

## Agreement in Principle

**Mr ANDREW STONER** (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [10.00 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

Hurlstone Agricultural High School is an educational facility that has tremendous significance in the history of this great State. The school has a proud tradition with outstanding alumni throughout New South Wales, across the nation and internationally. It is one of only two agricultural high schools in Sydney and one of only four in the entire State. That school site incorporates 160 hectares of land. It is of such a size because the school is an agricultural high school. The school essentially runs model farms, for example, in horticultural cropping, including grains, and livestock, on site. Those model farms are on site because, as any teacher or educational expert knows, hands-on education needs both theory and practice to achieve the best results for students. Hurlstone Agricultural High School has been doing precisely that for many years—then along came the Government and its mini-budget.

After almost 14 years of mismanaging the State's economy and frittering away windfall revenues of about \$17 billion, the Government has absolutely nothing to show for it. In a desperate bid to rescue the New South Wales budget the Government cast its eyes around to see at what it could flog off to get out of a financial pickle that is a result of its own incompetence. The Government's microscope fell on all the lovely land that is attached to the Hurlstone Agricultural High School. The Government in its mini-budget proposes to sell 140 hectares of the site, leaving just 20 hectares. That is an absolute disgrace not only for the delivery of agricultural education, but also for western Sydney—140 hectares of green space in western Sydney is invaluable. Under Labor over the past 14 years we have seen poorly planned development in western Sydney that has put huge areas of land under housing without the attendant services, in particular transport, roads and rail. Once again the Government is rushing into putting more land under development for housing. No doubt when the land is sold, any facilities will be inadequate. I am told that the Government expects to realise well in excess of \$100 million for the sale of that land. There is demand for land for housing, but Western Sydney needs green space.

I have heard loud protests, not just from the current students of Hurlstone Agricultural High School, not only from the alumni—of course, the staff are muzzled, under threat from the Government should they speak out—but also from the residents of western Sydney generally, who do not want that land to be sold. They do not want rampant development to continue, and they do not want to lose valuable green space in western Sydney. Obviously the Government is feeling the heat. The Macarthur boys are clearly worried about their seats, and so they should be. Recent State polls have shown that the community does not appreciate this sort of policy and that is why the New South Wales Labor Party is in dreadful trouble in the polls. Clearly, the member for Macquarie Fields and the member for Camden are feeling the heat, and so is the Government, as it wants to retain those seats.

So, what has the Government done? It has announced that it will establish an inquiry into the sale. That is a typical tactic of this Government. When it feels the heat, it shifts the matter off the agenda by establishing an inquiry. It does not make a decision in the best interests of the community, it simply shifts the matter off the agenda in the hope of escaping a little bit of heat and pressure from the community for long enough to allow the original decision to subsequently go ahead. However, I do not believe that people will be fooled by this latest tactic of the Rees Labor Government. We do not know who will chair the inquiry, nor do we know the terms of reference of the inquiry. The Government has held inquiry after inquiry, for instance into public health and the Royal North Shore Hospital, and just this week we learned that nothing has changed. The Government has botched the planning of the new Royal North Shore Hospital despite holding an inquiry. There was an inquiry into the Cross City Tunnel, but nothing ever changes.

An inquiry into the sale of land at the Hurlstone Agricultural High School will do nothing to change the Government's position. Its position is all about money, all about developer mates, not about education or agriculture and their importance to this State. The Labor Party just does not get it! Right now the State economy is being carried by primary industries, in particular agriculture, but also mining, forestry and fisheries. The Government just does not get it! We have seen collapses in the financial sector, in the retail sector, in the manufacturing sector, but country people continue to produce resources for this nation and continue to shoulder a significant load by doing the heavy lifting for the economy. And what does this Government do? It cuts agricultural research facilities, closes them down, including those in Mr Speaker's electorate of Northern Tablelands—an absolute disgrace—and carves up and flogs off a very fine agricultural high school.

As I say, this is simply a bad decision. The mini-budget was littered with shocking decisions but this one stands out in particular because it sells out western Sydney and it compromises the future of agricultural education in New South Wales. Once the land is sold and houses are built on it, it cannot be bought back to establish a working farm, as is the case with Hurlstone Agricultural High School. If the sale of the 20-hectare site of Hurlstone Agricultural High School goes ahead we will see a school that cannot achieve its best in agricultural and horticultural subjects.

I commend the bill to all members of this place. I believe every member, whether he or she is based in the metropolitan area or in country areas, understands the value of a working agricultural high school with a working farm. Members understand the value of retaining green spaces, especially in western Sydney, which is fast becoming overdeveloped. Therefore, I seek the support of all members, and particularly those so-called Macquarie boys out in the west, for this legislation. This is their opportunity to make a stand on behalf of their communities to do the right thing instead of toeing the party line in pursuit of some sort of promotion within the Labor Party, which we have seen time and time again. I commend the bill to the House.