

UNCORRECTED PROOF
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3

Tuesday 25 October 2011

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE, THE CENTRAL COAST

The Committee met at 12.15 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones (Chair)

The Hon. J. Ajaka
The Hon. A. R. Fazio
The Hon. C. J. S. Lynn

Mr D. Shoebridge
The Hon. S. J. R. Whan

PRESENT

The Hon. Chris Hartcher, *Special Minister of State, and Minister for the Central Coast*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CHAIR: I declare this hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2011-12 open to the public. I welcome Minister Hartcher to the hearing to examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Special Minister of State, and the Central Coast. Before we commence I will make some comments about procedural matters. In accordance with the Legislative Council guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, members of the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available at the table by the door.

Any messages from attendees in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. I remind the Minister that he is free to pass notes and refer directly to his advisers. The Committee has previously decided that time will be divided equally, with questions first from the Opposition, then the crossbench and then the Government. If the Government chooses not to use all its time, that time lapses. In addition, the Committee has also decided that due to the time constraints questions will not be divided between the two portfolios but be answered together. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web tomorrow morning. If any questions are taken on notice, answers will need to be provided within 21 days. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: My question relates to the Wallarah 2 coal project, and I am asking you this question in your capacity as the Minister for the Central Coast. Can you take note of this picture, which appeared in the *Newcastle Herald*, and which was taken and published before the election? At a rally held on 28 January 2009 then Opposition leader, now Premier, Barry O'Farrell, stated, "The next Liberal-Nationals Government will ensure that mining cannot occur here. We will ensure that mining cannot occur in any water catchment area and we will ensure that any mining leases and mining exploration permits reflect that common sense. No ifs, no buts, a guarantee." Do you acknowledge that you and the Premier have broken your promises to the people of the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I would regard that as a somewhat loaded question, would you not?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Perhaps you would like to turn your microphone on before you continue.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The issue of the Wallarah 2 was a planning application that was determined by Minister Kelly; Minister Kelly made a determination in respect of that and refused the application. So there is no mining matter. The member for Wyong at the time—I am pleased to acknowledge his presence in the public gallery today—issued a statement on 16 March in respect of your very question, in which he said:

"There can be no court challenge to last week's decision by State Planning Minister Tony Kelly to refuse the Wallarah 2 mining application for the Dooralong and Yarralong valleys," says Wyong State Labor MP David Harris.

Mr Harris said the Minister was advised that because the public hearings were conducted by the Planning Assessment Commission any challenge to the substance and merit of the decision was out of the question.

"Under planning law, the only grounds to challenge would be along procedural lines," he said. "The Minister has advised me that any technical challenge on process would be strongly defended by the Government. This would be of a technical nature and would not be able to question the substance of the decision," Mr Harris said.

The application has been made. The decision was made by Tony Kelly and that stands.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: There was media comment recently of a subsequent application, a new application. Does the no ifs, no buts guarantee apply to any subsequent application in the same area?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: There is no further application.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Will you rule out—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: None has been lodged.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Will you give a commitment that the no ifs, no buts guarantee applies to any subsequent application that may be lodged in that area?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No application has been lodged.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you will not give a guarantee.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Point of order: The question was asked and answered. It is not for the Hon. Steve Whan to put words in the Minister's mouth. He made it clear that there is no application.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: We have 15 minutes for questions. Do not waste our time.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Then ask appropriate questions.

CHAIR: Order! Is the Hon. Amanda Fazio speaking to the point of order?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: No, that is a simple fact.

CHAIR: Order! I uphold the point of order.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You have been asked to give a commitment that you will not approve any subsequent mining application in that region. I am asking you for a yes or no answer.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No application has been made.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What if an application was lodged next week? What would be your response?

CHAIR: Order! That is a hypothetical question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: It does not matter. There are no rules against hypotheticals in estimates.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If it is a hypothetical question it deserves a hypothetical answer, which is that no application has been made.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: So you will not attempt to abide by the promise that you and the Premier made to the people of the Central Coast?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Point of order: It is clearly a loaded question. That goes way up there with "Have you stopped beating your wife?"

