regard to the single tower he mentioned? Has the Government conducted flood evaluation works involving that single tower?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:19:48):** In terms of the single tower, I will get some more information. But the member can rest assured that hydrological studies have been done all the way through this process. It is a requirement in central Parramatta that buildings are built above the one-in-100-year flood line. To anticipate a possible further line of questioning, while we know the site is affected by flood events from the Parramatta River, it is also affected by overland flow paths as well. The new concept design takes full consideration of the New South Wales Floodplain Development Manual and relevant City of Parramatta Council requirements, as do other developments in the vicinity.

The proposed museum ground floor level will be raised above the site's existing ground levels on the Phillip Street side so that it is protected from the one-in-100-year flood level. Images from the recent rainfalls show water levels well below the ground level of the proposed museum concept design. Observations from the project flood engineer confirm this. Additional exhibition levels, I might add, are even higher again. A flood impact assessment will be prepared and submitted with the State significant development application. This will identify the impact of the proposed development on flooding and stormwater flows and identify any necessary design and management measures required to mitigate potential impacts. No works are proposed to the watercourse or the existing river edge.

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (12:22:02):** I ask a second supplementary question in relation to the \$60 million that was part of the New South Wales budget coming to the Government for the sale of the airspace, et cetera, over Willow Grove. Will the Minister elucidate whether the funding may not have been in the total budget figure but actually has impacted on the New South Wales budget bottom line?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:22:30):** It absolutely has not impacted on the net cost to taxpayers, which is \$645 million.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** That's not the question.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** I should not respond to interjections. The honourable member indicated that that was not her question. Given that, I am happy to take it on notice and provide a response on that and any other aspect of the two preceding questions that we might be able to provide.

## REGIONAL YOUTH

**The Hon. TAYLOR MARTIN (12:23:08):** My question is addressed to the Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women. How is the New South Wales Government delivering on its election commitments for young people in regional New South Wales?

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR (Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women) (12:23:27):** I thank the honourable member for his really fantastic question, which it gives me great delight to answer. A key election commitment for this Government was to establish a Regional Youth portfolio. As part of that we wanted to establish an Office for Regional Youth, which we have done. We wanted to establish a Regional Youth Taskforce, which we have also done. We wanted to dedicate at least 50 per cent of round three of the Stronger Country Communities Fund to regional youth projects, and guess what—that is done too. We have delivered that and we have delivered a lot more. I am very pleased to inform the House that we have gone above and beyond our Stronger Country Communities Fund election commitment. So far we have allocated more than \$53 million towards youth projects, all of which fall under the key pillars of our Regional Youth Framework.

We have more than 30 projects that will focus on upskilling and preparing young people for jobs of the future. We have more than 90 projects that will connect young people with cultural and recreational opportunities. We have a number of projects that will connect young people physically and digitally to the services they need. As the Minister for both mental health and regional youth, I am so pleased to say that we have close to 150 projects that look at the wellbeing of youth and young people. These projects will transform the lives of young people in the regions. Last week I had the pleasure of joining my colleague from the other place Mr Kevin Anderson in his hometown of Tamworth—also the Acting President's hometown—to announce the first of hundreds of youth projects, including \$369,000 to establish a youth training cafe at the local skate park.

*[An Opposition member interjected.]*

You might be interested to listen to this answer. When completed the cafe will be a social enterprise, allowing young people to learn about commercial cooking and customer service—valuable hospitality skills and

experiences for them to get a job or begin a career. The revenue earned from the cafe will be spent on training more young people. Our Regional Youth Taskforce member Ryan said, "This program is going to be a milestone ... to help those young people upskill and get into employment services that they otherwise might not be able to get a start ... I think it's fantastic". I met a young lady there who had not had a job or been able to access any type of employment until doing this program. She now has a job and she is transforming her life. It is one of hundreds of projects that I am proud to say will help to make our communities more vibrant and transform the lives of thousands of young people in regional New South Wales—all possible thanks to this Government prioritising regional young people. We received over 600 applications for youth-focused projects— [*Time expired.*]

#### CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AND EVALUATION

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK (12:26:39):** My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell. In light of the Premier's most recent comment to the media about finding the secret ingredient to education and given that the secret ingredient has already been researched by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, will the Government now commit to funding the implementation of the 2015 research paper titled *What works best: Evidence-based practice to help improve NSW student performance?*

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:27:10):** I thank the member for his question, and I thank him for asking a question about the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE] and the work that it does. It is an excellent body here in New South Wales that provides very good advice. I know the paper that the member referred to and it is a good one. The centre does an amazing job, particularly to provide advice to us as a Government and to the Department of Education about what we could be doing to improve student performance.

**The Hon. Greg Donnelly:** Listen to it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, we do listen to it. We listen to what CESE says. As I say, it provides excellent advice and it certainly is a part of the department that I value. It is very clear—I made these comments in the House yesterday—that we need to do more to improve student outcomes. We are upfront about that. We know it is important and we know we need to have evidence-based practice. In his question, the member referred to comments from the Premier about making sure that we are relying on evidence-based practice when it comes to what we are implementing in our schools.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** Order! The Hon. Penny Sharpe is not a carnival barker. She will let the Minister answer the question.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** As I was saying, effective teaching underpins student growth, engagement and achievement. We are focused on ensuring that our teachers understand and implement the most effective evidence-based teaching practices. CESE is a great evaluation body that exists to provide a central point of evidence for educators in New South Wales. It has developed resources for principals, teachers and policymakers across a range of evidence-based practices. Resources include guidance for principals and teachers in implementing evidence-based practices in schools.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** The Minister will resume her seat. I call the Hon. John Graham to order for the first time. I call the Hon. Daniel Mookhey to order for the first time. I have made the position quite plain to the Hon. Penny Sharpe. It seems to me there is a tactic: When I stand on one of the members at the table, the Hon. John Graham and the Hon. Daniel Mookhey act as substitutes. Those members will cease interjecting. If this tactic moves to involve other members, they also will be called to order. The Minister has the call.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The *What works best* research synthesis paper and practice reflection guide that the member referenced in his question helps educators to interpret the evidence on effective practice, including effect sizes, and apply it in their classroom teaching. As with other professions, the evidence base of what is effective in classroom teaching continues to evolve with new research. There will always be a need for teachers to use their professional judgement in identifying, applying and reflecting on the use of evidence to help them meet the learning needs of their students.

Professional learning that we deliver via the department to teachers in New South Wales public schools is quality assured to ensure that it is informed by the most effective practices to drive student learning, including those that are outlined in the *What works best* research. Additionally, the School Services directorate provides strategic support to schools for improving teaching practice. Again, that is closely based on evidence and tailored to the needs of the school. As a department, we are continuing to improve our school excellence framework and *What works best*, which is used in professional learning and support services, so that we can provide teachers with

clearer direction and guidelines for best practice. This is something that I care about and I am passionate about. It would be nice if members opposite shared that passion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I call the Hon. Rose Jackson to order for the first time. I call the Hon. John Graham to order for the second time. I call the Hon. Walt Secord to order for the first time. I urge members to use a modicum of restraint.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK (12:31:21):** I ask a supplementary question. The Minister in her response spoke about moving on from research and adopting new research findings in education in terms of *What works best* or evidence-based practice. Will the Minister please elucidate as to what research from CESE has surpassed the 2015 research paper and has been funded and implemented in New South Wales schools?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:31:57):** I made the point in my answer that we rely heavily on the evidence that we get from CESE. It is the central point of evidence for educators in New South Wales. As I said, as in any profession, the evidence base of effective classroom teaching evolves with new research. That is the point of doing research into evidence and practice. CESE does a lot of research, and as a former teacher the member would know that. I am sure the Hon. Mark Latham would also be very well across the work that CESE is doing. If the member wants specific examples of the work that CESE has been doing, I am happy to come back and provide the member with more information about the research that has been done and the way it has been implemented in our classrooms.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM (12:32:40):** I ask a second supplementary question. Will the Minister elaborate on her statement about quality assurance in the education system? What are the quality assurance methods used in schools and how does she explain the fact that of all the teaching methods outlined in the CESE document *What works best* very few of them are actually mentioned in school annual reports and school plans detailing their teaching methods?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:33:06):** I thank the member for his second supplementary question, particularly in relation to our quality assurance in terms of effective practice to drive student learning. In my earlier answer I referenced the School Excellence Framework but I did not go into much detail about it. Effectively the framework is about supporting all our New South Wales public schools to make sure they have pursuit of excellence and a key description of the key elements of high-quality practice across the three domains of learning, teaching and leading. Each element of that School Excellence Framework is underpinned by a very rigorous evidence base. We require schools to self-assess their practice against the descriptors for these elements, including effective classroom practice, which covers explicit teaching, student feedback and classroom management. School self-assessments are then externally validated.

The framework supports all schools to plan for and monitor ongoing improvement in evidence-based teaching practice. This is something that we take very seriously. As I said, I know it is an area that the member who asked the supplementary question is particularly interested in. I also know that these are matters he has raised in the report his committee recently handed down, particularly in relation to school plans and the manner of interaction. His committee has made recommendations in that regard which, as I said yesterday, the Government will be considering in due course.

## RURAL AND REGIONAL EDUCATION

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH (12:34:32):** My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning. What is the Minister doing to address comments from the Secretary of the Department of Education, Mark Scott, that he was told by the OECD that the New South Wales Government was not doing enough to tackle educational disadvantage in rural and regional areas?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:34:55):** I thank the Hon. Mick Veitch for his question about rural and regional education. As one of the only members on the opposite side of the Chamber who lives in a regional area, I know it is a question in which he has a particular interest. I know of the comments that he is referring to. I was at a school summit last week, organised by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, where there was a conversation about what we can do to see improvements in student outcomes. A comment was made about rural and regional education and the fact that there is still a disparity. The member is right to refer in his question to advice from the OECD about what we need to be doing to improve outcomes for our rural and regional kids.

This is a topic that is very close to my heart as education Minister but equally as a very proud person who lives and works in regional New South Wales. The State is seeing increased funding and more opportunities but unfortunately we still see a disparity between our rural and regional kids and our metro kids. I spoke about it at the summit, at which the Hon. Anthony D'Adam was present. Although it was a comment made in jest, I said,

"This is what keeps me up at night." But it does. It is not acceptable to me that we still are not reaching levels where rural and regional kids are on par with their city counterparts.

There are a range of things we need to do to improve. As I said, we are seeing increased funding. Our resource allocation model goes towards rectifying some of the issues in education by way of additional loading. We know that funding is a major part of the situation. However, we also need to look at the teachers we are sending to spend time in regional communities. We need to look at the professional development that teachers in rural areas can access. We need to look at how our schools are able to network so that they can support each other. We need to look at the resources in our regional schools. We need to look at what we are doing to attract the best and brightest. I accept that there are issues with regional incentives. Again, I spoke very openly about it at the forum.

Particularly for me, this is the year where we need to look at what we can do to close the gap that still exists. We saw it yesterday with the finalised NAPLAN results. I speak about NAPLAN a lot but we received the final results in March for a test that the kids sat back in May. The lag of that data is not particularly helpful. However, we are still seeing disparity between the regions and the metropolitan areas. There are a range of things we want to work on and that I personally want to drive because it is the right thing to do. If we can lift the results of our rural and regional kids, we will see better results across the system overall.

I have spoken many times in the House about the Bump It Up rollout. We are looking at literacy, numeracy, attendance and wellbeing, but we are also looking at an equity slice. We are looking at results of kids with similar backgrounds who attend similar schools in the regions versus in the city. This important data will be used to ensure we are targeting resources where they need to be targeted. We are doing everything we can to ensure that country kids are not left behind.

**The Hon. MICK VEITCH (12:38:04):** I ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister elucidate that part of her answer where she spoke about the best and brightest? Does that include looking at the Victorian model for supporting and incentivising teachers?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:38:20):** Before I answer the member's supplementary question, I make the point that we have great teachers in our rural and regional schools and we have fantastic schools. I do not in any way want my comments to indicate that there are not great opportunities out in the bush, because there are, and we have wonderful people working out there. However, in education, which is not unlike other government service areas, there are difficulties in getting professionals to the bush. It is not a new issue. It is not an issue that is new to our Government and it is not an issue that is new to education.

As I said in my answer, we need to look at how incentivisation works and whether conditions around incentivisation need to change in order to ensure that people want to go to regional areas. I do think that in some cases money may be part of the solution. I know that is the path that Victoria has gone down. I have spoken to the Victorian education Minister, James Merlino, about that and I am interested to see how it works down there. Late last year I was in Narrabri meeting with local community members. Narrabri High School is having trouble attracting an agriculture teacher. Agriculture is the heart of the Narrabri community. They have offered extra incentives and additional pay but it is still difficult.

As far as I am aware—it may have changed recently—that position is still vacant. It is not always money; sometimes we have to look at professional development opportunities, career paths and support for their families and loved ones who may want to accompany them. There are a range of issues that need to be addressed. It is not simple and it is not easy but we have to do it. For me personally, as someone who lives and works in the bush, I see it every day and I will make it a priority this year.

#### **BUSHFIRE RECOVERY ASSISTANCE**

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY (12:40:12):** My question is addressed to the Minister for Finance and Small Business. How has the strong economic position of the Government helped it to respond to the challenge of the recent bushfires and what is the Government doing to fund recovery?

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** How is the economic position now with that budget blowout?

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Minister for Finance and Small Business) (12:40:41):** I would love to respond to that interjection.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** Go on. You know you want to.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE:** Paraphrasing the question and answering the interjection—which I should not do—isn't it lucky we have a Coalition Government? That is the complete answer. The complete answer is that they are lucky to have a Coalition Government.

**The Hon. Courtney Houssos:** Our schools are failing after nine years of your Government.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE:** It was better than the 16 years of yours.

**The Hon. Courtney Houssos:** We were leading the world.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE:** Let's be calm about this.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I have plenty more calls to order available in my back pocket. I encourage the Hon. Courtney Houssos to restrain herself. The Minister should not respond to interjections nor should he encourage them.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE:** I should not be goaded by them. Everyone in this Chamber and across New South Wales would agree that the faster we get this process underway and have communities on the path to recovery the better it is for those communities. What is the Government actually doing and what money has been dedicated to the recovery process in New South Wales? Let me outline it. There is a \$1 billion package to rebuild bushfire-impacted communities, focussing on vital infrastructure such as roads, rail lines, bridges, schools—the education Minister has indicated—health facilities and communications facilities.

The New South Wales and Commonwealth governments have together announced relief and recovery initiatives totalling more than \$1.5 million to support individuals, small businesses, primary producers and communities to recover from the impacts of the bushfires. These relief and recovery initiatives include a clean-up program, grants of up to \$75,000 for primary producers and \$50,000 for small businesses and concessional loans of up to \$500,000 for businesses, farmers, primary producers and non-profit organisations.

I am pleased to say that the clean-up is underway. Last week the bulldozers and excavators arrived in Mogo on the South Coast to kick off these important works. Economic recovery and community resilience grants totalling \$36.3 million are available to provide targeted grants to community groups, local governments, industry groups and incorporated organisations for locally led recovery and resilience building activities. Councils can apply for up to \$250,000 each for local activities to kickstart social and economic recovery, including events or initiatives designed to support local business recovery. We will also cover council rates for the third and fourth quarters of this financial year for properties destroyed. If I had not been rudely interrupted earlier I would be able to complete my answer on the initiatives.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I am glad the Minister did not seek leave for an extension.

#### **BUSHFIRES AND TAFE NSW**

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE (12:43:53):** My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, representing the Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education. Will the Minister ensure the House that no TAFE courses in any fire-affected regions of New South Wales will be cancelled or postponed because of low enrolment numbers, given the enormous difficulties many students are facing in attending TAFE and paying the fees this season?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:44:28):** I thank Mr David Shoebridge for his question. It is a good one and I will seek advice from the Minister responsible to obtain clarity around the issues he has raised, particularly as he has acknowledged that the fires have severely impacted many communities. During the bushfire season there were periods when TAFEs were closed, so it is a very real issue that he is raising. I do not have the information with me but I will take the question on notice and come back to him as soon as I can.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE (12:44:57):** I ask a supplementary question. In taking the question on notice, could the Minister be asked if the arrangements that he has made for the South Coast, particularly for the Bega and Moruya TAFEs, will be extended across the rest of the State to ensure that courses proceed regardless of low enrolment numbers?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:45:16):** I thank Mr David Shoebridge for asking me a question he already knew the answer to. I appreciate that.

**Mr David Shoebridge:** I only know of two TAFEs, that is all.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will take the second question on notice as well.

**Mr David Shoebridge:** It was a heads up too.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I appreciate it.

#### **RURAL AND REGIONAL SPECIALIST TEACHERS**

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS (12:45:36):** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning. Given the concerns that we do not have the data on the number of specialist maths teachers in rural and regional areas, will the Minister conduct an audit to see where the specialist teacher shortages are and commit to rectifying the gap?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:46:01):** I thank the honourable member for her question and again the opportunity to talk about regional education, particularly the issue of the shortage of maths teachers. The honourable member raises a very real issue. It is something we see in the regions but the principals I meet with in city schools also indicate that it is a domain where they have difficulty attracting staff—as well as Technological and Applied Studies, which surprised me a little. These things ebb and flow. As I said in my answer to a question asked of me earlier by the Hon. Mick Veitch, we need to look at how we attract regional teachers, incentivisations and where the gaps are, and that includes issues around maths teachers.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS (12:46:43):** I ask a supplementary question. I seek an elucidation from the Minister to further outline whether, as part of the measures to ascertain shortages, the Minister will commit to conducting an audit of shortages.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** That is not a supplementary question. It is a repeat of the original question. The Minister did not answer that part of the question but the member cannot then rectify the non-answer—if that is what it is—by repeating the same question.

#### **KINCHELA BOYS HOME ABORIGINAL CORPORATION MOBILE EDUCATION CENTRE**

**The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD (12:47:31):** My question is addressed to the Aboriginal affairs Minister. Will the Minister update the House on the launch of the Kinchela Boys Home mobile education centre?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (12:47:53):** This year, 13 February marked the twelfth anniversary of the Australian Parliament's apology to the Stolen Generations for the forcible removal of children under past government policies and practices of assimilation. On that anniversary I had the honour of joining a number of Stolen Generation survivors at the launch of the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation Mobile Education Centre. For those members who may be unaware, between 1924 and 1970 the Kinchela Boys Home, situated just outside of Kempsey, housed Aboriginal boys who were forcibly removed from their families by the New South Wales Government under past policies of assimilation. I have seen the home and I can believe it was an extremely harsh and cruel place. The survivors still recite the numbers they were given, like prisoners, as they were never referred to by their names. This is not fiction or a myth; it happened.

The Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation supports programs that address the legacy of physical, sexual, psychological and cultural abuse experienced by survivors and intergenerational trauma experienced by descendants. The Mobile Education Centre, which was developed from a retired commuter bus, houses an exhibition that tells the story of the more than 400 boys who were placed at the Kinchela Boys Home. The centre, designed by survivors to support truth-telling, is the first of its kind. Its aim is to ensure that the experiences of Stolen Generation survivors are never forgotten and never repeated.

The centre will draw on oral testimony, archival material, visual images and timelines to share their history. The back half of the bus has been converted into a cinema that will show a short film produced by some of the survivors. The Mobile Education Centre will travel across New South Wales visiting schools and communities to expand the understanding of the Stolen Generations. I am proud that the New South Wales Government was able to provide a financial contribution of over \$250,000 to support the fit-out and development of the centre. I am very proud of the work that is being done by the Government by continuing its close work with survivors on policies and programs led by my Stolen Generations Advisory Committee.

#### **GREYHOUND WELFARE AND INTEGRITY COMMISSION**

**The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK (12:50:49):** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Finance and Small Business, representing the Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation. Is the Minister aware that the head of the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission [GWIC] Legal, Mr Matthew Tutt, is now being rostered to attend greyhound race meetings as a steward? Is the Minister also aware that Matthew Tutt's role as

head of GWIC Legal is to look into all legal and regulatory matters and that this is in conflict with what his job description entails? Does GWIC require a full-time head of its legal section, given it appears that Mr Tutt has insufficient work to keep him occupied in his current role if he is being rostered on as a steward at race meetings, pretending to be something that he is not?

**The Hon. Walt Secord:** Whoa! Now that's a question.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** Take it on notice.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Minister for Finance and Small Business) (12:51:59):** Will I take it on notice?

**The Hon. Walt Secord:** No, take a swing at it.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE:** Take a swing? Mr Acting President, do you see what happens?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I do see what happens: The Minister invites comments.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE:** I did not ask for that response, by the way. Clearly I am not aware of the role that Mr Tutt is playing in relation to his being a steward. He might do it in his free time. I have no idea but I think it is appropriate—

**The Hon. Walt Secord:** Speculate.

**The Hon. DAMIEN TUDEHOPE:** I will not speculate. I think it is appropriate in the circumstances that I seek advice and come back to the member. I will take the question on notice.

#### SCHOOL STUDENT ASSESSMENT RESULTS

**The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM (12:52:33):** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning. Given that more than 20 per cent of New South Wales students are now classified as low performers in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] literacy tests and that New South Wales students are now a full year behind students in the Australian Capital Territory after nine years, what is the root cause of this deteriorating performance? Why is this happening?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:53:16):** I thank the Hon. John Graham for his question in relation to the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] results. Looking at the decline shown in the PISA results, it is important to state the platform on which PISA tests. PISA is a sample of randomised tests of 15-year-olds across the country and, in fact, across the world. It is looking not at a particular content base or a particular curriculum but at a 15-year-old's ability to apply knowledge. Each year PISA examines different domains.

The Hon. John Graham is saying that there were issues with the New South Wales results this year and that there was a drop. That is true. Other States also saw drops. I preface my comments by saying that this is not an issue faced just by New South Wales. All States around the country are paying attention to this issue. Education Ministers met in Alice Springs in December, after these results were released.

**The Hon. John Graham:** But it is worse here.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We talked about a range of issues. Other States had concerns about their results as well, so it is a national problem, which we are addressing. We made recommendations and put forward movements at that meeting of education Ministers to look at streamlining the curriculum reviews and focusing on maths and science because they are areas in which there have been drops. That was agreed to.

**The Hon. John Graham:** Yes, but why is it happening?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am getting to that. That was agreed to by all Ministers sitting at that table. It was a very thorough and good conversation. In fact, I would almost say it is probably the best education council meeting I have been part of since I have been attending these meetings. The Hon. John Graham asked about the root cause behind these issues. We ask that question when we see the PISA and NAPLAN results. One of the interesting results from PISA was that not only were there concerns about the lower performing students but also over time our higher performing students had dropped back as well.

**The Hon. Walt Secord:** Yes, that is right.

**The Hon. John Graham:** Worse. What is the root cause?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I assure you I will get to that. I am being honest with you. We analyse the data and we take it seriously. We also need to consider other jurisdictions against which New South Wales is

measured in a testing regime like PISA. We look at their systems. Have we dropped behind? Have they moved ahead? Have they moved ahead further than we have and we are now stagnant? We have to analyse that data properly so that we know what we are dealing with. The short answer is that there are a range of issues behind this.

There is no one silver bullet. There is no one issue we can point to and say, "This is why we are not getting the results we want in PISA or NAPLAN." We can look at HSC data and how students are going in that area. We can look at how students perform in the year 1 phonics test that will be introduced this year. We need to look at a range of measures in terms of the data and what the different data are telling us. As I said at the beginning, PISA measures the application of knowledge—how students apply what they are learning. Our curriculum review will be carried out by Professor Masters. [*Time expired.*]

**The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM (12:56:21):** I ask a supplementary question. I invite the Minister to elucidate on that part of her answer where she said that she would get to providing an answer as to why this is happening. She has spoken extensively about the data and how New South Wales is performing. I am yet to hear her describe the cause of the terrible results.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:56:45):** I ran out of time but I am happy to have that extension, afforded by the supplementary question, to answer. As I was saying, effectively PISA measures the application of knowledge. It is looking at how students can apply what they have learnt. Obviously a range of curriculums from around the world are being tested, so it makes sense. Professor Masters, in his interim report of the review, identified ways in which we could better improve our teaching system so that our education curriculum is not just the fundamental knowledge that our kids need to learn but also how they apply that knowledge. We have spoken about this in the House before. One example the professor raised in his work is to look at project-based learning for senior year students and how students can apply the knowledge they are learning.

**The Hon. John Graham:** Is that the problem?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They are the type of measures we need to be looking at.

**The Hon. John Graham:** I am not asking about methods. What is the problem?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The Hon. John Graham has asked what the problem is. If there is a problem, you have to have a solution.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** What is the problem?

**The Hon. Adam Searle:** No, what is the solution?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am telling you that PISA identifies issues with the application of knowledge. The review by Professor Masters talks about looking at what we are doing in our schools and in our classrooms to make sure that students can apply what they are learning.

**The Hon. John Graham:** To fix what problem?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We also need to look at issues around the core knowledge bases in science, maths and other areas that PISA tests. As I said, we talked about changes to the curriculum at a national level and we are doing our work for the curriculum review. We are decluttering the curriculum.

**The Hon. John Graham:** Is that the problem?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** As I said to the Hon. John Graham in my earlier answer, there is no silver bullet. There is no single problem. There are a range of factors that need to be considered. We need to analyse the data. PISA is part of that discussion, as are NAPLAN, the HSC results and phonics. We cannot be led by just one measure. We need to look at what is happening across all of our schools. We need to support our teachers to be able to do their job. We need to make sure that teachers can spend quality time in the classroom doing what they do best, that is, standing up in front of the kids and teaching them rather than spending time on red tape. We are looking at measures around that. Everything we are doing is about improving educational outcomes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD (12:58:50):** I ask a second supplementary question. Would the Minister elucidate in regard to that part of her answer where she said that the Government will be introducing year 1 phonics tests? What style of phonics testing will occur? Will it be individual letters or groups of letters? How and where will that program be rolled out?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (12:59:15):** I am very happy to answer that question. In the budget last year we announced that we would be rolling this out.

We are modelling it largely on what they have done in South Australia quite effectively. They started that, I think, a couple of years ago and I have been able to speak to their education Minister, John Gardner, about it. It will be opt-in this year. It will be open for schools to apply in a couple of weeks, if my recollection is correct, during term one for the test to take place in term four. My understanding is that it is quite a simple test. It is a five- to seven-minute one-on-one interaction with the teacher to give us an understanding of how that child is progressing in respect of their phonics, based on what they have been doing in South Australia.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** The time for questions has expired. If members have further questions I suggest they place them on notice.

#### **ULTIMO TRAMWAYS POWER HOUSE**

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (13:00:25):** With respect to a supplementary question, I think, asked by the Hon. Penny Sharpe about the nomination of the Ultimo Tramways Museum for a State heritage listing, the answer is that the nomination was brought forward by the National Trust.

#### **BUSHFIRES AND WILDLIFE**

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (13:00:50):** In relation to a question that the Hon. Emma Hurst asked concerning food drops to animals, I am advised that this summer's fires have burned around 2.7 million hectares of the New South Wales National Park estate. Some estimates of the number of animals killed in fires across Australia exceed a billion. To support the natural recovery process and ensure the protection of native wildlife, in January 2020 the New South Wales Government released the Wildlife and Conservation Bushfire Recovery immediate response, which sets out the impacts from the fires and key actions to support recovery of wildlife and conserve native vegetation. As the member has noted, these actions have included food drops to support native animals such as the brush-tailed rock wallaby.

I am advised that almost 12 tonnes of supplementary food, such as carrots and sweet potato, through more than 85 food drops, have been delivered to sites across the State between 22 January and 14 February 2020. This food was donated by Woolworths and Foodbank. Sites include the Capertee and Wolgan valleys, Yengo National Park, Jenolan reserves, Curracabundi National Park north of Gloucester, Watagans National Park inland from Lake Macquarie, and Glen Innes, Oxley and Guy Fawkes national parks. A dozen brush-tailed rock wallaby colonies, as well as possums, birds and a range of macropods have been enjoying the food dropped. This food has been delivered by air but also by National Parks and Wildlife staff and volunteers on foot.

Other recovery efforts include feral animal control, the establishment of koala watering stations and captive protection of some colonies of unique populations, such as the Manning River turtle, southern corroboree frog, koala, platypus, grey-headed flying foxes and the Booroolong frog. These actions are examples of the Government's immediate response. I am advised that the Minister responsible and his department are working with scientists, stakeholders and wildlife recovery groups to establish intermediate and long-term response plans. I am assured by the Minister's office that copies of these plans will be provided to the honourable member when they are released.

#### *Supplementary Questions for Written Answers*

#### **POWERHOUSE MUSEUM**

**The Hon. WALT SECORD (13:03:40):** My supplementary question for written answer is directed to the Leader of the Government and arts Minister. How many one-in-100-year floods have occurred in the last 200 years at the Parramatta Powerhouse development site?

#### **SCHOOL STUDENT ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM (13:04:05):** My supplementary question for written answer is directed to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Education in response to her answer about the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] results. Can the Minister, in the supplementary answer, explain why the department, in response to these disastrous results, has launched a research project on why New South Wales students are not trying hard enough, on the supposition that every three years our students try with less intensity compared to past results in other States? Will the Minister undertake to end this shameful blaming of our students for the failing results, instead of the true root causes of New South Wales' academic decline?

