



**Legislative Council**  
**Governor's Speech: Address in Reply**  
**Extract**

18/09/84

**The Hon. R. T. M. BULL** [9.26]: It gives me much pleasure to support the motion moved by the Hon. R. D. Dyer for the adoption of the Address in Reply to the speech delivered by His Excellency Sir James Rowland. Like other members, I take this opportunity to congratulate Sir James and Lady Rowland on the excellent manner in which they perform the duties of their office. I know all the people of New South Wales have a great deal of admiration and respect for our present State Governor. Before going on with my speech I wish to congratulate a number of members of the Legislative Council who have made their maiden speeches since I last spoke. I mention the Hon. J. P. Hannaford. His future contributions in this Chamber will, I am sure, be of great significance. The contribution of the Hon. Beryl Evans was excellent. She spoke of the many problems in the area from which she comes. The Hon. J. M. Samios delivered an outstanding speech on some of the problems with which he is most conversant. The Hon. G. R. Ibbett made a contribution that I enjoyed immensely. The Hon. K. J. Enderbury gave us a most entertaining speech. I hope he enjoys his new residence in Tamworth. I am sure he will find it difficult to be the duty MLC for that area, but he will enjoy the hospitality of the good city of Tamworth. I look forward to further contributions to debate by the Hon. J. H. Jobling, who I congratulate on his maiden speech. I reserve special mention for my colleague the Hon. Judith Jakins. She has a great deal to offer to this Chamber. She has wide knowledge of the western areas of this State and a keen understanding of the role of women in our society. I specifically congratulate her on her speech, which covered many of those areas of western New South Wales, the role of women and the problems of Aboriginal assimilation in this State and this country. I enjoy working with her as a colleague in this place.

In the Address-in-Reply debate I intend to cover several points of concern to me and to people in country areas of New South Wales. The first is the area of pre-school education in New South Wales. It has become obvious to me that pre-school children in New South Wales are getting a raw deal compared with children in other States. This is apparent when one examines the level of funding of our children compared with the children in other States. Funding is provided by the Commonwealth Government and the State Government specifically for pre-schools. The Commonwealth Government introduced block grants in 1977 to each of the States for the benefit of pre-school children. On the figures supplied to me, the New South Wales grant has been significantly lower than that for any other State in all cases except the Northern Territory, and is less than half that which is available to those other States. On a *per capita* basis a child under 4 years of age in New South Wales receives \$18 compared with Victoria's \$37, Queensland's \$38, South Australia's \$39, Western Australia's \$36 and Tasmania's \$42. The Northern Territory receives \$23 on a *per capita* basis for children under 4 years of age. Clearly New South Wales is missing out.

**The Hon. Ann Symonds:** Was missing out.

**The Hon. R. T. M. BULL:** Is missing out and worse is to come. Having received less than half from block grants compared with other States, the New South Wales Government has compounded the problem by providing less than a third in grants to pre-schools compared with grants in other States. On a *per capita* basis of children under 4 years the contribution of the New South Wales Government in grants is \$29 compared with Victoria's \$89, Queensland's \$147, South Australia's \$153, Western Australia's \$118, Tasmania's \$99 and the Northern Territory's \$257. Existing funding is based on the provision of a sessional subsidy of \$2.05 a child for each half day session. This existing funding basis gives no recognition of or encouragement for the employment of properly trained qualified teaching staff. Pre-schools that care for their children enough to provide proper staffing levels—which is one qualified teacher and one assistant for each twenty children and a minimum staffing quality of a three year diploma in early childhood education—are penalized.

