

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Tuesday 4 March 2008

The President (The Hon. Peter Thomas Primrose) took the chair at 2.30 p.m.

The President read the Prayers.

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

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Report

The President tabled, pursuant to the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, the report entitled "Report on Investigation into Corruption Allegations Affecting Wollongong City Council: Part 1," dated March 2008.

The President announced that, pursuant to the Act, it had been authorised that the report be made public.

Ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. John Della Bosca.

TABLING OF PAPERS NOT ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

The Hon. Eric Roozendaal tabled, pursuant to Standing Order 59, a list of papers tabled in the previous month and not ordered to be printed.

COMMITTEE ON THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN AND THE POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Report

The Hon. Lynda Voltz tabled report No. 1/54, entitled "Report on the Eighth General Meeting with the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission," dated March 2008.

Ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Lynda Voltz.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report

The Hon. Amanda Fazio tabled the report entitled "Legislation Review Digest No. 2 of 2008," dated 4 March 2008.

Ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Amanda Fazio.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Postponement of Business

Business of the House Notices of Motions Nos 1 and 2 postponed on motion by the Hon. Duncan Gay.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY AMENDMENT (OFFENCES) BILL 2007

Second Reading

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [2.41 p.m.], on behalf of the Hon. Ian Macdonald: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill. The amendments in the bill strengthen the protection of vital electricity infrastructure in New South Wales. The Government is committed to securing the reliable supply of electricity to the people of New South Wales, and this includes ensuring the protection and security of electricity infrastructure, such as transmission towers, power poles and distribution lines.

There have been several occasions in recent years when young people have been caught climbing on high-voltage transmission towers—an extremely dangerous activity. The gap needs to be addressed in order to protect the safety of individuals and the vital electricity works that deliver the reliable supply of electricity in New South Wales. The bill amends the Electricity Supply Act to create a new offence of entering, climbing, or being on, electricity works. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$1,100 and imprisonment for up to three months.

The new offence is designed to deter illegal and dangerous conduct involving electricity works and will apply to electricity works as defined in the Electricity Supply Act to mean any electricity power lines or associated equipment or electricity structures that form part of its transmission or distribution system. This means the prohibition extends from transmission towers to the distribution lines and poles that deliver electricity to residential and commercial buildings. The maximum penalty for the new offence is consistent with the maximum penalty for climbing on, or jumping from, other structures contained in section 8A of the Summary Offences Act.

The new offence does not apply to persons authorised to be on electricity works, such as employees or contractors acting on behalf of the electricity businesses. The proposed offence explicitly states that a person must not enter, climb or be on electricity works unless authorised to do so by the network operator or retail supplier concerned. This ensures that the offence will apply only to those people committing illegal acts without any authority from the owner of the electricity works concerned.

The other object of the bill relates to the theft of electricity. The bill amends section 64 of the Electricity Supply Act to increase the maximum term of imprisonment for the offence of the theft of electricity from two years to five years. It also provides for the offence to be an indictable offence if the offence is committed by an individual. The maximum fine for theft of electricity aligns with the maximum fine for larceny. However, the current maximum term of imprisonment for two years for theft of electricity is significantly below the maximum term of five years imprisonment for larceny. The theft of electricity is no less serious than the theft of tangible goods. For this reason, the bill increases the maximum term of imprisonment for theft of electricity to align it with the penalty for larceny provided for in the Crimes Act.

The increase in the maximum term of imprisonment provided for in this bill will send a clear message to offenders that theft of electricity will be taken no less seriously than theft of tangible goods. Lastly, the bill makes the events of theft of electricity an indictable offence. Chapter 5 of the Criminal Procedure Act will apply to the offence. Chapter 5 of the Criminal Procedure Act provides for the summary disposal of proceedings for indictable offences unless an election to proceed on indictment is made. This approach is consistent with the approach taken for the disposal of larceny offences. I trust honourable members will support the protection of vital electricity infrastructure provided in the bill, which I commend to the House.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX [2.45 p.m.]: Mr President—

The Hon. Christine Robertson: Nice new suit!

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I acknowledge comments from members on the Government side who have nothing better to do than admire my new suit. I note that five Government members are listed to speak in debate on this bill. I am very much looking forward to what they will have to say, given their leanings on the privatisation of electricity assets in New South Wales. I will be very interested indeed.

The Hon. Christine Robertson: How would you know?

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: I saw the Hon. Mick Veitch marching down the street, and that was most amusing. All Opposition members and I will be watching and listening very carefully when Government members' contributions are made. It will be a wonderful opportunity for mea culpa, and a wonderful opportunity for them to hold their Government to account on the privatisation process.

The object of the debate is the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill 2007. At the outset I restate what was said by Opposition members in the other place: the Opposition does not oppose the bill. The

objects of the bill are to amend the Electricity Supply Act 1995 to increase the maximum term of imprisonment for the offence of theft of electricity from two years to five years, and to provide for the offence to be an indictable offence if committed by an individual. The bill will create a new offence of entering, climbing or being on electricity works as defined in the Act. Those objects are supported by the Opposition.

The security of infrastructure assets involved in the electricity industry is of serious importance. We must ensure that there are no accidents affecting people or property. The Greens propose to move two amendments, the first of which deals with allowing the entering or climbing on electricity structures for the purpose of fixing a placard or paper, as long as a person does not come within two metres of any live electricity wires. I am not sure of the import of the amendment, but the Opposition will oppose it on the grounds of the probability of dangerous activities and the potential to cause serious injuries as a result of dealing with any power poles in such a manner.

It is worth noting that it is illegal to fix placards or paper on electricity poles. At election time we all become frustrated at seeing the Electrical Trades Union and others affixing placards of Labor candidates to poles, but the problem lies in enforcing the provisions that make it illegal to affix papers and placards to poles, and the provisions must be enforced. At times when I am driving down the highway in Eden-Monaro and see the face of Mike Kelly beaming at me, it is a bit scary. I know of people who have been shocked, dismayed and forced to pull to the side of the road after seeing such photographs, so the problem should be addressed. Not for a moment am I reflecting on Labor Party preselection processes and candidates, but it is quite confronting to see their visages plastered all over poles throughout rural New South Wales.

I understand that the practice also occurs in the city, and we would like to see the practice finished. We do not want to see political parties use electricity poles for party political purposes. Electricity poles should be used to supply electricity, the use for which they are intended. Electricity is dear to the hearts of Opposition members, as it is to the hearts of Government members, and I look forward to hearty comments from members opposite about electricity privatisation, which no doubt they will make in this debate. This is a wonderful opportunity for them to put their comments on the record. In summary, the Opposition supports the bill, and we will give consideration to each of the Greens' amendments as they are moved in Committee.

Dr JOHN KAYE [2.50 p.m.]: The Greens support the intent of the bill. Electricity safety is an important objective that needs to be pursued vigorously. The potential for horrendous injury and indeed death as a result of contact with electricity is well known, and it is important that we send a strong signal that individuals must not climb on electricity infrastructure. Likewise, electricity theft, which is more common around the world, has resulted in an unacceptably high rate of fatalities and injuries. In a society that is dependent upon electrical infrastructure it is important that we maintain safety as a high priority in all aspects of infrastructure regulation.

I will not take this opportunity to talk about privatisation and its impacts on safety. However, I will raise concerns of the Greens, particularly about proposed section 65A. We think its intent is good: ensuring that people do not climb on infrastructure, on poles, is a good idea and will increase safety. However, we think that the provision will have unintended consequences, that is, it will create an inequity with regard to access to an important communications channel. The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox talked about seeing posters of Labor faces on poles. As I said to the member privately, where I live I see posters of Liberal faces on poles. There are probably posters of Nationals faces and Greens faces on poles also; we must be realistic about this. We all use that communications channel as a way of canvassing support for votes.

It is not only political parties represented in this Chamber that use that communications channel. A number of community and social groups communicate with the population by means of placards and papers on poles. The act of placing placards on poles is an important political, community and cultural asset that allows for communications. We are concerned that section 65A will, effectively, discriminate against those who cannot afford to use cherry pickers to place placards and posters on poles. Our logic is this: With a cherry picker one does not need to climb a pole to affix a placard; one can get right next to a pole and, using a nail gun, nail a placard to a pole—which is actually how the Labor mob do it.

However, in the absence of a cherry picker, the only other sensible way of doing it is to use a ladder to climb the pole, but this is deemed a criminal offence under proposed section 65A and would put the offender at risk of a penalty of three months jail. The reality is that proposed section 65A will create an unacceptable level of unfairness with regard to access to communication. People who can afford a cherry picker can communicate via power poles; people who cannot afford a cherry picker either do not communicate or take their chances with

a three-month jail sentence. It is simply not fair. No doubt the Government will argue that what we are saying is invalidated by section 65 of the Act, which states:

A person must not interfere with a network operator's or retail supplier's electricity works unless authorised to do so by the network operator or the retail supplier concerned.

The point about that and other legal injunctions against using cherry pickers on power poles is that they are ineffective. There is no question that throughout New South Wales, in both rural areas and the city, various groups use cherry pickers for this purpose. I do not think a single party represented in this Parliament has not used a cherry picker at some stage to fix a placard to a pole. I take that back—I am not sure that the Greens use cherry pickers. We use ladders. Section 65 is honoured more in the breach than in the observance; it has not been effectively enforced. That means that we are creating a new barrier with proposed section 65A.

There are only two reasonable avenues to pursue to overcome that barrier to access. The first is to ban entirely the placement of political or community notices on poles. Our concern is that, while it would be popular with some sections of the community, it would effectively cut off a major form of cultural, political and social communication—an important and relatively low-cost form of communication. The second avenue, which we will pursue in our amendment, is to create exemptions for the placing of placards and papers on power poles. By creating an exemption with appropriate mechanisms to guarantee fairness, we think we can overcome the unfairness built into proposed section 65A.

The Greens argue that this is an important principle. Allowing groups without access to the money necessary to hire a cherry picker or to access a cherry picker to allow them to have access on equal footing, or as close to equal footing as possible, to those who have money to hire a cherry picker, is an issue of democracy. It is about not creating yet another barrier to groups that operate low-cost campaigns. Our concern is that proposed section 65A is just another step towards the politics of money, towards driving political parties and community groups into requiring more money to conduct campaigns. The Greens will not oppose the bill but we will move an amendment to overcome the unfairness we have identified.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON [2.57 p.m.]: I am pleased to support the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill 2007 as it will help to protect our electricity infrastructure and create a new offence of entering, climbing or being on electricity works. Recently a Country Labor parliamentary group visited the Country Energy installation at Parkes, which is one of three installations responsible for training and apprenticeship programs for the State. The issue of occupational health and safety relating to electricity infrastructure was high on the agenda at that installation. Members of the visiting group had to obey every rule at that facility, and were required to sign in and out of when entering and leaving each of its sections. We were given a demonstration of the work Country Energy puts into safety. The visit related to the emphasis put by electricity suppliers—for example Country Energy—on occupational health and safety, and the amendments in this bill are an extension of that emphasis. The new offence will deter offenders from climbing or entering electricity works. This kind of behaviour is not only downright dangerous; it can result in disruption to electricity supply. The Iemma Government is committed to securing the State's energy supplies, which are essential for the State's growth. Let me talk for a moment about the New South Wales Government's excellent—

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: Privatisation process.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: —GreenPower initiative. Did the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox read the amendments? I do not think they have anything to do with privatisation.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: You are talking nonsense, so you might as well continue.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: GreenPower is a renewable energy source from the sun, wind, water or waste.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. I do not think this has any relevance to the bill before the House.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is the tradition in this House that debate on bills, provided it is generally relevant, may be wide ranging. In that regard I extend to the Hon. Christine Robertson the same latitude extended to the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox in his contribution.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: Under the GreenPower Accreditation Program, GreenPower sales by energy retailers and generators' operations are independently audited to make sure they are meeting the

strict accreditation criteria. Customers can be confident that by purchasing GreenPower they are making a real and positive contribution to the environment. At the end of the fourth quarter of 2007, 202,083 customers were opting for environmentally friendly GreenPower in New South Wales, 189,740 of whom were opting for its use in their homes, which represents about 7 per cent of households in the State.

Importantly, New South Wales leads the way in the amount of GreenPower purchased nationally, with preliminary figures for 2007 indicating New South Wales customers represented 34.2 per cent of voluntary GreenPower purchases. The number of customers now opting for environmentally friendly GreenPower in New South Wales is nearly three times what it was in December 2006. GreenPower now has approximately 725,000 customers across Australia. The outstanding results in New South Wales can be attributed to the Government's delivery on commitments made in the New South Wales Greenhouse Plan. A key part of the plan was a major community awareness program to promote GreenPower, which began in December 2006, and the introduction in January 2007 of new laws requiring retailers to offer at least 10 per cent accredited renewable energy to new or moving residential customers.