*Questions Without Notice: Take Note***TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE:** I move:

That the House take note of answers to questions.

**ULTIMO TRAMWAYS POWER HOUSE**

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (13:05:00):** My take-note contribution is in two parts. The first is in relation to the answers given by the Hon. Don Harwin in relation to heritage matters and the Ultimo Powerhouse. I welcome the idea that more things are going to be placed on the State heritage register, because there has been a desert of heritage protection for the past five years in New South Wales, with very little attention paid to matters put forward on the State heritage list. The point that I want to make is that we need to compare the treatment of heritage on this side of the city with the treatment of heritage in western Sydney. Let us compare and contrast. The Minister gave an answer today about the Hyde Park Barracks. We are very pleased to see the work that is happening at the Hyde Park Barracks, but let us not forget that we have one of the most significant heritage sites in Parramatta, the Parramatta Female Factory and the orphan home, which have been crying out for World Heritage listing and for progressing these nominations for a very long time.

**The Hon. Don Harwin:** Point of order: This debate is to take note of answers to questions. At no time during question time was this issue raised.

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE:** To the point of order: My question is directly relevant to where we asked about reconciliation of Willow Grove and Parramatta heritage versus what is happening in Ultimo.

**The Hon. Don Harwin:** It was about the female factory and that was not raised.

**The Hon. Adam Searle:** To the point of order: The House changed the rules governing take-note debates. Debate is in order as long as it is relevant to the subject matter either of questions asked or answers given or things that occurred in question time. This is squarely within order.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I am not going to give a full response. The member is a long way off the subject matter and should come back to the subject matter. I am sorry that we are unable to stop the clock during points of order.

**The Hon. PENNY SHARPE:** I have 14 seconds left. In the western suburbs, let us look at what is happening with Willow Grove and let us look at what is happening with the Parramatta Female Factory—virtually nothing and they are being demolished. Let us look at Hyde Park Barracks and let us look at the Powerhouse and they are getting heritage protection. That is wrong. [*Time expired.*]

**SCHOOL STUDENT ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK (13:08:10):** I wish to take note of answers given by the Hon. Sarah Mitchell on a range of things along the lines of the Minister's perception of what is happening with the department versus the reality of what is happening with the department at a school level. There is a serious disconnect there. In respect of the work of the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE]—and it does great work—what is the point of it if schools do not get notified about the work or, if they do, they are notified in an email or a weekly circular that comes out on Friday afternoon? Let us be honest, no teacher will get to a circular that comes out on a Friday afternoon. There is an expectation that learning just happens by osmosis. There was absolutely no direction given by the department in the 2015 paper about what works best. The department just said, "Have a look at this, it might be all right." There has been no strategic implementation of funding for anything that has come out of CESE and that is a problem. That is a problem. What is the point of having this great department within a department if we do not listen to it?

And then we go to the School Excellence Framework. There have been two versions of that, it should be noted. It was essentially just a shuffling of the deckchairs in the second version. But there is no consequence for a school that scores itself a sub-par result. The department created another element called "working towards developing" because schools were finding they were not at the "developing" stage. But there is no consequence. You can evaluate and say, "I think I'm here," and then the external validators come in and say, "No, you are not," and nothing else happens. Once again, what is the point of that data?

The Minister also mentioned the Bump It Up program. Originally that was just in targeted schools. Now we are using a blanket approach with Bump It Up but once again with no consequence. The department says, "You're a Bump It Up school. Set yourself some goals. We'll be back in 18 months or two years. We'll see whether you've done anything." There is no support, no funding, nothing. What is the point? Again it beggars belief that the department throws these lollipop ideas up but does not do anything with them. Real educational leadership is

needed. The department throws the concept of educational leadership in teachers' faces—how about some educational leadership from Mark Scott? Because I have not seen him deliver anything for five years. I heard a lot of the promises when he came in and he has delivered nothing, in my view.

## SCHOOL STUDENT ASSESSMENT RESULTS

### POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

**The Hon. WALT SECORD (13:11:03):** I make several observations. As the shadow Treasurer I respond to some questions involving the arts Minister but primarily I respond to answers from the education Minister. Most of this question time was devoted to education and I thought the Minister would have stayed in the Chamber and responded. We on this side even indicated that the take-note of answers debate was going to centre on education so we gave her the opportunity. We have the worst literacy results in a generation. She did not spell out a single new initiative or program that she was going to do. She has been captured by her department. We heard bureaucratic language, legalese and jargon—not a single practical measure about increasing educational standards in New South Wales.

I say this repeatedly: I stand here because of a strong public education and public health system—my mother with a year 10 education and my father illiterate. I devote my life to the pursuit of higher education standards. I find it extraordinary. The Minister for Finance and Small Business said he wanted to challenge the Government's record after nine years versus Labor's record after 16 years. I stand behind Bob Carr's record. Under Bob Carr New South Wales had attainment levels equal with the world, including those of Finland. Now we are at the bottom of the league table. I stand by Labor's record. Nothing was spelt out by this Minister. Then she referred to the fact she was going to introduce phonetics testing in year 1. I asked her to spell out what she was going to do and she said it would be an opt-in trial—absolutely unacceptable.

I end with my remarks on the issue of the Powerhouse Museum. It comes as no surprise that this arts Minister has mishandled this \$1.5 billion project. It is no wonder the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party this morning moved a further continuation of that inquiry. I have asked the Leader of the Opposition to arrange for me to serve for Labor on that inquiry. I look forward to that. This morning we saw an advertisement in the *Government Gazette* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* advertising that the Ultimo Tramways Powerhouse site was going to be put on the heritage register. This has provoked outrage from groups involved with the Powerhouse Museum. Kylie Winkworth, an internationally renowned curator, is furious about the Minister's actions. She said:

We are gutted after four years to see this hopelessly inadequate, even ludicrous nomination that does not even mention in the assessment criteria the Powerhouse Museum, its Sulman award winning adaption and elegant Wran building, the tram depot for which the power station was built, the in situ gantry cranes and relics, and collection items ...

She goes on to say the worst part is that the Powerhouse Museum Alliance was not even consulted on this. It had no idea. Its members woke up this morning to discover it in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. It beggars belief that the Minister would be protecting heritage there and then destroying it in Parramatta.

### CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AND EVALUATION

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM (13:14:10):** I too take note of answers given by the education Minister. I thank the Hon. Mark Banasiak for the contribution he has made with his question and his speech, because there is a teacher giving the true life account of what has actually gone wrong in our school system. I said yesterday of this Minister that she faces the biggest challenge of any Minister in the 170-year history of public instruction in New South Wales. Well, I could give her one other tip and that is I would not go reading out departmental briefing notes that are not entirely valid because, quite frankly, if excuse-making by the department was the criteria for academic results we would be a world leader. It is a department that is very defensive. It has a million excuses but very few solutions for lifting these academic results.

Take the example of direct instruction. Direct instruction was measured by Professor John Hattie out of the University of Melbourne, looking at tens of thousands of research studies and millions of students around the world, to be one of the most effective things you can do in the classroom. The teacher teaches at the front, inspiring the students, and directly instructs—a high-effect, positive thing to do in the classroom. It is a headline item in that Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE] document on what works in schools. It is confirmed in the 2017 School Excellence Framework as something that should be happening in every classroom in every school in New South Wales. Yet if you go to the self-assessment mechanism, which is not quality controlled—it is self-assessment by the schools—you go to their school plans and their school annual reports and I will buy you a lottery ticket if you can find a healthy mention of direct instruction. The schools are not doing it.

You can have all the documents in the world used by the department as a fig leaf for their own failings but if the schools are not following the documents and doing the things that work in the classroom, such as direct instruction, is it any surprise the results go backward disastrously? Of course not. There is no quality control.

What is to blame? Let me have a go at answering the question of the Hon. John Graham. Have a look at Local Schools, Local Decisions, which has given schools the freedom to ignore documents like CESE's *What works best*. It has given schools the freedom to ignore the School Excellence Framework. It has given schools the freedom to ignore John Hattie's compelling research findings about direct instruction and other teaching methods. It has given schools the freedom to fail and keep on failing.

I say to this department, to the senior people from Mark Scott down: You are out of excuses and you are out of time. We are not putting up with this any longer—a failing school system where, quite frankly, the students who suffer most are the disadvantaged students, the ones who do not have daddy's money to get them a job later on or mummy's social status to look after them, the ones who rely on a good government school down the road to lift them out of the poverty of their parents. And if you do not have that, you ain't got much in life out in those public housing estates. For the department and the Minister there are no more excuses. Do the quality control. Correct failing policies like Local Schools, Local Decisions and get on with the job of lifting these results.

### RURAL AND REGIONAL SPECIALIST TEACHERS

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS (13:17:17):** In question time today I asked the education Minister about the lack of specialist maths teachers in rural and regional areas. In her answer she outlined that it is not just a problem for maths teachers in rural and regional areas; it is a problem for all teachers in rural and regional areas. In fact, the problem for maths teachers spreads right across the State. Other speakers in this debate—other members of the Opposition and of the crossbench—have made the point today that we heard plenty of motherhood statements from the Minister today. We heard about how it keeps her up at night. We heard yesterday that it is her number one priority. But what we are not hearing from this Government are solutions about how we are going to address failing results.

Today the Minister outlined how we are not just failing across the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] or NAPLAN but now we are going to have a new year 1 phonics check that she outlined we might fail on as well. What are the solutions? After nine years on the Treasury benches, what is this Government doing to address this failure? Today the Minister for Finance and Small Business had the gall to say, "We'll compare your record with ours." I will too. Our record, when Labor was in government, was that we led the world. After nine years we are not even meeting the OECD average in maths, which, incidentally, I asked a question about today. We know if we do not have specialist maths teachers who love maths, who are imparting their passion upon students, we are not going to have students who do well. If teachers who do not have specialised knowledge are teaching students, we cannot expect them to compete with the best in the world.

Instead of hearing solutions from the education Minister today, we heard they are reanalysing the data and having a really thorough conversation. I am so pleased that they are having a thorough conversation, but it is time for action. Last week a school summit was hosted by *The Sydney Morning Herald*. It outlined a range of the issues and at the time suggested some helpful solutions. An immediate solution was one that I asked about today around conducting an audit. Let us work out where we do not have maths teachers and let us get the data so that we can work out where we need to send the teachers. Would the Minister commit to that very small initiative today? No.

Let me suggest some bedtime reading for the Minister while she is up late at night: the Legislative Chamber education committee's thorough report from last week. I did not agree with all of it; in fact, I would strongly suggest that the Minister start with the dissenting statement at the end, written by my Labor colleague. But it is a starting point; it is a road map. There are 67 recommendations for her to consider implementing. She should get that mighty Department of Education working on some solutions instead of reanalysing the data and telling us how we are failing.

### SCHOOL STUDENT ASSESSMENT RESULTS

**The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM (13:20:30):** I contribute to the take-note debate regarding an answer from the education Minister. I simply want to know why this is happening. We know the results are going backwards, but I want to understand what the Government says is the root cause of this problem and why it is happening. I thank the Hon. Mark Latham for his explanation, which was a lot more powerful than the Minister's. But we need to know the Executive's answer to that question. We need to know what the Government says is the root cause of this problem.

In answer to a question from the Hon. Mick Veitch, the Minister ran through what some of the issues might be in regional New South Wales. She said it might be funding, it might be the individual teachers we are sending out, it might be teacher training, it might be how these schools are networking between schools, it might be resources—I assume that is different from funding—it might be needing to get the best and brightest out there, it might be the incentives that we are providing in regional areas or it might be the NAPLAN data. We wandered through all of these areas.

There was a shopping list of seemingly random reasons as to why things might not be going well in regional New South Wales, which I found totally unconvincing. I agree with observations made about how bureaucratic this response was. It was like flicking through the pages of an education textbook written by the department that does not shed any light on the issue. That is what it sounded like. I thoroughly reject the part of the Minister's answer where she said this is more a national problem. Well, it is a national problem—a problem for the country—but it is far worse here and we should be more worried. We are now in the second tier of education systems and we are slipping backwards. Yes, it is a problem right around the country, but we should be far more worried than Queensland is. Queensland has gone okay; it has held its own while we have crashed past it.

This was a random wander through the potential reasons, but I was even more alarmed to hear it might be the fault of the students, who are not trying hard enough. I have not heard that one. We will add that to the list of potential problems here. Teachers are under pressure, parents are worried and students are worried about their future. I thank the Hon. Mark Latham for his generous offer of a lottery ticket for people, but the State used to provide every citizen a ticket out of poverty, and it was a good education at a New South Wales school. That ticket is rapidly disappearing.

#### CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AND EVALUATION

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM (13:23:40):** I contribute to the take-note debate regarding answers from the education Minister today. First, I echo the comments of my colleague the Hon. Walt Secord about the absence of the Minister during this debate given the amount of time spent in today's question time covering the subject of education. I think it is shameful that she is not here. It is a take-note debate, not a take-off debate.

**The Hon. Don Harwin:** Point of order: I was not going to say anything, but that was a disgraceful personal attack on the Minister that I will not put up with.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** To the point of order—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I will withdraw the comment if that is satisfactory.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** There has been a convention in this place that one does not refer to the presence or absence of members in the Chamber. If we start on that exercise we will enter dangerous territory for all sides, including the crossbench. All members should reflect upon that before they make further comments on the subject. The honourable member has withdrawn the comment.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The Minister did a very good job today deflecting and skating over the surface of the problems without going into specific commitments. She received a question from the Hon. Mark Banasiak about the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE] and *What works best*. His question was about what additional money or funding was directed towards the implementation of that publication from CESE, to which the Minister did not answer. She avoided the question altogether. Then the Minister was asked a question from the Hon. Mick Veitch about what she is doing on rural disadvantage. We heard responses like "We need to look at what can be done," or "We want to work on that," but there were no specifics about what the Minister has done or what proposals she was prepared to bring forward.

The Hon. Courtney Houssos asked the Minister a specific question on maths teacher shortages in rural schools and whether she would be prepared to commit to an audit. She did not commit; she skated over it and avoided this question as well. Then the Minister received a question from the Hon. John Graham on the root cause of the decline in the Programme for International Student Assessment results. Again she avoided the answer. She said, "There are a range of issues," but she did not canvass any of them. This is a complete avoidance of fundamental problems. The Minister needs to say to this House exactly what she will do and what proposals she will bring forward to remedy some of these issues.

**The Hon. Mark Latham:** Point of order: Regarding the matter of attendance in the Chamber, I understand under the standing orders there is a requirement for a Minister to respond at the end of the take-note debate.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** There is a Minister in the Chamber.

**The Hon. Mark Latham:** Yes, but I hope this is a proper Parliament. The Opposition notified the education Minister that the take-note debate would be on her subject matter. Is it not a courtesy to the House for that Minister to stay here, listen and offer a response at the end of the debate? I raise a second point of order. The Acting President raised the issue of the crossbench attending the Chamber during question time. I think every parliamentarian should be present during question time. It is the most important part of the day. Can we clean that up? Instead of having a walk-in, walk-out Chamber for question time, members should attend and questions should be asked on the basis of that attendance.

**The Hon. Don Harwin:** To the point of order: The standing orders are clear. It is also clear that points of order should not be used to make debating points.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I understand the member's point but there is no point of order.

**The Hon. Mark Latham:** I am seeking a ruling.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** This is not a matter for me to rule on because there is no point of order.

**The Hon. Mark Latham:** Where is Ajaka? I will take it up with him when he gets back.

#### TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (13:28:30):** I start by responding to the comments made by the Hon. Penny Sharpe about heritage listings. During my year as the Minister responsible for heritage there have been eight State heritage listings, one State heritage curtilage adjustment and four Aboriginal Place declarations. Her comments are simply wrong. In response to the comments made by the Hon. Walt Secord about the nomination and his quote by Kylie Winkworth, I make the point that if the member has a real problem with the nomination he should take it up with the National Trust, which made the nomination.

Heritage NSW and the Heritage Council are just going through the statutory process. In response to Kylie Winkworth's comments that they were not consulted I say that, for heaven's sake, today is day one of a 28-day consultation process. Kylie Winkworth should have a look at the Act. I am surprised that she said something so silly. Finally, I will respond to the issue that the Hon. Penny Sharpe raised about the Female Factory before I took a point of order and again after the Acting President ruled, despite him telling her not to mention it.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** He didn't tell me not to mention it.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** He said you were out of order; it is the same thing. With regard to the Female Factory, a large amount of money is being spent, formerly by UrbanGrowth NSW and now by Infrastructure NSW, on the heritage core of Cumberland Hospital.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** Where is the World Heritage listing of the Female Factory?

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** That's not what you said in your comments. I am not talking about that.

**The Hon. Penny Sharpe:** I couldn't get it out because you kept interrupting me.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** Order! I call the Hon. Penny Sharpe to order for the first time. Members will not shout across the table.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** I am referring to what the honourable member said when she described neglect. The heritage core has had a considerable amount of money spent on it over the past year or so. I have visited those buildings and seen the good work that has been done to bring them back up to code. [*Time expired.*]

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** The question is that the motion be agreed to.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I will now leave the chair. The House will resume at 3.00 p.m.

#### *Documents*

#### TABLING OF PAPERS

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I table the following papers:

- (1) Animal Research Act 1985—Report of Animal Research Review Panel for the year ended 30 June 2019.
- (2) Water Management Act—Report of Murray-Darling Basin Authority for the year ended 30 June 2019.

I move:

That the reports be printed.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions***BUSHFIRES****Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

**The Hon. SAM FARRAWAY (15:01:07):** I join my colleagues in this Chamber in sharing my gratitude for our emergency services and our volunteers. I offer my sincere condolences to those who have lost their homes, their livelihoods and their loved ones. It is at this moment that we stand here in solidarity. Despite political affiliation, all of us in this Chamber stand together with the affected communities. We will do what we can to help them get back on their feet. Although my hometown of Bathurst was not directly impacted by the devastating bushfires seen elsewhere across the State, my community, like many others, still felt the raw emotion of those affected. Many of our local volunteers, including a nine-vehicle convoy of State Emergency Service crews, selflessly put up their hands to help out wherever they could across New South Wales.

In my travels around the Central West I could not help but be inspired by so many courageous and dedicated individuals putting their holidays aside and helping others. We are very lucky to have such an amazing force of volunteer and professional emergency services personnel who are willing, ready and able to help out when our State is in need. I express my extreme and sincere gratitude to the volunteers and emergency services staff in the Central West and right across New South Wales. What they did and what they continue to do for their communities and others is nothing short of heroic. In January I visited the Canobolas Zone RFS headquarters in Orange, where at the time of my visit they had coordinated 628 volunteers and 50 strike team deployments in 128 days. Those volunteers helped communities such as Glen Innes, Grafton, Coffs Harbour and the Snowy Valley whilst still managing much smaller fires within the Canobolas zone. I witnessed a truly impressive display of teamwork, organisation and dedication by the Canobolas Zone RFS and I know it was replicated through different Rural Fire Service zones across New South Wales.

I also spent time in Lithgow and Capertee with member for Bathurst Paul Toole. Homes on the outskirts of Lithgow and around the Clarence and Dargan regions had been lost just days before Christmas. In the previous days the winds had reached incredible speeds and fires were popping up at random. Embers were flying through the air, causing spot fires across the community and increasing unpredictability. Firefighting strike teams from across New South Wales were present, but conditions made it tough for even the most experienced and prepared firefighters. In Capertee, RFS Captain Steve Dalli spoke of the progress being made to contain the Gospers Mountain fire and of the efforts being made by his team to save properties across Capertee, Glen Davis, Glen Alice, the valley and beyond. Some of his volunteers had been on the ground since 26 October and they were determined to protect every person, animal and property that they could. I know that story is just one of many and that this experience was shared by several communities and firefighting teams across our State. Again, I thank them.

I also congratulate and acknowledge RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, along with Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers, who did an amazing job day in and day out and continue to do so. I thank the commissioner and his entire RFS headquarters team for their work in coordinating the firefighting effort across the State. Iron Man, Superman and Batman are all heroes to some, but our tireless and dedicated RFS and emergency services volunteers are heroes to all Australians, not just those in New South Wales. Over time we can discuss what we must do better and what we must change, but right now we need to support communities to allow them to get back on their feet. As we move through the recovery we must all work together to ensure that those communities, small businesses and families can go back to their homes, rebuild and return to some normality. We must understand that in some instances people will have a very tough time getting back to how things were before the fires hit. In some cases, people will never get back to that position.

It is true that in the worst of times we see the very best in humanity. I am confident that the people of New South Wales and our great country will continue to rally behind those affected. Regional New South Wales, including those communities affected by bushfire, is open for business. I would say to people to grab your esky, have a weekend away and go and see what some of those amazing communities have to offer. We will recover no matter what it takes, and those of us in this Chamber will stand by the affected communities and the people who call them home to ensure that they are not alone through this difficult journey.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST (15:06:45):** I speak in support of the motion moved by the Government. The tragedy of the recent bushfires has been immeasurable. The loss of countless human and animal lives, the destruction of native habitat and the complete annihilation of homes and communities have devastated the people of New South Wales and Australia. The extreme loss of animal lives in these fires has made headlines around the world. Conservative estimates put the number of animals who have perished at over one billion but the figures have neglected to include animals such as frogs, lizards and bats, so the overall number may be far higher than these estimates. Native animals, including threatened species, are at crisis point. Earlier this month an expert panel

identified 113 species that are in urgent need of attention following these destructive fires, and this is before we have fully identified the extent of the damage to our environment.

Unique native animals ranging from Albert's lyrebirds to the Parma wallaby are now considered to be at extreme risk. Their habitats have been decimated and they have been left without food or shelter as they struggle to survive with what is left. Flying foxes are dying en masse from the extreme heat. Thousands of those endangered animals have literally fallen from the trees in which they roost, unable to cope with the high temperatures. Their helpless babies have died from starvation. It is estimated that as many as a fifth of Australia's flying foxes died during these burning summer months—all casualties of the blazing fires and the impacts of climate change. Then there are kangaroos still being shot by hunters for their flesh and skin even though it is likely that, at the very least, over 10,000 kangaroos and their joeys have perished in these fires. Wildlife carers are struggling to treat the horrific burns and injuries of surviving kangaroos, and those animal saviours are forced to remain horrifyingly aware that when the bushfire survivors are released from care they will return to barren, burned plains and will be at risk of being shot or dying from starvation.

The full devastation brought on by these fires cannot be discussed without mentioning the plight of koalas, now considered by some to be at risk of becoming functionally extinct. The Australian Koala Foundation estimates there are less than 100,000 koalas left in the wild and possibly as few as 43,000. These iconic animals have received worldwide attention following the harrowing photos of burned koalas being rescued from the flames and treated for their horrific injuries. The outpouring of public grief for these gentle creatures has been indescribable as communities across Australia and the world try to grapple with the uncertain future koalas are now facing.

We must not forget the devastating consequences the fires have had for farmed animals. Farmed animals are the ones least likely to be saved and the ones most likely to be left behind. Cows used by the dairy industry have suffered from melted teats and severe burns. Sheep have been seen wandering burned pastures, desperately trying to find food. With nothing to eat and their homes destroyed, farmed animal survivors are being slaughtered at record levels because animal agribusiness considers these traumatised sentient beings to be nothing more than units of production. These animals, too, are victims of the bushfires, and yet it is likely we will never know how many of them have lost their lives in the fires.

We cannot ignore the fact that for many species the emergency is far from over. While the rain is a welcome reprieve from the bushfires, it has brought with it its own disastrous consequences. Fish and other animals who rely on our freshwater systems have been and will continue to be impacted by the bushfire ash currently contaminating our waterways. Mass fish kills—the sudden death of millions of fish—are becoming increasingly common. Platypus are being driven from their aquatic homes. Already, 22 species of crayfish and 17 species of fish are considered to be at crisis point.

Yet within the stories of pain, trauma and fear, there are also stories of hope and of heroism. The tireless work of animal sanctuaries and wildlife rescue groups to protect bushfire survivors has been awe inspiring. Across our State and across Australia, thousands of volunteers have been working around the clock to find and care for victims of the fires. We have heard countless stories of heroism from animal carers who are out on the front lines, rescuing animals from the bushfires. One in particular that stood out to me was the story of Amelia: a hen and lone survivor of her flock, taken in by NSW Hen Rescue after being found wandering in the bush in Charmhaven. Her comb, wattle, face and feet were all badly burnt, and her eye exploded after being struck by an ember. Amelia was nursed back to health by carers determined to save the life of that sentient being.

Behind the scenes farmed animal sanctuaries have been quietly fighting to provide safety not only for their animals, but also for those who were casualties of the destruction. When I realised that they were doing so without any government aid or support and that they were battling to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of animals, I knew I needed to take action. With the help of animal lovers across Australia, the Animal Justice Party Sanctuary Saviours raised over \$35,000 for struggling sanctuaries and wildlife rescue groups—the unsung heroes who have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that any animal fire victim, whatever the species, is cared for.

Lastly, I highlight that it is not only humans who have been coming to the rescue of stranded, struggling animals. Wombats have emerged as the fire heroes of the animal kingdom, digging water holes that provide relief to animals struggling with the effects of ongoing drought and allowing other species to use their burrows as refuge from the flames. Their actions, whether intentional or otherwise, have saved countless animals from certain death during the bushfires and have shown us how much we still have to learn about the animals with whom we share this country. If there is one lesson we take away from this catastrophic tragedy—a tragedy that has destroyed lives, homes, communities and our environment—it is that in times of crisis we must come together and save who and what is left. We must protect all human and non-human animal survivors. We must work to rebuild what has been lost. And we must better prepare for next time—and there will be a next time, because there is simply no denying now that we are in a climate crisis and we are living that crisis as we speak.

**The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM (15:13:57):** I thank colleagues on both sides of the House and in the other place who have made contributions to the debate on this matter. I listened to many of those contributions and found a number of them really moving. I will try not to cover the ground that has already been covered; I simply say upfront that I feel many members have spoken for me in their contributions. They have said many of the things that I would like to have said about this summer, and I will not repeat them. In particular, I thank two of my colleagues in this Chamber, the Hon. Penny Sharpe and the Hon. Lou Amato, both of whom named each of the people who lost their lives over the summer in New South Wales. I will not repeat them, but I thought it was a fitting tribute to have those people at the front of our minds as we have this debate.

This summer's bushfires have touched all of us. We are an urban nation—perhaps the sixth most urbanised nation in the world. Over summer the fires ringed our cities; the smoke was ever present. We are also a nation that clings to the coast, and that is never more true than over the summer and Christmas holidays. We really are a saltwater people. Aside from the scale of the summer bushfires, one of the most shocking things was seeing those fires burn right to the coastline—right down to the beaches. I agree with the views that have been put in this place and in the other place: New South Wales really has been changed as a result of living through that experience together. The bushfires caused not only loss of life but also loss of homes, businesses and forests in national parks. They have devastated native flora and fauna and have also been a real blow to regional economies.

One particular aspect that I want to put on record, which has not been referred to in the debate so far, is the impact on and the contribution of musicians in the State. I do so especially because many fire-affected communities, especially on the South Coast—but it is also true of the north—are music communities. Many musicians lost much of their employment at what would have been the busiest time of year for them. Many of them lost homes, vans and equipment. Venues have also been impacted. Shows have been cancelled and there has been less work for staff. As we know, in many regional areas New Year's Eve events were cancelled, as well as agricultural shows in Berry, Cobargo, Candelo, Albion Park, Kiama and Bowral.

Most notably, the Cobargo Folk Festival was cancelled. It would have been held this weekend, but anyone who saw those incredible photos of Cobargo knows that it will be some time before that festival is held again. It will be back; they are hopeful for next year. Over the summer 100 venues cancelled events, including three venues which were totally destroyed by fire. A map of venues that have been impacted is on the South Coast Live Music Office website. There are many stories from those communities and people. I will tell a story about one musician and one family, and that is Fanny Lumsden and her husband, Dan. Members would remember Fanny because she performed here at the Parliamentary Friends of Music event just last year.

**The Hon. Sarah Mitchell:** She does all the country halls.

**The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM:** Yes, she is one of our most toured artists. She travels country halls in regional Australia, playing some fantastic alt-country music. She is a resident of Tooma, which was heavily impacted over January. It is a village community not far from the border, about 11 kilometres east of Wallerawang and 34 kilometres south of Tumbarumba. I saw her at the Tamworth Country Music Festival and had a brief chat to her. She had to cancel a series of shows at country halls across New South Wales late last year and over January. She also talked about having to fight the fires in Tooma literally with a hose on the back of a ute at their farm, with little help because resources right across the State were so stretched at the worst of those moments. I am happy to report she will now be launching her new album in her home town of Tooma on Sunday 14 March and the proceeds will go to the local community bushfire recovery. It was fantastic to see her playing up at Tamworth but it was obvious that she and a range of the others were really shaken by what they, their towns and their communities had just lived through.