The Leeton pre-school, which is the one closest to me, estimates that in 1984 it will receive 46 per cent only of its teaching staff salaries from sessional subsidies, estimated to be \$65,000. The shortfall in

income is to be raised by a combination of attendance fees and parent fund-raising activities. Thus the cost to the parents of a 4-year-old attending two full day sessions a week is \$480 a year. An economic needs subsidy is available but is set too low with respect to parent income to be able to assist many families. As a result, those people most severely hit are low to medium income earners. Unless these people receive a further subsidy, their children will continue to be denied pre-school education because of economic hardship. These are obviously the children likely to benefit most from pre-school education. They are either denied access to pre-schools or they are unable to attend the number of sessions needed to maximise their development.

This inadequacy in funding means that children in New South Wales are being severely penalized compared with children in other States. The shortfall in funding has to be met by charging the parents of pre-school children exorbitant fees. In effect this has placed a means test on this vital part of a child's education and has forced it to be a luxury rather than a necessity. Pre-school education has taken over the role that used to be the sole province of the kindergarten in public schools. The basic skills required for children to be adequately prepared for formal education are far more comprehensive than in the past. Thus the role of pre-schools is so important to a child of pre-school age. It has been proved by projects in operation for a considerable time that children who attend pre-schools gain an immediate academic advantage over non-attenders. This head start actually increases in later schooling. It has been found also that where a cognitive emphasis was strongly fostered over the pre-school and early primary years, the demand for special education placement, especially in the form of remedial education, declined significantly.

This emphasizes the important role that pre-school education plays in the provisions of supportive programmes for young handicapped children and for their parents and in the detection of children with developmental setbacks that might affect subsequent educational progress. This lack of funding is not good enough and must be rectified by the New South Wales Government. The Government must consider its priorities and provide a better deal to New South Wales children. Obviously the first priority must be in the direction of approved staff salaries. Additional funding should be made available immediately to cover the shortfall of funding that is partially available. Community based pre-schools have provided outstanding facilities for young children in most of our country towns. They have developed through the hard work and initiative of parents and concerned citizens and have survived through the generosity and work of these people.

**The Hon. Ann Symonds:** And the funding of Labor governments.

**The Hon. R. T. M. BULL:** Not in this State. The Government must recognize that more assistance is needed urgently to enable these pre-schools to function efficiently and to meet the needs of pre-school education. That New South Wales drags behind other States is simply not good enough. Our children's education is far too important to be denied adequate support. At a similar pre-school in Victoria in which qualified staff are funded, parents contribute \$15 a term only. The other area of concern upon which I should like to touch concerns roads. I was pleased with the recent Government announcement to increase spending on roads in the next year from \$860 million to \$953 million. This was a welcome announcement but much more has to be done to catch up in an area of Government expenditure that has sadly slipped behind.

Some of the major areas of funding for the next year involve freeway construction and major projects in city areas. There is a great need to improve the Sydney city traffic problems, through freeway construction, which projects this Government abandoned in 1976. However, I wish to comment on the forgotten roads. I refer to the roads in the country areas of this State. There are State highways in the western part of the State that are completely impassable during winter months. I refer to the Cobb Highway between Booligal and Ivanhoe. After rain, children cannot get to school. In wet winters the town of Ivanhoe becomes isolated. This is one of the State's highways. In January the National Roads and Motorists Association produced a booklet entitled, *Road Deficiencies in Rural New South Wales*, which, apart from highlighting the problems of rural roads, actually named eighty-one trouble spots, as an example of some of the critical areas of poor quality roads. The survey covered only the State highways and some major main and trunk roads.

Since the advent of the motor car fifty years ago, our development of roads has been unable to keep pace with the technological improvements in the car. We have been unable to maintain our road system

to meet its demands. The fact that 40 000 lives have been lost in road accidents between 1970 and 1984 is an appalling testament to that fact. Obviously positive and direct action must be taken now to avoid a similar fifty year period ahead, providing the same consequences. The usual answer to inactivity in these important areas is lack of funds. How often do we hear that cry? I refer honourable members to the funding situation to see what is taking place. This year we are spending \$860 million on our roads programme. That is an enormous amount of money that I believe to be the greatest contribution ever made to our roads system. Despite the spending of this large sum of money, what have we to show for it? Our whole roads system is probably as bad as it has ever been.

