

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

### Thursday 25 June 2009 - Estimates Committee B (Cox) - Part 2

**CHAIR** - We will put in place the mechanisms to inform Madam President that we may need extra time, but we may get through this in a speedy fashion.

**Mr COX** - We will do our best to ensure that happens. Before we go any further, can I take this opportunity to table two documents that were called for. One is the police salary package and the other has the salary levels of the commanders and the commissioners.

**Mr WING** - I know the answer to this but for the purposes of this committee I would like to ask how many members of the force are there in the traffic section?

**Mr HINE** - At the last meeting of the Road Safety Committee I gave you the full figures. It was about 70 in traffic plus 16 in the MAIB taskforce. So there are about 90 people dedicated to traffic but general police officers have a traffic function also. I will get you the collated figure, but I do not have it to hand at the moment.

**Mr WING** - I think it is correct to say that some of those who are in the dedicated traffic section also perform other duties?

**Mr HINE** - Yes they do. The Road Safety Taskforce is supplied by the MAIB and consists of 16 or 17 officers whose primary function is traffic duties. The primary role of the other traffic staff is traffic duties but they are called upon to do other duties as well. A proportion of the time of the remainder of the service - and this includes general uniform, patrol, CIB and other support services - is dedicated to traffic duty when there is an issue.

**Mr WING** - Where are the members of the traffic force based? How many are in each part of the State?

**Mr HINE** - Burnie, Launceston, Bellerive and Hobart each have a dedicated section. Southern traffic services has a total of 19.

**Mr WING** - Based in Hobart?

**Mr HINE** - Based in Hobart. Northern district traffic services has 17. In eastern district traffic services there are 14, and in western traffic services there are 17.

**Mr WING** - Thank you. When you have special exercises, such as at the long weekend earlier this month, where do the traffic services predominantly come from in order to service the Midland Highway?

**Mr HINE** - Predominantly, they would come from the traffic areas but they are supplemented by the uniform areas. On occasions, we have also used recruits from the academy to supplement those numbers.

**Mr WING** - I gather that if a police officer based at Bellerive who is on mobile patrol is required to service the Midland Highway, most of the officer's shift would be taken up with travelling from Bellerive through the midlands to Oatlands and then back again, leaving little time available for patrolling the Midland Highway?

**Mr HINE** - We have stations on the Midland Highway and part of their function is travelling up and down the Midland Highway - they are at Oatlands, Campbell Town, Ross and Kempton. For example, while the new highly-visible police cars are driving up the highway, some will be fitted with a mobile-mode radar - so they are doing radar duties as they are travelling - and also looking out for other offences. So it is a little bit like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge, you drive until you get to one end and then you come back again.

**Mr WING** - Do you expect to have a significant visible presence of police on the main highways with these new police vehicles that were publicised yesterday.

**Mr COX** - Yes, The intent is that there will be four within the four areas and they will be deployed by each region.

**Mr WING** - Four in each of those areas.

**Mr COX** - No, four altogether, one in each region, in addition to what is already there.

**Mr WING** - Is there any intention to increase either motor vehicle or motorcycle patrols in urban areas, particularly CBDs and cities?

**Mr HINE** - Each commander has autonomy to deploy their resources as they see fit. If there is an issue in an urban area in relation to traffic or crime then they dedicate appropriate resources to those areas. If there is a crime problem in an area, sometimes they dedicate traffic staff to that area to patrol as well. So it is a matter of identifying the problem and then seeing what resources are needed to combat that problem. I cannot give you a definitive answer to the question because it is a matter of ascertaining what the problem is and then dedicating resources to help fix that problem.

For example, quite often the eastern district and the southern district combine resources to conduct RBTs or other operations. It is what they call 'closing off the three bridges' between the western and eastern shores. They work together and combine resources for dealing with that problem. So it is a matter of identifying the problem and then putting resources into it.

For the Launceston Cup, for example, resources go from Hobart and also from Burnie to assist them to do RBTs, traffic patrols or traffic management.

**Mr WING** - There are so many people who wander around on the roads and move from lane to lane, turn right and do not give any signals and develop bad attitudes encouraging inattentive driving, which is a big factor in road safety. I think you would agree that if there were the resources to enable more visible presence of the police monitoring and enforcing the normal traffic regulations it would be a major step in promoting road safety?

**Mr HINE** - I hear your argument, Mr Wing.

**Mr WING** - Can we have some confidence that there will be more of that patrolling for that reason?

**Mr HINE** - It is a little bit hard to say more of the patrolling. It is a matter of utilising the resource you have to combat that problem you have now. Sometimes patrolling, if there is no

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

perceived benefit of patrolling a certain area, is not going to help. You have to maximise the resources you have. Sometimes a car sitting on the side of the road has a greater benefit than patrolling up and down. Sometimes having an unmarked vehicle in an area is a better way to go. I cannot promise you there is going to be more patrolling of certain areas but I can promise you there is an intelligence-led process to looking at some of the issues.

**Mr WING** - On random breath testing, could you give us the figures over a period of about 12 months, or whatever set of figures are available, the number of people random breath-tested and the number of offences detected with random breath testing? Also, could we have the number of tests for blood alcohol that are targeted and the number of offences detected with the targeting?

**Mr HINE** - Random breath tests last year, for the same period up until end of May, we conducted 638 000. Year to date we have conducted 629 000. In relation to random breath tests for the State through general patrols, it was 415 000. High-visibility operations were 214 000, just to give you a bit more of a breakdown from those figures.

**Mr WING** - In the case of each of those, could you tell us how many people exceeded the limit?

**Mr HINE** - Drink-driving offenders, out of high visibility operations for the State year to date, is 556; out of general patrols, RBTs and that nature, is 3 44; and drug-affected drivers is 231, compared to 208 last year.

**Mr WING** - So far this year with 629 000 random breath tests, 556 offences?

**Mr HINE** - No, that is in total. I am trying to give you a bit more of what a targeted operation is and what is a random breath test. There are specific sites where you set up, in a large operation, more than six people have to be high visibility. There are different categories but overall we treat them all with random breath tests. If we intercept a vehicle, that is a random breath test.

**Mr WING** - I would like to have the figures for the number of tests done with roadside random breath tests where, at random, cars are stopped as compared with the number of people tested after being targeted - that is, stopped on the roadside or followed. I would like to know the number of tests and the number of people exceeding the limit in each case.

**Mr HINE** - I can get you those figures. Just as a general breakdown, for the ones we class as high visibility operation, which is a dedicated high visibility operation compared to a static point, I do not think I can break it down. A static point can be one person or two people; a high visibility operation has to involve a number of police officers. There are some categories within that as well but the best I could probably break it down for you is the number of the high visibility operations where there is a number of police officers, and I do not have it off the top of my head, but an RBT can be two police officers on the side of the road intercepting vehicles.

**Mr WING** - Usually there would be more than two though wouldn't there? There might be four. I include that when I talk about the random breath testing where cars are stopped at a specific location compared with the testing where you do not have police officers set up in any particular area stopping vehicles at random but where they stop a motorist, follow the motorist in patrol cars, stop them, target people rather than just having a roadside testing method.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr COX** - So you want the number of people who were caught driving back from a pub who were picked up by a police car on their way home?

**Mr WING** - That sort of thing compared with the roadside testing.

**Mr HINE** - You are talking about static compared to mobile - mobile patrollers?

**Mr WING** - Yes thank you that is a good way of describing it.

**Mr HINE** - We will see if we can get you those figures for you.

**Mr WING** - Thank you very much.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**Mr DEAN** - This question is a follow-up one from last year's in relation to an undertaking was given then, and I should have brought it with me -

**Mr COX** - That is all right.

**Mr DEAN** - that there would be a review or a revision of the pursuit policy, and that followed on from a fairly lengthy explanation I gave as to why it should be reviewed. I will not go into that again other than to simply say that the example given was an innocent person and his wife being followed in a country area right on the speed limit at night -

**Mr COX** - I can remember this.

**Mr DEAN** - the first time they had experienced an unmarked car with the lights in the grill and they were frightened to hell. They were intercepted by police, the police behind them ran up and said they were going to charge them and they were petrified. They never went over the speed limit, they in fact travelled under the speed limit and never committed any offences whatsoever. Has that review taken place, has it been considered?

**Mr HINE** - The review in relation to that was followed up and the commander had a look at it.

In relation to police pursuits and training and all those issues, we are constantly looking at how best we can intercept vehicles. What we class as a police pursuit - and there were only three so far this year - is where someone does not stop and then it turns into a pursuit. We looked at how we can best capture the attention of the driver. There were a number of issues that came out of it from both our point of view and the driver's point of view, about people's understanding of the situation. We spoke to the driver involved and obviously you have as well. There are some issues and maybe some understandings of what was required by the police. That was an individual case and we compare it to some of our policies about stopping police vehicles as well.

**Mr DEAN** - You say it was an individual case but there are other cases that are very similar, and there was the Falconio case in Darwin, Northern Territory, where drivers started to become suspicious when people tried to stop them and a lot of people said they would not stop late at night unless they were 100 per cent certain it was a police car. It followed on from that so it was not isolated as such.

**Mr HINE** -Our unmarked vehicles have very bright police lights within the grill or on the visors. They are also fitted with sirens and we know what the marked vehicles have. We still get circumstances where people do not see those lights, do not hear the sirens. It is like when you travel along and sometimes people do not hear ambulances and do not pull to the left as they should do. We still get circumstances where people do not hear a police car. They will see the flashing lights or not use their rear vision mirror and no matter how much you try to get their attention they just don't see the police. We certainly have highly visible unmarked cars in that lights are in the grill and they have sirens. The marked cars we have seen and we know what they are like.

**Mr DEAN** - Are any changes necessary in view of the new legislation that is coming into Parliament, where evading police or avoiding police would become an arrestable offence. I think it is critical that we get this right. Minister, is that being looked at? I take it that it is.

**Mr COX** - My understanding is that it is. There are discretionary powers, of course, that the police have and they would be utilised if there was a problem in this area. I think, again, with the vehicles that were announced yesterday, it would be impossible not to recognise what they are and what they are doing. I think the acting commissioner was quite right; the ones that people do have a problem with are the unmarked ones.

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, they do.

**Mr COX** - I can understand, in some cases, why that may well be but they stand out.

**Mr FINCH** - I was aware of this particular incident and I did see an unmarked police car using that same method with the flashing lights in the grill. I would not have had a clue what that was all about. I watched one do a pursuit but I would not have had a real recognition, if I was looking in my rear vision mirror, and would have wondered what the heck was going on because I do not think the public has got an understanding of the lights in the grill.