She is not alone in regrouping. The music community right across the board has been involved in so many fundraising events. Many members have thanked our first responders: the Rural Fire Service; Fire and Rescue NSW; the SES; the parks service and the forestry fire workers who have just fanned out across the park and forest estates on these hottest of days to be ready to react when and not if the fire starts; wildlife rescue, the ambos and police. I place on record my support for those comments. I highly endorse the thoughts that have been expressed to those first responders. However, I do add the thanks of members of the House and the community to those members of the music community who have rapidly come to the support of these communities. It has been an amazing mobilisation of the music community—a real act of heart to support these affected people. On Aus Music T-Shirt Day members here helped raise money for Support Act, the charity that supports musicians. Support Act delivered up to \$50,000 in instrument and music equipment replacement for needy musicians in New South Wales and Victoria. APRA AMCOS has been in direct contact and has been waiving fees in a lot of these venues.

The Fire Fight relief concert held out at Homebush with 75,000 people in attendance was described as an iconic moment in Australian history, and it felt like that to be out there. I headed out to the event and it was an amazing feeling. Some \$10 million was raised, an amount described by music legend Glenn A. Baker in his characteristic style as "pretty bloody staggering". The concert included Queen reprising its Live Aid set from

1985. A lot of people were out there to see Queen—the band got a pretty good reception—but I will tell you what got a better reception: The first mention of the RFS volunteers got the most remarkable reaction from the crowd. That really conveyed the depth of feeling from these ordinary citizens of New South Wales. I thank TEG, Paul Dainty and all the artists who played.

Finally, I look forward to the Cobargo concert to be put on by the folk community in early May. Funds will go to the Cobargo Community Bushfire Recovery Fund. Two of the key organisers, Zena Armstrong and Peter Logue, have been amazing. They are an incredible team down there. They have not just been organising that relief concert but have literally been running the relief program in Cobargo. They dropped what they had been doing and used their significant logistical and organisational skills to organise the fire response in Cobargo. I thank them for the work they have done on behalf of the community.

New South Wales has changed over summer. We now have to change as a State to adapt to this new reality we live in. It will require a profound change and we do need to look honestly at all the issues this raises. One of those—members have talked about it—is the resilience of our roads, our power, our water and our emergency support. Most confronting especially have been those stories about communications and not knowing what is going on. I think we need to say there is better than ever communication about what is going on; however, at the crucial moment there is no communication. That has been the confronting thing. Members will all look at those issues. I was pleased to see Infrastructure Australia rapidly recognise that in its official plans released today, talking about making sure our road infrastructure and communications equipment are able to adjust to this new environment.

As members have raised, we need to look at issues such as back-burning and land management. It does not need to be ideological. It seems to have become a culture war, in the Government and outside. I was interested to read the view of Don Watson on this—hardly a right-wing participant in the culture wars. He stated:

It might be best if we cool-burned our blocks each year, if we were required to do it ourselves, or have it done by a fire authority or the stalwarts of Landcare. Were we all to pitch in each year, who can say that our communities would not be enlivened and the national spirit bolstered from the ground up. It might awaken in all of us the fellow feeling and common purpose that fire has always aroused in Australia's rural bosom. Mateship plus Indigenous cultural practice sounds like a promising combination.

We should look at all these issues. Let us be guided by the science. We also have to look at the impact of climate change and the profound changes that we need to make to adapt to a far more fire-prone land. That should not be a culture war, either. That should be guided by the science as well. What do we need to do to adapt? What do we need to do to protect rural communities from extreme climate change? We should ask what the costs are of action, alongside asking of its upsides and the costs of inaction. Yesterday I was pleased to see the article of our former colleague Niall Blair calling for climate action on behalf of farming communities.

I simply say this: These are now unavoidable questions. However, they are for later; there is plenty of time to talk through those issues. Today, we pause to remember those who have died and those who have had their lives turned upside down. We pause to thank those volunteers right across the State. We pause to reflect on the best of humanity and the incredible stories that have already been told about how people have coped or the acts of kindness and bravery over this time. We also reflect on the fragility of our humanity as we live clinging to the coastline of this massive continent, confronted very directly over this summer by the power of nature. It is a reminder of the fragility of our place on this continent.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES (15:27:55):** I speak to the condolence motion moved by the Leader of the Government about the devastating bushfire season that has swept our State and nation. The motion acknowledges those who have been affected by the bushfires and also pays tribute to the men and women who selflessly dedicated themselves to protecting people's lives, homes and communities. Whilst we have always had and will continue to have bushfires, the ferocity and magnitude of these fires along with the destruction they have caused has made this bushfire season one of the worst on record. This fire season has left lives lost, houses destroyed and communities significantly affected.

Like many members in this House I know people who have been directly impacted, including immediate family in Batemans Bay. Although our home was in an area of the Southern Highlands under watch, I was very fortunate that we were never asked to evacuate. I acknowledge the work of the RFS in the Southern Highlands, particularly for keeping everyone informed through social media but also for the regular updates and meetings they held. To put the devastation into perspective, the fires have destroyed more than 2,400 homes in New South Wales, with over 10,000 buildings impacted and more than 5½ million hectares burnt. In the small town of Mogo the community suffered enormously, with 44 homes lost plus more than 100 other properties, including outbuildings and businesses, destroyed. My heart goes out to the community as they now try to rebuild with the bushfire clean-up process now underway.

These fires burnt from August 2019, affecting northern New South Wales, and continued throughout the summer, with multiple states of emergency being declared and catastrophic fire conditions placed on Sydney and the Greater Sydney region—the first time since the current fire danger ratings were implemented. It was during this period that we experienced the unfortunate and tragic loss of life. I offer my sincere condolences to the families, loved ones and communities impacted. Families have been broken and communities traumatised by losing their loved ones. This loss will continue to be felt for a long time.

I acknowledge and thank the brave men and women of the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, and all emergency service workers who worked tirelessly and answered the call to protect and preserve life, even in the face of incredible danger. Our firefighters are some of the best in the world, dedicated to protecting lives, and our communities and I thank the 72,000-plus volunteers who have given so much. Many of these people are our neighbours, friends and family. They go above and beyond, displaying courage and bravery. At any given time during the fires there were 4,000 firefighters in the field, supported by around 70 to 100 aircraft. These heroes battled to save homes across the State in conditions that words cannot describe. While 2,400 homes were lost, thousands were saved thanks to the heroism displayed by our firefighters.

However, the tragic impact of the fires led to the loss of brave RFS volunteers and firefighters: Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer, Samuel McPaul and Colin Burns. I offer my heartfelt thanks and condolences to those in the RFS, their families and their loved ones who have been impacted by these losses. These men embodied the Rural Fire Brigade's values and displayed courage, bravery, and selflessness in the face of danger and will be remembered not only by their loved ones but also by their communities as heroes. I also offer my deepest condolences and heartfelt thanks to the families of the three United States firefighters: Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, who tragically lost their lives in January this year.

Finally, I wish to commend the leadership and dedication shown by NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, together with Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers and the 72,000 volunteers who fought the fires. I also acknowledge the work of Fire and Rescue NSW Commissioner Paul Baxter and the NSW Police Force Commissioner Mick Fuller. In addition, I acknowledge the work of the multiple agencies who assisted the RFS. I thank Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Ambulance, NSW Health, the NSW State Emergency Service and the Australian Defence Force. All played an important role in combating these fires, ensuring the safe evacuation of members of the community and working with our communities to rebuild.

While the recent rainfall has extinguished several fires and contained the rest, we must still be vigilant as the fire season is not over. The fire threat in many parts of the State remains real as much of the State remains in drought. The large clean-up effort is underway, as is the process of healing—which will take a long time—as the State comes together to rebuild in the wake of such destruction. But the resilience of our communities and the people of New South Wales is one of a kind. We unite and come together during difficult times and show mateship and camaraderie that can only be found in Australia.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM (15:32:49):** I offer my condolences and sympathy to the family and friends of the 25 people who passed away during the New South Wales bushfire crisis: the three New South Wales RFS firefighters, Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul; the three American airmen, Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr; and also the 19 civilians, community members, who lost their lives. I pay tribute to their bravery and to their service and certainly share the sentiment of the Government that they will never be forgotten in this State, and most importantly, their children—in many cases growing up without their father, in some cases without their mother—will always be looked after, remembered by community and supported for the rest of their lives.

There has been a lot of accurate, commendable commentary about the bravery of our volunteer and professional firefighters, the Americans who came here, the overseas service—the effort has been phenomenal. In my contribution I would like to reflect for a moment on the bravery of the civilians, which perhaps has not received the same profile. For many of the 19 who lost their lives it was in the act of fighting the fire at their home, of defending what they believed to be the treasured possessions of their loved ones. We know the example of the member for Bega, who stood and fought the fire at his home while his wife and children took shelter on one of the beaches of the South Coast. Most of those who lost their lives were men. I think this is the best instinct of masculinity, to stand and fight and do things to protect your family and its best interests.

In reflecting on that I contrast it with the tragedy north of New South Wales, the monster Baxter, and the debate he has created about the nature of masculinity. That is not anything other than evil. The best side of masculinity is to stay and fight, be a protector, be a man who protects loved ones and the things that they treasure. Those civilians did that in circumstances, perhaps some of them ill-judged. I know of a circumstance at Lake Conjola where a man got his wife safely to the beach and went back to protect what he thought she valued and

lost his life in the process. He was a real man, doing the right thing, acting by the best masculine instinct of protection. I take comfort in that and compare and contrast with the minority influence that unfortunately tragically in Brisbane displayed a different side of masculinity.

I pay tribute also to the community volunteers. What a magnificent effort in evacuation centres, the people who helped with emergency service work, in repair and recovery. This has been the best side of our State, and indeed the best side of human nature overall. I pay tribute to the members of this House who were affected and directly impacted by this crisis: the Hon. Shayne Mallard, the Hon. Lou Amato and the Hon. Bronnie Taylor. People talk about MPs as if we are some rarefied class. We were affected as a group and our members were affected by this as directly as anyone else in the community and they bring those stories and experiences here. We value that and listen closely to what they have to say about what actually happened on the ground and how we can ensure it does not happen again.

At the ministerial level I pay tribute to the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian. That calm, methodical, competent approach to management really shone through in this time. There is no magic solution in a crisis but the public certainly values leadership that is measured, calm and confident, and provides information in a logical way. People take a lot of comfort from that. The press conferences with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, David Elliott, were very reassuring to people I spoke to in these affected communities. I pay tribute to Andrew Constance, who has received a lot of credit for his work, not just in his electorate but as a broader inspiration in this crisis; and John Barilaro, who has done a fantastic job in directing and leading the recovery effort.

There is also a Minister I mention in the category of quiet achiever. Not every Minister received the same amount of publicity but Sarah Mitchell, the education Minister, did a tremendous job in ensuring all affected schools were either rebuilt or repaired, and come the beginning of the 2020 school year they were all open for the school population, which would be reassuring for those communities that life could resume and the education of their children was given that priority. She did a tremendous job travelling the State with the assistance of her department. Local MPs have worked very hard. I mentioned Andrew Constance, also Gareth Ward, Joe McGirr in the electorate of Wagga Wagga; the Blue Mountains, Central Coast and Hunter MPs. There have been a lot of people affected and it has been a credit to the Parliament that in the worst and most difficult of circumstances so much effort has gone in to recover, rebuild and reassure people and give them some hope for the future. I offer my condolences.

**The Hon. TARA MORIARTY (15:38:29):** It is hard to know where to start with a condolence motion like this one. So much of our State and so many of our fellow citizens across our community have been affected by the damage caused by these devastating fires. No words can capture our sorrow about the loss of lives. For anyone to lose their life in these awful circumstances, for the families left behind, my heart is with you. It is also hard to capture the sadness of the loss of well over 2,500 homes. Houses can be rebuilt, of course, but losing your home and irreplaceable belongings, being displaced and losing a sense of peace has been devastating for so many.

The loss of many thousands of animals is awful. The scale of the loss of animals and the loss of over 5.5 million hectares of much of our beautiful landscape is hard to see and hard to contemplate. Sure, we know that it will generally rejuvenate and regrow over time, but the scale of the damage is unprecedented. I visited many of our fire-affected communities over the last month or so. I have seen much of the destruction and spoken to many people about the trauma they experienced, either personally or as a community. I have seen an extraordinary level of resilience. I have seen people and communities come together to help one another get through what is a very difficult and traumatic time.

I offer my deepest and sincere condolences to the family and friends of those who lost their lives in this disaster. I acknowledge the heart-wrenching loss of Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul—the heroic and brave RFS volunteers who sadly lost their lives. I acknowledge their bravery and sacrifice and my thoughts are with their families. I also pay my respects to Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, who travelled from America to help in Australia's time of need and who tragically lost their lives.

To all RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW workers I say thank you. Thank you for your courage, thank you for your bravery and thank you for not giving up. Without the work that each and every one of you did, the loss would be much worse. I acknowledge the many communities right across New South Wales that have been hit by devastation over this summer. In addition to lives lost and homes lost, many people lost businesses and work as a result of the fires. We need to rebuild and reinvest in these communities—not just literally rebuild buildings but by showing long-term and ongoing support for these businesses and spending money in these areas. Many businesses based on seasonal interests, particularly like those around the South Coast, had prepared themselves for a busy summer season and now find themselves in what will be a very difficult, and probably long-term, financial period. I know many people lost or suffered reductions in work while the bills did not stop, adding to the ongoing difficulty.

The Government has a significant role to play in the continued support of these areas over the long term, particularly if we want people to feel that they can rebuild lives for themselves in their communities and not feel that they have to move away to rebuild and to feel secure—either personally or in secure employment. We know that many people witnessed and experienced some very terrifying and traumatic scenes and circumstances across the summer, and my heart goes out to them all. Many people experienced the trauma of finding themselves in unexpectedly unprecedented fire situations. Many faced the difficulty of finding themselves evacuated or in some cases being unable to evacuate as quickly as they would have liked.

By talking to people in their fire-affected communities over the last month or so, I have seen that people really want to support each other through this difficult time. I have seen an extraordinary level of resilience and I also have seen a lot of the results of mental stress. We need to make sure that as members of Parliament we are there for these communities and continue to be so, long into the future. Their pain and difficulty cannot be forgotten. We know that the immediate difficulties these communities face, and have faced, have started to be dealt with. But we need to acknowledge that many of these communities already were doing it tough before the fires. The rebuild of stuff has commenced and will continue, although we have to acknowledge it will take a long time.

Houses and property will be rebuilt. Roads and bridges will be repaired. All of the physical rebuilding is absolutely essential and should be done as quickly and carefully as possible. But we can all acknowledge that the mental and emotional rebuild, the long-term personal support these communities will need, is the responsibility of us all, and will continue to be long into the future. Significant mental health resources must be embedded in these communities. Many of these communities were doing it tough before the fires and many had very limited local mental health and trauma support before now. Those communities desperately need mental health support now and for the long term. It is essential that the proper necessary resources are there as and when they are needed.

Again I say how sincerely sorry I am for the lives lost and for the lives adversely affected by these bushfires. The community expects us to work together to acknowledge the difficult days faced by our friends across New South Wales and to ensure real support is provided for all of our affected communities into the future. We all need to be in this together, regardless of where we live.

**The Hon. SHAYNE MALLARD (15:44:13):** I join my colleagues in expressing my condolences in response to the important motion moved by the Minister, the Hon. Don Harwin, and thank him for bringing this important matter to the attention of the House. It is important that Parliament records this historic event in the history of our State and records for posterity the people and communities who were involved. I also offer my sincere condolences to victims and their families. A condolence motion provides an opportunity to acknowledge the lives lost in the tragedy and to express our condolences for the loss of communities that were impacted by the devastating fires.

The recent bushfires in New South Wales, some of which still continue, were unprecedented in the State's history. When the House adjourned for the Christmas break, the impact of the bushfires was just starting to bite around the State. The bushfires came on the back of a historic deep and sustained drought, which still prevails across approximately 99 per cent of the State. The impact of these fires has been nothing short of devastating. No-one, even those not directly impacted by the flames, can unsee the images of fires across our State—the images of homes, businesses, farms and townships being destroyed by fire—or the really moving and powerful images of people fleeing from the insatiable advance of huge fire fronts.

Across the country seven million hectares were burnt, which includes 5.4 million hectares in New South Wales, and 2.7 million hectares of national park were impacted by fires in New South Wales. As a resident of the Blue Mountains, an area which is surrounded by World Heritage-listed national parks, I feel that impact acutely. I will reflect upon that a little later. There were 11,000 bushfires and grass fires across the State. I am sure that those of us who were in a fire zone spent many anxious hours of our summer, Christmas and New Year period glued to our mobile phones to monitor the activity of fires near our homes and our communities on the RFS Fires Near Me app, which I commend. Across the nation, 2,439 homes and properties were destroyed and more than one billion domestic, farm and native animals perished in the flames.

But most tragically of all, and the core of this motion, is that the bushfire season claimed the lives of 33 people across the nation, including eight firefighters. New South Wales has been the worst-affected State, with 25 fatalities that include the deaths of six firefighters. Three of the firefighters who lost their lives were NSW Rural Fire Service firefighters Samuel McPaul, Deputy Captain Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer. We acknowledge their loss in the service of our community.

Also three United States aviators, who operated one of the Large Air Tankers, were killed during a firefighting mission on 23 January: Ian H. McBeth, First Officer Paul C. Hudson, and Flight Engineer Rick A. DeMorgan Jr. We acknowledge their service to our country as citizens of the United States. They all made

the ultimate sacrifice to protect the people of New South Wales. Today the Parliament honours them for their great bravery. The Parliament also honours their families for the unimaginable sacrifice their families are enduring after such a tragic loss. As the Premier stated at their memorial service, their sacrifice "will not be forgotten" by the people of New South Wales. The people of New South Wales and Australia thank them for their selflessness and their bravery.

Most if not all members of this Chamber have been either directly or indirectly impacted by the bushfires. I turn to focus on my home region of western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Bushfires are in the DNA of the Blue Mountains community. Those of us who live there know it is one of the most bushfire-prone areas in the world. All year round we live with the issue of bushfire always firmly in the forefront of our minds. That is the price we pay for living in the world's most beautiful bushland environment. It is for that reason that I, like many other residents of the Blue Mountains, joined my local community firefighting unit. We know the risk of living in the Blue Mountains that is posed by fires.

Many others in the mountains join the RFS and a good contingent become members of Fire and Rescue NSW. Everyone in the Blue Mountains knows their local RFS, usually because either a neighbour or a family member is a member of the RFS. We all fundraise for and support the RFS. We see them manning the barbecue at Bunnings at the weekends. We see them at our local schools talking about fire prevention. We see them in our local shopping precincts and in our communities. It is an honour for me that, in the period that I have been in this House, on quite a few occasions I have represented Minister David Elliott and the former police Minister at various ceremonies held by the Rural Fire Service in the Blue Mountains. These ceremonies can be awards for training and skills development or, more movingly, awards for longevity of service. I awarded a medal to one fellow—I think his name is Bob; it is remiss of me not to remember—who had done 50 years of RFS service. I saw him in Bell with Senator Payne, when we were inspecting fire damage. He was there directing traffic.

In the mountains we have to be prepared for bushfires and the RFS certainly is prepared. To put this in perspective, the Blue Mountains local government area covers 143,000 hectares of land in the greater Sydney region and about 70 per cent of that area is in the World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park. The greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area covers one million hectares of national park and bushland and is dominated by very flammable eucalyptus forests. The price we pay to live immersed in such great beauty is the ever-present issue of bushfires. It is not so long ago that the Blue Mountains community was impacted by bushfires. In 2013 several hundred homes were destroyed in one afternoon. Fire regularly features in the life of the Blue Mountains. When I lived in Penrith my father was in the RFS and he was on the local council. He was in the mountains in the 1990s dealing with bushfires. I recall that when I worked here for President Willis in the early 1990s we witnessed a parade of RFS vehicles on the road in front of Parliament House and flags were flown to thank the bush fire fighters for their work.

Every summer, including the one just past, we in the mountains hold our breath expecting a horror fire season to eventuate. Sadly, this summer it did. Many in the Blue Mountains have been reliving previous traumatic bushfire experiences as a result of these recent fires. I encourage them to avail themselves of the mental health resources that the State and Federal governments have put in place to assist. These resources include schools. There were several key fires burning in the Blue Mountains. They all have names, which etch them into the memories of the community—the Ruined Castle fire, the Gaspers Mountain fire, the Grose Valley fire, the Green Wattle Creek fire and the Erskine Creek fire. They all menaced communities in the Blue Mountains on both sides of the spine, where the Great Western Highway runs from Penrith to Lithgow.

I will focus on one of these fires, the Ruined Castle fire. It was started by a lightning strike on Clifftop Drive in Katoomba, which goes to the Three Sisters. Many members would know it. It was the second time that a fire had been started there. It headed across Narrow Neck, which is traditionally viewed as a barrier to prevent fires from getting out of control. Narrow Neck had been heavily doused in pink fire retardant from the beautiful Marie Bashir water tanker. Nonetheless, overnight the fire swept down into the Megalong Valley, menacing those communities. Later it was joined by the Erskine Creek fire. It then travelled on both sides of the highway towards Springwood, creating a dangerous situation for those residents. In the Megalong Valley the fire was met by the hardworking efforts of the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW and National Parks and Wildlife Service crews. A friend of mine who is an RFS member and I walked to the point overlooking the Megalong Valley after the fire had gone into the valley. We saw the fire, the smoke and the spot fires to the left heading back towards Katoomba and every now and then we saw the flashing lights of firefighting crews working to contain that fire.

I congratulate the strategic planners in the fire command headquarters in Katoomba, who had the foresight to prepare firebreaks and conduct back-burns below Narrow Neck, which helped to contain the fire from going into the Megalong Valley and back up towards Blackheath, Medlow Bath and surrounds. I note that that fire, which was contained for a few weeks, was extinguished by the amazing rain we have had in the mountains in the

past two weeks. That fire, which was on the southern side of the highway and the Grose Valley fire and was a breakaway from the fire from Woolamai, swept into the Grose Valley and threatened homes at Blackheath. It was a dangerous fire that singed homes, although it did not burn any. Then the fire travelled west over the Causeway, which traditionally has been a firebreak, not a route for fires. The fire destroyed a huge amount of railway infrastructure and then it swept into the valley and all the way to Lithgow.

At the same time the fire hit from that side, the township of Bell was hit by the fire and seven of the 12 houses in that town were destroyed. That fire raced down towards Katoomba on the north side of the highway. It came to within about 250 metres of my house on two occasions. Our small community was mobilised. We had fire vehicles, sprinklers, helicopters doing water drops, water bombing and all the usual things. We received two communications to evacuate. Earlier an honourable member spoke about the need to have a fire plan. My family has a fire plan but when it was put into action we found that there were shortcomings in our fire plan. That lesson has been learned. Fortunately, wind changes turned the volcanic fire that was looming over our house away from us and into the Grose Valley.

I visited fire headquarters in Katoomba a number of times. I did not want to be a nuisance, so I only went there occasionally with Ministers to show support and see how they were going. The men and women at the Katoomba emergency response headquarters are heroes. They may not be out there fighting fires but they are heroes behind computer screens and giant television monitors. They are amazing. The centre was essentially divided into three giant rooms. In one room RFS commanders were concentrating on the active fires. In another room, in which I have presented medals in the past, there were tables for all the different services—police, railways, the local area health service. The services were coordinating their responses to the fires. In the third room people were planning for the fire activity three days ahead, which I thought was fascinating. They were getting weather reports, they had maps and they were working on firebreaks and where to move resources. The operation at the emergency response headquarters in the Blue Mountains was like a military operation.

I visited the headquarters with the environment Minister, Matt Kean, and on another occasion with the Premier. When I visited with Matt Kean, we received a briefing in which we were told that their plan for the fire in the Grose Valley was to keep the fire burning towards Katoomba by building firebreaks and then to push it back into the Grose Valley, using the dam at Katoomba that supplies water to the Blue Mountains as a barrier. In the Grose Valley last year and the year before there had been hazard reduction burns, so they would be able to contain the fire in the valley. That is exactly what happened. They trapped the fire in the Grose Valley and it burned itself out. After that, the rain came and killed off the fire. The RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW and National Parks crews worked together to control the fire. They knew what they were doing and they managed the fire in an amazing logistical exercise. Once the fire was contained, they transferred their resources to manage the Erskine Creek fire, which was menacing the community of Springwood and surrounds. I commend the people working behind the scenes, those who are one step behind the frontline firefighters. All of them had been firefighters at some time in their life.

On 8 February the RFS declared the Ruined Castle fire extinguished. On 10 February the Gospels Mountain, Grose Valley and Erskine Creek fires were declared out after 47 long, hard days of firefighting by tireless firefighters. To the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Blue Mountains, I say a huge thankyou. I do not think you can really say we are lucky because we are not lucky, but we are relatively lucky in comparison to other regions in New South Wales. We lost 18 homes in the Blue Mountains. One home is too many. I cannot even imagine losing my home. We lost no lives in the Blue Mountains but 80 per cent of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area was burnt. I do not say destroyed because it is already rebounding but it was certainly damaged.

I turn to the recovery and challenges confronting the Blue Mountains community. I toured the bushfire-affected areas with the Premier and prior to that with Minister Kean. We went out to meet firefighters and to look at the damage. Minister Kean clearly wanted to be there for the National Parks and Wildlife Service fire teams, which were extensively involved in dealing with the Blue Mountains fires, and the RFS. The Premier and I visited communities up to Mount Victoria and were briefed on the situation with the fires but there were much more pressing areas in the State for the Premier and Minister to attend. I thank them for coming and the community appreciated seeing them.

I was also joined by my Federal colleague and friend Minister Marise Payne and Minister Littleproud. They started out in the Hawkesbury and I joined them at the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden at Mount Tomah, which was damaged by the fires. We continued to the community of Bell, which was one of the most moving experiences for me. Bell was devastated by the fires but the people of Bell are so stoic and matter of fact. They joined us. There were hugs. They related the stories of the fire. Traditionally in Bell fire has come up on the north side around Bells Line of Road. This time it was following that course.

The Bell RFS unit of two trucks and 20 firefighters were down on the north side when another fire, the one from the Grose Valley, unexpectedly came up on the other side and hit the RFS station. The womenfolk in RFS gear who had been preparing meals and stuff for the firefighters—it is mainly women—and kids and pets sheltered in the shed with the sprinklers on as the fire swept through the Bell community and burnt six or seven houses. We are talking about an area of about 12 houses. Their stoicism and optimism about it all and their preparedness to talk about the lessons learnt from it were amazing to experience.

Minister Littleproud, Minister Payne and I then went to the rhododendron gardens at Blackheath, which was about one-third destroyed by the fires. It is a much-loved community attraction and, in fact, an international attraction. In the car park we held a roundtable with businesses and talked about the impact of the fires. That is where we learned directly by word of mouth of the huge impact the fires are having on the tourist industry up there. For example, the guesthouse at Mount Victoria had had 100 per cent cancellation of bookings. All the other tourist attractions were experiencing similar impacts and still are. That means they have had to lay off casual and permanent staff, which has a knock-on effect in the local economy. We heard that restaurant suppliers were not being paid. It is not the restaurants' fault; they did not have the turnover to pay their bills.

One of the initiatives I discussed at that meeting—and I am not taking credit for it but, having had businesses of my own, I understand it certainly helped—was a simple thing: to suspend the payment of GST due at the end of January. The Government announced that initiative two days later. I understand the tax department was not too happy but the suspension of GST meant businesses that probably would have defaulted did not have to scramble around to find the cash to pay the GST. You might say, "Well, they collected the GST," but they had been devastated by the loss of trade.

The Federal Government went a little further. Businesses in fire-affected postcodes—and the Government was pretty generous about that too—could apply to have their November GST refunded back into their bank account. They could then work it out with the tax department at tax time whether they would repay it or had made losses. Simple things like that, along with all the loans, helped the businesses. I commend the Federal and State governments for those initiatives. Since then I, together with Senator Payne—who is not only our foreign Minister but also our Senator for western Sydney—have held two roundtables in the mountains with businesses to discuss issues about delivery on the ground, which we hear a lot about.

The message we now have to send is that the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury are recovering and open for business. Whilst we talk about a lot being burnt, in fact there was a lot that was not burnt. I place on record my thanks to the following people who have worked tirelessly during this devastating bushfire season in the mountains. Whilst they were omnipresent in the media, they were in the mountains as well. I thank the RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, whom I saw speak at the Lifeline fundraising lunch, which raised \$1.2 million for Lifeline's special service for fire counselling services around Australia. I was not previously aware that his father was killed in a bushfire accident. I also thank Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers, who was very impressive in the mountains.

I thank Fire and Rescue NSW Commissioner Paul Baxter and Deputy Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell. I particularly pay thanks to and make special mention of those I met and worked with in the Blue Mountains. There are too many to mention but I will talk about a couple of the people at the top. Please accept that there are a lot of people supporting them. I thank Greg Wardle; the RFS incident controller for the Blue Mountains was always there. He is from the Illawarra and was moved to the Blue Mountains for the fires. He has only just gone back home. He was incredibly impressive. He worked hand in glove with David Crust, whom I have great respect for. He is the director of the Blue Mountains National Parks and Wildlife Service. The RFS, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Fire and Rescue NSW worked seamlessly together in dealing with this challenge for our community.