Funding for road works is spread through the three tiers of government. This year the Commonwealth will provide funds for national highways and some rural, urban and local roads to an amount of \$258 million. This includes funds directed through the State Government to fund State highways, trunk and main roads. An extra \$417 million will be raised by the State through weight tax and a tax levy, plus a tax on diesel fuel. However, local government has the greatest responsibility to our road funding. Apart from allocating a portion of the 2 per cent Commonwealth tax share to their local roads, it splits a \$526 million Commonwealth grant to local roads. Coupled with that is the contribution from the bicentennial road funding programme of 2c a litre provided by motorists and other road users.

The \$860 million in funds for this year, spread over the 193 488 kilometres of roads in New South Wales, will average out at \$4,445 a kilometre. As bitumen costs \$80,000 a kilometre and freeways \$7 million a kilometre, the funds will not spread very far. Unfortunately, the poor relation is the rural road, which is suffering the most. It is time for the Government to take a hard look at road funding, examine the priorities of its expenditure, and somehow strike a better deal for roads outside Sydney. In the past eight years there have been seven Ministers for Roads. Surely that is not good for policy direction and responsibility within the Department of Main Roads. One other area of road funding deserves comment. Despite the urgent need for more expenditure on the State's roads, the Government is hiving off funds that should be going towards roads. Funds that should be going towards roads and which have been diverted to other purposes include \$197 million from petrol tax, \$40 million from the bicentennial roads programme to purchase buses and ferries for city commuters, and \$24 million absorbed from road funds to pay for the cost of the pensioner registration concessions.

It is imperative that the indexed 2c a litre bicentennial roads programme levy, which will raise \$500 million by 1988, all goes to road funding. With the additional injection back into roads of those funds now being hived off by the Government, I am sure that New South Wales motorists will have a chance of getting improved roads. The State cannot afford to have its roads deteriorate. Maintenance and development must be increased to ensure satisfactory progress. Bad road surfaces are still the major cause of road accidents, and until the pavements are upgraded and maintained on a continuing, financially sound, and equitable basis, road deaths will continue to plague the State's roads.

Many other matters raised in the Governor's Speech to the Parliament deserve comment. Agriculture, as the Hon. F. M. MacDiarmid mentioned, was dismissed in several short paragraphs. That is probably indicative of agriculture's low priority with the Government. A further indication of the Government's scant regard for agriculture is noted in the Minister's answer to a question in the House last week about the wheat industry. The position of Minister for Agriculture in this State should be one that has the complete confidence of those engaged in agricultural pursuits. When 2 500 wheatgrowers see fit to gather across the State to voice their concern about the industry, I should have thought that a concerned Minister would have had some sympathy, shown concern, or said nothing at all instead of trying to ridicule their cause in an attempt to score cheap political points. The problems of the wheatgrowers in New South Wales are too great to be acknowledged by political point scoring. The ramifications of wheatgrowers in Australia becoming unprofitable are more than farmers becoming poor. Australia's economy relies heavily on export industries. Without exports, what future does the country have, other than to go broke?

I am a wheatgrower, probably the only one in this House. Over the past few years profitability in the wheat industry has been decreasing at an alarming rate. That is due primarily to rapidly increasing costs, which have risen at an annual rate of 17 per cent a year in the past five years, while wheat prices have increased by only 2 per cent in the same period. Does the wheat industry have to wait until it reaches a situation similar to that of the dried fruit industry, to which the Minister alluded today, before the

Government will be willing to acknowledge that a problem exists? I do not believe that the present Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries really believes what he told the House last week about the wheat industry. I assure him that he does so at his peril. The wheat industry is far too important to the State and the nation to be dismissed by asides. I urge the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries to take notice of what is happening to the wheat industry in New South Wales and give it the support that it now seeks.