**Mr HINE** - I take your point, but a lot do. A lot sometimes just do not take into account the red light and the siren as well because you actually -

**Mr FINCH** - I didn't hear the siren.

**Mr HINE** - You have a visual but you have an audio as well. Occasionally if they do not pull up that is when we have to put a car in front to try to get their attention as well. I can tell you about various circumstances where we have had that many flashing lights, whether it be an RBT or an accident, and they will sail past and just do not see it. That is unfortunate and there is always the exception to the rule. We do have 177 unmarked vehicles and over 90 per cent would have lights and sirens. It is a matter of training our police officers in how best to gain the attention of the driver, but it does not always work. It also does not always work with highly visible situations like road works. Sometimes, no matter what you put out, people just do not take any notice.

**Mr WING** - I do not think I have ever seen one of those unmarked cars, so they obviously are not visible on the -

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr COX** - Mr Wing, I can tell you that every time you travel on the highway I bet you would pass at least two of them.

**Mr WING** - I see.

**Mr COX** - I will tell you how to identify them.

**Mr DEAN** - Sanction him to exceed his speed limits for the purposes of finding out?

*Laughter.*

**Mr COX** - Yes and he will find out very quickly.

**Mr FINCH** - That would be a good defence, wouldn't it?

*Laughter.*

**Mr COX** - Various makes and models; I will tell you that much.

**Mr DEAN** - Red light cameras are not functioning in this State, as I understand it. Is there any intention, Minister, to bring them back into use in the foreseeable future?

**Mr COX** - We are currently discussing cameras but not the red light cameras. There is a discussion at the moment as to what is the next best step, if you like. I and the acting commissioner believe that probably the best way to go is mobile cameras. Again, it is fairly logical, although having said that it is a contradiction in terms - though the one that seems to capture the most people is the one on the Tasman Bridge. It just defies me. I do not quite follow that one. We are currently looking at speed cameras and what can be done but you are right, there are no red light ones out there at the moment.

**Mr DEAN** - The reason I ask is that it was brought to my attention that there are still a number signs out there which one could say are dishonest signs. They say red light cameras operate in this State. I know of two or three; there is one on the East Tamar Highway and there are a number of others. So the public are saying to me, 'Do they operate?' and I have said, 'No they do not' and they say 'Well, why have we got these signs?'. I am wondering whether it is a matter that needs to be addressed by DIER or what? Should we be misleading the public?

**Mr HINE** - I take your point. But again, we certainly police red lights. The last thing you want is to give the impression that people can run red lights. Certainly we can give the impression that there is policing of red lights, but I take your point. We will have a look at it.

**Mr DEAN** - Minister, do police have any say at all or are they approached in relation to speed limit changes?

**Mr COX** - Yes.

**Mr DEAN** - Let me refer to the one in Cleveland where we recently had a new surface put on the road. The road was built up to a very good standard, a better standard, and then all of a sudden we see it reduced to 80 kph. It will not be long before it is reduced to about 40 kph or 50

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

kph and then we are dreading the fact that they might be asking us to reverse through Cleveland before long.

*Laughter.*

**Mr DEAN** - Why has it been reduced?

**Mr COX** - This is the process as I understand it. A request is usually made by a community to DIER. DIER, then, has a consultative process nearly every time, though I do not know if they did when talking about Cleveland - obviously I have to talk to the commissioner about that. Normally there is some input. There is another one on the east coast, in your electorate, Madam Chair, and they have asked for input. Police will have some say in that. With the Cleveland one, I would assume that normal practice would be followed. That normal practice is that police have some input into it.

**Mr DEAN** - I was concerned that police might not have and I think they ought to. They understand traffic hazards and dangers and all of those things.

**Mr COX** - I cannot specifically talk about the Cleveland one because I do not know the circumstances to it, but normally the process would be a community-based one. I am familiar with what transpired out through Bridgewater and that area.

**Mr DEAN** - It has just been reduced. It was 90 kph and it is now reduced to 80.

**Mr COX** - It came as a surprise to me also, Mr Dean, as I drove through there the other day.

**Mr WING** - It would be very good to know who did have input into that because there are only about six or seven houses there. I am not sure whether they are occupied. I have been driving past there for 26 or 28 years and I have never seen a person.

**Mr COX** - They are occupied. Mr Wing, it is probably a question you should put to DIER but they have a standard concerning the number of accesses onto a highway. There are set guidelines that they abide by.

**Mr DEAN** - I just wanted to touch on performance indicators, benchmarks or quotas. I guess it does not matter very much what we call them. We have talked about fatalities. Mr Wing talked about the road accidents and so on. It would seem that a lot of our performance indicators, Minister, are not really meeting what was desired of them - making our roads safer. There is no evidence to suggest that has occurred. Have our performance indicator there, rather than use the words quotas, changed in any way at all to focus on those very areas that really contribute to accidents, serious accidents and fatalities.

**Mr COX** - I understand they have been changed.

**Mr HINE** - Yes, they have changed. We have reviewed them for the next financial year. As I have said, over 250 offences were used in part of that process which were benchmarked. We are focusing on speeding and on seat belts.

**Mr DEAN** - I understand the percentage of those not wearing seatbelts has risen or the number of infringement notices in that area has risen, which means we have a real problem there.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr HINE** - Under some of the national survey results I think nearly 10 per cent of people admitted driving without their seat belts.

**Mr DEAN** - I do not understand why.

**Mr COX** - If you ever work it out, perhaps you could let me know, Mr Dean.

**Mr HINE** - Those ones we benchmark are speeding, seat belts, drink driving - and we are going to focus on disqualified drivers this year as well.

**Mr DEAN** - Excellent. That was my next question.

**Mr HINE** - Detecting more, so we are going to focus on that. They are the ones we are benchmarking.

**Mr DEAN** - I think police out there would absolutely be delighted with that because that is what they want to focus on. That is what they keep telling me. It is very pleasing to hear that.

**Mr FINCH** - With disqualified drivers, how does the process work in nabbing them?

**Mr HINE** - We raised these figures yesterday. I have to say it is concerning when people choose to drive when they have no licence or it has been suspended, or they are disqualified by the courts. With restricted licence contraventions, last year we had 20 up to the end of May and this year we have 41. Suspended drivers charged through demerit points - 337 at the end of May last year; this year we have 448. Disqualified drivers last year up to the end of May was 1 347 and this year we have 1 502.

[2.30 p.m.]

**Mr FINCH** - What I am getting at, and you might help me here, operationally out in the field you have pulled over a car and you are going through the checks with the driver, how do you find out whether that driver is licensed?

**Mr HINE** - Under the legislation, as you would know, you must carry your driver's licence for a start so that is the first indicator. If someone has not got their driver's licence or even if they do then they can call the radio room to do a check on the name to see if they are, firstly, a licence holder or, secondly, a disqualified driver.

**Mr FINCH** - You communicate back to base?

**Mr HINE** - Yes, but there is - and we discussed it at the road safety committee that Mr Wing chaired - a new technology with numberplate recognition and DIER have the technology and we are looking at it to be able to introduce it but we work on operations with DIER as well where it will check the numberplate, it will ascertain if that vehicle is registered or unregistered, it will ascertain if the person associated with that vehicle is licensed, unlicensed or disqualified. That is another technique we are investigating from our independent point of view so we buy the technology and we also use it with DIER.

**Mr COX** - This is the technology we talked about and I said we would mention it a little later on - you are right on the money.



**Mr FINCH** - Six or seven years ago I brought it up.

**Mr COX** - No, that was an original one that was commonly known as Carmen but this is the new technology which is far and above anything that -

**Mr FINCH** - When I spoke against the carriage of licence for every driver -

**Mr COX** - Was that you?

**Mr FINCH** - I said there is a technology that is available and at that time I think Jack Johnston was the Acting Commissioner and he commented on that and said that police would not be going down that path at this stage, that technology is not available, and I was under the impression that it was because a tractor driver in my community pulled out of one paddock, got on the highway - and this is six years ago -

**Mr COX** - I can remember the story.

**Mr FINCH** - and by the time he had pulled into the next paddock he was pulled over and booked for having an unregistered tractor on the highway.

**Mr COX** - In hindsight that was probably a bit harsh.

**Mr FINCH** - It was because the police car behind him actually punched up - and I think it was a police car -

**Mr HINE** - This is different technology. There is no punching in, it is a camera that recognises the numberplate therefore there is no typing in and if you have it mounted in a vehicle, it will have a look at the numberplate and it will come up.

**Mr FINCH** - That is the technology you need.

**Mr COX** - And that is what we will have. There you go, you asked me before about expensive technology and I have provided the answer.

**CHAIR** - Minister, when you do unfortunately run out of points are you notified?

**Mr COX** - That is a DIER issue, it is not ours. The answer is yes, you are notified. That is my recollection from what DIER does.

**Mr DEAN** - They send out a notice.

**CHAIR** - I am pleased to say that I have never had one.

**Mr HINE** - That is why it is important that there is legislation to make sure you change your address if you move address, so you notify Motor Registry and then if you run out of points they can send the notice to you.

**Mr COX** - You would have noticed, Mr Finch, this morning in a beautifully crafted article by Mr Stedman in today's *Mercury* -

**Mr FINCH** - Where do you think I get the time to read the paper?

**Mr COX** - that we talk about what we will do in the very near future and that is the clamping of vehicles.

**Mr FINCH** - I have not seen it.

**Mr WING** - And they do that in the driveway, I read in that article.

**Mr COX** - It is going to come up at some stage anyway so let us get it out of the way now. We looked at clamping of vehicles. I thought it was going to be very easy. I went with a police officer to look at another jurisdiction and it was not as easy as I thought. What happened was that we had so many we did not have anywhere to put them and the difficulty for us was going to be that if Ivan Dean Incorporated decided to open a business where he would be responsible for looking after these, at a price of course, the difficulty would be for Mr Dean that hopefully it would work so well that after a very short period of time he would have a diminishing business, so what to do with the vehicles we confiscate? We did some research and some very good people came up with steering wheel clamps. To my knowledge, these are not trialled in Australia at this stage so we could be the leaders once again. I said yesterday to Mr Stedman that they are currently being tested at Rokeby to see just how secure they are. We believe they are very secure, they cannot be removed, and the intent will be - and this legislation will come to your House - that they are confiscated and locked up on your property. So as you walk out each morning, lo and behold, there is your vehicle and you cannot move it.

**Mr FINCH** - Minister, what is the difference between clamping the wheel and clamping the steering wheel?

**Mr COX** - The wheel requires a great deal more effort. It requires probably a tow-truck operator, it requires somebody to put it on - it could be the police. It is a much more time-consuming effort and the expense of the wheel clamps are considerably greater.

This has the same effect, a police officer can carry three or four in the boot of his or her car, it is very simple to put on and we think nearly impossible - well, nothing is impossible - to remove, and has exactly the same effect.

**CHAIR** - If you can get inside the car to put it on.

**Mr COX** - If the person was not prepared to allow you to do that, then I imagine the repercussions would be far greater than having your vehicle clamped.