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: There is no point of order against loaded questions, and the Hon. John Ajaka knows that. If he thinks the Minister is incapable of answering questions they should not have put him in the ministry.

CHAIR: Order! The Minister has already answered the question.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Regarding your portfolio of Special Minister of State, the New South Wales Government website shows that you are not responsible for any legislation and no agencies are listed, and from what I can tell you have put out no press releases in your capacity as Special Minister of State in the past few months. Why are the taxpayers of New South Wales paying you?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: They are not paying me to be Special Minister of State. They are paying me to be Minister for Resources and Energy, and Minister for the Central Coast; Special Minister of State is one of the titles I have.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Does it have any particular set duties?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It will have duties when they are assigned to me by the Premier. At present—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: So you are waiting for a sign from the clouds or something.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering your question. Please do not interrupt. I will have duties when they are assigned to me by the Premier. At present no duties have been assigned to me in my capacity as Special Minister of State. If the Premier so elects to assign duties to me under that portfolio then I will discharge them. You were a backbencher at the time but you will recall that Mr John Della Bosca was Special Minister of State, and from time to time special areas of government responsibility were assigned to him under that portfolio and he discharged them. But there were no regular areas of responsibility assigned to him under that portfolio. That is the practice that will be followed by this Government. The precedent was set by the Carr, Iemma, Rees and Keneally governments.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Would you say that it is a very light load for a senior Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I have responsibility for resources and energy. I have responsibility for the Central Coast. If you regard smart questions as designed to address the issues before the New South Wales people, then that is a matter that reflects upon you. A very loaded portfolio, would you say?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: This is a Central Coast question; we do not have anything else on Special Minister of State. In Opposition you told ABC 92.5 FM presenter Scott Levi that the Central Coast has 5 per

cent of the State's population so it should receive 5 per cent of the State's budget. What percentage of the budget did the Central Coast receive, given that it had a massive cut in road funding and not one school, fire station, police station or ambulance station?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Hon. Steve Whan raised an issue relating to the Central Coast roads budget. The New South Wales Government committed \$93 million in funding for Central Coast roads for 2011-2012. The budget papers show that these major commitments included \$4.6 million to commence major work on the upgrade of the F3 and Wyong Road interchange at Tuggerah; \$20 million to continue major work on the four-lane widening of the Central Coast highway between Matcham Road, Erina Heights and Ocean View Drive, Womberal; \$2.5 million to continue improvements to Terrigal Drive; \$1.2 million for improvements to the intersection of Victoria Street and Charlton Road, Woy Woy; \$1 million to continue planning the upgrade of the intersection of the Central Coast Highway and Wiseman's Ferry Road, Kariong; and \$500,000 to continue planning the upgrade of the Pacific Highway between Gosford and Wyong.

The New South Wales Government has also committed a \$2 million package over four years to tackle congestion and safety on key routes on the Central Coast, including \$2 million this year for intersection upgrades on Wyong Road, starting at the Pacific Highway as part of a four-year \$8 million commitment; \$1 million for investigations for an upgrade of Woy Woy Road, Woy Woy, as the first stage of a four-year \$30 million project; and \$500,000 for safety improvements on Wiseman's Ferry Road as the first stage of a four-year \$5 million commitment. The Minister for Roads and I just announced the new emergency road package for the F3 near the Hawkesbury River Bridge. This Government is committed to major road projects on the Central Coast, so the member's question failed in that respect.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: What percentage of funding is the Central Coast receiving from the State budget overall?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I invite the Hon. Steve Whan to tell me what commitment the Central Coast received when he was a Minister. I am sure that his answer would be most interesting.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Unfortunately for the Minister, I am asking the questions today. I asked the Minister a simple question based on his pre-election comments. Can he tell us what percentage of funding the Central Coast is receiving?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No. I was commenting—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Will the Minister take that question on notice?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, I will not take it on notice. I was commenting on the failure of the former Government, of which the Hon. Steve Whan was a Minister, to address issues on the Central Coast. I stand by those comments.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, a number of the projects that you mentioned were committed to by the previous Government. Opposition members will now ask you questions relating to hospitals.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Minister, when will the maternity ward at Wyong Hospital return to a full service, as promised by the new member for Wyong and the member for The Entrance? What steps are being taken to recruit the necessary staff? Will this be a 24-hour service on seven days a week?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I ask the Hon. Amanda Fazio to repeat the first part of her question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: When will the maternity ward at Wyong Hospital return to a full service, as promised by the member for Wyong and the member for The Entrance?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The maternity ward at Wyong Hospital was downgraded by the previous Government; that is correct.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: And you have since promised that it would be reinstated.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Hatzistergos, a Minister in the former Government—