Since its inception in New South Wales, GreenPower has been responsible for cutting greenhouse gas emissions in Australia by approximately 4.7 million tonnes, which is equivalent to removing more than a million cars from our roads for a year. The people of New South Wales have done a fantastic job in saving energy and helping the environment. The bill supports the community's efforts by protecting electricity infrastructure responsible for delivering a safe and secure supply of electricity to people's homes and businesses. I commend the bill to the House.

Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES [3.02 p.m.]: The object of the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill 2007 is to amend the Electricity Supply Act to strengthen the protection of vital electricity infrastructure. The bill amends the Electricity Supply Act in two important ways. First, it increases the maximum term of imprisonment for the offence of theft of electricity from two to five years and provides for the offence to be an indictable offence committed by an individual. Second, it creates a new offence of entering, climbing or being on electricity infrastructure or works. Furthermore, the bill makes a consequential amendment to the Criminal Procedure Act 1986 to provide for the summary disposal of the offence of electricity.

The September 11 and Bali tragedies have reminded us to improve the critical protection of the State's vital infrastructure. Energy is the lifeblood of our economy, and we must act swiftly to ensure the protection of electricity infrastructure in New South Wales. The proposed amendment ensures the protection and security of electricity infrastructure such as transmission towers, power poles and distribution lines. Security arrangements must be in place to minimise the chance of any unexpected impact on infrastructure. In recent years and on several occasions, young persons have been caught climbing on high-voltage transmission towers. That extremely dangerous activity has led to quite a number of deaths. Although anti-climbing barriers on some transmission towers have been erected to reduce the incidence of serious fatalities, it is necessary to restrict unauthorised climbing on high-voltage transmission towers.

Currently, no criminal offence exists in New South Wales that prohibits a person from climbing on, or just being on, electricity works. Therefore, that gap needs to be closed to protect the safety of individuals and the vital electricity works that deliver the reliable supply of electricity in New South Wales. The bill amends the Electricity Supply Act to create a new offence for those who enter, climb, or are on a network operator's or retail supplier's electricity works unless authorised to do so by the network operator or retail supplier concerned. The maximum penalty is a \$1,100 fine and imprisonment for up to three months. The new penalties will deter illegal and dangerous conduct involving electricity works, and protect the integrity of the electricity grid.

The maximum penalty is applicable to electricity works as defined in the Electricity Supply Act. The maximum penalty applies to any electricity powerlines or associated equipment, or electricity structures that form part of a transmission or distribution system. It is in the best interests of the community that the prohibition extends from transmission towers to distribution lines and poles that deliver electricity to residential and commercial buildings. Honourable members will note that those who were allowed to do that were the people who had the support of the electricity grid suppliers. Therefore, workers or retail suppliers' electrical work maintenance people are authorised to do so by the network operator or the retail supplier concerned.

In reality that allows certain people access but not others, that is, union members who erect political posters but not others such as non-union members. The greatest offenders in affixing placards are members of unions who work for electricity supply companies because only people with cherry pickers and other facilities can erect with the agreement of the electricity supply companies. It provides a disproportionate opportunity for

people supporting one political party over other political parties. This means, for example, that the Australian Labor Party has access to high poles to which other parties do not have access. In my local area, for example, posters for the last Federal election are still in place because none of the workers who put them up have removed them. In the United States of America political parties are constricted to ground level placement—which certainly prevents the visual pollution we see in Australia. Political placard placements are not allowed on poles, overpasses, bridges et cetera.

The new offence does not apply to authorised persons such as employees or contractors acting on behalf of electricity businesses, who then privately add their own political thoughts and support to posters. This ensures, however, that the offence will apply only to people of other political parties who could be charged with committing illegal acts because they do not have authority from the owner of the electricity works concerned. The other object of the bill concerns the theft of electricity. The bill amends section 64 of the Electricity Supply Act to increase the maximum penalty for the offence of theft of electricity from two years to five years imprisonment to align with the maximum penalty for larceny of tangible goods.

The increase in the maximum penalty aligns the penalty for theft of electricity with the penalty for larceny contained in the Crimes Act. That approach is consistent with other jurisdictions such as Victoria and Tasmania. The increase in the maximum term of imprisonment provided for in the bill sends a clear message to offenders that theft of electricity will be taken no less seriously than theft of tangible goods. Electric power systems constitute the fundamental infrastructure of modern society. A successful terrorist attempt to disrupt electricity supplies or an attack on the electricity grid could have devastating effects on national security, the economy, and every citizen's life. I thank the Government for introducing the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill 2007, which I commend, in general, to the House. However, I will support some of the amendments.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI [3.10 p.m.]: I support the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill, which creates a new offence of entering, climbing or being on electricity works. Electricity works include power poles, electricity wires and transmission towers. I bring to the attention of honourable members a matter I know they all have a strong interest in: placing advertising material on electricity infrastructure. Power poles are commonly used to display advertising, signage and posters, ranging from bill posters and election material to street signs and cameras. Anybody who wishes to place a poster or sign on a power pole is required to seek the consent of the owner of the pole, the network operators EnergyAustralia, Integral Energy and Country Energy. If the consent of the owner of the power poles is not obtained, the owner may remove the sign or poster from their property. That was the case before this bill was introduced and it will continue to be the case when the bill becomes law.

Once the bill is enacted, individuals will face the possibility of criminal prosecution if they climb on power poles without the consent of the owner. In other words, the rules for placing material on power poles remain the same; it is the sanction for non-compliance with the rules that will change. Climbing on power poles is an extremely dangerous activity, particularly if it is done covertly or in darkness. That is why it is necessary to extend criminal sanctions to individuals who choose to climb on power poles without consent. Network operators have policies on the manner in which material may be attached to power poles. These policies are designed to ensure that material is attached to power poles in a safe manner that does not interfere with the reliability of electricity supply.

The Hon. Rick Colless: Are you sure about that?

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: We have a couple of cherry pickers for where I put my posters. The proposed offence does not apply to persons authorised to be on electricity works, such as employees or contractors acting on behalf of the network operator. Therefore, these changes, although small, are significant and I commend the bill to the House.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE [3.12 p.m.]: I support the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill. The aim of the bill is to amend the Electricity Supply Act 1995 to strengthen the protection of vital electricity infrastructure. Electricity supply is very important and the bill will help to ensure its reliable supply to the people of New South Wales. It is important that every part of our society, whether in our cities, towns, villages or farms, has reliable access to electricity. It is now part of modern society and we cannot function without the guarantee of continuous supply of electrical power. I am pleased to support the bill.

We must also ensure safety of our electrical infrastructure because we know that in the past children and teenagers who have climbed over fences into an isolated electrical power station that is not encased in a

building but simply surrounded with a fence, have died or have been seriously injured. It is important to guarantee that each location is safe and that is why we support the provision in the bill that creates a new criminal offence of entering, climbing or being on electrical works with a maximum penalty of a \$1,000 fine and/or three months imprisonment.

It is also important, in the face of the continuous threat of terrorism, to make the law stronger to prevent people from entering these places. We know that in other countries it has been very easy to disable a society by damaging towers or powerlines with an explosive and to do that at a certain time so as to cause maximum disruption to society. That is an added threat to a reliable source of power.

The bill also increases the maximum penalty for theft from two years imprisonment to five years to align it with the maximum penalty for larceny of tangible goods. The increase in the maximum penalty aligns the penalty for theft of electricity with the penalty for larceny contained in the Crimes Act. This means that our legislation will be consistent with that of other States such as Victoria and Tasmania. Other States have also tightened their legislation to deal with unlawful entering, climbing or being on electrical works. I refer to States such as Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania, and to the Australian Capital Territory.

Finally, the Greens amendments have raised political campaign posters being put on electricity poles, which are still to be found in most suburbs although some powerlines are now being put underground. Certainly in older suburbs we still have all the power poles along each side of the road. I would prefer that the legislation prevented campaign posters being put on poles, full stop. In the past I have written to Integral Energy and others who own the poles asking for permission to put campaign posters on their poles. They have replied that it is not their responsibility, and they cannot and will not give permission. They say it is a local council responsibility to enforce any law relating to displaying campaign posters. It is still very much a grey area as to who has the say. It seems the councils also are reluctant to take action against people putting up campaign posters. I would support campaign posters not being put on poles at all. The Christian Democratic Party supports the bill.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD [3.17 p.m.]: I support the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill 2007. The Government is seeking Parliament's support for an Act that will amend the Electricity Supply Act and the Criminal Procedure Act to strengthen provisions to deter people from unlawfully entering, climbing or being on electricity works, or stealing electricity. The bill will increase the existing maximum penalty for theft of electricity from two years to five years, and if an individual commits that offence, the offence will be indictable. The bill will also create a new offence of entering, climbing or being on electricity works. Fortunately, electricity theft is not an everyday problem that our electricity networks need to deal with, but it is a very serious offence. The illegal production of illicit substances can require significant amounts of electricity and if this electricity were consumed legally it would lead to very large bills. As such illegal activity can often occur in residential premises—we have all seen reports of this in the media—the electricity companies can investigate what appears to be abnormally high electricity consumption.

Such investigations can be a valuable tool for the police in gaining intelligence on suspected illegal activity. It is not rocket science to say that to avoid potential threats to their operations criminals can steal electricity from networks by bypassing electricity meters and running connections directly to their premises. Regrettably, we have seen many reports in the media of this occurring in suburban areas. Electricity companies are paying for infrastructure to support electricity demand, even though it is to support illegal activity, and they are unable to recover their costs from those stealing electricity as they do from law-abiding customers.

Accordingly, the proposal is to increase the penalty for stealing electricity from a maximum of two years imprisonment to five years. This offence is for those who deliberately seek to minimise their electricity bills by bypassing their meter and drawing power directly from the low-voltage network; it does not apply to consumers who are unable to pay their electricity bill. The Government has a range of support mechanisms for those who, due to temporary financial difficulties, are unable to pay their accounts in full. In fact, the Government provides \$30 emergency assistance vouchers through community welfare organisations to assist people in these very difficult circumstances. Last year the Government imposed tough licence conditions on all retailers in New South Wales requiring them to implement hardship policies and offer payment plans for customers before any action to disconnect for non-payment of a bill is begun. The proposed increased penalty is designed to be a further deterrent to those who seek to steal electricity, whether it is to support illegal activity or not.

The second component of the bill is designed to strengthen the protection of vital electricity infrastructure in New South Wales. Unfortunately, irresponsible people force entry to, and vandalise and

interfere with the operations of the State's electricity networks, thus reducing reliability and imposing costs on the community. Entering electricity substations or climbing on power poles or towers, whether they are high or low voltage, is an extremely dangerous activity. As honourable members will be aware, electricity can be deadly if due care is not taken. Contact with wires, transformers and other high-voltage equipment can cause death or serious injury instantly. As Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile said, we have seen reports of that in the media. We must do whatever we can to deter this. Electricity distributors are required to have in place a public electrical safety awareness plan to identify key public safety issues associated with operating an electricity network and strategies for managing those issues. These strategies include running programs to educate children and young people on electricity safety, and ensuring the safety of emergency services personnel and other workers using heavy equipment, plant and machinery near powerlines.

Through this bill the Government is supporting improved network reliability and safety with strong laws to protect electricity infrastructure. Once this bill is passed, people charged with tampering with or entering electricity works will risk spending up to three months behind bars. These measures will deter illegal and dangerous conduct, thus protecting the safety of individuals and the security of electricity works that deliver reliable supply of electricity in New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN [3.23 p.m.]: I support the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill. However, like Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes, we will have a close look at the Greens amendment. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Electricity Supply Act 1995 to strengthen the protection of vital electricity infrastructure. There are two aspects to it: The theft of electricity and the public safety aspect, trying to deter people from entering, climbing or being on electricity works. The theft of electricity is probably not a widespread practice, although I do not have any figures to support that. We would never see much in the news about it, except when it is accompanied by news of the bust of a marijuana-growing facility—

The Hon. Michael Veitch: And they would not be members of the Shooters Party.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: No, they certainly would not. In fact they do not like us being in the forests because we find their little plantations. We support measures that make the theft of electricity a more serious matter such as increasing penalties and perhaps imposing a term of imprisonment. The issue that concerns us more is public safety. My colleague the Hon. Roy Smith and I have worked in the industry. The Hon. Roy Smith was an electrical contractor for more than 20 years and the early part of my career involved working in heavy industrial environments with medium- and high-voltage electricity supply being part of the infrastructure. It is interesting to note that, generally speaking, governments support industrial safety in an industrial environment, and that is to be lauded. I do not know whether any member in the House has seen somebody hit by 11,000 volts. It is not a very pretty sight. I have seen it; a person copped a splash from the high-voltage side of a transformer. It seems to be a given that we should extend the standard of industrial safety into the public arena. Obviously one of the areas of concern is the proliferation of at least medium-voltage cables through our streets within relatively easy reach of persons who may want to use the telegraph poles, such as people who want to nail up their election posters.

The Hon. Michael Veitch: Or take them down.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: Or take them down. I have seen election posters among cable bundles. In other words, a person must have had to go above the level of the lowest cables to affix the poster. In a lot of cases they appeared to be union placed posters, but I have also seen some Greens posters. The practice of anybody climbing that high on a normal telegraph pole is fraught with danger. You really only have to travel around the more leafy suburbs to see hanging off wires possums and flying foxes that have been electrocuted.

