

Madam President, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to hear from many of my honourable colleagues regarding the Treasurer's latest offering. I would like to acknowledge the Treasurer's sound work ethic in travelling to Devonport last Friday night to address approximately 40 people invited by the Devonport Chamber of Commerce and Industry, especially after presenting both in Hobart and Launceston earlier in the day. Indeed, a number of individuals appreciated his commitment and they were encouraged to discuss with the honourable Treasurer the Government's 2009-10 and extended **Budget**. The Devonport Chamber of Commerce president and executive are also to be commended for their efforts in facilitating this occasion. It was an informative and enjoyable evening.

At the presentation I was also heartened to hear Mr Andrew Scobie from the TCCI talk both succinctly and favourably about many aspects of what he referred to as a responsible **budget**. It was pleasing to hear Mr Scobie's constructive comments on behalf of the business and industry sector on the likely impact of the **Budget**.

I would also request the Treasurer to pass on my compliments to his staff. Many of us in this Chamber greatly appreciate the amount of work and thousands of hours undertaken on behalf of the Government for the Tasmanian people to actually progress and evolve the **budget** documents from the very early drafts to their end format. Each person who has contributed in some way, shape or form should be recognised and congratulated.

A successful financial blueprint for Tasmania is crucial to the continuing progress and improved future for all of us. The responsibility is enormous and the Government needs to listen carefully to the questions and reflections of each of the Legislative Councillors regarding the **Budget** to appreciate its importance. No doubt next week clarifying questions will be the order of the day and, whilst it might be a little precipitous, I would suggest that the scrutiny and questions from the upper House will be objective and straightforward, as they should be, as should be the responses as we seek further information based on our desire to understand the impact on not only the citizens in our electorate but also across our regions and State.

The north-west coast is a special place and I realise there are many special communities across Tasmania. All of my colleagues are obviously very proud of their patch, thus it will come as no surprise to the honourable members when I say that I am particularly proud of the north-west coast, especially the eastern end which encompasses primarily the Mersey electorate. However, I am not convinced that my electorate is actually firing on all four cylinders and while some communities, businesses and sectors are doing well and there is some outstanding work in individual efforts in the region, the Mersey electorate just does not appear to get the assistance it so rightly deserves.

To achieve its full potential the area needs an injection of attention. It should be noted that this is not a criticism but more an objective comment on how I see the Mersey region is faring. It is the place I have chosen to live my life and of which I am very respectful. I try at all times to be supportive and proactive. Indeed, I believe we all want our electorates to be successful and to support positive initiatives, recognise the weaknesses, acknowledge the areas for improvement and, where possible, devise action plans to rectify or challenge an issue.

I also see little advantage in finger pointing at any government - local, State or Federal - and I am the first to accept that representatives from all these three government spheres are responsible for and need to achieve more for the Mersey region. The honourable member for Murchison in her address highlighted Formby Road in Devonport as a much-used transport route and I will return to that issue a little later. I thank her for her assistance in recognising the importance of Devonport and the Mersey region to the north-west and west coasts and, ultimately, the rest of Tasmania.

As the gateway to Tasmania, Devonport does play a very important role and whilst many visitors from the mainland would be aware of the name of the city where the *Spirit of Tasmania* docks, very few Australians other than Tasmanians or seasoned travellers have any idea that only 7 kilometres from the dock is the Devonport Airport. Whilst the Devonport Airport actually resides in the Latrobe Municipality, it is a most important piece of infrastructure whose continued viability to our local community in regional tourism cannot be underestimated.

The future of the Devonport Airport is integral to the north-west coast and people from the community are willing to invest in the airport to ensure its sustainability. Hopefully, governments and local community members can continue to work together to ensure the airport's future and that all of Tasmania can benefit from the advantages of having a seaport and airport in such close proximity to each other. For the honourable member's information, the Devonport and Latrobe councils are currently awaiting a response from the RPDC regarding the proposed Mersey industrial zone situated near the airport. It has been suggested and stated that there is the potential for at least an \$80 million development for hydroponics on the coastal Mersey strip of land.