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Minister, I am asking you—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the question.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Will the Minister answer the question?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the question.

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Amanda Fazio will let the Minister answer the question.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: He is not answering the question that I asked.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: He is being generally relevant.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: The Hon. John Ajaka should turn off his microphone and butt out.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The member is correct; the previous Government downgraded maternity services. Mr Whan was a Minister in the former Labor Government and the Hon. Amanda Fazio was President of the Legislative Council.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: And the member for Wyong, and the member for The Entrance, made a promise to the people of Wyong that they would reopen that hospital.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Mr Hatzistergos, a former Minister for Health in the previous Labor Government downgraded that service.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What are you doing to reopen it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Who downgraded that service?

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: The Hon. Amanda Fazio should let the Minister answer the question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What are you doing to reopen it?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: That was extremely deleterious to health services on the Central Coast.

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Amanda Fazio will come to order and allow the Minister—

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I ask you to call the Minister to order.

CHAIR: Order! The Chair is speaking.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Try calling the Minister to order. I asked him a question and he will not answer it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Hon. Amanda Fazio should let me answer the question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I want you to answer my question and to state what you are doing to reopen it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Hon. Amanda Fazio is continually interrupting me.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What are you doing to fulfil your election commitment?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Hon. Amanda Fazio can keep asking questions but I will answer only after she has stopped talking.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Answer the question that I asked you.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Have you finished?

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Please.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Answer it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will answer the question when the Hon. Amanda Fazio has finished.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I have finished asking my question. I ask the Minister to answer it.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Good. The Hon. Amanda Fazio just kept talking. The New South Wales Government, in line with its commitment, is establishing the service at Wyong Hospital. The Government will proceed to establish that service, in line with its commitment.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What is the time frame?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The time frame will be announced by the Minister for Health.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: So you do not know?

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Point of order—

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: The Hon. John Ajaka should not waste our time by taking points of order.

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Clearly this question falls within the ambit of the Minister for Health. I did not interrupt earlier because I did not want to take up the time of the Opposition. However, it is unacceptable for the Hon. Amanda Fazio to continually badger the Minister on a matter that does not come within his portfolio.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Stop wasting our time.