The Shooters Party would support strengthening the bill, as was suggested by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, to ban all forms of posting on power poles because it would probably guarantee that only properly trained and equipped persons would be there: contractors or transmission workers in cherry pickers or, as they did in earlier times, wearing climbing spikes and being heavily protected. They used to be earthed, these days they are isolated, but these people are equipped and they know what they are doing.

On the question of protecting vital electricity infrastructure from things such as terrorist acts, I do not see that the two amendments to the bill would necessarily do too much to deter a terrorist. The problem of kids or persons getting into and onto high-voltage towers is very worrying. The towers are deadly once one gets up to the cable cluster; they are not meant for climbing or playing around on. Nor are they meant to be used as protest towers. I recall being appalled at seeing Greens protesters on the roof of a power station.

Dr John Kaye: Greenpeace.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: My apologies, Greenpeace.

Dr John Kaye: And it was not a high-voltage powerline.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: No, but they were on the roof of a power station and below them was the major transformer station. I believe that these sorts of activities must be discouraged by any means. A question for debate is whether or not the extent of the penalties that are included in the bill is sufficient. The Legislation Review Committee, which examined this legislation, found that the proposed maximum penalties were consistent or were in line with current maximum penalties for the offence of larceny, that is, the stealing of electricity, and the offences of climbing on or jumping from other structures, in section 8A of the Summary Offences Act. Climbing on, jumping from or using electricity infrastructure to display posters obviously are more dangerous activities, so perhaps the penalties for those offences could have been slightly higher. However, one has to go with the Government's recommendations on that issue. As I said earlier, the Shooters Party supports the bill, congratulates the Government on taking some public safety measures, and awaits debate on the Greens amendments with interest.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH [3.31 p.m.]: I support the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill 2007, which strengthens criminal offences relating to electricity. Importantly, the bill also aligns the maximum penalty for the theft of electricity with the maximum penalty for the theft of tangible goods. There is no reason why the penalty for the theft of electricity should be any less than the penalty for the theft of tangible goods. Electricity is a valuable resource. Individuals, households, communities and businesses need a secure and reliable supply of electricity each and every day. Our households, communities and businesses also need a secure and reliable supply of electricity for the future.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: Will privatisation give us that?

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: I am certain we will find out at some stage what are the member's views on privatisation. Security and reliability of supply are not enough to ensure economic security and prosperity. We must consider the impact of climate change and the very real challenges it presents for our communities. Climate change represents a significant challenge to the capacity of modern economies to embrace economic growth as they have done in the past. The task of getting serious about climate change can seem insurmountable, but one of the most immediate things we can do is increase the efficiency of use of our current electricity supplies.

The New South Wales Government recognises that we need cost-effective energy efficiency measures to reduce the energy we need to do our day-to-day business. Energy efficiency measures must be implemented everywhere—in homes, schools, businesses and government operations across New South Wales. I am proud of this Government's active energy efficiency program. I would like to put on the record some of the initiatives that this Government is implementing. The New South Wales energy efficiency strategy includes an energy efficient audit and refit program for households to help low income earners improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: It is a good program.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: It is a great program. The Government requires the top 200 energy users in the State to implement cost effective energy savings measures. It has brought forward the rollout of smart meters, time-of-use pricing, and an education program to teach consumers how to use those meters. There are energy efficiency audits for small and medium businesses and the Government is working with industry and the Commonwealth cost-effectively to phase out inefficient electric water heaters in favour of solar, gas and efficient heat pump alternatives. The Government is also looking towards its own infrastructure and improving its energy efficiency performance through energy savings projects across government buildings, hospitals and schools.

The Government is appointing an energy coordinator who will review best practice energy efficiency for major infrastructure projects and assist commercially feasible energy generation projects, in particular, renewable and low-emission proposals. The Government's world-leading New South Wales Greenhouse Gas Reduction Scheme has also been very successful in improving energy efficiency through its focus and promotion of demand side abatement activities. Many joint Commonwealth-State activities are also under way. New South Wales supports a national energy efficiency trading scheme. The Government will consult with the

Commonwealth to explore the potential for and probability of a national scheme through the Council of Australian Governments.

A national energy efficiency trading scheme would complement the introduction of a national emissions trading scheme, towards which the Commonwealth is currently working. However, while a harmonised national efficiency trading scheme clearly would be preferred, the Government is also evaluating the case for the development of a New South Wales energy efficiency trading scheme. Both the Victorian and South Australian governments have announced that they will introduce energy efficiency target schemes in 2009. New South Wales is also an active participant in the national framework for energy efficiency of the Ministerial Council on Energy.

Stage one of the national framework for energy efficiency developed and implemented energy efficiency packages in areas such as residential and commercial buildings, government sector appliances and equipment, trade and professional training and accreditation, commercial and industrial sectors, and general consumer capacity building. Following the success of stage one a suite of stage two measures will be implemented from 2008-09, which include: expanding and enhancing the minimum energy performance standards for appliances and equipment, an inefficient lighting phase-out strategy, government leadership on commercial building efficiency through green leases, a heating, ventilation, air-conditioning, high efficiency systems strategy for commercial buildings, and development of measures for a national hot water strategy.

Key elements include minimum energy performance standards and energy labelling activities. Minimum energy performance standards are designed to keep the worst performing electrical appliances and equipment out of the Australian market, while labelling complements the standards by providing consumers with information about the relative energy performance of household appliances. Products that are required to meet minimum energy performance standards are refrigerators and freezers, mains pressure electric storage water heaters, low pressure and heat exchange water heaters, three-phase electric motors, single and three-phase air-conditioners, linear fluorescent lamps and ballasts for linear fluorescent lamps, distribution transformers and refrigerated display cabinets.

Products that are proposed for regulation in the future, subject to normal regulatory impact assessment processes approval by the Ministerial Council on Energy, include external power supplies, televisions, set-top boxes, home entertainment products such as audio and video equipment, boiling and chilled water dispensers, vending machines, commercial icemakers, a range of lamp types, and commercial chillers. All these measures will assist to improve efficiency and our greenhouse gas challenge right now. These important measures will ensure ongoing prosperity and a safe and reliable electricity supply for the people of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.38 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to debate on the Electricity Supply Amendment (Offences) Bill 2007 and note that it has reasonably broad support. Obviously the bill creates a new criminal offence that is designed to better protect electricity works from highly dangerous behaviour such as climbing on transmission towers. I note in particular the contribution of the Hon. Robert Brown who has some direct experience in these matters. I do not think that some of the Greens' proposed amendments take into account the danger posed to those who climb up and down poles all around the State.

The Minister has committed to calling on network operators and getting them together to review existing policies on authorising the placing of material on power poles. This will include election material and community announcements used by local interest groups. This review will take place before the amendments take effect. The aim of the review is to develop consistent policies about the circumstances in which posters and placards may be affixed safely to power poles. If a political party wants to reduce the costs of hiring a cherry picker to place advertising on power poles, it simply needs to obtain the consent of the power pole owner to use a ladder. This bill does not create unfairness or inequities. It simply aims to protect the public from dangerous activity. I shall deal with the amendments in detail in Committee.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

In Committee

Clauses 1 to 5 agreed to.

Dr JOHN KAYE [3.42 p.m.]: I move Greens amendment No.1:

No. 1 Page 3, schedule 1 [3], proposed section 65A. Insert after line 33:

- (3) This section does not prohibit a person from entering, climbing or being on an electricity structure for the purpose of fixing to the structure a placard or paper if the person does not come within 2 metres of any live electricity wires.

Clause 65A criminalises the activity of placing placards or posters on a power pole. Current legal constraints do not attract a criminal penalty for this activity. Clause 65A is significant in that it turns a common activity that has occurred for a number of years into criminal activity only if undertaken with the use of a ladder. The same activity will not be criminalised if a cherry picker or other mechanical human lifting device is used. That argument cannot be justified on safety grounds. The operation of a cherry picker by an inappropriately qualified person is far more dangerous than the use of a ladder to place posters on power poles, because of the risk of falling and electrocution.

Clause 65A fails to implement the safety intent of the legislation because it leaves open the opportunity to use a cherry picker to place placards or posters on power poles. The proposed Greens amendment creates a far more level playing field by allowing ladders to be used to put posters and placards on power poles but insisting on a two metre stand-off distance to maintain safety. People climbing power poles in a street or public thoroughfare to put up a placard or poster will be adequately protected against flashover from low and medium voltage. The amendment refers specifically to electricity structures. The principal Act defines them as any structure other than a building used to carry overhead lines or associated equipment, and includes any structure used for the purpose of street lighting.

The Greens explicitly exclude the idea that this would allow people to put up posters on power stations or on electricity substations. The amendment refers only to structures that carry overhead powerlines. The intent of our amendment is to remove the unfairness by putting cherry pickers and ladders on exactly the same level footing. We note the Minister's commitment to not commence proposed section 65A without first reviewing the bill with the state-owned corporations that have responsibility for power poles, that is, the three electricity distributors. However, we are concerned that clause 65A as it stands may create a Gordian knot that we simply cannot unravel. Currently a state-owned electricity corporation carries no implied liability for somebody who falls or is electrocuted while putting up a poster whether with a cherry picker or a ladder. If somebody falls or is electrocuted, they might find that it is their problem.

Once clause 65A is instituted and permission is given by a state-owned corporation to put up a poster or placard on a power pole, transfer of liability is implied. Our concern is that once clause 65A becomes effective, no amount of approval from the state-owned corporations will absolve that corporation of its liability. Therefore, we urge members to support our amendment to clause 65A as it will overcome the liability issue. In the absence of that support, we welcome the Minister's commitment to institute a review of the bill, as outlined by the Parliamentary Secretary in the second reading speech. We commend this Greens amendment to the Committee.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.47 p.m.]: This amendment is not supported by the Government as it will endanger public safety. It is important to note what is being placed on power poles these days. In my area the Greens are not just putting up signs; metal windmills and a range of other paraphernalia, including some road signs that I believe are misleading, are being placed on power poles. The Greens amendment addresses the serious issue of safety. The amendment proposes to allow ordinary persons to enter, climb or be on an electricity structure for the purpose of fixing placards or posters, provided that person does not come within two metres of the electricity wires. If this amendment is passed, people with no specialist skill or understanding of electricity wires and structures will be exempt from committing an offence. It simply is not safe for non-expert people to climb electricity structures or to use ladders inappropriately in the vicinity of those structures.

This legislation should not encourage such activity. Maintaining a distance of two metres from live electricity wires does not ensure the safety of ordinary people. To better understand the danger, I refer the Greens to the Standards Australia publication *National guidelines for safe approach distances to electrical*

apparatus by the Energy Networks Association. The guidelines specify safe approach distances for ordinary people. The safe approach distance varies with the voltage of electricity carried by the power poles and wires. The safe approach is three metres for low voltage poles and wires, and up to six metres for voltages of 330 kilovolts and above. These safe approach distances also are adopted by the WorkCover Code of Practice Work near Overhead Power Lines. Ordinary persons do not have the expertise to determine whether a power pole is carrying high or low voltage electricity wires—power poles are not labelled with the voltages they carry. It will not be possible for an ordinary person to determine whether they will be committing an offence if this amendment is passed.

Many electricity poles and towers have earthing conductors from the overhead earth wire or a neutral conductor on the ground. These wires are covered near ground level so that members of the public do not touch them. During electricity faults and lightning strikes, the wires can carry dangerous voltages for short periods and could seriously injure a person who happened to be in contact with them at the time. Non-expert people may not be in a position to know which metal parts are live electrically, and this particularly applies in substations. The climbing of these structures should not be encouraged.

I acknowledged the concern referred to by the Greens in terms of implied liability. The Minister has stated that that will be specifically examined as part of the review. For the reasons I have stated, the Government will maintain its focus on the protection of ordinary people around electricity structures, and does not support the amendment.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX [3.50 p.m.]: For reasons similar to those outlined by the Parliamentary Secretary, the Opposition opposes the amendment. Proposed section 65A of the bill focuses on protecting public safety and ensuring that people do not have access to electricity infrastructure and seeks to protect them from the potential downside of obtaining access. The amendment suggests that the network operator may give access consent under proposed section 65A (1), but clearly the provision envisages access by expert or qualified people, as the Parliamentary Secretary pointed out, rather than a member of the public who has no understanding of the risks involved in accessing electricity infrastructure.

I make the very important point that power poles are not a community billboard. During elections, while I am sympathetic to the objective of the Greens, public safety must be paramount, and there should be no access to power poles for the purpose of presenting a political case. I hope that in future elections the Electrical Trades Union and others will be prevented from having access to power poles. The nub of the issue is enforcement. It is against the law to access a power pole and fix placards or anything of that nature to them. The problem with the current situation is that there is no enforcement of that law. That is the nub of the issue, and for that reason, while I am somewhat sympathetic to the Greens, the Opposition opposes the amendment.