**Mr DEAN** - The right of entry, perhaps.

**Mr COX** - The car may disappear and they may be in a lot more trouble than they were five minutes ago. Does that answer the question?

**Mr WING** - Yes, thank you.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr DEAN** - I want to touch on the automatic vehicle location devices that have been budgeted for in the Budget this year. I take it that there will be a number of these fitted to police vehicles this year, Minister?

**Mr COX** - Yes, four have gone into the new high-visibility vehicles.

**Mr DEAN** - I would like your position on an issue that officers have raised with me. They see them as a very good device, they are accepting of the devices, provided they are not used for the purposes of checking up on them, as it were, because they will have the potential, as I understand it, to check the speed of a police vehicle between certain points. It can be done, on the advice I have, but as long as they are used for the right purposes - is that what they are being obtained for?

**Mr COX** - It is certainly my understanding they will be used for the right purposes. I think they are an excellent safety device for police officers, the fact that you can now locate a vehicle anywhere, which we could not previously do, and there have been instances where it would have been ideal had we been able to. There are other benefits, and Mr Hine might add to that.

**Mr HINE** - The minister is exactly right, and there is a concern that we can check up on speeding of vehicles. They are not designed, and we do not want to use them for that, that is not its primary purpose. There may be some occasions when an allegation is made against a police officer for speeding and therefore we can actually assist them. But it is not the primary purpose and it is not going to be that Big Brother type of issue where we monitor police vehicles all the time because they may be speeding for a specific purpose. No, that is not its primary purpose.

**Mr COX** - They are intended to assist.

**Mr DEAN** - So the position this year will be to locate them in the vehicles that are mainly involved in traffic frontline-policing vehicles? Is that the way it is intended to go?

**Mr HINE** - The contract still has not been signed so I have to be careful what I say, but the primary purpose is to put it in those vehicles that are doing front-line patrol work and for the officers' safety. So, yes, you are right.

**Mr DEAN** - The other issue that has been raised is how much clobber do we get into police vehicles? It is like a police officer now walking around the street, there is so much clobber on their belts. It is quite amazing what they carry, it really is.

**Mr COX** - And the Police Association would you have believe they might want more.

**Mr DEAN** - That is interesting one, too.

Minister, you have already talked about the numberplate identification technology that may go into vehicles in due course, you have this technology that will hopefully go into vehicles this year and there has been some suggestion of the mini computers in vehicles as well. Where are we with those and where will all of this clobber fit in the police vehicles?

**Mr HINE** - If you go to the mainland States you will find there is a lot of technology within their vehicles but there are also Australian design standards that have to be followed for safety reasons. In relation to the mobile-data terminals, the AVL is almost the first step in that and the

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

actual equipment that goes in the vehicle is limited. The numberplate recognition is also limited. This is the first step. Are we going to mobile-data terminals at some stage? Yes, we will, but this is the first bit into it and it might take some time before we get down that track.

There is a standard that must be followed for what can be put in a vehicle to make sure the occupant is safe, because that is what it is all about. Hopefully there are no accidents involving police vehicles, but it has to be practical, comfortable and a safe work environment so all those things are taken into account.

**Mr DEAN** - In relation to fatalities, Minister, what say do the police have in issues that they see on the roads that could be dealt with that may make them safer? Some of the latest fatalities we have had have been where vehicles have run off the road and run into a tree or something else on the side of the road. Do police in those instances, when they report on these things, say, 'We believe that there ought to be side fencing or Armco railing fencing to protect these areas?' Do they identify dangerous travel areas on the roads and do they identify what they think is an answer to try to make those roads safer?

**Mr COX** - There have been instances in the past where police have made comments. I may have this wrong, but I think usually the coroner makes some recommendation in those areas. There is always input - DIER usually makes the decision of where and when these will go. I would think in every occasion police have some input into this, whether it is done through the Road Safety Task Force, the Road Safety Council or whether it is just on a general one-on-one meeting that DIER has with Tasmania Police. So yes, they do have an input. Having said that, I have yet to see an instance where maybe a road was at fault. It has usually come back to excessive speed and human error.

**Mr DEAN** - I think in the last two or three fatalities we had, a side fence or Armco railing would probably have saved a life.

**Mr COX** - As I say, I am a fanatical believer in that stuff but I am also a believer in driving - you are talking about recent ones and I don't want to -

**Mr DEAN** - No, I understand.

**Mr WING** - I understand that the figures of static testing with breathalysers and mobile testing are not available now, but it is my understanding from some figures I have seen that there is a much greater rate of detection in targeted situations than with the static roadside ones. Has any consideration been given to having more of the targeted ones - actually following people from hotels who appear to be affected by alcohol, rather than devoting so many more of the limited resources to the static testing?

**Mr HINE** - It always must be a multi-pronged approach in relation to random breath testing and testing a drug. Our first point is that we do not want people to drink and drive. As the ad for the Road Safety Task Force says, 'If you're in doubt, don't drive'. Random breath testing has a two-pronged approach. It is about targeting those areas where we know it is a high-alcohol time or a high-alcohol area, where people are either leaving hotels or whatever, but it is also getting into the forefront of people's minds. We might not detect many at the time but people need to be reminded that random breath testing is still about. We might not catch many driving but it is still reminding the motorists that the random breath testing is about. Our general police officers do patrols around licensed premises. Do they sit outside and watch a hotel to see who leaves? No,

they do not. Occasionally they might be patrolling past but it is also that targeted area; there may be a random breath test in an area where we know there is a high incidence of drink-driving. The first point we have to make is that we do not want to catch any because we do not want any drink drivers. So how do we do that? We do it through education, television advertising and public awareness. Part of that public awareness is getting people to drive past RBTs and think, 'I forgot about RBTs', so it is at the forefront of people's mind. It is like driving past a police vehicle, 'Okay, I know they are about so I have to make sure I do the right thing'.

**Mr COX** - A lot of our drink drivers, tragically, are recidivists. This comes back to intelligence that Tasmania Police has. Fortunately more and more people are now intolerant of that and are more inclined to dob someone in, and so they should.

[2.45 p.m.]

**Mr COX** - It is totally unacceptable, as it should be.

**Output group 4  
Emergency management**

**4.1 State Emergency Management Services -**

**Mr DEAN** - First of all, how many full-time employees do we have in SEMS, SES - whatever we call it now?

**Mr HINE** - SES.

**Mr DEAN** - SES still?

**Mr HINE** - Yes.

**Mr DEAN** - How many full-time employees do we have in SES?

**Mr COX** - We may have to take this one on notice.

**Mr DEAN** - My next question is, Minister: how many volunteers do we currently have on the rolls?

**Mr HINE** - There are 548 volunteers and 24 SES permanent.

**Mr DEAN** - Full-time?

**Mr HINE** - Yes.

**Mr DEAN** - While we are on volunteers, Minister, are there any difficulties in getting the volunteers there? Are there still quite a few wanting to come into the service? Where are we?

**Mr COX** - It has increased by 50 in the last two years. So it is on an upward trend.

**Mr HINE** - That is exactly what I was going to say. In fact the SES has actually been working hard to increase their volunteer rates. I know there have been some studies and pilot programs put in place by the director of SES. In 2006-07 there were 516 and now it is up to 548,

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

through a conscious effort and a conscious volunteer drive. I am not sure if you have seen the ads on television on some of the community services ads -

**Mr DEAN** - I cannot say that I have. I don't watch a lot of television.

**Mr HINE** - about SES. They run SES Volunteer Week as well. They have had a project and it is actually working quite well, I must say.

**Mr DEAN** - I think there has been \$200 000 or \$180 000 decrease in funding in this area. How will that impact, or do we have a similar situation that we had before with all of the other adjustments and so on?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - It is a combination of both. There is an adjustment because of the national disaster mitigation program. There was a \$90 000 drop because of expired projects that have gone through. And then the remaining \$90 000 drop is that consistent administrative application cost there.

**Mr DEAN** - Which has to be picked up. Even though that is a relatively small amount, one could say, in a service with a limited number of permanent employees how are we likely to be able to move forward with SES in the situation? How will they recover that amount?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - We have worked through that issue with the SES and they are still working through some issues in relation to it. Some of the areas that we have been targeting are around the travel associated with it, around their vehicle fleet. We have been managing some of those issues. Also they are looking at some of the out-of-hours work with their staff and the more appropriate rostering and work agreements which suit both the needs of their staff but also their budget situation.

**Mr DEAN** - The other question is: how many emergencies have been attended by the unit, say, in the last 12-month period? I do not think there is table.

**CHAIR** - There is: it's 9.10.

**Mr DEAN** - I have it now.

**CHAIR** - That is it. Mind you, they are a year behind. Is that correct?

**Mr COX** - Yes, it is.

**Mr DEAN** - So what have the SES call-outs been for, predominantly?

**Mr HINE** - Road crash rescue is the majority. They are very professional the way they do road crash rescue. For a volunteer organisation they do an excellent job, and they work closely with the fire department as well for training. That is the majority of their call-outs.

**Mr DEAN** - What sort of support is the organisation getting from local government? I am aware of the Launceston City Council and what they provide. I think it is almost up to \$30 000 now annually. What support are they getting from other local governments around the State?

**Mr COX** - I cannot give you the individual councils. What I can say is that of the areas and the councils that I have visited - and there have been quite a few of them - we have looked at the SES and volunteers and they are as one. They are respected, admired and I do not think there is anywhere that does not get monetary support or in-kind support. I cannot break it down unless we have some figures.

**Mr HINE** - The minister is correct. So each local government supports them in different ways. It is almost on a unit-by-unit basis on how they interact and have a partnership with the local government. Do I have figures in relation to it? No, I do not, but I know from talking about this that they interact in different ways. For some is for building, some is vehicles, and from their point of view it works quite well.

**Mr DEAN** - It is a very economical way, really, for local government to provide a service that they must provide in an emergency situation, to have SES on site and to do it that way.

**Mr COX** - Absolutely.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Mr Dean mentioned a figure of \$30 000 for Launceston. With all due respect, I think we are up to \$25 000 in Latrobe. We have just built a new station for them. So for a small community we have seven local volunteer fire brigades who work with emergency services, so each rural community probably has a greater need. I think it is commonplace across the State to have different models for different communities.

**Mr COX** - It doesn't matter whether it is the west coast, Circular Head, Latrobe or Launceston, there is, as you said, respect and cooperation.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I would have thought \$30 000 for Launceston City was a little bit light on, actually.

**Mr COX** - So what do you think it should be?

**Mr DEAN** - We provide a lot of other services as well, Minister, do you want me to go through those?

**Mr WING** - Swimming pools.

**Mr COX** - I was going to mention that but I didn't like to.

*Laughter.*

**Mr FINCH** - I noticed the total number of police-initiated helicopter hours. Last night at about 11 o'clock there was a helicopter over Hobart. I was trying to look for markings to see what it represented or whether it was police service. It was interesting because it made a lot of noise and I was just starting to think to myself -

**Mr COX** - What colour was it?

**Mr FINCH** - It was very dark because it had no lighting underneath, but I think it was orange and white. It was very noisy and I did not know whether it was tourism or some sort of emergency or police service.