CHAIR: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. However, the Minister has answered the question. Do Opposition members have another question?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, what stage has been reached with the Central Coast conservation plan and the North Wyong structure plan? When will the public get an opportunity to comment on the conservation plan and when will the final version of the structure plan be released to give greater planning certainty on the Central Coast?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Both those plans are under consideration by the Department of Planning in conjunction with Wyong Shire Council. The Department of Planning and Wyong Shire Council will make the appropriate announcement.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Do you have a time frame on that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Department of Planning and the Wyong Shire Council will make the appropriate announcement.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Are they informing you, as Minister for Central Coast, of their progress on this?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am informed of progress by the Department of Planning and by Wyong Shire Council. Appropriate announcements will be made by them.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, is the O'Farrell Government committed to implementing the Central Coast transport strategy?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Which of the many transport strategies that were announced under the former Government, none of which proceeded? Is that what the Hon. Steve Whan is referring to?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The strategy that includes north Warnervale railway station, for example.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Yes, that was a transport strategy of the former Government which was not proceeded with, along with a number of other announcements.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister, you have had plenty of opportunities to make comments about this issue.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: A number of announcements relating to the Central Coast were made by the former Government in its 16 years in office but it never honoured its promises.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Why do you not tell us specifically whether or not you are supporting the north Warnervale railway station? Have you scrapped that project or are you pushing it out for the future?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The plans announced by the previous Government, which were never proceeded with, are under evaluation by this Government. The people of the Central Coast got tired of announcements made year after year by the Hon. Steve Whan and by other Labor Ministers which were never honoured, which is why Labor was resoundingly defeated on 26 March 2011, including in the Monaro electorate. But let us look at Warnervale railway station. Warnervale railway station is part of the overall plan for the Warnervale town centre and the north Wyong structural development, which the Government is proceeding with.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The Government is proceeding with?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government is proceeding with the Warnervale town centre project.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Is the railway station likely to be a part of that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Government is proceeding with the Warnervale town centre project.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The previous Government created a \$5 million Central Coast Advantage Fund to assist in attracting investment and strengthening business opportunities on the Central Coast. Can you give us a breakdown on how that money is being expended?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The \$5 million is held by the Central Coast Regional Development Corporation. It will determine its allocation from funding.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Who—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the member's question. Please do not interrupt.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Who does it report to?

CHAIR: Order! The member will let the Minister answer the question.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I do not intend to be interrupted.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: This is estimates, Minister. It is part of your responsibilities to answer questions.

CHAIR: Order! The member will let the Minister answer the question.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If the member wishes to interrupt I will not answer the questions.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Minister that would be a disrespectful position to take in an estimates committee hearing.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are being disrespectful right now because you are constantly interrupting my attempts to answer your questions.

CHAIR: Order! The member will let the Minister answer the question.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Show some courtesy.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You are not showing any.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering the question. The Hon. Steve Whan keeps interrupting me and will not let me answer the questions.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: I am simply asking: To whom does it report?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Central Coast Regional Development Corporation was established under the former Government and its members were appointed by your Minister. The Central Coast Regional Development Corporation received the allocation from the former Government. You are aware as much as anyone else that it reports to the Minister for Planning.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: The money is not with Industry and Investment NSW?

CHAIR: The Opposition's time has expired. The Minister does not have to answer that question. We will now move to crossbench questions.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, given that there is no legislation and no agencies appointed to your position as Special Minister of State, are any staff positions allocated to that?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No positions at all funded in relation to your Special Ministry of State?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You were asked some questions by Mr Steve Whan about coal projects on the Central Coast. I would like to ask you a question of principle, not a theoretical question. As a question of principle, and not as a theoretical proposition, are you opposed to coalmining in the Central Coast water catchment area?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am here as Minister for the Central Coast. If you wish to ask me questions as the Minister for Resources I suggest you attend the Resources estimates committee hearing. The issue of coalmining is an issue for the Resources estimates committee hearings. As far as the Central Coast is concerned the Government has made its announcements. As far as water catchment on the Central Coast is concerned the Government stands by those announcements.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking you the question in your capacity as Minister for the Central Coast. Do you, as a question of principle, oppose coalmining in the Central Coast water catchment area?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: If you look at my statements you will see what I have said. They are out there on the public record.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking about your position today, as you are sitting here before this Committee. As a question of principle are you opposed to coalmining in the Central Coast water catchment area?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What I said is that I am 100 per cent committed to protecting the water catchment of the Central Coast.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And I am asking you whether that commitment extends to an opposition as a matter of principle to coalmining in the Central Coast water catchment area?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The statement stands for itself. I do not intend to explain statements. I have made the statement to you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do not want this to be unnecessarily combative. The question was quite simple: As a question of principle do you oppose coalmining—

CHAIR: The Minister has answered the question. I ask the member to move on to the next question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: He has not.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: He is just being as evasive and secretive as usual.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I object to that comment. I ask for the withdrawal of that comment.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Point of order—

CHAIR: Order! Before I hear the point of order will the Hon. Amanda Fazio withdraw her comments about the Minister?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To the point of order: The Minister is here in the capacity of a witness before this Committee. He interrupts the questions that I am putting to him—

CHAIR: Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you direct the Minister to answer the questions and not to interrupt when questions are being asked?