Hopefully, the Mersey region will be seriously considered for funds identified and earmarked for broadband opportunities, and the Enterprise Growth Program as a potential for return on that investment in our industries is very realistic with the niche markets and increasing productivity of the natural assets of the Mersey region. It would be a huge boost of confidence for our region to be one of the first cabs off the rank as there is a coastal opportunity in maximising the diversity of innovative practices obvious in my electorate. However, this presentation will continue to focus primarily on those issues which impact more on my electorate and immediate surrounds. Other more eloquent speakers are to be thanked for their comments on broader **budget** areas that will continue to be addressed during next week's Estimates questioning.

This **Budget** is a very important document for my region and this State and sets parameters and financial guidelines for all to appreciate and, at the same time, question. As it is with any **budget** for any community, one must act transparently in the best interests of the people and groups from where the revenue is being derived and in determining where it will be spent. The process in which we are currently engaging allows us to ask the questions on behalf of our communities. It also allows an opportunity for the Government to justify and provide answers to our inquiries.

As with most budgets whether at a company, council, State or Federal level, there will always be some sectors that are considered winners and others whose needs are perceived to have been overlooked or ignored. I fully appreciate that there have been external factors

impacting on this **Budget**. The financial environment around the world has created an unusual set of circumstances that in turn have created difficulties for the setting of this **Budget**. However, there are some notable, positive inclusions.

Regarding the **Budget** I profess to be a student of constructive criticism more than a master of numerical negativity. Thus, for the record, any financial support for the Mersey region is well received and graciously accepted by the people in my electorate. However, we do face testing times, particularly in regard to potential job losses. For instance, the situation at the Wesley Vale mill - approximately 280 residents from the Mersey region and even a greater number who work at Burnie are waiting for the update and report from the company on the future of the mill.

As reported in yesterday's *Advocate*, currently the future of 850 jobs - that is, Swift Australia, Tas Paper - formerly Australian Paper - Excelsior call centre jobs - are in limbo. The possibility for our community to experience economic pain is very real. As economics and business commentator Dr Bruce Felmingham stated, 'The multiplier effects of the current crisis are going to be severe compared to other regions. It is a very fragile web, the north-west coast'. He had previously mentioned that the biggest issue for the north-west coast in the financial downturn is, firstly, our reliance on manufacturing; secondly, a greater number of smaller-scale operations less able to absorb the slowdown; and the third issue mentioned was the knock-on effect of job losses. In times of trouble and discomfort we need to ensure that the glue that holds communities together is sustained in an environment that will allow it to gel and provide support for a wide range of people who will need our assistance.

The agricultural and rural community provide a most important lifeline for the Mersey region, many of whom will be directly and indirectly receiving benefit from the Sassafras/Wesley Vale irrigation schemes which involve 62 kilometres of pipeline at a cost of \$8.7 million, expected to be completed in April 2010.

Whilst the announcement is not new it is a good example of three spheres of government working together to provide the necessary water resource to a most rich and fertile valley. The State Government is to be congratulated on its efforts to address the water needs of the farming community.

For the honourable members' information, 80 per cent of Australian frozen vegetables come from the north-west coast and many of the Fair Dinkum food campaigners and Produce of Heaven enthusiasts come from the north-west coast, primarily from the Mersey region. However in the Mersey region the most important vibrant aspect of my community is perhaps best reflected in the considerable number of dollars the Government has allocated towards volunteering - a \$1.04 million contribution over four years towards reinvigorating and supporting volunteers in Tasmania.