**Mr HINE** - Yes, the Westpac helicopter is quite distinctive. It has police markings and Westpac markings as well.

**Mr FINCH** - Would that have been last night?

**Mr HINE** - I do not know off-the-top of my head if it was the Westpac rescue helicopter or another company. .

**Mr WING** - That is the one used by the Clarence Foot Club, isn't it?

**Mr COX** - That is out of service now, Mr Wing.

**Mr COX** - It could have been night exercises, it could have been anything. Was there an emergency in Hobart? Not that we are aware of.

#### **4.2 State security and rescue operations -**

**CHAIR** - Can you give me some reasoning behind the change in performance measures in this area of State security and rescue operations. In table 9.10, they all have footnote 5 beside them, which says 'new performance measure'. Can I have some explanation why there is a new performance measure used?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - They are not actually new performance measures but they are displayed in the Budget Papers for the first time. They are performance measures that we have always used but because the State security unit was wrapped up across a number of output groups, for visibility purposes we have put it into that emergency management output. So it is the first time those performance measures have actually been displayed.

**CHAIR** - Right, so normally we would have asked for these particular numbers and they would have been provided by the minister or whoever?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - When it comes to the number of search and rescue operations, what is the actual for this year and what are they predominantly made up of? I guess they are probably bush walkers and boating.

**Mr COX** - Land, sea-search -

**CHAIR** - Would they be mostly bush walkers and people who are at sea?

**Mr COX** - There has been a couple of sea ones but mainly bush walking.

**CHAIR** - Because the actual for 2007-08 was 57.

**Mr HINE** - There were 117 helicopter rescue and recovery missions, 21 dive missions, and 27 land-based operations undertaken for the same period up until the end of March 2009. Also our search and rescue personnel were involved in protestor situations as well.



## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr DEAN** - Is that covered under this area?

**Mr HINE** -With search and rescue?

**Mr DEAN** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - It is identified as security and rescue.

**Mr HINE** -Yes. On 18 occasions, search and rescue personnel have been involved in forest protest actions.

**Mr COX** - It was when there was a requirement to remove the protestors.

**CHAIR** - Obviously there is a slight decrease in the budget, and that would obviously go back to the initial explanation, but there will be no diminishing of frontline services in that area, Minister?

**Mr COX** - Correct.

**Mr WING** - The helicopter that is available for emergency work is based in Hobart and the fixed wing Royal Flying Doctor Service aircraft is based at Launceston Airport. Is that a satisfactory placement of each from the point of view of the police operations?

**Mr HINE** - Yes, it works very well for us in relation to the helicopter. Obviously the fixed-wing aircraft is not our responsibility but having the rotary-winged aircraft in Hobart works very well for us.

**Mr WING** - Do you use the other one at all?

**Mr HINE** - No.

**Mr WING** - That is mainly for patients.

**Mr HINE** -Yes, medical; we do not have any call upon that. If we need a fixed-wing aircraft for an operational matter, whether it is surveillance or transporting people, then we make our own private arrangements.

**Mr DEAN** - Questions often come up about cost recovery. Are we progressing any further in relation to some of the rescue tasks undertaken by police on a cost-recovery basis, or some cost recovery?

**Mr HINE** - There has been a lot of discussion about cost recovery in relation to the use of the helicopter and so on. At the moment we don't, apart from road rescue or something to do with a medical situation; then we can recover the cost from MAIB or workers' compensation. There is always an argument that if we recover costs from someone who needs rescuing, will they hesitate in calling for a rescue or activating the EPIRB or whatever. There is always that argument. If I activate it and they deem that I should not have activated, therefore I could have to pay for an very expensive piece of equipment, so I might not activate it therefore I might get myself in further danger. Whilst there have been occasions where it has been used totally inappropriately, we do not want that situation where someone hesitates to activate an EPIRB to get the helicopter

there in a timely fashion. It could endanger someone's life because it is in the back of their mind that they have to pay for this if it is so deemed. We have discussed it but there are always those arguments. So at the moment we still do in relation to MAIB and workers' compensation, but do not recover costs from those others.

**Mr DEAN** - I think that is exactly the same argument that the upper House put up in relation to ambulance fees, Minister.

**Mr COX** - I have heard something about that Mr Dean, yes.

**Capital Investment Program -**

[3.00 p.m.]

**CHAIR** - Why did the Government deem it necessary to re-announce the redevelopment of the Bellerive Police Station considering we already have the 'public works approved' document? I believe this is called 'spin', so why would it be necessary to do that?

**Mr COX** - It was originally not going to be the first; it was one of three redevelopments. As a result of discussions with police, it was moved to become the number one priority.

**CHAIR** - It has already been approved by the Public Works Committee, so why was the re-announcement necessary?

**Mr COX** - It was just to let people know there has been a bit of movement with the fund.

**CHAIR** - It was announced in the Budget speech on 11 June. Is this a new development?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - Yes, that is Public Works Committee is to approve that after that process.

**CHAIR** - I am just wondering what on earth would possess a government to re-announce something so major as a redevelopment?

**Mr COX** - After it was approved it was moved in priority and, other than that, I really cannot give you any further reason.

**CHAIR** - So this project was not in last year's Budget?

**Mr COX** - It was, there was a forward Estimate.

**CHAIR** - So in this Budget it is not the same Bellerive Police development?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - Yes, it is. The project funding was approved previously but it has been brought forward significantly.

**CHAIR** - Can you explain to me in why the amount is different?

**Mr COX** - Originally the money was going to be split around then was then decided to make Bellerive the priority project and spend more on it and get it up and running first.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**CHAIR** - At the expense of another development?

**Mr COX** - No, not at the expense of other projects. That was the preference by Tasmania Police and considered to be the priority, so the funds were reallocated to there, but the others will still be done.

**CHAIR** - So there is no real explanation of why it was restated in the Budget?

**Mr COX** - Devonport was going to be first initially.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I can give a bit of background here which may help. The announcement was made of funding of more than \$6.5 million for redevelopment in 2009-10, as part of that Bellerive, Devonport and Glenorchy police stations were identified. Devonport City Council was expected in January 2011 and Glenorchy in 2011. However, if we go back to *Hansard* in 2003, the major works undertaken in 1999-2000 were Bellerive and Glenorchy. Bellerive Police Station was again refurbished in 2000-01, along with Latrobe Police Station and the Devonport Police Station in 2002-03. The police station at Devonport received airconditioning. In 2005 questions were asked of Mr McCreadie about Devonport and his response was:

'It has been a high-sickness station, it has also been a bit of a low-morale station. It is difficult to get good competent sergeants to go there and stop there.'

It goes on to say:

'**CHAIR** - There was talk of a new police station at Devonport but I noticed Launceston won the day.

**Mr LLEWELLYN** - This is an issue that we obviously have to handle in the future because Devonport is not your state-of-the-art police station.'

Mr McCreadie further goes on:

'We have spent \$100 000 on that place twice just tidying up. It is not good, there are problems with the interview room, the positioning of that, so we are trying to deal with it. As part of our strategic asset management plan we have then closed the station. We would really like to knock it over and rebuild it but we are preparing to do some more cosmetic work. However, there is a limit to how many times you can shift the walls. It might have been better if that bloke had been successful and set fire to it, but we got to it too quickly.'

It was a difficult station. There were no comments in *Hansard* like that regarding Bellerive Station. This year in *Hansard* the honourable Mr Dean said:

'Unfortunately development for the Devonport Police Station again is on the backburner, to commence in 2011. This concerns me somewhat because the Devonport Police Station - I feel right in saying this - is much older than the Glenorchy Police Station and was built when I was at Glenorchy, so it must have been ages and it was much older than the Bellerive Police Station.'

He then goes on to say:

'I served there as Inspector of Police for a number of years and as a detective sergeant for 9-10 years. I can say it was deplorable then so ... I know it has had a few makeovers. The whole station really does need removing and rebuilding.'

As I understand it, the words in the Budget indicate that this is going to be another makeover. My point is -

**CHAIR** - Is there a question to the point?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes, there is a question. This is good background information. These glossies went out around the State about the Tasmanian Budget 2009-10. In the northern region paper there was nothing mentioned about police stations. In the southern region paper the only one that was mentioned was Glenorchy Police headquarters for \$6 million. There is no mention of Bellerive in this publication. Then on the north-west region for 2009-10, my community, there is Devonport Police headquarters listed as \$6.2 million. These publications have gone out showing that there is a Devonport Police Station redevelopment, but no mention of Bellerive. I get the impression that somewhere along the line the Devonport Police Station which was the number one priority in the State, and has been for a number of years, has now been delayed to 2011. I am sorry for going on but please explain how this has occurred?

**Mr COX** - I can give you an answer on Devonport, and I think the reason will make you pleased. There are ongoing discussion with the Devonport Council and there is consideration being given to total relocation, so we would be looking at a greenfield site. It involves the transfer of some property, and I think we are just about there, but until we have reached an arrangement I do not want to pre-empt what the outcome will be because I think there is a bit of paperwork still to be finished off.

**CHAIR** - Be bold, Minister, pre-empt.

**Mr COX** - No, because they might put the price up. It is very close to completion and it will be a far better outcome than was originally envisaged.

**Mr DEAN** - A new station certainly would be.

**Mr COX** - It is in a better location now.

**Mr HINE** - I can back-up what the Minister said, basically it is a greenfield site and it is going to a far better location. It is better to build a brand-new station from the ground up rather than refurbish the station that is already there. Everyone accepts that it needs fixing and the solution, I think, is far better than what we first envisaged.

**Mr COX** - Mr Gaffney, I think that it was at a request originally from the Devonport Council. It was a combination of discussions but they were certainly very proactive in coming to this arrangement.

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - In relation to some of those issues, the Treasurer has only recently signed off on that reallocation of funding to allow us to recognise the better outcome for Devonport and to reprioritise those projects.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr GAFFNEY** - So what I am hearing is that \$6 million is going to be enough funds to build a brand-new station at Devonport?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - It is \$6.2 million. It will be substantially larger than the existing station.

**Mr COX** - There is an exchange of properties, and we can talk to you about it later if you like.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I know the people in Devonport were very disappointed that it appeared that it was in this year's Budget and when you look at this sheet it says, 'New projects: Bellerive.' There is not a lot of continuity there.

**Mr COX** - By arrangement with the Devonport Council and with Tasmania Police, we are looking at a greenfield site and it should be announced very shortly.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - In Latrobe?