CHAIR: Order! I have made a ruling that the Minister has already answered that question and that you can move on to the next topic.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is the Government intending to sell the site of the current Gosford Public School?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The previous Government—well represented here—made the announcement that it was moving the Gosford Public School site to the Henry Kendall site. That decision stands.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I ask the Minister to listen to the question. I am asking you whether you are intending to sell the current site of Gosford Public School.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: All surplus land is determined by the Government in accordance with its usual procedures. The Government will make a decision in that respect.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking you about a core piece of public land central to the Central Coast, which is central to your responsibilities as Minister for the Central Coast. I am asking you about that particular site, not as a general theory. Is the Government intending to sell that site?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The site will be determined in accordance with usual government procedures for surplus government land.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is your position as Minister for the Central Coast in relation to the future public or private sale of the Gosford Public School site?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: My position is the position of the Government. The Government will make a decision about the future use of that site, or whether the land is retained in public ownership in accordance with normal government principles. No decision has yet been made.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Has an evaluation been obtained by the Government as to the sale of the Gosford Public School site?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, it has not been done.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Will you make a commitment as Minister for the Central Coast to seek to retain the site—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, Mr Shoebridge—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you would let me finish the question, Minister. Will you make a commitment as Minister for the Central Coast to advocate for the retention for public uses of the current Gosford Public School site?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I will advocate for the best interests of the Central Coast and I will make my decision on what are the best interests of the Central Coast.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Has your Government considered any alternative sites for Gosford Public School, apart from locating it to the grounds of Henry Kendall High School?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The decision was made by the previous Government, as you are aware. The previous Government decided to move it to Henry Kendall. The new Government decided to review that decision. A review was undertaken. The review recommended that the Henry Kendall site stand and that is the decision the Government has made in accordance with the review.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It has been said by a member of your Government that the redevelopment of the Gosford Public School site might allow a further 10,000 residents for Gosford. Where will those extra school students produced from that residential expansion attend school seeing as the expansion of both the local public and high schools will not be possible, given that they will be located on the same site?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: What is the source of that comment? You referred to a member of my Government.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This is not a process whereby you ask me questions—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am asking you to identify the source.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This is a process whereby I ask you questions.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I cannot comment on statements when I do not know who they were made by. I am surprised that you would be reluctant to reveal the source. What is the secrecy behind it, Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Madam Chair, the Minister seems to have a misunderstanding about the committee process. It is for Committee members to ask him questions and not for him to be continuously combative and ask Committee members questions. Could you call him to order?

CHAIR: Order! Mr David Shoebridge will ask his question and the Minister will answer it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Apparently he will not. Minister, are there any plans to ensure that there is sufficient public land to allocate for increased school numbers in Gosford following the sale of the Gosford Public School site?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am just not sure of the premise on which your question is based, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given that there will be expanding residential numbers on almost anyone's plans—both the State Government's and the local council's plans for Gosford—what plans is your Government making to ensure there will be sufficient space to allocate for expanded public schools?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Have you been to the Central Coast? There are no expanding numbers. Every public school in my electorate is experiencing a decline in enrolments, not an increase in enrolments. The premise on which your question is based is false, which is why I was interested as to the source—and that source, for some reason, you are unwilling or unable to state.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And answers you are unwilling to give, obviously, Minister, as you have done for the previous half hour. What is the current status of EnergyAustralia's proposed Empire Bay substation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is under construction.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What feedback, if any, have you received from the local community about the substation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: When?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In the past 12 months?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: A number of people were concerned about the location of the substation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the current status of the Avoca-Kincumber-Empire Bay power line?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is under construction.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: When will it be completed?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It will be completed soon. If you want that date, I will advise you of it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Will you do that on notice?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Oh, yes.