Again I thank Senator Marise Payne and Minister Littleproud for coming to the mountains on several occasions. I pay tribute to the Mayor of Blue Mountains City Council, Labor councillor Mark Greenhill, who was regularly in touch with me to check that I was okay, which was really nice. He was using social media incredibly well, daily updating the community on what was happening with the fires and the briefings he attended each morning. He already has a Medal of the Order of Australia. I commend him for his leadership of the community during that fire.

The Australian Defence Force [ADF] came up to help clear the roads and start reopening roads. I thank the ADF. I must not go without mentioning members of the Blue Mountains SES, to whom I often present awards. They had a lot of call-outs during the flooding and with the trees that are down from the storms but they were also very active during the fire period. I also thank the staff from the Blue Mountains RFS district. I conclude by thanking all the firefighters, paid and unpaid, across our State who risked their lives to keep us all safe. I particularly thank the members of the 23 brigades in the Blue Mountains. There are 30 villages in the Blue Mountains and there are 23 RFS stations. We will forever be indebted to the 2,257 members who protected

thousands of residents, including my family, from the ravages of bushfire over what the Prime Minister has called the black summer of 2019-20. I commend the motion to the House.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON (16:08:04):** How do we honour the memory of the 25 people, including the three local and three American firefighting volunteers who died during this unprecedented fire season? How do we mourn the loss of more than a billion wild animals and the ongoing deaths of those injured and starving in the bush? It was reported that the beekeepers entering the recently burnt north-east forests looking for their hives but instead hearing forest animals screaming in pain and agony required counselling. What of the tens of thousands of sheep and cattle who succumbed to the flames, trapped in paddocks with no means of escape, trapped by what Indigenous Americans call "the devil's rope"? The lucky ones died quickly but how many had to wait for the euthanasing bullet? Each animal that perished is a sentient being, an individual who wanted to live, who felt terror and excruciating pain as they burnt to death.

There are too many dreadful images to recount: the charcoal joey entangled in the barbed wire; the incinerated koalas looking like gruesome exhibits from Pompeii's volcanised artefacts. There is also the vicarious trauma experienced by friends and family who witnessed the deaths and the devastation of their loved ones and their homes. There is the terrible fear that this is the new normal. As our Prime Minister said, "Nothing new here." How do we heal fire-ravaged communities when the biggest fear is that anything rebuilt is likely to burn again—if not next year, then certainly within a few years—as fire seasons start earlier, become more intense and run for longer periods?

The loss from these catastrophic fires was repeated throughout much of the State over many weeks, resulting in the worst fire season in living memory. The toll on the landscape is immense: 5½ million hectares burnt badly and in places where no fire has burned for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The once extensive Gondwana Rainforests plundered for their timbers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries now only account for less than 2 per cent of our landmass. After the fires we must now assess what has been lost forever. Forest giants were destroyed in World Heritage Nightcap National Park and other listed rainforests. The historic stand of rainforest at Protesters Falls in Nightcap only survived due to the tireless work of a group of local volunteers, led by respected rainforest activists Nan and Hugh Nicholson and their family.

We have heard from survivors such as South Coast resident Sam Markham, who gave an account of being caught up in the firestorms. He described the noise of the approaching flames as surreal, like the sound of jet engines. Everything goes dark as the smoke blocks the sun and the sky. The deafening noise gives way to a deadly silence as oxygen is drawn from the air and then the firestorm arrives, incinerating everyone and everything in its path. The horror that I experienced firsthand was not the deafening roar of the approaching fires but the crushing silence of a dead forest. I went into the Blue Mountains bushland to assist wildlife carers Greg Knightley and Tracey Dodds look for injured or hungry native animals but nothing stirred: no birdsong, no insects buzzing, no startled wallabies or lizards darting into their hollows, no sign of any animal life whatsoever.

The fires have been so intense and pervasive that we are looking at nothing less than ecocide and a massacre of innocents on a scale that cannot be comprehended. But comprehend we must. These lessons must be learned or we will be condemned to repeat them into our own oblivion. I spent time at Monty's Rest sanctuary, putting my old nursing skills to good use, treating kangaroos with burn wounds and re-bandaging limbs. The animals seemed to understand our motives and were incredibly stoic, though surely they must have suffered from our ministrations. I felt a rising nausea and had to drive home. When I was alone, the full emotional impact hit me physically. I learnt a few days later that one of the kangaroos had died; the third-degree burns were too severe for recovery.

I have nothing but admiration for all the frontline workers and volunteers, firefighters and animal carers who step up to take on the hardest jobs, both emotionally and physically, in the community. In the beginning I asked the question: How do we honour the dead? Some may say that now is not the time to ask the difficult questions, to criticise those whose acts and omissions took us to this dark place. Respectfully I disagree. I believe that we honour the dead by doing our best to make sure that we have done everything we can as a parliament to reduce the likelihood of such catastrophic forces from being unleashed upon our people, animals and environment again. We must do everything we can to stop the new from becoming the normal.

We have heard in the koala populations inquiry that climate change is drying out our forests, making them more susceptible to fire. Koalas have been more than decimated in these summer bushfires. They are slow and cannot move quickly enough to move out of harm's way. In less extreme fires they can move to the top of the trees but with these recent fires the canopies exploded in flames. Witnesses to the inquiry considered solutions included addressing climate change by no longer giving development approvals to clear land for new or expanded coal or coal seam gas mines. The current review of the Independent Planning Commission must not consider watering down its powers to assess applications or to impose conditions on fossil fuel industries.

The Government should withdraw the Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Territorial Limits) Bill 2019 so that downstream greenhouse gas emissions are taken into account when assessing development applications. Once and for all we must abandon the pretence that climate change is not a result of human activity. Reputable scientific bodies have concluded that temperatures are rising in significant part due to our use of fossil fuels. Another major cause of global warming is animal agriculture, as established at the Paris summit. At least 15 per cent of greenhouses gases are produced by animal agriculture. In New South Wales we continue to clear land and empty our rivers in order to expand this cruel industry. We need government financial support for plant-based industries and at the same time we need to withdraw subsidies for animal agriculture.

We know that there has been a shocking free-for-all in tree felling and land clearing since the repeal of the Native Vegetation Act in 2017. This loss of bushland cover is also exacerbating global warming. As a matter of urgency we need to fund the planting of millions of trees and repeal the new legislation. We also need to immediately stop the logging of our native forests, which operate as carbon sinks that take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and store it in the forest's soil. We need to fund practical measures for addressing fire management on the ground. We need more, not fewer, national parks staff for fire prevention and for monitoring early warning systems. We should trial Indigenous fire management practices, as it is abundantly clear that back-burning is of limited use in a warming climate.

The window of opportunity for back-burning has narrowed, while the fire season has expanded from early spring to autumn. We need to purchase our own fleet of water bombers and establish a publicly funded, professional, paid rural firefighting force. Volunteers can always augment firefighting services during emergencies but it is unacceptable to expect that volunteers should put their lives on hold and on the line because of the appalling mismanagement of the environment by successive governments. Finally, members of Parliament need to step across the partisan divide and work together to honour the memories of those who died in the fires. We must enact legislation and support government policies that will reduce the impact of climate change and hopefully prevent the firestorms of this summer from becoming our new normal. Otherwise we will have betrayed the dead and abandoned the citizens of New South Wales, who will be forced to live with the consequences of our neglect and ineptitude.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS (16:19:11):** I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and the State that we represent and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, whom we should look to learn from as we try to salvage lessons from the devastation, tragedy and destruction of the summer bushfires. There will be questions to ask and the Opposition will hold the Government to account, but that is for another day. Today we mourn with our New South Wales communities for the loss of lives, of homes and of properties. I offer my deepest sympathies and condolences to everyone who has suffered loss and near misses over the summer. I offer them especially to the families of the 25 men and women who lost their lives. I extend sympathies and sincere thanks to the families of Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, who travelled here from the United States to help defend our towns, our homes and our lives, and lost their own.

I honour the extraordinary sacrifice of Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul. RFS volunteers Geoffrey and Andrew both had young children, with Samuel soon to become a father. I do not have the words to thank their wives or their children for their sacrifice. I can only imagine their grief. Instead, I will use the words of my Labor colleague the member for Prospect, who is a member of the same RFS brigade as Geoffrey and Andrew. Earlier this month he gave an incredibly moving speech in the other place and a haunting account of the approach of a bushfire. In paying tribute to the heroism and sacrifice of Geoff and Andrew and the other volunteer firefighters who raced to help them on that day, he said:

The actions of these volunteer firefighters ... were both extraordinary and typical of our brigade and the members of the RFS.

I pay tribute to all of the volunteers of the RFS who have fought fires this summer, along with the firefighters in the Forestry Corporation, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and, of course, Fire and Rescue NSW. I pay tribute also to their unions: the Fire Brigade Employees Union, the Public Service Association and the Australian Workers' Union. To run into a fire and not away from it is truly a remarkable thing. Every time they do it, it is a heroic act. The scale of the loss of life, property and bushland this summer has been unprecedented, with 25 people killed, 2,400 homes destroyed, more than 11,000 buildings lost or damaged, 5.5 million hectares burnt and perhaps hundreds of millions of animals killed. But it certainly would have been so much worse if not for the work of our professionals and the many volunteers.

I pay tribute to my friend Darren Rodrigo, who volunteered this summer, as he has for many years, and the beloved Phil Costa, a former member for Wollondilly. Phil has been an RFS volunteer for 35 years, first in the local area he represented and now in his retirement on the mid North Coast near Forster. Recently Phil recounted to me that when he joined the brigade on the mid North Coast he instituted a rule that the youngest man was on the hose. Earlier this year he was surprised when his team turned to him to staff it. "I said the youngest man on

the hose!" They turned to him and said, "You might be 70, but today you're it." I apologise to Phil for revealing his age, but the challenge of an ageing volunteer base is just one of the issues we face, especially with a longer fire season and the changing nature of the fires themselves. The member for Prospect also said:

At a time when many say our social institutions are declining and individualism is on the rise, their commitment reminds us that there is a civic mindedness embedded in our Australian DNA. We need to build on this so that being an active member of the community, of finding how to help our neighbour, is the norm and not the extraordinary.

This summer it was the norm. In the face of devastation the community has responded with incredible generosity, from huge fundraising efforts from across the State to locals—even when under threat themselves—helping their neighbours. I pay tribute also to my friend the member for Lakemba, Jihad Dib, who has worked tirelessly in our local area to connect the generosity of our community to give practical support for fire-affected areas on both the South Coast and North Coast. He has done so much, even driving trucks to deliver food and other essential items to those who have lost everything. We have spoken about how these fires were unprecedented. The ferocity of the fires, the nature of the fires and the length of the season have not before been experienced. In November last year I was shocked and deeply moved by the pictures and videos of the way the fires raged around areas so familiar to me in my home town of Forster on the mid North Coast.

At the end of January we visited the area and I was surprised at how quiet it seemed, with less visitors than previous years. I had thought, incorrectly, that with the fires on the South Coast, tourists would move northwards instead. I asked local businesses and community members and they confirmed it had been a quieter season. Unfortunately, tourists, with their important economic multipliers, had largely stayed home. In Forster locals spoke to me about already feeling forgotten. The scale of the fires requires enormous recovery efforts. Different communities face different challenges to rebuild, and they are spread right across our State. That is something the member for Lismore, the indefatigable Janelle Saffin, is facing in her community. I commend her for her amazing ongoing efforts on their behalf. We all have a responsibility to ensure our communities receive the support they need.

When visiting Forster I drove along the road to where I used to live. On one side of the road the fire had totally burnt out the bush; on the other houses stood almost as if nothing had happened. I could only imagine what those residents went through on that November day last year—an experience so many residents in so many towns and villages went through over the summer. I thank the firefighters who avoided worse damage. But as I drove I was also amazed that I could already see green shoots and larger fern leaves. Less than two months later the bush was already regenerating. In the face of these unprecedented fires communities have shown themselves to be incredibly resilient, but we cannot rely on that. Grief and trauma can take a long time to manifest, and even longer to heal. We have a responsibility to ensure that no community is forgotten.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN (16:27:42):** I commend the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council for moving this motion in the House. It is important, and the quality of the debate and the genuine sincerity of all members has demonstrated how necessary it is for this place, as well as other Parliaments across the nation, to express the views of the entire citizenry of this country. I appreciate the contributions of all members from all sides to this debate, but I make particular mention of the contribution of Mr Justin Field. Anyone who heard it would recognise how extraordinary it was when he spoke about his own personal experience. As the Hon. Mick Veitch said, Mr Justin Field brought the issue to life in a real way. It was an experience than a number of other members and I did not have, but that many others did. His words were impactful and moving. His comments about the effects of the fire on his community—particularly when he discussed the notion of guilt and the guilt being carried by so many in our community—were profound. I encourage all members who did not get the chance to witness it to read his speech.

This summer has been like no other we have seen, and I hope we never see such a summer again. There has been excruciating loss, with nearly 2,500 homes destroyed, 5.5 million hectares burnt, hundreds of millions of animals killed and, most devastatingly, 25 human lives lost. I join my colleagues on all sides of the Chamber in supporting this motion and extend my deepest sympathies to all who have faced tragedy and loss this bushfire season. It will take our communities and our State years to physically and emotionally recover from the carnage.

The fire season first began to garner the attention of New South Wales in October, when a ferocious blaze tore through Rappville on the Northern Rivers. We started to see reports in our papers and on our radios and televisions that the North Coast was on fire. It was genuinely inspiring to see the willingness of brigades across the Northern Rivers to come to the aid of communities that had been struck by this devastation. With homes, pets and precious memories gone, people came together to support one another. I cannot thank rural fire brigades across the North Coast enough for what they have done to save the lives and homes of so many. The Rappville fires took over 50 homes and, tragically, two lives, but many more were saved because of the bravery of those brigades.

This then ebbed into every interaction and community. For example, in Alstonville over Christmas I heard a wonderful story of a family who decided to give up what they would normally spend on gifts for one another and instead donate that money to the Alstonville Wollongbar fire brigade. According to the local Fire and Rescue NSW, the idea was championed by the grandchildren of the family, who just wanted to help. It is hearing stories like this—and I know there are so many others—that starts to heal the scars left on the community by these bushfires. The North Coast has the most wonderful sense of generosity. When the fires were at their worst, friends, neighbours and strangers were there to help pick up the pieces and support those in need. Despite what we saw and the concerning forecasts by weather experts and the RFS, we hoped against hope that this would be the worst. But as we now know, it was only the beginning. I do not think any of us could really imagine what was about to unfold across the State.

I am deeply saddened but very humbled to stand in this place today and acknowledge the incredible bravery and sacrifice of our firefighters, emergency services and everyday heroes in protecting their towns and communities and to pay respect to those who have lost their lives in battle. Both here at home and overseas, families and friends are mourning the loss of their loved ones. These heroes put themselves in the path of an inferno, doing all they could to slow its progress day after day after day, and they paid the ultimate price. On 19 December we received the tragic news that two firefighters had been killed on their way home following a long day fighting fires, after a tree fell and caused their tanker to roll. The deaths of 32-year-old Geoffrey Keaton and 36-year-old Andrew O'Dwyer shocked and saddened us all. With over two decades of experience between them, Geoffrey and Andrew were deeply respected members of the Horsley Park fire brigade and their local community.

On 31 December we awoke to more tragic news that another firefighter had been killed overnight: 28-year-old Sam McPaul died as cyclone-like winds picked up and overturned the fire truck he was in. We were once again crushed by this tragic loss of life. The names Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Sam McPaul have become synonymous with bravery, comradery and integrity—men whose lives were taken far too soon. Geoffrey, Andrew and Sam leave behind a proud legacy of ordinary men doing something extraordinary for their community. To Geoffrey's partner, Jess, and son, Harvey; to Andrew's wife, Mel, and daughter, Charlotte; and to Sam's wife, Megan, and their unborn child: I offer my deepest condolences and echo the sentiments of our RFS commissioner, Premier Gladys Berejiklian and countless people across the country that they died as heroes and will forever be remembered that way. We send our condolences to each of the brigades that have laid to rest one of their own and then got up the next day, went back out into the heat without their mates and continued fighting to save others.

An acknowledgement and a deep appreciation of this strength, courage and sacrifice is not restricted to our borders. Many firefighters from across the globe joined our crews to help in any way they could. For their service we are truly grateful. On 23 January we received the devastating news that three American crew members had been killed when their C-130 Large Air Tanker crashed in the Snowy Monaro region. Captain Ian McBeth from Montana, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson from Arizona and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr from Florida gave their lives to help strangers in a foreign land. We offer our deepest condolences to their partners, their children, their families and their communities. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten, and I am pleased that all of New South Wales was given the opportunity to remember and farewell them at the very moving memorial service in Sydney over the weekend.

I also pay tribute to the 19 other people who have died in New South Wales this bushfire season and express my profound sadness for their families as they grieve the loss of a loved one: Robert Lindsay and Gwenda Hyde, Vivian Chaplain, George Nole, Julie Fletcher, Barry Parsons, Chris Savva, Russell Bratby, Robert and Patrick Salway, Laurie Andrew, Col Burns, John Butler, John Smith, Michael Campbell, David Harrison, Ross Rixon, Michael Clarke and a man who is yet to be identified. I acknowledge that many of my colleagues in this House and in the Legislative Assembly knew these men and women and grieve for them too. I thank them for sharing their stories and struggles with us. That is not an easy thing to do. I wish to also acknowledge all my colleagues in this place and the other place who have fought to save their own homes and farms. They have stood side by side with their communities and shared in the trauma they have gone through together.

I acknowledge the extraordinary leadership and service of Shane Fitzsimmons, our fire commissioner, who has been a strong and calm presence for all of us throughout this crisis. The courage and fortitude that Shane showed every day was incredible, as he came onto our television screens and delivered heartbreaking news while still encouraging our volunteers to keep on fighting and encouraging communities to remain vigilant and to care for one another. I thank Shane for the compassion he has shared with us all as New South Wales faced such devastation. Through him I thank every single firey who answered the call, stood up when they were needed and put their lives on the line.

I acknowledge the difficult task our Premier has faced. I commend Gladys for her realness, her pragmatism and the genuine care that she has shown throughout this entire ordeal. I also acknowledge my own leader, Deputy Premier John Barilaro, for the vital work he is doing overseeing the recovery operations on behalf of the Government. To coordinate communities and recovery and relief efforts across a State that is more than twice the size of Germany is no easy task, and I am grateful for their leadership and sincerity.

This bushfire season we have seen immense tragedy, but we have also seen incredible strength and resilience from so many in the face of adversity. When the fires on the North Coast started last year, we could not have imagined the scale of devastation that was yet to come. I saw our fire brigades come together to support neighbouring communities when the bushfires started hitting the North Coast and beyond. Although exhausted, our Rural Fire Service volunteers never wavered and continued to protect our community day and night in extremely difficult conditions. I thank those from my region: the fire brigades of the Northern Rivers and Far North Coast zones, which take in the local government areas of Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley, Tweed, Ballina and Byron. We are all too aware that without them and their colleagues from across the State, we would have farewelled many more homes, businesses and loved ones. We cannot thank them enough for everything they have done.

I acknowledge and commend all local emergency service workers and volunteer organisations, such as the Red Cross, the SES, Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service firefighters, Forestry Corporation, BlazeAid, the POD Army, police and ambulance services, as well as the local councils, for the incredible support they have offered and continue to offer to those in our community who have been affected. I acknowledge the local organisations that offered their facilities as evacuation centres across the region, such as Coraki bowling club, Nimbin and Glen Innes showgrounds, Grafton Community Centre and Southern Cross University. I thank all the schools and halls that opened their doors. Of course, the generosity of those organisations and groups was replicated across the entire State again and again and again.

Every community has shown so much courage to keep on keeping on. In times like this it can seem easier sometimes to give up, but that is the one thing we have not seen. Although we have witnessed outpourings of grief, we have seen in equal measure outpourings of love and support for our towns from across Australia and from across the world. We have seen people open their homes to total strangers to look after them. We have seen Australians literally take the shirts off their own backs to rescue wildlife from the blaze. We have seen volunteers drive hours just to provide a meal to those who have lost everything. We have seen families give up their Christmas Day to volunteer at evacuation centres and we have seen incredible support and donations from people on the other side of the world who have probably never heard of most of the towns affected by these fires.

Today I also acknowledge those who offered their support but who we have not heard about and whose names we do not know: the neighbour who has been a shoulder to cry on, the friends who helped sandbag their mate's place, the children who have written letters and drawn pictures to help the firefighters. There are countless stories from every community that have gone unsung and so today I say thank you. Although many have lost everything, it is this kindness and display of human spirit that provides people with hope and the strength to rebuild. It has been so moving to see rural, regional, coastal and city communities working together to support one another.

A fortnight ago I believe we as a State and as a nation collectively breathed a sigh of relief as reports came through that, for the first time this summer, all fires were under control. While this is wonderful news, there will still be many trying times ahead for towns, businesses, families and individuals who must literally rebuild their lives from the ground up. Communities have been traumatised and sometimes destroyed and it will take a long time for them to recover. For the many who lost their home, their business or members of their family, life will never be the same.

We now must all work together to heal. I hope that the wonderful momentum of support that has been built throughout this crisis does not fade just because the worst seems over. When the media coverage slows and our summer turns to autumn, regional communities will still need support to find their feet again. I encourage everyone to keep booking weekends away in areas that have been affected by fire, keep buying from regional businesses and organise work conferences and retreats in a coastal or country town. The towns that have been decimated are wonderful places with extraordinary people, but they cannot rebuild on their own.

I commend our Government for continuing the Buy Regional campaign to help local businesses survive. I also commend all of the groups and individuals that have started social media campaigns to help—campaigns such as Empty Esky, Buyfromthebush, Spend with Them and many others whose sole purpose is to support the rise of country and coastal communities from the ashes and the dust. It will not be an easy or short road to recovery, but we will recover. We will rebuild. And we will always remember those who gave their lives so we can.

**The Hon. NATALIE WARD (16:41:12):** I support the motion and commend it to the House. I thank the Hon. Don Harwin for moving the motion so that members might join in offering condolences on these bushfires. Firstly, to all the RFS volunteers who were out there day after day, week after week and month after month on the front line of these fires, saving the lives and properties of so many Australian men, women and children: From the very bottom of my heart I sincerely thank them for everything they have done for their communities and for people who they have never met. I offer my sincere condolences, heartfelt gratitude and thoughts to families, communities, businesses, schools, clubs and sporting groups across New South Wales. So many people have been affected in so many different ways.

I am not the first and will definitely not be the last to stand in this Chamber and talk about the terrible tragedy our country has experienced this season—some of the worst bushfires in our history. Even long after the bushfires are over, the physical, emotional, mental and financial impacts have only just begun and will be felt by Australians for a long time to come. It has been a very emotional experience to listen to all the Australians who have been so strongly impacted by these fires in so many ways and to hear my colleagues speak of particular experiences. To spend every day for weeks not knowing what the future holds for you, your children, your family, your neighbours, your stock, your pets and, of course, the wildlife is something that nobody can really contemplate until they are in that situation. I pray that we may not have to contemplate it again.

I do not profess to have suffered significantly or experienced the devastation of the fires, but I have watched the stoicism of those who have. I have spoken in this place before of having owned a property in Braidwood and being a quintessential Pitt Street farmer. Braidwood is, of course, where the *Ned Kelly* movie was filmed. Reading of the devastation in Braidwood and Bungendore broke my heart, particularly the closure of the Kings Highway and the devastating impact that those towns and businesses have suffered. I wanted to bring to the attention of the House the ongoing impact of the stop of holiday traffic—my colleague the Hon. Ben Franklin spoke of it, as others have. Two businesses in Braidwood stand out.

One is that of Fiona Mutton, whose great-grandparents opened Len Mutton & Co some 107 years ago. It is a typical country main street store—the double-storey general store where you can buy everything from boots to mats to hats and everything in between. We absolutely loved going into that store because of the smell of it and the family history of it. Fiona has stopped paying herself and has had to stop paying her staff but has nonetheless said that she will not surrender, despite the store never encountering such a devastating position before. She has said they rely heavily on bumper-to-bumper traffic through the main street of Braidwood with all the Canberrans coming through.

I commend the comments of my colleague to please try to spend some time and some money in these communities that desperately need it. In our time in Braidwood, the beautiful Braidwood Bakery had queues around the corner in the mornings from the traffic going from Canberra to Batemans Bay, but also from locals and us city slickers popping down for the weekends. They would sell up to 1,500 coffees a day.

**The Hon. Mark Latham:** Great pies.

**The Hon. NATALIE WARD:** I acknowledge the interjection of my honourable colleague. They are great pies. To know that that business is suffering is just devastating. I urge people to get down there, buy a pie and a coffee or two and help them out.

While it does not compare to the nightmare that so many Australians had to face, during the House's penultimate sitting week of the year last November I experienced a small scare of my own. I was sitting in this Chamber and, like everyone was, checking the Fires Near Me app. I am very grateful for the existence of the app. Members and the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner have acknowledged it is not perfect, but it was a very useful tool to acknowledge where fires were. I received a notification on my phone that the fires were approaching my suburb.

In that moment a couple of thoughts flashed into my mind. The first was knowing that the beautiful bushland near us was very susceptible to bushfires. That was not as important as knowing that my two teenage children were at home alone. I got a phone call and ducked out of the Chamber into the members' lounge. My best friend asked, "Where are your kids? Do you want me to pick them up?" That was enough for me. The theory became a reality; for the first time in my life I had to actually acknowledge the existence of that danger rather than just talking about it. I left immediately to get home.

The stress I felt on that day cannot even begin to compare to that of people who lost their homes and lost lives. It was a lesson for me about the anxiety, the pressure and the stress that people felt at that time. I thank my colleagues for assisting me on that day and stepping in. It was a great comfort at that time that I was able to leave. It has also been a great comfort to me to watch colleagues come together on this condolence motion and to watch

this House work so beautifully to convey to Australians and particularly to people in New South Wales that we are here for them.

I briefly touch on Lifeline. I have mentioned it in this place before. I was honoured to attend the launch of Lifeline's 24-hour, seven-day-a-week bushfire helpline to support the thousands of Australians affected by these blazes. The helpline will provide specialised bushfire assistance through on-the-ground support teams and the provision of the new 13 HELP—13 43 57—phone number. People are walking traumatised out of this fire season and the impact has changed their lives forever. NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons spoke candidly at the fundraiser. He provided some insights into his early days in the service and, in fact, losing his father in a burn-off. He spoke about mental health and said that when he first joined the service mental health was not discussed. There was a sentiment of "get over it, get on with it, move on, stand up, be a bloke".

At a time such as this it is more important than ever to reach out to anyone you may know who has been affected by the fires—friends, neighbours, co-workers—and let them know, in his words, "It is okay to not be okay". We are all human. It is so pleasing to see so many blokes in this place acknowledge the importance of mental health and talk about challenges that people may face now or in the future. I encourage all members to promote the helpline and other services as they are needed. Sadly, since December last year Lifeline has had a 10 per cent to 14 per cent increase in calls. I commend Lifeline on the great work it has done.

Rebuilding communities will be difficult but it will be done. I know that as Australians we are robust and tenacious and that is what our communities do. The challenge will be to ensure that people's emotional wellbeing is appropriately supported so that they feel they can seek help. As our Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, said:

As a government we need a multi-faceted approach to ensuring people have access to mental health support where and when they need it ...

Supporting Lifeline is an important part of providing this support.

I thank the Premier for her leadership and her calm humility, for getting on with the job and for getting out of the way of the people who provide the services.

I am pleased that on Friday we learnt that one of the world's leading experts on mental health and the social impacts of disaster, Professor Alexander McFarlane, AO, will help lead the long-term recovery in the aftermath of our devastating bushfires. It is good to know that we have Professor McFarlane in New South Wales to assist and guide us in this trying time because, sadly, he has experience in this area. He has guided bushfire recovery efforts for decades and he will help us get this right.

I touch briefly on the State memorial service held on Sunday for the 25 people who were killed during the fire season. I offer my condolences to their families and everyone affected. It was a moving service. I cannot imagine how those people are getting on with their lives. Among those 25 people were 19 civilians, three volunteer RFS firefighters and three United States firefighters. I take a moment to acknowledge those firefighters. Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer were travelling in a convoy to battle the Green Wattle Creek fire when they were struck by a tree and killed. At Mr Keaton's funeral his young son, Harvey, aged 19 months, was presented with his father's posthumous medal by Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

Less than two weeks later another volunteer firefighter—a volunteer, a person who gets up in the morning to go to help others—Samuel McPaul, aged 28, died when his truck flipped on him in the Green Valley blaze. It is extraordinary to imagine that a huge fire truck can be lifted up, turned on its head and unfortunately have the consequence that it did. In late January Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr were killed when their C-130 Large Air Tanker hit the ground in Cooma during a firebombing mission. Those were our friends from around the world who travelled to help us and did not make it back.

