

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Thursday 15 May 2008

The President (The Hon. Peter Thomas Primrose) took the chair at 11.00 a.m.

The President offered the Prayers.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing Orders: Presentation of an Irregular Petition

Motion, by leave, by Ms Sylvia Hale agreed to:

That standing orders be suspended to allow the presentation of an irregular petition from 839 citizens of New South Wales concerning Yasmar grounds and buildings.

IRREGULAR PETITION

Yasmar Estate

Petition requesting that Yasmar grounds and buildings be secured for community use, that the House support a Yasmar Trust Bill, that ownership of the site be transferred to Ashfield Municipal Council, and that the Government fund the costs of restoration and maintenance, received from **Ms Sylvia Hale**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Order of Business

The Hon. GREG PEARCE [11.06 a.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow a motion to be moved forthwith that Private Members' Business item No. 115 outside the Order of Precedence, relating to the report of the Owen inquiry, be called on forthwith.

The motion is urgent because currently the greatest issues facing New South Wales are the electricity industry, climate change and capital for infrastructure. The motion calls for papers that have been prepared by Treasury. They already exist and producing them does not require any extra work. They form the background for the electricity sale, and they outline potential impacts of climate change, carbon trading, and future capital expenditure.

The motion is urgent because the Government, particularly the Treasurer, used figures in the public arena to form its argument. The public is entitled to see detailed modelling to test that against what the Government is telling them. The motion is urgent also because the budget will be presented on the next sitting day. It is very important to compare the documents and modelling to the budget. I commend the motion.

Dr JOHN KAYE [11.08 a.m.]: On behalf of the Greens, I support the claim of urgency in relation to this motion. This motion is highly urgent because the conclusions reached by the Owen inquiry are contested, not only by the overwhelming majority of people in New South Wales but also by a large number of experts who have spent a long time studying the electricity industry. The Owen inquiry reached a number of conclusions that not only are counter-intuitive but also are counter-factual and run hard against the known facts of the planning and operation of the electricity industry.

This motion is urgent also because, if we do not get those facts out into the public, the myth promulgated by both the Premier and the Treasurer—that we need to privatise the electricity industry to keep the lights on—will continue to be promulgated. The longer a myth is perpetuated, the closer it comes to appearing to be the truth. But the reality is that it is a long way away from true to say that privatisation of the electricity industry is necessary.

The motion is extremely urgent because the Iemma Government is steaming ahead with its plans to privatise the electricity industry, selling the retailers and leasing the generators, based on supposed evidence

before the Owen inquiry, for which there is no independent check. Insufficient data was presented before the Owen inquiry to enable the major areas of logic put forward to be understood. The Greens support the claim of urgency for this motion and also will support the motion, if it is debated.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN [11.10 a.m.]: The Shooters Party supports the motion for urgent debate, but for exactly the opposite reasons outlined by Dr John Kaye. It will be enlightening to see the detailed modelling behind the conclusions in the Owen report. It might finally keep the voodoo science of the Greens at bay for a little while.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [11.11 a.m.]: Clearly this motion for urgency will be supported in the House this morning. However, I want to place on record that the Government opposes the urgency of this motion—as it does for all the other urgency stunts in this place every Thursday. A number of other matters are listed on the *Notice Paper*, but this time the Opposition has been able to stitch up the numbers to establish urgency. The Government opposes urgency.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Order of Business

Motion by the Hon. Greg Pearce agreed to:

That Private Members' Business item No. 115 outside the Order of Precedence be called on forthwith.

TREASURY MODELLING

Production of Documents: Order

The Hon. GREG PEARCE [11.13 a.m.]: I move:

That, under Standing Order 52, there be laid upon the table of the House within 14 days of the date of the passing of this resolution any documents in the possession, custody or control of the Treasurer of New South Wales Treasury relating to:

- (a) the medium term fiscal model and the projections outside the current estimates period provided to the report of the Owen inquiry and referred to on pages 6 and 22 of the Owen inquiry into electricity supply in New South Wales, including all supporting calculations and assumptions;
- (b) any Treasury modelling, including all supporting calculations and assumptions, referred to by the Treasurer in his speech to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry on 3 April 2008, and relating to the economic impact of cuts to greenhouse emissions recommended by Professor Ross Garnaut;
- (c) the projections and modelling, including all supporting calculations and assumptions, for future capital spending referred to at the Treasury briefing by the Office of Financial Management held in the Parliament House Theatre on 27 March 2008; and
- (d) any document which records or refers to the production of documents as a result of this order of the House.

My comments will be brief. The motion relates to an order for papers relating to Treasury modelling documents. The papers comprise Treasury forward forecasts that have been prepared in relation to matters of great public importance—the electricity sale, about which members will have different views on what the figures show, the impacts of climate change and the carbon trading scheme, and future capital expenditure. It is important for the documents to be available in the public arena while debates on electricity and climate change are in their current crucial stages so that they can be tested against all the other commentators and the budget papers.

I very carefully drafted the motion so that it is narrowly defined. It relates only to the documents that have been prepared already by Treasury. It is not a fishing exercise. I cannot see that there are any loose ends in anything that is asked for. The motion is very specific. Each of the documents already has been referred to publicly by the Treasurer or provided selectively by the Government. Given that the documents have been used by the Government to publicly advance its views, great public interest in having the documents available for review has been created.

It is inappropriate for the Treasurer to be able to selectively use the public's resource, the Treasury, to develop his personal arguments. Where the Treasury does work, it works for the public, in the public interest,

and it is appropriate that these documents be made available to the public so that people will be able to see exactly what Treasury is thinking. It is likely, or possible at least, that there may be some material in the documents that may in some way inform about the electricity sale. As we all know, if the Government has a genuine claim for commercial in confidence, under processes for the production of papers the Government will be able to claim privilege for truly commercially sensitive documents. There is no risk of having to produce the other projections. I commend the motion to the House.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT (RESTORATION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION) BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 8 May 2008.

Ms LEE RHIANNON [11.17 a.m.]: Recent events in the Shoalhaven area add further weight to the Greens position that a ban on developer donations must be in place before the impending local government elections. Ms Sylvia Hale's bill would achieve that ban. Last week in speaking to this bill I provided the House with information based on donor and candidate returns lodged with the Election Funding Authority for the 2004 Shoalhaven council election and for the 2003 State elections, and information about local developments. Obviously I am not privy to conversations between developers and Mr Watson. The Greens do not know whether there is any connection between the donations received by the Shoalhaven Independent Group and local planning decisions.

I stand by my comments that Mayor Greg Watson owes the people of the Shoalhaven an explanation for planning decisions outside accepted procedures having been given the go-ahead. The head of WD Pty Ltd has been financially generous to Mayor Greg Watson and the Shoalhaven Independents Group. Triple One Holdings, one of Mr Corban's companies, donated \$5,000 for Mr Watson's 2003 State election campaign. WD Pty Ltd donated \$20,000 to the 2004 Shoalhaven council campaign for Mayor Greg Watson's Shoalhaven Independents Group. Mr Corban sought and received rezoning of valuable and prominent land on the Nowra central business district fringe in 2004. The Shoalhaven City Council Development Committee recommended on 6 July 2004 that a number of lots "on the corner of Moss Street, North Street and the Princes Highway, Nowra, be adopted as exhibited". They were the words stated in the council's document.

The decision was ratified by elected council and gazetted. The change from residential zoning to business means that this is the first commercial site that people encounter in the Nowra central business district when travelling south on the Princes Highway. Significantly, the rezoning of the site pre-empted completion of the design and consultation process behind the East Nowra Sub Arterial road, known as ENSA, linking the Princes Highway to Greenwell Point Road. The site is now situated on the corner of the proposed East Nowra Sub Arterial intersection. It is interesting to note that this rezoned land is now up for sale. It is described as:

The future is more than encouraging with Stockland's Nowra as your neighbour and the proposed East Nowra Sub Arterial Road to adjoin Moss Street, the East Street intersection is to become the gateway to Nowra and entrance to its new and accepted retail hub.

Ralph Lucas is another financial backer of Mr Watson and the Shoalhaven Independents Group. He donated \$10,000 to Greg Watson's State election campaign in 2003 and \$12,000 to the 2004 local Government election campaign for the Shoalhaven Independents Group. Mr Lucas is the owner of Lucas Property, which has substantial interests in the Sussex Inlet area. According to their website:

The Group's holdings include a further 200 hectares adjoining Riviera Keys. This holding contains the Sussex Inlet Golf Course, as well as extensive areas to accommodate further development. Current plans are to redevelop the Golf Course into a prestigious 18-hole course combined with residential development in excess of 600 home sites integrated in and around the Golf Course.

Rezoning and development of the Badgee Lagoon area was presented in the draft Shoalhaven council strategy, despite clear concerns from the Department of Planning and the then Department of Environment and Conservation. A Department of Planning document states:

Badgee Extension—extent of the wetland and swamp ECCs on site is greater than is mapped in the draft strategy. The Department believes that the potential lot yield outlined in the strategy is significantly overstated. The ECC boundaries need to be verified by onsite mapping and be excluded from the developable area.

Badgee Lagoon and the urban land between Berrara & Cudmirrah, are both listed as Sensitive Urban Lands and are currently subject to the independent review being undertaken for the Minister of Planning. The draft Strategy will need to be consistent with any findings of this Review. The extension of the Badgee area needs to be justified in light of the environmental attributes of the site.

This is the information that has come from the department. The clear conclusion from the then Department of Environment and Conservation was that the area of environmental concern has been minimised in the draft strategy exhibited by council. Maybe the error was a mistake, or maybe deliberate, but what we do know is that the result potentially maximises the area Lucas Property can develop—another reason why the mayor needs to explain what is happening here. I understand that last year those concerns were presented to the Minister for Local Government, Paul Lynch, and the Minister for Planning, Frank Sartor, in a document entitled "Protection of Shoalhaven Independent Group Interests in the Sussex Inlet Settlement Strategy Process".

Another one of Mr Watson's backers has been in the news lately. LED (South Coast) Pty Limited is a subsidiary of Beechwood Homes. This company donated \$3,000 to the 2003 campaign for Mayor Watson. It donated a further \$10,000 to the Shoalhaven Independents Group in 2004. In November 2002, the Shoalhaven City Council agreed to sell the 33-hectare former University of Wollongong agricultural campus to Vyntage Pty Limited, a Beechwood Homes subsidiary, for \$5 million. This was confirmed at an extraordinary meeting of council on 11 February 2003. Mayor Watson was required to provide the casting vote for the sale to proceed. One month later the company donated \$3,000 to Mayor Watson's State electoral campaign.

Elderslie Property Developments is another company that donates to the mayor. It is involved in a number of projects in the Milton-Ulladulla region. This company contributed \$10,000 to the 2004 Mayor Watson-Shoalhaven Independents Group campaign for Shoalhaven council. Elderslie has submitted three applications for development involving a total of 11 commercial units, 48 tourist units and 212 residential units in the Ulladulla area.

Clearly a lot needs to be explained. The examples I have provided highlight how there is currently little to enforce transparency and accountability when local government candidates receive political donations from property development interests. If members are sincere about ending the damaging association between donations and developers, this bill deserves to be passed.

Ms SYLVIA HALE [11.25 a.m.], in reply: I thank all members who contributed to this debate. I find myself in the unusual position of replying to a debate during which no speaker raised any objection to any part of the bill, yet it appears that the bill may well be shuffled off to a committee. Having said that no objection was raised by any speaker, I should note also that the Labor Party chose not even to participate in the debate. I can certainly understand why no-one from the Labor Party wants to be the one who in this House defends the way the Government not only has allowed but also has actively promoted systemic corruption of the State's planning laws.

The record of favourable treatment for developers who are political donors, which has been outlined to the House in speeches by my Greens colleagues and the Opposition, presents an overwhelming case that political donations and conflicts of interest that arise from them have corrupted, and continue to corrupt, the planning system at all levels. I thank my Greens colleagues for their considered contributions to the debate. Ms Lee Rhiannon pointed out the level of proven corruption at local government level arising from developer donations. The so-called "*Dirty Sexy Money*" scandal, involving certain Wollongong Labor councillors and staff members, exposed for all to see the way in which corrupt developers and corrupt Labor Party members work together to get developments approved that should never have been approved. Ms Rhiannon pointed out that the corruption of the planning system at local government level does not begin, nor does it end, at Wollongong. There are ongoing concerns at other New South Wales councils about the way donations to the campaigns of certain councillors have led to perceived favourable treatment of donors.

Dr John Kaye focused on the State level, pointing out that since part 3A of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act was introduced in mid-2005, donations by property developers to the major political parties total more than \$8.5 million. He also pointed out that since mid-2005 almost \$3 billion worth of developments have been approved under part 3A of the Act for 13 developer companies who between them have passed more than \$2 million in political donations to the political party whose Minister was determining their development applications! Dr Kaye also showed how developers who donate to the New South Wales Labor Party have a much higher success rate than non-donors in having their part 3A developments called in and approved.

The Labor Party's conflict of interest in this situation is blatant, inexcusable and irreparable. No wonder no-one from the Labor Party is willing to stand up and defend the blatant systemic corruption of the State's

planning system. It appears that the Minister stands alone as the sole defender of this indefensible position, with not one of his colleagues rushing to get to their feet in this debate and defend him. Mr Ian Cohen focused on the way local communities are ignored when big developer donors come to town, and how easy it appears to be for a developer donor to have their pet project declared State significant whenever it appears that there is serious community opposition.

Speakers for the Opposition, the Hon. Don Harwin and the Hon. Marie Ficarra, and, for the Christian Democrats, Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, expressed support for all aspects of the bill. I thank them for doing so. However, I must express my great disappointment that the Opposition and the Christian Democrats are not willing to convert their words to action. The bill does not need to go to the Select Committee on Electoral and Political Party Funding for inquiry and report. The majority of the provisions of the bill—schedule 1 items [1] to [7]—do not fit within the terms of reference of that committee, so the committee cannot inquire into and report on them.

The provisions of the bill that fit within the terms of reference of the committee, that is schedule 1 item [8] of the bill, are clear, precise and simple. They run for less than one page. We do not need a committee to tell us what those provisions mean or how they will work. The real reason for seeking to refer this bill to a committee was made clear in the speech by the Hon. Don Harwin when he quoted the evidence of Dr Joo-Cheung Tham in the inquiry into electoral and political party funding.

I agree that what Dr Tham had to say is important and that the inquiry into electoral funding should address both the supply side and the demand side of the electoral funding equation. But we are not debating the broader electoral funding system now; we are debating whether or not a regime that allows political donations from developers who have development proposals under consideration by councillors or Ministers should continue. Unfortunately, the reference to Dr Tham's comments shows that the other parties remain motivated by what will be the impact of those changes on their campaign coffers and electoral prospects, rather than what will be the impact of those changes on cleaning up the State's discredited planning system.

The most disappointing aspect of the amendment moved by the Opposition and supported by the Christian Democrats is that it displays an unwillingness to act even when they agree that political donations are causing enormous damage to the planning system. Even as I speak development applications are sitting in front of councils and the Minister from proponents who continue to make donations to their political campaigns or those of their party. We can take action immediately to stop this disgraceful conflict of interest now before any further damage is done to the State's heritage and environment, and the public's confidence in the planning system and the political system generally.

As I asked in my second reading speech: Why should we continue to tolerate a regime that gives a cloak of legality to corruption-promoting activities? That question has not been answered because there is no satisfactory answer. We should not continue to tolerate such a regime. The Greens support moves for a broader ban on political donations and will welcome any further legislative changes to be brought forward by the Government, but we believe it is urgent that donations are removed from the planning system as soon as possible. The outcomes of the inquiry into electoral funding will not be known for some time. Implementation of any of the recommendations of that inquiry could take months or years, or they may never be implemented.

The Premier's promise to reform the donation system may go the same way as the north-west rail line and the Parramatta to Epping rail link. The recommendations for the electoral funding inquiry may go the same way as recommendations of the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC] that aim to reduce corruption risks in the planning system. The Premier is well known for big announcements that are never implemented and there is no evidence yet that the donations reforms will be any more real than the many other announcements from this Government that have disappeared without a trace. The Labor Party's refusal to support this bill shows it is so addicted to developer donations that it cannot stop itself, regardless of the damage being done to the public standing of the planning Minister and the Premier, let alone the environment and heritage of this State.

So we wait in hope for a new electoral funding system that will remove the disgraceful conflicts of interest that have brought the planning system into such disrepute. In the meantime, unless we take the sort of action that this bill represents, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of developments will be considered by councillors and Ministers under a system so corrupted in the public mind that the community sees the planning system as little more than a fundraising racket for politicians. Participants in this debate have not advanced any good reasons for allowing such a discredited system to continue to undermine public faith in the planning and broader political systems. I urge all members to make the transition from high-principled words to effective action. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 26

Mr Ajaka	Ms Griffin	Mr Smith
Mr Brown	Mr Khan	Mr Tsang
Mr Clarke	Mr Lynn	Mr Veitch
Mr Colless	Mr Mason-Cox	Ms Voltz
Mr Costa	Reverend Dr Moyes	Mr West
Ms Fazio	Ms Parker	Ms Westwood
Ms Ficarra	Mrs Pavey	<i>Tellers,</i>
Miss Gardiner	Ms Robertson	Mr Donnelly
Mr Gay	Ms Sharpe	Mr Harwin

Noes, 4

Ms Hale
Dr Kaye
Tellers,
Mr Cohen
Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Question—That the motion [That this bill be now read a second time] as amended be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Bill referred to the Select Committee on Electoral and Political Funding for inquiry and report.

**OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AMENDMENT (LIABILITY OF VOLUNTEERS) BILL
2008**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 8 May 2008.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH [11.41 a.m.]: The Government opposes this proposal. The issue of the liability of volunteer officers on boards, community trusts and other such entities in New South Wales was canvassed in the Government's review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Numerous representations were made to the Government on this matter during 2005 and 2006 either by or on behalf of these volunteers. In each case the Government explained that there have been no prosecutions of volunteer officers since modern workplace safety legislation was adopted in New South Wales in 1983—that means none during the governments of Wran, Unsworth, Carr and Iemma, and none during the Greiner and Fahey governments. It must be remembered that prosecutions for breaches of workplace safety laws are made only as a last resort—that is, when all advice and assistance has failed and where there is a clear public interest to be served.

In moving this motion, the Hon. Rick Colless is attempting to engineer a crisis where no such crisis exists. Volunteers make an invaluable contribution to a wide range of boards, community trusts and other government entities; they should not be misled into a state of paranoia or exploited for cheap political points. The Government has listened to the concerns of volunteer board members; I believe that future legislative changes will address these concerns. However, this is but one component of an extremely important and sensitive legislative process. The Government has said that it will not sell the success of current workplace safety laws down the river before consensus can be achieved on some of its most difficult points. These laws have led directly to vastly improved workplace safety outcomes.

The WorkCover Statistical Bulletin for the year 2005-06 showed that the number of serious workplace injuries in New South Wales fell by 13 per cent on the previous year, and total workplace injuries were down

12 per cent. The incidence rate for workplace fatalities has more than halved since the WorkCover scheme commenced in 1987. Traditionally high-risk areas such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction and mining have experienced significant reductions in incidence rates for injury and fatality. The reforms have also led directly to an annual saving of more than \$5.5 billion to the State's economy and a boost in productivity that will add well over \$600 million in gross State product every year. This Government is not prepared to jeopardise these advances. On the contrary, proposed amended workplace safety legislation will build on these outcomes. As I said earlier, the Government opposes this proposal.

The Hon. CHRISTINE ROBERTSON [11.44 a.m.]: The Government opposes this proposal, as already stated. The Government is mindful and appreciative of the valuable work provided by community-based corporations, trusts and organisations—and, of course, I am wearing my special scarf today. It should be noted that no volunteer director has been prosecuted since modern occupational health and safety legislation was first introduced in New South Wales in 1983. The House will be aware that the statutory review of the State's workplace safety laws has been a major focus of the Government over the past year. Members will recall also that the initial draft amendment bill proposed that the Act be amended to exclude volunteers from prosecution; however, the Government has been unable to achieve consensus among key stakeholders on other aspects of the draft legislation. This has delayed the progress of all proposed amendments, including the exclusion of volunteers from prosecution.

The Government is doing all it can to get agreement to the solution from both sides. I am confident that future legislation will address the concerns of volunteer officers. On workplace safety laws the Opposition is trapped in a fiction of its own creation. Its understanding of the role of WorkCover ignores entirely the agency's role in providing advice and assistance to employers and workers in New South Wales. The Opposition chooses instead to believe that WorkCover's sole purpose is to prosecute; it is this misguided belief that motivates the Hon. Rick Colless to move this motion. This motivation just does not support the facts. WorkCover's latest statistical bulletin indicates that there were approximately 110,000 workplace injuries during the 2005-06 period, as well as around 140 work-related fatalities.

Yet over the past year WorkCover has undertaken only around 200 prosecutions, most of which involved serious injuries and fatalities. In fact, employers are 20 times more likely to receive advice from a WorkCover inspector than any form of penalty—that is a much more positive way to move forward. The Lemma Government is committed to ensuring that New South Wales is served by world's best practice workplace safety legislation, and this is what we will deliver to this Parliament in good time. We will benefit also from the new spirit of cooperation between the Commonwealth and the States and will be active in pursuing a harmonised approach to workplace safety across Australia. At the February meeting of the Workplace Relations Ministers Council, the New South Wales Government made it clear that it is committed to working with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to harmonise workplace safety laws. The New South Wales Government wants to see consistent legislation across the country sooner, rather than later—not a knee-jerk response to a crisis that does not exist. It is for these reasons that the Government cannot support this proposal.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ [11.47 a.m.]: More than 700 Crown reserves across the State are managed by community trust boards. The volunteers who sit on these boards provide an important service to their local communities and the Government is grateful for their continuing involvement and support in managing these important State assets. These volunteers are not left to interpret their occupational health and safety obligations without guidance. They are not waiting and fearing the day that WorkCover will come knocking on their door to prosecute them for making a mistake, as the Opposition would have this House believe.

The Department of Lands maintains comprehensive guidelines and operating instructions in the handbook *"A Trust Handbook—A Handbook for Trusts Managing Crown Land Reserves and Commons, and Trustees of Schools of Arts"* to guide these community trust boards and other Crown reserve trust managers. The handbook provides reserve trusts with clear and comprehensive guidelines and operating instructions on occupational health and safety including, particularly, trusts' obligations; instructions on developing and implementing an occupational health and safety management system; occupational health and safety training; hazard, incident and injury recording and reporting; formal notification procedures for incidents; investigating accidents and near misses; and injury and claim management.

The reserve trust handbook also provides community trust boards with the tools they need to manage occupational health and safety within the Crown reserves they care for on behalf of the people of New South Wales. Community trust boards can use these tools to get on and do the job they do so well for their communities. The first objective of the Occupational Health and Safety Act clearly states that the Act's intention

is "to secure and promote the health, safety and welfare of people at work". There have been no prosecutions of volunteer officers since modern workplace safety legislation was adopted in New South Wales in 1983. WorkCover has a key role providing advice and assistance. Prosecutions for breaches of workplace safety laws are made only as a last resort where that advice and assistance has failed and there is a clear public interest to be served. The New South Wales Government supports and values its volunteers.

