

WELLBEING INDICATORS BILL 2014**Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by Ms Jan Barham.****Second Reading****Ms JAN BARHAM** [12.15 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am very proud to introduce the Wellbeing Indicators Bill 2014 as it goes to the heart of my views about our purpose as elected representatives to care for the quality of life of all citizens of New South Wales. As The Greens representative with responsibility across the human service portfolios, including family and community services, disability, ageing, housing and Aboriginal affairs, I have spoken in this place on many occasions about issues affecting the wellbeing of people. I have also an overarching portfolio—community resilience, which has coloured many of the issues I have worked on since entering Parliament. I see this bill as being a key platform for pursuing a future for our communities across the State that enhances the resilience of the people of New South Wales.

This bill is about changing how we conceive the purpose of government and public policy. It is not about promoting particular policies or setting in place a specific set of constraints on how the Government can deliver services, infrastructure and programs to our communities. It is about establishing a process for the development of the indicators that can inform performance reports on how well legislation and policies deliver on the quality of life for the citizens of the State. The Wellbeing Indicators Bill seeks to broaden, clarify and establish a solid, shared basis for understanding what we mean when we ask how we are doing as a society and how the Government is performing its role of caring for the community.

I note at the outset that the focus on wellbeing enacted by this bill is not to be confined to one specific department of government. This is about a whole-of-government, all-of-society approach to measuring, reporting and acting to achieve improvement in wellbeing. This is about changing the conception of how the Government allocates its resources and determines its policy priorities, instead of a government that is single-mindedly focused on how many dollars are allocated and how the funds are spent for each government agency. This is about establishing a measure of how well the funding and policies deliver outcomes. This bill envisions a government that asks what allocation of its resources is needed to provide the best economic, social and environmental outcomes for the present and future quality of life for the people of this State.

This bill is a significant step for New South Wales to join a growing movement towards wellbeing measurement and reporting by governments and non-government organisations in countries around the world. The contemporary wellbeing and progress movement extends far beyond the classic example of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index initiative which began several decades ago. It draws on the work done to build understanding and support about the need for wellbeing measures carried on by organisations like the Australia Institute and the New Economics Foundation in the United Kingdom through the Development of the Wellbeing Manifesto.

In 2005, along with nearly 10,000 others, I signed the Wellbeing Manifesto and endorsed its proposal of nine areas in which government could improve national wellbeing, including the proposal to "Measure what matters" by having national accounts of wellbeing that report on "the quality of work, the state of our communities, crime rates, our health, the strength of our relationships, and the state of the environment." It can be seen in initiatives such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Measuring the Progress of Societies project and its Better Life Index and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, in the work of France's Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, and in many other local, regional, national and international projects.

These initiatives aim to address the increasingly obvious limitations of a focus on narrow measures of economic performance, such as gross domestic product. These measures, and our general tendency to focus on overall indicators of economic performance, do not capture the full range of issues that affect the quality of life. They can capture as economic benefits a range of activities that are actually harmful to quality of life or that deplete our natural resources and damage our environment in a way that puts the sustainability of our quality of life and our biodiversity at risk.

They do not reflect the distribution and inequality of outcomes within a society and an economy, which can be the source of social and economic disadvantage that harms the most vulnerable and undermines the strength and capacity of our communities. The danger of defining our progress by gross domestic product was eloquently expressed as long ago as March 1968 by then United States presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, when he told an audience at the University of Kansas:

It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl.

It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armoured cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children.

Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials.

It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

The Australian Greens leader, Senator Christine Milne, recognised the need for genuine measures of progress in her speech to the National Press Club in September 2012 on: "How do we build an economic system that serves the needs of people and nature, both for today and for tomorrow?" She made the case that:

We have to limit our use of GDP to those purposes it is suited to and measure our true progress as a nation with different tools. The Greens will redouble our efforts to support development of the best possible economic tools and work to see them adopted across Government and society so we can build and measure the wellbeing of people and nature for the long term.

In short, the Greens do want to see growth, but growth in quality of life, growth in equality of society, and growth that plans for the long term.