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.52 p.m.]: I agree with the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox. I do not believe anybody should put material on power poles, irrespective of whether people are standing on a ladder or on the back of a ute, or are Electrical Trades Union employees using a cherry picker. It is hypocritical to have an Electrical Trades Union placard remain at the top of a tower or pole whereas a placard opposing Gerard Martin is removed. The good old Lithgow council removed a placard that was at a level it could reach, but did not remove the other one. That constitutes interference at a very basic level with political process.

I have indicated to the chairperson of Country Energy, Mr Murray, that if he allows Electrical Trades Union employees to use cherry pickers, I will deduct an amount from my Crookwell electricity bill because he is allowing people to run a political message that is aimed against The Nationals candidates. Why should I have to pay for that? I will seek a deduction from the cost of electricity at my Crookwell residence.

Dr JOHN KAYE [3.54 p.m.]: I will respond briefly to the remarks made by those who have participated in the consideration of the amendment, and I thank them for their comments. If we are seriously concerned about unskilled people being in contact with high-voltage or medium voltage powerlines, surely we should also be concerned about those who use cherry pickers. There is a logical inconsistency in the way the law currently works. It does not allow access to those who use ladders, but it does allow access for those who use cherry pickers. A serious approach to the issue would be to ban all posters on power poles.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: That is what we are saying. That is what we want.

Dr JOHN KAYE: That is one way of dealing with the matter, but as I said during the second reading stage, the other way of dealing with it is to give equal access, which is what the Greens seek to do. I do not

believe we can advance a safety argument against ladders and not apply the same argument to cherry pickers: that seems to me to be completely inconsistent.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 4

Ms Hale
Ms Rhiannon
Tellers,
Mr Cohen
Dr Kaye

Noes, 37

Mr Ajaka	Mr Hatzistergos	Ms Robertson
Mr Brown	Mr Kelly	Mr Roozendaal
Mr Catanzariti	Mr Khan	Ms Sharpe
Mr Clarke	Mr Lynn	Mr Smith
Mr Colless	Mr Macdonald	Mr Tsang
Mr Costa	Mr Mason-Cox	Mr Veitch
Ms Cusack	Reverend Dr Moyes	Ms Voltz
Mr Della Bosca	Reverend Nile	Mr West
Ms Ficarra	Mr Obeid	Ms Westwood
Mr Gallacher	Ms Parker	
Miss Gardiner	Mrs Pavey	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gay	Mr Pearce	Mr Donnelly
Ms Griffin	Mr Primrose	Mr Harwin

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported from Committee without amendment.

Adoption of Report

Motion by the Hon. John Della Bosca, on behalf of the Hon. Ian Macdonald, agreed to:

That the report be adopted.

Report adopted.

Third Reading

Motion by the Hon. John Della Bosca, on behalf of the Hon. Ian Macdonald, agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time and returned to the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

UNCLAIMED ANNUAL LEAVE

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Is the Minister aware that the New South Wales tourism Minister has claimed that "New South Wales workers' reluctance to take holidays costs the State approximately \$1 billion in potential tourism expenditure and 8,000 jobs" and, further, that "research shows that New South Wales workers save more leave than any other State, having 23 million annual leave days saved up"? What concerns has the Minister raised with the WorkCover Authority, given that the value of recreational leave held by WorkCover employees leapt by 46 per cent between 2003 and 2007, rising to \$9.102 million and, additionally, that the value of unused extended leave, both current and non-current, leapt by 61 per cent to more than \$21 million?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: A squall of knowledge hit the lad! Obviously he is getting ready for his estimates; he left it a little late. He is getting primed on what to ask the chief executive officer of WorkCover.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: The ministry.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The Leader of the Opposition is about nine years ahead of himself, and then some. As usual, the Leader of the Opposition has confused two different issues. The first is a general issue about the alleged reluctance of New South Wales employees to take all their annual leave. I have made a number of public statements about that. I hope the Leader of the Opposition is well informed about that. I can provide him with those statements if he is interested in doing some retrospective research about my position on unclaimed annual leave. I am happy to investigate the amount of leave that has not been pursued by WorkCover employees and provide the Leader of the Opposition and the House with a detailed answer as soon as practicable.

BLACKTOWN SCHOOLS STORM DAMAGE REPAIRS

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Will the Minister update the House on the major repair operation being carried out at schools damaged during the storms in Blacktown?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I thank the Hon. Penny Sharpe for her ongoing interest in these matters. In December 2007, 10 schools in the Blacktown area suffered serious damage to buildings, particularly roofs, during storms. The damage was severe with the 10 schools requiring a total of 87 roofs to be replaced. That is an enormous task. Contractors, even as we speak, are working hard to complete the works in the shortest time frame possible. Repairs to roofs at half the storm-damaged Blacktown schools are set for completion over the coming days. The department's contractors have completed repairs on 33 roofs, and work is well underway on 18 more. Roof repair works have been completed at Blacktown North and Lynwood Park public schools, and should be completed at Coreen School, Bert Oldfield and Lalor Park public schools before the end of the week.

Contractors are working extended hours and on weekends to ensure that the work is completed as quickly as possible and to the high standard which parents, teachers and children are entitled to expect of New South Wales public education. I personally met these contractors during an inspection of the repair work at Lynwood Park Public School on Saturday 16 February. Ian Jeffery and his team from IPA Roofing were working on a number of schools in the Blacktown area, including Lynwood Park. I was very impressed at their approach to the work and the professionalism of the tradesmen and staff. The estimated time required to repair the roofs of the affected schools range from about three weeks to approximately ten weeks, depending on the number of buildings at each school that require roof repairs.

At this stage repairs are on target for completion by the end April, that is, by the end of the April school holidays, but the weather remains a variable factor and, of course, beyond anyone's control. The repairs range from the replacement of three roofs at Blacktown boys and girls high schools respectively to 22 roofs needing replacement at Seven Hills West Public School. Repairs to classroom buildings are given the highest priority for obvious reasons, with roof repairs and replacement gutters and downpipes being prioritised ahead of undertaking repairs to any internal damage.

The Hon. Robyn Parker: Be careful with gutters.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I am always careful with gutters. The department has been working closely with schools, principals and staff and has ensured they were consulted regarding the proposed program of works. Principals and staff are supportive of the strategy that the department has put in place. They have arranged classroom relocations to help the progress of repairs to occur in the shortest possible time frame. In that way students can continue learning, teachers can continue teaching with minimal disruption, and works can continue with maximum safety. The department carefully considered a number of options with a view to fast-tracking the repairs. This included considering closing schools for the duration of repairs, closing schools early on Friday afternoons, and the use of demountable accommodation while repairs were being undertaken.

For various reasons, and in consultation with schools and regional support staff, those options were rejected. For example, demountable accommodation was not an option because sites would need to be dry to install demountables at the time, and the time needed to deliver and connect demountables would delay the repairs. Demountables would also take up a significant space at the sites and hinder access to the sites by contractors. Estimated costs of roof repairs range from \$130,000 to \$432,000 per school, not including repairs to internal damage. Internal works to rectify damage to ceilings, walls and carpets will be completed once the roofs are fixed. The Western Sydney Asset Management Unit is in daily contact with contractors and the Department of Commerce to ensure continued progress. I commend staff and students of the affected schools for their patience during this difficult time, and for their commitment to continue teaching and learning while these majors repairs continue.

HUME HIGHWAY WOOMARGAMA BYPASS

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: My question is directed to the Minister for Roads. Is the Minister aware that the Roads and Traffic Authority is favouring an option for the duplication of the Hume Highway at Woomargama of a long, greenfields bypass, cutting through prime agricultural land, instead of duplicating the existing road and putting in a shorter, closer bypass to the main street? How much time have the Minister's consultants spent with local landholders and visiting affected farms to collect information for environmental and indigenous impact studies? Given the claims on the website of the Roads and Traffic Authority that it is "working with property owners, road users and other shareholders to improve the proposal and minimise potential impacts on the community", why is the Minister's department favouring a far more expensive project?

The Hon. Eddie Obeid: What a great answer!

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: We have not had an answer yet. It was an outstanding question.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The Roads and Traffic Authority has a comprehensive consultation process whenever it looks at introducing new infrastructure, or improving road infrastructure. Certainly that is demonstrated in the application of the Roads and Traffic Authority processes with the Pacific Highway and the Hume Highway. Obviously planning a major road upgrade is a rigorous and complex process involving many steps. Competing social, economic and environmental cost factors have to be equally considered before routes can be selected and planned. Community involvement ensures effective planning and decision making. It provides important information on development and maintenance proposals, and identifies key issues and community concerns.

The Roads and Traffic Authority seeks community involvement through activities such as public meetings and workshops, community liaison groups, media announcements, letterbox drops, site open days, advisory committees, newsletters and questionnaires. The Government appreciates that communities can experience uncertainty during the development phase of key infrastructure projects. It is important to acknowledge that there will almost never be 100 per cent consensus among the community views on any given road proposal. The Roads and Traffic Authority determines the option that represents the best possible balance of all competing needs, including environmental, engineering, social and cost factors.

HUNTERS HILL LAND AND WATER CONTAMINATION

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries. Given the concerns being expressed by people in the Nelson Parade area of Hunters Hill about radioactive waste on a number of building blocks in the street, primarily numbers 7, 9 and 11, and the fact that previous toxin issues have affected commercial fishing in the harbour, and given recent heavy rains, has the Department of Fisheries

done any research in regard to this waste and whether it may have leached from the land into the water? If so, what was found? Given the number of recreational fishers in Sydney Harbour and around the Hunters Hill area, should they be concerned about fishing in the Nelson Parade area?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I do not have to hand any reports in relation to any spillage of radioactivity from the Hunters Hill site into the harbour. The other issues were the subject of extensive research over the years relating to dioxins in the upper and middle parts of the harbour due to the industrial sites being in that part of the harbour for more than 100 years. I do not have any specific information to hand in relation to radioactivity in the water. I will look at this matter to see if there is any truth in the claim or anything that should be regarded as a problem for local residents who may wish to fish there, although I think that area is subject to the same sort of closures that are in place for dioxins. If anyone is catching and eating fish caught west of the Harbour Bridge they are contravening the general order in place and the recommendation that fish caught in that part of the harbour should not be eaten.

INSURANCE LAW SERVICE

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: My question is addressed to the Attorney General. What is the latest information on the work of the Insurance Law Service?

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: On 6 February I had the pleasure of formally launching the Insurance Law Service, which is an important new service providing free advice and advocacy for persons experiencing difficulties in relation to their insurance. The Consumer Credit Legal Centre runs the service, with funding from Legal Aid New South Wales, the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales and the Law Foundation of Victoria. This service is the only national legal advisory service for consumers in the area of insurance. It does not advise or assist insurers or businesses; instead it helps the community.

In light of the storms that recently hit the western suburbs of Sydney, I am sure the honourable member would recognise the immense value of such a service to the people in this State. Since the pilot project commenced on 1 July 2007, it has experienced a significant community response in relation to a wide range of insurance issues, and has provided legal advice in response to more than 500 calls. In more than 200 of those matters, the service has assisted the client until settlement of the dispute, and has achieved a settlement in favour of the client. The service has also provided representation in 42 cases, of which 10 remain ongoing.

Thirty-one of these cases have now been resolved with the settlements on the client's terms in all cases. I am advised that all the cases involved people who were in no position to assert their legal rights in the face of a dispute with their insurer, and without help they may have experienced severe hardship. Thanks to the service they were spared this. Examples include a woman whose insurer rejected her claim for care for her children while she was receiving treatment in hospital and an elderly man whose doctors said he would die without surgery but whose claim was rejected because the insurer felt the surgery was non-essential. The gentleman in question is now fully recovered and the claim was paid out within days of surgery.

I am very pleased to see that the service is also undertaking a strong community education role. It has already conducted 18 community legal education sessions in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. Most of these have been on-the-ground response sessions to natural disasters, specifically storms and floods. Policy is another strong arm of the service. Since it began operation the service has focused on a number of key policy issues. One such issue is improving consumer access to internal dispute resolution schemes that exist in insurance companies.

It is clear that the results achieved so far show that the service is meeting and exceeding the goals originally set for it. In light of this, the Premier announced earlier this month that the opening hours of the service would be extended from three days to five days a week thanks to an increase in funding of \$60,000 from Legal Aid New South Wales. The service can be reached on 1300 663 464 on Monday to Friday from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. With its expansion to five days a week, it is clear this new initiative will be able to assist even more people with their problems in an increasingly important area of the law.

HALF-YEARLY BUDGET REVIEW

The Hon. GREG PEARCE: I direct my question to the Treasurer. Why did the 2007-08 half-yearly budget review fail to include projected growth in expenses for the year as a percentage? Is it a fact that expenses have blown out by 6.8 per cent over the 2006-07 budget, which is approaching four times the 1.9 per cent expenses growth the Treasurer forecast?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: Members do not believe anything he says, do they?