The Government is committed, as my colleague has already pointed out, to ensuring that New South Wales is served by world's-best workplace safety legislation. And that is what we plan to deliver—a comprehensive package that addresses all occupational health and safety issues at once, not a series of knee-jerk reactions or a piece-meal approach, as the Opposition proposes. The Government opposes the motion and I urge all members to vote against it.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX [11.50 a.m.]: I support the comments of my colleague the Hon. Rick Colless on the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Liability of Volunteers) Bill 2008. I will address some of the nonsense that has flown from the Government benches in regard to the wider aspects of occupational health and safety. It is important that the record show that the Government is being incredibly hypocritical on this matter and is at a loss to understand the impact of its legislation on volunteers who perform a very valuable service in their communities. The Hon. Lynda Voltz and the Hon. Michael Veitch commented on the occupational health and safety statutory review and the changes that have been worked through the system. It has become patently clear to the Opposition that real reform in occupational health and safety is probably beyond the Government. There is clear evidence in that regard in the conduct of the Government over time.

Members would be aware that the Government has an occupational health and safety bill ready to roll, but it has refused to introduce it. Indeed, that proposed bill has gone through a very wide consultation process. It has widespread community and business support for the changes that it proposes, yet the hurdle that the Government seeks to overcome is in its own backyard—that is, getting union consent to some changes which, in the past, caused a lot of severe hardship for business. Similar to dealing with the problem that the Government faces with electricity privatisation, the Government is in a back room trying to work out how to deal with occupational health and safety to ensure that the union power base is not eroded.

I now refer to a couple of particular aspects in the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Bill 2007, in particular the strict liability regime that applies for occupational health and safety in New South Wales. It is a dire problem for a lot of businesses that, should they be subjected to a claim in respect of occupational health and safety, they have no natural justice rights. Under the current scheme no appeal rights are available. The liability is more or less a strict liability regime, given the burden of evidence. The access of unions to workplaces to prosecute claims is an ongoing concern to businesses. It is worth noting that if a union accesses a workplace and decides to bring a claim for an occupational health and safety matter, the union is entitled to do that under current legislation, and is also entitled to share in the proceeds of that court action.

The shame of that matter is that the proceeds of court actions in a strict liability regime is really at the heart and soul of the business concerned. A number of businesses have been bankrupted as a result, causing dire financial hardship; and a number of businesses have been sent very close to the wall. It is that situation that the proposed occupational health and safety bill sought to address. The business community was very strongly supportive of it. Given the Government's failure to make any progress on this matter, the Leader of the Opposition in the other House took it in hand and introduced a bill to deal with it. However, the Government derailed that process and sought to, again, retire to the back room to continue discussions with unions. A lack of consultation and willingness to act without the unions on board is paralysing the State. Indeed, consider electricity privatisation and the paralysis of that gridlock becomes very clear.

I return to the tenet of the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Liability of Volunteers) Bill 2008. I commend the Hon. Rick Colless for identifying a very significant problem for volunteers on community boards. They provide a valuable service to their communities and should not be at risk of liability under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000. I note that in his contribution to the debate he has outlined a range of submissions that he has received from people serving on those boards who are very fearful of the potential liability to which they may be exposed under current conditions. The reality is that the Government is out of touch. It does not understand the valuable contributions made by volunteers. In future, people will be less inclined to give their valuable time and as a result the communities will miss out. I certainly commend the bill to the House.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [11.56 a.m.]: As already outlined, the Government supports in principle the Occupational Health and Safety (Liability of Volunteers) Bill 2008, but has some issues with the timing of its introduction. The Minister is to hold further discussions in relation to the bill. Therefore, I seek to adjourn further debate until the next sitting day on which private members' business takes precedence.

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Postponement of Business

Private Members' Business item No. 5 in the Order of Precedence postponed on motion by the Hon. Greg Donnelly, on behalf of Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.

PUBLIC DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Debate resumed from 8 May 2008.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY [11.57 a.m.]: Under the former Federal Coalition Government, dental services in this State were essentially derelict. The lack of Federal financial assistance to the States resulted in a decline in the standard of dental health in New South Wales, the most populous Australian State. There are increasing reports by dental and medical experts that dental health in all States and Territories is facing real difficulties. In many instances children and young adults have major dental problems.

They may be cavities or more complicated dental matters that involve root canal treatment and other complex treatments. These people will need to have the work done. Dental health services were utterly neglected by the Commonwealth under the Howard Coalition administration. This debate has been around for some time. Time and time again health Ministers have reminded the House that dental care is a Commonwealth responsibility. The Federal Government has changed, and the new Federal Government has shown a preparedness to work towards much greater cooperation with the States not just in health but also in a whole range of areas. We are seeing a much better level of cooperation.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

RULES FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The PRESIDENT: Yesterday in question time a point of order was taken to a supplementary question. On the basis that the Minister indicated that he was prepared to answer the supplementary question, I allowed him to do so. In reviewing *Hansard*, however, I note that I had previously ruled the question out of order, and as a consequence I was in error in allowing the Minister to answer it. I would remind members, however, that under Standing Order 95 (3) a point of order is not required to cause the Chair to intervene to rule that a question is in contravention of the standing orders or to absolutely uphold the rule that interjections are disorderly. In accordance with the traditions of this House I always extend the maximum latitude possible to members during question time. A more strict legalistic approach would likely result in few questions being asked and answered, and even fewer members being present in the Chamber to listen to either.

POLICE MEDICAL DISCHARGE PAYMENTS

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Industrial Relations. On the eve of the New South Wales Police Association's biennial conference, is the Minister aware that the New South Wales Police Force takes an average of up to six weeks to process the final payment for police officers who are discharged on medical grounds if they were employed prior to 1988? Does the Office of Industrial Relations believe it is acceptable that many medically discharged police officers must

wait in excess of six weeks to receive their final payment when they have financial commitments to meet, such as mortgage payments, et cetera? Given that medical discharges are not decided overnight, what action is being taken or considered by the Office of Industrial Relations to ensure that the New South Wales Police Force processes payments much more expeditiously?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The Leader of the Opposition is referring to my role in relation to public sector employment rather than industrial relations. I concede that the question has an industrial relations dimension. However, it is about a public sector employment issue and I think it relates to the brief of the Minister for Police. I will undertake to investigate whether the alleged delays are occurring and, if they are, what action the Minister and the Government propose to take to overcome these issues, and I will make that answer available as soon as possible.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Will the Minister advise the House what the Iemma Government is doing to promote public education in New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I thank the member for her ongoing interest in education. Our public schools are inclusive; they offer a broad curriculum choice to meet the needs of all students and are the first choice of parents and students across the State. About two-thirds of primary and secondary students in New South Wales attend public schools. Monday 26 May marks the beginning of Education Week, which has been designed to showcase the great work that is going on in our public schools. Education Week brings together more than 745,000 students and 80,000 teachers, all taking part in celebrations in more than 2,200 public schools. A wide range of events and community activities will give families the opportunity to get involved and visit their local public school.

This year the theme for Education Week is "A Love of Learning" and some of the highlights include the Principal for a Day program, which will occur on Wednesday 28 May. Well-known community and business leaders will visit schools and shadow the principal to gain a better understanding of the demands of running a school. It is both exciting and educational for students. This year, for example, we have the ABC morning radio presenter and polymath and maths expert Adam Spencer, Channel 9's Peter Harvey, High Court Judge Michael Kirby, Elizabeth Anne McGregor, the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, and Tracey Fellows, the Managing Director of Microsoft Australia. More than 48 schools will participate in Principal for a Day this year.

The Back to School Program, which will run all week, invites past students to go back to their school and inspire and celebrate their great achievements with students. In the past we have had Olympic champion Kieren Perkins, former world champion motorcycle racer Wayne Gardner, fashion designer Alex Perry and media personality Deborah Hutton return to their old schools. The Gala Celebration and Parade of School Flags on Sunday 1 June is another popular activity. The gala at Tumbalong Park, Darling Harbour, will be like a mini Schools Spectacular showcasing the great talent in our public schools. It will feature a jazz orchestra, drummers, millennium marching band, the New South Wales Public Schools Junior Dance Company and hip-hop dancers. A parade of school flags will also be held on the day.

In addition, Education Week will feature hundreds of local activities, including a school leadership breakfast at Berkeley Vale Public School; exhibitions reflecting what schools are doing to preserve our environment in the Riverina, North Coast and Hunter areas; reconciliation day celebrations to coincide with Reconciliation Week and many more informative displays, performances, sporting events, debates and technological creations. As members can see, there will be something for everyone, so I encourage families to get out there, get involved and find out more about their local schools. Education and training remain a high priority for the Iemma Government. Our record \$11.2 billion Education and Training budget reinforces our commitment to literacy and numeracy, and practical strategies to address the skills shortage and education infrastructure. We are committed to ensuring that New South Wales students continue to receive a world-class education, and the Iemma Government is backing this up with resources and investments that students and teachers require.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Roads. Is the Minister aware that in a letter dated 14 April to a Tweed constituent the Federal Minister for infrastructure,

Anthony Albanese, indicated that \$2.4 billion will be allocated towards future upgrades of the Pacific Highway, including \$210 million for the Banora Point deviation project at Sexton Hill? Given that an internal departmental document has costed option C at under \$210 million, will the Minister now proceed with the wishes of the community and construct option C?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The New South Wales Government will work closely and cooperatively with the Rudd Federal Government on the Pacific Highway upgrade. We are moving ahead with the Banora Point upgrade project at Sexton Hill. The community does not want to delay this project. We have announced the preferred concept, and the environmental assessment was placed on display for public comment on Wednesday 20 February 2008. I am advised that the display closed on 31 March, and comments are now being assessed. We are getting on with the job of upgrading the Pacific Highway, and we will work closely and cooperatively with the Federal Government to get work started as soon as possible after detailed planning has been completed and approved.

In the 10 years since 1996 the New South Wales Labor Government has contributed \$1.66 billion to the Pacific Highway upgrade. In that time the Commonwealth contributed \$660 million—a huge contrast. In a three-year program to 2009, the New South Wales and Federal Governments are jointly investing a further \$1.3 billion in the Pacific Highway. This year the State Government has committed \$45 million to continue the planning, design and land acquisitions for a number of key Pacific Highway projects, including the Banora Point upgrade. The Banora Point upgrade will provide a high standard 2.5 kilometre dual carriageway and will connect the completed Chinderah bypass with Tweed Heads bypass. The upgrade will significantly improve safety and relieve traffic congestion on that section of the Pacific Highway.

The Hon. Duncan Gay: Point of order: I would be careful if I were you! You are already in trouble. Don't you start—you relish your job for as long as you have it because you are only temporary in that position.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Does the Deputy Leader of the Opposition have a point of order?

The Hon. Duncan Gay: My point of order relates to relevance. The Minister was asked a question about option C and he has not answered it.

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

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Do trucks use that area a lot? Is that why the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is interested? The preferred concept design was announced in September 2006, after careful consultation with the community. The Roads and Traffic Authority has continued to refine that concept design. Traffic suggestions have been made by the local community and Tweed Shire Council and have been incorporated into the design. I understand that the Roads and Traffic Authority has continued to consult with the community and other project stakeholders since the announcement of the preferred concept. I am advised the preferred option provides the best overall balance and certainty for the local community. A range of issues, including property impacts, hydrology, noise, traffic and access were closely considered as part of the assessment process. This option will provide uninterrupted flow for highway traffic and continue to provide effective highway access for local traffic.

I am advised that the Roads and Traffic Authority has conducted two reviews of an option proposed by the Tweed Chamber of Commerce, called option C, the key feature of which is a deep tunnel. Those reviews were undertaken in 2005 and 2006 by different specialist organisations. In December 2005, the review by Parsons Brinckerhoff found that, due to the geological restrictions, tunnelling would be very difficult and the construction of a tunnel would require extensive and prolonged blasting, which would have a major impact on the lives of people above the tunnel area. The 2006 independent review of costings for the design options was undertaken at my request after I met with a number of community members at Tweed Heads in June 2006. The review found that option C would be substantially more costly than the preferred option. As part of the environmental assessment for the upgrade, which was recently on display for public comment, the independent review of costings has been updated. [*Time expired.*]

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY PRIVATISATION

Dr JOHN KAYE: My question without notice is directed to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer list those utility corporations or other potential purchasers or lessees of the energy services corporation's undertakings with which the Treasurer's office or his department has had communications in relation to the proposed sale of the State-owned retailers, or the leasing of the State-owned generators?

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: He's got you there, hasn't he?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: He hasn't got me. Clearly this question is of such detail—

The Hon. Catherine Cusack: Too much detail?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: I have many meetings with many people and I do not know whether they are about the very issues to which the Dr John Kaye referred. It may well be that some of the people with whom I have had meetings are interested in the energy companies that are likely to be leased, but at the same time have come to see me about other matters. I am sure that has also occurred with the Minister for Energy. It is a difficult question to answer.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I ask a supplementary question so the Treasurer can elucidate further information on his answer. Has the Treasurer met with the Shenhua group or the China Huaneng group?

The Hon. Amanda Fazio: Point of order: The supplementary question of Dr John Kaye is out of order because, firstly, the Minister said the question was too detailed to answer.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

The Hon. Amanda Fazio: Secondly, the member is asking about organisations that were not mentioned in his first question and to which the Minister did not refer.

Dr John Kaye: To the point of order: It was unfortunate that the Hon. Amanda Fazio did not allow me to complete my sentence. I was asking whether the Treasurer or officers of his department had meetings with those two specific corporations.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The standing orders allow a supplementary question to be asked of a Minister to elucidate an answer. By members simply using the word "elucidate" in a question that contains additional information does not make it in order as a supplementary question. The question is out of order.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE: SERVICE AND EXCELLENCE AWARDS

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Commerce. Will the Minister update the House on the recent service and excellence awards of the Department of Commerce, and specifically how the people and projects recognised are benefiting the people of New South Wales?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I thank the honourable member for his interest in this important matter. The Department of Commerce plays an integral part in connecting, supporting and delivering value to the citizens of New South Wales. I recently had the pleasure of presenting the department's Service and Excellence Awards and was happy to be able to recognise the many individuals and teams responsible for delivering some great projects. A range of individual and team awards were handed out on the day including the People Management Award, which recognises individual achievements in developing, aiding and nurturing colleagues. The winner of that award, Bruce Pettman, is the department's principal Heritage Architect. He manages a team that repairs and adapts significant historic public buildings and places across New South Wales. He demonstrated the value of open communication and creative problem solving to resolve issues surrounding heritage conservation.

The Innovation Award recognised those who have used creativity and innovation to create new and better ways of doing things. The individual winner was Joe Tokarczuk for the \$10.88 million Mitchell Link Fibre Trunk project. That project addressed a gap in the State's fibre-optic broadband telecommunications infrastructure on the route between Sydney and Dubbo. The Managing Projects Award recognised excellence in project or program management. The individual winner was Duncan Cumming for managing the delivery of the Iemma Government's \$52 million Prospect raw water pumping station, which now provides Sydney with an emergency backup water supply. An award that specifically recognises achievement in improving quality of life for the people in New South Wales, the Service Delivery Community Award, was presented to Jim Paton, for the Lift and Link-ways Project at Macarthur Girls High School. Jim project-managed the complicated installation of lifts and link-ways at Macarthur Girls High School to provide access for students with special needs.

The Director-General's Young Achiever Award recognises the outstanding achievements of young employees, and the winner of that was Kate Miles. Kate successfully managed and delivered a project to install nearly 250 ultraviolet disinfection and filtration systems in schools that were not connected to the mains water supply. New this year was the Minister's Award for Excellence, which recognises outstanding performance and achievement. The winner was the Lake Cargelligo emergency management response team. Members might be aware that just days before Christmas the water intake pipeline for the Lake Cargelligo water supply was damaged during a storm, cutting off an essential supply of water to local communities. This team pulled out all stops to fix the damage, working until late on Christmas eve at the expense of precious family time. I take this opportunity to again congratulate the Department of Commerce staff recognised by these awards. It is clear from the range of activities encompassed by these awards that the Department of Commerce has established itself as a significant asset to both Government and the hardworking families of New South Wales.

CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Reverend the Hon. Dr GORDON MOYES: I address my question to the Minister for Lands, representing the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health). Is the Minister aware that the big intergenerational issue that dominates the health debate is not related to our children but focuses on the ageing of baby boomers and the demands for better health care? In particular, is the Minister aware of recent statistics which finds that 25 per cent of all health-related disability under the age of 14 is due to mental health problems in children? That rose to 60 per cent for all 15-year-olds to 34-year-olds, and overall, 75 per cent of all adult mental disorders commence before the age of 25? Is the Minister aware that those in early childhood or in the teenage years—generation Z—will build and sustain our communities, support our economy, and generate prosperity for future generations? Will the Minister inform the House what research and clinical policies will be established to deliver a twenty-first century response to child and youth mental health problems?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: I thank the honourable member for his question and undertake to pass it on to the Minister concerned for his speedy reply.

BEECHWOOD HOMES

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My question without notice is directed to the Treasurer. Is the Treasurer concerned for the welfare of 400 clients of Beechwood with homes under construction? Has Minister Burney briefed the Treasurer on the problem and sought financial backing or other assistance for these victims? How many of those clients are eligible for the \$300,000 insurance cover as claimed by the Minister?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: I heard the Minister answer this question yesterday—and I think it was on the radio. I refer to her answer.

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES INNOVATION

The Hon. IAN WEST: My question is addressed to the Minister for State Development. What is the Lemna Government doing to support innovative manufacturing industries in Sydney?

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: I thank the honourable member for his question and note his long-term interest in manufacturing. Today, just two months after the announcement that V Australia was setting up its headquarters in Sydney, I am pleased to announce New South Wales Government support for an expansion to Turbomeca Australasia's operations at Bankstown airport. Turbomeca plans to create more than 30 jobs initially when it establishes a new helicopter engine repair operation later this year.

Turbomeca Australasia, part of the global SAFRAN Group, is investing \$9.5 million to establish a second repair and overhaul facility at Bankstown. The facility will employ 33 people within the first five years and as many as 100 workers when product lines are expanded. The new facility will service growing national and international markets. Sixty per cent of civil helicopter engines sold in Australia are Turbomeca engines and, with the Department of Defence purchasing new helicopters for the navy and army, local demand is bound to increase. As a continuation of Turbomeca's current trend, about 80 per cent of the increased global activities will be for the export market, servicing increased global demand.

Turbomeca currently employs more than 120 people at Bankstown airport, assembling and servicing helicopter engines for the Australian and global markets. New South Wales Government support for Turbomeca dates back to 1999 when the company moved to Bankstown from Alexandria. The Department of State and

Regional Development worked with Turbomeca to secure a longstanding relationship in New South Wales against competition from Victoria and Queensland. The operations of Turbomeca Australasia are at the leading edge of innovation. Turbomeca is the only company in Australia assembling helicopter engines and clearly it is going from strength to strength. The company's capabilities include assembly, servicing and engine testing for more than 300 military and civil engines in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and other island states of the Pacific. The new operation will allow the company to provide helicopter engine services to Europe as well as the Asia-Pacific region. It is a great Australian success story, one built on the foresight and strategic planning at a global level led by its managing director, Mr Brayle, and combined with the skills of the whole Turbomeca team. Turbomeca demonstrates that we can compete very successfully in the international market when skills and innovation are combined.

Innovation of this magnitude is one of the keys to the State's future economic growth. The Government recently spelt this out in the New South Wales innovation statement. We are determined to ensure that New South Wales fosters innovation in those industry sectors where we have a clear comparative advantage. Manufacturing is one such sector and the consistent success of manufacturing, especially in western Sydney, underscores why the New South Wales Government has singled out the sector as one of the pillars of innovation. Manufacturing is the largest industry in western Sydney and, as this is part of Western Sydney Manufacturing Week, there is no better time to note that the area has more than 13,000 individual businesses collectively generating annual sales and service income of more than \$30 billion.

I should point out Turbomeca's latest expansion comes hard on the heels of Virgin Blue's decision to select Sydney as the operational headquarters for V Australia, its new international airline. V Australia's choice of Sydney is a massive vote of confidence in this State and its workforce. The new international airline is set to bring great benefits to Australia, and in particular New South Wales, as it will not only bring a new wave of visitors to our shores but will create more jobs in the aviation sector. The Virgin announcement is a major win for New South Wales workers with V Australia to create 1,000 new jobs in the State, including pilots, ground crew and operational staff. Government support for companies of the calibre of Turbomeca and Virgin underscores our determination to secure long-term sustainable business and industry development for New South Wales.

FIREARMS LICENCE RENEWAL NOTICES

The Hon. ROY SMITH: My question is directed to the Minister for Roads, representing the Minister for Police. I refer to an article in today's *Daily Advertiser* which reports on comments made by a senior police officer who said that the firearms registry no longer sends letters to gun licence holders to remind them when their licence is about to expire and that, as a consequence, hundreds of firearms have been confiscated from New South Wales farmers who have inadvertently allowed their firearm licences to lapse. Is it a fact that the firearms registry is not sending reminder notices? Given the serious consequences for people who inadvertently fail to renew their firearms licence, and given that people get reminder notices for such things as car registration and drivers licences, will the Minister undertake to include in legislation a provision that the firearms registry must send timely renewal notices to firearms licence holders?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I thank the member for his question and interest in this matter and will refer it to the Minister for Police for a speedy response.

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY PRIVATISATION

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX: My question without notice is directed to the Treasurer. What action has the Treasurer taken in the public interest to establish an independent body comprising the Auditor-General, community representatives and financial experts to oversee and monitor the use of the funds realised from the sale or lease of New South Wales electricity assets?

The Hon. Eric Roozendaal: Another recycled question.

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: It is a recycled question, but let me say that the Auditor-General has extensive powers under legislation to monitor all of the Government's activities.

SENTENCING TRENDS

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN: My question without notice is addressed to the Attorney General. What is the latest information on sentencing trends in New South Wales?

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: Following the release of the New South Wales Sentencing Council's latest report on sentencing trends and practices, which examines the 12-month period up to August of last year, I am pleased to provide information to the House on this important issue. The report gives consideration to the standard non-parole period scheme introduced by the Government in 2003 and finds that for many offences sentences are getting longer following the introduction of the scheme. For murder, the midpoint of sentences increased from 18 years prior to the scheme to over 20 years afterwards. The midpoint for murder non-parole periods increased from 14 years to 18 years.

The council found that the scheme was leading to greater consistency in sentencing with a narrowing of the range of sentences imposed. The council also found that the term of sentence had increased for 11 out of 15 of the scheme offences whilst remaining consistent for two other offences. There has been an increase in the rates of imprisonment for some offences. For example, the percentage of offenders convicted of aggravated indecent assault who are sent to jail has risen by 15 percentage points and the percentage going to jail for aggravated indecent assault of a child under 10 years of age has increased by 20 percentage points.

The council also reported a considerable increase in the number of successful Crown appeals heard by the Court of Criminal Appeal where the standard non-parole period was an issue. The Crown recorded an 81 per cent success rate, up from 73 per cent in the preceding year. For some offences the number of cases is too small to be statistically significant, but nonetheless the observations we can draw are encouraging. The report also provides information on projects that the council has completed in 2006-07, including reports presented to me and self-initiated projects. For example, late last year I released the council's interim report on the effectiveness of fines, which highlighted a number of issues with the way that fines and penalty notices are imposed, administered and enforced in New South Wales.

The Government has established a working party to respond to the sentencing council's recommendations, including making the payment of fines easier by allowing people to pay penalty notices by instalments and expanding the role of the hardship review board in reviewing decisions of the State Debt Recovery Office. The council is due to report on the use of fines for breaches of occupational health and safety matters and environmental offences shortly.

Earlier this year I released the Sentencing Council's review of the Periodic Detention Scheme. While acknowledging that the Periodic Detention Scheme has been a valuable sentencing option for some offenders, the council has recommended that it be replaced with a new sentencing option—the Community Corrections Order. The Government is currently considering the council's proposal, which would feature stringent conditions such as curfews or residential requirements, participation in rehabilitation or educational programs, and the performance of community work. The council's functions were recently extended to include the education of the public on sentencing matters.