*Laughter.*

**CHAIR** - Minister, do you accept that table 9.11 is misleading?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - I would not say the table is misleading, it reflects the current situation of the funding at present and it is simply that the reallocation of the projects and funding across the agencies is more realistic. We went to the Treasurer, through the minister at the time, and sought funding for all three stations. We were provided with the funding for all three, recognising that there might be a need to swap priorities, depending on when we could get each of those up. The funding for those was spread across three or four years, which was not realistic for a build timeframe and the Treasurer indicated that he was quite prepared to bring that back to what would constitute a build program and funding for a build program and that target now reflects that.

**Mr DEAN** - Minister, can we assume then that if the deal with the company is done sooner rather than later, that the project could be brought forward?

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - No. There are some issues with it. That time frame is what we have discussed with the council, and the proposed site actually fits with the council's proposals in regard to making the site available to us.

**Mr COX** - And what they have to do to be part of the plan.

**Mr DEAN** - Fine, okay.

**CHAIR** - Minister, my next question is to do with the forward Estimates and new projects. I appreciate that the GFC word is used quite a bit at this point in time but I am aware that there is a concept plan for a new development of the St Helens Police Station. Can you tell me how long it will be before we see something tangible from those concept plans for St Helens?

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr COX** - I have heard discussions about it, I have heard comments that council would like to be involved although I think that is improbable -

**CHAIR** - They are right next door.

**Mr COX** - Whether it has gone beyond that point, Scott would have a better knowledge than me on that.

**Mr WILSON-HAFFENDEN** - The concept plans were drawn up at the same time that we had the concept plans drawn up for Bellerive, Devonport and Glenorchy and I think a number of secondary, smaller stations. We still have those and we have funding for the three projects that we have to move forward.

**CHAIR** - What about the forward Estimates then? Is there no -

**Mr COX** - In light of the current financial situation -

**CHAIR** - But you would be well aware that a minister before us yesterday told us that there was no problem; next year there would be a lot more done because the global financial crisis would be over.

**Mr COX** - I hope it is and if that is the case, Madam Chair, we would be very happy to pull the concept plans out of the bottom drawer and get them onto the table.

**CHAIR** - Well, I would like to suggest that whoever might be sitting in that seat next year is put on notice that we are going through a financial -

**Mr COX** - If the funding is available then I would like to think that it will become one of the priorities.

**CHAIR** - That is right; I would think that it has just as much need as the Devonport and Bellerive and Glenorchy -

**Mr COX** - No, I have to tell you that I do not agree with that. Bellerive is a group of terrapins out the back and it is not a very good operational police station - sorry, it is a very good operational police station but it is not a very good facility.

**CHAIR** - I am probably pleased to say that I have not spent much time at the Bellerive Police Station.

**Mr COX** - I know you have an interest in St Helens, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR** - I have an interest in any area that has a level of need.

Any other questions on capital investment program? If not, then, Minister, I would invite us to move over to the State Fire Commission.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, gentlemen, for providing the level of information.

### DIVISION 3

(Finance-General)

**Output group 3  
Government Businesses**

**3.2 State Fire Commission -**

**CHAIR** - Welcome to the table, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Minister, and I invite you to introduce the new people at the table. Minister, are you intending to provide any overview or brief comments about the work of the State Fire Commission?

[3.15 p.m.]

**Mr COX** - I would like to say, exactly as I said about Tasmania Police, that they are a fine organisation, Madam Chair, and I think it would be far better using our time to do what we are here for.

**CHAIR** - Given they have a cut in their budget, do they have enough funds to carry out that excellent work that you spoke of?

**Mr COX** - I am sure they do and if you would like a run-down on that then I am sure that Mr Gallagher can give you an indication that that is the case.

**CHAIR** - Could you indicate to the committee how you are going to manage the savings and still deliver the services to the Tasmanian community on the cut in your budget?

**Mr GALLAGHER** - Madam Chair, although there is \$500 000 of State Government funding that we are short this year, that was a one-off funding for two special appliance vehicles, so that was something that was a little bit different, provided by the Government to the commission last year to assist us with our capital program for last year. It was always known that it was a one-off grant. We have used that money to secure two special appliances and as such there is no direct cut to the service.

In terms of other areas, our revenue areas, the Fire Service contribution has been increased by 5 per cent. The insurance fire levy has also increased. That is based on market. We do not have any direct impact on insurance fire revenue and the motor vehicle revenue has increased as well. There is a formula in the act that works on CPI that increases it periodically based on CPI. In terms of our budget there are sufficient dollars there to allow us to continue both operationally and with our capital programs.

**CHAIR** - Minister, can you inform the committee to date what funds have been spent on going through the court process and what is needed to occur through the Myer fire - the unfortunate incident.

**Mr COX** - The total expenditure?

**CHAIR** - Yes, the total expenditure to date.

**Mr COX** - Keeping in mind that is still before the courts. I know I am cautioning you unnecessarily.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**CHAIR** - I am not asking any specifics - just the quantum to date that has been expended.

**Mr COX** - My advice, Madam Chair, is that because this is ongoing I need to take this on notice. We can do an estimate but it will not be factual, that's the only thing.

**Mr GALLAGHER** - That is right, Madam Chair. Had the coronial finished in April we would have had all our accounts in but we still have specialists working for us, producing work, and we have not been billed as yet. We have received some bills from the Crown Solicitor. We also have a barrister or a solicitor representing our people for which we have not been fully billed. We can certainly provide that to you. At the present time I would be having a bit of a stab at it and we would probably be talking in the vicinity of \$200 000 to \$300 000.

**CHAIR** - To date?

**Mr GALLAGHER** - To date.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Any idea when - well I guess it is in the hands of the court.

**Mr COX** - It has resumed again this week, as you know, Madam Chair.

**Mr GALLAGHER** - We have asked our specialists to provide accounts to us so we can get them into our system for this year. We would hope we would have them by 30 June.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - As we speak the hearing is continuing. I think it is expected to finish either today or tomorrow so hopefully we will be able to finalise accounts this financial year but really it is still open-ended in that we do not know how long the coronial is going to run and how long the legal representation will be needed for. Presumably, it will be concluded by the end of this week or next.

**CHAIR** - Obviously the whole process has taken a toll on the morale of the State Fire Service. Would that be a fair thing to say?

**Mr BROWN** - I have sat in there for most of the case and certainly a number of our people came under some very intense questioning.

**CHAIR** - That is what came out in the media and that is the reason for my comment and it is unfortunate.

**Mr BROWN** - It is unfortunate that with so much information coming from witnesses over any given day the media will sit there and take the parts that are sensational or controversial so we get those parts coming out in the media the following day or on that night and there is no opportunity because it is subject to the coronial investigation for us to respond to that, it is not ethical to do that. Whether there is another point in time that we can say something further to the public I am not sure. But of interest has been that there was a high level of media interest, particularly in the first two weeks, and undoubtedly it is because the media still had a significant amount of newsreel and so on they could show and it is sensational footage and photographs no doubt but the response back through either Letters to the Editor or talkback radio and the public generally has been almost zilch. I do not think there is any great lack of confidence now from the public but it is a blow we take, I guess, and we just have to recover from that, but I do not know if it is as severe as we might think it is as the news is coming out.



**CHAIR** - What about the morale amongst the employees themselves?

**Mr BROWN** - We need to be really careful because it almost appeared for a while that some witnesses were saying things in a derogatory way about other people and our own people, staff as well, so we needed to be very careful about how they assimilated back into the workplace following their experience in the courts. We furnished those people with, for example, full transcripts so that they know the context of what was said in the media, so such and such was said, but they needed to understand the context of why that was said and how it was said and I think when you look at it in the transcript it is not anywhere near as sensational as the media put it.

**Mr COX** - Madam Chair, can I just add to that and say the TFS management have done a terrific job of bringing people back together. There were some rifts, if you like, as Mr Brown alluded to, and there has been a great deal of work to make sure that they are back working together as a team and that morale is not down and that they are looking forward.

**CHAIR** - I am pleased to hear that. Obviously support was provided -

**Mr COX** - Very much so.

**CHAIR** - in both external and internal?

**Mr COX** - Yes, particularly with these two gentlemen.

**CHAIR** - It was something that I had just read through the media and I especially wondered how the employees would be coping.

**Mr COX** - Anything of this magnitude, whether it be fire, police or whatever, is a hell of a whack and it is something that they have to work through, and they have to work through it collectively.

**CHAIR** - I would suggest that none of us would sleep as well of an evening or whenever if we did not think that the State Fire Service was there to support us.

**Mr COX** - They are very trusted members of our community, as you know.

**CHAIR** - I do know.

**Mr DEAN** - They are higher on the status level than we are.

**Mr COX** - I was about to mention that and I thought better of it.

**CHAIR** - That would not have to be very high, unfortunately, would it?

**Mr COX** - We are in front of car salesmen, I think.

**Mr DEAN** - As a result of that fire, has the Fire Service made changes to the way in which you operate as a result of that already?

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Yes, we have. We came under criticism in two or three areas essentially, and some that we can learn from and I cannot have any arrogance about this I have to say.

**Mr DEAN** - This is a unique fire, is it not, and it is unique ground I think for you.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Two of the main areas have been in standard operating procedures. Our standard operating procedures needed to be reviewed and we have looked at the way in which other States handle standard operating procedures and in fact there ought to be - and this is work for us from hereon in - things that are standards and should not be varied but there are other things, particularly in terms of operations, where in this day and age you need to keep taking dynamic assessments, risk assessments and the like and there need to be guidelines but not mandatory ways of doing things because every situation is slightly different.

The other one is in pre-incident planning which is an area where we have done work in the past but we have focused it mainly on where the risks are high and it is a fact that in department stores across Australia people do not die of fires, people die of fires in their homes and in our level of risk, department stores do not rate particularly high so we have prepared pre-incident plans for a lot of other things, particularly things like events like the Falls Festival and Agfest where we have mobile communities and other high-risk facilities. We have now merged a lot of those pre-incident plans and in fact as of last week we are trialling a computer in a fire truck so that we have all that information, standard operating procedures and pre-incident plans at the fingertips of the personnel at the fire, which is where that information is really needed. We will get some feedback on that and roll that out through the organisation.

**Mr DEAN** - So you do not have a vehicle, as it were, fitted out with all of that in to operate as a forward command post for yourselves? You do not have that vehicle to go to a site?

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Not as such. We have moved away from that. Our incident management teams are better off operating out of other facilities, we have decided, than vehicles. We used to be there with vehicles but they are fairly inflexible. So now we have incident management teams and kits that go with those. Fire trucks in smaller communities carry folders with their pre-incident planning information in it, for example. But if you are in Hobart or Launceston with a community that might need several thousand pre-incident plans it is impractical to carry around filing cabinets, as you can imagine.

**Mr DEAN** - Is it true to say then that, as a result of this, it has made, I guess, the service more conscious of a need to continually review your guidelines, your policies and your positions moving forward?

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Yes.