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Take it on notice, will you?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: As a favour to you, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is not a favour to me. It is your responsibility to the extent that you are meant to be responsible to Parliament in your ministerial capacity.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I might say that it is a bit mysterious what on earth your ministerial capacities are because you have nothing to say associated with being Special Minister of State.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You have asked questions about—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And you have sought to avoid every question relating to the Central Coast. It is rather a peculiar set of ministerial—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You are asking questions that should be asked of the Minister for Energy, and these are not the Energy estimates.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And you are the Minister.

CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge, do you have a question for the Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Do you have a question, Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, have there been any increases in costs paid by consumers for water since the creation of the Central Coast Water Corporation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Central Coast Water Corporation only came into force on 1 July 2012.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are there any plans to further corporatise or privatise the Central Coast Water Corporation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is a corporation, so how can it be corporatised? Please explain yourself, Mr Shoebridge. It is already a corporation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are there any plans to privatise the Central Coast Water Corporation?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Well, no, there are no plans to privatise the Central Coast Water Corporation. It is not owned by the Government, Mr Shoebridge. The premise of your question falls already. It is owned by Wyong council and Gosford council. The only—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And how does that attempt to answer my question, Minister?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am answering your question, Mr Shoebridge. Please do not interrupt.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, you are not.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please do not interrupt.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have had a pattern of not answering questions for the half hour you have been here.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Please do not interrupt, Mr Shoebridge. I am answering your question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have a hide to say that, Minister.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Gosford council and Wyong council are the shareholders in the Central Coast Water Corporation. Your question reveals your ignorance because it is already a corporation. It can only be privatised by Gosford council and Wyong council.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, can I suggest—just for a helpful hint for future reference—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No, there is no need for you to make suggestions, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —that you actually listen to the questions—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Why do you not ask your questions?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —rather than engage midway through in a combative response with misapprehensions.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Why do you not ask your questions, Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: As a result of the creation of the Central Coast Water Corporation, were any positions lost?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Well, Mr Shoebridge, it is owned by the Gosford council and the Wyong council. I just explained that to you. That question would need to be addressed to them.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And it was incorporated, which was a process that you supported.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking you whether or not any positions were lost.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It was—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And you do not know.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It was a corporation created by the previous Government. It came into force on 1 July 2012 under a statute passed by the previous Government, which you supported when it passed through Parliament.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And which you supported, Minister—which is why I am asking you about that.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It is your support.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What steps have you taken to consult with residents affected by the opening of hunting in the Olney State Forest?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The opening of hunting in the Olney State Forest?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, the Olney State Forest being opened for hunting.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am not aware that it is.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given the Olney State Forest has been open for hunting by your Minister for Primary Industries, will you undertake to speak with affected residents?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why is it you will not undertake to speak with affected residents?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Because that is a matter for the Minister for Primary Industries, not for me.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And you do not view your position as Minister for the Central Coast extending to dealing with concerns arising from residents concerned over actions of your Government.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: No concerns have been expressed to me. If people wish to express their concerns to me, they will, and I will address them.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, given you have no work to do as Special Minister of State—no work at all, and that is very clear from your answers—and given you seem to view your role as Minister for the Central Coast as having minimal, if anything, to do with consulting with affected residents—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Well, I reject—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —do you accept that both these ministries are mere paper ministries?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I reject the premise of your question, which was a loaded tendentious question, given that—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I reject your notional mock ministries you seem to have been given by this Government, which simply are being done for the purpose of status.

CHAIR: Order! Have you got a question for the Minister?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, no further questions.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Minister, could you please provide some information about the Woy Woy rehabilitation centre and funding in this year's budget?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I think that is an excellent question, and I thank you, Mr Ajaka, for that question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: I believe that this question is more appropriately asked of the Minister for Health. As the Minister indicated earlier that he is not responsible for anything in particular on the Central Coast and that he could not be expected to answer anything about specific questions related to the Central Coast, I think it is very hypocritical of him to be asked and to now attempt to answer Dorothy Dixier questions from his supporting gallery on the Government benches.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: To the point of order: Madam Chair, there is a 15-year precedent for this type of question, based on the answers we used to get when I used to ask questions of the former Minister for Western Sydney.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Further to the point of order: That was the case when Ministers had adhered to and had shown some respect for the budget estimates process, which this Minister has failed to do.