In this capacity, the council co-authored the sentencing information package, a booklet designed to assist victims of crime understand the sentencing process. As part of its educative function, the council is currently conducting a joint project with the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research examining public attitudes towards sentencing. A report detailing the results of a survey of 1,000 participants will be completed and should provide a valuable measure of what the public thinks of the efficiency, administration and fairness of the State's criminal justice system. I thank all members of the council and its staff for their hard work over the last year and for the considered reports that they have given me.

PROBLEM GAMBLING WEEK

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I ask the Treasurer: As this week is Problem Gambling Week, could he inform the House how much State revenue comes from money raised from gambling? What actions is the Treasurer taking to wean his Government off gambling revenue? Does he plan to reduce the State's dependence on this revenue? Will he increase funding to tackle the significant economic health and social consequences of the gambling epidemic in this State?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: The member's question is full of false premises. The Government is not dependent on gambling revenue. In fact, gambling revenue is a very small proportion of State government revenue. The honourable member ought to get her facts right before asking a question like that.

SNOWY HYDRO CORPORATION

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I direct my question to the Treasurer. Given that he has told the people of Cooma that he believes the best way the Snowy Hydro Corporation can compete in the national

electricity market and continue to grow is for the Federal Government to take over this \$3 billion asset, what contact has he had with his Federal Labor counterparts to make that happen, and what representations has the local member, Steve Whan, made to the Treasurer to ensure that the investment required to maintain the viability of the biggest employer in his electorate is secured?

The Hon. MICHAEL COSTA: I am amazed at the member's question. At a recent Cabinet meeting in Cooma many members of the local community—some of whom opposed the proposition to sell Snowy Hydro—came to see me and indicated that they had reconsidered their position and that the Government should consider Snowy Hydro as part of its current energy strategy. I indicated to them that the Government had no intention of doing anything with the Snowy—I think the Minister for Energy did that. Members should remember that Coalition members pulled the plug on Snowy Hydro. The Howard Government pulled the plug, not this Government. The Coalition needs to explain to the people of Cooma its position on the Snowy.

FEDERAL BUDGET: RURAL AND REGIONAL IMPACT

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH: My question is addressed to the Minister for Rural Affairs, and Minister for Regional Development. Could the Minister advise the House of some of the implications for rural and regional New South Wales as a result of the Federal budget, and other matters relevant to country New South Wales?

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox: Are you relevant to country New South Wales?

The Hon. TONY KELLY: A good question and a good interjection by the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox. The Rudd Government appeared on the scene just in the nick of time for rural and regional Australia. I welcome the Rudd Government's first budget as a down payment on a stronger, more sustainable economic environment for the bush. I am encouraged by the announcement by Senator Conroy of an extension of the Australian broadband guarantee until 2012 to safeguard broadband opportunities for all Australians, regardless of where they live.

After ditching the inadequate OPEL deal, which was knocked up in the dying days of the Howard Government, and with this new guarantee in place the Rudd Government can now begin to implement its commitment to establish a national broadband network to provide high-speed broadband services right across the nation. I also welcome the new direction for regional Australia announced in the Federal budget based around the new \$176 million Better Regions Program and up to \$74 million for the Regional Development Australia network. This budget is a welcome change from the Howard years. Finally we have a budget with a plan for the bush that does not rely on a bit of pork-barrelling here and there.

State and regional development Ministers around the country will be sitting down with our Federal colleagues to work out the best way of delivering to the regions through this new, cooperative, long-term plan for regional development. Rather than planning for the future The Nationals spent their years in power caving in to the Liberals, selling out country families on businesses like Telstra, broadband and WorkChoices. Their answer to regional development—the sustainable regions and regional partnerships programs—was politically motivated and morally bankrupt. The National Audit Office stated that these programs had fallen short of an acceptable standard of public administration.

No wonder a recent editorial entitled "No future for isolated Nats" saw the future looking pretty fuzzy for the Opposition, with the traditional base of The Nationals eroded by Country Labor and the Independents. Members would have to agree that they are fairly strong words. Did the editorial calling on The Nationals to team up with the Liberals appear in one of those inner city newspapers? No! Was it one of the big metropolitan dailies, or even the regional *Illawarra Mercury* or *Newcastle Herald*? No! These words of wisdom came from an editorial in the *Land* dated 17 April. I am happy to table last week's editorial in the *Land*. When the *Land* gives up on The Nationals, the game is over. We are all aware of last month's merger shenanigans north of the border so I do not need to elaborate on them. In New South Wales we have country-based Liberals such as Alby Schultz, who also writes to the *Land* and makes suggestions.

The Hon. Helen Westwood: A great letter.

The Hon. TONY KELLY: It was a great letter. Alby Schultz and Bill Heffernan are licking their lips over the skeletal remains of The Nationals. On a point of clarification: Recently I referred to talks regarding the Federal seat of Lyne. I state for the record that I have not had any negotiations with Senator Bill Heffernan on what happens once Mark Vaile stands down. I repeat the offer I made last year to The Nationals: they should put "country" back in their name and join Country Labor.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Mr IAN COHEN: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Does he think it is important to teach New South Wales students and schoolchildren skills to care for their environment, such as the concept of reducing, reusing and recycling in the classroom? Do all New South Wales students, both primary and secondary, have access to facilities within their school grounds for recycling and waste separation as they do at home via kerbside collection? Would the Minister support a scheme whereby the Government ensured that all New South Wales schools had recycling facilities, thereby creating consistency between what is taught in the classroom and what is practised in the schoolyard?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: The member asked a good question about recycling—an issue that has been on my mind of late. I go around to schools a fair bit and I see many things that are happening that would make the Greens and all responsible people interested in conservation excited and happy. However, I do not know whether Opposition members would feel that way. A lot of things are happening that are affecting primary school-aged children through to secondary school-aged children—the higher and more senior levels. The science curriculum is taught in a way that encourages students to question environmental issues and it challenges them in respect of conservation issues.

At the younger level schoolchildren are often involved in useful lessons regarding the principles of conservation and sustainability, and school structure initiatives such as the installation of water tanks and sustainable gardening. Those sorts of programs are in place in primary schools. Recycling and the development and use of composting and other sustainability initiatives are very common. In fact, there is scarcely a primary school that I have been to where there is not some form of environmental or sustainability initiative.

The Iemma Government welcomes the Solar in Schools funding to improve energy and water efficiency. The funding will provide up to \$50,000 to more than 9,000 schools across Australia to install solar power systems and other measures, and this aligns with existing New South Wales initiatives and plans, and gives them greater strength. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training, and students and staff in schools and TAFE colleges across New South Wales have a longstanding commitment to helping the environment in developing sustainability principles in schools. On 8 May 2008 the Premier announced that the New South Wales Government will become carbon neutral by 2020. This move will help the environment and save taxpayers millions of dollars.

The Hon. Greg Pearce: At what cost?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: No, you have to listen to this because it is very important. "Learning for Sustainability", the New South Wales Environmental Education Plan 2007 to 2010, is the Government's environmental education plan for students across the State. We all can contribute to reducing our carbon footprint in a range of ways, including using renewable energy sources, reducing our use of energy—

The Hon. Greg Pearce: Bike riding.

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: That is one useful suggestion, yes. Proper disposal of industrial pollutants and sustainable usage of land and forestry are other ways we can reduce our carbon footprint. A \$20 million lighting upgrade program for schools and TAFE over five years has been estimated to achieve a 14 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions at up to 150 schools in the program. The department has built schools that incorporate passive solar features and will continue to research, design and build energy-efficient facilities that incorporate increasingly sophisticated passive solar design solutions. I thank the agency of my colleague the Minister for Roads, and Minister for Commerce, for its fantastic work looking at best-cost practices that also produce sustainable and environmentally acceptable outcomes.

The department will seek to achieve a 4.5 star energy rating on its offices in excess of 1,000 square metres by 1 July 2011. However, as the member knows, many Department of Education and Training buildings are subject to heritage listing. Many people would like to continue to use those buildings as education properties, but it is expensive to convert them along sustainability lines simply because of their age and physics. The department already purchases a percentage of its electricity from green sources, and is well advanced on achieving the recycling target of 85 per cent recycled content of all copy paper purchased by 2014.

[*Interruption*]

The problem with the Opposition is that it is recycling its jokes. New South Wales government schools are well prepared to support the Government's target of carbon neutrality by 2020. Every government school is required to have a school environment management plan addressing the sustainable management of resources such as energy and water, and linking this to classroom teaching programs. [*Time expired.*]

Mr IAN COHEN: I ask a supplementary question. I appreciate the advances in schools as outlined by the Minister, but do his comments relate to the part of the question about standardised recycling bins in public schools particularly, but also private schools, similar to the kerbside collection?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: If I do not answer the member's question in my additional and concluding remarks, I will provide further information at a later time. As I said at the beginning of my initial response, I am not aware of a school that I have visited that does not have an appropriate recycling initiative; however, some may not have caught up with that part of the program. I will investigate that and forward any information I receive on it to the member. The Government has three integrated-support programs for sustainable energy use in schools. The Sustainable Schools website, which I launched last year, provides for the planning template, energy audit tools and case studies of best practice in sustainable energy education. The Schools Climate Change Initiative has developed sustainable energy and climate change teaching programs and resources to assist the study of these issues in the classroom. A \$5 million Student Energy Savings Fund will promote energy savings projects developed by school students. These programs will support the Schools Energy Efficiency Program, which provides \$20 million for energy-efficient lighting in secondary schools.

Through these programs we not only want to put initiatives in place in the schools, as the question suggests, but also we want active education of students in sustainability and recycling issues. As the largest provider of vocational education and training in Australia, TAFE is in a unique position to contribute to sustainability education and runs specific courses to do so. The Premier and the Government will have future announcements about that shortly.

F3 TO BRANXTON LINK ROAD

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Roads, and Minister for Commerce. Is the Minister aware that the Federal budget this week did not provide any funding for the construction of the F3 to Branxton link road, but in its place allocated funding to conduct the twenty-eighth study into the transport needs of the Lower Hunter? Can the Minister explain to the House what this means for the \$20 million allocated in this year's 2007-08 State budget for the construction of this project and the millions of dollars spent in previous years? How much more of taxpayers' money is the Minister going to waste in delaying the construction of this project? Is it inevitable that the F3 to Branxton link road will go down in history as the Hunter's version of the failed Lane Cove Tunnel project, the failed Cross City Tunnel project, and the failed Spit Bridge project?

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I welcome the Rudd Government's commitment to planning and transport needs in the Lower Hunter. The Federal Government has committed \$800,000 in 2008-09 for this study, with the balance of the estimated \$1 million study costs to be provided by the New South Wales Government. This study will examine the overall transport needs of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, Maitland and Cessnock. I am pleased that future roads planning in this region will be part of the integrated approach to transport planning. The New South Wales Government will continue to work cooperatively with the Rudd Labor Government to improve roads throughout the Hunter and New South Wales.

WORKPLACE RIGHTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Hon. LYNDIA VOLTZ: My question is addressed to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Can the Minister advise the House about any Iemma Government initiatives to help young people better understand their workplace rights?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: I thank the member for her question and her ongoing interest in this important area. Many young people enter the workforce while still at school, getting jobs to supplement their pocket money and, obviously, to give them a sense of the independence and freedom that earning an income can bring. Many young people thrive also on the responsibilities they are given and the new friendships they are able to forge through the workplace. Unfortunately, for the first time the workplace is also a place at which they are most at risk. Comprehensive research conducted by the New South Wales Office of Industrial Relations clearly shows that young people are vulnerable when it comes to workplace rights. For example, the

research reveals that 52 per cent did not know what type of agreement covered their work, 46 per cent did not get written information from their employer about pay, hours worked or occupational health and safety when they were recruited, and 26 per cent did not get a payslip with each pay.

All workers should know this information before they start their new jobs. Most employers want to do the right thing by their staff but, unfortunately, some unscrupulous businesses take advantage of young people's lack of experience. The New South Wales Office of Industrial Relations provides advice and support to businesses to help them meet their workplace responsibilities and helps workers understand their workplace rights. This financial year New South Wales inspectors will visit 12,850 businesses across the State to ensure our workplaces are fair and productive. The Office of Industrial Relations is promoting awareness of workplace rights and responsibilities to apprentices and trainees undertaking TAFE studies.

Last year the office conducted face-to-face presentations to more than 2,000 young apprentices and trainees in 30 TAFE colleges across New South Wales. The program educates students about exactly what an award is—a legal document that sets out what they should be receiving from their employer in their pay and by way of entitlements. Students also are provided with information about specific entitlements, such as penalty payments and the hours their employer can request them to work. Importantly, students are encouraged also to think about what their employer may expect from them. Feedback from TAFE teachers tells us that this program provides essential information that better prepares their students for the workplace.

The Office of Industrial Relations also provides resources to secondary schools and career counsellors to distribute to senior students detailing their rights at work, including *Offered a job, know your legal rights*, a pocket-sized booklet that provides comprehensive information for young workers, and wallet cards and stickers promoting our Young People at Work website. A further initiative to promote workplace rights among younger people is the "Know the deal" video competition. The competition challenges year 7 to year 10 students to produce an engaging and informative video advertisement for their peers that contains an important message about workplace rights and promotes the Office of Industrial Relations' Young People at Work website.

Students can win \$250 for themselves and \$1,000 for their school and there are prize categories for both metropolitan and country schools. The winning advertisements may be loaded onto relevant youth websites to promote the office's Young People at Work online resources. Information about the competition will be distributed to all high schools in the next two weeks and will be promoted on the Young People at Work website at www.youngpeopleatwork.nsw.gov.au.

PARKLEA PRISON VIDEO FOOTAGE

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I address my question without notice to the Minister for Justice. I refer to media reports on 6 May 2008 of a raid on the cells of prisoners at Parklea prison, and specifically to video footage of that raid that appeared on commercial media showing the faces and personal effects of two prisoners. Why was that search filmed? Who made the decision that the footage should be given to commercial media outlets? Was permission sought from or given by the individual prisoners concerned for footage showing their faces and personal effects to be distributed to commercial media outlets?

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: The Government makes no apologies for ensuring that our system remains safe and secure; that means from time to time conducting raids on prisons in order to uncover contraband. People who want to deal in contraband in the prison system should not count on a good night's sleep, because they will not get one. There will be times when contraband among prisoners will become an issue if their personal effects are not checked to determine whether they have mobile phones, drugs or other implements. If Ms Sylvia Hale thinks that is not the way to run a safe prison system, she has another think coming, because that will not be happening. Raids will be carried out from time to time, and without prior notice to her or to anyone else.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: I ask a supplementary question. My question concerned giving permission for the raid to be filmed and whether the permission of prisoners whose faces and personal effects were shown was obtained. My question related not to the holding of the raid, but to the permission for filming.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: Point of order: The member has repeated the original question. She did not ask a supplementary question.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I uphold the point of order.

SCHOOL COMPUTERS

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Does the Minister agree with the West Australian Premier that the Federal Government has underfunded the rollout of the Computers in Schools Program for students in years 9 to 12? Does the Minister agree with the comments by the Prime Minister on ABC radio that if there were "any other roll-on of unanticipated costs associated with this program from the States and Territories, then we'd work together about how we could best meet those needs". Will the Minister guarantee that no school in New South Wales and no parents and citizens association will have to pay for the shortfall in the installation of computers?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: In answer to the first part of the question, I suppose it is a truism to say that State Treasurers and Premiers of all persuasions will always say that any Commonwealth program related to State undertakings is underfunded. It could be called the first step in an ambit position, so I would not worry too much about what my good friend Premier Carpenter says about programs. Perth is a long way away. We do care what happens in Perth, but it has its own issues to deal with. If the Hon. John Ajaka really wants to know what Premier Carpenter thinks, he might take the opportunity to ask him.

I agree with the Prime Minister that the program in place as part of the Rudd education revolution to roll out more computers across primary and high schools in New South Wales has resulted in more computers being rolled out for some time. Indeed, the proud boast of this Government is to be the first anywhere in the world to connect all public schools to the Internet. That was one of our great achievements. We are building on a whole range of other important issues around using digital technology in education. The Connected Classrooms Initiative is critical to not only ensuring that the promise of comprehensive education is available—that is, that any child going to any school can get the curriculum to the level of richness that is appropriate to the child's aptitude or ability—but also to ensuring that people in regional areas have access to the full range of the curriculum and opportunities that young people who live in the metropolitan area of Sydney or larger regional centres have.

The Connected Classrooms Initiative gives a whole lot of prospects for cross-referencing and cross-activities between primary and secondary schooling and TAFE and university to give better transitions to young people. It will provide alternative pathways, including pathways to employment while the students are attending school. That is part of another debate, about the school leaving age. A whole range of opportunities is offered because of programs in education in New South Wales since the election of the Carr Government. This is what I call the silent revolution. It has been continued and improved by recent initiatives of Premier Iemma and the Iemma Government. We are doing very well in education, specifically in digital information education.

[*Interruption*]

The Hon. Robyn Parker is interested in education; she may well know some of these important facts about how well the Iemma Government is doing in education. Perhaps for the benefit of other members she will stop interjecting and listen to the rest of my answer, which is that a number of unique opportunities have been created for our young people in our schools via the Rudd education revolution, particularly the digital rollout package. There is a saying, and the Treasurer would agree with it, that one should never look a gift-horse in the mouth. As a result of the initiatives in the digital information component in the Rudd education revolution, there is a prospect that has been capitalised on by the Department of Education and Training.

The Government is very satisfied that we will be able to extend access to information technology to young people in schools very comprehensively. Not only that, but because of good work by the Department of Education and Training, Treasury and the Department of Commerce I am satisfied that we will be able to undertake the promise of that opportunity, which was put in place by the Rudd digital education revolution, and the other important components that make up the requirement for doing very well, that of professional development and assistance to teachers. [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. Tony Kelly: Mr President, I am not sure whether this is a point of order, and you will obviously determine that, but I would appreciate you acknowledging the presence in the public gallery of the holder of the most senior Nationals position in the State: the Mayor of Dubbo.

The PRESIDENT: Order! There is no point of order. However, I certainly acknowledge his presence.

COLOUR CITY CUP RACE DAY, ORANGE

FOOD OF ORANGE DISTRICT WEEK

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: My question is addressed to the Minister for Primary Industries. Will the Minister inform the House about the success of the recent Colour City Cup race day meeting and FOOD Week in Orange, that is the Food of Orange District Week?

[Interruption]

The PRESIDENT: Order! All members of the Opposition are called to order for the first time.

The Hon. IAN MACDONALD: Last month I was pleased to attend the Colour City Cup race day event in Orange, which attracted more than 3,000 people to the Towac Park racecourse. Like many rural communities—in particular the horse industry in those communities—the central west was affected by equine influenza, horse flu, both economically and socially. To help get the local industry back on its feet I worked with the Orange City Council and the Golden West Race Club to secure a half-day public holiday for the event on Friday 11 April, in cooperation with the Minister for Industrial Relations. The half-day holiday was designed to coincide with the beginning of the Food of Orange District Week, known as FOOD Week, to help get that important tourism event off to a flying start. I am pleased to report the event was regarded as a huge success from a sporting and tourism perspective. The following day the front page of the *Central Western Daily* ran the headline, "It's a winner: Macdonald". The editorial stated:

The numbers were on par or better than previous successful meetings like the picnic races of a big Melbourne Cup day meeting.

And, further:

The solid crowd helped the half-day holiday cup clear its first major hurdle.

Local residents were joined by hundreds of visitors who came from across the central west and further afield to enjoy some quality racing. The event also recognised the Department of Primary Industries' successful management of horse flu, which was officially eradicated in February this year. There are about 700 staff at the Department of Primary Industries' head office in Orange. The department is one of the largest employers in the city, so it was only fitting that the department also supported the event through race sponsorship. Those who attended the Colour City Cup even got the chance to see the former Melbourne Cup winning horse Might and Power and the Melbourne Cup itself, which was kindly brought to Orange by owner Nick Moraitis.

Later that night I had the honour of launching the seventeenth annual FOOD Week event in Orange. It is a celebration of the city's award-winning wineries, producers and restaurants. Orange has established one of the most important wine industries of finesse and quality in New South Wales, and it is the highest altitude winegrowing region in Australia. The city is at the heart of a significant and diverse food region that produces high-quality beef, lamb, pork, venison, rabbit, olive oil and grains, to name just a few products. There are more than 36 wineries in Orange, including about 20 that have cellar door sales. I can assure members that they are excellent. The introduction of a half-day holiday is not just about racing; it is about putting Orange and the Central West on the map as a destination of choice for high-quality sporting events and food and wine.

Given the enormous benefits of the half-day holiday, Orange simply cannot afford not to take up this opportunity again. With the concurrence of the Minister for Industrial Relations, we are putting this event on again next year—indeed, for the next five years. I was disappointed to hear that in the week leading up to the event the member for Orange, Russell Turner—nice bloke though he is—could not or would not appreciate all these positive benefits for the place he calls home. The half-day holiday was announced before Christmas but it took Mr Turner until after Easter to make his views known. I point out that 23 half-day holidays are held across New South Wales every year for events such as horse racing carnivals, festivals and rural show days. Many of our more important regional centres have a half-day holiday each year for this purpose. Members can rest assured that we will work with Orange City Council and Central West Racing Club to continue to make this a great event and to build it over the next few years.

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

WORKPLACE FATALITIES

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: On 10 April 2008 the Hon. John Ajaka asked me about workplace fatalities. The WorkCover's Fatalities Unit was established on 30 September 2002 as a recommendation of the

New South Wales Workplace Safety Summit in 2002. Since its establishment the unit has pursued 202 prosecutions. There are currently 80 matters in relation to which the investigation or coronial inquest is not yet complete. There are no fatality matters that are statute barred.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICES BUDGET

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: On 10 April Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile asked me a question without notice about cigarette and alcohol initiatives. Substance abuse is one of the most complex and potentially devastating problems facing our community today. Through the State Plan we have identified a target of keeping illicit drug use below 15 per cent. We have also committed to reducing total risk drinking to below 25 per cent by 2012 and reducing smoking rates by 1 per cent each year to 2010 and beyond. Our strategies for reducing binge drinking are resulting in positive trends, with data showing a significant reduction in risk drinking among both the general population and students.

Last year we piloted a successful responsible drinking education campaign, "Be Part of It, Not out of It", focusing on the problems associated with excessive or binge drinking. The Minister for Health has since approved a second phase of the campaign. This time it is aimed specifically at 14- to 20-year-olds. This year alone the Iemma Government will spend \$12 million on anti-smoking media campaigns. We are also set to release a major discussion paper on the next steps to be taken in relation to reducing the smoking rate with a particular focus on measures targeting children and young people. We will ask the community for comments on a range of proposals, including toughening the registration of tobacco retailers, deregistration of those convicted of selling cigarettes to minors and a number of other initiatives. The reduction in smoking rates among Aboriginal people is even more impressive, with 43 per cent of Aboriginal adults smoking in 2005 dropping to less than 30 per cent in 2007. This particular reduction exceeds the target set in the New South Wales State Health Plan.

QUEANBEYAN SHOWGROUND CAR PARK

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: Yesterday the Hon. Melinda Pavey asked me a question without notice about the Queanbeyan showground car park. I am advised that the Department of Commerce was engaged by the State Property Authority to manage the design, development and delivery of the Queanbeyan Government Office Building and that the parking capacity within the Queanbeyan Government Office Building was approved by Queanbeyan City Council. I am advised that the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the relevant agency for this matter, is currently in discussions with the council about off site car parking arrangements.

RADIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS: On 10 April Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes asked me a question about radiotherapy services. The Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer) has provided the following response:

Yes, the Minister is aware of this information and the Government is responding.