The leaders of some nations—including those with conservative governments—have recognised the same need to broaden our vision of how we should measure the progress of our society. Six months after assuming office in 2010, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, directed the Office of National Statistics to develop and begin reporting measures of wellbeing. Since that directive, the United Kingdom's Office of National Statistics has initiated a national public debate, produced a range of specialised publications and begun public reporting of detailed statistics that measure wellbeing.

In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] work on Measures of Australia's Progress—a project initiated more than a decade ago and enhanced following a public consultation process in recent years—has identified and presented a set of statistical indicators as well as highlighting areas that relate to our progress but where gaps exist in the available data. Peter Martin, the Economics editor of the *Age* reported in June that Federal budget cuts had forced the ABS to axe the project along with a range of other social and industry statistics, leading Martin to suggest that, "It is as if the Government is navigating an economic highway while dimming the lights."

Although we can hope that the Federal Government's short-sighted shuttering of independent measures of national progress will be reversed, the non-government sector is contributing to a push for wellbeing to be a key part of the national conversation about how we are faring. The Australian National Development Index initiative has provided a non-government directed initiative within Australia, and the networks and partnerships supporting wellbeing measurement in this country continue to grow. In July 2013 a collaborative project involving academic and government departments, along with social and environmental non-government organisations and peak bodies, released the report on their pilot project called, "Australia's Progress in the Twenty-First Century: Measuring the Future We Want". The project aims to provide a cross-disciplinary scientific foundation for measuring societal progress, to develop tools and information that will support informed policy debate and choices by government and the community, and to build a strong and effective national research network that connects to the growing global movement on measuring societal progress.

In some important areas we also see government and non-government groups acting to measure and report on progress in addressing key social, health and other outcomes. The national focus on eliminating the shameful inequality of outcomes and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is assessed annually through reporting on the Australian Government's Closing the Gap targets, together with the non-government Close the Gap Shadow reports. These are important initiatives to provide an indication of whether we as a nation are making progress and acting effectively to address the disadvantage and inequality

that exists for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They would suggest that we should consider implementing State-based targets and reporting requirements as well for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These could be incorporated into the framework this bill provides.

All of these moves to advance our understanding are crucial to improving our capacity to consider the way in which public policy is affecting our society. But what most of these initiatives lack is any direct incorporation of those measures into government decision-making and public policy. Whether they are supported by government agencies or advocated by non-government organisations, most of the initiatives for wellbeing measurement do not ensure that the relevant government or legislature will give consideration to the measures, will use them to evaluate the performance of public policy or will develop directions for future legislation and policy initiatives.

New South Wales has the opportunity to lead the way with a robust, evidence-based and transparent approach to bringing wellbeing measures into our concept of good government. This bill provides a framework that would ensure that in New South Wales wellbeing is not only measured but is placed at the centre of government decision-making and accountability. It does not define how wellbeing will be measured. That is not a concept to be defined by any one political party or government. It must be based—as the growing body of research I have mentioned makes clear—on public input about the things that matter in people's lives and on the best available evidence about how those elements can be measured.

Upon the commencement of the bill, a parliamentary Joint Committee on Wellbeing will be established. The first task of the joint committee will be to conduct an inquiry into the definition, development and publication of wellbeing indicators. It will consider the broad societal values on which a definition of wellbeing should be based, the availability of data through existing government sources, any gaps that exist in the things we measure and a range of other considerations. The Committee on Wellbeing is to report on this initial inquiry within 12 months.

The bill establishes an independent statutory office of the Commissioner for Wellbeing, who will have regard to the inquiry's recommendations but will then be responsible for developing, maintaining and reporting a list of measures that indicate the wellbeing of people, communities and ecosystems in the State. The commissioner's objectives will be to report on matters relating to wellbeing, to enhance knowledge and understanding of wellbeing issues, and to encourage decision-making that promotes wellbeing.

Every two years the commissioner will produce a wellbeing of the State report, which will assess how we are progressing across the State and report on any issues or trends affecting wellbeing based on the indicators. The commissioner may also conduct inquiries and provide special reports addressing any specific issues relating to wellbeing, including regular annual reports of the commissioner's activities. In any of these reports, the commissioner may make recommendations to the Government about matters relating to wellbeing, in which case the Treasurer shall provide a response to any recommendations within six months.