CHAIR: I have heard enough on the point of order.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Further to the point of order—

CHAIR: I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have not heard from me on the point of order.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: The Chair has made her ruling. She has heard enough.

CHAIR: Does the member have a point of order?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have. Where you have a Minister before this Committee refusing to answer questions—a very specific question about a maternity ward—on the basis that it falls within the portfolio of the Minister for Health and he then takes a Dorothy Dixier from the Government about another specific Health question, it goes to show the contempt in which this Minister is holding this Committee and mock accountability of this Government, which said—

CHAIR: As I have said, I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —repeatedly that it would change the way that Government did business in this State.

CHAIR: Mr David Shoebridge will come to order.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Throw him out.

CHAIR: Members will come to order.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And to rely on the record of the previous Government is a disgrace.

CHAIR: Mr David Shoebridge will come to order. As I said, I will not uphold the point of order. The Minister has previously answered questions in relation to broad portfolio matters on the Central Coast.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This is doing things differently, is it, Madam Chair? This is doing things differently?

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: No different to what it has been over the last 15 years, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It was a disgrace and you should change it. This is not change. It is the same appalling conduct.

CHAIR: Mr David Shoebridge and the Hon. Charlie Lynn will come to order. The Minister will answer the question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You said you would do things differently and it is even worse.

CHAIR: Mr David Shoebridge will come to order.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We are being chaired by government.

CHAIR: Mr David Shoebridge will come to order.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Madam Chair, the Woy Woy rehabilitation hospital is a great service for the people of Woy Woy and the Central Coast. It was closed by the previous Government despite strong community concern. That community concern was evinced in many public meetings and questions in the House. The people of the Central Coast were determined that they would get their Woy Woy rehabilitation back, so the Government allocated \$500,000 in this year's budget to commence planning of the \$5 million refurbishment of rehabilitation at Woy Woy Hospital. This funding will allow it to work towards reopening the rehabilitation unit at Woy Woy, which was closed by the former Labor Government on 1 December 2008.

The services proposed to be provided are geriatric rehabilitation and palliative care subacute services and are anticipated to be operational in 2012-13. Committed funds from both State and Commonwealth funding will enable construction of a new inpatient unit for these services at Woy Woy Hospital. The funding will also enable the upgrade of services such as communications, waste management, kitchen and food services, hazardous materials management, engineering and the receiving dock at the Woy Woy Hospital site to ensure that clinical services are appropriately supported.

The Woy Woy rehabilitation unit will proceed. What was happening was that very sick people who needed rehabilitation were being forced to go to the site at Woy Woy Hospital and were then transported over a 40-minute trip in an uncomfortable bus up to Wyong. That was causing great distress on the peninsula, which has a much higher-than-average percentage of elderly people in the community. It showed a callous disregard for them. It was one of the early commitments of this Government, and I am very pleased to see that this Government is honouring that commitment.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Minister, could you provide an update on the Wyong police station and some history perhaps around the construction of police stations on the Central Coast?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Surely this is a question for the police Minister, not the ever-accountable Minister for the Central Coast.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: Madam Chair, will you call the member to order? The Greens over the past 15 years never acted like this, but this member is really treating this Committee with disrespect.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This Minister is treating this Committee with disrespect.

CHAIR: I ask Committee members to allow the Minister to answer the question.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: My point of order is that this question should be rightfully directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The Minister indicated earlier that he is not responsible for anything in particular on the Central Coast.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. I already have ruled that the Minister is able to speak broadly on portfolio matters across the Central Coast. The Minister will continue.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Wyong police station was promised in 2004 by the previous Government. The previous Government announced it would be completed in 2009. In 2009, the then State Government pushed the Wyong police station back to 2011. In the 2008 budget, \$7 million was allocated to the police station, but only \$921,000 was actually spent. The new Government is proceeding with the Wyong police station and it not only has been constructed but also will become operational this Friday, 28 October. An official opening date is yet to be determined. The total budget for the station was \$14.64 million.