Access to cancer services through the provision of radiotherapy treatment services has increased by more than 30% over the last 10 years and there are now 13 public radiotherapy services across NSW.

Since 1995, four new Radiation Oncology Treatment Centres have commenced at Nepean, Campbelltown, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie, and seventeen linear accelerators have been replaced in the public sector to the end of 2007. Three more machines are scheduled for replacement in 2008 at St George, Royal North Shore and Liverpool hospitals. Sixteen additional linear accelerators have been commissioned in the public health system since 1991 from a base of eighteen machines. The average age of linear accelerators in the public sector is less than six years.

There are currently three linear accelerators at St George Hospital and the oldest of these machines is being replaced by a new \$3.6 million state-of-the-art linear accelerator.

The new linear accelerator was delivered to the St George Hospital on 10 May 2008 with installation of the new machine occurring over the following four to five weeks.

This world-class new machine will be able to treat more patients, more reliably, providing patients with access to the most advanced radiotherapy treatments currently available, and delivering a higher more accurate treatment dose.

During this replacement period the operating hours of the St George Hospital radiotherapy service are also soon to be increased to meet patient demand.

During the period that one of the linear accelerators at St George Hospital experienced mechanical problems, I am advised that no patients had their radiotherapy treatment cancelled. Patients' radiotherapy sessions were rescheduled, and I am further advised that every course of radiotherapy treatment was delivered, as determined by the Radiation Oncologists.

At St George Hospital all category one patients who are designated as urgent patients requiring radiation therapy treatment within 24-hours continue to be treated within this 24-hour timeframe.

Further, all patients receiving radiotherapy treatment at the Hospital continue to be treated within the guidelines of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists.

The Cancer Institute NSW advises that cancer outcomes in NSW are as good as, or equal to, the best in the world.

DEFERRED ANSWERS

The following answer to a question without notice was received by the Clerk during the adjournment of the House:

TIMBER INDUSTRY WORKERS COMPENSATION RATES

On 9 April 2008 the Hon. Charlie Lynn asked the Minister for Industrial Relations a question without notice regarding timber industry workers compensation rates. The Minister for Industrial Relations provided the following response:

Neither WorkCover or my office is aware of any concerns raised with regard to the base industry premium rate for the log sawmilling or timber-dressing industry.

Questions without notice concluded.

[The President left the chair at 1.05 p.m. The House resumed at 2.45 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Order of Business

Ms SYLVIA HALE [2.45 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow a motion to be moved forthwith that Private Members' Business item No. 124 outside the Order of Precedence, relating to a further order for papers regarding "Yasmar", Haberfield, be called on forthwith.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 21

Mr Ajaka	Mr Gay	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	Ms Hale	Ms Rhiannon
Mr Clarke	Dr Kaye	Mr Smith
Mr Cohen	Mr Khan	
Ms Cusack	Mr Lynn	
Ms Ficarra	Mr Mason-Cox	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gallacher	Reverend Dr Moyes	Mr Colless
Miss Gardiner	Ms Parker	Mrs Pavey

Noes, 17

Mr Catanzariti	Mr Kelly	Ms Voltz
Mr Costa	Mr Obeid	Mr West
Mr Della Bosca	Ms Robertson	Ms Westwood
Ms Fazio	Mr Roozendaal	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Griffin	Ms Sharpe	Mr Donnelly
Mr Hatzistergos	Mr Tsang	Mr Veitch

Pair

Mr Harwin

Mr Macdonald

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Order of Business

Ms SYLVIA HALE [2.55 p.m.]: I move:

That Private Members' Business item No. 124 outside the Order of Precedence be called on forthwith.

PRESIDENT: Order! Members should not speak to the substantive motion at this time. The question before the Chair is whether an item of business should be called on forthwith.

Ms SYLVIA HALE: This morning I sought to have this matter dealt with under Standing Order 44, but the Government objected, in keeping with its obsession with secrecy, and necessitating the motion for urgency. To not unduly take up the time of the House, my address will be brief. The motion is urgent because it relates to leasing public land to a private organisation that has submitted an application to Ashfield council for a development on the site.

The development application currently is under consideration. The council already has received considerable community feedback. The question of how and why the Yasmar lease came to be signed is of considerable public interest. There are clear guidelines for how leases over public land that are granted to private individuals or organisations should be dealt with. It is not at all clear that those guidelines have been followed properly. I moved the motion because I believe this is a matter of great urgency.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

YASMAR ESTATE

Ms SYLVIA HALE [2.57 p.m.]: I move:

That, under Standing Order 52, there be laid upon the table of the House within 21 days of the date of the passing of this resolution all documents created since 1 June 2006, in the possession, custody or control of the Premier, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Minister for Juvenile Justice, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Minister for Education and Training, the Department of Education and Training, the Minister for Commerce, the Department of Commerce, the Minister for Lands, the Department of Lands, the Minister for Planning, the NSW Heritage Office, the Historic Houses Trust, the Minister for Roads, or the Roads and Traffic Authority relating to the conservation, lease or disposal of any part of the Yasmar Estate at 185 Parramatta Road, Haberfield, and any document which records or refers to the production of documents as a result of this order of the House.

The granting of the lease is a direct reversal of the Government's previous policy, as demonstrated by a letter from former Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Training, Andrew Refshauge, to the Federal member for Lowe, John Murphy, dated 11 February 2004. The letter was written in response to representations made on the behalf of the Co.As.It. school. The then education Minister said:

I understand that from information provided by the school, it appears that it will operate in direct competition with government schools. Given these circumstances, I regret to advise I cannot ... provide direct assistance in securing alternative accommodation for the Italian Bilingual School.

Granting the lease in 2007 therefore was a direct repudiation of the Government's previous position. All of these issues are urgent and relevant to the council's current consideration of the development application and the community's response to that development application. This week the issues surrounding the lease have received considerable coverage in the local media. This morning a petition from more than 830 people regarding the use of Yasmar was presented to the House. The matter is attracting considerable public interest. With the council currently considering a development application for the site, the motion is of considerable urgency. I commend the motion to the House.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO [2.59 p.m.]: The Government opposes the motion. This is a pathetic political stunt, and a thinly veiled attack on the Italian community in the inner west. Firstly, the Government's proposal to revitalise the historic Yasmar House and estate at Haberfield has not been secret. Secondly, producing the papers as called for would tie up many government departments for several weeks, and the cost

would be very substantial—money and time that could be more usefully spent in providing services for the people of New South Wales. Yasmar House previously was the site of a juvenile detention centre. It is now a Crown reserve that has been set aside for community and government use and is under management by the Department of Lands. The reserve is a prime example of the Iemma Government's State Plan in action—encouraging people to enjoy Crown reserves for recreation and cultural activities.

Last November, the Minister for Lands visited Yasmar House to sign a lease for the Italian Bilingual School and announced the commencement of a plan of management for the site. The lease and the plan of management are vital steps in restoring Yasmar to its former glory. The lease not only caters for the Italian Bilingual School, an important group in the inner-west community, but also by its proceeds will assist in the future restoration of the homestead and gardens. The plan of management, which I expect the Government will release for public comment in a matter of weeks, provides the community with an opportunity for input into the future of the site.

The plan of management also provides opportunities to examine ideas for restoring Yasmar House as a wonderful heritage icon of Sydney's inner west. The consultant for the plan of management contacted key stakeholders during its preparation. Stakeholders include the Department of Juvenile Justice, which will continue to use the west wing of the reserve, and the Italian Bilingual School, which will occupy the east wing under the lease. The public also was invited to make submissions. When the Government releases the draft plan of management, the community will have further opportunity to have its say on the future of Yasmar House.

I will address each of the reasons for opposing the motion. The new lease arrangement and planning for the future of Yasmar House have not been secret. Anyone who has taken the trouble to read coverage of this matter in inner-west newspapers over the past few years would be well aware of what has been happening with Yasmar House, and of efforts to find a good and suitable use for Yasmar House. People in the inner west would have a very good idea of the problems that the sponsor of the Italian Bilingual School, Co.As.It., has had in finding appropriate accommodation for its students.

Currently, students of that school are meeting in adapted rooms at the Co.As.It. headquarters in Norton Street, Leichhardt. The outdoor play area is the car park that was originally built for Co.As.It. It is not suitable, but the parents who send their children to the school are so committed to having their children attend the Italian Bilingual School that they are happy for their children to attend until something more permanent and more suitable is provided. I have outlined the very process underway for restoring Yasmar House as a community icon. The Government has issued media statements on its actions and will do so again in the near future. I repeat: the draft plan of management shortly will be subject to further community scrutiny.

My second reason for opposing the motion is the cost to government. As honourable members would be aware, government departments already have a lot of work to do. The requirements of this motion will tie up government agencies for weeks and provide nothing worthwhile. Government departments have better things to do with their time than find every piece of paper written or email sent with respect to Yasmar House. By my count, the honourable member's motion would tie up the resources of at least nine agencies. At the supplementary budget estimates hearing 2006-07, Mr Vince Graham, the then chief executive of RailCorp, indicated that compliance with a similar Standing Order 52 request from the Legislative Council with respect to OSCars would cost some \$210,000 because of the imposed time frames. More importantly Mr Graham needed to divert 12 employees for three weeks to go through the vast range of papers involved. He anticipated the photocopying bill alone would be some \$25,000.

I suggest that Ms Sylvia Hale should wait a few weeks, by which time she will be able to read the Government's intentions for Yasmar House in the draft management plan. We really should consider the whole concept. Yasmar House is probably the last major historical building in the inner west of Sydney that still has its grounds intact. The grounds and Yasmar House, through the lease to the Italian Bilingual School, will be refurbished and maintained.

Ms Sylvia Hale: Think of all the trees that will be lost.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I hear the interjection of Ms Sylvia Hale. In response I advise that it is far more important to have properties maintained, kept in good condition and used by the community than it is to have them moulder and rot while the Greens run campaigns against any form of development, which is all they ever do. The Greens are opposed to any development. They do not have one positive policy. All they do is oppose. They find a very few disaffected people in any local community and start a campaign to try to stop developments, such as this wonderful, adaptive use of a historical property.

Lastly, if the motion is agreed to, having tied up numerous departments and agencies for several weeks, Ms Sylvia Hale will be provided with little of substance that is not already, or shortly will be, in the public domain. It is about time the House seriously considered that a successful call for papers results in agencies associating a cost with providing the papers. If the time, effort and expense involved in producing the papers are calculated, we would know what it costs to produce papers—half the time the Greens do not look at the papers that have been produced—and we would know what it costs to run the Greens little stunts and campaigns.

It is not just this issue that could be costly. In the run-up to council elections in September, more and more calls for papers will be made by the Greens about issues on which they want their motley crew of local government candidates to run campaigns. Members should bear in mind that when they vote in favour of calls for papers by the Greens, in effect they are subsidising the Greens local government candidates. That is a disgrace and an abuse of process. I urge members to oppose the motion.

The Hon. DON HARWIN [3.06 p.m.]: Today is private member's day, and obviously this matter is a concern for Ms Sylvia Hale. Members who have supported the urgency motion have supported her having the opportunity, on private member's day, to put her case. So far that is all we have done. Ms Sylvia Hale has been given the opportunity to justify why those papers should be produced in the House. I waited patiently to hear the Hon. Amanda Fazio present a case against transparency. Instead we heard her argument on the merit of the Co.As.It. proposal. I am sure that no member of the Opposition would utter one word of disagreement with that: there is a lot of merit in the Co.As.It. proposal. The motion is not about the merit of the Co.As.It. proposal, and the Hon. Amanda Fazio knows that. That was her first argument. The second argument by the Hon. Amanda Fazio was about the cost of calls for papers. That argument is presented on a regular basis.

The Hon. Jennifer Gardiner: It is a standard line.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Yes, it is a standard line. I had it put to me in discussions with government representatives, outside the House, on serious issues such as the call for papers concerning Dr Graeme Reeves. I was told of the huge mountain of paper, I was told of the cost, I was told they could not be produce the papers in two days. I have become a little cynical about the constant cries from the Government that production of papers cannot be done. Last week I called for papers in the Dr Reeves case.

Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes: Tell us how many boxes were involved.

The Hon. Jennifer Gardiner: None! No boxes.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: No, no. Last Friday's call for papers resulted in one inch of papers—that is all. I am not saying that relevant papers were not supplied, despite what I was told.

Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes: But the report would have taken up a few boxes.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I was told the cost of the material I received. It was nowhere near the thousands of dollars that was suggested by the Hon. Amanda Fazio. It was not even \$500, not even \$300. I am a bit cynical about the cost claims. I was told also that the papers could not be produced in two days. Of course, the papers arrived within two days. There absolutely is no doubt about that. I note that the motion gives the various agencies involved 21 days to produce the papers. If the Government has a reason for stating that there should not be transparency in this kind of arrangement, with what is a very merit-worthy proposal from Co.As.It., it should inform the House: the Opposition will be reasonable, and will not agree to the motion. However, that argument has not been launched. There is still time for the Government to tell the House why there should be transparency. So far the Government has given no reason for not having transparency in these arrangements.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA [3.09 p.m.]: There is considerable cross-party support for Co.As.It., from the Coalition, the State Labor Government and the Christian Democrats—I do not know about the Shooters Party. We will not turn this motion into a political football against Co.As.It. As the Hon. Don Harwin said, this is purely a matter of process in terms of the cost of the provision or release of papers. If government agencies enter into leases that involve public lands, it is the democratic right of all members of this House, and indeed any constituents in New South Wales, to see those lease documents to ensure that the process was transparent and conducted in proper fashion. So any argument relating to cost is spurious; it is ridiculous. We are asking for leasing papers that should present no difficulty to the Department of Lands to produce.

Co.As.It. is a marvellous organisation that has worked diligently in the New South Wales community and throughout Australia for many, many years. It provides senior citizens services, of which the Hon. Amanda Fazio is well aware. It provides language skills not only to Australian families of Italian background; an enormous number of Australians from all sorts of backgrounds are seeking to take up those language skills. Co.As.It. provides teachers to government schools, and it provides aged care and other services throughout the community. This motion is not about Co.As.It., which is doing a marvellous job. We want to ensure that the process was conducted in a fair and reasonable manner.

If the Government can provide evidence of that, then we have further issues to consider. We support this motion of Ms Sylvia Hale for the production of documents. The Coalition congratulates and commends Co.As.It. for the work it has done. If the monies that are provided by this lease are used for the beautification of the Yasmarr site—indeed, it has a plan of management—that will be a good thing. Again, this motion is about process and government transparency; it does not offer any opinion on the functions of Co.As.It. or any other similar organisation. It is about looking at the way the Government undertook the leasing arrangements to ensure that the process was conducted properly.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.12 p.m.]: The Hon. Don Harwin raised the issue of transparency. Let us be clear about the process that was conducted to award this lease. The Minister called for expressions of interest for suitable use of that site. It was well publicised in the press. As the Greens well know, this has been an ongoing issue for some time. Three groups came forward. The department reviewed them and recommended that Co.As.It. as the most appropriate occupant for the site. Co.As.It. will help maintain the site, which all members have acknowledged will be used for an appropriate community purpose. The process has been totally transparent. There is no need for a call for papers. We ask the Opposition to accept that there has been a fair and transparent process and that this motion is unnecessary.

Ms SYLVIA HALE [3.13 p.m.], in reply: I do not wish to take up more time of the House. I simply observe that if the Government had its way, there would never be one sheet of paper ever released to anyone other than to its own members. As has been made clear, the debate is not about Co.As.It. and I am not arguing that it is not necessarily a suitable lessee. I am merely interested in obtaining details of the lease because I am keen to learn whether the terms of the lease conform to the business directives of the Director General of the Department of Lands with regard to the leasing of Crown land.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 21

Mr Ajaka	Ms Hale	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	Dr Kaye	Ms Rhiannon
Mr Clarke	Mr Khan	Mr Smith
Mr Cohen	Mr Lynn	
Ms Cusack	Mr Mason-Cox	
Ms Ficarra	Reverend Dr Moyes	<i>Tellers,</i>
Miss Gardiner	Ms Parker	Mr Colless
Mr Gay	Mrs Pavey	Mr Harwin

Noes, 17

Mr Catanzariti	Mr Kelly	Ms Voltz
Mr Costa	Mr Obeid	Mr West
Mr Della Bosca	Ms Robertson	Ms Westwood
Ms Fazio	Mr Roozendaal	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Griffin	Ms Sharpe	Mr Donnelly
Mr Hatzistergos	Mr Tsang	Mr Veitch

Pair

Mr Gallacher

Mr Macdonald

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Motion agreed to.****GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2****Reference**

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER: I inform the House that in accordance with the resolution establishing general purpose standing committees, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 resolved this day to adopt the following reference:

That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 inquire into and report on the management and operations of the NSW Ambulance Service, and in particular:

- (a) management structure and staff responsibilities,
- (b) staff recruitment, training and retention,
- (c) staff occupational health and safety issues,
- (d) occupational health and safety issues, and
- (e) any other related matter.

PUBLIC DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

Ms SYLVIA HALE [3.23 p.m.]: I thank the Hon. Michael Veitch for this motion, which gives members a chance to reflect on the poor quality of dental health we enjoy, or should I say suffer, in this country. As a former Greens spokesperson on Health I took great interest in dental health issues. I have hosted and participated in many forums and meetings about dental health, especially in rural areas. Now that we have a Federal Government that purportedly has some interest in assisting low-income people, we urgently need to ensure that we have a decent Commonwealth dental health scheme in operation. The Greens unreservedly condemned the move by the former Federal Government in 1997 to axe the Commonwealth Dental Health Program. As a result of the discontinuation of that program there has been a sharp decrease in oral health standards among people on low incomes.

While it is always appropriate to condemn the former Howard Government, and perhaps this motion was written while we were still suffering through the dark ages of that Government—and thankfully these days Mr Howard can enjoy jogging around Wollstonecraft in his Wallaby's tracksuit undisturbed—we should now direct our comments on dental health towards the new Rudd Government. Poor dental health is linked to coronary heart and circulatory diseases, stroke, diabetes, respiratory disease, arthritis, cancer, pre-term and low-term birth weight babies and obesity. It is very costly and inefficient not to underwrite dental health promotion programs, and not to treat dental decay as early as possible. The failure to do so results in lost employment opportunities, poor health, increased acute care and hospital admissions, and blow-outs in general health and social service budgets.

I remind members of reports of people, some elderly and some in rural areas who, after an incessant wait for public dental assistance, have been forced into extracting their own teeth using pliers and whiskey. That simply should not happen in 2008. We are not living in the eighteenth century. The Greens pose a very simple question: Why is a toothache treated differently from any other form of bodily pain or affliction? Why does Medicare not cover necessary dental work? Our teeth are not optional extras. Simply, former governments made a bad decision when Medicare was set up, not to have the scheme cover basic and medically necessary dental procedures.

The Australian Dental Association [ADA] noted that there are extremely mixed levels of oral health in Australia. We have a poor dental health rating—we are seventeenth amongst Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries—despite living in a prosperous country where citizens enjoy a long life expectancy. We are simply not providing oral health care to the poor, the Indigenous, the aged and people in rural and remote areas. Once again we are caught up in the absurd bifurcation of State and Federal responsibilities in health. The Greens do think the Commonwealth should lead on all aspects of health care and ensure a basic level of access to affordable health care for everyone. As the Australian Dental Association points out, people are totally over the blame game approach.

I turn now to the recent Federal budget, which is very relevant to this matter. The Australian Dental Association forwarded a pre-budget submission to the Federal Government. The Australian Dental Association submitted that additional funding of \$416, 907, 000 was required for 2008-09. So what was actually in the Federal budget? Thankfully, we now have a Commonwealth dental health plan that targets assistance to needy people. But it may not be enough. The Treasurer announced a \$10 billion health infrastructure budget. However, within that, \$2.6 billion has been lost from some areas, including some funding for dental health training. Of the \$10 billion, \$780.7 million has been put towards public dental health and check-ups for teenagers, which the Greens agree is a step forward. However, we lost \$491.4 million for chronically ill people who need dental treatment, which should be available through Medicare. This was obviously needed, as the take-up rate was growing.

John Matthews, the Federal President of the Australian Dental Association, said that the measures in the Federal budget did not go far enough. He said, "The Commonwealth has provided the State/Territory Health Services with additional funding", less than provided 10 years ago, "to prop up schemes that have not delivered to date. It's a Band-Aid solution at best." Mr Matthews noted further that the States are setting about reducing their own commitments in anticipation of Federal funding, that is, using that funding as an offset. In regards to the Teen Dental Plan he said:

This is a basic plan with some merit but with refinement it could deliver much more.

The Australian Dental Association meant that while the children and teen plans are working well, young adults, those in their 20s, have shown a significant susceptibility to dental decay. It asked therefore that the scheme be extended to people up to age 25. We should note also that many people now, not just those aged 25 and under, cannot afford to visit a dentist. In a recent *Insight* program on SBS television that examined the question of whether wages were keeping up with the cost of living it was made clear that many people, Rudd's much-mentioned "working families", are simply forgoing dental care. They might infrequently visit the dentist and be told they need dental work that they cannot afford, so they just do not go back. Several people on the SBS program said that they just did not go to the dentist at all or had not gone for years.

While the motion of the Hon. Mick Veitch highlights the whole dental health issue, some of his Labor colleagues have gone further. I note that Federal Government backbencher Craig Thomson has advocated expanding Medicare coverage to dental care for everyone under the age of 18 and over the age of 65. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling estimates his plan would cost more than \$2 billion. This would be a good start, although preferably it should extend on a needs basis to all groups. Mr Thomson said on *ABC News* on 12 March:

It's something that has some support within the caucus, but certainly talking to the ordinary Australian in my electorate, it has overwhelming support that they're simply not able to afford to go to the dentist and they can't see why Medicare isn't extended... We need to be moving towards having Medicare covering dental care in its entirety.

Clearly that did not occur in the recent budget. Perhaps the Hon. Mick Veitch can tell us whether he agrees with Mr. Thomson's plan. The motion states that we should commend the New South Wales Government on its spending. The fact is that New South Wales has a shocking record of per capita spending on dental health compared to that of other States and Territories. As Professor Hans Zoellner of the Association for Promotion of Oral Health said in 2005:

New South Wales is exceptional in that we do it worse than anyone. We have the lowest level of funding of all other States and Territories, so we are exceptionally bad.

The Greens will be monitoring the State budget process very closely. The Federal Government has decided to put more funds into dental care, which it should, but we must also ensure that this State matches that funding. It is true that the Rudd Government at least has taken on responsibility for instituting a dental health scheme, but it is a ridiculous state of affairs that Medicare does not cover medically necessary dental health care. To again quote Hans Zoellner, Medicare operates "as if the human body stops at the mouth".

I thank the member for his motion on this very important issue. However, I commend the contribution of my colleague Ms Lee Rhiannon, who has moved an amendment to the motion. Being someone who has worked itinerantly in rural areas as a shearer, I am sure the member Mr Veitch is only too aware of rural health issues and would join with the Greens in condemning the lack of dental health services in rural areas. I call on Government members in this place and the Federal Rudd Government to strengthen the new Commonwealth dental health scheme. I commend the amendment of my colleague Lee Rhiannon; it will strengthen the motion by adding a requirement to train more dentists.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA [3.32 p.m.]: I wish to speak to the amendment that will be moved by Ms Lee Rhiannon. I agree to the omission of the words "commends the Government for" and inserting instead the word "notes". In my speech to the substantive motion I outlined how hypocritical it was for the Government to congratulate itself on pathetic results in the provision of dental and oral health services in New South Wales. I support the amendment, which draws attention to the fact that even after extra funding New South Wales spends less per capita on dental health services than does any other State in Australia. An Australian Dental Association fact sheet on State and Territory oral health budgets in 2006-07 records that in New South Wales dental expenditure per capita was the lowest amongst all States and Territories, even the Northern Territory. New South Wales spent \$18.89 per capita, compared to \$39.99 in the Northern Territory, \$34.36 in Tasmania, \$33.97 in Queensland, \$33.45 in South Australia, \$28.39 in Western Australia, \$25.49 in Victoria, and \$25.00 in the Australian Capital Territory. I repeat: New South Wales spent \$18.89. What a disgrace!