After completing its initial inquiry, the parliamentary joint committee will monitor and review the exercise of the commissioner's functions and examine each report issued by the commissioner, and may inquire into any issues relating to the functions of the commissioner. This framework will ensure that the commissioner is independent from government but provides clear evaluations and advice to which the Government will be required to respond about our State's progress in improving wellbeing. It will also ensure that the consideration of all issues raised by and evaluations from the commissioner will be examined by the Parliament and will be transparent to the public through the joint committee.

Along with the independent statutory role of the commissioner, the bill provides that the Government's progress with regard to the State's wellbeing will be addressed through the inclusion of wellbeing issues in the annual reports of departments and statutory bodies, the Auditor-General's performance audits of any government agency, and Ombudsman's reports of investigations where conduct has been detrimental to wellbeing. These provisions will ensure that the links between public policy, government programs and the outcomes for this State are considered through a comprehensive framework based on the adopted set of wellbeing indicators.

It is essential that the public is engaged in the conversation about the wellbeing of our people, communities and ecosystems. This begins with the public inquiry that will identify the values on which our notion of wellbeing should be based. However, the commissioner will be responsible for ensuring that the measures of wellbeing, current and historical, relating to the State as a whole and, wherever possible, the detail about the wellbeing of specific localities and communities is made available in a way that is accessible to all

members of the public. The commissioner's functions will also include public awareness and education activities to support public authorities, local governments, non-government organisations and communities in considering and promoting wellbeing.

I have spoken in this Parliament about many issues that relate to the wellbeing of communities and ecosystems. I have made reference to many of the challenges we face and the data that has been presented to inform us about how we can address those issues. These include deep and persistent disadvantage; the affordable housing crisis and the continued challenge of homelessness; the large numbers of children being placed in out-of-home care and the alarming overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; the impact of a changing climate and the changing coastline on people's lives and our environment and the loss of biodiversity; and the barriers to ensuring the right of people with disability and older people to have equality of participation and choice in all aspects of their lives. These are all factors that affect the wellbeing of our society.

I have also spoken about the importance of targeted investment in early intervention and support services to deliver benefits to people's lives, to address risks, and to prevent future burdens on our society and governments. All of these things are underpinned by the idea that our role as members of Parliament, and the role of the Government, is to direct all of our efforts toward improving the lives of all people in this State, preventing harm to those who are vulnerable and at risk, and ensuring that we deliver the same or greater opportunities and quality of life to future generations.

This bill will provide the mechanism to inform the Parliament and the community of New South Wales about the performance of Parliament, legislation, funding and policy on people's lives. I will be seeking the support of communities across the State and consulting with all political parties and organisations that work to advance our society, to reduce vulnerability and disadvantage and to promote wellbeing. I take this opportunity to thank David Mallard, who is in the President's gallery. David works with me and has undertaken the detailed work involved in preparing this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Order of Business

The Hon. WALT SECORD [12.34 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow a motion be moved forthwith that Private Members' Business item No. 2123 outside the Order of Precedence, relating to an order for papers regarding nurse-to-patient ratios in the New South Wales health and hospital system, be called on forthwith.

Question put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 19

Ms Barham	Mr Green	Mr Veitch
Mr Borsak	Dr Kaye	Ms Westwood
Mr Brown	Reverend Nile	Mr Wong
Mr Buckingham	Mr Primrose	
Ms Cotsis	Mr Searle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Donnelly	Mr Secord	Ms Fazio
Dr Faruqi	Ms Sharpe	Ms Voltz

Noes, 15

Mr Ajaka	Mr Gay	Mr Pearce
Mr Clarke	Mr Khan	
Ms Cusack	Mr MacDonald	
Ms Ficarra	Mrs Maclaren-Jones	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gallacher	Mr Mason-Cox	Mr Colless
Miss Gardiner	Mrs Mitchell	Dr Phelps