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: I believe what he says a lot more than what you say. I had to believe what Alex Mitchell had to say about you.

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: How desperate can you be? For the record, a number of us have been to the beach but we do not spend all our time in coffee shops as the Leader of the Opposition is trying to imply via Alex Mitchell's article. I thought that article was a complete disgrace. Alex Mitchell is a disgrace as far as I am concerned, and that article is probably the lowest piece of journalism I have ever seen. For the *Australian Financial Review* to publish it is an absolute disgrace. It is an absolute joke.

[Interruption]

It was a terrible article. In answer to the question, I think the honourable member has got his numbers wrong as usual. As I announced at the time, there were a number of one-off factors that impacted on expenses, the drought being a large component of that, and that is why the numbers were the way they were. The figure of 6 per cent is wrong. If the one-off factors are taken out, we were very close to target.

SHARK CARCASSES DUMPING

Mr IAN COHEN: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries. Will the Minister investigate the dumping of several tonnes of shark carcasses with fins removed on a farm at Nana Glen, near Coffs Harbour? Is it a fact that the carcasses were sold for fertiliser? Given that shark carcasses are fetching \$2 a kilogram and fins up to \$150 a kilogram, is the Minister monitoring the concerns of local residents about the regular dumping of shark carcasses at sea? Is it a fact that the preferred bait for catching these sharks is dolphin meat? Will the Minister act on these devastating fishing practices in New South Wales, or will he preside over the demise of yet another shark species?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I have not presided over the demise of any shark species and I do not intend to. I am aware of reports that shark carcasses without fins were found in bush near Nana Glen, about 25 kilometres west of Coffs Harbour. New South Wales Department of Primary Industries staff investigated reports and found that a Coffs Harbour commercial fisherman sold the carcasses via the Coffs Harbour fishing cooperative to a farmer who was going to use them for fertiliser. The farmer apparently put the shark carcasses on his property while he dug a pit to further compost them. Sharks can be fished for under the current regulations, which require that no more than 1,000 kilograms of shark be taken in a 24-hour period, or if the trip extends beyond 24 hours, no more than 2,000 kilograms. Fins may be removed from the carcass only after the shark has been landed ashore. While the use of these shark carcasses for fertiliser is unusual, it does not appear that the sharks were illegally taken. Department of Primary Industries [DPI] staff take reports of illegal fishing seriously. I encourage any member of the community to report suspected illegal fishing activity to the nearest DPI fisheries office or phone Fishers Watch on 1800 043 536.

In relation to the broader issue of management in the shark fishery, a discussion paper canvassing options for future management arrangements for shark species within the ocean trap and line fishery was released in October 2007. Some of the management options include the implementation of an annual catch cap, revised trip limits, limited access until further information is collected on the species being harvested, the release of a comprehensive identification guide for shark species in New South Wales, and more refined catch reporting and compliance arrangements. I have asked my peak advisory bodies to review the proposed management actions taking into account the responses to the discussion paper and I will consider their advice shortly.

WATER FOR RIVERS

SNOWY AND MURRAY RIVERS WATER RECOVERY

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI: My question is addressed to the Minister for Energy. Can the Minister update the House on the progress of water recovery efforts for the Snowy and Murray Rivers?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I thank the honourable member for his question and his interest in this vital issue. Water for Rivers is a joint government enterprise established at the corporatisation of Snowy Hydro. It is charged with returning 21 per cent of average natural flow to the Snowy River by 2012. The main

objective of Water for Rivers is to identify and implement water savings projects from infrastructure improvements and on-farm reconfigurations, which account for about 80 per cent of its water recovery efforts. This is a win-win situation with environmental flows without a significant hit on production. The New South Wales, Victorian and Commonwealth governments have all provided \$375 million in funding to find the 282 gigalitres in water savings by 2012. I am pleased to be able to inform the House today that Water for Rivers is not only on track to reach its targets on time but now believes it can make additional water savings. Since the commencement of operations in 2004, the national water market has evolved considerably.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: It is a farce.

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: At the time, Water for Rivers was the only major player in the market for water recovery programs. I will take on notice that the Hon. Duncan Gay described Water for Rivers as a farce. I will convey that to the chairman, the Hon. Richard Bull, very quickly. Since then a number of other large-scale operations have emerged, such as the Living Murray Program, Riverbank and the National Plan for Water Security. This has significantly increased competition for water savings projects, as well as inflated the price of water. However, Water for Rivers continues to lead the way in water recovery efforts. By focusing its efforts on infrastructure improvements rather than water purchases, which provide no additional benefit to the community, Water for Rivers has found water savings where others in the market have struggled.

It was originally hoped to deliver a total of 282 gigalitres of water to the Snowy and Murray Rivers by 2012—that is the equivalent of 282,000 swimming pools. Due to the Iemma Government's water saving initiatives and the ongoing success of innovative programs, Water for Rivers is on track to deliver 158 gigalitres of water to the environment by 1 July this year. It is also on track to reach its target of 212 gigalitres by July 2009. The enterprise has achieved these savings for an average cost of \$1,004 a megalitre. That is a great figure. Of these savings, roughly a third will be delivered to the Murray River with the rest delivered to the Snowy River. I am pleased to report that with additional funding promised by the Commonwealth Government, the Water for Rivers scheme could well exceed the original target of 282 gigalitres by just over 10 per cent. The group did not take the easy road but the results are obvious: a win-win situation for the environment, the long-term health of the river systems and local economies. Water for Rivers has been able to achieve these savings because of its focus on infrastructure. It has demonstrated that replacing decades-old water infrastructure can create substantial environmental flows while at the same time maintaining and increasing regional employment and economic activity.

Projects such as the Barren Box swamp or wetland scheme, near Griffith, have seen better management and reduced areas exposed to evaporation save 20 gigalitres of water. The Forrest Creek stage 2 project has reduced the volume of water required over the Warrison Weir through the provision of alternative stock and domestic water supplies saving another 23.35 gigalitres. In addition, there are a number of other projects, including the Central Goulburn Channel Automation Program, which will save 20 gigalitres; the Murrumbidgee River efficiency project—Water for Rivers has identified as much as 25 gigalitres of savings to be achieved through various projects including improvements to the Yanco and Old Man Creek tributaries—and the Hay private irrigation district pressurisation project. Many of these projects have been very important in reaching the target, and they have done a great job.

SNOWY HYDRO PRIVATISATION

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I direct my question to the Minister for Primary Industries, Energy, Mineral Resources and State Development. Is the Minister aware of ongoing attempts by the senior management of Snowy Hydro to promote the privatisation of that organisation, including the engagement of a public relations company, the publication of newsletters in the local community, and the creation and distribution of DVDs? Is it the Government's intention to privatise Snowy Hydro? If the Government does not support the privatisation of Snowy Hydro, will the Government, as a major shareholder, take steps to stop the Snowy Hydro senior management using Snowy Hydro funds to promote the privatisation of that organisation?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I met with representatives of Snowy Hydro in Cooma recently. They raised the privatisation of Snowy Hydro. They were taking the view that they might be left stranded in the privatisation debate that is going on in New South Wales. I made it very clear to them—and there were at least two or three groups—that the New South Wales Government has no plans whatsoever to privatise the Snowy Hydro Corporation. That was very clearly conveyed to them, so much so that there was a degree of upset amongst those who sought to meet me and a number of my colleagues. I repeat that I made it clear to them that there are no plans to privatise Snowy Hydro. I am not particularly aware of whether any literature has been

produced by Snowy Hydro or its staff, but I advise the House that am not in the process of interfering with what is done at Snowy Hydro. If some action should be taken in that regard, I suggest it be taken up with shareholding Ministers.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CANOLA GROWERS INSURANCE

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: My question is directed to the Minister for Primary Industries. Is the Minister aware that New South Wales canola growers have been advised by their insurance providers that their public risk contracts will not provide any cover for claims arising from genetically modified crop contamination? What discussions has the Minister and/or his department had with the insurance industry with respect to the provision of insurance cover for potential genetically modified canola growers, and what advice will the Minister's department be offering to canola growers contemplating commercial plantings of genetically modified canola given that they will be embarking on a practice that insurance providers are refusing to underwrite?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: The honourable member's question is about correspondence obviously between private insurers and farmers in relation to the potential for genetically modified canola to be grown in New South Wales. This issue was amply debated in the House late last year, the result of which was a number of amendments to the Act that are now in force. I have not had any specific discussions with the insurance industry in relation to this matter, but I am sure that the Genetech Advisory Council, the body established by this Parliament, would give consideration to that matter and, if it thought it appropriate, give me advice in relation to it. If the member were to provide me with the information, I would be more than happy to speak with the insurance industry.

MID NORTH COAST STATE PARKS

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: My question is addressed to the Minister for Lands. Can the Minister provide details of the Government's plans for new State parks along the Mid North Coast?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: Last week I took great pleasure in announcing three more State parks along the Mid North Coast, another example of the Iemma Government putting in practice its State Plan.

The Hon. Rick Colless: You want them to be on the north coast rather than Cobar. Are you going to manage them?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: I do not think it is appropriate for The Nationals to make such comments on a day like today, when newspapers are showing that support for a National Party/Liberal Party merger in Queensland and across Australia is gaining considerable momentum—no doubt The Nationals have done their sums in this State and are considering similar action. When I read these articles I wondered how The Nationals do their numbers, so I turned to a very good source: the National Party conversion scale.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Point of order: I am happy to discuss the future of The Nationals if a motion is moved on that subject. However, my point of order is one of relevance. The future of The Nationals has nothing to do with the question that was asked.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: To the point of order: I was purely going to point out that, although The Nationals claim to be so great with numbers and to understand rural issues, their conversion scale indicates that 1 hectare equals 100 acres. In other words, it would mean that these people have about six acres—

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Minister should not dwell on the future of The Nationals. His answer must be generally relevant to the question asked of him.

The Hon. Rick Colless: It only took the Minister 12 months to find that. Those pens have been out for 12 months.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: The Nationals did not see the mistake even then.

The Hon. Rick Colless: Yes, I did.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: It is supposed to be one hectare equals 100 ares, not 100 acres! The Manning Entrance State Park, the Harrington Beach State Park and the Bellinger Heads State Park are the three

latest additions to the New South Wales State park network. While the State park network had its origins on the major inland dams, in recent years we have been augmenting the model to incorporate and better manage some of the magnificent series of coastal Crown reserves in New South Wales. A State park designation means Crown reserves contain particular statewide significance, whether cultural, recreational, environmental, or a combination of these. Commonly in a State park you will find a wide range of fun and affordable activities for the whole family, from picnics and water sports through to bushwalking and birdwatching. They also play their part in providing a range of affordable accommodation, such as camp and caravan sites, bungalows and cabins—perfect for day trips or longer holidays.

Under the new arrangement, community trust boards made up entirely of volunteers can be established to have a major say in the future direction of these significant lands for the benefit of the entire community. The State Government, through the Department of Lands, will now work with Greater Taree City Council and Bellinger Shire Council to determine the future management regime of those areas. The Manning Entrance State Park incorporates Crown land at Old Bar, Muddbishops Reserve, Farquhar inlet and park and the Manning Point peninsula. The Harrington Beach State Park includes Oxley Park, Pilots Hill and Crown land at Crowdy Head. Bellinger Heads State Park includes most of the coastal Crown lands from Hungry Head to Mylestom.

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY PRIVATISATION

Dr JOHN KAYE: My question is directed to the Treasurer. How does he justify the statement on page 17 of his response to the Unsworth inquiry that the State will only lose \$500 million a year in dividends and tax equivalent payments when he admitted in a media release on 28 January this year that the transmission distribution businesses bring in about \$500 million a year? The budget states that TransGrid brings in \$126 million a year and the budget states that there is \$1.26 billion a year in total dividends and payments. Does the arithmetic not indicate that the total benefit from those parts of the electricity industry that the Treasurer is trying to sell would be \$1,232 million, minus \$126 million, minus \$500 million, which is \$858 million?

[Interruption]

It is the Treasurer's problem if he cannot follow the figures. My question is: Where has the initial \$358 million gone, or are the Treasurer's budget forward estimates total fiction?

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: Alex Mitchell got it right. Does anyone believe that you can manage the economy?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: I would not support Alex Mitchell's column; it is atrocious.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: He is spot on in relation to you. He asks, "Does anyone seriously believe that Michael Costa can manage the economy?"

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: He referred to a \$40 billion economy when it is a \$350 billion economy. He does not even understand the size of the economy.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: It is a misprint.

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: That misprint was also in the newspapers. The Greens and their allies, in opposing the Government's policy on electricity supplies—

The Hon. Rick Colless: What about your own backbench?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: Caucus made a decision and that decision stands, as it has all along, so there is no need for Coalition members to worry about the Government's backbench, particularly on a day when my popularity has reached a new height of 7.5 per cent. I noticed today that Brendan Nelson's popularity is—

The Hon. Ian West: Lower than yours!

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: No, it is achieving my level of 7.5 per cent! Brendan Nelson's popularity has reached 7.5 per cent.