**Mr COX** - Can I just say that there have always been reviews done. I am very mindful of where this is at and where it may go. I do not mean in this room, I mean after this. I think it is probably fair to say that there are always reviews and the reviews will continue to be done, and any major incident will be a reason you are doing it.

**Mr DEAN** - Going back a few years ago you had, I think, a vehicle replacement program. Is that still moving forward or is it concluded?

**CHAIR** - He is just taking some advice.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - The vehicle replacement program that was commenced a few years ago now continues. It is never ending. Whilst we really formalised and kicked it off probably five or six years ago now -

**Mr DEAN** - It was about when I first came in, I know that.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - it is continuing and there is no anticipated completion of it because fire engines age regardless of how much they are used. Age wears fire engines probably more than use. With 450 or thereabouts fire appliances across the State, that means that we have to continually replace them. Rather than do it in fits and starts, we have aimed to get it on a rolling replacement basis. That has been extremely successful and has seen quite a significant improvement in our fleet. Certainly a high, if not the highest, priority on the commissioner's capital agenda is to continue that program.

**Mr DEAN** - Regarding your rural fire brigades, you have some exceptional brigades out there, there is no doubt about that, and volunteers than run those vehicles, both female and male. Are there no problems within the rural brigade side of things; things are moving along quite well?

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Recruitment certainly is not an issue of great concern. We have local pockets of concern which occur from time to time and probably relate to interpersonal issues as much as anything, or it just may be coincidence that a number of people leave the district at the same time. Sometimes it does come down to issues within the brigade. They are a group of people working closely together and sometimes things do not work as they should be.

**CHAIR** - Human nature, I think it is called.

**Mr COX** - That is what it is called. Exactly right.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - We have a cross-section of the community that are providing all of those services but generally speaking our numbers are quite adequate and stable. We have concerns about the ageing population and what that is going to mean for us. We also have concerns about rural decline and that movement from rural areas. But, by and large, across the State volunteer brigades are in a healthy situation. We have localised situations where we cannot always get people in the numbers we may like through the day but that is common across the country, not just in Tasmania. Perhaps anywhere in the world that is an issue.

**Mr DEAN** - Has an issue that was, I think, really emphasised during the east coast fires about three years ago now been resolved in relation to volunteers being called into an area, as happened on the east coast, spending two to three days there and losing salaries in some cases. One example I put forward last year or the year before was where the person lost salary and was fighting alongside permanent fire service personnel and was not getting anything for it. Has that situation been resolved?

[3.30 p.m.]

**Mr COX** - My understanding, Mr Dean, is that where the volunteers do exactly that then there is usually an agreement with their employers. I remember your talking about that particular instance last year. I think there was some discussion from TFS with some of those employers. I was not part of those discussions but I am pretty sure they occurred.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr DEAN** - The example given was of a gentleman with three or four young children in Ravenswood, a very nice man with a lovely family and they were put in financial difficulty.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Our underlying principle is that volunteers need to be loyal firstly to their employers. When they want to participate in activities with the fire service they need to have negotiated with their employer prior to that. In extreme hardship cases we will consider that, but generally speaking we do not like going into that area because we know, and I know from experience, that at times our volunteers would much prefer to be out fire fighting than be at work.

**Mr DEAN** - You are right.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - There are issues there. As soon as we start providing compensation in those cases we in fact make the situation worse in the long-term; we may fix the immediate issues but we create an ongoing problem. So we have run a very hard line on that and I will continue to run a hard line because volunteers essentially do not want to be paid. They are there for all sorts of good reasons that certainly do not involve money. As soon as money comes into the equation you start compromising the volunteer ethos and you get all sorts of outcomes that we do not particularly want.

**Mr DEAN** - I think it is slightly unique because in this instance he was called there and spent a number of days there, so that is not the average normal situation.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - He volunteered to go; there are no demands put on volunteers to be there. He wanted to be there, no doubt, for a very sound reason. He wanted to support his colleagues and support the community but clearly he has to realise that his employer comes first. There are some difficult issues, particularly with self-employed people who will forgo their income. In that case we say that your first loyalty is to yourself as the employer and not to us. We try and manage around that but in extreme hardship cases we are quite prepared to consider the situation on a one-on-one basis.

**Mr FINCH** - Minister, last year we talked about a Fire Service loan from the 1980s and the bank overdraft. You said that the Treasury is doing a review of funding of the Fire Service, had discussions with the Fire Service, and there would be a review of how we do it and what we have done. Could you give me a report on that?

**Mr GALLAGHER** - In terms of the review I do not believe anything has been released. We met a number of times with Treasury. I and the Deputy Chief, Mike Brown, were on the committee. We provided a lot of information with regard to the basis of our funding and from that the Treasury did a lot of number crunching, but to this day we are not aware of any recommendations that have come out. We provided what we were asked to provide and we left it at that. We certainly explained to those on the committee how the funding worked. They were certainly after information we could not provide because we do not collect some of the information they were keen to analyze.

**Mr COX** - So the review was done, Mr Finch, but there has been no outcome.

**Mr FINCH** - Is there going to be an outcome?

**Mr COX** - I cannot imagine that these people would have wasted their time, but I cannot speak for Treasury. I am assuming there will be.

**Mr FINCH** - You might remember that last year we talked about a loan from the 1980s that I think there was an element of embarrassment about. I think Mr Gallagher was going to explain how a loan from the 1980s might sit comfortably with the fire service.

**Mr GALLAGHER** - If you look back probably 17 years ago, we had loans of more than \$13 million. That was before the changes to the act in terms of funding, which happened in the 1990s and which all of a sudden gave the commission the money to start to run some capital programs and also to pay off debt. Over the last few years, because of various changes like falls in insurance revenue, the commission has continued to push the capital program. We have refinanced that debt and we have a role in a debt program now where each of our loans - and there are four - comes up once a year. At the present time we have not had the cash to pay these off. In terms of whether we pay the loans off or whether we service the loans, the commission's decision at the present time is to continue to service the loans, not to pay them off, because those dollars are being put into the capital programs that the commission believes are priorities.

**Mr FINCH** - Was there any indication from Treasury as to how that sat with them? Are they comfortable with and understanding of the situation and arrangement?

**Mr GALLAGHER** - In terms of the funding, yes. Treasury does not get involved in commission funding per se. The Fire Service Act is quite specific in terms of the commission producing a corporate plan for the minister, with a copy going to the Treasurer, but at the end of the day it is the commission's recommendation to the minister. The Treasurer certainly has input into it through Treasury.

**Mr COX** - Treasury sits on the commission.

**Mr GALLAGHER** - That is right, but it is the minister who signs the corporate plan. That corporate plan, in terms of the capital programs, outlines the priorities and whether we will repay debt or continue to service it.

**Mr FINCH** - The bank overdraft, that is all part of this circumstance? The bank overdraft is still there?

**Mr GALLAGHER** - That is right. We use the bank overdraft. We have become, I guess, smarter over the years. Previously we used the bank overdraft and, whilst we still use it, we use Tascorp - the government financial institution - to fund any shortfall we have on a daily basis. So we pay it off and pay a lot less in bank overdraft interest because we pay the government institution rather than a commercial organisation.

**Mr FINCH** - So when we are here for Estimates next year, with a new minister in this portfolio, we can expect an update of the advice that comes back from Treasury to the minister as to how this financing operation is going and whether it is secure and a good one?

**Mr COX** - As I have said, I believe there will be a response to that.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - I will put my other hat on as chair of the State Fire Commission. The commission considers debt as part of its overall capital program. It has been, and continues to be, quite comfortable about maintaining some debt because there was a view that the capital program that we talked about, particularly the vehicle program, is so important. If we stopped to pay off

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

that debt, the capital program will slip. It is one of those things that from experience we have found really hard to catch up. In the past the commission did pay off a considerable amount of money outstanding on loans when we more or less had a windfall, unexpected revenue coming out of insurance, something we cannot budget for or estimate accurately. A substantial windfall was directed towards paying loans out but there still remains some there and I believe the commission's view is that if those circumstances occur again, which they may well do because we know insurance goes through a cyclical sort of up and down arrangement, then in good times that will be duly considered but at the moment the priority has been to maintain the capital program.

**Mr WING** - Are you able to say how many houses on rural properties would have fire extinguishers?

**Mr COX** - No.

**Mr WING** - Do you have any idea? I assume that you would want to see as many as possible?

**Mr GLEDHILL** - I cannot say we have every surveyed that. A survey would be the only way we could reasonably get an indication but we have not done. We certainly promote the need for houses to have an extinguisher or extinguishers to manage risks that they may have. It is not something that we have data on, I think.

**Mr WING** - Are many sold each year? Do you have a stand at Agfest?

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Certainly our Tas Fire equipment sells fire extinguishers and I cannot tell you how many we would sell a year, how many of those end up in houses or how many in businesses. We only have a portion of the market; there are plenty of other fire extinguishers sold. I think most hardware stores now have them readily available. I do not believe our sales would indicate anything significant.

**Mr WING** - It is not an important part of your overall operation, I suppose.

**Mr COX** - Education is the important part, Mr Wing, and the Tasmania Fire Service puts a great deal of time and effort into educational processes, be it fire alarms, fire extinguishers or whatever. I suspect that that is the main part of that exercise. You would like to think that most people would heed that advice and have the good sense to have a fire extinguisher or at least a smoke detector.

**Mr WING** - Yes. I do not recall seeing any advertising encouraging people on rural properties to have fire extinguishers in their homes.

**Mr COX** - We would not single any particular people out, sir.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Whether it's rural or urban, it is as important in either situation because when a fire occurs, it does not matter how close the fire brigade is, the actions of the person at hand taking immediate first-aid action with a fire extinguisher are likely to be effective far more than intervention by a fire brigade. So, in a rural area, if a fire brigade was a bit longer, it really would not make a lot of difference to the outcome. We do encourage, through our education programs, as the minister said, people to ensure they have fire extinguishers and, more importantly, know how to use them.

**Mr COX** - Mr Wing, there was a very good DVD put out; I do not know whether you have seen it or whether you are aware of it. It was put out by TFS and it was how to prepare your property in the event of a fire. It is an excellent piece of work.

**Mr WING** - Yes, I have one.

**Mr COX** - You would know, then, that that is part of what they advise and how they go about it.

**Mr WING** - Thank you.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Minister, in light of the Victorian bushfires there have been a lot of councils and municipalities that are really concerned now about what they should be doing to update their fire management plans and especially with councils that own large tracts of reserve or with buildings going into rural residential areas. Individually councils ensure that individual properties are doing the right thing but as a larger picture, what role will the Fire Commission and Service play in coordinating some of that? I think we are a bit rudderless at the moment. Everyone wants to do something but are not quite knowing what to do. King Island has a wonderful fire management plan that was worked on with a number of different groups.