Among the 19 civilian deaths were father and son Robert and Patrick Salway, who died protecting their home in Cobargo. As Commissioner Fitzsimmons said, they died as heroes and we are in great debt to them. I acknowledge the words of everybody in this place at such a difficult time. When we all thought at the end of the year we would be looking forward to a long and lazy summer, it was not to be. I acknowledge the hard work of all local members who have been supporting their communities. That work will be ongoing. I again acknowledge the RFS men and women who have risked their lives to save so many others. We are in great debt to them.

I acknowledge all the individual stories that have been bravely told in this place about people who we do not know and will not meet but who we are here for in every possible way, and that is ultimately our job. The road to recovery will be difficult but we will stand together in this place to do everything we can to ensure the needs of the community are met and will continue to be met. I commend the motion to the House.

**The Hon. ROD ROBERTS (16:53:12):** I express my deepest and sincerest condolences to the families and communities around New South Wales who tragically lost their loved ones as a result of the catastrophic fire season we have just endured. In particular I mention Rural Fire Service volunteers Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew

O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul. Those brave men paid the ultimate price whilst selflessly protecting the lives and properties of others. I also record my condolences to the families of the three American aviators who perished when their aircraft crashed whilst they were defending the people and property of our State. It should be remembered that many others have been impacted in various ways as a result of the fires. That extends to those who lost or sustained damage to their homes.

A home, whether owned or rented, is a place of security, belonging and comfort. I cannot begin to comprehend the anxiety, heartache and pain that those who lost their homes are feeling. Our farmers and the agricultural industry were also impacted. These poor souls have had to endure this horrid fire season on top of one of the most ferocious and prolonged droughts in living memory. The fires have compounded the financial and emotional stress upon them. The timing of the fires—right in the peak of the holiday season—has had a significant negative effect on numerous businesses, small and large, up and down the coast as well as inland rural areas. Some of the businesses, although themselves not directly impacted by the fires, have suffered financially because of their inability to trade due to road closures and the absence of tourists. My thoughts go out to them as well.

I mention some very close and personal friends of my wife and I who have been impacted by the fires. Some members may be aware that my family has a connection to the South Coast of New South Wales, in particular the Eurobodalla area, as we have owned property there for a number of years. Dave and Jeannie Scott and their daughter Jorga's lovely home at Malua Bay was engulfed and destroyed before their very eyes. Nicole and Stuart Gray bravely fought the fire to save their property at Runnyford, only to suffer some structural damage to their Malua Bay home. Dean and Michelle Wright and their son Sam also suffered structural losses at their Malua Bay property. Adrian and Vicki Saker also bravely fought the fire at their property at Batemans Bay, managing to save their home but suffering some structural losses. Lynette and I are thinking of them all.

I commend the incredible work of the Rural Fire Service and its volunteers for their service, sacrifice and tireless effort to protect people, homes, property, the environment and wildlife in this great State. Working alongside the RFS were members of Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force, NSW Ambulance, the State Emergency Service, members of the Australian Defence Force, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Forestry Corporation, and, of course, various local councils. Apart from these government bodies and departments numerous charity organisations, community groups and individuals stepped up to support their local communities, not only on the fire front but also behind the scenes working with victims, manning evacuation centres and feeding the firefighters et cetera. Whilst our communities suffered incomprehensible loss of lives and properties, let us take the time to reflect on the lives saved and properties protected by the hard and dangerous work undertaken by the men and women of those organisations. I thank them for their unquestioned commitment and efforts.

In this Chamber on 21 November 2019 I spoke about the commitment and hard work of our Rural Fire Service volunteers. At that time it was very early in the fire season and I was not to know, nor would any of us have been aware, that we would be standing here today reflecting on the fire season that we had. At that time I noted the generous actions of employers in allowing staff members to fulfil their obligations with the RFS. Again I thank those employers who, at great expense to themselves, let staff members go so they could fight the fires on our behalf. While these words of mine are sincere, they are only words. I am sure that fire victims and affected communities appreciate them. However, I believe those affected expect more than just words. They expect action. In particular, they expect action on delivery of a recovery program to assist them to try to return to a normal life. It will take months and years in some cases, and for some life will never be the same again.

Yesterday Minister Andrew Constance, in an interview with Alan Jones on 2GB, expressed his frustration with the recovery program. As members know, he is embedded in his electorate and is experiencing firsthand the rollout of the assistance program. He is a member of the Executive Government. If he is saying that the departments are not working well together, there must be an issue. It is incumbent upon us as members of this Parliament to ensure that this State's bureaucracy delivers appropriate and timely recovery assistance. Affected communities will look to us for leadership to ensure that they do not again suffer from bushfires to the extent that they just have. If we fail to deliver on that front, all the words in the world will mean nothing and those lives will have been lost in vain. I commend the motion to the House.

**The Hon. ROSE JACKSON (16:59:23):** I honour, pay tribute to and say thank you to the volunteers and staff who worked extraordinarily hard to keep our community safe during the horrendous black summer bushfires of 2019-20. I thank the NSW Rural Fire Service and every single member of the RFS family. Importantly, I also thank Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Forestry Corporation of NSW, the NSW Police Force, NSW Ambulance and the NSW State Emergency Service. They are heroes all. I also acknowledge and pay tribute to the people who lost their lives in this unmitigated natural disaster. I acknowledge those heroes who died in the service of others: RFS firefighters Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul; and United States firefighting air crew Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr.

I also acknowledge the members of the community—our sisters and brothers—who lost their lives. I will once again read their names onto the public record: Laurence Andrew, BM; Russell Bratby; Colin "Rover" Harold Burns; John "Butt" Ronald Butler; Michael "Mick" Campbell; Vivian Chaplain; Michael "Mick" Clarke; Julie Fletcher; David Harrison; Gwen Hyde; Robert "Bob" Frederick Lindsey; George Nole; Barry "Bazra" Parsons; Ross Alphonsus Rixon; Patrick James Salway; Robert John Salway; Christopher Savva; and John Robert Smith. I pause for a moment in their honour.

As a member of the New South Wales Parliament, I am so sorry that this has happened. I am so terribly sorry for the loss the community has suffered. For me there is some significance in delivering this bushfire condolence speech on Ash Wednesday. When the ash was thick in the air in Sydney, it reminded me that for many generations and in many spiritual traditions ash has been a signifier of grief. I offer the small prayer of Ash Wednesday in honour of those who have died and the loss we have suffered: We should all remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Ash Wednesday is also about repentance and the observance of Lent; on Ash Wednesday when we say sorry we also ask for forgiveness. These fires, whilst unprecedented, were not unpredicted. It is my view that as a Parliament we have not done enough to prevent the scale of destruction we have seen. For that I am sorry and I ask for forgiveness.

It is important to call this out and to acknowledge this shortcoming, not to apportion blame but to create a space for honest dialogue and hopefully for coming together. Coming together has already defined the black summer. Our communities have shown an incredible capacity for resilience and sustainment. Members have talked about city and country, big cities and small towns, old and young, and coming together—all of that is true. People and communities across New South Wales have done so much to help and support each other. To them I say that I see you and we thank you.

Obviously, the immediate tasks of recovery and rebuilding are important and appropriate priorities. People need support. Insurance claims are very complicated and many are already finding themselves significantly underinsured. These are exactly the sort of people who cannot afford to pay the difference. Property, fences and outhouses all need rebuilding and livestock needs replenishing before work on farms can start again. The small businesses that rely on the busy summer months to get through the slower winter months have tough times ahead. People have physical injuries that need to heal, and mental and emotional trauma that cannot be minimised. This all needs to be acknowledged and worked through over the long term. This task is essential right now and is appropriately the priority for all of us, but there are other questions that must follow.

Saying sorry to the community means committing to ensuring that this does not happen again, which involves important conversations about land management and hazard reduction. Those questions can be discussed and debated in a normal way by political leaders and experts; they do not need to be caught up in weird culture wars. I am not sure how the relatively dry subjects of land management and hazard reduction somehow became hot political topics, but we can all have meaningful and honest policy dialogue about how to reduce hazards on the land. It is not just about land management, it is also about climate change. We know that bushfire severity and frequency has been affected by climate change. If we are all up for it, we can discuss that topic based on facts and not with political barbs. Climate change did not cause the fires to start; I acknowledge that. It was only one of the factors that made them so deadly and dreadful—but it was one of the factors. If we are serious about being sorry and making sure it never happens again, then our conversation needs to include that topic. That does not seem controversial to me. Climate change is real, our activity is causing it and our activity has the potential to fix it.

One thing that has been said before which I do not accept is that the 2019-20 bushfire season is "the new normal". Nothing is normal; we are in a moment of transition and change. It is in our capacity to make that a great change and to transform into a better, cleaner and fairer society and economy. Obfuscation and denial—having no plan and pretending that there is nothing more we could have done when that is patently not the case—is not going to help things get better. Like so many have said, I prefer action and being hopeful—not just expressing sorrow and sadness, but coupling that with action. Members of our community did not just feel bad about what was happening. Although they definitely did feel bad and they definitely did have their hearts broken, they then went and did something. Australia is not "thoughts and prayers". That is not what we are about. Our values mean that when something terrible happens we go and do something about it. We help our mates out. We do not sit around feeling sorry for ourselves and talking about our feelings all the time. We go out there and we do something. We give money, we give time, we make donations.

That is what our community did in response to feeling bad, and we in the Parliament should also act. A week of parliamentary business offering condolences is appropriate and fine and we should do that. There have been beautiful words spoken. But it is only really sincere if we then do our actual job, which is not just talking—it is legislating and acting. I say that not because I am a Capricorn and thus find it extremely uncomfortable to talk about feelings. I say it because to me this feels fake and hollow unless it is followed up with a plan to make sure it does not happen again. That is on us and that is our responsibility as parliamentarians. That is way too

much for one individual or one community to bear. It is squarely within the purview of political leaders. I want to emphasise that I am completely uninterested in blame right now. It is so unhelpful to try to make political mileage out of this tragedy. It is really inappropriate and it does not move us forward. We have to try to come together, meet people where they are and build coalitions.

Members cannot come in here, have a go at people, shame them and make ludicrous claims about how much they love or hate coal. That is all completely unhelpful. The next election is three years away; I accept that. The climate does not have that long. The community cannot wait three years. We have to get our act together now. I am not interested in the pointscore and I am not blaming anyone. All members know where I am: Room 1107 and extension 3789. I will work with anyone and everyone who is interested in talking about and planning our future. It does not matter what has happened in the past; it can be a great future. I am always hopeful when I talk about this because acting to fix our failing climate speaks to the massive and awesome potential of transformation. Australia should be a global low-carbon superpower and New South Wales should lead the way. There is so much potential in energy, transport, agriculture, construction and other new industries. All of that is going to be based in regional New South Wales, in the very communities hardest hit by fire and drought. The exact communities paying the price for climate inaction right now can be the ones that benefit most if we act on a meaningful plan.

I am aware that one of the great injustices of the modern world is that it is always working people—low-income people—who shoulder the burden of industrial change and who wear the cost of transformation. They are the people least able to bear that cost. When we look at the industrial revolution, world wars, the finance industry, globalisation and the digital revolution, it is always lower-income working people who find themselves out of work. They are the ones on the front line. They are subject to the change but they are not in control of it. The transformation to a low-carbon economy can and must be different. People on low incomes should not pay the price for a low-carbon economy and they do not need to.

We owe it to the communities devastated by the bushfires to do everything we can to make the great potential for the future a reality. We have to cut out the climate wars and the blame games and turn the deep sorrow that we feel into burning energy to move forward. Anna Bligh might have been right in saying "We are Queensland" during the horrendous 2013 floods, but we are New South Wales and New South Wales does not bounce back when something bad happens—we bounce forward. We are going to be a better community, a better society, and in some ways we already are. The tremendous banding together and the bonds of love and affection and mateship that have been built will extend far beyond the recovery phase.

This is a moment for a little bit of State pride. Yes, what has happened has been truly dreadful for New South Wales, but we've got this. We are going to fully recover, fully rebuild, and we are going to be even better. Thank you to our great heroes. Vale our community members who died in our black summer. You are in all our thoughts. We honour, love and respect you. I offer my condolences to your families, your friends and your communities. I offer also my commitment, not just to words but to action.

**The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX (17:10:16):** It is my great privilege to join with other members of this House in expressing our deepest heartfelt condolences to the families, communities and loved ones of the 25 men and women who tragically lost their lives during the recent catastrophic bushfires and in offering our sympathy and support to those who have been affected by the fires. I firstly acknowledge the moving and outstanding contributions of my colleagues in this place and in the other place to motions of condolence. It has been a harrowing time for many and an opportunity for us all to lend a helping hand in affected communities.

I acknowledge the leadership and personal commitment and sacrifice of the Prime Minister, the Premier, NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, Fire and Rescue NSW Commissioner Paul Baxter, NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller, the emergency services Minister and many, many others involved either directly or indirectly in our initial response to these fires and the continuing recovery efforts across this State. The contribution to date of the Deputy Premier, the Hon. John Barilaro, as the Minister responsible for the recovery has been absolutely outstanding. He will need the support of members of this place and in the other place to ensure that we are able to make a difference and deliver the outcomes that we all wish for the affected communities as quickly as possible.

I offer a special thankyou to those on the front line saving life and property against overwhelming odds. They have performed magnificently under the most horrendous conditions. In particular, I honour the tragic sacrifice of Rural Fire Service volunteers Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul. They have inspired us all with their selflessness. They simply reflect the best this nation has to offer. Similarly, I honour the courage and sacrifice of the American aviators Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, who died in service when their plane crashed near Numeralla. I met some of their colleagues in Merimbula in late January and was deeply impressed by their bravery, expertise and commitment in fighting

our deadly fires, so far away from their homes, and protecting the lives and homes of strangers in a foreign country. I also offer my deepest condolences to their families and friends.

This tragedy has scarred our State and changed people's lives forever. The road back from virtual oblivion will be long and hard for many. This has provoked an enormous compassionate response from many generous Australians as well as from many people overseas. This is both humbling and life affirming. It makes me extremely proud to be an Australian and a member of this place. Coincidentally, as a member who spoke before me mentioned, today is Ash Wednesday—the start of the Christian season of Lent. It is a time for reflection, a time for preparation, a time of hope and a time for renewal. That is precisely what we now need in our devastated bushfire communities: hope for a better future, as we help them to rebuild and renew their lives. It is the rebuilding and recovery phase to which we must all now turn our undivided attention. Again I offer my deepest condolences and sympathy to all those affected by the tragic fires this summer.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD (17:14:14):** I support the motion of condolence and express my sorrow for the events of this summer. It is with deep sadness that I speak to those who have lost someone they loved and offer my heartfelt sympathy to them. No words could ever adequately express the pain of their loss and the shock of losing someone so dear. I hope they have the support and comfort that they need at such a difficult time. To those who have experienced trauma throughout these bushfires—and there are many of them across this State—healing will take time. I hope that they are able to find the space and the support to work through the after-effects of that trauma. We must look after one another, while also remembering to look after ourselves.

I recognise and sympathise with all those who have had their lives disrupted, those who have lost property, those who have seen their businesses falter or their livelihoods ruined, and those who have suffered ill health from the impacts of the smoke. I suspect there are very few people across our State who were not directly impacted by the bushfires, the intense smoke or the floods that, although helping to put out the bushfires, also brought with them a new wave of devastation to so many people, animals and property. Throughout this time my thoughts have particularly been with those who experience special obstacles: those with a disability, carers, women evacuated from domestic violence shelters and people forced to evacuate from areas without their pets. And to those who spent weeks away from loved ones to respond to the crisis—members and volunteers of the RFS, the SES, Fire and Rescue NSW, the Army Reserve and all the other emergency responders—I say thank you. I acknowledge the huge personal sacrifices that they were each required to make to defend lives and properties.

As I travelled around the State this year, among the devastation I have seen signs of hope. I believe it is true that amongst the aftershock of disasters we often see the best in humanity. Communities across our State have been supporting one other. Community-led groups like BlazeAid have been connecting farmers with volunteers and helping to repair kilometres of fences. Schools have proactively taken in kids from neighbouring areas that were impacted by the fires. Businesses have donated tools so tradespeople can get back to work. Community members used their boats to resupply cut-off coastal communities with food and clean water. Volunteers took in people's animals, or volunteered to care for them at evacuation centres, so people could return to defend their homes. RFS sheds worked as surrogate community centres to make sure people were okay and had a place to sit and process what has happened to them. Property owners with dams offered their most precious resource, water, so the RFS could defend their neighbours' homes.

There have been so many examples of people across this State caring for each other and reaching out to provide support. And everywhere, community groups have come together, strengthened and inspired to demand better from our governments. They are demanding that both State and Federal governments take real action to address climate change; they are demanding more adequate funding for response and rescue services; and they are demanding that governments listen to the science, listen to First Nation peoples and listen to the community to stop this season's bushfires becoming the new normal. Words from politicians are worth nothing if they are not backed up with action. It is up to all of us in this place to take stock of the devastation of this summer, to reflect on our responsibilities and to take the action required now to preserve our precious planet for future generations.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM (17:18:14):** I add my support to the motion and offer my personal condolences to the families of those who lost loved ones during this horrific bushfire season. The severity of the most recent crisis is unprecedented and has shaken this State to its core. Some have lost their homes, some their businesses and others, most tragically, friends and family members. I join my colleagues in paying tribute to the 25 victims of the bushfires, including the six brave firefighters who made the ultimate sacrifice for the safety of our communities. I acknowledge and express my thanks to emergency personnel and other public sector workers for their courage and tireless work in fighting fires, protecting lives and saving flora, fauna, homes, animals and anything else that they could.

I also offer my deepest gratitude to the volunteers who contributed and offered assistance in any way possible. In response to the ongoing crisis we saw the emergence of a strong community spirit. I thank all those people who acted with generosity, compassion and kindness. I thank those who volunteered to fight the fires and

to save wildlife, those who volunteered their homes as shelter to pets, all the volunteers who took action in response to the question "What can I do to help?" I would also like to offer my thanks to those involved in the recovery efforts. Nature will start to slowly heal but the animal and human lives lost will not come back.

In paying tribute to the victims of the bushfire crisis, this House must acknowledge that tragic events of this nature will become increasingly frequent until we take meaningful action on climate change. As Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said in early January, "With climate change we know that the fire seasons are starting earlier, they're finishing later. The cumulative fire danger during a fire season is higher". In yesterday's *Sydney Morning Herald* we heard Shane Fitzsimmons' fears echoed by Australia's climate scientists. Peter Hannan draws attention to the fact that in a series of papers published in the academic journal *Nature Climate Change* researchers say that this season's fires have been the largest ever recorded since European settlement. Professor Bradstock estimated that 21 per cent of Australia's temperate broadleaf and mixed forests have been burnt. However, this almost certainly underestimates the impact of the fires, given his work only records damage to the end of January and excludes fires in Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

It is essential that we heed the warnings of the firefighters who spend their time training and preparing to defend our homes from catastrophic fires. When their leadership warns us of the dangers of climate change, we are obliged to listen and to take appropriate action. An honest condolence must be accompanied by an honest pledge that members of this House will do all within our power to reduce the likelihood of another catastrophe in the future. I hope that we can honour the sacrifice and loss of bushfire-affected communities by answering the Rural Fire Service's call for additional support, funding and environmental policies based on scientific evidence.

For the first time in recorded history we spent several consecutive weeks blanketed in thick smoke and ash clouds. Far from the postcard summers of Sydney, most of this season was bleak and immobilised by an atmosphere of fear and distress. But in the depths of the crisis we also saw the very best of our State. Ordinary people from all walks of life joined together to support people they had never met. In my own community in western Sydney I was pleased to join the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque and its congregation at their barbecue for the bushfires. I also note that Muslim Aid Australia delivered over \$400,000 in drought and bushfire relief programs across the country, including feed for livestock. These were in addition to organised donations by the Hindu Council of Australia, the Australian Sikh Association, which donated \$30,000 in New South Wales, and all manner of other religious groups and community organisations across the country who did what they could to ease the suffering of bushfire-affected communities.

While some people would seek to divide Australia on religious and ethnic lines, the bushfire crisis showed us the power and resilience of our multicultural society. This crisis was not caused by migrants or refugees, but they played their part in holding the fabric of our communities together. This ethos of cooperation and solidarity is the glue that binds modern Australia and one that should give us hope that change is possible.

I also want to acknowledge the trade union movement and its members for their courage and solidarity during this trying time. Trade unionism is not just about wages and conditions; it is about working together to create a fair and fulfilling society for everyone. It is this foundational principle that motivates us to organise in our workplaces, but it is also what galvanises union members to fight for fairness in our society generally. I was proud to see that when Australians needed help, the labour movement heeded the call. In addition to sizable individual contributions from specific unions, both the Australian Council of Trade Unions [ACTU] and Unions NSW established bushfire appeal and fundraising strategies. When people were without power, Electrical Trades Union [ETU] members were out at a moment's notice making repairs in trying conditions. When residents in Murrumbidgee needed supplies to be delivered by ship, Maritime Union of Australia [MUA] members on the *Far Saracen* answered their call. When communities asked for direct financial support, the National Construction Division of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union [CFMMEU] lobbied the building industry to step up and match its \$100,000 donation to the bushfire recovery effort. All across the State, trade union members were mobilising their skills and resources to rebuild in the face of adversity.

The sombre experience of this bushfire season encourages us to reflect on the future of New South Wales. Our condolences to the victims of the bushfires cannot be empty promises and platitudes; they must frame a call to action. Clearly significant changes in the climate present an obstacle for our society, but we should not allow ourselves to be immobilised by fear. The bushfires do not just show us what challenges face our society; they have also shown the strength of our multicultural society and spirit of solidarity and cooperation for the common good.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR (Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women) (17:24:40):** I wish to make a contribution to this condolence motion on bushfires, along with other members of the House. It has been a real privilege to listen to people's contributions and I would like to make special mention of the contribution of the Hon. Mick Veitch, who told us about what country communities have been facing. What started as an ember became a raging flame. When the first fires of the 2019-20 bushfire season began, I do not

think anyone could have believed what damage that they would cause. Almost every region of the State has been affected—the North Coast, the mid North Coast and Hunter, the greater western Sydney area, the Hawkesbury, Wollondilly, the Blue Mountains and the Illawarra. Other regions that were affected were in southern New South Wales, the Snowys, the Riverina and the South Coast.

Hundreds of fires have burned over 18 million hectares of our State. Millions of Australia's native fauna have perished. Livestock, property and businesses have been completely and utterly destroyed. Well over 2,000 homes have been demolished with 25 lives lost, including three of those six brave firefighters. These fires were not predicted and have been unprecedented, but they could have done so much more damage if it had not been for our Rural Fire Service and our volunteer services. I would like to thank every one of them for fighting so bravely. To their families, thank you for raising the kind of men and women who risk their lives to protect our communities. Despite all the destruction and all the loss, when travelling from community to community I witnessed incredible things, such incredible bravery, as many have mentioned.

I am the mental health Minister and I am really proud to have a team that has responded to the situation faced in these challenging conditions. NSW Health has deployed teams to respond flexibly to local needs as they emerge and change. NSW Health really did a terrific job, as has been said on many occasions in this place. I offer my heartfelt thanks to NSW Health and all employed there for what they have done. It has been wonderful to see their camaraderie.

I would like to share my personal experience of the bushfires. We were significantly impacted by the Dunns Road fire. We have a property at Adelong where we fatten our cattle. It is a beautiful place in the Yaven Valley, with which the Hon. Mick Veitch is very familiar. It is a beautiful part of the world with lush green pastures. Cattle from the drought-stricken Monaro salivate when they are relocated to Adelong, where most of our cattle were when the fires struck. We were fattening them for sale—after all, these are animals bred for production. On the day the fire struck we were sitting around the kitchen table with our youngest daughter, Holly, who was home. My husband got a call from our neighbour Larry Casey to say the fire was moving towards our properties, which we call Innisfail and Kinross. Duncan bolted into the LandCruiser and Holly and I were dashing around madly shoving water and drinks into his bag because we did not know what he would face.

When travelling from where we live in the Monaro to Adelong you go over the range, where the phone reception is really bad. By the time Duncan got to Blowering he rang me and said, "Bron, it's not very good, it doesn't look good and I think we've lost everything." I wondered what he would face when he got to our property. Last year was a challenging year for us, with my new role in Parliament and the exposure for me and my family that came with that role. We split off our family business and Duncan and I decided to go out on our own. We had just taken on Adelong and we were very excited about it. Little did we know that we would be completely burnt out only months later. At the time of the bushfires many people in my community and in the communities surrounding us had husbands, sons, daughters out fighting fires with the RFS.

That was a very difficult thing as well because you did not know what was going to happen or how they were because the phone reception was so bad. But one of the great things is I have a great bunch of close friends in the Monaro and we would meet every morning at the local coffee shop and support each other. My friend Penny's three boys were out fighting fires at Tooma and they were completely surrounded. Their plan at one stage was that they would have to get all the cattle down to the river and dive in themselves. They were pretty harrowing times.

When Duncan got to Adelong when the fire was raging it was not as bad as what we first thought. The first front came and it got about 400 acres over there and then we thought everything was fine. We almost relaxed and then the second front came. Dunc said there was absolutely nothing anybody could have done because of the ferocity and the force of the fire that came out of the pine forest bordering our property. As the Hon. Mick Veitch alluded to, that forest was laden with blackberries and weeds. It was a private pine plantation. Even *Marie Bashir*, the big jet, came and dumped fire retardant but unfortunately for us it did not help.

One of the hardest things was that we lost one of our houses at Adelong. Although it was not the home I live in with Duncan, it was the home of Chris Potter, an outstanding man who has worked for us at Adelong for a long time. The Hon. Mick Veitch has shorn with Chris over many years. He is a lovely bloke but that house is gone now. There is absolutely nothing there, which is sad. We were lucky. We talk about resilience and how experiences like this bring out the best in people. One of the most amazing things happened to us on New Year's Eve. Tim Schofield, the local stock and station agent in Cooma, spent New Year's Eve in the motel in Tumut selling all of our cattle. That is what country people do. They pulled out all the stops to help us. They made sure we could get all our cattle off the property safely and get a decent price for them, for which I am very grateful.

Minister Andrew Constance showed incredible resilience during the fires. He has been brave and courageous enough to talk about mental health and to ask for help. In doing that he has given permission and

validity to the fact that there is no shame in putting your hand up and asking for help. I commend him for that. I saw him during the crisis as he was travelling between the two electorates on either side of mine. It was wonderful to see him and the incredible job he was doing in his community.

Lately I have been spending a bit of time in the local laundromat because our water is pretty dirty at the moment. When I want to wash my whites I have to go into the laundromat in town and I have made lots of new friends in the laundromat. Everyone there was talking about Andrew Constance and what an incredible job he had done. As politicians we should all reflect on that. I reckon he has lifted our general cred in the community quite a bit lately because he has been so real. I know we as members see each other's realness but obviously people outside of this place do not necessarily see that. The other great thing about the laundromat was meeting all the helicopter pilots. They were lovely and a lot of fun and they did an incredible job. I was very grateful and expressed my thanks to all of them.

I give a special shout-out to our neighbour at Adelong, Larry Casey. We are fortunate to have such great neighbours. Had those neighbours and the RFS not gone in and cut all our fences to let our cattle out, they all would have burnt, which would have been a terrible thing. I love our cattle and I am sad that we have had to sell them all, but we could not have done that without those neighbours. They are incredible people. I thank the Darlow fire brigade at Adelong for all that they have done. They made a terrible situation a lot better for me and my family.

I will wind up my contribution by saying everyone needs to get out and support businesses and communities in fire-affected areas. I recently visited Merimbula. People were thanking us for having a meal in their restaurant. They are desperate for people to support them. The South Coast is so beautiful. People should visit and spend their money there as well as on the North Coast. Go to fire-affected communities and support them to lift their spirits. They will appreciate it.

I acknowledge all of the volunteers, including those from overseas and interstate. I offer my heartfelt sympathy and thanks to the families of those American and Canadian firefighters who lost their lives in my neck of the woods. I thank the Premier for the great job that she did. I thank the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I give a special shout-out to the Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, who as soon as he knew what had happened to my family was with us, giving us all the support we needed, as usual. He was with us the day Cooma turned to night at 4:00 p.m. I am always grateful for the support he shows me and my husband.

I make special mention of my good friend the Hon. Wes Fang, who is not present in the Chamber today. He knew that fire was coming and he knew the location of our farm. He was texting every hour asking if he could help. He is a good friend and a decent, lovely human being. That really became evident to me during this fire period. I also thank the rest of my upper House colleagues. I thank the Hon. Sarah Mitchell for always being there and the Hon. Sam Faraway for reaching out. It makes such a difference to know people are behind you, that they know how you are feeling and that they know what you are going through.