In its budget the Federal Labor Government heartlessly abolished the Medicare dental scheme. But have we heard a peep out of the State Labor Government about that? No. With 160,000 people on the dental health waiting list in New South Wales, it is unacceptable that the Federal Government should do this. It constitutes an attack on the most vulnerable in our community. After spending years blaming the previous Federal Coalition government for New South Wales dental woes, Minister Meagher has remained silent on the axing of the Medicare dental scheme. It is a tragedy. Overall funding on health by the Rudd Government is even less than that spent by the former Howard Government. Appendix B to Budget Paper No. 3 outlines under payments to support State health services that New South Wales received \$3.769 billion in 2007-08 but will receive only \$3.721 billion in 2008-09—a reduction of \$48 million. Despite all its talk about health funding, the Federal Labor Government has cut funding to New South Wales health services. But do we hear Minister Meagher saying, "This is outrageous, we want our fair share, we want incremental CPI increases because of inflation"? No. We have gone backwards and we do not hear a peep from the Minister.

I agree also that we need additional dental places in our universities, in particular at the University of Sydney's Westmead Centre for Oral Health. We need more dentists, hygienists, and therapists. The Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Sydney, Eli Schwarz, is doing a marvellous job, but we know that will suffer a massive shortage of dentists in future years. Projections indicate a shortage of 200 to 300 dentists in New South Wales by the year 2010. We need to act now, but the inadequate provision of expenditure on health in the Federal Labor budget is a poor start.

The Hon. MICHAEL VEITCH [3.37 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members for their contribution. The Government will not support the Greens amendment. It is obvious that my Opposition colleagues have not understood the grim reality of what 11 years of John Howard's Government forced upon the Australian population, in particular its failure to appropriately fund the oral health needs of the Australian population. Ms Sylvia Hale spoke about my previous itinerant work life. Howard's slashing of the dental budget could not have happened at a worse time for country New South Wales. We were already in trouble with the decrease in dental professionals caused by the professionals and their academic institutions deliberately winding down training positions as well as dentists themselves preferring to work in Sydney's eastern and northern suburbs. The removal of the funding of the Public Dentist was even worse for country New South Wales.

As I have previously articulated to the House, the New South Wales Labor Government believes that prevention is always better than cure. That is why the New South Wales State Plan, a comprehensive plan that focuses on five key areas of activity of the New South Wales Government, is committed to prevention and early intervention as the best health policy. New South Wales leads the country in preventative dental health care. The Iemma Government's investment in oral health services is delivering on our commitment outlined in the State Plan to improve access to quality health care. The New South Wales Government is committed to expanding the emphasis on a population oral health approach that better addresses risk factors by population-based and targeted health interventions.

The New South Wales Government has demonstrated also its leadership in the prevention of dental disease through the Teeth for Health project, which since 2002 has involved the implementation of a range of oral health promotion strategies, in particular, water fluoridation in the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. Earlier the Hon. Marie Ficarra said that money must be spent on a national fluoridation scheme to provide longer-term amelioration of dental decay rates. Water fluoridation is a proven and effective public health measure. Government members agree, which is why we have taken on the challenge and now lead Australia in prevention in this area with the funding of fluoridation programs.

I take this opportunity to remind the House that the long-term neglect of oral health services, as espoused by the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner, commenced when in 1996 John Howard's Liberals and Nationals

painfully extracted \$1.1 billion from dental health services funding. Over the past decade Labor States have had to fill the gaping hole created by the Liberals and Nationals, who clearly failed to take responsibility for the nation's oral health by providing affordable dental health care for all Australians. The Howard Government's painful dental services funding cuts have resulted in public dental waiting lists increasing dramatically in all States.

The Iemma Government does not have the total capacity to cover for the Commonwealth's years of neglect, but it has worked consistently to ensure that access to oral health services is maintained and enhanced for the people of New South Wales. The New South Wales upper House dental inquiry report, which was released in March 2006, highlighted the need for the Commonwealth Government to accept its responsibility towards all Australians—I quote from that report—"not just those with private health insurance". In 2006 the Australian Council of Social Service [ACOSS] also released a report on oral health, which again highlighted the Commonwealth's failure to accept responsibility for dental health and called for greater Federal intervention in this area.

From 1 July 2008, following cessation of the dismal Howard Government's scheme, the Commonwealth Government will provide \$290 million over three years under the Commonwealth Dental Health Program to the States and Territories to bring much-needed relief to the 650,000 people on public dental waiting lists around the country. That is in addition to the Rudd Government's new Teen Dental Plan. The Teen Dental Plan will result in the Commonwealth investing up to \$360 million over three years to make it more affordable for working families to keep their children's teeth in good health. The Hon. Jennifer Gardiner said that the Teen Dental Plan was no good and that it would enable problems to be identified but not treated.

The idea behind preventative dental health care is to identify problems before there is a need for invasive dental procedures. Many costly dental health problems can be avoided with early detection and advice on how to maintain and reverse the damage—simple solutions such as improved cleaning techniques, mouthwash, flossing and the like. The Hon. Marie Ficarra said that there must be reform in the dental sector and that policy leadership was what was required to bring about a longer-term benefit and improved outcomes in the oral health of all Australians. The kind of preventative health care that is being offered by both State and Federal Labor governments is true policy leadership. The desired outcomes of the Commonwealth Dental Health Program must achieve the targeted outcome of one million—and I emphasise the words "one million"—additional patient visits over three years.

I am sure that the Hon. Trevor Khan would be interested to know that 48,000 of those visits are to be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Estimates for New South Wales indicated a total of 330,000 additional dental visits, of which nearly 16,000 will be for indigenous people. I am also advised that the basic goal of the Commonwealth Dental Health Program is to assist all States and Territories to reduce dental waiting lists. The New South Wales Health Department will maintain the existing eligibility criteria known as the Priority Oral Health Triaging Program, as well as the State Oral Health Services Program infrastructure. The Hon. Jennifer Gardiner acknowledged that a commitment to train and recruit more dentists and adequately resource oral health facilities would provide lasting improvements for patients and health professionals. That is exactly what the Rudd Government is doing in consultation with the States.

The Rudd Government will invest in up to 50,000 additional health vocational training places to tackle the current health workforce crisis, that is, 50,000 additional training places. That commitment, in cooperation with all the States, will deliver one of the biggest injections of workers to the health system in Australia's history—a huge injection in the future health workforce of Australia. The training places will target areas of chronic skills shortages, such as dental health, nursing and indigenous health. I commend the motion to the House and call on all members to oppose the Greens amendment.

Question—That the amendment of Ms Lee Rhiannon be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 18

Mr Ajaka	Ms Hale	Mr Pearce
Mr Clarke	Dr Kaye	Ms Rhiannon
Mr Cohen	Mr Khan	
Ms Cusack	Mr Lynn	
Ms Ficarra	Mr Mason-Cox	<i>Tellers,</i>
Miss Gardiner	Ms Parker	Mr Colless
Mr Gay	Mrs Pavey	Mr Harwin

Noes, 20

Mr Brown	Mr Kelly	Mr Tsang
Mr Catanzariti	Reverend Dr Moyes	Ms Voltz
Mr Costa	Mr Obeid	Mr West
Mr Della Bosca	Ms Robertson	Ms Westwood
Ms Fazio	Mr Roozendaal	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Griffin	Ms Sharpe	Mr Donnelly
Mr Hatzistergos	Mr Smith	Mr Veitch

Pair

Mr Gallacher

Mr Macdonald

Question resolved in the negative.**Amendment negatived.****Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.****Motion agreed to.****TABLING OF PAPERS****The Hon. Tony Kelly** tabled the following paper:

Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999—Report of the NSW State Parole Authority for the year ended 30 June 2007

Ordered to be printed on motion by the Hon. Tony Kelly.**PEAK OIL RESPONSE PLAN BILL 2008****Second Reading****Debate resumed from 8 May 2008.**

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN [3.53 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the Peak Oil Response Plan Bill 2008. The Opposition will not oppose the bill. The term "peak oil" is used to describe the point when global conventional oil production is at its highest. Following that point the production of oil starts to decline and theoretically never regains that level. The credit for defining the peak oil curve goes to Ms Marion King Hubbert, a geoscientist who worked at the Shell research laboratory in Houston, Texas. The theory has otherwise been referred to as the Hubbert peak theory and its application is not limited to oil production.

It is important to note that the point in time when peak oil is set to occur is an estimation only and, as new oil deposits are discovered, a recalculated time frame is required from time to time. Notwithstanding that, it must be acknowledged widely that peak oil will occur in all likelihood in the first half of this century, if it has not occurred already. Therefore, the decline poses significant challenges for our society, as oil is a foundation for many of the goods and services we enjoy. The management of the decline and the shift of the economy's production to alternative and renewable energies will take leadership from any government.

Clause 4 of the bill provides that the Premier is to establish a peak oil task force which, according to clause 5, is to inquire into and assess the likely negative impacts of peak oil on the State and people of New South Wales, and to report on the best strategies to mitigate those impacts. The Opposition makes the point that the impact of the decline in oil production worldwide will have national effects on our economy and hence require national objectives and solutions to be formed. In reality, the most effective work on this issue will occur nationally, not simply at a State level. However, this does not excuse any State government from its obligation to assist and mitigate where possible the negative effects of any transition from old to new energy sources felt by the good people of this State.

To that end, this bill seeks to keep the Premier informed and directly accountable for ensuring as harmless a transition as possible. The Opposition sees a need for some form of reporting to the governments of

the nation on the estimated peak oil point in time and the subsequent rate of decline in production so that we can make the most informed policy decisions on the matter. Again, it seems that this bill attempts to add a piece to that puzzle by keeping the State Government aware and up to date on the requirements, shortages, impacts and effects of oil on this State's economy. If one were to take the view that economic change and transition from old to new energies will occur only in reaction to high prices as a result of oil shortages, rather than in reaction to the threat of an oil peak, then the degree of hardship felt during the transition period will increase the higher the rate of decline post-peak.

In other words, if after peak oil production the global economy faces a sharp decline in production, the pain felt through the markets will be more severe than if a gradual and slow decline were to occur. In a 2004 book entitled *Power Down: Options and Actions for a Post Carbon World* an American commentator on peak oil, Richard Heinberg, argues that the post-peak period in our global history will be characterised by social and economic confusion, disruption of trade, declining standards of living and potential warfare. Mr Heinberg outlines four possible strategies nations could employ to respond to the economic challenges associated with declining oil production. These strategies include "Last one standing"—global competition for remaining resources; "Powerdown"—global cooperation to reduce energy usage, conservation and resource management; "Denial"—waiting, and hoping that some unforeseen element will solve the problem; and fourthly, "Isolationism"—in which nations prepare local areas to be sustainable in the event that the global economic project collapses.

We do not need to be alarmist regarding this matter: I strongly believe that with good governance and strong leadership, global cooperation can lead to a reduction in the reliance on old energies in favour of new energies. The other point I seek to make is that of the four broad reactions to oil production decline outlined in Mr Heinberg's books, the reality is likely to be that components of all four reactions will be visible simultaneously in many nations. The question then is how best to manage this State's reaction to peak oil decline. I believe the answer is that a system that fully informs the Premier about the predicted dynamic impacts on the economy should be supported. The Opposition will not oppose this bill.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG (Parliamentary Secretary) [4.00 p.m.]: The Government does not support the Peak Oil Response Plan Bill 2008. Honourable members may be interested to know that the Queensland Government convened an Oil Vulnerability Task Force, which delivered its final report in April 2007. I understand that the 158-page report, a detailed investigation of concerns about diminishing oil supplies, cost several million dollars to prepare. The three key findings of the Queensland report were that actions should be taken to reduce consumption of liquid fossil fuels; encouragement should be given to the development of alternative fuels, technologies and strategies; and preparations should be made for potential demographic and regional changes.

The New South Wales Government is currently undertaking all those actions, therefore the need to establish a task force as called for by the honourable member is not supported by the Government. Under the State Government's 2 per cent ethanol mandate, primary petrol wholesalers will need to ensure that ethanol makes up a minimum of 2 per cent of the total volume of New South Wales sales. Petrol companies are ramping up the availability of ethanol biofuels, which means more ethanol-blended petrol will be available at more New South Wales petrol pumps.

Most New South Wales cars that use unleaded petrol can safely use 10 per cent ethanol-blended fuel, trading as E10. Ordinary petrol will still be available for older cars, boats and other engines that are not able to use ethanol. This mandate is the New South Wales Government's first step towards a broader use of ethanol and other biofuels in New South Wales. The New South Wales Government requires its vehicle fleet to use ethanol-blended fuel wherever it is practicable, available and cost-effective. Ethanol-blended fuel is now purchased under the Government's new fuel supply contract. But it is not just in terms of liquid fuels that we are demonstrating our commitment to reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

The New South Wales Government has given strong support for renewable energy, first through the introduction of the Renewable Energy (New South Wales) Bill 2007 into Parliament on 27 June 2007 and more recently our support for the Commonwealth's renewable energy target. New South Wales has almost 2,000 megawatts of renewable generation proposals pending for New South Wales, including wind, solar, biomass, and other zero emission technologies. The New South Wales Government is also helping renewable technologies not yet commercial through the \$100 million Renewable Energy Development Fund for pilot and demonstration projects. This fund is part of the Climate Change Fund. Additionally, the National GreenPower Accreditation program was launched by the New South Wales Government in 1997, and has since been taken up by Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

GreenPower's success has been recognised throughout Australia, winning gold at both the 2005 New South Wales Premier's Public Sector Awards and the national 2006 Banksia Awards Climate Category. GreenPower provides a guarantee to customers that their purchase of a GreenPower product supports new renewable energy development while reducing greenhouse gases. At the end of 2007, more than 200,000 New South Wales customers were opting for environmentally friendly GreenPower. Importantly, New South Wales continued to lead the way in the amount of GreenPower purchased nationally, representing some 34 per cent of total sales for the period.

The number of customers opting for environmentally friendly GreenPower in New South Wales has tripled in the last year. These outstanding results in this State can be attributed to the Government's delivery on commitments made in the New South Wales Greenhouse Plan. Since its inception in this State, GreenPower has been responsible for cutting greenhouse gas emissions in Australia by around 4.7 million tonnes—the equivalent to removing more than a million cars from our roads for a year. The Government is working with all sectors of the community to implement practical measures to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. The work we are currently undertaking means that the task force proposed by Ms Lee Rhiannon is not required, and therefore the bill is opposed.

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

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICES

Debate resumed from 8 May 2008.

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN [4.05 p.m.]: Previously I spoke in support of a motion commending the New South Wales State Emergency Service and its many dedicated volunteers. I also briefly outlined the State Emergency Service [SES] and the important role it plays in today's society, the investment of the service's new 24-hour call centre at the Wollongong State headquarters to support the volunteers answering calls for help and to deploy State Emergency Service road-crash rescue units to emergencies. Significantly for our rural and regional centres, this funding has led to an increase in staff numbers from three to five in each of the 17 State Emergency Service regional headquarters. These staff members provide their local volunteers with administration, training and operational support. One of the most successful developments undertaken by the State Emergency Service to support volunteers in units across the State over this time has been the replacement of its volunteer region controllers with paid controllers in all 17 State Emergency Service regions.

This move reflects the increased sophistication of State Emergency Service training and response operations and an acknowledgement that the time commitment required to lead a State Emergency Service region is more than can be provided by, or fairly expected of, most volunteers. Over 13 years, the Government's record funding has included: \$17 million for rescue equipment for State Emergency Service units; more than \$20 million for personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of volunteers; \$8.4 million in subsidies to assist with the purchase of emergency response vehicles for local units, including \$800,000 this year; funding for the replacement and purchase of 236 flood rescue boats and 79 sand-bagging machines; \$5.1 million allocated to purchase and build eleven State Emergency Service region headquarters; and more than \$26 million in improved radio communications, paging and information technology systems for volunteers, including \$2.4 million in the current budget.

On top of this, the Government has allocated \$975,000 a year since 2002-03 to provide volunteers with a direct helping hand with the day-to-day expenses of their unit operations. This subsidy is designed to help cover costs such as fuel, utilities and vehicle maintenance. In practical terms, it means that volunteers need to give up less of their time to carry out fundraising to meet these expenses. The Government is continuing this support, with \$5 million allocated over the four years from 2007-08. Over those four years, the Government has also pledged \$3.2 million for rescue equipment, \$1.8 million for up to 60 new flood boats and \$3.2 million to continue upgrading the State Emergency Service emergency response fleet. The Government's record reinforces its commitment to ensuring that our State Emergency Service volunteers are well equipped, trained and supported to continue to provide professional emergency assistance to the community in times of need.

I have previously spoken in this place of the dedication and commitment displayed by the thousands of State Emergency Service volunteers. The State Emergency Service has a proud history in this State. It was formed in April 1955 following devastating floods that swept throughout New South Wales causing substantial property damage and claiming 22 lives and celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2005. After such a tremendous

loss it became evident that a rescue and recovery strategy needed to be established so that the losses would not be repeated in the future. Since then the State Emergency Service has been called on during some of the State's toughest times. Whether it be floods, storms, bushfires or motor vehicle accidents, the service has always been there providing its very valued assistance in times of need.

In the coming months thousands of State Emergency Service volunteers again will give up their time to help out during the World Youth Day celebrations from Tuesday 15 July to Sunday 20 July. It is estimated that during that week there will be more than 125,000 visitors to Sydney. The volunteers will be responsible for assisting with crowd control and traffic management during the week. Many volunteers have already committed to making themselves available to assist. Thousands of visitors in the city will definitely show what Sydney has to offer. I am sure that our State Emergency Service volunteers will do a tremendous job, as they have previously on many important occasions.

In early April this year parts of Victoria were hammered by severe windstorms. Immediately coming to the aid of their Victorian counterparts, members from various New South Wales State Emergency Service teams arrived in Victoria to assist with the clean-up. The volunteers came from across the Sydney metropolitan area, including Kogarah, Camden, Liverpool, Hornsby, Wyong, Gosford, Ku-ring-gai, Waverley, Ashfield, Mount Druitt, Holroyd, Penrith and Blacktown. The New South Wales contingent spent several days in some of the hardest hit areas, and during their stay they completed over 280 tasks. This earned them praise for their skill and professionalism.

I refer once again to December last year when we were hit with our own devastating storms. On Sunday 9 December a severe thunderstorm hit western and north-western parts of Sydney. The storm was so damaging that it caused flash flooding, hail damage, wind damage and structural damage to homes and buildings. Within hours of the storm the State Emergency Service had received approximately 1,755 requests for help. The most damaged areas were those surrounding Blacktown, Baulkham Hills and Mount Druitt. State Emergency Service volunteers sprang into action and immediately responded to the overwhelming calls for assistance with hail damage, trees that had fallen through houses, and roofs that had been torn off by high winds. The volunteers were pushed to limit, but one by one they attended the call-outs.

Relationships between the State Emergency Service and other organisations, such as the New South Wales Police Force, rural fire services, the New South Wales Fire Brigades, the New South Wales Ambulance Service and local councils, are paramount. Many councils work with the local State Emergency Service to promote safety awareness and during responses to storms, floods and fires. For example, in my local area the Canterbury State Emergency Service, together with Canterbury City Council, has been instrumental in providing local residents with the information needed when responding to disastrous storms. I previously have spoken in this place about their cooperation in producing the Stormsafe brochure, which was developed after council approached the Canterbury State Emergency Service seeking advice for their ethnic community brochures. As a result of these consultations, the Stormsafe brochure has been produced in six different languages—Italian, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Vietnamese and Greek.

The close working relationships between the State Emergency Service, councils and other emergency services ensure that our State Emergency Service teams respond effectively following the devastation of severe storms or other disasters. The State Emergency Service also endeavours to make people more aware of what to do before, during and after storms. I again extend my thanks and congratulations to each and every one of the volunteers of the State Emergency Service for their commitment, energy and spirit in serving their local communities during times of crisis. I note that this week is National Volunteer Week.

I congratulate and thank all those who volunteer in our community and in the broader community across our State and the nation. We owe them a great debt of gratitude. We can never repay their thoughtfulness and tenacity in helping people when they most need help, and for being involved in so many activities, all on a volunteer basis. One will meet no finer people than the members of our emergency services. Their professionalism, courage, skill and experience are second to none. They are a credit to their service and to our State.

The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI [4.13 p.m.]: I support the Hon. Kayee Griffin in thanking the volunteers from the State Emergency Service [SES] throughout New South Wales, in particular the members of the units from the Murrumbidgee, Murray-Darling, Wagga Wagga and Albury electorates, for which I have the honour of being the duty member of the Legislative Council. I am well aware of the commitment and dedication that men and women bring to their voluntary work with the State Emergency Service. Our community is

fortunate to be able to rely on volunteers in times of trouble. One of the most commendable characteristics of volunteers is that their community spirit is not confined to the borders of their own home town and local district.

The weather pays no heed to lines on the map—nor do the volunteers, who are willing to travel wherever they are needed to support their colleagues during major emergency operations. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the Hunter Valley and Central Coast storms and floods in June last year, of which the Hon. Kayee Griffin has reminded us. State Emergency Service crews from across the central west, the far west, the north west, Lachlan, Murray and Murrumbidgee regions responded quickly to the call for help, enthusiastically joining their colleagues from around New South Wales and interstate during the operation. Late last year I was particularly pleased to be able to present 77 volunteers—30 from the Murray region and 47 from Murrumbidgee—with their commemorative State medals which recognised their contribution to that operation.

Those members were tasked to undertake a storm damage response in some of the worst affected parts of the Hunter and Lake Macquarie areas. As always, they performed their tasks with skill, professionalism and dedication. The personally engraved State medals were struck by the State Government to recognise all unsung heroes from the State Emergency Service, and other emergency and community organisations, who worked so hard and gave so much of their time to our community. We also have experienced emergency operations in our State in the time since the June natural disaster.

In the week before Christmas, when most of us were looking forward to some time off with our families, a severe weather front crossed New South Wales, bringing very strong winds and heavy rainfall. It hit the outback city of Broken Hill on the afternoon of Friday 21 December. Wind gusts of 120 kilometres per hour resulted in some 100 requests for assistance being received by the Broken Hill State Emergency Service unit that night. The foyer of the local hospital sustained roof damage, as did a number of local residences. Powerlines and trees were brought down, with parts of the city being blacked out. State Emergency Service volunteers from Sydney flew to Broken Hill on the morning of Saturday 22 December to assist local volunteers in undertaking temporary repairs. The State Emergency Service received 251 requests for assistance with damage, mainly as a result of very strong winds during the storm causing tree damage to many properties.

The severe storms also caused flash flooding in a number of communities in the Riverina and central west. In Griffith, State Emergency Service volunteers deployed some 800 sandbags to keep water away from properties. In Deniliquin the State Emergency Service received 36 requests for assistance, mostly because of roof damage and fallen trees. The Lachlan, Bland and Parkes shires experienced flash flooding, with homes inundated at Lake Cargelligo, Tullibigeal and Ungarie. In Tullibigeal four homes, the pub, a café and a service station were flooded, and at least 10 motorists needed to be rescued after having driven into floodwaters. Lake Cargelligo and Trundle were isolated until the next afternoon. State Emergency Service volunteers were called also to a house under threat of flooding in Blayney and to another, with 14 occupants, near Condobolin.