**Mr COX** - You would be aware that the Premier announced that we would be waiting until the outcome of that commission. Having said that, he has some very good advice because Mr Gledhill has been over and given evidence to that commission.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I think they are awaiting the result of the royal commission but they also intimated that he wants to put some work in earlier to get out some of the council and regional plans for it.

**Mr COX** - This would be through TFS?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes.

[3.45 p.m.]

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Through the planning process, the Government has announced that it wants to introduce uniform planning arrangements for houses or developments in bushfire-prone areas across the State. At the moment almost every council planning scheme has slightly different requirements and some very different. There are some that align but that is something that is a priority and at the moment it is going through the consultation process which has to occur, of course, because there are a number of stakeholders that need to have input; it is not just about the Fire Service but local government will be involved in that part of it. I think there will be a number of changes that come about indirectly and directly from what occurred in Victoria. I think it was a huge wake-up call - or it should have been - for people right across Australia, but Tasmania is in a very similar situation geographically, the vegetation and the demographics are quite similar to Victoria and so is our weather and the drought. There is not too much that is different so quite clearly we need to follow very closely what is occurring there and I can certainly say that the Fire Service is doing that. We are very close to what is happening Victoria.

Local government in Victoria is vitally interested in this as a stakeholder, as it is here, and I expect that with the outcomes in Victoria there will be immediate flow-ons here, but rest assured

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

that I think all property owners are going to have to play their part in being responsible for the land that they own or manage. Land management and how we allow development on land are critical areas and I think in the future we have to be more rigorous than we have been in the past. There is a lot of development that has been allowed across Australia in inappropriate places and without apportioning blame to anyone, I think that will need to be tightened and I believe it will be and there will be a flow-on here and councils will play a role in that. We certainly see councils as major stakeholders and councils will be consulted, and we will be working with councils to try to get appropriate plans and arrangements in place right across.

**Mr DEAN** - Just going back to the replacement vehicle program, there was a five-year program which is current. When did that five-year program commence?

**Mr GALLAGHER** - It is a rolling program, so we drop off one year and pick up the next year and, as the chief officer said, that will continue.

**Mr DEAN** - The current five-year program has identified the need to replace 92 fire appliances. I am trying to work out whether those 92 fire appliances are to be replaced over the next five-year period or does it just go on and on?

**Mr GALLAGHER** - You are right.

**Mr DEAN** - We have five years now to replace those 92 so the budget is worked out to ensure that that replacement program can be effected?

**Mr COX** - Yes. Let me give you an example for this year. In 2009-10 there are 14 four-wheel drive, heavy crew cab vehicles, one crew cab urban heavy vehicle, so there is 2.8. So yes, it is a rolling program.

**Mr DEAN** - I cannot find the tables in here. Is your attendance at fires increasing? We read about house fires all the time -

**Mr COX** - When you say 'attendance' do you mean are there more fires or are we sending more personnel?

**Mr DEAN** - Are there more house fires now? Are they increasing or are we getting education through and people are being more conscious?

**Mr GLEDHILL** - There has been a trending decrease over the last 10 years and quite significant - 30 per cent over the last 10 years - and in fact there should be a graph somewhere.

**CHAIR** - In the annual report.

**Mr COX** - You would believe that this is part of the educational process and again the people actually showing sense and putting smoke detectors in.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - If you look at total structure fires from 2003-04 to 2007-08, they have fallen steadily each year. I am sorry, there was a slight blip a couple of years ago but there has certainly been a trending fall from 760 to 639. The nice thing is it is still trending down and -

**CHAIR** - Was the blip the east coast?



**Mr GLEDHILL** - No.

**Mr COX** - Could I give you some figures, and I am interrupting Mr Gledhill. Over the last financial year there was a decrease from 707 to 639.

**Mr DEAN** - That is in the last financial year? This is the problem we have. You obviously do not have the figures to date as to how we are travelling now. It is more important and more up to date - I did not look at your annual report before. How are we travelling up until this time; is it still trending the right way?

**Mr COX** - I believe it is trending down.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - For building fires, accidental building fires. Where there is arson involved it is beyond our control. That is a matter really for Tasmania Police. We are obviously a player in that but usually we do not report on total fires as much. The accidental fires are the ones that we want to have -

**Mr DEAN** - An impact on?

**Mr GLEDHILL** - Yes, and the impact has been positive and it continues to be.

**Mr DEAN** - The other one was car fires, and I think I ask this question every year as well. From reports we read in the papers, car fires are probably on the way up for you.

**Mr COX** - Usually related to car theft.

**Mr DEAN** - The other one was your attendance at fatalities, your road rescue unit. How is that progressing?

**Mr BROWN** - The road rescue unit is progressing well. SES have the lion's share of the business in the State of Tasmania but the metropolitan and surrounding areas are responded to by the career crews based in those areas. The situation has developed very well since 2006.

**Mr DEAN** - Since the changeover occurred it has gone well. Perhaps it was always going to happen and your organised services are professional so that is good.

**Mr WING** - I was wondering if it is compulsory for councils to require new homes to have smoke detectors?

**Mr COX** - Hard wired.

**Mr WING** - Yes, compulsory in all new homes?

**Mr COX** - Yes, has been since 2001.

**Mr WING** - That is good.

**Mr GLEDHILL** - And also anywhere major building work is undertaken hard-wired smoke alarms have to be fitted.

**Mr WING** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, gentlemen. Always enlightening. As the minister said, you do fantastic work and serve our communities well.

**The committee suspended from 3.53 p.m. to 4.04 p.m.**

**CHAIR** - Minister, before we move into Minister for Local Government, output group 7, I would like to place on *Hansard*, after a prompt from Madam President, our appreciation for the work that John Gledhill as chief officer for the Tasmanian Fire Service has delivered to the Tasmanian community. It was remiss of me not to have read the article where he is retiring. I would like to wish him and his family all the best. I know he will be frequenting the Coles Bay area, so I feel sure I might even catch up with him from time to time.

**Mr COX** - Madam Chair, can I part in that, too. I should have said something at that time. I will pass on your remarks and good wishes to him. You are quite right, we owe him a debt of gratitude. There will be someone moving into his position and we will find out who that is going to be in the next month or so.

**CHAIR** - There always is a good person to replace another good person, Minister. It always reminds us that we are not irreplaceable.

**Mr COX** - Let me put it on the record that we will be going through a proper and thorough independent and transparent assessment process.

**Mr WING** - He doesn't have a brother or anything?

*Laughter.*

**Mr COX** - He won't be applying!

**CHAIR** - I know from my information, Minister, that the process that appointed Mr Gledhill had a very independent person who made a terrific decision, so I do not doubt that it will happen again.

**Mr COX** - I will pass on your remarks.

**DIVISION 9**

(Department of Premier and Cabinet)

**Output group 7**

**Development of local government**

**7.1 Development of local government -**

**CHAIR** - Minister, local government is very dear to this committee's heart, as you can see.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr COX** - I feel somewhat inferior in this group.

**CHAIR** - The committee has a keen interest. I suppose you would be expecting me to ask the first question. So, do you have an agenda of three super-councils for Tasmania?

**Mr COX** - I would have thought, Madam Chair, your first question would have been, 'Would you like to name the people who are with you?'

**CHAIR** - I thought you would do that before you answered my question.

*Laughter.*

**Mr COX** - On my immediate right is Jessie Byrne, Director, Local Government Office; on her right is Alastair Scott, Deputy Director, Local Government Office; and on my left is Jen Butler from my office. Greg Brown is Director, Partnership Agreements and Rachel Nielsen is from Local Government Division, should we need them.

Do I have an agenda? No, I do not and I never have. It was a question that was put to me on ABC Radio one morning. We were talking about the potential and possible amalgamations and partnerships of councils around Tasmania. The host of that particular show said, 'How many do you think there should be?' and I said I had no idea, that that was something that a review will work out one day. He said, 'Do you think it should be the same as water and sewerage?' and I said I had no idea. He said, 'Do you think there should be three?', and I said, 'Like the others, I wouldn't rule that out'. So of course the headline was that there will be three super-councils. I will not direct anyone to amalgamate, I will not direct that there be three. It is a decision that will be made into the future by the councils that wish to amalgamate and go down that path.

**CHAIR** - Do you believe that 29 local government areas are not sustainable into the future for Tasmania?

**Mr COX** - My personal view is that with 29 there are too many councils. I believe that some of those will be shown in the future to be not sustainable. I made that statement on more than one occasion and I will stand by it. I think it is only a matter of time - and I apologise to Mr Gaffney and others who have heard me rabbit about this in the past - before councils will look at ways that they can merge. On the east coast there are two that have formalised that process. Will it be successful? I have no idea; it is a matter for the board to make that decision.

**Mr WING** - So you are quite firm, Minister, that it should be a number somewhere between three and 29?

**Mr COX** - Yes, but a decision not to be made by me, Mr Wing. If two councils, three councils or whatever do not wish to go down that path, I am firmly on record as saying that I would not under any circumstances push for that to occur. I cannot be any clearer than that.

**CHAIR** - I think there will probably be some happy councils around, Minister.

**Mr COX** - I think most of them know. They have been told pretty clearly on more than one occasion.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**CHAIR** - But the message keeps changing, with due respect. At one stage it was, 'No, we won't push it', then 'obviously you're not sustainable', so the message is a bit mixed, in my view.

**Mr COX** - I will be really clear: I do not believe they are sustainable and I would think that councils into the future should show some initiative and look at where they are going to be in the next four or five years. My belief is that some of those will not be sustainable.

**Mr DEAN** - If we had left it to councils we would probably still have 46.

**Mr COX** - I accept that. I do believe, based on discussions I have had with mayors, general managers and councillors that there is now a will to move into the direction of mergers and amalgamations. Other than the two east coast ones, there are probably seven or eight that I know of who have talked about it.

**CHAIR** - The Government has no policy on amalgamations at this point in time?

**Mr COX** - The Government has no intention to force amalgamations. Should councils wish to go down that path we will support them.

**CHAIR** - When you say support, do you mean financial support or resourcing to assist a transfer?

**Mr COX** - Let me give you an example from the east coast ones. The request for the process to be implemented is not at a cost to those councils. That cost is to local government.

**CHAIR** - To the Local Government Association?

**Mr COX** - No, to the division of local government within the State Government. So councils have no costs to bear in this process.

**Ms BYRNE** - That is correct. In fact by virtue of the act, the cost of any local government board review must be met by the State Government and the board, not by the councils involved.

**Mr COX** - Whatever decision comes out of this - there may be a recommendation that they merge, there may be a recommendation that they do not - that is a final decision.

**CHAIR** - For now, Minister.

**Mr COX** - It is for me.

**CHAIR** - That is what I said: 'For now'.

**Mr COX** - It is for me.

**CHAIR** - Note 13 talks about the decrease in funding due to the Premier's local government council project, *Stronger Councils, Better Services*. I believe there were four projects encompassed in that \$200 000. When are you expecting an evaluation of the success or otherwise? What projects will be delivered through the funding that was given to local government?