But I give my biggest shout-out to my husband, Super Dunc, who handled it all so well, with the strength, integrity and courage that he always does. He said, "Bron, 2019 was a pretty tough year and then they decided to burn us out but we're so much better off than so many." We have had some rain at Adelong and the valley is coming back. We are going to buy some more stock and put them on. Like every other family in the country and everyone who has been affected, we will be okay because we have got each other. I know we are all going to work together to make sure New South Wales gets through this.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD (17:36:34):** I support the motion and I thank the Government, crossbench members and the Opposition for coming together to support this motion on some of the State's worst bushfires in memory. Firstly, I offer the Opposition's deepest condolences to the 25 victims of these devastating fires and their families and communities. I note that this figure includes three volunteer firefighters and three aerial firefighting crew members. While all lives are equal, it is natural that we speak of those who lost their lives because they risked danger purely to help others. I also thank the thousands of volunteers and members of the community who joined the effort to protect homes and property.

Our State is grieving but our State is also starting a long recovery and rebuilding process. As the Leader of the Opposition said in the Legislative Assembly, after these bushfires nothing can be the same. It has changed how we think about drought and hazard reduction and how we respond to climate change. It is likely that the world will be interested in our response as this crisis was seen by the whole world. To my absolute astonishment, just a few weeks ago when I was in Israel and on the West Bank, a Palestinian taxi driver, when he heard that I lived in New South Wales, asked me about the recovery process from the bushfires in Australia. He asked about the rare flora and fauna, saying his heart broke for the families and the poor animals consumed by the fires that he saw on Al Jazeera. It was extraordinary. The images and numbers broadcast to the world caused great heartbreak.

In total, 2,439 homes were destroyed, 1,014 homes were damaged and more than 5.46 million hectares have been burnt. There were also 265 facilities and 5,360 outbuildings destroyed. Of the homes destroyed, 703 were in northern New South Wales, 215 were in the central west, 1,490 were in southern New South Wales and about 10 in western New South Wales. In addition, 14,500 head of livestock have been killed and crops, farm infrastructure and pasture has been destroyed—worth more than \$1 billion. This includes \$862 million in fencing alone. From July 2019, 11,000 fires burnt more than 5.5 million hectares of land in New South Wales. We have also seen schools, health facilities, powerlines, communication links, bridges, roads and rail lines destroyed and melted. In fact, more than 180 schools have been directly impacted by bushfires since October last year. This ranges from issues relating to retardant damage to actual fires consuming them.

The total economic cost is believed to be more than \$5 billion nationally, and I dare say that is conservative. There will be more economic costs, as we see businesses and restaurants, shops and accommodation go to the wall due to a lack of tourists and other customers. No matter how you cut it, it is going to cost a lot to rebuild and recover. It is in this context that I urge the Berejiklian Government to rethink its priorities. As the Leader of the Opposition said repeatedly, the Government should abandon its controversial plan to spend \$1.5 billion to move the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta and redirect these excess funds to rural and regional communities ravaged by bushfires and continuing drought. As I said earlier, the State is still grieving and it is now at the recovery and reconstruction phase, but that requires prioritising regional and rural communities.

I acknowledge that on 8 January the Berejiklian Government pledged \$1 billion. However, much of those pledged funds will go towards existing projects or necessary ones for schools and roads that were destroyed. I also note that only \$100 million has been spent so far, which is much less than what is needed. As the shadow Treasurer, I have spoken to many economists about the impact of the bushfires on the State and national economies. They are united in their view that if the State Government plays a constructive role in the recovery process it can provide a mini-stimulus to local communities, especially in southern New South Wales. If handled strategically, the bushfire recovery efforts can provide a short-term boost to local economies, so we do not want delays that risk the recovery efforts and stall jobs in hard-bitten communities.

The first step in the recovery process is to clear the properties, which the State Government is funding. The second step is to make sure that insurance companies start to pay out policies so that funds can be released and construction can begin. When rebuilding begins, it creates jobs on sites, pumps money into recovering retail and keeps cafe and restaurant doors open. The levers that the State Government has at hand can make a real difference to every fire-affected community, so I urge the Treasurer and the Premier to use them. I also note calls by small business for assistance. As the Minister for Finance and Small Business said yesterday in question time, "We may not know the full long-term consequences of the bushfires for a long time." We need the Berejiklian Government to get cash flowing into communities as quickly as possible.

The cash flow can be generated by cash injections, grants or loans. The Government says it has made loans and grants available to businesses that have been directly affected by bushfires and loans are available to other businesses adversely affected, but let us pray that it gets through to communities. This includes businesses and operations that were not in the direct line of fire but were affected. I point to wineries in the Hunter and others in New South Wales near the Australian Capital Territory, which have had crops destroyed by smoke. Members would also be aware that the New South Wales shadow Cabinet visited Tumut and accepted an invitation from the Snowy Valleys Mayor to hear about the community's needs. I congratulate Labor leader Jodi McKay for accepting the invitation.

As part of the visit on 11 February the New South Wales shadow Cabinet conducted a meeting with the Snowy Valleys Council in response to the recent bushfire emergency. I also note the presence and attendance of local MP Dr Joe McGirr at the briefing and in consultations with the local community. One of the major concerns raised by the local council was the need to upgrade Tumut aerodrome to assist with future emergencies and to support the local economy. To that end, as shadow Treasurer I was accompanied by shadow transport Minister Chris Minns, shadow lands Minister Mick Veitch, shadow emergency services Minister Trish Doyle, shadow roads Minister John Graham and shadow regional transport Minister David Harris to hear firsthand the case to upgrade the Tumut aerodrome.

We met with RFS officials who briefed us on how it was inadequate for the bushfire emergency. Due to the length and the lack of reinforcements to the runway, aircraft were unable to carry their full capacity of water to fight the surrounding fires. A senior RFS official at the airport advised that if the airport had been upgraded properly they would have been able to save more homes and property. After the briefing we reached the firm conclusion that the Federal Government should provide immediate support to improve the aerodrome. Therefore we have written to the Deputy Prime Minister in his capacity as Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, throwing our support behind the initiative and urging them to fully fund the project. We have been advised that the total package is around \$10.217 million.

The improvements include additional sealed taxiways and a lengthening of the runway, animal-proof fencing, improved lighting, drainage improvement works and a bridge over the local creek. Last year I and other members spoke in this Chamber of the need to both pray for rain and plan for all possibilities. Mercifully—whether you believe it is the mercy of God or of nature itself—rain has since reduced our immediate fire threat, but we would be foolish in the extreme to think that what we have seen this summer cannot, or will not, happen again. Indeed, all evidence suggests the contrary. Bushfire seasons are getting longer, hotter and drier, and the people of Tumut and the Snowy Valleys Council deserve to have the best means to protect themselves in the event of future disasters.

On a broader scale, so do all New South Wales communities, which is why I welcome the decision to hold a State inquiry into the bushfires to be conducted by former chief scientist Professor Mary O'Kane and former deputy police commissioner Dave Owens. However, it is disappointing that the task force will not hold public hearings. I agree with my colleague and rural affairs spokesperson, the Hon. Mick Veitch, who said that "to get a real sense of people's feelings" the Berejiklian Government should hold public forums to get verbal evidence from those on the ground. It is very hard to prepare a written submission when you do not have a computer or a home. But, most importantly, there are voices in our regional communities who want to speak and I believe they have earned their right to be heard.

As the Leader of the Government, the Hon. Don Harwin, said in question time yesterday, "We need to learn from what happened and make sure we can work together to prevent further tragedies." Finally, I end with an observation. I read with interest yesterday that NSW Rural Fire Service Chief Shane Fitzsimmons has cancelled a planned address to a Liberal Party event. I am pleased that he cancelled his appearance. On that note I commend the motion and I thank the House for its consideration.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE (17:45:44):** As a member of The Greens I give our strong support to the condolence motion before the Chamber. The motion is worthy of repeating. It says:

That this House:

1. Expresses its deepest condolences to the families, communities and loved ones of the 25 men and women who have tragically lost their lives during the catastrophic and unprecedented 2019-2020 bushfire season.
2. Honours the extraordinary sacrifice of Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul, Rural Fire Service volunteers who tragically lost their lives while protecting the lives and property of others.
3. Places on the record its gratitude for the courage of Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr of Coulson Aviation and the United States of America, who died in service to New South Wales.
4. Offers its sympathy to those who have been affected by the fires whether through injury or the loss of or damage to their homes or livelihoods.
5. Acknowledges the devastation caused by this season's bushfires, which has already seen 2,400 homes destroyed, over 11,000 buildings lost or damaged, 5.5 million hectares burnt, countless local businesses affected and hundreds of millions of animals killed.

You cannot sum up the impact and the tragedy of these fires in a five-, 10- or 20-minute speech, and nor should you, but to get a sense of the scale of the devastation and the collective trauma that has been visited upon much of New South Wales you need to get out and see it for yourself. At the end of January I spent time visiting fire-affected communities in New South Wales. We started our visit in Bundanoon and went down to Cooma, Eden, Bega and Mogo. We also saw Tathra, Bermagui and Malua Bay. We went up to Pointer Mountain, Manyana and Kangaroo Valley. More recently I visited Glenn Innes, Wyaliba and the national parks that surround that beautiful part of the State. Everywhere we went we heard the same thing: It has never been like this before. This is actually new. The impact that this has had on those individuals and those communities is extreme.

To the families and communities of all of those who lost their lives in the bushfires, the motion says that we express our sincere condolences—we do more than that. We express our collective grief and we are so sorry. We also express our condolences and thanks to the families of those RFS volunteers who gave their lives fighting fires. They often fought fires in one part of the State or in one part of their area when their own home was at risk or their own family was at risk. To those American firefighters who came over here and died trying to save us, save property and save nature, you helped save lives and we will remember you. Every loss of life is a personal tragedy, a family tragedy and it is one that is shared by a local community. Many are still mourning, and we join with them.

As we travelled around everybody thanked the RFS, and we join with them in doing that. They also acknowledged the service of the firefighters in the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Forestry Corporation and the brave Fire and Rescue teams. The gratitude was universal. Everyone acknowledged how much was given by the volunteers. Many people, whether from the city or the country, could not believe the extent of the sacrifice

the volunteers were willing to give. In due course we will talk about whether that is sustainable, but it was extraordinary. It is hard to express the universal gratitude and acknowledgement of that effort.

Another constant feature we witnessed was local councils stepping in to provide essential and immediate aid, often in the absence of State or Commonwealth resources. Local councils, particularly those in the regions, are a fundamental service that steps up in hours of need. I thank those council workers, councillors and mayors—such as Mayor Amanda Findley of Shoalhaven City Council, who dealt first with the fires and then straight after with the floods—and all the people who work with them and I offer my hope for a commitment to greater support in the future. I acknowledge the work over the years done by Greens Mayor Carol Sparks of Glen Innes Severn Council, an RFS volunteer of 20 years. Carol lost her township of Wyaliba in these fires and her own home was badly damaged. Recently when I was up there with her, she still was not able to get home because the bridge is burnt out.

While speaking of Wyaliba—credit where credit is due—I acknowledge the extraordinary work of the Department of Education in rebuilding the local public school over the holiday break, sending a clear message of commitment and hope to that community that the people of New South Wales are on their side. I visited that rebuilt school and it was an extraordinary achievement. It is a credit to the education Minister and the professionalism and commitment of the staff of the Department of Education, who sent a very clear statement of hope and support to the community of Wyaliba. Now we need to get the bridge built so that they can get home and get to school.

I acknowledge the work done by, amongst thousands of others, Blue Mountains City Council Greens Councillor Brent Hoare, who has worked with the RFS across the State this fire season to contain the bushfires, whether it was up in Tenterfield or in his local area. I acknowledge the service of Greens Councillor Peter Marshall of the Queanbeyan-Palerang Council. He has been a volunteer with the Captains Flat brigade for 15 years. Some of the conditions he faced over the past few months were deeply frightening but he kept going back, along with so many others. I acknowledge Greens Deputy Mayor Dr Amanda Cohn of Albury City Council for her work as a senior operator with the SES. Dr Cohn has been all around the State, stepping away from her profession and career as a doctor to work wherever she was sent and needed by the SES, along with many others. There are countless other Greens councillors and members who have volunteered with organisations from the RFS to WIRES and many more. I pay tribute to all of their work.

When we travelled around New South Wales, the people we spoke to were all experts on what happened in their communities and what they need. We do not need a royal commission to work out what is required; we need a willing ear to hear the demands they are making—and they are making them loud and clear. We are listening and will continue to ensure that their ideas are heard in this place. After witnessing the contributions made to this condolence motion, I genuinely believe that a majority of members in this Chamber are also trying to listen with good faith and, as best we can, put politics aside and work out what to do after this awful tragedy.

Those we spoke to want a systemic and community-focused support program that helps those who need it and includes assistance to those who are rebuilding to ensure that the rebuilds are far more fire resistant. That may mean putting our hands into our collective pocket to help with the rebuild because the insurance coverage will often be insufficient to rebuild a fire-resistant home. That is particularly necessary in the high-risk areas of the State. We need to take a proactive approach to help businesses and individuals transition from industries at serious fire risk. We need a collective effort. We cannot leave people and communities to confront this challenge alone.

Communities want someone coordinating the advice from experts and biologists to help the natural world recover. No-one we spoke to said it was too soon to talk about climate change. Everyone said they want our national parks to have more, not less, funding, protection and resources following these terrible fires. We stood with our friend Nick in the ruins of his burnt-out home in Malua Bay. He told us that he knew this was coming and has been fighting for action on climate change for decades. For him, it is now very personal. Standing in the ruins of his house, which was destroyed in an unstoppable fire that was partly driven by the impacts of climate change, how could you not see it as personal? The challenge of climate change is very real for Nick and so many others.

There is a strong need for local resilience, including designated safe areas with off-grid solar battery systems so that when the powerlines go down, as they do during catastrophes of this scale, communities are not completely stranded. There were generators available at many community centres but there was nowhere to plug them in so the centres could not operate. Communities have tried to work out solutions to this issue themselves; some have funded their own emergency off-grid solar battery facilities. This solution is essential because when a fire hits and the power goes down people will be able to access emergency communication, keep their essential medication chilled in the fridge for the days and weeks they may be isolated and charge their phones to talk with loved ones. How often have we heard that the absence of information is devastating when the fires hit? An increased investment in community resilience is needed because, tragically, this is not going to go away.

While solutions are still being built, communities are pulling together. That was wonderfully exemplified by the work of Erin Riley and Find a Bed, an organisation that was sparked out of a Twitter idea. We often deride Twitter as being an inflammatory echo chamber, but in this case Erin and her team linked people who needed shelter with those who were able to provide it. The organisation is now helping Australians find safe places to stay, recharge and get information during extreme weather events. Find a Bed was just one of many community initiatives that we witnessed where people rallied around to help each other.

People are devastated about the loss of the forests and the animals. Without counting the smaller creatures in our forests that have been lost and killed, well over one billion native animals across the country were incinerated in these fires. The scale of that tragedy is inexpressible. The people I spoke to, whether it was in Wyaliba, the South Coast or the Southern Highlands, did not move to the regions in spite of or in fear of the trees and nature; they moved there because they love the trees and nature that surround them. When they looked at the burnt-out forests they recognised not a threat but a tragedy, with the forests in need of help to recover. These burns were worse than most have ever seen.

The forests I visited were deadly quiet and the silence was extreme. My drive into Manyana along the 13 kilometres along Bendalong Road, which connects the Princes Highway to Manyana on the north side of Lake Conjola, was devastating. It has always been a gorgeous drive for me and Conjola National Park is a magical place, but the forest was reduced to black matchsticks and there were no leaves and almost no debris present. There were just black matchsticks and a forest floor white from the ash, with perfect utter silence. It was devastating. Communities tell us that if we do nothing the result will be localised and potentially there will be statewide extinctions. The devastation is real and frightening.

Many of the firefighters we spoke to quite clearly said that the record drought and extreme heat, which have been driven in part by climate change, meant that these fires were simply unstoppable. They were dealing with 47-degree heat, dry winds and dry ground and forests from record drought. These fires were simply unstoppable. I still remember the description that the RFS crews gave us of the pyrocumulus that formed just outside of Bundanoon, one of the major towns in the Southern Highlands. It was in the afternoon and the pyrocumulus storm cloud was being driven by the severity of the fire. The fire was making its own storm conditions and sucking up the embers and flames three, four, five kilometres into the sky with this huge pyrocumulus forming. Then it was hit by a southerly change that came in just on the outskirts of town.

As the southerly change hit the pyrocumulus, the temperature dropped in this column of ash and fire and it collapsed like a bomb. It blew embers in a five-kilometre radius all around Bundanoon. Spot fires started everywhere on an extreme heat day. There was fear and anxiety and there was the bravery of the RFS as they ran from fire to fire to fire around the town and the surrounds, putting out fires. As the embers came down it was not just the trees that caught on fire, the soil was also burning because it was so dry and so hot. That is an unstoppable fire and it is unmistakably caused by climate change. We must acknowledge that.

Communities are calling for more funding for national parks to get out there and help the landscape recover, and we join with them. They want First Nations rangers helping to manage the country and implementing cultural burns. They want change. They want native forest logging stopped and the loggers not put out of a job but instead tasked with the repair and replanting of our forests. They want the forests that are left protected from chainsaws and bulldozers. Lastly I will say this: The best way to honour those who have lost their lives is to learn the lessons of these terrible fires and of the years of inaction that preceded them. That surely is our job and that must be our promise.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK (18:01:26):** I have listened with care and humbleness to the speeches given in this place and the other place about members' experiences of the fires, meeting with victims and the consequences. All the speeches have been outstanding. I particularly single out my friend Andrew Constance, who was not the face of the Government but rather the face of his community in the midst of an extraordinary and tragic crisis. This Parliament is united in its dismay, compassion and engagement with the community that we serve. The stories we have heard recounted here and in the other place—the loss of 25 lives, including people's parents, husbands and, for some, children—are incomprehensible.

The Hon. Mark Latham spoke of real men. I felt this point was really well made. I have often seen larrikins, guys sometimes referred to as yobbos or rednecks or whatever, who are out in force at the Deni Ute Muster. I look at these young men and middle-aged men. Having brought up sons myself, I have learnt a lot about the resilience, the independence, the skill, the good humour and what I now think of as the Anzac spirit that we saw on the beaches of Gallipoli. It lives on in these young men, in the Australian man. The Hon. Mark Latham articulated it very well. We need to remember that, to be proud of that and to honour that.

People lost deeply meaningful parts of their lives: their homes, their most precious possessions, generations of family icons and history. The randomness of this event—just an unpredictable wind change and, bang, it is all

gone in irreversible and unrecoverable moments—has left a lifetime of trauma for many. I fully believe our Parliament, our Government, our public servants, our community and, indeed, many who have never really visited this country have given their best for us.

We are used to being the ones who send help when there is a crisis, and we are proud of that generosity and the skills that we have to offer. It was so strange for me to suddenly find New South Wales benefiting from help: planeloads of Queensland firefighters coming down to help us. Firefighters came from all over the country and they came from around the world. We are forever in the debt of the three Americans who came here to help us and were lost in an air crash. They will never be forgotten. I believe the best we can be has come out in this shocking crisis. There were so many individual, nameless actions of selflessness, bravery and skill.

In this debate we refer to the summer fires but I want to clarify that they started up on the North Coast in spring. These fires have raged for four months. For communities like Nymboida, Friday 8 November, Black Friday, was a disastrous day, as well as for the mid North Coast and into the mountains. So much was lost. The scale of it was not understood by anybody, I think, other than the fire services that were trying to meet the demand. By Christmas, due to those fires, we had lost 600 or 700 homes on the North Coast.

I visited Nymboida as a volunteer with BlazeAid and stayed at the old canoe centre there for several nights. I did so not as a politician—let me tell you, politicians are very unpopular in places like Nymboida—but as a North Coast resident giving a hand, as so many others were. We sat and talked for hours and hours with people who had lost their homes and wanted to talk about the history of the homes. There was trauma but all of them, amazingly, also spoke with gratitude that nobody was killed, which is a miracle.

Four enormous fires joined together and destroyed that community—101 homes. I did not even know Nymboida had that many homes. Houses by the river, which were specifically located because it never burns there, all just went. Those whose houses were not burnt were almost as traumatised. I am also concerned for their mental wellbeing because they were out there helping their neighbours. We were fencing with BlazeAid and they were very quiet, very hurt for their communities and unable to comprehend how they had survived because there was no rhyme or reason to this.

**Mr David Shoebridge:** It is an unspoken guilt.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Survivor guilt, absolutely, 100 per cent. On the North Coast, fires always happen early in the season and then they move south. I visited our Service NSW centre in Taree. Many of the staff there have been affected by the fires and they all knew people who had lost their homes. They were helping people by cancelling registrations of vehicles that were lost, and they could not comprehend the number of vehicle registrations that were being cancelled every day. There is no record of those enormous property losses. The mobile services that the Government initiated last year really came into their own. I thank the staff and everybody for the assistance that they gave and the work they did. I could not believe the burnt landscape, which has been described very well by others. On the National Highway signs had completely melted like birthday candles.

I plead that the North Coast not be forgotten. The scale of the fires meant that many communities were trying to enter the recovery phase while we were still dealing with that horror inferno down on the South Coast and resources were so stretched. I have spoken with the Premier and she has reassured me that the North Coast will not be forgotten. She has been such a figure of trust and reassurance in all of this, together with Shane Fitzsimmons, as everybody has acknowledged. But the scale is just incomprehensible and it does require everybody to bear in mind that these fires did rage for a full four months and the losses up north have been as deeply felt as in other parts of the State.

In January I visited the Maitland Rural Fire Service headquarters and received a briefing. This was very shortly after the fires from which came the international images of people on the beaches on the South Coast. Ironically my parents were at Batemans Bay for years; we would normally be down there. Up in the Hunter they still had 2,200 volunteers fighting those fires, which had come across from the middle part of the State. They were exhausted. Some had not been home for Christmas. Their kids were on holidays and these people were so far from home, choosing duty over family every time. They were honestly at the end of their ropes. I salute them, as others do.

I mention the role of the media, in particular the ABC. Our local ABC is an absolute icon of information. We just kept the television on the whole time to follow the news. Many of those journalists had never experienced anything like that. The words they used, the calmness with which they reported and the information they gave people saved lives. It communicated the seriousness of the event and what to do. Cate Faehrmann has recounted James Fitzgerald's story in Kosciuszko. I will not repeat it, except to thank her for the compassion and the way in which she told it. The enormity of the tragedy is beyond anything we could have imagined.

I love our bush; I love it so much. I escape into it at every opportunity. For many of us, it is where we grew up. When I listened to the contribution of the Hon. Mick Veitch to this debate I felt the same thing. It is where we belong and who we are. It belongs to all of us and it is the responsibility of us all. How it is managed is a higher duty, not one only for individuals, this Parliament or this State. It is precious for our planet that we all do the right thing. I thank the volunteers who have come from everywhere, including internationally. I thank the people who have opened their wallets and donated, including tens of millions of dollars from the United States and Europe. The fundraising was unexpected and extraordinary.

Where to from here? I suppose there are two ways to approach this. There is the approach in which we search for the guilty and for scapegoats. This condolence debate has been mercifully free of that, and I thank members for that. The other approach is one of what lessons we can learn and how we can do better. None of us has been perfect and none of us will be, but all of us come together. If we take this latter approach we are going to have our community more united on the same page and we will be more successful. I believe the role of the Australian Defence Force [ADF] is an important matter that has come out of this. During the horrific floods on the North Coast in 2017 residents were asking me, "Where is the ADF? We need them." I learned a lot about what inhibits deploying those forces. I know the Prime Minister wants this issue addressed so that help can be made more easily available. When the navy and the soldiers arrived people said, "We know this does not change anything but somehow it is going to be okay".

The issue of potable water was an enormous one. Because of the scale of the fires there were just not enough trucks that were certified to carry water. These are the sorts of issues that the inquiry will identify. I believe we will learn those lessons from this event. In the longer term the issues are planning and technology. I know that we will talk about these fires for many years, if not decades, to come. I again thank all members. It has been a privilege to meet and talk with those who were involved. I offer my condolences. My heart breaks. I am proud of this Parliament for the way in which it has responded. I thank my Government. I do not believe anything more could have been done to prepare for these fires. I thank the Leader of the Government for moving this excellent motion.

**The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY (18:13:30):** I make a modest contribution to this condolence debate. I am most humbled by the contributions that have been made by members in this place and in the other place. I concur with them in both sentiment and in the stories that they have told. While all of us in this Chamber and in the other place have directed these comments predominantly to what has happened in New South Wales, it is fitting that we also acknowledge that many of the same tributes are owed to places such as Victoria, South Australia and other places in the Commonwealth that were equally as devastated by bushfires.

I extend my condolences to the families of the people who have lost loved ones this summer and earlier. It must be devastating for the families of the 25 people referred to in this motion. It is a devastation that will never end. Anyone who has ever lost a family member knows that type of grief never leaves. Particularly to have lost people in the circumstances in which those people died is just unfathomable. Those people are in our hearts and in our prayers and are now in our Parliament as well.

I also offer condolences to First Nations peoples, with their precious and ancient connection to land. They have watched it burn in the most horrific of circumstances. That adds an additional element of cultural trauma to that which they have already experienced. I offer my condolences to the First Nations peoples who had to witness the destruction of much of their land. I offer condolences to the people who lost property, be it vehicles, homes or farms. It is devastating. For many it is accompanied by income loss as well. Memory is entwined with place and with property. That is also going to be a long-term devastation for those people.

With the recent drought, holding livestock has been challenging and it has been made even more challenging now with the bushfires. The worst thing is that at a time when the world is paying very high prices for our livestock, the ability of a lot of people to recover from drought was turning on whether they could sell that livestock. To have lost a lot of livestock in these fires is just as devastating.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers who participated in the magnificent response that we witnessed. This includes the tens of thousands of volunteers who contributed to the RFS and those who have donated to it. In this State we have avoided some of the hard conflict that can at times erupt between bodies like the RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW. We should pay tribute to the Rural Fire Service and its leadership and the volunteers for the work they did at their own expense for such a long period of time and involving such high levels of exhaustion to put these fires out. The professional firefighters of Fire and Rescue NSW who are fighting fires and are engaged in rescues all year around should not be forgotten either, nor should the firefighters who work in the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Forestry Corporation. They are all worthy of our thanks and our gratitude for the work that they performed.

Our defence personnel in the ADF were deployed for the first time on such a scale in an Australian crisis. It is typical to see the defence personnel deployed in the Solomon Islands, Indonesia and elsewhere to respond to floods. In fact, it is the case that the ADF has acquired one of the world's best capabilities for natural disaster relief, forged over a very long time. It is not meant to be the mission of the defence force and it is not its core business but it is a service that it performs magnificently when called upon. I thank the police, our paramedics, our nurses and all the other members of the emergency services who were dealing equally with tremendous trauma, providing law and order and a health response in very difficult circumstances. Those people are worthy of our praise and our thanks as well.

I thank the electrical workers, the water workers, those who repaired utilities, those who allowed power to come back on and those who maintained our radio networks. That critical infrastructure is easy to forget but the ability for everybody else to perform their services often turns on whether or not these services exist. In addition to those traditional utility workers, it is right that we should thank those who repaired the NBN. They very quickly repaired the NBN in devastated areas. In this day and age, access to the internet is crucial in disasters. At great risk, a lot of people were doing their job to make the NBN work. I thank them.

I thank the trade unions and employers who were amicable about the utilisation by employees of their hard-fought and carefully negotiated leave provisions to allow RFS volunteers to perform their work. Again, it is not something that we typically associate with disaster relief but the fact that we have a mature trade union movement and a mature employer community that were able to come together quickly and ensure that such leave provisions could be utilised was the reason that our RFS could perform its job as magnificently as it did for such a long period of time. Other members have reflected that we have always assumed the bushfire season is a relatively short summer season. All those assumptions are being challenged and our systems have to respond. That requires an ability to set aside what people could otherwise conflict about to ensure that these systems work. Thanks are owed to them as well.

Other members have spoken about the tangential effects, or perhaps the second or third order effects that arise from bushfires like these. Yesterday the Minister for Finance and Small Business spoke about the impact on small business—as I did in the take-note debate. I reiterate those sentiments. The small business sector has been devastated. Many have battled drought and many are now battling the coronavirus as well. It is a triple whammy you would not wish on anyone. Many people in the small business sector in regional New South Wales are dealing with that. Solidarity, care and support is offered to them all as well. Attention will turn to councils to restore local communities, to rebuild local infrastructure and do the very hard work of processing the development applications to allow the recovery to take place and establish the utility of the public spaces that communities need, particularly in times of distress as a psychological lift. Those council workers are in our thoughts as well.

The generosity of Australians has been magnificent with the level of financial donations they have made. The level and speed of the support has been unprecedented. I acknowledge a lot of that support has come from overseas. I had family members in other countries who saw the media coverage of the bushfires and donated in their currencies. It is remarkable and heart lifting to know from where such support comes. We hope that money reaches the communities fast and thank all the not-for-profit organisations engaged in its distribution.

As the immediate aspect of this crisis passes, attention will turn to discovering the truth about what happened, what lessons could be learnt from the response and how things could be improved. I remember a few years ago having similar discussions about the Tathra fires. There it became clear that many people who have gone through this type of trauma require the opportunity to tell their story and be acknowledged as having suffered this trauma. That is an opportunity which our coronial courts can provide in circumstances of death, and I imagine they may well do in some of these cases. Whether it is a Commonwealth royal commission, a New South Wales inquiry process or a process that may or may not be embarked upon by this House, it is important for people to be able to tell their stories and have them recorded for posterity. That assists them in their recovery and it is vital that they be given the opportunity to tell their stories, in public if they so wish.