To quote the Premier, 'Volunteerism is a part of the Tasmanian culture that we can all be incredibly proud of and something I believe we should celebrate and encourage'. Volunteering not only has social benefits but also economic. People develop new skills and make an important contribution to delivering services and support in their communities. I would suggest that all of us would hope that this area of funding will be considered for further extension in the future and no doubt the questions by colleagues next week will try to gather more information regarding this significant amount of funding for volunteering to help to manage effectively and support service clubs and volunteer organisations.

Madam President, an issue which affects countless families in my electorate and around the country is the timely provision of services at both some quality early learning childcare and parent and family support. The East Devonport Child and Family Centre will play a vital role in strengthening the local community and helping to prepare our youngest Tasmanians for a healthy lifestyle and success at school. The philosophy of the centre will be to provide easily accessible services and information and promote the optimal health, development and wellbeing of young children and their families; to support and work collaboratively with children, their parents and communities operating within an early childhood development framework; to recognise and support parents as their child's first teacher and to prepare children and their families for a healthy life and success at school and to be adaptable in response to the changing needs.

I look forward to witnessing and reporting back to this Chamber upon the positive impact of the establishment of the East Devonport Child and Family Centre. The allocation of \$75 000 for the Devonport skate park redevelopment and \$300 000 for regional all abilities play space are also positives for the area. The benefits of creating, maintaining and developing safe places for children and adolescents in the community to meet and participate in outdoor activities cannot be underestimated.

However, lack of funding support for the Devonport Surf Club is exceptionally disappointing for that worthwhile and successful organisation which exists to provide a public service and at the same time keeping people of all ages, especially youth, healthy and involved.

Another omission from the 2009-10 **Budget** highlighted earlier by the member for Windermere, is the implementation of the immediately needed and much discussed upgrade of the Devonport Police Station. In spite of the minister's acknowledgment that to have modern and functional facilities is vital in supporting Tasmanian Police in conducting their work effectively and efficiently, Devonport Police are unlikely to see any improvement in the existing conditions for some time. The member felt that the Devonport building was older and, in his opinion, more depleted than both Bellerive and Glenorchy.

To quote the member:

'Approvals and final design is expected in the second half of next year with construction expected to start in January 2011.'

Given that the issue has been on the drawing board for at least five years, a two-year lead time for the project seems excessive. Many members would be aware of the proposed closure of the Devonport Imaginarium. This extraordinary facility has provided literally thousands of children in the region with an innovative and fun introduction to applied science concepts. Should it not receive appropriate financial attention in the near future, the educational, social and community building benefits may be lost.

It is extremely disappointing to note that the relatively small amount of funding required to continue the operation of the Imaginarium has not been granted or found. This is an important regional asset which is providing a great platform to engage with people of all ages, especially the young, challenging them to reach out, to touch and question, to explore and to interact with the world around them.

We are fortunate on the north-west coast to now have a wonderful university campus at Burnie - something that was missing for far too long on the north-west coast. I congratulate all involved with the University of Tasmania and the Government for their ongoing support for expansion of a significant learning centre providing a rich opportunity for our greater region.

However, as a teacher for over 25 years with the department, I cannot understand how the importance of the Imaginarium is not receiving the attention that it deserves. It provides the eastern end of the north-west coast with a learning centre which is so different and capturing of the inquiring scientific mind. Surely the potential loss and closure of this educational facility is tragic. It should be financed by the Education department and sponsored by the university as infrastructure encompassing and reinforcing the importance of learning.

It provides a much broader experience for our community youth. Our cities and larger centres have museums, art galleries, parliamentary buildings, aquatic centres, football grounds with big, bright, expensive lights to be a beacon of hope for the young who can aspire to become a professional footballer, a player, a Matthew Richardson, a coach, a Jade Rawlings or maybe an enrolled member of the Richmond Football Club. All of that right at their fingertips. While some may fall short, at least this Government has made the dream possible. On the north-west coast, in my electorate, for a relatively minimal cost we could maintain and involve a centre of learning to capture the imagination of our students who want to play on the science field not the sports field.