Dr John Kaye: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. I asked the Treasurer a serious question about \$358 million that is missing from his figures. I think he owes members in this place an answer.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I ask the Treasurer to be generally relevant.

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: While we are talking about numbers, it is extraordinary that Brendan Nelson's popularity has reached 7.5 per cent. When the Federal Leader of the Opposition was elected he made great promises about change. He jettisoned all the Opposition's—

Dr John Kaye: Point of order. The Minister is flouting your ruling. He is not being relevant. He is avoiding my question, which relates to the missing \$358 million.

The Hon. John Della Bosca: That is because there is no missing \$358 million.

Dr John Kaye: Then let the Treasurer explain that!

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: I do not need to. Mr President, have you ruled on the point of order?

The PRESIDENT: Order! I again ask the Treasurer to be generally relevant.

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: In relation to the member's question—

Dr John Kaye: Just answer the question.

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: If the member listened, he would realise that I was answering his question. Not having had the benefit of attending the upstairs university, I am not able to work through how the member reached his conclusion. Dr Nick obviously has it wrong. The Government has been consistent in its numbers on this matter. If there is confusion, it is on the member's side and not on the Government's side. We have consistently said that the return on assets in this area is around 5 per cent to 6 per cent. I know that Bob Walker and other Greens allies have tried to misconstrue the numbers upside down and round and round to try to reach some other conclusion, but on every occasion they have made a mistake.

The Government's position has been verified by Professor Owen and many other experts, and we are undertaking an appropriate strategy that has been supported by a number of major industry players. The Greens will do anything to try to subvert this process. We know that they are about closing down our power industry. They do not support the Government's policy, because they are about changing people's lifestyles to reflect their prejudices. Fortunately, we live in a democracy where people have a right to choose to live their lifestyles within a legal and demographic framework—one that the Greens will not be able to change, certainly not in my lifetime.

COOMA TAFE ARTS DEPARTMENT CLOSURE

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Is the Minister aware of widespread community concern about his decision to close the arts department at Cooma TAFE, especially due to the fact that he recently spent approximately \$15,000 installing brand new kilns in that department that will now be useless?

The Hon. Eddie Obeid: What a waste of time!

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Is the Minister aware of the implications that this will have for local students as it was the only art and craft training facility in the region and students will now have to travel to Goulburn or Bega if they want to undertake similar courses? I acknowledge the interjection of the Hon. Eddie Obeid, who said that this was a waste of time. He should tell the people of Cooma that he thinks art is a waste of time.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I confess upfront that I am no Philistine. I am very concerned about ensuring that arts and crafts continue to prosper everywhere in this State, including in Cooma. It is important for all manner of arts and crafts to be well supported and sponsored by community organisations and, on occasions, when appropriate, by Commonwealth, State and local governments. There are all sorts of ways in which that can be achieved. I think that the member is referring to recent decisions relating to Cooma TAFE to ensure that it focuses on its core mission, that is, skills that will provide employment opportunities and prosperity for the people of Cooma and the obvious prospects to be gained by the Iemma Government's substantial investment—in accordance with the will and activism of the member for Monaro, Steve Whan—in a new commercial kitchen for teaching hospitality, chefs and related skills in the tourism industry.

The Iemma Government is focusing TAFE on its core mission, that is, to anticipate skills that are required in the future in those regions in which TAFE campuses operate. It could be said that blind Freddy would know—it certainly would be fairly obvious—that the big opportunities for young people in Cooma relate to jobs and skills in the tourism and hospitality area. Those factors are obvious because the population in the Monaro electorate triples during the winter season with the expansion of tourism for alpine sports and the like. The member might occasionally apply her mind to the fact that that is but one example of this Government's investment in that area.

Great employment opportunities for young people in Cooma and in many other parts of the State exist also in building and construction. The Government has significantly expanded opportunities at Cooma TAFE for young people to develop skills in building and construction, and that has involved a substantial reinvestment in Cooma TAFE. The member also said that the Government, in making those new and significant investments in Cooma TAFE, had curtailed some courses, in particular, a boutique course in ceramics. As Minister for Education and Training I am happy to continue to facilitate access to courses in Cooma TAFE that have been there for quite a while, that attract a boutique interest, that have minimal regard to vocational opportunities, and that are more in line with what might otherwise be thought of as hobby courses.

The Hon. Catherine Cusack: Arts and crafts are very important.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I was very specific about that course. The course to which the member referred was accessed by a particular group of people. Very few graduates of that certificate course have achieved the vocational levels that are required for them to progress to the next level. In other words, the course is being pursued more or less as a hobby course. If I were given the choice of making a big investment in the future of young people in Cooma so that they had more skills and better opportunities and there was more prosperity for the region, that would be the choice that I would make. [*Time expired*].

CHILD CAR RESTRAINT LAWS

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: My question is directed to the Minister for Roads. Will the Minister update the House with the latest information on the Government's proposed changes to child restraint laws?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I thank the member for her question and commend her for her interest in this important matter. I am pleased to inform members that all Australian transport and road Ministers unanimously support the Iemma Government's push for changes to child restraint laws—

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Point of order. Do I understand that the Minister is using question time to make a ministerial statement? If that is the case, it is inappropriate.

The PRESIDENT: Order! As I understand it, the member's question asked about the Government's current position rather than for an announcement of government policy.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: The Minister indicated he was going to announce some policy.

The PRESIDENT: Minister, are you announcing government policy?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am reporting to the House on the deliberations of the Australian Ministerial Council for Road Transport and its decision for national laws regarding child restraints.

The PRESIDENT: Order! As the Minister is not making an announcement of government policy he may proceed.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I am pleased to inform members of the House that last week at the Australian Ministerial Council for Road Transport all Australian transport and road Ministers unanimously supported the Iemma Government's push for changes to laws relating to child restraints in motor vehicles. The changes make it mandatory for children up to six months old to be restrained in a rearward facing infant capsule, children up to four years old to be restrained in a forward facing child seat, and children aged four to seven years to be restrained in a booster seat. Under existing laws any child over the age of one year can be restrained with an adult seatbelt, but adult seatbelts are designed only for adults. The size and skeletal structure of young children means that they do not get proper benefit from an adult seatbelt.

The new laws will reduce alarming statistics showing that 500 children are killed or seriously injured every year nationwide in car accidents, with more than 2,300 sustaining minor injuries. What was alarming was the inertia we faced from the Howard Government when we raised this issue nearly two years ago. Thankfully we now have a Prime Minister and a Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government—Mr Anthony Albanese—who is willing to work with the States to find sensible solutions to real problems. The New South Wales Centre for Road Safety will work closely with the Commonwealth and other States to implement these changes. We want to make sure that the changes are applied with a minimum of inconvenience to families. We expect the transition period will be over the next two years.

The New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority already advises parents that a child should remain in a child restraint until he or she is at least four years old. As a father of three I know that the safety of children is one of the biggest challenges parents face. Indeed, a chat with a fitter at one of our approved fitting stations emphasised how parents always are concerned to make sure they have the appropriate child restraint device fitted in their vehicles and return to a Roads and Traffic Authority approved fitting station to make sure the restraint properly fits their child or children. I recommend to all parents that if they have doubts about the way their child restraint is fitted, they should take it to an approved Roads and Traffic Authority fitting station to have it checked and adjusted appropriately. Kids grow very quickly and it is important that child restraints fit properly.

Common sense will make sure children are restrained properly. Restraints protect children in crashes. Research shows that injuries can be prevented by the correct use of restraints. The transport council's changes recognise also the increased protection offered to children seated in rear car seats. A child under seven years of age must now be seated in the rear seat unless all of the rear seats are occupied by other children under the age of seven years. Of course, parents should always use a child restraint that is Australian Standards approved and appropriately fitted. The Roads and Traffic Authority has more than 190 authorised restraint fitting stations across New South Wales. The Iemma Government's record on improving road safety speaks for itself. I look forward to continuing to update the House on this important issue.

NSW FOR KIDS CAMPAIGN

Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES: I ask the Minister for Primary Industries, on behalf of the Minister for Tourism, a question without notice. Is the Minister aware of the NSW for Kids campaign he announced whereby children will get free entry to tourist attractions when they buy a Happy Meal from fast food chain McDonalds? In particular, is the Minister aware that 1.2 million cards will be handed out during the promotion, which starts this Friday and ends on 3 April? Given that the rate of childhood obesity in Australia is among the highest of the developed nations—more than 25 per cent of Australian children are overweight or obese—will the Minister indicate why the Government is partnering initiatives that encourage the consumption of fast food, which the Minister for Health has been discouraging?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: What a good question. I will gladly refer it to the appropriate Minister.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: You've had a few happy meals in your time.

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I have happy meals all the time, but they are not McDonalds.

WORKCOVER BUDGET

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: My question without notice is directed to the Leader of the Government, Minister for Industrial Relations, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Finance. Can the Minister confirm to the House that WorkCover is over its budget by more than \$40 million? What services will be cut as a result of the blow-out? What action will the Minister take to address this massive blow-out and protect the employers and workers of New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The Leader of the Opposition obviously is distributing his knowledge around his backbench. That is a good thing, but I caution the Hon. David Clarke that the Leader of the Opposition got it wrong all the time when he was the shadow Minister for Industrial Relations and he is getting it even more wrong now. The fact of the matter is that WorkCover's operations, of course, underline many of the outstanding achievements of the Iemma Government in both occupational health and safety and workers compensation.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: Ha ha! That is tongue in cheek.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The Leader of the Opposition laughs, but he knows full well that the workers compensation achievements of the Iemma Government have put half a billion dollars back into the private economy every year since the reforms were put in place. That is an outstanding achievement. It is bigger than any phoney promise the Coalition has made about concessions to small business and other business or anything else in the last two or three election campaigns. It is more important than just about any other change or reform that can be made to the way the economy operates in the short term that is within anything like the realms of fiscal reality. That is the first point. Secondly, the workers compensation system is delivering better than ever for injured workers and is contributing to a very significant reduction in the rate of industrial accidents. As for the budget, the member clearly does not understand that the workers compensation system is administered by WorkCover. The WorkCover Authority operates entirely off budget, though it is accountable to the budget process. There is no deficit or loss in relation to WorkCover's operations.

CENTRAL COAST TOURISM AND EMPLOYMENT

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: My question is addressed to the Minister for the Central Coast. Can the Minister inform the House about recent tourism and employment initiatives on the Central Coast?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I thank the Hon. Eddie Obeid for his ongoing interest in the Central Coast—and Terrigal. No-one else will get that joke, of course! The Iemma Government has been working cooperatively to deliver exciting new employment opportunities on the Central Coast—one of the fastest growing regions in New South Wales.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: You lost Aloisi. I'm blaming you for that.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: That is just one job.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: Not a bad job to lose.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The Leader of the Opposition should not worry. John Aloisi is a very nice man and I am quite happy for him to go to Sydney. But we can now afford to pay the rest of the Central Coast Mariners team! Last month the Premier and I visited Bluetongue Stadium to announce that Coca-Cola Amatil's Pacific Beverages, a joint venture with SABMiller, will build a boutique premium brewery at Warnervale. Pacific Beverages is looking to invest up to \$100 million in the new brewery development, creating as many as 120 jobs.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: Get Paul Crittenden a job as a tester.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: That could be on. Winning this new investment in New South Wales would not have been possible without a strong working relationship between the New South Wales Government and the Wyong Shire Council. Warnervale was chosen against heavy competition from Victoria and Queensland. The site was chosen, of course, for its proximity to Sydney and for its skilled workforce. The Central Coast's strategic position and ability to supply Brisbane and Melbourne through efficient transport links were important factors also in the decision. The brewery will include a world-class tourist destination with beer-tasting facilities, cellar door and restaurant, and is expected to be completed in 2010. The New South Wales Government supports Central Coast businesses also through the Department of State and Regional Development. Central Coast businesses have received payroll tax rebates through the incentive scheme, supporting investment worth more than \$18.3 million and the creation of 229 jobs since 2006.

In less than two years the department also secured 33 investment projects for the coast, representing capital investment of more than \$37 million and 350 jobs. There is more positive employment news for the region. Yesterday I inspected *HMAS Adelaide*, which will become the first navy diver wreck in New South Wales when it is sunk off Terrigal next year. Currently the ship is being stripped of its military hardware at Garden Island before the New South Wales Government takes possession. The Iemma Government lobbied hard for *HMAS Adelaide* against strong competition from other States. The artificial reef will create a further 20 jobs for the region and flow-on benefits for the local tourism and hospitality industry.

As a Minister I do not often participate in adjournment debates and therefore I do not have the chance to highlight obvious achievements, so it would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to mention the

tremendous effort and record of Central Coast Mariners this year in the Hyundai A-League 2008 Grand Final and the role it has played in promoting the region, unifying its residents, building regional confidence and helping to deliver regional jobs. The Mariners won the regular season and, in my view, were cruelly robbed of the grand final.