We will turn now to the recovery phase of the bushfires, knowing full well that recovery will still be underway when the next bushfire season hits. This is something we will have to get used to. Earlier the shadow Treasurer made the point that the faster insurance companies pay out, the faster these communities can turn around, and I join him in that sentiment. It is the responsibility of the Parliament to superintend the recovery effort to make sure that it is happening in a manner which is inclusive and at a pace with the community desires, with investment that is effective. That is our responsibility as parliamentarians. Members of the Executive Government have certain responsibilities. Other members have the responsibility to speak on behalf of those communities and apply the accountability aspect to how that is happening. That is work that cannot be forgotten in this Parliament as we continue onwards.

Eventually, as other members have said, this Parliament, the Commonwealth Parliament and other parliaments will need to turn to the steps we should be taking to prevent such fires taking place again and to

minimise the severity of them. I do not intend to use this as an opportunity to talk about what that could look like, but needless to say it is a basic expectation that we as leaders have to ensure that if we can take steps to eliminate risk, we do. It is crucial in matters as serious as bushfires that we are open to all forms of truth and we are not prejudiced in our views that we bring to those debates, and if the facts lead to an outcome, that we are prepared to support the facts and take action accordingly. Again, I am devastated on behalf of the 25 people who lost their lives. Many people have lost property and many First Nation people have lost land as well. I extend my heartfelt condolences and I pray for their recovery and relief.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** I make it clear to all members that the next speech is the last before the Minister in reply.

**The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG (18:24:51):** We wish that the fires did not happen, let alone their unprecedented ferocity, duration and magnitude. We wish that individuals and communities did not lose their homes, their businesses and their lives because of these fires. Unfortunately, our wishes are not reality. The New South Wales fires claimed 25 lives and I give my heartfelt condolences to the friends and family of every victim. Of these 25, there were 19 civilians, three RFS firefighters and three American airmen who came to assist us. I thank them for their dedication.

I thank every person who assisted in fighting the fires. In particular, I thank the Rural Fire Service, under the leadership of Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers; Fire and Rescue NSW, under the leadership of Commissioner Paul Baxter and Deputy Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell; the Forestry Corporation; and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. I also thank all the unions who work to aid and represent firefighters, including the Fire Brigade Employees Union, the Public Service Association and the Australian Workers Union. I thank the community groups, NSW Police Force, New South Wales Ambulance and volunteers who assisted in whichever ways they could, and those who are assisting in supporting and rebuilding the damaged communities in the aftermath of the fires.

It is important that we take the opportunity to reflect and learn from the events that have transpired. If we are to take a lesson from this tragedy—and we should—it is that we need to be better prepared. This includes ensuring that there are enough professional and retained firefighters to deal with such catastrophic events, as well as ensuring that volunteers are adequately resourced to be able to respond. The Government has a responsibility to use taxpayers' money in a way which prioritises human life and welfare, which includes retaining enough firefighters and adequately resourcing the brave volunteers who put their lives on the line.

A volunteer will always want to support their community, but this should not be taken advantage of or exploited to cut down on full time paid resources. So many of these firefighters volunteered through their own generosity, and I deeply respect and thank them for their bravery. We are lucky to have them. If we are to learn from these events, and if we are going to rely on the voluntary spirit of volunteers, the least we can do is adequately resource them. There is a growing and concerning trend for modern government to avoid difficult conversations regarding the tax base and budgetary policy in favour of outsourcing to the private sector, and voluntary and charitable sectors, core government responsibilities of protection of human life and welfare. Of course they have their place, but they should never be relied on to the point where volunteers and citizens are placed in mortal danger.

Being a city person, the closest I got to an understanding of the gravity of this situation was when my good friend and colleague from the lower House, Trish Doyle, relayed the story of her son who, while trapped in an immobilised and ill-equipped fire truck, sent a text to his mum saying, "I don't think we're going to make it." Trish then showed me a video of the men in that vehicle making a crucial decision—against their formal training—to leave the vehicle while the bush around them burnt to the ground. The decision was based on the fact that the truck was not equipped to deal with the situation and it was ultimately a decision that saved their lives—a decision that potentially could have been avoided, if they had been adequately resourced.

My heart goes out to those who have family or friends who were affected by these bushfires. We have heard many stories about them, recounted by my colleagues today. Our community, the New South Wales community, is in mourning and is suffering the loss of victims, the loss of houses, and the loss of our native flora and fauna. I know from the evidence we have been hearing on the inquiry into koala populations and habitat that there has been immense damage done to the koala population by the bushfires, and similar destruction has occurred in relation to other species of fauna and indeed flora. On a recent visit to the Koala Hospital at Port Macquarie after the bushfires, I was fortunate enough to witness firsthand the amazing work of that hospital and the excellent medical care and rehabilitation that was provided to injured koalas. I can only imagine that the jobs of the staff are becoming more demanding as a result of the fires. I thank all those involved in rescuing and caring for our wildlife.

With the welcome rainfall and all fires in New South now by and large under control, the media spotlight of course has turned away from the bushfires. But this does not mean the work is over, nor that we forget about the victims. In fact, it is often after the flurry of activity and resources surrounding the immediate relief effort that the problems with recovery and rebuilding actually commence. We must now continue to support the communities who have been affected by these unprecedented fires. We saw a tremendous coming together of the community and support during the fires, and we must continue this support and assistance in the aftermath. We must ensure that we do not follow in the footsteps of past tragedies where houses, businesses and property had not been restored years after the initial destruction. These communities are an integral part of our future. Together we must ensure their longevity by making sure the long-term recovery process is resourced and completed as quickly as possible to avoid further unnecessary pain and suffering.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (18:32:05):** In reply: Thirty-four members of the House have contributed to the debate. They were fine speeches. They were worthy expressions of the heartfelt feelings of honourable members for all families, communities and loved ones of the 25 men and women who tragically lost their lives during the bushfire season. Members have placed on record their immense thanks to all those who have done so much to fight the fires, including the firefighters who lost their lives. In a very personal way members spoke about how the devastation caused by this season's bushfires has affected our State and indeed how it has impacted upon many of them personally as well. It was our House at its finest. I thank all honourable members. I commend the motion to the House.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** The question is that the motion be agreed to.

**Motion agreed to.**

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

#### *Bills*

### STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL 2020

#### First Reading

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

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** I move:

That the second reading of the bill stand as an order of the day for the next sitting day.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Committees*

### STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AND JUSTICE

#### Government Response

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** I table the Government's response to report No. 71 of the Standing Committee on Law and Justice entitled *Crimes (Appeal and Review) Amendment (Double Jeopardy) Bill 2019*, dated 26 February 2020. I move:

That the report be printed.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Members*

### CODE OF CONDUCT

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE (18:36:44):** I move:

That this House adopt, for the purposes of section 9 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the following Code of Conduct—

#### PREAMBLE

Members of Parliament acknowledge their responsibility to maintain the public trust placed in them by performing their duties with honesty and integrity, respecting the law and the institution and conventions of Parliament, and using their influence to advance the common good of the people of New South Wales.

## **THE CODE**

### **1 Purpose of the Code**

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to assist all Members in the discharge of their parliamentary duties and obligations to the House, their electorates and the people of NSW.

The Code applies to Members in all aspects of their public life.

In complying with this Code, Members shall base their conduct on a consideration of the public interest, avoiding conflict between personal interest and their duties as a Member of Parliament. It does not apply to Members in their purely private and personal lives.

Members will not act dishonestly for their own personal gain, or that of another person.

It is recognised that some members are non-aligned and others belong to political parties. Organised political parties are a fundamental part of the democratic process. Participation in the activities of organised political parties is within the legitimate activities of Members of Parliament.

## **PROPER EXERCISE OF POWER**

### **2 Improper influence**

- (a) No member shall act as a paid advocate in any proceeding of the House or its committees.
- (b) A Member must not knowingly and improperly promote any matter, vote on any bill or resolution or ask any question in the Parliament or its Committees in return for any remuneration, fee, payment, reward or benefit in kind, of a private nature, which any of the following persons has received, is receiving or expects to receive as a consequence:
  - (i) The Member;
  - (ii) A member of the Member's family;
  - (iii) A business associate of the Member; or
  - (iv) Any other person or entity from whom the Member expects to receive a financial benefit.
- (c) A Member must not knowingly and improperly use his or her influence as a Member to seek to affect a decision by a public official including a Minister, public sector employee, statutory officer or officer of a public body, to further, directly or indirectly, the private interests of the Member, a member of the Member's family, or a business associate of the Member.

### **3 Use of public resources**

The use of public resources should not knowingly confer any undue private benefit on the Member or, on any other person, or entity.

Members must take reasonable steps to apply the public resources to which they are granted access according to any guidelines or rules about the use of those resources.

#### *Commentary*

*There is a range of information available to Members to assist them in determining the accurate and appropriate use of resources including:*

- *The Legislative Assembly Members' Guide;*
- *The Legislative Council Members' Guide;*
- *The Department of Parliamentary Services Members' Entitlements Handbook; and*
- *The Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal's Annual Report and Determination of Additional Entitlements for Members of the Parliament of New South Wales.*

*In addition it is open to any Member to seek advice on these matters from the Clerks of the House, Senior Parliamentary Officers, or the Parliamentary Ethics Adviser.*

### **4 Use of confidential information**

Information which Members receive in confidence in the course of their parliamentary duties should be used only in connection with those duties. It must never be knowingly and improperly used for the private benefit of themselves or any other person or persons.

### **5 Limitation on breach of Code**

This code is not breached by reason of a benefit or interest that could be or was advanced or received by the persons set out in 2(b)(i)-(iv) by reason of them being a member of the public or a member of a broad class.

## **OPENNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **6 Disclosure of interests**

Members shall fulfil conscientiously the requirements of the House in respect of the Register of Disclosures by Members.

*Commentary*

*The Constitution (Disclosures by Members) Regulation 1983 (the Regulation) requires that Members lodge regular returns, disclosing certain interests such as real property, interests and positions in corporations, income, debts and gifts.*

*The Regulation also requires that each Clerk compile and maintain a Register of Disclosures for their respective Houses. The purpose of the Register of Disclosures is to promote greater transparency, openness, and accountability in the parliamentary process.*

*Members' attention is drawn to the following sources of information and advice on compliance with the requirements of the Regulation:*

- *Schedule 1 of the Regulation outlines the requirements for each type of interest to be disclosed, and gives examples as to how to make entries on the return;*
- *The respective guides for Members of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council explain the requirements of the pecuniary interest disclosure regime in plain language, with examples where possible; and*
- *It is also open to any Member to seek advice on these matters from the Clerks of the House or the Parliamentary Ethics Adviser.*

*In conjunction with the Regulation and this code, the following Standing Orders apply in relation to personal or pecuniary interests:*

- *Legislative Assembly Standing Orders 176-7 and Legislative Council Standing Order 113(2) on voting in divisions; and*
- *Legislative Assembly Standing Order 276 and Legislative Council Standing Order 210(10) on participating in committee inquiries.*

**7 Conflicts of interest**

Members must take reasonable steps to avoid, resolve or disclose any conflict between their private interests and the public interest. The public interest is always to be favoured over any private interest of the Member.

Members shall take reasonable steps to draw attention to any conflicts between their private interests and the public interest in any proceeding of the House or its committees, and in any communications with Ministers, members, public officials or public office holders.

A conflict of interest does not exist where the Member is only affected as a member of the public or a member of a broad class.

*Commentary*

*Members should be aware of the important distinction between disclosing an interest and having a conflict of interest.*

*There are certain pecuniary interests that must be disclosed on the Register of Disclosures although these may never come into conflict with a Members' duties. There are also interests that are not required to be disclosed on the Register of Disclosures but which could give rise to a conflict of interest if they are not managed appropriately.*

*It is open to any Member to seek advice on these matters from the Clerks of the House or the Parliamentary Ethics Adviser.*

**8 Gifts**

- (a) Members must take reasonable steps to disclose all gifts and benefits received in connection with their official duties, in accordance with the requirements for the disclosure of pecuniary interests.
- (b) Members must not knowingly accept gifts that could reasonably be expected to give rise to a conflict of interest or could reasonably be perceived as an attempt to improperly influence the Member in the exercise of his or her duties.
- (c) Nothing in this Code precludes the giving or accepting of political donations in accordance with the *Electoral Funding Act 2018*.

*Commentary*

*The Constitution (Disclosures by Members) Regulation 1983 (the Regulation) requires that Members lodge regular returns, disclosing certain interests such as real property, interests and positions in corporations, income, debts and gifts.*

*The Regulation also requires that each Clerk compile and maintain a Register of Disclosures for their respective Houses. The purpose of the Register of Disclosures is to promote greater transparency, openness, and accountability in the parliamentary process.*

*Members' attention is drawn to the following sources of information and advice on compliance with the requirements of the Regulation:*

- *Schedule 1 of the Regulation outlines the requirements for each type of interest to be disclosed, and gives examples as to how to make entries on the return;*
- *The respective guides for Members of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council explain the requirements of the pecuniary interest disclosure regime in plain language, with examples where possible; and*

- *It is also open to any Member to seek advice on these matters from the Clerks of the House or the Parliamentary Ethics Adviser.*

#### UPHOLDING THE CODE

##### 9 Upholding the Code

Members have a duty to cooperate fully with any processes established under the authority of the House concerning compliance with this Code.

Breaches of this Code may result in actions being taken by the House in relation to the Member. A substantial breach of the Code may constitute corrupt conduct for the purposes of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*.

This resolution has continuing effect unless and until amended or rescinded by resolution of the House.

#### Debate adjourned.

#### *Sessional Orders*

#### SITTING DAYS

#### SCHEDULE OF GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL BUSINESS

#### PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (18:37:29):**  
I move:

That from 24 March 2020 and for the remainder of the current session and unless otherwise ordered, the following sessional orders are amended as follows:

- (a) the sessional order relating to the sitting days of the House be amended by omitting "Wednesday 11.00 a.m." and inserting instead "Wednesday 10.00 a.m.",
- (b) the sessional order relating to the scheduling of government and general business be amended by omitting paragraphs (1) and (2) and inserting instead:
  - "(1) Government business is to take precedence of general business on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday each sitting week.
  - (2) General business is to take precedence on Wednesday each sitting week.", and
- (c) the sessional order relating to private members' statements be amended by omitting "after questions on Thursdays" and inserting instead "after questions on Wednesdays".

Honourable members will now be very well aware of the motion. It is a very simple proposal, which involves a change to the sessional orders. It is about changing the way in which the House conducts its business to what in my view is a much more rational and productive approach. It involves changing general business, which traditionally has been debated on Thursday, to being debated on Wednesday; and Government business, which traditionally has been debated on Tuesday and Wednesday, to being debated on Tuesday and Thursday.

The other change is that the House would commence its business at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday morning, which is an earlier start than it currently has, which is 11.00 a.m. It therefore ought to be obvious to honourable members that the maximum sitting hours will increase, not reduce, contrary to some media reports. Prior to the 2019 election—and, frankly, for almost 30 years—Government business took precedence over general business on Thursday from either 4.00 p.m. or 5.00 p.m. Frankly, in my 21 years in this House it has not been used that often. More often than not, the adjournment was put at about that time. Why? The main reason is because the volume and progress of government business are less predictable than general business. It therefore was always a more productive and efficient use of the House's time, in terms of peaks and troughs, to have the last part of the sitting week less likely to be used.

About a year ago we changed that and we decided that there would be no provision for government business on Thursday afternoons after question time. The consequence of that has been what, in my view, has been a far less satisfactory approach to our sittings. For at least six of our 12 sitting weeks last year, we adjourned at about dinner time. That reflected the amount of government business. Most of the time we sat late on Tuesday nights, we got up at dinnertime on Wednesday nights and then we sat for varying periods of time, but generally speaking until about seven or eight o'clock, often later, on Thursdays.

The principal downside to these arrangements is, in my view, workplace safety for regional members, in particular those regional members who are unable to access air services to get home. I was a country member for 18 years, when I had a three-hour drive to get home after Parliament finished on Thursday. Obviously, when there was an earlier adjournment I could get home having, generally speaking, driven at least in part in daylight hours.

Now, with very late sittings, a number of members get home very late. It worries me that they have to drive home after a very long and often quite intense and stressful sitting week. It is, in my view, a serious workplace safety issue.

I also note that last year we made a number of changes to sessional orders, which were articulated, I think fairly, as changes that would suit members with family responsibilities by facilitating the capacity of members who, for whatever reason, needed to have their children in the precinct and possibly even in the Chamber in certain circumstances. In truth, these changes were family friendly only for metropolitan members. What we did for sittings on Thursday nights was profoundly anti-family friendly for regional members. If we have a more extensive debate on this motion, other members might make this point, but I have been asked by at least one regional-based member to make this point.

The Thursday adjournment was relatively well known. At least two regional-based members have said to me that if they had known that they would virtually never be able to get to home on Thursday nights, because both of them relied on air services to get home, they would have reconsidered running for the Legislative Council. Both were female members and the point should be made and put on the record that anything we do in this House, in respect of our sessional orders, which makes it more difficult or less attractive for females to seek preselection and election to this House is something we should be very wary of. I do not make that point for any reason other than I have been asked to make it by a member of this House.

I particularly thank the Leader of the Opposition and members of the crossbench who have made time to see me and the Deputy Leader of the Government—who feels particularly strongly about this issue and I am sure she will make a contribution to this debate—and our staff so that we could explain our perspective. We explained two possible models for correcting this perceived problem. Simplicity has generally been preferred by members. As we have spoken to them, their preference has been for a direct swap of Wednesday and Thursday, with an earlier start on Wednesday to make sure that exactly the same amount of time is available for private members' business on Wednesdays as is currently the case on Thursdays.

With those few observations, I would say that I think there is a lot of merit to what has been put forward by the Government. Making this change at the beginning of the year is the right time to do it, just as the changes made that have led to this situation were done at the beginning of last year. The beginning of the year is the appropriate time to consider how the House should manage its own business. I believe this will lead to a better management of the business of the House. Earlier in the day the Hon. Mark Pearson said that perhaps we should do this on a trial basis. I have absolutely no problem with that. In fact, the whole concept of a sessional order is a trial, because it is not a permanent change to standing orders. We trial changes all the time through sessional orders. It is the right thing to do. With those few words, I commend the motion to the House.

**The Hon. ADAM SEARLE (18:46:20):** I indicate to the House at the outset that the Labor Opposition will not be opposing this suggested change. We do acknowledge that the later sittings on Thursdays, which reflect the longer period of time this House now has for private members' business, has had the practical impact for some regional members of delaying their return home. But the prime reason for moving this change is because the Government's own legislative agenda is pretty bare. It used to be the case that the Government would sit late on a Tuesday and often late on a Wednesday, but that has not been the case in this term of Parliament. The later sitting on Thursday has had the practical impact of members not getting home earlier. Moving private members' business to Wednesday is a reflection that this Government has a bare legislative agenda and has no real intention of changing that over the term of the Parliament. I think we ought to acknowledge that as well.

All members want a more inclusive elected Chamber. We would not want to create barriers to participation for any person, but particularly for women who have had historical barriers to joining elected chambers. All members would want to improve workplace health and safety. Those are some of the reasons for why we would not oppose this proposal before us today. However, all members should reflect that an earlier adjournment on Thursday does not guarantee that regional members will be able to get home. Not everyone will be able to leave this place on time to catch a plane. Some people will still have to drive and many members, because of their other roles in this place, will not get home on Thursday no matter when the House adjourns. They will still be leaving on a Friday. That was the case in previous years and it will continue to be the case. But if this change helps some members to get home earlier, that would be a good thing. Obviously, the Opposition will keep a close eye on the pattern of sittings and the business of the House. We, of course, reserve the right to revisit these issues should the need arise. In the spirit of goodwill, we will not be opposing these changes proposed here today.

**The Hon. MARK PEARSON (18:49:03):** The Animal Justice Party will support this motion. I foreshadow an amendment, which the Hon. Don Harwin has referred to. I will be very brief. The Animal Justice Party supports the motion for three reasons. The first is that to us it seems sensible that if we are going to sit late it should be on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. When we finish on Thursday it is better that we finish at an earlier time. It is the Government and the House's call as to whether we continue to debate urgent and pressing matters

on a Thursday, which may take us into the later hours of Thursday night. The second reason is that the time for private members' business or general business is equal to what it was up until now, so that time is not being jeopardised or changed in any way. The third reason is that the time for Government business is exactly the same as it was before. For those three clear reasons the Animal Justice Party will support the motion. I move:

That the question be amended by inserting at the end:

- (2) That, following the final sitting day in November 2020:
  - (a) the Procedure Committee inquire into and report on the impact of the amendments to the sessional orders; and
  - (b) the committee report by 4 February 2021.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD (18:51:05):** On behalf of The Greens I must say that we have a number of reservations about this proposal. I accept the concerns raised in relation to women and families in particular. As a woman with children who also lives in a regional area, I have to stay every Thursday night. For me this change does not really make any difference because I will still be at the mercy of Government business over whether or not I will be able to get home or leave in time to sensibly drive back to my children at night. Our major concern though is how difficult it is for crossbench members to prepare for Thursday's private members' business day, given the very short time between knowing what other members are bringing and what we will need to discuss on the Thursday. Primarily for that reason we are opposed to the motion, but we would be willing to accept it if it was amended. I move:

That the question be amended by omitting "from 24 March 2020 and for the remainder of the current session" and inserting instead "from 24 March 2020 until after the final sitting day in June 2020".

The amendment would allow the change to the sitting days to happen until June and then we would need to have this motion brought again if we wanted it to continue. By that time we will have been able to compare clearly what the course of business looks like under the new timing versus the old timing and whether it actually makes a difference, particularly for women and the crossbench members in this House.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK (18:53:25):** I find it amusing that there has been a lot of commentary about regional women with kids. As a regional father with three young kids, I took on this job knowing there would be long hours. I do not have the benefit of a \$300,000-plus ministerial position to make that any better. Whether it is Government business or private members' business, the average finish time of Government business last year was 10.00 p.m. or 11.00 p.m. Even if I did drive home at that time of night, my kids and my wife would be asleep. It makes no difference.

I made the conscious choice, after going up the back of someone on a Friday morning because I had decided to drive home, that it would just be better to stay anyway. I resent the fact that the discussion has been all about regional women and that the Hon. Don Harwin is speaking for regional members when he should not be. I am here saying I will be opposing the motion because I do not believe there is any benefit to us in it. I have made the conscious choice that I will be here late on a Thursday night and I will just stay here and drive home safely the following morning. I have made that commitment to do this job properly, so I will be opposing the motion.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL (Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning) (18:54:57):** As a regional woman I am going to say something. That probably will not surprise members of the House. In his contribution the Leader of the Government has extensively canvassed why the Government is bringing this forward. It is effectively taking us back to the arrangements that were previously in place, when Government business would take precedence on a Thursday afternoon. He has gone into that detail well so I do not intend to, but I want to be on the record as saying a couple of things, mainly as Leader of The Nationals, as a Minister, as the mother of two young girls and as one of the members behind the drive to make this change to the sessional orders this year. I have been open about it.

Members know that we started to talk about it towards the end of last year and we formalised those discussions last week. It is no surprise that the Government was going to bring this back and it is happening for a number of reasons. The first—and again the Leader of the Government has articulated this well—is that last year there was a late Tuesday night, a late Thursday night and an early finish on a Wednesday night. It is now seven o'clock. We will probably be out of here in about half an hour. Tomorrow night we will probably be here a bit later. I accept that Government business schedules will change throughout the year. We may not be able to leave early every Thursday night, but there will be times when that will be the case if we look at the trends from last year. It is just a commonsense approach to say that we should put the two late nights in a row and have the likelier earlier finish on a Thursday or at least have the option for that. I think the Hon. Mark Pearson said that in his contribution as well.

There are two reasons behind The Nationals members wanting to do this. The first one and the main one is that we want to get back to the communities that elected us and that we represent. It is true that there are times

when you cannot make the flight or the car trip home, but we found last year that we now lose Friday mornings. We lose these opportunities to be back in our regions after spending all week in the city. We are asking for that time back. It is not a big ask. We did it for a long time. We have done it for the eight years I was here up until last year. The sky did not fall in. I do not see why it is such an issue for members to go back to this old way of doing things.

I also make a point about the personal element, as someone in this place who has a young family. My girls are six and two. The Hon. Wes Fang is not here at the moment because he is unwell and because his kids are sick—he is a father in this place with a young family. I will only speak on behalf of The Nationals, as the leader, but the reality is we have a responsibility. I feel a responsibility as the first female Nationals Minister in this place and the first female Nationals leader in this place to call it out and ask for the system to help us when it can. We see that in this Chamber—we saw that last year. As the Leader of the Government said, everyone agreed to the changes about children up to four years old coming into the Chamber. There was no opposition to that.

I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition saying that he is not opposing this; I would love it if he would say he was supporting it. The reality is that when the changes were made last year to allow children up to four years old to enter the Chamber we on this side did not oppose them; we supported them. I know I will never or hardly ever benefit from that because my kids are not here—that is not the reality of my working week in Sydney—but I do not begrudge the fact the female members of the Opposition have used that. I think it is great that they can have their kids in here at dinnertime. If they need to bring their kids into the Chamber to get a work-life balance, that is fantastic. We do not begrudge that. We are asking for the same respect and consideration in return.

I say to The Greens that they cannot support women in some instances and not in others. I think they are being fairweather friends to some extent. The reality is that if we want to see change we all have to embrace the change. Often in the media there are conversations, particularly about Federal MPs, where good women on both sides of the Federal chambers have left—people like Kate Ellis or Kelly O'Dwyer who go because they say, "I can't do this anymore with my family. I knew what I was signing up for but it was hard." I am not one of the members who said I would not stand if I knew I had to be here on a Thursday night, just to put that on the record. I know what I have signed up for. As the Hon. Mark Banasiak said of himself, I appreciate what I have signed up for. But if we cannot say that we should let the system have a little flexibility to support women like me or those who might come after me, then I am not doing my job in the time that I am here.

The reality is that we are here for sitting weeks and we are here in non-sitting weeks. We have members who are here for committee work, we have Ministers who have responsibilities and we have others reasons to travel around the region. It would be fair to say that most regional members average about three nights a week away from home every single week. I know I do. That is not something that other people in this House have to deal with in the same way. This is a small change that does not affect people in a very big way. I am happy to support the amendment from the Hon. Mark Pearson that we look at it at the end of the year, but there is no reason why we should not be doing this to try to redress the balance a little bit back in favour of regional women, who do find this hard sometimes. People ask, "How do you manage?" You do manage but sometimes it is bloody tough. This is something that might make it a little bit easier and it should be supported by everybody.

**The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK (19:00:06):** I have to say that I am a little bit worried by this sort of precedent being set by the major parties in this place. This time last year, after the last election, we saw changes to the sessional orders to make the Government accountable and to make this House work very, very hard to scrutinise government as it has never been scrutinised before. We saw those major reforms only to now see a situation where members of the Government are going to be able to skive off when they want to on Thursdays.

**The Hon. Don Harwin:** That is absolute rubbish.

**The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK:** It is not absolute rubbish. It is fact.

**The Hon. Don Harwin:** You should not tell lies.

**The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK:** I listened to you in silence. You will listen to me. I am not going to stand here and play the sex card as it is being played, or the gender card, or whatever you like. The reality is that we have that over there with my fellow member, my partner in this place. You accept the responsibility of this House. The people of New South Wales will not like this at all, especially given what the Premier said after the last election—that she was going to hollow out the bills and do everything by regulation. That is what we have seen. We have seen this Government attempt to run this State by regulation and not by legislation because this House, for once, is holding it accountable. Oh, dear! How bloody terrible that is! Fancy that! Now we are going to see a deal done with the Opposition to make sure that that does not happen on Thursdays anymore. Thursdays will effectively be a lost day. I am not going to support that in any way, shape or form. I supported the changes that

were there; I supported it all. The Government cannot go ahead and cut a deal with the Opposition to see this happen in a way that is not right and that leaves the people of New South Wales out in the cold.

Despite my children being adults and despite me having to look after my grandchildren, I am spending more time than ever before—and I have nearly done 10 years in this place—trying to work for the people of New South Wales, my own party and everybody else. I just do not accept the arguments that are being put forward. You take the money, you take the responsibility and you do the time. You serve the people of New South Wales and nobody else. That is really the way I see it. Go home on Friday morning if you have to. Drive safely and make sure that you think about the interests not just of your government and not just of your skivvy-wearing mates. Make sure you think about this State first. Our job is to hold this Government to account. Government members think they are going to run this place by regulation and we are going to make sure that they do not.

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD (19:03:06):** Last year this House made a number of really substantial changes to the way that we do business. Overwhelmingly, they have been positive in the main in terms of general accountability, the ability of this House to do its business in a methodical way and the ability for private members' business to take a little bit more precedence for a lot of good outcomes. But some of it has had consequences and we have had a year of experiencing that. I think we need to look at those consequences, and if we can make some changes that do not ultimately impact on our ability to deliver those positive outcomes from last year we should do that.