The new station will house more than 150 staff from the Tuggerah Lakes Local Area Command, including crime, Highway Patrol, intelligence and administrative services. General duties officers will remain located at Toukley and The Entrance. The new headquarters at Wyong will house all support services for the Tuggerah Lakes command under one roof. This will assist the operation of police and improve efficiencies of service to the community.

Wyong police station was promised in 2004. That promise of course was never honoured. It was then promised repeatedly. Money was budgeted in 2008 that was never spent. But now of course the Wyong police station is proceeding to construction and to operational readiness. The facts speak for themselves. The member also asked me about the history of other police stations on the Central Coast. I thank him for that. Kincumber police station was also promised by the previous Government.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Point of order: I would like the Minister or the person who asked the question to point out where in the budget papers these items that he is now referring to appear.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: That is not a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is outside the scope of the inquiry.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: The Hon. John Ajaka should not tell the Chair what to do.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: To the point of order: The previous questions were related to opinion by the Minister on principle and so forth. I am asking here for factual information about construction of the police stations on the Central Coast, which are within the budget papers.

CHAIR: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. Questions are to be proposed in relation to budget papers or to prior expenditure.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: In relation to prior expenditure, Kincumber police station was a promise and it was a promise that the previous Government carried out. It constructed it in 1996 and it cost \$1.4 million. The police station was going to be 24-hour operational and it was organised to seat and equip 12 police officers. It never opened for a single day. It was staffed initially by one disabled officer who had no gun and no car. After some time that officer on light duties was taken away and an Eagle Phone system was set up which connected this \$1.6 million police station for 12 police officers to Gosford police station. Despite petitions and community consultation and endless attempts by the council and the local community to have the police station manned, it was never manned.

It stood there as a great white elephant along Avoca Drive for all to see. In fact, at one election one of the candidates put up a sign that read, "This building to let. Apply Bob Carr Real Estate." That stayed there for some days. In 2008 the police station was finally declared surplus and was sold off. A station that cost \$1.6 million in 1996 was sold off for \$332,000 in July 2009, having sat there for over 12 years totally unmanned. If ever there was a manifestation of the concern of the Labor Party and the previous Government for the Central Coast, Kincumber police station stands out like a beacon.

The Hon. CHARLIE LYNN: I can see why they did not want that question. Minister, can you provide some up-to-date information on the construction of the Kincumber fire station?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The Kincumber fire station was promised by the previous Government at the 1999 election. Nothing happened. It was promised again at the 2003 election. Nothing happened. It was promised again for the 2007 State election. At the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections the previous Government made a solemn commitment that it would build a fire station at Kincumber—and nothing happened. Yet we have here a person who was once the Minister for Emergency Services under that Government.

The site was purchased eventually and in 2008 the budget papers allocated money for staff at Kincumber fire station even though that fire station was not built. It was not even approved by the council as part of its construction authority permit. That was well publicised by the *Daily Telegraph* at the time as another major incompetent stuff up by whatever Premier was then in office. So in 2008 money was allocated for staff at an empty, non-existent fire station. Finally the fire station did go ahead and it was opened in July—

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: Sorry, who was the Minister when it went ahead?

CHAIR: Is that a point of order?

The Hon. STEVE WHAN: It is a point of clarification.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: It was opened in July 2011 by the excellent Minister the Hon. Michael Gallacher. It is a magnificent, state-of-the-art station that cost \$2.3 million and has the latest firefighting equipment. It was specially designed to complement the surrounding bushland. It will be staffed by 21 full-time firefighters working in five teams on a 24-hour roster. The station has the latest Scania fire truck to help do the job. The truck is capable of hazardous materials operations as well as firefighting and is diesel powered to help noise control as it leaves and returns to the station. In 1999, 2003 and 2007 nothing happened. In 2008 money was allocated for staff yet there was no fire station. The *Daily Telegraph* had fun with that one. In 2011 the fire station was opened under the O'Farrell Government. What a magnificent story.

(The witness withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