The Castlereagh River at Mendooran approached moderate flood levels, threatening to cut the main bridge in Coonabarabran. At the same time in Baradine the levee protecting the small town of 300 people was breached, and water entered parts of the town. A concerted sandbagging effort was needed by State Emergency Service volunteers and the local community to protect property from major damage. A person was rescued from his vehicle in Baradine and another at Lightning Ridge. Many local roads were closed. Rain in the upper Murray River resulted in significant rises in water levels upstream of the Hume Dam. This posed a hazard to campers along the river who were advised to relocate their sites to high ground and were warned to avoid entering floodwaters.

Across the State, a total of 583 requests for assistance were received for this storm event. At the same time as that bad weather struck, a flood warning was issued for the Castlereagh River. As a precautionary awareness measure, the State Emergency Service doorknocked 25 properties in the township of Coonamble, and residents were advised to be vigilant in monitoring flood levels. State Emergency Service volunteers from the Coonamble unit were assisted by volunteers from surrounding areas as well as the Rural Fire Service, the New South Wales Fire Brigades, the local police and local council in that and other related tasks.

The State Emergency Service spent Christmas Eve ensuring that there were sufficient volunteers and resources in place, if required. Additional volunteers and sandbags were brought in by helicopter. The river peaked at Coonamble at 11.00 p.m. on Christmas Eve at 4.75 metres and caused some minor flooding. State Emergency Service volunteers continued to monitor the river overnight and reported that there had been no significant effects within Coonamble as a result of flooding, other than the town being isolated with all access roads closed. Local State Emergency Service volunteers spent their Christmas focusing on resupplying several

dozen isolated properties downstream of Coonamble. Some of those properties were isolated for up to two weeks. The Coonamble unit volunteers completed 15 tasks related to air support operations, including resupply of essential items and fodder drops to isolated livestock.

It is clear to me that, as a community, we will never be able to repay the debt we owe to volunteers. They are invaluable and irreplaceable. The Government is proud to support them with record funding, now totalling more than \$365 million over 13 years, including \$51.5 million this financial year. The record funding is an incontrovertible sign of this Government's commitment to our emergency services volunteers. We can never thank them enough for their professionalism, skill and experience. They are one of our State's greatest assets.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN [4.23 p.m.]: I support the motion to thank, commend and honour the State Emergency Service and the role that volunteers and volunteerism plays in assisting people within our State during emergencies such as bad floods, fires, et cetera. I am pleased that the Army has a long established link with the State Emergency Service. In 1988 the Minister for Police and Emergency Services appointed Major General Ron Grey to conduct a review of rescue policy in New South Wales.

The review examined the history and legacy of the development of rescue services in New South Wales. Each of the permanent voluntary services was examined and the issues of command, control and coordination were addressed. General Grey's recommendations for the future of emergency management were accepted by the then Coalition Government in 1989, and the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989 was introduced. I knew Major General Ron Grey during my own Army service. When I came to Parliament the State director was Major General Horrie Howard who retired after a long and distinguished service. His position recently was taken over by Brigadier Phil McNamara, who was the head of our Special Forces. The spirit of the State Emergency Service [SES] is all about the spirit of volunteerism. Governments could not afford to pay volunteers on a full-time basis. I commend the Government for giving great support to the State Emergency Service and for bringing together those with the spirit of volunteerism in New South Wales.

Recently a bill was debated that dealt with people who, on one side of the equation, drop huge rocks from bridges onto cars and on the other side those who point laser beams at pilots of planes. I wonder about their mentality. Is it as a result of a lack of parenting skills, education or community or spirit? What makes them do it? On the other side of the equation in times of flood, a firestorm or an emergency, suddenly unsung Australians in uniforms work day and night under tremendous adversity and give their best. Each and every one of us feels nothing but absolute pride in them. I often think that if we were to introduce programs to give more young people an opportunity to serve their State or nation in a disciplined unit, such as in the State Emergency Service or the Rural Fire Service, and if we gave them recognition, perhaps negative leaders could be turned into positive leaders.

A civil service scheme could be introduced to disconnect negative leaders from the environment that produced their mentality. They could be sent to a rural environment where they could learn basic bush skills, sporting skills and learn to work in teams to give them a sense of self-esteem and pride. They could be offered an opportunity to work in the State Emergency Service, the Rural Fire Service or other community organisations and be paid the equivalent of what they already receive from unemployment benefits. We could award medallions and certificates and offer them further education as they mature.

I believe, as is demonstrated with the links among people who have been in the Army, that emergency service really is the spirit of Anzac. Although it could be argued that Anzac is related to war service, it is really the spirit of service to the nation. I look forward to a time when members of the State Emergency Service and the Rural Fire Service march on Anzac Day because that is the ultimate recognition of their selfless service to nation, which, as I said, is what I regard as the spirit of Anzac. The diverse skills and absolute commitment that volunteers bring to their tasks is enormous. I congratulate the Government on ensuring that the SES is well equipped, trained and supported in its work. On that issue, the Government has enjoyed complete bipartisan support from the Opposition.

Providing a service for those who need it in times of natural disaster gives emergency services personnel an opportunity to do something they would not otherwise do—wear a uniform and badge with pride, and receive appropriate recognition. I think we are a better State and nation for that. On behalf of the Opposition, I congratulate the Hon. Kayee Griffin on moving a motion that honours our State emergency services and the spirit of volunteers in New South Wales.

The Hon. IAN WEST [4.30 p.m.]: I am more than happy to support the motion moved by my colleague the Hon. Kayee Griffin during National Volunteer Week. I am proud to be a member of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard. Based on my experience over a number of years as a member of a volunteer organisation, I will outline the overall framework of the State Rescue Board and the organisations that constitute the emergency services under the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act and affiliated Acts.

The principal function of the State Rescue Board is to ensure the maintenance of efficient and effective rescue services throughout New South Wales. The board is the fundamental building block of the State's emergency services. Under section 43(1) of the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act, the board's membership comprises representatives from the State Emergency Operations Controller, the Director General of the State Emergency Service, the Police Senior Executive Service, the New South Wales Fire Brigades, the Rural Fire Service, the Ambulance Service, the Volunteer Rescue Association and the Volunteer Marine Rescue Council.

I will comment on the role of the Volunteer Rescue Association, but I will focus on the work of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, of which I am a member. National Flotilla 1 is the inaugural flotilla in Sydney and includes Sydney Harbour, the Parramatta River, Middle Harbour and an offshore area stretching 11 kilometres out to sea through the heads. Our marine radio base is located at the Macquarie Lighthouse at South Head where, unfortunately, there is some difficulty providing suitable access for disabled people to carry out watch duties at the marine rescue radio base. The coast guard is trying to obtain appropriate facilities and adequate funding to ensure a better arrangement.

The Australian Volunteer Coast Guard National Flotilla 1 operates eight-metre catamarans that are equipped with 150 horsepower outboard motors. We operate on Sydney Harbour and look after events, such as the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, the New Year's Eve fireworks, the Australia Day races and parades, and more recently the historical arrival of the Cunard Queens, *Queen Mary 2* and *Queen Elizabeth 2*. Because we look after such events, it is an eye opener for us, given the speed limitations and the exclusion zones, to see the number of people who get out on the water but have absolutely no understanding of marine safety. The Australian Volunteer Coast Guard's slogan is "Safety by all means". As I have said on many occasions, regrettably it is more good luck than good management on the part of many skippers who are in charge of very expensive vessels and who do not have much marine understanding that there are not more accidents on the harbour.

I pay tribute to the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard's National Commodore, Chris Gillett, who first joined the Ku-ring-gai Flotilla, or NF3 that operates in Broken Bay, in 1987. Being a schoolteacher, Chris was soon volunteered to assist with the production and running of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard's public instruction courses. Chris had a certain style that was rather laid-back, informative and easily understood, and it was not long before he achieved the highest operational rating within the flotilla, patrol officer. Shortly thereafter Chris became Staff Captain of the New South Wales Squadron Board, and he then went on to become the Squadron Commodore.

The Port Jackson Flotilla, which was established in 1967, has celebrated its fortieth anniversary. The average size of the flotilla's vessels in 1967 was 7.3 metres. All the vessels in the flotilla were donated: indeed, all facilities were donated. As members no doubt are aware, government funding did not begin until 1992. Volunteers who were out on Sydney Harbour, on the Parramatta River, out past the heads, down at Botany Bay, around to Solander Bay, up to Broken Bay, and right up to the Queensland border, were also the people who ran the raffles and the sausage sizzles. That still happens. More than 50 per cent of our funding comes from fetes, sausage sizzles and the like. Volunteers contribute an inordinate amount of time to keep the flotilla going.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the diving section of the flotilla had a range of equipment, right down to underwater oxyacetylene cutting gear. The equipment was owned by Graham Salisbury, an A-grade certificate diver. Graham put a lot of money into keeping the diving section going for many years until, unfortunately, it folded in the late 1970s. National Flotilla 2 and National Flotilla 3 were formed in the 1970s. Ern White became the New South Wales Squadron Staff Captain in September 1970, and on 21 September of that year Lloyd Parry, who is still a member of National Flotilla 1, was elected Flotilla Commander, and Colin Heaton was appointed Flotilla Staff Officer. In 1977 the Hon. K. G. Booth, MLA, accompanied by his wife, officially opened National Flotilla 1's new radio base at the Middle Harbour Yacht Club but it was not long before the radio base had to close. Fortunately, some time later, we obtained the facilities we now have at Macquarie Lighthouse at South Head.

Hopefully, as time goes by, we will be able to amalgamate with other volunteer associations, such as the Coastal Patrol and the Volunteer Rescue Association, so that the three organisations that provide very similar services will become one and will receive more funding as a result. I live in hope that in time we will use the same boating facilities as those used by the Water Police under the Anzac Bridge. Perhaps our marine radio facilities will be increased to match those of the Coastal Patrol at Terrey Hills or the like, which will enable us to use the services of people with disabilities who cannot negotiate the stairs at Macquarie Lighthouse.

Discussions that are currently taking place hopefully will overcome those disadvantages and improve the services that we are able to provide to people who at times, quite frankly, do not have a full appreciation of the dangers that present on the water or of the assistance that is provided by marine rescue volunteers. At times it is hard to help some people. I enjoy the opportunity to get out on the water whenever I can—once a month or thereabouts—as part of National Flotilla 1. I thank the mover for bringing this important proposition to the House during Volunteer Week.

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER [4.41 p.m.]: I congratulate the members of the State Emergency Service on the wonderful work they do. I do so as a resident of Maitland—indeed as a resident of Duckenfield, which is just a paddock away from the Hunter River. This organisation owes its genesis to the response to the 1955 floods in Maitland. That is where it began. Sadly, we are too often reminded, living where we do, of the importance of this organisation and the selfless work and commitment of its wonderful volunteers during times of natural disasters, particularly in the Hunter over recent years. On all occasions there is a timely response. As everyone acknowledges, these volunteers do fantastic work.

I note that the motion congratulates the Government on its 23 per cent increase in funding. The Hon. Ian West talked about sausage sizzles, barbecues and raffles. There is a great deal of community support for the State Emergency Service and a considerable amount of operational funds is provided by the community. Just how much the Government contributes to the State Emergency Service is perhaps a debate for another day, but I wish to note that a great deal of time is spent by volunteers raising funds in order that they can do even more work.

There is ample evidence of State Emergency Service response in the Hunter in the past couple of years. During last year's floods its response was almost flawless. People had planned for such an occurrence, calling on the experience of major flooding in 1955 and the 1970s. Floodplain management plans are in place. In my area alone, we conduct rehearsals to prepare for such emergencies. The State Emergency Service knows exactly how to respond, as we saw in June 2007 and even more recently. Though the recent flooding was relatively minor the State Emergency Service was on hand to close roads. Volunteers even assisted me to get my car out of some quite deep floodwater that had risen very quickly. The fantastic efforts of some volunteers during the floods in the Hunter region in June last year have been widely acknowledged. Their efforts to help people escape from floodwaters were most brave, selfless and above and beyond the call of duty. Many people owe their lives to the State Emergency Service volunteers.

I have talked about floods quite a lot, but as members know the Hunter has also experienced a severe earthquake. I grew up in an earthquake area, but the Hunter was not prepared for such a disaster. However, in 1989 when an earthquake struck Newcastle, the State Emergency Service once again came to the fore. I am reminded of the response of the volunteers and of their efforts pulling people out of dangerous situations, every time I see reports of earthquakes overseas. I had given birth just a couple of hours before the earthquake struck, and I remember being evacuated from the hospital. Each year we pause to remember those who lost their lives and the fantastic work of the volunteers during that earthquake.

On behalf of the Hunter and from my heart, I give thanks to the wonderful volunteers for the work they undertake with the State Emergency Service. The community thanks them wholeheartedly for their support and ongoing commitment. I hope that the Government continues to support them, and indeed that the Government sees its way clear to increase funding over time. We will forever acknowledge, and congratulate them on, their contribution.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO [4.47 p.m.]: I join my colleagues in paying tribute to the members of the State Emergency Service. I am sure all members of this Chamber would be able to tell similar stories of witnessing these volunteers hard at work, usually in the worst conditions, turning out to help people who have suffered damage in storms, floods and other emergencies in their local district. I am aware that the past year has been one of the busiest on record for members of the State Emergency Service, who have put in a tremendous effort to protect the community from the ravages of nature.

The State Emergency Service was in constant statewide operational response mode from the June long weekend last year until February as severe weather struck many areas of New South Wales. The electorates for which I am the duty member of the Legislative Council—Ballina, South Coast, Orange and Tweed—have not escaped this weather unscathed. The coastal region from the South Coast through to the Hunter has endured numerous wind and rainstorms over this time. While the worst of the weather on the June 2007 long weekend struck the Hunter and Central Coast, the weather system that caused those howling winds and flooding rains stretched down the coast to the Illawarra, keeping local volunteers busy.

Less than a month later these volunteers again turned out in response to gale force winds that felled trees and caused roof damage across Wollongong and Kiama. With 854 requests for help, crews from the Southern Highlands and South Coast helped to complete the work. This has been followed by a series of storms across the latter half of last year and throughout the summer. As my colleague the Hon. Tony Catanzariti has described to the Chamber, widespread storms and floods across much of the State's Central West meant that local State Emergency Service volunteers and their colleagues from further afield spent much of the Christmas-New Year period helping residents who had suffered storm damage, protecting others from rising floodwaters, and ensuring that those who were isolated had essential food, medical and livestock supplies.

I am afraid that volunteers in the State's far north who were looking forward to spending the new year relaxing on the beach were sadly disappointed. Just a few months after the severe Lismore hailstorm and Dunoon tornado in October, both of which were declared natural disasters, volunteers again pulled on their orange overalls, this time to respond to widespread flooding. This run of natural disasters across the State's northern rivers was so severe that the local newspaper, the *Northern Star*, was prompted in January to print "Three Strikes", a lift-out pictorial souvenir of the hailstorm, tornado and floods. It was a tough few months for the local community on the North Coast.

Just after New Year's Day a low-pressure system brought heavy rain and severe weather to the coastal Tweed and Northern Rivers areas. Widespread flooding across the region resulted in the declaration of more natural disasters. Tragically, one woman lost her life in the floodwaters. I am sure that all members join me in extending condolences to her family and friends. Flood warnings were issued for the Richmond, Wilsons and Tweed rivers, and major flood levels were reached along the Richmond River. This emergency showed the versatility of our State Emergency Service volunteers as they carried out flood reconnaissance and planning; rescued people from vehicles trapped on roads and bridges by rising floodwaters; evacuated a caravan park at Kyogle and the Aboriginal community at Cabbage Tree Island near Woodburn; responded to two landslide incidents, one of which threatened the safety of three occupants in a house; transported a young mother and her sick baby through floodwaters to a waiting ambulance so that they could be taken to hospital; and transported a community health worker to an isolated resident with an ongoing medical condition to deliver essential medicine.

They also coordinated major air operations for evacuating and resupplying residents, in particular, those in Coraki, which was isolated by floodwaters, and gathered intelligence on flood levels and peaks. No wonder they like to refer to themselves as the Swiss army knives of the emergency services! State Emergency Service volunteers are truly very versatile. State Emergency Service volunteers also travelled from around the State to support this flood operation, including members from Wollongong, Shoalhaven, Sydney, the Northern Tablelands, Goulburn, Yass, Bungendore and Queanbeyan. Other members referred to this Government's commitment to supporting State Emergency Service volunteers with record funding over 13 years. I welcome that funding and the advances in facilities, training and equipment it has brought to members around the State. I place on record my thanks to each and every one of the service's volunteers who gave of their time so willingly to help people in emergency situations in real need.

People suffering storm and flood damage are at their lowest ebb: there is nothing worse for them or for small business owners. I suppose it could be said that I had the misfortune of visiting small business owners in the small village of Tabulam in my duty electorate of Ballina after a freak flood wiped out all small businesses on the main street—it is only a small village with about eight businesses. The corner store had to contend with freezers full of defrosted food and all businesses had to remove stinking mud. It is well and good for people to say that volunteers help these communities—the State Emergency Service is good in responding to these crises and insurance companies eventually come to the party and pay for damages—but home owners and small business owners have to deal with these dreadful situations. All their electrical goods and floor coverings were damaged and they had to remove the mud and stench.

People in farming areas often have the awful task of disposing of animal carcasses from their yards or fences. That is why I said that people suffering storm and flood damage are at their lowest ebb. That is when the

skilled, professional and friendly State Emergency Service volunteers make all the difference: they help these people return their lives to some kind of normalcy. I also thank the volunteers' families for their strongly continuing support, and the employers who allow the volunteers on their staff to leave their workplaces to respond to calls for help. They also make a valuable contribution to our emergency operations. Not that long ago my elderly parents, who are not in a position to climb up ladders and onto roofs, had to call in the Marrickville State Emergency Service to come and help them when they had a major problem with a leaking roof, which caused a ceiling collapse and flooding to one of the rooms in their home.

The level of support and the friendly and good-natured services they received from the Marrickville State Emergency Service overwhelmed them. Volunteers came out with ladders and tarpaulins in their truck, secured the tarpaulins to the roof and later, because there was quite windy weather, rang back to establish whether the tarpaulins were still in place. I do not think my parents have had to call out the State Emergency Service before; they have always been pretty self-reliant. Even though I think it is pretty foolhardy to get up on a roof without a harness most homeowners seem to think it is the normal thing to do, that is, until they have an accident. My parents, who have been very self-reliant about maintaining their home, were exceptionally pleased and grateful for the assistance they received from the State Emergency Service on that occasion.

The volunteers of the State Emergency Service are a force for tremendous good. I congratulate them on their hard work and unflagging commitment. People in New South Wales would be in a pretty parlous situation if it were not for State Emergency Service volunteers, and volunteers in so many other organisations such as the Rural Fire Service, who provide assistance. I thank all those who give of their time for nothing other than the good of the community. It is serendipitous that we are dealing with this motion in Volunteer Week—a week in which we recognise volunteer contributions to our communities.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA [4.56 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak about the wonderful job that is done by more than 10,000 volunteers operating in the 229 State Emergency Service [SES] units located throughout New South Wales. As we are celebrating Volunteers Week this week I pay tribute to all those unpaid heroes. The State Emergency Service is an emergency and rescue service dedicated to assisting our communities. While its major responsibilities are for flood and storm operations, it also provides the majority of general rescue effort in rural parts of the State, and that includes road accident rescue, vertical rescue, bush search and rescue, evidence searches in both metropolitan and rural areas, and other forms of specialist rescue that may be required due to local threats.

The service's trained rescuers also support full-time emergency services during major disasters—services such as the New South Wales Police Force, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, the New South Wales Fire Brigades and the Ambulance Service of New South Wales. The third part of this motion is a little too rich for me. It claims that this Government spent \$51.5 million in 2007-08. However, no report confirms that the money was spent or where it was spent. I cannot congratulate the Government on announcing that more money has been allocated in the budget unless it can prove that other funding has been spent and on what it has been spent. Local State Emergency Service volunteers work closely with councils and other community groups on a number of community education activities to help people help themselves when storms and floods occur.

The State Emergency Service and councils are partners in creating resilient and well-prepared communities. In my 16 years as a member of Hurstville City Council I had a close relationship with the State Emergency Service. Indeed, when I was the member for Georges River my electoral office was in the emergency services building, so I had daily contact with the State Emergency Service, administration staff and many of the volunteers. As has already been mentioned, hundreds of State Emergency Service volunteers will be on duty throughout the World Youth Day celebrations from 14 to 20 July. Without them our authorities and our agencies would be stretched to the limit. Those volunteers respond to a variety of emergencies, many of which are life threatening, resulting from flood, fire, storm, tempest and other incidents involving much danger and hardship. In particular I place on record the Coalition's thanks for the efforts of all volunteers involved in assisting the local communities of the Hunter and Central Coast and other parts of New South Wales during the wild storms experienced in those regions. I praise each and every State Emergency Service volunteer who responds to any request for help.

On 11 June 2007 waters around Maitland were expected to reach 11.4 metres; water had inundated an estimated 100 low-lying properties on the fringe of Maitland. Up to 4,000 residents from central Maitland, south Maitland and Lorn were evacuated by the State Emergency Service for safety reasons, and spent the night in evacuation shelters. Flood warnings were declared for the Hastings, Manning, Paterson and Williams rivers, and Tuggerah Lakes, and a flash-flood warning was posted for Bulahdelah with regards to the Myall River.

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

The House continued to sit.

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

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by the Hon. Penny Sharpe agreed to:

That this House at its rising today do adjourn until Tuesday 3 June 2008 at 2.30 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Postponement of Business

Government Business Notice of Motion No. 1 and Government Business Order of the Day No. 2 postponed on motion by the Hon. Penny Sharpe.

ADMISSION OF THE TREASURER INTO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Consideration of the Legislative Assembly's message of 14 May 2008.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [5.01 p.m.], on behalf of the Hon. John Della Bosca: I move:

That this House agrees to the request of the Legislative Assembly in its message dated 14 May 2008 for the Hon. Michael Costa MLC, Treasurer, Minister for Infrastructure, and Minister for the Hunter, to attend the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday 3 June 2008 at 12 noon to give a speech of unlimited duration in relation to the New South Wales Budget 2008-2009.

The Hon. GREG PEARCE [5.02 p.m.]: Of Course, the Coalition will not oppose this motion as the Constitution requires the Treasurer to present the budget in the lower House. The procedure has taken place on at least 12 occasions over the past 13 years, and I look forward to it continuing after the 2011 election when the Coalition is in government. Obviously, I would not say anything today that would preclude that process from continuing. However, the point must be made, as we have on other occasions, that the Government has descended to an unexceptional level with regard to transparency, due process and accountability.

When a motion was debated in the lower House to permit the attendance of the Treasurer in that place to present the budget, my colleague the member for Murrumbidgee moved an amendment that was designed to emphasise that the Treasurer is not accountable in the lower House for his budget. However, I add that the Treasurer does not respond to the budget debate in this House either. The amendment sought to allow the Leader of the Opposition equal time to speak to the budget after it was delivered. The amendment further sought that the Treasurer return to the lower House on the first sitting day following his Budget Speech to answer questions on the budget and the appropriation bills. The Coalition has moved a similar motion with regard to this procedure over past years. The Opposition believes that there should be proper scrutiny of the Treasurer immediately after the delivery of the budget.

On a number of occasions I have referred to the Treasurer's inability to properly forecast or deliver budget results. I do not propose to take up the time of the House to again go through his record, suffice it to say that he has presided over two years of breaches of targets under the Fiscal Responsibility Act. The Opposition expects a repetition of those breaches when the next budget is presented on 3 June. Such breaches go to the credibility of this Government, and of the Premier and Treasurer, both of whom cannot comply with their legislative fiscal targets.

