

owes her a hundred dollars. There is Helen, whose husband died. She has had trouble transferring the account across to her name and had her telephone number quarantined and her mobile disconnected. Another couple had ongoing problems with an account. They were signed up to a Blackberry over the phone. When it arrived they said, 'I do not want this,' but they keep receiving accounts for this Blackberry that they had returned immediately after receiving it.

There is a litany of complaints that I have received in my office. I would like to call on Telstra to be much more receptive to the concerns of their customers and to the concerns of people that have contacted their office and whom I have contacted on their behalf, and to resolve some of the problems that are real issues for these people. Given the fact that there is a time constraint, I will finish here but I would like to reiterate that it is time for Telstra to act and be receptive and do something for all these people.

#### **Landcare**

**Mrs MIRABELLA** (Indi) (12.57 pm)—At a time when the government is talking about the issues of climate change and Penny Wong is touring the countryside buying up properties and water rights on the premise that it will save our depleted waterways, it is very surprising that the government would dramatically change funding for Landcare groups. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has admitted that, thanks to his reshuffle of funding for Landcare, there are now only 56 facilitators to cover the entire country. The government has introduced a funding model which now puts Landcare groups in competition with one another for funding. Under the new system, 70 per cent of funding must go toward funding grants, leaving only 30 per cent for wages of staff. Despite the minister's assurance that funding levels have not decreased, he cannot guarantee—and he will not—that Landcare groups on the ground will not suffer. It does show that the minister is totally out of touch.

Landcare, as we know, is made up of volunteer farmers—farmers who take time out of their busy day to contribute to their local environment and community. It is these volunteers, who rely on the expertise of paid Landcare facilitators, who help local groups in so many ways—to identify problems, to provide advice on funding opportunities and to help draft proposals. Local farmers just do not have the time to keep up with government funding. They are not always in a position to be able to draft proposals to access funding.

In an ABC Radio interview, the minister failed to accept responsibility for the reduction of staff in areas in Victoria—and in some areas, such as the Mallee, they are down to one paid facilitator for the entire region. The minister must take responsibility. He is the one who approved the change. He should speak to farmers on the ground and other Landcare operators and actually do something that helps farmers care for their environment.

#### **Banking: Occupational Health and Safety**

**Ms GEORGE** (Throsby) (12.58 pm)—I met recently with the delegation from the New South Wales branch of the Finance Sector Union to discuss the recommendations arising from the national review into model occupational health and safety laws. Among the group were three women—Anne, Narelle and Debbie—who had all been subjected to violent hold-ups while working in local branch offices. They are particularly concerned about the recommendation which could put an end to the ability of unions to commence prosecution over safety issues in the workplace.

Anne was a bank manager when she was attacked in a hold-up in 2002. She was kicked unconscious, suffering permanent back and psychological injury. The incident was reportable to WorkCover New South Wales but no action was taken against her employer, even though she had previously reported the obvious gaps in branch security measures. Narelle worked at a suburban branch which was robbed four times in nine months between August 2002 and April 2003. She and her workmates were confronted with screwdrivers and sledgehammers. The doors were smashed as the offenders took advantage of a security weakness that the branch head office had been informed about. After the fourth hold-up, the FSU commenced court action against that particular bank. The bank pleaded guilty and was fined \$175,000.

Debbie's workplace was attacked in September 2004 by three offenders, at least one of whom was armed with a handgun. The union had had 23 exchanges with the bank's head office about weaknesses in security measures. After the attack on Debbie's branch, the union commenced court action, again for a breach of the act. The bank pleaded guilty and was fined \$145,000.

I raise these three case studies because it was cases like this that led the FSU to begin its compliance campaign against the banks to bring about better safety standards. In 2002, when the campaign began, there were 106 bank hold-ups in New South Wales. They have now fallen to about 20. Most banks, as we know, now have full-height antijump barriers, ATM bunkers and digital CCTV with live back-to-base monitoring. I ask: what would have been the outcome if the union did not have a statutory right to initiate prosecutions? I thank the FSU for bringing this matter to my attention and to Anne, Narelle and Debbie for sharing their traumatic experiences with me. I

firmly believe in the right of unions to undertake prosecutions for safety breaches, and I believe this is fundamental to the wellbeing of all Australian workers.

Question agreed to.

**Main Committee adjourned at 1.01 pm**