The Mariners have united the region, with record crowds attending every home game in the magnificent Central Coast Stadium—a facility built by the cooperation of the New South Wales, Commonwealth and local governments. The Mariners are the best example of a community-based model for a sporting team. They have become an important part of the region's identity and have won phenomenal bipartisan support. As minor premiers, the team will represent New South Wales and Australia in the AFC Asian Cup in 2009. By then, Danny Vukovic will be back.

The Mariners are helping to promote the region to an international tourism market of hundreds of millions of people. This is a fantastic opportunity. The Central Coast is a region that has a great future. The Iemma Government is working hard to generate local employment for Central Coast families to match the region's excellent lifestyle. [*Time expired.*]

POLICE OFFICERS BREACH OF PRIVACY CHARGES

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I ask the Attorney General, and Minister for Justice: Is it a fact that transsexual Brigitte Fell had a sexual relationship with Garrick Jacobson without informing him that he had undergone a sex change? Is it an offence under section 61I of the Crimes Act to have sexual relations with a person without their informed consent? Is it a fact that Constables Tyrone Stacey and Brendan Ritson allegedly informed Mr Jacobson of this crime and subsequently were charged with a breach of privacy? Will the Attorney General take action to have the charges against Constables Stacey and Ritson reviewed and dropped?

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: This is a matter that I understand is before the court. I decline to comment in those circumstances.

KING GEORGES ROAD, BEVERLY HILLS, TRAFFIC DIVERSION

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My question is directed to the Minister for Roads, and Minister for Commerce. Is he aware of the proposal to divert traffic from King Georges Road past the Regina Coeli Memorial Church Primary School on Ponyara Road, Beverly Hills? What measures will he take to ensure the safety of students, given that an estimated 72 B-double trucks use Toorongra Terrace to access the nearby Kingsgrove industrial estate, and that many of them will be diverted onto Ponyara Road under the proposal? Will he support the Hurstville mayor's proposals to divert traffic by a right-hand turn at Stony Creek Road for traffic travelling north along King Georges Road, rather than using Ponyara Road?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: This is a very detailed question about a very specific traffic issue. The Roads and Traffic Authority manages in excess of 17,776 kilometres of State roads, including 4,259 kilometres of the Auslink national network, and 2,962 kilometres of regional and local roads. It is important to get the appropriate answer for the member, so I will take the question on notice and provide a comprehensive response.

WINE WEEK

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON: My question is addressed to the Minister for State Development. Will he inform the House about New South Wales Wine Week and what the Government is doing to support the industry?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I thank the honourable member for her very perceptive, timely and excellent question. The largest-ever promotion of New South Wales wines will occur during the inaugural New South Wales Wine Week that begins today and culminates on 15 March. New South Wales Wine Week is a major 10-day consumer and trade-focused event that is intended to help to grow the State's wine industry. It follows last month's launch of a new brand identity for the New South Wales industry that underpins a five-year strategy to promote New South Wales wines in domestic and export markets. New South Wales Wine Week is the largest ever promotion dedicated exclusively to New South Wales wine. It is a strategic approach to raising awareness of our industry—its quality, its range of varieties and styles, its commitment to excellence and innovation, and its regional diversity.

New South Wales accounts for more than 30 per cent of Australia's \$5 billion wine industry. The State exported just on \$500 million worth of wine last year. New South Wales Wine Week will help to support this important contributor to our economy that creates jobs, investment and export income. Hopefully it will lead to more sales of New South Wales wines and greater featuring of New South Wales wines on leading restaurant menus. The Government is supporting the inaugural New South Wales Wine Week through the Department of State and Regional Development and the Department of Primary Industries that jointly are contributing \$80,000.

New South Wales Wine Week has been developed by the New South Wales Wine Industry Association in conjunction with Fairfax media and the New South Wales Wine Industry Advisory Council. It will be officially launched tomorrow night at a major function for 300 trade, media and VIP guests at the Gazebo Hotel. New South Wales Wine Week will include a week-long restaurant-based promotion, Dine with New South Wales Wine, involving a minimum of 30 high-end Sydney restaurants. In addition, a four-month online promotional and selling initiative, Buy New South Wales Wine, will be conducted through the Fairfax Online Wine Shop, and a series of five high-profile wine dinners will be held at selected three-hatted restaurants.

Next Sunday a full-day consumer wine festival will be held in Hyde Park. This major event—Sydney Cellar Door—is expected to attract 20,000 attendees. Approximately 100 New South Wales wineries will exhibit their best products from the following regions: Bathurst, Canberra, Cowra, Gundagai, Hastings River, Hilltops, Hunter, Mudgee, Nepean-Hawkesbury, New England, Orange of course, Riverina, the Shoalhaven coast, the Southern Highlands and Western Plains. As well as the 97 regional wineries from various regions, New South Wales Wine Week will feature regional heroes, which are wine varieties for which different regions are particularly noted. For the Canberra district, it is shiraz; for Cowra, it is chardonnay; for Hilltops, it is cabernet sauvignon; for the Hunter, it is semillon; for Mudgee, it is cabernet sauvignon; for Orange, it is sauvignon blanc; for the Riverina, the regional hero is botrytis semillon; and for the Southern Highlands, it is pinot noir.

Importantly, New South Wales Wine Week also will promote awareness of the State's various wine-producing regions, which will help to contribute to regional tourism. We have a range of traditional and emerging wine regions that are well regarded for the quality and distinctive wines they produce. For example, traditional producers include the Hunter, the Riverina, Mudgee, and all the areas I mentioned earlier. New South Wales wine regions attract approximately 4.1 million tourists each year, generating spending benefits of approximately \$353 million for regional economies. We hope New South Wales Wine Week will further raise public awareness about our regions and encourage more tourist visits. New South Wales Wine Week is just one of a number of initiatives that the Government is supporting in 2008 to help to grow the State's wine industry. On 12 May we will have a New England-North West Regional Food and Wine Showcase at this Parliament, which I hope many honourable members will attend. This will be the latest in an ongoing series of regional food and wine showcases. [*Time expired.*]

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

COOMA TAFE ARTS DEPARTMENT CLOSURE

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: Earlier the Hon. Melinda Pavey asked me if I was concerned about the loss of investment because of a kiln at Cooma TAFE. The kiln referred to by the honourable member is not going to waste, as she implied. It is being relocated to the Bega campus of TAFE.

WORKCOVER BUDGET

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: In response to the point made by the Hon. David Clarke I advise the House, as I said during my answer, that the rate of contribution in 2007-08 remains at 0.4¢ for WorkCover for every premium pool dollar.

Questions without notice concluded.

ADJOURNMENT

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA (Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for the Central Coast, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Finance) [5.08 p.m.]: I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

MR BASILIO REYES 457 VISA EMPLOYMENT

The Hon. IAN WEST [5.08 p.m.]: Last Friday, 29 February 2008, a community rally was held outside a restaurant in my duty electorate of Cronulla over the mistreatment of an overseas worker. Basilio Reyes came to Australia from Chile in February last year and was employed as a chef at Sombreros Mexican Restaurant under the controversial 457 visa scheme. The signs were dodgy from the beginning. Mr Reyes was required to work six days a week and was not paid for public holidays. He received only two or three payslips, despite working at the restaurant for a year, and did not receive any payment for any annual leave. It is also alleged that he was victimised after he complained about poor hygiene standards at the restaurant. This was despite the restaurant later admitting that it received an unsatisfactory rating in a council health check, after a number of customers complained about food poisoning. But worse was to come.

In December 2007 Mr Reyes was diagnosed with a serious melanoma that required surgery. He underwent the operation on 16 January 2008 and was in hospital for four days. His doctor told him that he was not fit to return to work for four weeks and provided a medical certificate, which Mr Reyes passed on to his employer at the restaurant. On 18 February Mr Reyes was fired because he was unable to work due to his ongoing cancer treatment. Mr Reyes did not receive all the sick leave he was entitled to for the period he was off work. His medical expenses to date have been more than \$7,000. Despite the legal requirements under migration law that his employer either provide health insurance, or agree to pay medical expenses, Sombreros has not paid one cent. Now unemployed, Mr Reyes, his wife and son have been forced to move out of their rented apartment.

Unfortunately, Mr Reyes's story is one we have become too familiar with under the 457 visa scheme. There has been a seemingly unending supply of cases of abuse of the scheme since 2002 when the Howard Government tightened the conditions of 457 visas so that workers could not change to a different employer. Previously, changing employers had been allowed conditional on the approval of the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. So 457 visas became a form of indentured labour—effectively, a form of slavery—that allowed unscrupulous employers to exploit the vulnerabilities of foreign workers who might be lacking in knowledge of local laws and lacking language skills. This legacy of the Howard Government is also symptomatic of the previous Federal Government's lack of investment in skilling the local workforce.

The Rudd Government should be applauded for recognising this bottleneck in the economy and seeking to address it. It has announced that it will provide an additional 450,000 Australian training places over the next four years and 820,000 in the next decade. Some of the industries the extra places will cover include mining, construction, health and community services, and other service industries. Of course, the benefits of addressing the skills shortage through training local people will take some time to flow through. Until then, we have a duty to ensure that overseas workers coming to Australia to plug the gaps are not abused in the way that Mr Reyes and his family have been. Again, the union movement—in this case, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union—has taken up the cause of these people. The union must be commended for bringing matters such as this particular case to public attention, and for continuing its ongoing fight for justice for the people affected by the shortcomings of these 457 visas.

The one saving grace in all this, if there is one, is that the business is a partnership and is not covered by the remnants of WorkChoices, so the union is able to run a case for unfair dismissal for Mr Reyes. Mr Reyes is also meeting with immigration authorities this week and is hoping to get an appropriate visa to allow him to stay in Australia while his cancer treatment continues and while he is unable to obtain employment in a fair and dignified way, rather than under the slavery conditions imposed by 457 visas.

AUSTRALIAN VIETNAM VETERANS RECONSTRUCTION GROUP

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN [5.13 p.m.]: Recently I was honoured to be invited to be the national patron of the Australian Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group. If someone had said to me about 40 years ago, when I was a plant operator in Vietnam, that one day I would be invited to be patron of a group representing such a wide cross-section of Australia, it is something I never would have thought about. In accepting the position—I think I am the only Vietnam veteran in an Australian parliament—I pay tribute to the former patron, Graeme Edwards, who is the Federal member for Cowan. Graeme's tireless efforts on behalf of the plight of Vietnam veterans earned him the respect of veterans across Australia. I have spoken about the plight of Vietnam veterans on a number of previous occasions in this Parliament. I am currently reading Paul Ham's excellent book entitled *Vietnam: The Australian War*. I strongly recommend the book to every member of Parliament. Ham provides an excellent overview of the struggle of the Vietnamese people over the centuries.

The debt we owe these people was recognised by the founder of the Australian Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group, Paul Murphy, following a visit to Vietnam in 1990. Paul was shaken by the devastation of the social and physical infrastructure caused by the war and the country's 20-year isolation by the West. This was most evident in rural areas where facilities were non-existent. It was in the province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau, which contains the former Australian Task Force Base at Nui Dat and the Australian Logistic Support Group Base at Vung Tau, that Paul established contact with the people's committee to identify areas where assistance could be given. After lengthy discussions and formalities, the Australian Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group was established in 1994 and incorporated, and a nationwide membership and fundraising program was launched to support the first project.

The association now aims to provide practical aid and assistance to the people of Vietnam, in particular within the province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau but not excluding any other province within Vietnam; to assist in building, medical, educational, agricultural, aquacultural and reconstruction projects throughout Vietnam by all means within the group's power; to assist and implement educational programs, including the provision of printed material, within the guidelines as set by the relevant education departments within Vietnam; to implement and provide medical assistance and programs for the people of Vietnam, including in-country visits by medical teams; to foster and improve relations between the people of Australia and Vietnam; to provide aid by way of labour, advice, expertise, planning, materials, money or whatever other means may be necessary to achieve these goals; and to take all steps necessary to become registered as an Australian non-government organisation for the furtherance of the above aims.

Since the Australian Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group has been incorporated there have been a number of great projects. We have built a kindergarten at Nui Dat, which is a childcare centre. Stage one was built in 2003. Stage two, which will commence this year, will see the addition of a kitchen, toilet and security fence, which will allow the local communities to fully utilise the facility. Tonight I am the guest speaker at a function to kick off the fundraising effort for this project. Another project undertaken by the Australian Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction group has been a successful goat and cattle breeding scheme to help alleviate poverty in the area. Currently, there are 58 families involved and the herds now number more than 150 goats and about 30 cattle.

We have constructed a school for the blind and an orphanage. There are health programs and health teams from Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. As more veterans come to know about the Australian Vietnam Veterans Reconstruction Group they give us their support. The group is not limited only to Vietnam veterans but includes other members of the community. It is a wonderful gesture and a way of allowing us to help these wonderful people, the Vietnamese, in a small way with local projects in Vietnam.