Labor's almost 13 years of expenses blowouts, high anti-competitive taxes, debt policy switches, and infrastructure and services decline have been accompanied by a deterioration in budget transparency and accountability, and have reduced the Parliament's role to a virtual rubber stamp. Transparency and accountability have been weakened in many respects by Labor's budget processes and financial management. I mention just a few: reporting of information is inconsistent and routinely changed to suit political exigencies—it will be interesting to see what changes occur in the presentation of this year's Budget; billion-dollar transactions are routine without adequate explanation; and millions of dollars are switched between programs or paid without prior appropriations or explanation as to the variances.

These are serious weaknesses in transparency and accountability, especially when considering the significant fluctuations and variations in forecasts and results, which, as I previously stated, have reached a new level under Treasurer Costa. Two continuing trends in the Treasurer's mis-forecasts are the continuing blow-outs of expenses—again it will be interesting to see whether he has been able to rein in his high-spending Ministers—and the reliance of this Government on windfall unforecast tax revenues, and increased Commonwealth revenue as well as revenue and payments it gouges from public trading enterprises.

When tested on its provision of core public services, such as health, education and police services utilising core government revenue from the tax base, the current New South Wales Government consistently has operated a cash deficit and relied on funds derived from public trading enterprises to rescue its financial position. Billion-dollar transactions and variations are routine with little explanation. For example, in the 2007-08 budget a so-called grant of \$960 million to the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation was disclosed for the 2006-07 year. This grant was not foreshadowed in either the 2006-07 budget or the mid-year review. Indeed, the 2006-07 budget forecast "growth in Budget grants for capital for rail, almost doubling from \$331 million in 2000-01 to \$605 million in 2005-06", but I add that the forecast continued with "a decline in grants for the Epping to Chatswood Rail Line from \$152 million in 2006-07 to \$18.9 million in 2007-08".

The budget forecast actually included a grant for the Epping to Chatswood rail line, which we all know is being produced now at double the cost and with half the meat from the forecast \$18.9 million. Suddenly, up popped \$960 million for that particular project. Under Treasurer Egan the Public Finance and Audit Act was amended to allow agencies to swap funds between programs during the year. Whilst each agency is required to produce a results and services plan, often the financial measures and results are not made public and no explanation or scrutiny of agencies' spending shifts is forthcoming. Transparency, scrutiny and accountability are foreign to this Government. Whilst the Opposition will not oppose this motion, these matters need to be taken into account.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Message forwarded to the Legislative Assembly advising it of the resolution.

JURY AMENDMENT BILL 2008

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

Second Reading

The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS (Attorney General, and Minister for Justice) [5.11 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The primary purpose of the Jury Amendment Bill 2008 is to amend the Jury Act 1977 to confer express powers on judges to discharge jurors for cause or due to irregularities in empanelment, and to allow trials to continue in appropriate circumstances. Trial by jury is one of the foundation stones upon which our system of constitutional democracy was established. Juries continue to play a central role in our criminal justice system today. Juries give legitimacy to the decisions made by our courts and provide the community with an ongoing opportunity to participate in the criminal justice system through an independent and impartial group of people drawn from the community. Public confidence in the institutions of the modern criminal justice system is critical to its continued successful operation.

In recent years there has been significant focus on juries and their role in the administration of justice in New South Wales. As society changes and develops, juries must keep pace so that they are able to meet these new demands. The bill implements the recommendations contained in chapter 11 of the New South Wales Law Reform Commission's Report 117, "Jury selection", which was released in January 2008. The bill proposes to implement the recommendations contained in that chapter with only minor modifications. Report 117 makes 74 recommendations about the jury system, including recommendations designed to widen the jury pool; improve juror fees, conditions and amenities; protect jurors' employment whilst they are serving on a jury; and review the adequacy of penalties for failing to attend court for jury service.

The Government has already implemented a number of other recommendations contained in the report, which concern the empanelment of additional jurors in long trials. These reforms commenced on 1 January 2008. The Government is continuing to consult with the community and stakeholders in relation to the report's remaining recommendations. However, it is important that the recommendations contained in chapter 11 of the report be implemented as soon as possible. It is anticipated that these reforms will reduce the need to hold retrials and thereby maximise court resources. The following organisations were consulted during the development of this bill: the New South Wales Law Reform Commission, the Supreme Court of New South Wales, the District Court of New South Wales, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Law Society of New South Wales, the New South Wales Bar Association, the Public Defender's Office, and the Legal Aid Commission of New South Wales.

I now turn to the key provisions of this bill. Schedule 1 inserts new part 7A, sections 53A to 53C, into the Jury Act 1977. This part will confer express powers upon courts and coroners to discharge jurors during the course of a trial or inquest. At common law, if a juror died or was unable to continue due to illness, the whole jury had to be discharged and a new jury sworn. This resulted in an excessive number of retrials, which were costly and disruptive to the administration of justice. Section 22 of the Act was introduced to address this situation by allowing trials to continue in criminal matters where jurors have been discharged and the number of jurors does not fall below a prescribed number. However, the Act does not currently contain an express provision empowering judges to discharge individual jurors. The power to discharge individual jurors is currently only implied as necessary to give effect to section 22 of the Act.

As such, the bill will insert new sections 53A and 53B into the Act. These sections will give judges express legislative powers to discharge jurors. Section 53A will require a court or coroner to discharge a juror if, in the course of a trial or coronial inquest, it is found that the juror was mistakenly or irregularly empanelled, whether because the juror was disqualified or ineligible to serve as a juror, or was otherwise not returned and selected in accordance with the Act; the juror has become disqualified from serving, or ineligible to serve as a juror; or the juror has engaged in misconduct in relation to the trial or coronial inquest. Misconduct is defined for the purposes of the section as conduct that constitutes an offence against the Jury Act 1977, or other conduct that, in the opinion of the court or coroner, gives rise to the risk of a substantial miscarriage of justice in the trial or coronial inquest. In the circumstances set out in new section 53A, the discharge of the juror will be mandatory.

New section 53A will give a court or coroner discretion to discharge an individual juror in the course of a trial or coronial inquest on certain specified grounds or for any other suitable reason. The statutory grounds for discharge include: the juror becoming so ill or infirm as to be likely to become ineligible to serve or to be a health risk to other jurors; the juror appearing to be unable to give impartial consideration to the case; the juror refusing to take part in the jury's deliberations; or any other reason affecting the juror's ability to perform the functions of a juror.

New section 53C requires a court or coroner to discharge the entire jury if, following the death of a juror or the discharge of a juror, the court is of the opinion that to continue with the remaining jurors would give rise to the risk of a substantial miscarriage of justice. In assessing whether there is a risk of a substantial miscarriage of justice, it is expected that the court or coroner will consider whether the risk is a real one; that is, a risk which is a material possibility, not a risk which a reasonable person would dismiss as being far fetched or merely fanciful. Further, it is intended that the death of a juror would only give rise to a risk of a substantial miscarriage of justice if the juror's death occurred in circumstances which are intended to, or likely to, intimidate or influence the deliberations or verdict of the remaining jurors; that is, it is not intended that the death of a juror, in and of itself, even if it causes a short disruption to the trial, will be sufficient grounds for the discharge of the remaining jurors.

In the event that the court or coroner is satisfied that there is no risk of a substantial miscarriage of justice, section 53C will allow the trial or coronial inquest to continue with a reduced number of jurors. The power to continue the trial or coronial inquest will continue to be subject to section 22 of the Act, which specifies that a trial or coronial inquest may only continue where there would be a sufficient number of jurors left to comply with that section of the Act. As such, the bill also makes consequential amendments to sections 19, 20 and 21 of the Act to make it clear that a jury will be treated as consisting of persons selected and returned in accordance with the Act if the court or coroner orders that a trial or inquest continue with the remaining jurors following the death or discharge of a juror under proposed part 7A, and the number of jurors does not fall below the numbers specified in section 22 of the Act.

These amendments are made in response to the decisions in *R v Brown & Tran [2004] NSWCCA 324* and *Petroulias v R [2007] MSWCCA 134*. In the Brown case, a juror received a jury summons but reported for jury service a day early. The mistake was not noticed and the person was empanelled. During the trial, the mistake became apparent and the juror was discharged, but the trial continued. The Court of Criminal Appeal held that the trial, and therefore the verdict, was invalid because of the failure to comply with the statutory requirement that a jury consist of persons returned and selected in accordance with the Act. In the Petroulias case, it was discovered mid-trial that one juror was the subject of an order disqualifying him from driving. Under the Act, such an order automatically disqualifies a person from jury service.

The trial judge discharged the juror, and elected to continue the trial with the remaining 11 jurors under section 22 of the Act. On appeal, the majority of the court held that the trial process was flawed from the outset because the jury did not consist of persons returned and selected in accordance with the Act. The Law Reform Commission's report argues that these cases were decided on arguably too narrow technical and procedural grounds. In its verdicts in both those matters, the Court of Criminal Appeal relied upon strict interpretation of the legislation. It is intended that the amendments contained in the bill will instead require an assessment of whether the irregularities in empanelment were likely to have unduly influenced the decision making of the other members of the jury.

The bill also amends section 73 of the Jury Act 1977 to ensure that the verdict of a jury is not invalidated if a juror who was summonsed for jury service was empanelled irregularly or by mistake, or becomes disqualified from serving, or ineligible to serve, as a juror during a trial or coronial inquest. The amendment to section 73 will clarify that when a mistake has been made in empanelment or a juror has become disqualified from serving, or ineligible to serve, during a trial or coronial inquest the verdict will not be invalidated solely on that basis. Section 73 will also be amended to make it abundantly clear that a verdict will not be validated under that section when there is evidence of an attempt to impersonate a juror or to otherwise deliberately manipulate the composition of a jury. This amendment will apply to all of the grounds under section 73.

Finally, the bill inserts a new section 75C into the Act to enable jurors and former jurors to report irregularities in the empanelment or eligibility of another juror, or in relation to a fellow juror's conduct or capacity. Jurors can report any reasonable concerns they may have about another juror to the court or coroner during the trial, or to the sheriff after the conclusion of the trial. It is envisaged that this amendment will assist in bringing to light any irregularities in a juror's empanelment or eligibility status, or any misconduct on the part of a juror.

Schedule 2 to the bill amends the Criminal Appeal Act 1912 to allow appeals to the Court of Criminal Appeal in circumstances where a trial judge has decided to discharge an entire jury. This amendment is complementary to section 5F of the Act, which already allows appeals against a decision to discharge a single juror and to continue a trial with the remaining jurors. These reforms will allow trial judges to remove individual jurors who have been wrongly empanelled or who have engaged in misconduct. Judges will be able to continue with a trial, provided they are satisfied that to do so would not give rise to the risk of a substantial miscarriage of justice and there remains a sufficient number of jurors to comply with section 22 of the Act.

These amendments will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the New South Wales justice system. In the normal course of events an entire trial should not be aborted simply because of circumstances affecting one or two jurors. Aborted trials are costly and delays in finalising proceedings can cause significant distress, particularly to victims and witnesses. Avoiding unnecessary retrials will ensure that limited court resources are not wasted unnecessarily. The New South Wales Government is committed to ensuring that the jury system is strong enough to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The Government's commitment is demonstrated by this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

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

WORKERS COMPENSATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 14 May 2008.

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) [5.23 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to the debate. I commend the bill to the House.

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 4 agreed to.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER (Leader of the Opposition) [5.25 p.m.], by leave: I move Opposition amendments Nos 1 and 2 in globo:

No. 1 Page 6, schedule 1, line 21. Omit "extends". Insert instead "does not apply".

No. 2 Page 6, schedule 1, line 22. Insert "the day occurring 30 days after" after "before".

Members of the crossbench have indicated to me that they will not be supporting these amendments. That is unfortunate. I had hoped that there would be an opportunity for a degree of fairness to be applied to the various industry groups, as I put forward in my contribution to the second reading debate yesterday. I am not seeking any special favours; I am simply asking that these amendments be at least given a chance to stand on their own merits in terms of their application, and that the Government show not generosity but a degree of fairness and fair play to the organisations, particularly the Aged Care Employers Mutual Limited, that have done everything asked of them. Providing for a 30-day period would give organisations and industry groups such as Aged Care Employers Mutual an opportunity to put their case for becoming a specialised insurer.

Given the conversations I have had this evening, unfortunately that will not happen. I simply express to the industry groups that have missed out on this occasion that the Opposition is dissatisfied that, despite their attempts to meet the Government's requirements, the Government has moved the goalpost and changed the rules mid-stream. That is unfair. I wish them well in terms of their continuing participation in the workers compensation scheme.

Ms LEE RHIANNON [5.28 p.m.]: The Greens do not support the amendments. While we acknowledge that some individual specialised schemes deliver a good service, what must be a priority is the integrity of the workers compensation scheme. That must be maintained and safeguarded so that the scheme delivers for the majority of workers. We are concerned about cherry picking. Cherry picking occurs in lucrative areas, and over time cherry picking would result in the scheme being white-anted. That would be the outcome of the Coalition's amendments.

It is worth noting that the amendments moved by the Leader of the Opposition go much further than what Aged Care Employers Mutual asked for. The suggested amendment circulated by that group would have allowed it, as a specialised insurer, to continue with its application for a WorkCover licence. Interestingly, the Coalition's amendments go much further. The Leader of the Opposition said that he wanted his amendments to stand on their merits. It is worth remembering that request when we consider the amendments because, if adopted, they would provide a 30-day window for specialised insurers to move into the workers compensation area.

The Leader of the Opposition is opening a wide door for many insurers to move into that field, which would pick the eyes out of the scheme. That is what the Greens are concerned about. We need to maintain the scheme to provide universal coverage. We should not allow anything to further weaken the workers compensation scheme. The amendment would result in some good employers leaving the scheme, and that is already happening even at a Federal level with Comcare. Optus has gone over and that impacts on the overall way the scheme works.

The Greens cannot allow a weakening of the scheme because that would leave only small and bad employers, therefore scheme premiums and compliance costs would increase, and over time the scheme would become unviable. The scheme that will be put in place by the provisions of this bill is a major achievement. It is a big breakthrough to exempt employers paying wages below the \$7,500 threshold from the requirement to have a workers compensation policy because it will bring a big shift in the handling of this issue in New South Wales. In rejecting this amendment the Greens do not reflect on some of the smaller insurers: I acknowledge their commitment to assist workers. I have heard firsthand about the way they work and the benefits that they bring to

the lives of people and about their commitment to bring back people to work. Many of them run efficient, well-managed schemes. I reiterate that universal coverage is an important principle of workers compensation, and it is obviously linked to the viability of the scheme. The Greens do not want to set back that advance and will not support the amendment.

The Hon. ROBERT BROWN [5.31 p.m.]: The Shooters Party is disappointed that the Greens will oppose the amendment. I understand their concept of the opening of the floodgates. There are some dichotomies of ideology when one thinks about what the Federal Government is doing to the private health care industry, as it has a similar argument. I do not believe that the end result of agreeing to this amendment would open the floodgates. I am mindful that the Regulation Review Committee found that the retrospective aspects of the bill are discriminatory, particularly against groups like Aged Care Employers Mutual who had gone so far down the track to have its application tested on its merits. But that is politics, and the Shooters Party will swallow its disappointment.

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) [5.32 p.m.]: The Government is pleased that the Greens will not support the amendment. The Government thought through very carefully the consequences—to use the expression of the Hon. Robert Brown—of closing the floodgates in this particular aspect of the scheme. Ms Lee Rhiannon has very accurately stated in her contribution why there are serious risks to the scheme and to the public interest by continuing to allow the floodgates to remain open.

When the board and the executive of WorkCover made recommendations to me about the timing of such a decision and the way in which, effectively, the floodgates would be closed, as has been acknowledged, a number of organisations were in the process with applications and some will be disappointed that the line has been drawn. I state that the line has to be drawn at some point, and the Government was mindful in accepting advice about drawing that line to be fair to those that had applications on foot, and were proceeding, and had completed all the appropriate steps. None of the organisations, regardless of whatever goodwill they established and good faith they expressed, were in a position to meet the requirements as at the closure of this element of the scheme. I commend the proposed section to the Committee.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER (Leader of the Opposition) [5.34 p.m.]: The Minister for Industrial Relations referred to industry groups that were not in a position to proceed but that is because they did not know that the guillotine was coming down. No-one had bothered to tell them when the decision was made in the inner sanctums of WorkCover and the Government, or that on such and such a date it would be cut off. The Government should have done the right thing and let those who had invested money that it would happen. It was kept secret. I liked the contributions of Ms Lee Rhiannon and the Minister, who talked about the opening of the floodgates as if another party had opened them.

The Minister opened the floodgates and created this situation. The Minister is responsible for the workers compensation scheme that allowed industry groups to proceed down the path that he and his Government created for them. The Government and the Minister put in place the processes that asked them to get specialised insurance. The Minister should not make out that he is doing the right thing by closing the floodgates, to which Ms Lee Rhiannon referred, when it was the Government that constructed the floodgates and used the mechanism by which to open them. This mess is solely the Minister's responsibility. The Minister has treated unfairly the industry groups, who in good faith have followed the guidelines and steps that he set for them to have specialised insurance. When the Minister realised that the construction, as he now purports it to be, of this floodgate mechanism was a bad decision of the Government he quickly began to close it so that no-one has the opportunity to slip through, irrespective of fairness, how much had been invested, or any factor. The Minister should say that he and the Government constructed the floodgate, that it was wrong, accept responsibility for it and apologise to organisations that have invested a fortune following the guidelines set by the Government.

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) [5.36 p.m.]: I do not want to labour this debate, but for the record I would like to correct the Leader of the Opposition so there is no misunderstanding. The Leader of the Opposition referred to substantial investments and made inferences about good faith. Although I did not want to, I will refer to specific organisations because clearly that is the intent of some of the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition. The application from Aged Care Employers Mutual was received and handled by WorkCover in accordance with the legislation in force and WorkCover's licensing policy.

Aged Care Employers Mutual was also advised of the strategic policy direction the board intended to take in respect of specialised insurance. This information was provided to Aged Care Employers Mutual so that it would not unknowingly expend resources on its application process. The chief executive officer and the chair of the board of WorkCover NSW advised Ms Penny Le Couteur, chief executive officer and chairperson of Employers Mutual Limited, of the WorkCover board's intention to recommend that the licence class be closed.

The Hon. Michael Gallacher: What date was that?

The Hon. JOHN DELLA BOSCA: That occurred more than three months in advance of the announcement made by me. Aged Care Employers Mutual continued with its application in full knowledge of the risk that its application would not be considered. It is very important to understand that that was the case. If a licence were to be granted to organisations that already had expressed an interest—this is the point about floodgates—by changing the rules for one organisation, the rules have to be changed for others. If licences were granted to all organisations that expressed an interest in applying to WorkCover, which would be the criterion that the Leader of the Opposition contends for, that could reduce the size of the scheme by up to 15 per cent. Agreeing to the amendments will be detrimental to the interests of both employers and workers in New South Wales, and it could be catastrophic for the viability of the WorkCover scheme.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER (Leader of the Opposition) [5.39 p.m.]: Let me correct the Minister. I am not sure if he has been told of the existence of the document I have or, if he has been told, how he could advance his argument. How could it happen that Aged Care Employers Mutual, at least three months prior to the announcement—so at some point towards the end of 2007—could be told that WorkCover could not proceed with the application when, on 15 January 2008 the acting director of the regulatory and financial services group of WorkCover wrote to Aged Care Employers Mutual Limited, acknowledging receipt of the application dated 18 December 2007 for a specialised insurer licence under section 177 of the Workers Compensation Act 1987, and enclosing WorkCover's receipt for the application fee of \$30,000? I have a copy of the receipt. I am beginning to become a bit confused about where the three months came in.

WorkCover confirmed that the licence application dated 18 December 2007 from Aged Care Employers Mutual Limited met the broad application requirements for a specialised insurer licence, yet some time towards the end of 2007, in the last three months of 2007, Aged Care Employers Mutual was told, "Sorry, the door is closed. Forget it. It's all over, red rover." Later the company received a letter dated 15 January this year confirming that the licence application met the broad application requirements for the specialised insurer licence under section 177 of the Workers Compensation Act. Not only that, but WorkCover banked the \$30,000! Thanks for the money! WorkCover accepted the money and confirmed that the application met the broad application requirements.

The Hon. John Della Bosca: What were they supposed to do—put it on the favourite in the fifth?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: Minister—

The Hon. John Della Bosca: What are they supposed to do? What else are they going to do with a cheque?

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: Someone behind you is not telling you what is going on. No-one is telling the Minister what is going on. How could it happen that the Minister could somehow be misled? Aged Care Employers Mutual had been given the information that it was all over, yet in January WorkCover pocketed the \$30,000 and sent a letter stating, "You meet the broad application requirements." What in heaven's name is going on?

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) [5.42 p.m.]: I do not want to labour the point, but the Leader of the Opposition always has been good at histrionics and theatrics, and we have just seen another demonstration of that. My submission to the Committee is absolutely consistent with the facts that he has just outlined.

WorkCover is a public sector organisation—a public organisation, with public liabilities, and with a public process. Of course, when there is an application lodged, there are forms and processes to acknowledge that application. And, of course, if a public sector organisation—indeed, any responsible organisation—is given a cheque, it is banked. What would the Leader of the Opposition expect WorkCover to do—put it on the favourite in the fifth or something? That is silly. He knows that that is what an organisation would do.

I repeat for the benefit of the Committee, and so that members are not confused at all by the excellent acting skills of the Leader of the Opposition, that the chief executive officer and the chairperson of WorkCover advised the chief executive officer and chairperson of Employers Mutual of the board's intention to recommend that the licence class be closed. That occurred more than three months before the announcement was made. Members should not be deceived. This is no different from when Commonwealth governments, and sometimes State governments, but perhaps less often, need to change taxation arrangements and all kinds of categories of regulatory changes—fair notice is given to everybody. Indeed, other applicant organisations whose applications were far less advanced or had not yet been made also were aware. This was a fairly common point of discussion within the industry. It was a fairly common point of discussion certainly among the key players in the industry. It is drawing the longbow to suggest that because an application was received and a cheque was banked, that contradicts what I said in my original submission. I ask the Committee not to be distracted by the Leader of the Opposition's very good acting.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER (Leader of the Opposition) [5.44 p.m.]: I again make the observation that the facts I have outlined are consistent with a stuff-up by WorkCover. WorkCover banked the money and sent the applicant a conformation letter. I would hate to think that it is the normal practice of WorkCover for people to be sent incorrect information.

The Hon. John Della Bosca: It was not incorrect. It is not inconsistent.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: It was. It said that the company met the broad application requirements for the specialised insurer licence.

The Hon. John Della Bosca: No-one is saying that it did not.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: But the Minister had already made a decision that it was all over.

The Hon. John Della Bosca: Yes. But it is not inconsistent to meet the broad requirements and to be told that the category as a whole is being closed. They knew the category was being closed.

The Hon. MICHAEL GALLACHER: So WorkCover is going to take the money and send a letter saying, "You meet the broad application requirements for a workers compensation scheme that you have no chance of ever getting into"? WorkCover has said, "We'll take your money and send you a letter saying, 'Good luck', but the fact is that you have no chance of getting in." The Minister has not revealed this, but he may well have a very good point. I make the observation that the debate is to simply put matters on the record.