The challenge to the intellect; an environment for creative and inquisitive minds is also an opportunity for development and intellectual growth which will in turn be winners for our community which needs support not closure. I trust either the Government, Education department or university may be able to provide financial support and relief for this worthy institution.

The Federal and State relationship regarding the unique Mersey hospital situation has indirect impacts on the State **Budget**. The Health minister stated in her release that almost \$90 million of the increase in the Health **Budget** is accounted for by the operational return of the Mersey Community Hospital to the State health system and the need to provide for an additional pay period, 2009-10.

I am in regular contact with the staff at the Mersey hospital and it is pleasing to note that morale appears to be improving. There have been significant purchases of replacement equipment which is a positive outcome of the Federal intervention. However, with the increase of staff numbers and patient flowthrough, there is a need and room at the Mersey for further car parking. Whilst I am pleased that the LGH is receiving a major development, including a car park upgrade, I believe that the Mersey hospital should be seriously considered for a more effective and improved car parking arrangement in the not-too-distant future.

Some community concerns have been voiced, and justifiably so, regarding the cancer and oncology services and the MRI unit being unavailable in our region. Discussions need to continue between the medical professionals, hospital management and community representatives such as the Cancer Council of Tasmania to ensure that all strategies and avenues are explored. While deliberations and discussions continue, it is imperative that transport services and accommodation costs are adequately funded for those needing to travel

to access services not available locally. The stress and discomfort of individuals, family and friends, is further compounded by excessive travelling and out-of-pocket expenses.

While the Infrastructure minister is to be congratulated for his \$275.4 million road and rail infrastructure initiatives, it seems that the little Mersey electorate has missed out on this front as well. In comparison to some of the enormous projects to be undertaken, the Formby Road upgrade would cost the State Government approximately \$2 million. One of the interested businessmen who attended the Treasurer's **budget** presentation was Mr Craig Badcock. Craig was impressed with aspects of the **Budget** and is a practical and a down-to-earth person who provided quite an insight into the Formby Road upgrade. I quote from a recent e-mail from Mr Badcock:

'Reasons for this project to happen now include:

- The road surface is in terrible condition and requires immediate attention ...
- The recent Strategic Traffic Plan supports the upgrade
- This is the main access to Devonport and it promotes a very poor image to tourists
- The proposed upgrade includes a bike path that will enhance safety and a healthy lifestyle
- The current situation is dangerous with traffic exiting Formby Road business and turning right at peak periods a near impossible exercise
- Upgrade design work is well advanced and this project is ready to go

But most importantly -

and I would encourage the members to listen carefully to this -

'this project has been allocated Federal Government funding:

- This funding may not be available when the State Government deems the project worthy in the future
- If the State Government wants to stimulate the Tasmanian economy, a \$2M spend to create a \$7M project is a very effective way to leverage their funds

This is an issue that impacts on most Devonport and surrounding residents. Failing to provide funding reflects very negatively on the State Government.'

I come to my good friend, the honourable member for Murchison. She is supportive of funding for this road. Indeed, when the honourable member for Western Tiers inquired about the funding for the Tarkine road, the honourable member for Murchison commented, 'I do not want to lose the money from the region'. This does appear to me to be a wonderful gesture from the member for Murchison, acknowledging that the \$23 million should be spent in our region, that is, the north-west coast region.

As you would agree, Madam President, the north-west coast is a region which has proven to be caring and supportive and I thank the member for Murchison in planting the seed of possibility that \$2 million from the \$23 million project **budget** for the Tarkine road could be utilised this year on Formby Road. It is not as bad as it sounds. This would allow the Devonport Council to access and not lose the Federal funding available in this financial year and in the following year, no doubt, the State Government would reinstate the \$2 million needed to complete the Tarkine project. I am certain that the Tarkine concept project will more than likely take some time to finalise. Here we have the Formby project ready to go with promised Federal and local government funding, thus I urge the State Government to reassess and reconsider a tripartite approach to the Formby upgrade. This would allow a win-win situation.