DEATH OF MR STAN GILMOUR

Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES [5.18 p.m.]: One of the fathers of the change to decimal currency in 1966 died this week at the age of 101 years. Stan Gilmour, head of the then Victorian Employers Federation, stumped the country for more than a decade persuading employers of the financial benefits of departing from pounds, shillings and pence and adopting the decimal system. Despite immense opposition to his logical and researched arguments, he convinced businesses and industries to change. Stan was born in 1906 in Mordialloc, Victoria. He wanted to become a farmer; he entered Dookie Agricultural College and was determined to be a modern farmer. He joined the staff at Roseworthy Agricultural College in South Australia. He then studied commerce and economics at the University of Melbourne.

After graduating he took jobs with the Victorian Lands Department and with the Manpower office of the Federal Government. At Sunshine Harvester he blossomed as an industrial officer. His big move in 1945 was to take on the then unknown task of secretary of the Victorian Employers Federation. When he started work there was not enough money to pay his wage but he developed the Victorian Employers Federation as a provider of secretarial and administrative services for trade and industry associations and industrial award information services to industry nationally. The Victorian Employers Federation prospered, and Stan left a strong and wealthy organisation in 1970.

At the Victorian Employers Federation, Stan helped launch the Australian Decimal Research Organisation, which pressed for decimal currency. He established Victorian Aid to the Mentally Ill [VATMI], which developed sheltered workshops for the mentally ill; the Victorian Overseas Foundation, which provides training travel scholarships for young tradespeople; the Australia Japan Society; the Committee for Economic Development of Australia; and many other groups. He launched the Over 50s Association, which found work

for more than 40,000 retired Australians, the Australian Retired Persons Association, the Mutual Friendly Society and the Over 50s Friendly Society. He received an MBE for his work for older Australians.

Stan's management style reflected a formidable intellect and a fearless taste for battle; woe betide anyone who stood in his way or who let lower motives detract from grand ideas and high ethics. His loyalty to his Christian principles was clear to all who dealt with him. He was a formidable figure, unafraid of any principality or power in the land in his day. After he left full-time work, Stan travelled extensively and bought and sold some farming properties. He worked with various churches and for various social causes, including an enthusiastic campaign when he was in his nineties to draw attention to the economic costs of alcohol and to make the liquor industry accountable for the social ravages of alcohol.

Stan had a happy marriage to Ingrid for 61 years and her death was a heavy blow to him. Stan had two children, Helen and John. John became a feature writer on economics: for many years he had a weekly page in the *Bulletin*. He wrote of the travails of The Bootery, a chain of footwear shops in Melbourne, as it wrestled with the practical implications of government policies on employment, import protection, and the harrowing by government bureaucrats. Stan and John had a Saturday morning breakfast together at the Spencer Street railway cafeteria, where these issues were debated, adding spice to the many articles John published.

In recent years, John and Stan have travelled extensively together. At his peak, Stan was a great runner and high jumper: he had a tremendously strong physique. Each year he planted more than 20,000 daffodil bulbs on his Mount Dandenong property, cared for and cut them, and then gave away tens of thousands of daffodils each year to hospitals, aged care centres and the like. He never sold a bloom. Stan was a committed Christian, and few would ever forget the Annual Conferences of Churches of Christ when he would question the church bureaucrats on what they had accomplished. He had little time for non-performers, but gave life-long encouragement to those who were innovative and successful. A favourite prayer was "Lord, make me not so poor that I curse You; nor so rich that I forget You." He established a number of church-related foundations, trusts and businesses that resulted in money being raised to send young ministers overseas to research and achieve their dreams. He was a man given to regular exercise, abstemious ways and a careful and mainly vegetarian diet. He died this week aged 101½ years.

AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK CHALLENGE

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI [5.23 p.m.]: Last Friday night I had the good fortune to attend an Aussie Rules match at Narrandera. The game was part of the Australian Football League National Australia Bank Challenge between the Sydney Swans and the Richmond Tigers, and the second Australian Football League game to be played in Narrandera in as many years. Each year the National Australia Bank Challenge aims to take Australian Football League matches to regional locations that seldom have the chance to see Aussie Rules football at the highest level. Not only does the event provide great motivation for young aspiring players, but it also gives teams the chance to expose newly drafted players for the first time, and to trial any experimental rules.

Whilst there I had the pleasure of announcing a \$50,000 grant that had been made available through this Government's Climate Change Fund. The Australian Football League of New South Wales has matched this amount. The drought has had a real effect on rural communities; sporting clubs have felt the pinch too. The prolonged dry weather and water restrictions have affected the quality of playing surfaces, and there are a number of reports of games having to be cancelled because of safety concerns.

The \$100,000 will assist the Narrandera Shire Council to undertake significant water saving and recycling projects at the Narrandera Sportsground. The benefits that the climate change funding affords the local community are numerous: it will assist to drought proof sportsgrounds and provide important sporting opportunities for families while saving precious drinking water for the community. Aussie Rules has long been a popular sport in southern New South Wales. Sporting clubs and events are a major part of the culture of rural and regional communities: They play an important social role by way of bringing people together. Friday night's game was no exception. It attracted a crowd of more than 8,000. With a population of just over 6,500, Narrandera and the region benefit immensely from sporting events such as these. Not only do they generate a great social atmosphere but also there are significant flow-on effects to the local economy, and it helps to put Narrandera and the Riverina on the map.

The Narrandera Sportsground is the first project to benefit from the \$200,000 made available for water savings and recycling projects for local Australian Football Club grounds in drought-affected communities.

I have no doubt that the Narrandera Sportsground will set the benchmark for other such projects. The Narrandera Sportsground has been described as being as good as some of the grounds in Melbourne, which is a real credit to mayor John Sullivan, the councillors and the staff of Narrandera Shire Council. To host two Australian Football League games two years running is no mean feat. Narrandera faced fierce competition from much larger centres in the region.

My congratulations are extended to all those involved in the upkeep of the sportsground and to council on its hard work in bringing the Australian Football League back to Narrandera again. It just goes to show that we have facilities in small rural and regional towns that are on par or better than those in capital cities. I believe that it is one of the reasons that the Riverina-Murray region continues to boast elite athletes from a diverse range of sports. Thanks also go to the Australian Football League for supporting local regional communities, by showcasing their top teams and providing funding for this important project. It will help to ensure that the Riverina-Murray region will continue to produce world-class athletes in their chosen sports. Friday's game was clean and hard fought, but the Richmond players were quicker to the ball on the night. The final score: Richmond Tigers 17 goals 11 defeated the poor Sydney Swans 13 goals 10.

DEATH OF MRS SUSAN KATHRINE MITCHELL

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY [5.28 p.m.]: I am proud to speak about the life and contribution of Susan Kathrine Mitchell, a life that made a difference to the people of New South Wales, in particular, the Monaro. Susan Mitchell, who passed away in Cooma on 25 January 2007 following a sudden and aggressive battle with pancreatic cancer, leaves not only her family but also her beloved community greatly saddened. However, her funeral at Boloco on the Monaro plains was a stunning tribute to her life and her achievements as a wife, mother, nurse, and community activist. If one's contribution to life is measured by the size of one's funeral, and the tributes that flowed at that funeral, then Susan Mitchell's life was certainly a mighty one. One of her greatest tributes was being declared Cooma's citizen of the year. Sadly, however, she died two days prior to the Cooma-Monaro citizen of the year Australia Day celebrations held in Centennial Park, Cooma. She was informed of the award that was going to be presented to her before her passing, and she was said to have been greatly honoured.

Susan York, as she was, was born near Walcha in 1934 and her family could trace their Australian heritage to the Second Fleet's arrival in 1795. Coincidentally, given Susan's huge involvement in the New South Wales Farmers Association, the president, Jock Laurie, from Walcha, attended her funeral on behalf of the association. Susan started her working life as a bookkeeper and then trained as a Tresillian nurse. As soon as she could she moved to country New South Wales to care for country babies. She was very proud of her Tresillian family, a family so large that her five children thought that they were just some of dozens across New South Wales. They soon understood that they were her real children but that her Tresillian family was her other family.

After meeting her husband, Dugald Mitchell, at Currawatha Dalgety, they married 48 years ago. In fact one of the readings at the funeral could have been written by Dugald. It said: "Give her credit for all she does. She deserves the respect of everyone." Dugald certainly respected her and let her live the life she enjoyed. Susan did plenty of things, starting with having five children under six years of age with Dugald—Scott, Craig, Hamish, Lesley and Mary. Her son Scott said at the funeral: "She wasn't a pebble that skimmed the surface. She was a rock that created ripples of change."

Susan ran for the seat of Monaro for the National Party in 1981, unsuccessfully but with passion and commitment, so much so that her son Scott recounted the story of being in Bombala with her on the campaign trail. As is Country Party tradition, she had the loudhailer and she was campaigning off the back of a truck. When she started her speech in the main street of Bombala there were probably five or six people in the street. About a minute into the speech there was no-one in the street—they had all run for cover! True to her spirit and true to herself, Susan continued the job until her speech was finished. That is just the sort of person she was.

One thing that was not finished before Susan's passing was the extension of the Raglan Street Art Gallery and making it a regional art gallery. Susan had chaired the Raglan gallery for 12 years and had made an enormous contribution. One of her final wishes was to see that gallery turned into a regional art gallery facility. That work will continue with the people of the Monaro.

Among the speakers at the tribute following her funeral was Helen Hopkins from the Consumers' Health Forum, a national body. Helen explained to those attending the funeral that Susan had suggested in her work on that forum that every doctor throughout Australia should have a computer with a uniform diagnosis

program, and that came about. That was one of Susan's behind the scenes achievements that has had enormous implications for all Australians.

As I mentioned, Susan was involved with the New South Wales Farmers Association, National Party, Capital Region Development Board, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Cooma Unlimited, Monaro Domestic Violence Committee, and the Capital Region and Snowy Monaro business enterprise centres. At one point in 2001 she was on 30 committees simultaneously and in total she served on 50 during her lifetime. She was a very kind, big-hearted and generous person, a person with spirit and compassion and big ideas. She was the sort of person who makes a difference and gives country areas the sense of community and spirit we so love. Vale Susan Mitchell.

JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE [5.33 p.m.]: Tonight I wish to speak on the subject of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the most important person in the history of the world and he divides that history between Before Christ and After Christ. Many questions are asked during our lives, including "Will you marry me?" "Will you employ me?" "Will you buy my house?" The most important question was asked by Jesus Christ himself, not by Alexander the Great or Napoleon or Winston Churchill. Jesus Christ was speaking with his disciples, gradually teaching them and revealing to them who he really was. On this occasion—as is written in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, verses 13 to 17—he said to the disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" The disciples replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." This was a most important question by the most important person. Then he said, "Who do you say I am?" The apostle Peter, the fisherman, replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus Christ said to him that that truth had been revealed to him by God "my Father in Heaven".

If we asked the question today "Who is Jesus Christ?" we would get many different answers. People obsessed with their own lives, with wealth, gambling, sex or drugs are too busy to even listen to the question, let alone answer it. If one asked atheists they would say, "There is no God, so there can be no Son of God." The agnostic would shrug his shoulders and say, "I don't know." If we asked the modernist, he would reply along these lines: "Well, he was a good man, a moral example." But if one asks a Muslim today who Jesus Christ is, he has an answer because the Muslim religion came 700 years after Jesus Christ. It has a great deal to say about Jesus Christ. A Muslim would say, "Jesus is not the Son of God; he is only a prophet of Islam." That Muslim is quoting the Koran, which to him is a holy book revealed to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel. What does the Koran say? Chapter 9, verse 30 says:

The Christians say the Messiah Jesus is the Son of God. That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. Allah assail them! How they are perverted!

Chapter 10, verse 68 says:

Allah has no son.

Allah, of course, is the Arabic word for God. Chapter 16, verse 50 says:

Allah says take not to you two Gods. He is only one God.

That is rejecting the Christian belief of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God reveals himself in those three ways. The Koran in chapter 17, verse 110 says:

Praise belongs to Allah, who has not taken to him a son.

Is this an important question today? It is, because 138 Islamic scholars, Muslim leaders, issued a statement late last year called "A Common Word". They claimed there were great similarities between the Christian faith and the Muslim faith. But their statement begins with the words, "Allah (God) has no partner." That is their way of saying that God has no son. We are reminded in the Bible: "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" and "Those who believe in the Son of God know that they have eternal life." This is a very important question. I believe the majority of Australians would say, yes, Jesus is the Son of God. It is a very important for us to consider this today in our society.

SUSTAINABILITY GREEN GLOBE AWARDS

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH [5.37 p.m.]: Last Thursday I attended the New South Wales Government's Sustainability Green Globe Awards held in Parliament House. These awards are an outstanding

initiative, recognising leaders in environmental sustainability. I would like to congratulate all of the nominees; they are outstanding examples of environmental leadership. The winners included Sydney Water, North Sydney Council, the Investa Property Group and Petrea Bradford. These awards are an outstanding initiative and the Iemma Government should be congratulated for its continued leadership on environmental matters across this State.

[Time for debate expired.]

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

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 5.38 p.m. until Wednesday 5 March 2008 at 11.00 a.m.