The die is already cast in terms of the numbers. But when was the \$30,000 returned to Aged Care Mutual's bank account? That is a fair question. Did it go back the next day? Did it go back the next week? When did it go back? As a matter of interest, I would love to know, for the sake of debate. Another thing that needs to be said is that, for all the inconvenience suffered and the contribution made by a small number of organisations or industry groups that invested in this proposal, following the Minister's guidelines, the least his Government could do is offer an apology for closing the door on them and say, "Look, we're sorry, but we had to do it", instead of trying to make out that no loss was suffered by them, and it did not cause inconvenience at all. The least his Government could do is recognise that he has put that industry group through a fair degree of wasted investment and time, and apologise. It also would be interesting to know when Aged Care Mutual got its money back.

Question—That Opposition amendments Nos 1 and 2 be agreed to—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 16

Mr Ajaka	Mr Gay	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	Mr Khan	Mr Smith
Mr Clarke	Mr Lynn	
Ms Ficarra	Reverend Dr Moyes	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gallacher	Ms Parker	Mr Colless
Miss Gardiner	Mrs Pavey	Mr Harwin

Noes, 20

Mr Catanzariti	Dr Kaye	Ms Sharpe
Mr Cohen	Mr Kelly	Mr Tsang
Mr Costa	Mr Obeid	Mr West
Mr Della Bosca	Mr Primrose	Ms Westwood
Ms Griffin	Ms Rhiannon	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Hale	Ms Robertson	Mr Donnelly
Mr Hatzistergos	Mr Roozendaal	Mr Veitch

Pairs

Ms Cusack	Mr Macdonald
Mr Mason-Cox	Ms Voltz

Question resolved in the negative.

Opposition amendments Nos 1 and 2 negatived.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported from Committee without amendment.

Adoption of Report

Motion by the Hon. John Della Bosca agreed to:

That the report be adopted.

Report adopted.

Third Reading

Motion by the Hon. John Della Bosca agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Hon. TONY KELLY (Minister for Lands, Minister for Rural Affairs, Minister for Regional Development, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) [5.56 p.m.]: I move:

That this House do now adjourn.

GREEN CAPITAL "FACING WASTE" CONFERENCE

Mr IAN COHEN [5.56 p.m.]: This morning I attended the Green Capital "Facing Waste" Conference, which provided an illuminating debate on how societies manage the reuse and recycling of waste resources. Managing waste is not a sexy topic or issue. Diminishing reserves of traditional natural resources and increasing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions will reshape waste management priorities and its profile in the public's consciousness. We are facing a meteoric rise in the importance of how our society handles consumer products over the lifecycle of those products.

E-waste, in particular, poses new challenges to the way in which emissions from landfill can be mitigated. Looking beyond the fact that emissions from landfill contribute approximately 3 per cent of all Australian greenhouse gas emissions, waste in landfill that is considered as waste should be harnessed for its resource capacity. Steps must be taken to reduce the 23 per cent of products on the extended producer

responsibility list that are currently in landfill. Whether we support alternative waste technologies whereby methane emitted from landfill is captured and used to create energy that is sold back into the grid, or the source segregation of organics for the purpose of creating nutrient-rich compost to be used as fertiliser on agricultural crops, it is clear that we are facing a new paradigm in waste management.

The Federal Government has recognised that paradigm shift. The Commonwealth Standing Committee on Communications and the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts will be considering the issue of managing waste from various commercial household and industrial streams and will be establishing how to maximise resource recovery by source separating different waste streams. For all those positive, innovative and imaginative steps forward, certain elements at the conference projected an irrational fear of innovation and progression in waste management and continue to reject the effectiveness of container deposit schemes.

Murray Hogath, group strategy director of the Ecos Corporation, asked a question of Mr Russell Peel, board member of the National Packaging Covenant Council, on the relevance of extended producer responsibility, or EPR—the idea that the producer is responsible for packaging through the whole lifecycle of the product. Mr Peel curtly responded that the debate over EPR was long over. The question that remains is: How is EPR to be achieved? Strangely, the principle and term are glaringly absent from the lexicon of the packaging industry.

The National Packaging Covenant, which is a voluntary self-regulatory scheme that is alleged to reduce the environmental impact of packaging, makes no mention of the term "extended producer responsibility" in its glossary or in the substantive body of its covenant. If the packaging industry accepts the principle, why has that been omitted from the covenant? The National Packaging Covenant deals in terms such as "shared responsibility". The agenda of the packaging industry is to disperse the economic and environmental externalities of packaging across a broad range of society, but it squarely burdens the consumer with the liability for waste management. No manner of industry spin can contain this obvious fact.

Nine years of self-regulation under the watch of the National Packaging Covenant and nine years of packaging industry donations have created an atmosphere of recycling rate stagnation. Over the past nine years, Coca-Cola Amatil Ltd and Coca-Cola Amatil have donated over \$1.9 million to Australian political parties. Lion Nathan Australia Pty Limited and Lion Nathan Limited have donated \$427,491 to Australian political parties. Foster's Brewing Group Limited and Fosters have donated \$92,404, and Amcor Ltd has donated \$352,500.

I am not suggesting that packaging industry donations directly translate to a government rebuttal of waste recovery programs, such as container deposit schemes [CDS]. However, I feel uneasy that continued demands by the public for container deposit schemes, culminating in a 90 per cent public approval rate for the imposition of CDS, have not been heeded by government. I showed to conference attendees and the experienced panel a refillable coke polyethylene ter phthalate [PET] bottle that had been kindly passed onto me yesterday by a member of the German parliament, Hans-Josef Fell. The bottle I displayed to the conference had been refilled more than 20 times.

In my question to the panel, and specifically to Russel Peel who is a board member of the National Packaging Covenant Council, I suggested that compared to a resource recovery and waste management scheme whereby beverage packaging producers are required to refill bottles, a container deposit scheme is a conservative resource recovery proposition. Mr Peel's response was that the German system was an ideologically driven resource management system that is backed by punitive regulatory frameworks.

We must resist the imputations of the packaging industry which suggests that the implementation of waste management schemes, such as CDS, is a radicalisation of waste management measures. I certainly invite any member to see this PET bottle that has been recycled, reused, refilled some 20 times in its life. The average for PET bottles is about 20 times but for glass the average is 50 times. The study was undertaken in Germany with great success—it reflects the success rate of container deposit legislation in South Australia. I only hope the Government will take heed. [*Time expired.*]

WESTERN SYDNEY REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS CONFERENCE

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD [6.01 p.m.]: On 28 and 29 April 2008 the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [WSROC] celebrated 35 years of advocacy for Western Sydney with a major regional

conference entitled "Sydney the other city: building a sustainable Western Sydney by 2030". In 1973 WSROC was formed under Federal legislation. While this provided a legal framework for the organisation, WSROC's establishment and continued existence owe much to the initiative of the councils of Western Sydney. At the time of WSROC's creation, the region had experienced unprecedented population growth in the post-war era as new communities struggled with limited services and non-existent infrastructure.

The councils realised that they would have to work together and lobby Federal and State governments to recognise the urgent needs of the region. WSROC has advocated for Western Sydney communities ever since and has sought a fairer allocation of funding and resources to meet the needs of the region's still rapidly growing population. The organisation has a reputation for considered policy analysis and advocacy on a wide range of issues affecting the residents of Western Sydney. It provides a range of services for its member councils, including support for resource sharing and joint purchase initiatives. Its history of advocacy and working for its members illustrates the value of councils working together cooperatively through organisations such as WSROC.

The "Sydney the other city" regional conference is the latest example of WSROC's work. The objective of the conference was to shine a spotlight on Sydney's "other city"—Western Sydney, a critical part of Sydney, which does not always receive the attention that it deserves. This region—actually a region of cities—is home to 1.8 million people, or more than 40 per cent of Sydney's population. Expressed in another way, Western Sydney's population represents 1 in 11 Australians. The region will accommodate over 50 per cent of Sydney's growth over the next 25 years to become a region of 2.4 million people, and it is also Australia's third-largest regional economy.

For many years WSROC and the councils of Western Sydney have recognised that growth is one of the biggest challenges faced by the region. Managing growth will require comprehensive responses from all levels of government as well as the community and private sectors, especially if Western Sydney is to succeed as a region and continue to be economically, socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable. In particular, the region's growth presents a significant challenge for the new Federal Government as it tries to implement its commitments to engage with Australia's urban regions. In recognition of this challenge, the Hon. Anthony Albanese MHR, Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, presented the conference keynote address.

The State Government was represented by the Hon. Barbara Perry MP, the Minister for Western Sydney, and the Hon. Paul Lynch MP, the Minister for Local Government. A wide range of expert speakers also addressed the conference, including Professor Peter Newman from the Sustainability Policy Institute at Curtin University, Professor Phil O'Neill from the Urban Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney, Professor Bill Randolph of CityFutures at the University of New South Wales, and Professor Tony Capon of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University. They were joined by the mayors of Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Penrith and Parramatta, as well as a range of panel presenters.

All conference presenters addressed the following subthemes: providing leadership for change; linking people, place and sustainability; connecting culture, employment and education; and overcoming the divided city. The conference also explored a number of exciting WSROC regional initiatives, including the Western Sydney Sub-Regional Employment Strategy, the Western Sydney Regional Profile, the Socially Sustainable Urban Renewal Project; and the Agenda for Sustainability and Wellbeing in Western Sydney. I am pleased to report that the conference was a great success. It attracted approximately 200 participants as well as considerable media coverage. Conference delegates participated in workshop sessions to help develop directions for the region in achieving sustainability.

Some conference outcomes included a proposal that WSROC should develop a comprehensive regional sustainability strategy for Western Sydney in conjunction with the region's councils, State and Federal governments, other stakeholders and the wider community. The WSROC executive and board are currently examining the conference outcomes. I understand they will hold discussions with both Federal and State governments regarding implementation. It is likely that the conference recommendations as well as the Agenda for Sustainability and Wellbeing in Western Sydney will form the basis for much of WSROC's work over the next few years.

The "Sydney the other city" conference and the projects it highlighted illustrate WSROC's success and relevance as well as the value of councils working together in voluntary regional organisations of councils. I take this opportunity to congratulate WSROC under the leadership of its president, Councillor Tony Hay, and Alex Gooding, the executive director, on its 35 years of service to Western Sydney.

LIBERAL-NATIONALS RURAL HEALTH TASK FORCE

The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER [6.06 p.m.]: I report on some of the work of the Liberal/Nationals Rural Health Taskforce, which has been conducting a series of clinics across New South Wales recently in Dubbo, Grafton, Orange, Cooma and Tamworth. The task force is assessing the adequacy, or otherwise, of hospital and health services being delivered—or not being delivered, by the Iemma-Watkins Government and its hapless Minister for Health, the Hon. Reba Meagher—and the future services needed in country and coastal locations across New South Wales. The assessments are based on one-on-one consultations with a cross-section of key health stakeholders. Many of the issues are being highlighted at the public hearings of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services that is being conducted by Mr Garling SC. Our task force met with general practitioners, specialists, nurses, dentists and other allied health professionals as well as community representatives on a vast range of local, regional and systemic health issues.

Issues raised include the New South Wales health system's culture of secrecy; a failure to provide adequate radiotherapy access across the State—an issue on the coast as well as in other inland parts of the State; run-down hospitals; faulty equipment; lack of clinician consultation resulting in the debacles at the new Bathurst Hospital and the hospital that is planned for Orange; sidelining of health councils, vast area health services and their lack of accountability; bureaucratic blockages encountered by hospital auxiliaries and the overburdened auxiliaries, who are ever-generous and hardworking, but who are requested to raise funds for equipment they believe should be core equipment in any respectable health service; bereaved families suffering delays in autopsies due to centralisation of forensic pathology; poor hospital discharge planning; communications problems between hospitals and aged care facilities; overworked nurses; long dental waiting lists; problems with health-related transport and the Isolated Patient Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS]; unmet rehabilitation needs of an ageing population; a desperate shortage of mental health services; and community and nurse fundraising campaigns for basic hospital equipment.

Many stakeholders, including representatives of the Aboriginal Medical Service, medical staff councils, the Rural Doctors Association, the Country Women's Association, the Cancer Council and many cancer and other disease advocate groups, fundraisers and patient support groups, have given the task force frank and interesting information. Other stakeholders include representatives from local government, Ronald McDonald House, health councils, community programs, the Royal Flying Doctor Service and other aero-medical retrieval groups, mental health and social welfare groups such as Lifeline, the Anglican Counselling Service and St Vincent DePaul. The task force also heard from homeless people's support workers, aged care providers, hospital auxiliary staff, residents groups, community transport providers, the Rural Medical School at Tamworth and Armidale and university departments of rural health, divisions of general practice, rehabilitation services, private hospitals, drug and alcohol services, and renal dialysis advocates.

Patients' families have given the task force heart-wrenching insights into gaps in care, including the lack of emergency surgery at hospitals where such service used to be the norm. Recent task force clinics have coincided with hearings of the special commission of inquiry that the Government was forced to establish after the damning reports of the parliamentary inquiry into the Royal North Shore Hospital and the State Coroner's inquest into the death of young Vanessa Anderson at that hospital. I have also visited Bathurst, where the tragic implications of a dysfunctional hospital system continue to be exposed, not just in fundamentally flawed planning for the new hospital, but also in quality of care.

I know that today in the other place the member for Bathurst said that Bathurst Base Hospital was "brilliant". I would love to know what that means. Certainly the people of Bathurst do not have that view. The task force will conduct more clinics and the Opposition has referred matters relating to the infamous Dr Reeves to the special commission of inquiry. [*Time expired.*]

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY PRIVATISATION

STATE BANK PRIVATISATION

Dr JOHN KAYE [6.11 p.m.]: The debate over the future of the State's electricity industry has now entered its final stage. This change happened this afternoon in a media release in which the Government described the legislation that will lead to the privatisation of the electricity industry. We now know a lot more about—

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: Point of order: My understanding is, and I stand to be corrected, that the Greens have a bill before the House with respect to electricity reform. Dr John Kaye is seeking to debate that very issue. Under the standing orders the member is not entitled to do that. I respectfully request that my objection be considered and that a ruling be given accordingly.

Dr JOHN KAYE: To the point of order: I do not want to waste my allocated time, but I advise that I did seek advice from the President and the Clerk in respect of my speech and was advised that what I planned to say was adequate.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Dr John Kaye did approach me about this matter, about which I also sought advice. On a previous occasion the Chair has ruled:

Members may refer to matters which are on the Notice Paper if they are unlikely to come before the House in the foreseeable future.

I note that Dr John Kaye's bill is set down for resumption on Tuesday 3 June 2008. Standing Order 92 (1) states:

A member may not digress from the subject matter of any question under discussion; or anticipate the discussion of any matter shown on the notice paper, except an item of private members' business outside the order of precedence, unless, in the opinion of the President there is no likelihood of the motion or order of the day being called on within a reasonable time.

As the item of business referred to is outside the order of precedence, the member may continue.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I thank the member for his point of order, which has had the effect of limiting my contribution to two minutes. The outstanding feature of the information and the media release this afternoon in respect of the electricity industry restructuring that the Government intends to undertake is the way in which the Government has broken faith with its statements over the past six months. For six months we have been berated for using the word "privatisation" with respect to generators. We have been told that the Government will not sell the generators; that it will only lease them. We now discover that the intention of the legislation is to give power to the Government to sell off the generators. That is a breach of faith. It is a breach of faith with the people of New South Wales, the Parliament, the union movement and the members of the Australian Labor Party. The enabling legislation appears to be more than just enabling legislation; it will give carte blanche to the Iemma Government to do as it wishes. It will create enormous powers that were never envisaged in the creation of the Energy Services Corporations Act or the State Owned Corporations Act for the Iemma Government to dispose of assets in ways in which it sees fit without parliamentary scrutiny.

I had intended to talk about the State Bank and the lessons that should be learnt from its \$160 million privatisation. The State received only \$160 million for the bank, but by the year 2000 it was valued at between \$2.6 billion and \$2.9 billion—which highlights the dangers of privatisation without adequate scrutiny. I had intended to speak also about the important lessons that should be learnt particularly with respect to an industry that may well have a carbon liability of up to \$3.4 billion a year—a carbon liability that must be met by somebody, and it is unclear just who that will be. [*Time expired.*]

CAMPSIE FOOD FESTIVAL TENTH ANNIVERSARY

The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN [6.16 p.m.]: This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Campsie Food Festival. This event, which will be held on 17 May 2008, is now widely recognised throughout Sydney as a major food festival. In 1999, as part of the Tourism New South Wales Feast of Sydney Food and Wine Festival, the then named "Campsie—The Seoul of Sydney Korean Food Festival" was established. In the early stages of the festival a logo design competition was organised. The competition attracted entrants from across the metropolitan area. A number of wonderful designs were entered, but it was Phillippa Carenmolla's design that caught the eye of the selectors. Phillippa's striking design captured the vibrancy of both the Korean community and the community of Canterbury. Her logo was used on promotional and marketing material to showcase the festival throughout the area.

A number of local organisations, including the Campsie Chamber of Commerce, the Campsie Korean Business Association and the Central Sydney Area Health Service, joined with Canterbury City Council to promote the safe handling of food and Korean food. In 2002 the event was renamed the Korean Food and Cultural Festival. The event was renamed in order to celebrate not just food but also the Korean culture in the Canterbury local government area. Arts, crafts, local artists and performers are now celebrated as part of the festival. Another spectacular highlight from the festival during 2002 was the Soccer World Cup broadcast. In that year the quarter-final between South Korea and Spain coincided with the festival and was broadcast to festival patrons on giant four-metre screens. World Cup fever had hit and the screening of the match signified a spectacular end to the festival. I recall that Korea won the game after a penalty shoot-out.

In 2003 the festival, in conjunction with Cessnock City Council, showcased Hunter Valley produce. This was an ideal opportunity to highlight the value of the Hunter Valley as both a tourist destination and a

valuable part of our export wine industry. That year the number of visitors to the festival swelled to an estimated 25,000. In 2004 the festival's name was changed to the Campsie Food Festival, so that the event could showcase the diverse range of cultures within the Canterbury local government area. The festival has grown in popularity and in 2006 the event featured celebrity chefs Geoff Jansz and Elizabeth Chong. Television presenter Maeve O'Meara from SBS is scheduled to attend this year's event. Her show, *Food Safari*, has covered Korean food and it has also featured a local Korean chef from Campsie.

On the festival day there are a number of different stalls and activities, including cooking displays, dance performances and taekwondo exhibitions. To mark the tenth anniversary there will be a spectacular fireworks display, to be followed by the Campsie Moonlight Cinema. It is expected that this year's festival will attract approximately 30,000 visitors. As stated on the Canterbury City Council website, the objectives of the Campsie Food Festival are to provide the local and wider community with a quality festival celebrating the diverse community of Campsie, to assist in the revitalisation and promotion of Campsie, to help create awareness of this vibrant community among other Sydneysiders, and to attract visitors to the City of Canterbury. Because of the widespread popularity of the Campsie Food Festival there are a large number of sponsors. These include Korean Air, SBS radio and the Canterbury Bulldogs Leagues Club, among other local organisations and businesses.

Last year the festival featured its first ever school cooking competition, which came down to a grand final cook-off between two local schools. Throughout the many years of this festival we have witnessed a spectacular range of cultural displays and celebrations. The input from the community has been second to none; its contributions have made this festival so successful, and it is pleasing to see it continue to grow and flourish. As I said, this year marks 10 years of the festival. It also coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the sister city relationship between Canterbury City Council and Eunpyeong-gu. This relationship was formed in June 1988. It was the first relationship of its kind between a South Korean local government authority and an Australian council. The text of the proclamation document is as follows:

The City of Eunpyeong-gu and the Municipality of Canterbury wish to contribute to the promotion of mutual understanding and goodwill between their two areas and to develop an understanding of each others culture and traditions.

It is to that purpose that they hereby proclaim the establishment of Sister City relations.

Of course, that relationship has continued until now, when we celebrate its twentieth anniversary. The Campsie Food Festival is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the cultural diversity of my community, and I look forward to the tenth anniversary celebrations on Saturday 17 May.

PRINCES HIGHWAY UPGRADE

The Hon. DON HARWIN [6.20 p.m.]: As I drove up the Princes Highway from my home in Vincentia for Parliament this week I noted that there is good progress towards the construction of the duplicate bridge over Currumbene Creek. This is an important measure to overcome a notorious bottleneck on the Princes Highway between South Nowra and Jervis Bay Road, the cost of which has almost totally been funded by the previous Federal Government. The original funding from the Howard Government would have met the entirety of the project's expense. However, the State Government was so tardy in accepting the offer from Canberra that it had to provide a small contribution or risk losing the funds.

The previous Federal Government's role in funding work on the Princes Highway has never been appropriately acknowledged by the Minister for Roads. Quite the opposite! On at least seven occasions during the past two years, when asked about the Princes Highway in question time or during budget estimates hearings, the Minister chose to attack or complain of a lack of support. He said:

The Federal Government has completely shirked its responsibility to the people of the Illawarra ... they swim in a budget surplus, desperately trying to spend it, but do not have the decency to find money for the Princes Highway.

With the change of Federal Government last year, Minister Roozendaal clearly had hopes that his colleagues in Canberra would bail him out and provide the Princes Highway funding that he had been unable to deliver. On Tuesday he declared:

I look forward to the Federal budget because I know that Wayne Swan will do a terrific job ... [and] will ensure that New South Wales gets its just desserts in terms of road funding.

How galling it must have been for him to discover that the new Rudd Government has confirmed what the Howard Government and the New South Wales Opposition have been saying for years: the Princes Highway is

a State highway and the responsibility of the New South Wales Government. The new Federal Treasurer handed down a budget with \$925 million for road and rail projects in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. As Minister Roozendaal explained yesterday in question time, this expenditure includes just \$1 million for the Princes Highway.

It is a shame that this State Government failed to have the Princes Highway included as part of the AusLink agreement because the routes covered by the scheme have received Federal assistance in the budget. This omission, which most recently happened during the current Minister's watch, is a major disservice to the people of the Illawarra and the South Coast, and one for which we continue to be penalised. No longer able to play the blame game on this issue, it is time the New South Wales Government took seriously its responsibility for the Princes Highway. The litany of excuses, delays, broken promises, prolonged investigations, bungled management and inadequate funding needs to cease.

The upgrade of the route between Gerringong and Bomaderry, for example, should be fast-tracked. A further delay to the project has arisen due to the lack of a southern route among the upgrade options under consideration. The Roads and Traffic Authority should have included this option at an earlier stage or adequately explained why such a route is not feasible. It is another example of the Government's chronic incapacity to deliver critical new infrastructure. How long the peer review process will take remains unclear. We need a firm commitment as to when construction will commence and when it will be completed.

Meanwhile, residents of the Shoalhaven are becoming even more frustrated with travelling times between Kiama and Bomaderry. I have been presenting petitions with hundreds of signatures from such residents requesting that a 100 kilometre per hour speed limit on the highway between Omega Hill and Fox Ground be reintroduced. These residents regard the reduction of the speed limit to 80 kilometres per hour to be unnecessary and nonsensical, especially as the limit on more dangerous sections of the highway remains at either 90 kilometres or 100 kilometres per hour. I call on the Minister to resolve these matters quickly and appropriately, and to make decisions about funding and upgrading the Princes Highway, beginning with next month's State budget.

ASYLUM SEEKERS

Ms SYLVIA HALE [6.25 p.m.]: With the election of the Rudd Government, everyone's hopes were raised that the plight of asylum seekers would be improved. However, when we look at the record of the Government we have cause for despair. Even in the past two weeks five asylum seekers have been deported. The Government has rejected 41 claims out of 42 in the past five weeks. This is the highest rate of case rejections—

[Time for debate expired.]

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

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.26 p.m. until Tuesday 3 June 2008 at 2.30 p.m.