I thank the honourable member for philosophical support for a \$2 million transfer, possibly from the Tarkine project. The Formby Road upgrade will be raised again next week in Estimates, providing a wonderful opportunity for this State to further give thought to the Murchison electorate benevolent strategy or perhaps one with a different name but a similar outcome for the Mersey region and the City of Devonport.

Road transport infrastructure on the north-west coast is generally very sound and is necessary due to the linear structure of the communities along the coast. As a region, we do not have a major hub, although Devonport is the most populated centre. The Bass Highway is the integral transport route and generally well funded. However, the following comments from the 2007 Tasmanian Corridor Strategy should be noted:

'The growth in traffic volumes on road sections with a high casualty crash rate including those with a low level of freight efficiency such as around Latrobe and Burnie... will increase demands for road improvements.'

The document identifies as one of the strategies to -

'improve road infrastructure and alignment on the Bass highway between Port Sorell Main Road and Deloraine'.

The honourable members should be well aware now that for some years there has been an identified bypass route - from Wattle Hill, which is just before you enter the industrial area before Latrobe, and then you go across Oppenheim Hill and reattach to the road network, basically bypassing the hospital. The relatively small section of road between the speedway and Anvers, the single lanes, has recorded far too many accidents, including loss of life. I can recall four fatalities in the last three years in that small section of road. Latrobe Council is currently undertaking a strategic planning project for the area. As the identified bypass route does impact on their light industrial zoning, which is virtually full, the non-commitment by DIER and the Government is making the planning process quite difficult.

Elected members have also expressed an opinion to me that it would be more cost-effective and efficient to continue the four-lane Bass Highway past the hospital but to do so they would need to include that land in the current planning strategy. This again, is an opportunity for all three spheres of government to work together for a successful solution and one that is realistic and attainable.

Not only is road transport an important part of the Mersey region but so is rail. However, the debate regarding the rail issue has been well covered in the media and by my fellow colleagues so I will not comment any further.

Madam President, my final discussion point is waste management. Waste management tends to be the sleeping giant and not nearly receiving the attention it should. The Mersey region has a fine example of resource sharing with local government at the Dulverton Waste Management facility. This facility is owned by the Central Coast, Devonport, Latrobe and Kentish councils and has now achieved equity of \$3.5 million, a turnover of \$3.2 million, and is now paying dividends and recently has received a very positive review from the Local Government Board. The core business of Dulverton is as follows: landfill, organics recycling, providing waste advice to councils, contract administration of the Cradle Coast regional recycling contract, project delivery of regional waste projects and recent initiatives of investigating food waste and garden organic collection service.

The benefits of the Dulverton authority are an increase in waste expertise, support in growth of radical cultural industries, management of inter-generational liabilities, management of carbon pollution reduction scheme exposure and financial returns on long-term sustainability. The importance of the Dulverton Waste Management facility is more evident as, from 1 July 2009, no organic material will be transferred to any landfill in Tasmania as it is a major cause of methane emission. The new \$2 million to \$3 million organics recycling facility will enable waste material from industry to be mixed with biosolids - that is, council sewerage - and green waste to value-add as compost suitable to on-sell. The material currently obtained from the organic facility is of a lesser quality but is suitable to top-dress the Dulverton site.

The new facility will greatly reduce the cost for a carbon trading scheme but unfortunately the authority was not successful in its recent bid for major infrastructure funding offered by the Federal Government's stimulus package. I believe cricket and football ground lights should receive funding and it is acknowledged that waste management facilities are probably not as sexy as sports fields and nor do they grab the imagination and media attention of the public. However, the Dulverton Waste Management facility is going to be exceptionally important, not only for the Mersey region and north-west coast but other communities across the State who will not be able to contain and maintain their waste.

In conclusion, there have been many issues raised by the upper House members and I look forward to further discussion.