Everyone will have their own personal set of circumstances that will affect how they might view this particular decision, but we have a broader collective responsibility. From my perspective, this has had a pretty significant impact on my family and my life. Most Thursday nights I have been making the decision to drive home to Milton after late sittings. I have been getting home between 2.00 a.m. and 3.00 a.m. because often I have had an hour's kip on the headland at Gerringong. Sometimes that has stretched a little bit longer as I have missed the alarm, and I have gotten home very early to have a three-year-old jump on me at six o'clock in the morning. I am not the happiest guy on Fridays, but I had to make the call to do that because it was having real impacts on me at home.

That was because my wife had been trying to re-enter the workforce and re-engage in her business after we moved there and my son Banjo had passed two years of age. She had worked out how she was going to structure her business around my sitting schedule and my time away. When that change happened, I felt that I needed to support her and make every effort—despite it not being a safe thing to do at all—to try to go home. I will do that. I have made that commitment and we as a family have made that commitment. It has real consequences. I have been quite fortunate but I was reflecting over the Christmas break about whether I could continue to do that and whether we were going to have to make big changes at home. I personally will achieve some benefit from this change.

It is just not true that all of the important work that we do as parliamentarians and as members of the Legislative Council happens in this place. Much of it happens outside of this place. Let us spend as much time as we can outside of this place so that when we come back to it we can be as effective as we can. We can reflect on what is going on in our communities and we can do that with all of the knowledge that we have built up by engaging with our communities as often as possible. I do not see that these changes impact the ability for private members' business to have the effect that it has been having in holding the Government to account, or the ability for the Government to go through its legislative agenda.

I will be a little bit cynical here: From my perspective, 50 per cent of the legislation coming from the Government is neutral at best and, in my view, some of it is negative for the interests of the State. The less legislation they are bringing to the Parliament is probably a good thing. In the event that they bring in swags of positive legislation to fix the climate crisis in this State, to address water security and to regenerate our forests, then I will be here until midnight every night to pass that legislation.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK (19:06:48):** I wish to speak briefly and identify myself as the regional female MP who asked my colleague to raise this situation. I do not speak for anybody else's family, but in our family my decision to enter politics was a very big one. I live a flight away from Sydney and the deal was I would be away three nights. That is why the Legislative Council was an option for me. I certainly did not stop working when I got home and I worked over the weekend. There were Fridays where I had to be here for budget estimates hearings, but in that situation we knew that and the children would come to Sydney. That was really expensive. I had very little income for those first few years.

It has worked for our family but I do not tell other people how to run their families. Melinda Pavey experienced a similar thing. She had a baby. The Nationals were so excited and it was so historic when she was preselected to come to this House that they actually forgot to put her name in the press release. She was "young mother" all the way through it. It was exciting and it did motivate many women. Her success was important. But we all sat down and looked at the deal that they were asking for because we took it on as a family. That was the

arrangement that we signed up to. I know that I could not have signed on for this arrangement that we have at the moment.

I believe that it is not just my region. Labor has given me a pair tomorrow evening so that I can attend an 8.00 a.m. meeting in Newcastle on Friday. I thank it for that. I just could not have scheduled the meeting at another time. It is to meet the convenience of the Stockton community, who requested for it to be then. It is not just about me getting home. It is about everybody who wants to do something in a region on a Friday. It is actually not about stopping work; it reconfigures the week in such a way that we get the same number of hours. To be honest, some Thursday nights when we have been here I have looked at people and they are like zombies. You are not doing your finest work late on Thursday nights. It will be better all around to do it on a Wednesday evening and to shift it that way. I thank the Leader of the Government and I thank all members who have engaged in a genuine discussion.

**The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES (19:09:10):** I will clarify for Ms Abigail Boyd the concerns she raised that moving forward to a Wednesday would not allow enough time for members of The Greens to prepare for private members' day. Currently a Whips' meeting is held on a Wednesday evening, where the list is determined and circulated to all members at the same time. This allows members to prepare for the following day as private members' day. Under this model, if the change is agreed to, the meeting would occur on a Tuesday. However, if The Greens would like to have that meeting earlier, on a Monday or the week before, I am more than happy to look at that as well. I support the motion.

**The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR (Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women) (19:10:00):** I support my colleague and good friend the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, who has handled this process with integrity and courage. I congratulate her on that. We are asking to move things back to the way they were; there will be no less time. As women and as men, if we are going to make things a little bit easier for people in this place I really do not see what the big deal is. As a regional woman and a regional member whose children have grown up and are not at home anymore, when I get one more night at home, even if my husband is asleep and snoring at 2.00 a.m., which is often the case, I am so happy to see him there. One more night is not too much to ask.

**The Hon. DON HARWIN (Special Minister of State, Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) (19:10:55):** In reply: I think everything that needs to be said has been said. Ms Abigail Boyd has moved an amendment to have a trial until the end of June. That is only six sitting weeks. I honestly do not think that is enough time to assess whether it is the right thing or not. We gave the other arrangement a year. We let it go for the whole year even though we felt pretty early on that it was not working. I think the sensible thing for the House to do, if it is minded to have a Procedure Committee inquiry, is to support the Hon. Mark Pearson's amendment and give this approach a year as well.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** The Hon. Don Harwin has moved a motion, to which the Hon. Mark Pearson and Ms Abigail Boyd have moved amendments. The question is that the amendment of Ms Abigail Boyd be agreed to.

**Amendment negatived.**

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** The question now is that the amendment of the Hon. Mark Pearson be agreed to.

**Amendment agreed to.**

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (The Hon. Trevor Khan):** The question is that the motion as amended be agreed to.

**The House divided.**

Ayes .....32  
Noes .....5  
Majority.....27

AYES

Amato  
D'Adam  
Field  
Harwin  
Jackson

Buttigieg  
Donnelly  
Franklin  
Houssos  
Latham

Cusack  
Faraway (teller)  
Graham  
Hurst  
Maclaren-Jones (teller)

## AYES

Mallard  
Mitchell  
Moselmane  
Roberts  
Sharpe  
Veitch

Martin  
Mookhey  
Pearson  
Searle  
Taylor  
Ward

Mason-Cox  
Moriarty  
Primrose  
Secord  
Tudehope

## NOES

Banasiak  
Faehrmann

Borsak (teller)  
Shoebridge

Boyd (teller)

**Motion as amended agreed to.**

*Business of the House*

**NOTICES OF MOTIONS**

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** By leave: Pursuant to Standing Order 71, I give a contingent notice of motion relating to the referral of the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Complaint Handling) Bill 2020 to Portfolio Committee No. 5 for inquiry and report.

**POSTPONEMENT OF BUSINESS**

**Mr JUSTIN FIELD:** I move:

That business of the House notice of motion No. 3 be postponed until the next sitting day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Adjournment Debate*

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Hon. DON HARWIN:** I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

**SPACE INDUSTRY**

**The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM (19:23:46):** I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Australian Space Awards are coming to Sydney. I welcome this very good news. On Thursday 23 March at the Four Seasons Hotel the space awards will bring together the best and brightest Australian businesses and professionals to talk about the space industry. I raise this because it is about New South Wales getting its share of good jobs. The Australian space industry employs between 9,500 and 11,500 people, with annual revenues of \$3 billion to \$4 billion. The good news is that the industry is growing around the world at 9.6 per cent per annum. New South Wales' strengths are that many of the businesses are based in this State and, crucially, we dominate the revenue and the exports for this industry. In fact, New South Wales space businesses generate more than 50 per cent of the space-related revenue across Australia. As members know, it is very difficult to get to that significant percentage.

I welcome the *New South Wales Space Industry Development Strategy 2020*, which the Government recently released. It goes through and maps out the relevant strengths of the industry. It is the first time the Government has responded to the Opposition's calls to add space to the list of priorities in high-tech manufacturing, alongside defence, and for exactly this—a map of New South Wales' strengths. The Government has responded to that in this strategy, and that is welcome. It has not responded to the Opposition's third call, which is to also examine launch sites across New South Wales. Some of our northern and western areas might be of real interest for launch sites. We look forward to the Government also investigating those areas.

Of course, other States are moving. We lost the arm wrestle with South Australia for the headquarters of the Australian Space Agency. The Queensland Government has released the \$8 million *Queensland Space Industry Strategy 2020-2025*. There is more money behind that strategy than the New South Wales one, even though it is welcome. And Western Australia is looking to home the headquarters of a national consortium to develop remote and robotic technologies for space exploration. The race is on. This is unfolding now because of the move to small space satellites, which are much easier and more cost effective to deliver into space. Now it is

about who will benefit from the jobs that are going to come from that. New South Wales and Australia have the opportunity to jump the first space race and win the second space race that has started.

What are the challenges going forward? I draw the attention of the House to the recommendation of the parliamentary inquiry into defence. This excellent committee work resulted in an unanimous recommendation that the Parliament of New South Wales support the establishment of a joint committee on defence and space industries in New South Wales. That recommendation has not yet been acted on. I call on the Government and the Minister to re-examine that and bring it back to the House to provide a bipartisan committee that will drive these issues in New South Wales in the long term. We need to look at the balance between the city and the aerotropolis.

The Government's current strategy will relocate many of the space industry businesses in the city, which may come as a surprise to members. A lot of the discussion was about western Sydney and the new airport, but the new strategy will put many of these businesses in the city in the central Eveleigh area. That may make sense but the Government needs to spell out the balance between the aerotropolis area and the city-based businesses. It is a potential good spot, but it needs to be based on rigorous analysis, rather than fashionable planning decisions. I call the Government to further involve the Chief Scientist & Engineer in this work. I welcome the fact that Treasury is leading—it is about jobs and Treasury should be leading—but the Chief Scientist & Engineer should be more heavily involved in this strategy.

### NSW POLICE FORCE STRIP SEARCH PRACTICES

**The Hon. ROD ROBERTS (19:28:54):** On 24 October 2019 Mr David Shoebridge gave notice that he would move:

That leave be given to bring in a bill for an Act to amend the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002 to prohibit the use of drug detection dogs in carrying out drug detection without a warrant; to limit the circumstances in which strip searches may be carried out; to prohibit strip searches of children who are less than 16 years old; and for related purposes.

(Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Amendment (Drug Detection Dogs and Strip Searches) Bill)

I caution this House not to be deceived into believing that children who are involved in the possession and supply of prohibited drugs in this State are not in danger or that the attempt to water down police powers will in any way benefit our children. On 22 February—just this weekend gone—the Lost City music festival was held at the Sydney Showgrounds. This was an underage music festival for children aged between 13 and 18, with approximately 12,000 patrons attending. Police carried out more than 40 searches at this event, of which 12 were strip searches. Eleven children involved in those strip searches were found in possession of illegal substances. Of those 11 children, two teenagers were charged with drug supply. Please note that they include a 14-year-old girl who was allegedly caught with 31 MDMA capsules concealed internally and a 17-year-old boy who was allegedly caught with 75 MDMA capsules; additionally, a knife was found concealed in his shoe.

Clearly, these quantities are not for personal use and, if proven, these children will be convicted drug suppliers. Also detected and arrested were a 16-year-old girl who allegedly had four grams of the drug ice—the most dangerous drug known to us all; we are not talking about a little bit of cannabis here—and a 17-year-old girl who had 2.2 grams of MDMA. If the House requires, I can provide historic details of many, many more instances of children being involved in the illicit drug trade. Police have stated that all searches were carried out in accordance with the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act, which provides additional safeguards for children and vulnerable people. Those safeguards include that children under 10 cannot be strip searched and those under the age of 18 cannot be strip searched unless a parent, guardian, or another person "who is not a police officer and who is capable of representing the interests of the person being searched and whose presence is acceptable to that person" is present.

Note that the strip searches are conducted in the presence of a person who is acceptable to the child being strip searched. Claims of ritual abuse of children by police are just not true. It is a fact that children are involved in the possession and supply of prohibited drugs in this State. It is a fact that the risk of detection holds a deterrent for children to become involved in that insidious enterprise. It is a fact that the watering down of police powers by further restricting the use of drug detection dogs or changing the law in relation to strip searching children under the age of 16 would only benefit the drug-dealing criminals in our community and encourage them to further target our children.

I call on the members of this House not to be so naive. Please note that strip searches are a necessity in the police arsenal for the fight against illicit drugs in this State. Please note that police have stringent processes and procedures in place for the strip searching of children. Please note that our police do not routinely breach the law when strip searching children. The Greens have a written policy "to decriminalise the personal use, possession and non-commercial sale of drugs". Mr David Shoebridge's motion is not about traumatising children during strip searches; it is about furthering a Greens manifesto.

## TUGGERAH LAKES FLOOD MANAGEMENT

**The Hon. TAYLOR MARTIN (19:32:55):** Over a three-day period earlier this month, more than 300 millimetres of rain fell across the Central Coast. From Friday 7 February to Sunday 9 February, the coast was battered by flash flooding, torrential rain and dangerous surf conditions. The impact was significant, with the Central Coast SES receiving more than 1,150 calls for assistance, including 35 flood rescues. The rainfall caused Tuggerah Lakes to flood, peaking at 1.7 metres. Homes and streets surrounding the lakes were flooded at Berkeley Vale, Chittaway Point, Long Jetty, Tacoma, Tacoma South and The Entrance North. The flooding was made worse by the clogged channel at The Entrance, which restricted water draining from the lake into the ocean. Flooded residents were forced to wait for days for Central Coast Council to respond adequately to the disaster. It was entirely predictable that the lakes were going to flood. The Entrance Channel should have been excavated in the week prior at the very latest, when the rain was on its way.

Labor's mayor dillydallied and sat on her hands while the coast flooded. There was nowhere for the water to go because our Labor- and greenie-controlled council ceased dredging the channel years ago and even decommissioned the dredge that had been doing that work before it had finished the job. Meanwhile, the State Government stands ready and willing to support the council with expertise and funding—just like last week, we announced \$600,000 from the Rescuing our Waterways program. The mayor told media outlets that the reason the council did not act to open the channel was it needed approval from NSW Crown Lands to act. The fallacy of that statement was exposed by Skaie Hull from NBN News, who discovered that the council did not even seek approval from NSW Crown Lands until 8.23 a.m. on Tuesday 11 February—more than four days after the rain started falling and two days after locals at The Entrance, such as Ben Weber, had taken it upon themselves to use shovels and even an excavator to create a passage from the channel to the ocean to let the water flow.

On Tuesday morning, just 62 minutes after the council sought approval to widen the lake opening, NSW Crown Lands had already responded and advised that the council could consider using emergency powers under the Local Government Act for the widening or could do it under the council's existing licence, which it had completely forgotten about. The Labor- and greenie independent-controlled council has had its head in the sand when it comes to lakes issues. This is not the first time that the issue has been raised. Six times last year, motions were raised in council regarding dredging and the quality of Tuggerah Lakes. Each time the Labor Party voted against them or amended the motion to make it absolutely toothless. Councillor Jilly Pilon has been the community's advocate for her whole time on the council. In 2018 she warned that "our choked waterways at ... The Entrance are affecting tourism, employment, transport and land values on the Coast, as well as adding to the flood risk of homes around our waterways". With the rainfall earlier this month, this is exactly what happened and what Jilly had warned about two years ago: Homes were unnecessarily inundated with water.

During last year's State election campaign, the Liberal Party committed funding to establish an expert committee to determine the best way to improve water quality in Tuggerah Lakes. Councillor Pilon, as the Liberal candidate for Dobell in last year's Federal election, secured \$4.7 million to improve water quality in the Tuggerah Lakes. In council last year, Councillor Pilon moved a motion for the council to seek funding from the Federal Government to fund the recommendations of the State-funded expert panel. Labor councillors even voted against that. The Labor member for The Entrance—not normally an ally of the State Government—knew why this occurred. He went on ABC Radio and said, "It is very clear that The Entrance Channel has been mismanaged and I have thought about this long and hard over the past couple of days and my observation confirms the opinion that council had mismanaged the care of The Entrance Channel."

The member for The Entrance is referring to a council in which Labor has a working majority and a Labor mayor. He further said, "Council have had a dredge in their possession and their job has been to operate that dredge since the 1990s. They've been given a whole bunch of money by the State and Federal Government to, in part, go towards that dredging. However, they've allowed that dredge to be run into the ground. They haven't maintained it." He is dead right; that is exactly what this council has done. There are real consequences to our local council playing games. We are seeing instances of this across the Central Coast in the past week. It is unprecedented to see locals calling for their mayor to resign— [*Time expired.*]

## ISRAEL STUDY TOUR

**The Hon. WALT SECORD (19:37:57):** As NSW Parliamentary Friends of Israel deputy chair, I rise to report on my participation in the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies-supported January visit to Israel and the West Bank. While they provided local assistance, all flights and accommodation were paid for by participants. No matter how many times one has visited the Middle East, as I have, each visit is like a refresher course. These study missions are worthwhile. They are important. They are thoroughly fascinating. Each visit is an update on the daily security and terror threats that Israel faces and the realities of a very unfriendly neighbourhood. Each visit also reminds us that the Palestinians have a human right to self-determination. As naive as it feels, I still pray for a two-state solution.

I would say that I feel like I know less and less about the region every time I visit. Since 2011 I have visited the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Qatar, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq and Israel. Since 2012 I have visited Yad Vashem four times and made pilgrimages to Shoah sites around the world, including Auschwitz-Birkenau. I have also visited Jewish and Islamic sites of the Inquisition in Spain, including Cordoba, Granada and Toledo; Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe; and national genocide museums in Armenia and Iraqi Kurdistan. Furthermore, most recently I visited the two terrorist attack sites on the Israeli Embassy and Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires. I will report back on my visit to Latin American Jewish sites on another occasion.

I believe that if you think you understand Middle East politics, you do not understand Middle East politics. For the record, the mission provides a range of points of view, including somewhat uncomfortable ones. We heard from political commentators, met Palestinian leaders and the mayor of Efrat, saw the Magen David Adom in full operation, were briefed by water policy experts and Israeli cannabis innovators, saw Hezbollah tunnels in northern Israel, visited the Temple Mount, and laid a wreath at Yad Vashem. In addition, we visited sites in the West Bank, including the so-called martyrs' memorial in Ramallah and the somewhat bizarre Rawabi development.

In the face of rising anti-Semitism globally I find these trips worthwhile as they remind non-Jews about the need for a Jewish homeland as history and anti-Semitism repeat. To say this is happening is not alarmist—sadly it is not. Physical attacks on a person on the way to prayer, swastikas at Bondi Beach and a Nazi flag flying in Wagga Wagga are all symbols of a despicable shift in our community. I note the Executive Council of Australian Jewry [ECAJ] logged 368 anti-Semitic incidents nationally in 2019.

In conclusion, as for this year's mission, it was again deeply personal. This was because I was accompanied by my spouse, Julia, who is a member of the Emanuel Synagogue and has close family scattered throughout greater Tel Aviv. I will always remember our Yad Vashem visit and the absolute horror on her face when she happened upon massacre panels of the Ukraine. It turned out to be actual photographs of her mother's family's district. In total, more than 300 of Julia's grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins were slaughtered there. Incredibly, the district has had a documented Jewish presence since 1458. Before the Shoah, it had a large synagogue, a yeshiva and a strong Bund tradition. The panel was next to another one quoting Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem *Babi Yar*. I know the poem well, but the connection was far too personal this time. I wept.

Finally, on an uplifting note, I had the privilege of seeing Julia reconnect with her cousin Pavel Abramovich, his wife and their son Professor Felix Abramovich. They were famous refuseniks. Pavel had been trying to get an exit visa for Israel since 1971. He taught Hebrew and *Torah* study in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s. I did not know fully of their existence until Julia mentioned them at the Bob Hawke memorial service, which we attended together. They were contemporaries of Natan Sharansky and were released in early 1988 due to the efforts of Australian Jewry and activists like former Prime Minister Bob Hawke and former ECAJ president Isi Leibler. Pavel was part of a famous May 1988 delegation of 15 former Soviet refuseniks who came to Australia. They are chronicled in Dr Suzanne Rutland and Sam Lipski's book *Let My People Go*. When we met, Pavel pulled out a picture of himself with Naomi and Isi Leibler and Bob and Hazel Hawke in their tiny Moscow apartment. Pavel says he and Mr Leibler still keep in contact.

These personal and tender moments aside, I also got to the Israel Opera, the Shimon Peres Center for Peace and Innovation and the famous Geshen Theatre set up by Russian Jews in 1991. I think it is apt that I end with these mentions. Visits to Israel are as much about celebrating the culture that survives and prospers as they are about remembering the price of that survival. I look forward to visiting Israel again. My partner, Julia, is already hatching plans that we spend part of our retirement each year in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or Safed—her favourite city. As I remarked to my colleague the Hon. Natalie Ward on 18 February at the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies plenum, that retirement would be in about a decade—after serving in a New South Wales Labor Government and after I finish politics. I thank the House for its consideration.

### NUCLEAR ENERGY

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE (19:42:41):** It is a fact that members of this Parliament are pushing to overturn the statutory ban on nuclear power in this State. That is dangerous for our climate, dangerous for our land and water, and dangerous for State and household budgets. Every megawatt of new nuclear power costs at least three times that of new fossil-fuelled power and at least six times the cost of an additional megawatt of solar- or wind-generated power. Those costings are based only on the construction and operation of nuclear power plants and entirely ignore the billions more required to decommission and manage the radiation from a nuclear power plant for hundreds of years after it closes.

With a climate crisis upon us, nuclear energy cannot offer the solutions we need in the time frame we need when the planning, approval, construction and commissioning of a nuclear plant takes decades longer to complete than comparable renewable energy facilities. It is an embarrassing fact for the nuclear industry and its proponents

in this Chamber that every single one of the nuclear power construction projects currently underway in the developed world has experienced substantial delays and staggering cost overruns. The cost of building the UK's first new nuclear power plant in a generation at Hinkley Point has risen from the initial estimate of £14 billion to be now more than £22 billion. That is more than A\$43 billion and counting. Despite this eye-watering cost it is still far from completion, with an at-best operating date of 2025.

The Watts Bar Nuclear Plant in the US took a record 43 years to complete. Construction started in 1973 but was halted in 1988 due to safety concerns. The final unit briefly came online in 2016 before it was shut down again after just five months of operation due to urgent repairs. The publicly disclosed cost of construction is US\$12 billion. The best estimates available suggest that this is some 20 times—or maybe more—the original budget and roughly 38 years behind schedule. Hitachi has now officially abandoned the Wylfa project in Wales after the estimated cost of the twin-reactor project had risen from A\$26.4 billion to almost A\$40 billion. The eye-watering cost and construction delays make the project cripplingly expensive and ultimately unviable.

In France, a single reactor under construction at Flamanville is already seven years behind schedule and the most recent estimated cost of A\$17.7 billion is more than three times the original estimate of A\$5.4 billion. In Finland, the one reactor under construction is already 10 years behind schedule and the estimated cost of A\$13.8 billion is nearly three times the original A\$4.9 billion estimate. If that is not enough, the US State of South Carolina has given up on one plant entirely after 16 years of wasted work and US\$9 billion of public money being spent. It now has a grand hole in the ground, two grateful multinational corporations but not a single light bulb operating from the power.

Recent history tells us clearly that even if it was immediately approved and given the political and financial go-ahead, any substantial contribution from nuclear power in Australia would not be available until well beyond 2040. The year 2040 is the last possible date to close most of the coal-fired generation fleet to deal with the climate crisis. The effect of nuclear advocacy in this country is to prolong the life of coal-fired power—that is what it is designed to do. Support for nuclear power is part of the culture wars. Tony Abbott himself has been clear about this. He sees it as a way to drive a wedge between Labor and the unions and between Labor and the environment movement. Recently, regarding removing the ban on nuclear power, Abbott stated:

One of the things that we could easily do is go into the parliament (and) seek to change the law here. When you're seeking a third term, when you're defending a one-seat majority, when you've got a few self-inflicted wounds, when you've got the unions and GetUp and The Greens as well as Labor against you, you've got to be prepared to create a contest.

It is saddening and maddening—but not surprising—that politicians see halting the transition to a zero-carbon society as just a way to score cheap political points. We have precious little time to act, and if we are being honest we all know this. The Greens believe that the solution to the climate crisis must be one that leaves no person, no worker, no family and no community behind. It must be realistic and buildable and credible. That is a non-nuclear future. We can deliver it now, on time and on budget, with 100 per cent renewables.

### HUNTER REGION

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK (19:47:34):** On 19 December the Premier announced that in addition to my responsibilities as Parliamentary Secretary for Cost of Living I would assist the Government in the Hunter region. I thank her for this opportunity and report to the House the approach I am taking to support Australia's largest regional economy, which overflows with beauty and opportunity. The Hunter is often considered in two parts. The upper Hunter is represented by excellent Government MPs in Michael Johnsen and Steve Bromhead. The lower Hunter, also described by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment as Greater Newcastle, is an area that spans councils from Cessnock through Maitland to Port Stephens and south through Newcastle to Lake Macquarie.

The lower Hunter is a special focus for me as it has no elected Government representative. This had led to calls for the appointment of such a person to be a voice on the region's behalf inside the Government. Early in the new year I began this journey, visiting each of the five lower Hunter councils. I thank the mayors and chief executive officers for all being available, their very warm welcomes and their informative briefings. I was really impressed. I have also met the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils [JO], which is a model of good governance and has really demonstrated how powerful councils are when they put aside politics and rivalries to genuinely work together.

The JO epitomises what I perceive to be a transformation in the political culture of Hunter Valley councils, and good on them. I applaud their leadership. They are fine examples for the State and the nation of what great governance looks like when people who are focused on delivering for their communities combine their efforts for the greater good. This is a wonderful help for me in my new role. I have also met the highly regarded NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet staff in Newcastle and have been briefed on their work plans. Hunter Water briefed me on the development of the Lower Hunter Water Plan. I thank them and Minister Pavey for

agreeing to my request for a briefing of all local MPs. That was held here at Parliament House last Monday. I thank the Hunter members who attended. I believe they found it positive and beneficial.

I briefly touch on my recent visit to Tomaree Community Hospital. I had previously met nursing staff to discuss the summer surge issues that beset smaller hospitals in coastal tourism hotspots. I was also keen to see the progress on the new HealthOne facility. It is incredibly impressive. The appointment of a full-time change management officer to guide the planning and logistics has been inspiring. The nursing staff have had many of their valid grievances addressed and are looking forward to the project's completion. I acknowledge and thank Hunter New England Health for providing extra resources at the hospital during the summer surge and for so much it has invested in the co-design with nurses and other health staff. The project will be completed mid-year.

I have spent some time with the Newcastle Port Corporation management and I thank them for their tour and briefing on a wide range of issues. Newcastle is the biggest coal-exporting port on earth. It is the only transport hub in Australia where road, rail and port are fully connected, and this includes a direct link to the new Inland Rail. We discussed the container cap issue at length—a matter that has been taken up by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission—the depth of the port and the redevelopment of the BHP site. They showed me what a glittering future they and the Port of Newcastle have for the Hunter. The port is one of 11 catalyst areas identified by the Department of Planning and Environment in its Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036, launched in 2018 by then Minister Roberts. This is an excellent plan and has widespread support. It is a kind of blueprint for me for setting priorities for my role in the region.

I have been briefed by Newcastle City Council and separately by Venues NSW and the Hunter and Central Coast Development Corporation on the Broadmeadows catalyst precinct, which I fully intend to champion on behalf of the region. I thank the Nelson Bay and Newcastle chambers of commerce for their welcome and briefings. We have been able to connect the Nelson Bay chamber with TAFE to ensure the chamber is fully engaged in the implementation of the exciting new TAFE faculty at Salamander Bay. I acknowledge Greg Piper, the member for Lake Macquarie, who has given me a detailed tour of his electorate, its challenges and the immense opportunities on offer.

On Friday I will make my fourth visit to the region to meet Newcastle City Council's Stockton Community Liaison Group to discuss the coastal erosion crisis. I commend and thank Minister Hancock for her support, engagement and attention to the issue. It is very upsetting but all we want is everyone 100 per cent focused and on the same page. I have a great deal of work to do. I am far from perfect but I will always try my best for my Premier, my Government and, most of all, the good people of the Hunter. They deserve no less.

#### **MARYANNE STUART**

**The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG (19:52:45):** In the brief time I have I congratulate and recognise the excellent effort in the last election by the Labor candidate for the electorate of Heathcote, Maryanne Stuart, who worked exceedingly hard. I am sure the Hon. Natalie Ward—who was there on the pre-poll with me almost every day—will attest to that. It was a very vigorous and intense campaign. In general we should recognise all candidates from all sides of politics who give up extensive amounts of time away from their families for an uncertain future. They may or may not win. It is always gratifying to see a candidate put so much effort in and go so close—but she did not quite make it. I sincerely hope she runs for Heathcote again and, notwithstanding the reservations of the members opposite, I hope she wins.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (The Hon. Taylor Martin):** The question is that this House do now adjourn.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The House adjourned at 19:54 until Thursday 27 February 2020 at 10:00.**