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Ms BYRNE** - I am happy to respond to this. The *Stronger Councils, Better Services* initiative was funded last year to the tune of \$200 000. That \$200 000 is being distributed in three different ways. Firstly, \$96 600 has gone to a shared services grants program. That money has gone on to three separate projects for resource sharing between councils. So it is money that has gone directly to councils. I can give details on each of those. There is \$32 600 for the Latrobe, Kentish, Central Coast and Devonport City councils to develop a regional emergency management plan for potential emergencies such as bush fires, storms, floods and pandemics. Fairly timely. There is \$24 000 for two feasibility studies for the Northern Midlands, Meander Valley, and Launceston City councils to look into IT opportunities and cross-council networking. And there is \$40 000 for the Brighton and Tasman councils to develop, trial and evaluate a centralised administration facility. That is one tranche of money. Also \$70 000 has been provided to the Local Government Association of Tasmania to develop and pilot financial and asset-management models for application across all councils in the State. That is in keeping with national frameworks on asset and financial management which have been endorsed by all States, territories and the Commonwealth through the Local Government and Planning Ministers Council. A further \$33 400 has been provided to the Local Government Association of Tasmania to develop and pilot a training program on land-use planning for elected members of councils. So we believe the money has been spent broadly and wisely to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of local government but, in particular, resource sharing across the sector.

**CHAIR** - Is it not a requirement for all local government council areas to have an asset management plan at this point in time? Are we reinventing the wheel here?

**Mr COX** - No, we are not. I agree that all councils should have an asset management plan. In fact I wrote to all the mayors last night - the letter went out in today's mail - asking them to have a look at their asset management.

**CHAIR** - Are you aware that there are some local government areas that do not have adequate asset management plans?

**Mr COX** - Yes, I would say that there are some out of the 29 that have not managed their asset management plan correctly.

**CHAIR** - How many.

**Mr COX** - I do not know.

**CHAIR** - Are you prepared to name them?

**Mr COX** - No.

**CHAIR** - So where did that information come from then? Did it come through the review process?

**Mr BYRNE** - Apart from other things you would be aware of the most recent Solicitor-General's report in which, without naming councils, he makes points about councils that have not re-invested properly into infrastructure and therefore have not managed their assets to the degree that he thought was necessary. But there was no naming of the councils within that report.

**CHAIR** - But obviously those have been identified to the minister.

**Mr COX** - No. Let me add that this is also part of a national push. Minister Albanese has indicated that he would like to see this become a national move because, whilst we are not too badly off, some of the jurisdictions are not good. I would think that probably all States and territories are doing what I have done. I cannot speak for other ministers. Out of the 29, commonsense would tell you that there are some councils in Tasmania that have not managed their assets properly. I am not prepared to name them but I know there are some that have not done well.

**CHAIR** - You have sent out 29 letters so everyone will get a letter?

**Mr COX** - Correct. Showing no bias, no favouritism, no direction at any one. Just 29 letters asking them to look at their asset management processes.

**CHAIR** - How they are going to let you know whether they believe that their asset management is not appropriate?

**Mr COX** - They do not have to let me know.

**CHAIR** - Who do they report back to?

**Mr COX** - Their ratepayers are the people that they are responsible to. They are the ones that they must deliver for. All I have done is put up a warning sign for them, in my role as minister, saying, 'I do not know whether you are up to scratch on this; if you are not, get your act together and have a good look at it because the time has come where you need to be more productive and proactive.

**CHAIR** - If the asset-management plans are not as effective or as appropriate as the minister feels is required, would the Government force the of sharing of resources in a bigger way?

**Mr COX** - No, because the Government will not force them to do anything. I cannot emphasise that enough.

**CHAIR** - Tell me why you would bother sending a letter then? If there is no need for any feedback they could just put it in their file and say we think our asset management is fine.

**Mr COX** - They could do that.

**CHAIR** - So there is no responsibility to respond other than to thank you for your letter?

**Mr COX** - I expect some of them may do that.

**Ms BYRNE** - Can I say that the local government division is working very closely with the Local Government Association of Tasmania on a number of reforms including financial-asset management because we will be working together to make sure that some nationally consistent frameworks are applied within this sector by the end of next year. So we expect that the association will be liaising very closely with us as it works with councils on improving asset and financial management. I might say that the association has also been endeavouring to work on its Access Economics report which has provided a whole raft of recommendations to the sector on financial asset management amongst other things. We consistently liaise with them to make sure

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

that these things are put in place and I think the relationship is excellent and there is a genuine move towards greater efficiency. We are certainly tracking it.

**Mr COX** - In the Auditor-General's report, he noted that many councils were still budgeting for deficits. You cannot keep doing that. It is not my role to say, 'you will fix that, you will do it', but it is my role to say, 'let us have a look at this before this goes too far'. Ultimately, they are the masters of their own destinies, as you well know.

**CHAIR** - I am aware of it. Obviously the State Fire Service is still budgeting for a deficit.

**Mr COX** - They are. Some councils let their assets depreciate very badly and have had to play catch-up but they have chosen to do that and others have not.

**Mr DEAN** - Launceston City Council did that for years until they got some new councillors in to take control of it.

**Mr COX** - That is why I was looking at you.

**CHAIR** - Minister, I am mindful that I am not the only person on this committee with a huge input into local government, and an interest.

**Mr COX** - Yes, I am just looking at that; we have a mayor, a former mayor, a mayor, a councillor, a deputy mayor.

**CHAIR** - It is a pathway. I guess you can see what happens when you sit at this table for long enough.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - The Access Economics report done two years ago on behalf of local councils identified that some councils had very good financial and asset management plans but quite a number of them did not have a 10-year financial assets management plan, so that was an impact. Regarding depreciation, which I spoke about with the Auditor-General here the other day, in 2000-01 councils were only required to have their depreciation up to the level of 80 per cent. He then changed the goalposts a little bit and took it to 100 per cent. There are very few organisations in the State that can actually fund depreciation up to 100 per cent. In fact, the State Government, I would not think, on their asset management would be able to do that. This is an issue that the auditor is going to look at for next year because he realises the inequity in that position. He has also stated that the current water and sewerage reforms are going to have a huge impact on councils to manage their assets and know where they are now because that is a huge percentage of their assets and liabilities when water and sewerage are taken out. The Minister is right about having the right time for councils to discuss mergers and amalgamations because they work exceptionally hard to understand the reforms and impacts of those reforms now. So in your time as minister and being involved with local government, have you noticed a greater rapport in relationships between councils to share and support each other in going through this process?

**Mr COX** - Absolutely; without hesitation, yes. Councils now tend to work a lot closer together. I think a lot of this has to do with the working relationships that Government has developed with councils but also that LGAT, Government and councils have developed. There is a very good working relationship with LGAT and early all the councils. I do not know whether that is borne out of necessity. I suspect it is.

**CHAIR** - It might be leadership, Minister.

**Mr COX** - You took the next line; or -

*Laughter.*

**Mr COX** - Yes. I believe there is greater cooperation and I believe there will be even more in the future.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Are you aware, Minister, that the Prime Minister made an announcement yesterday of \$220 million being directed straight back into local government now, which is increasing local government's capacity to address some of these infrastructure problems that we actually have and which will then allow the State Government greater flexibility to focus on those areas that need -

**Mr COX** - Mr Gaffney, do you realise that, had we not been here, we probably would have been in Canberra at this point?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I know that recently in the House we passed a bill and it is important that we reflect on some of the advantages of that bill and where you see the division going in its role over the next two or three years in helping councils get to a better place.

**Mr COX** - I totally agree. Are you talking about the new board?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - The new functions, where they have gone away from the eight-year review into a better place.

**Mr COX** - There is more varied experience in there. This is not a personal reflection on anyone at all, but I think it just needed a revamp. We needed to look at what they could and could not do. I suspect that their first task is going to test them pretty well and we will see if they are still collectively happy with the process at the end of the time. It gives us an opportunity to now look at different functions. They are more expert-based than they were before and I think it is a step in the right direction.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Would it be the intention that, say, the Glamorgan situation with Break O'Day might give a blueprint or template for any other councils, as has the Waratah-Wynyard-Circular Head relationship where they are now sharing a general manager.

**Mr COX** - That is certainly the intent of this. Whatever comes out of this - whether it does or does not go ahead - it will give us the opportunity to have a blueprint, to use your terminology, for any future requests for amalgamation, if they occur. There is no point in doing the same job twice. Whilst different regions will have different requirements and needs, there will be similarities and it would be, we believe, an ideal opportunity to put some sort of foundation in place, so it is exactly for that reason.

**Mr DEAN** - I have been a strong advocate, and everybody knows my position on local government, that we need to amalgamate a number of them or bring them to together; there is no doubt about that in the report. Minister, I struggle to accept the fact that, where Government is aware that some councils are struggling, that some councils will not be financial into the foreseeable future or in fact short-term future, and some are not sustainable, the Government



## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

would not step in and ensure that changes were made now before those councils fall over and there are a lot of injuries to a lot of people that are involved in those local government areas. They exist simply because the State Government allows them to exist. I would have thought that you would have stepped in and done something before tragedy occurs.

**Mr COX** - There is a commitment from the Government that we will not force amalgamations, and that is the commitment that has been given. Neither I nor anybody else will break that commitment.

**Mr DEAN** - There is a huge amount of self-interest in this as well, is there not? Let us be open about it.

**Mr COX** - I do not believe you can give your word on something and then go and break it. That is my personal view. Will it change into the future? I cannot speak for future governments and I cannot speak for another term of government. I will be totally open with you here. Councils that I believe are heading down that path have spoken to me and my personal recommendation to them is that they need to do something. I have made it very clear as to what I think they should do. Whether they take that advice will remain to be seen. That was not the case with Glamorgan-Spring Bay and Break O'Day, I have to say. But my word has been given and, in my opinion, you do not break your word. I hear what you are saying and I do not disagree with it.

**Mr DEAN** - It is not for me to become involved in breaking your word, but things change, do they not, over time?

**Mr COX** - They do.

**Mr DEAN** - At the time this Government gave that position, local government was probably travelling quite well and that is the reason why they saw fit to make that statement.

**Mr COX** - Mr Dean, it is not a discussion I have ever had with the Premier or with anyone, but into the future with another government or this Government again, who knows. It may be that there is a need to do exactly what you are suggesting but it is not my place.

**Mr DEAN** - Are you involved, Minister, in any way in trying to broker this deal with the community service obligations on the water and sewerage rebates and so on?

**Mr COX** - No. Fortunately not in any way, shape or form.

**Mr DEAN** - I was just wondering where we are going with it.

**Mr COX** - I am very happy to say no.

**Mr FINCH** - Do we have a list of the projects that have been undertaken on the mainstream makeover? What I am looking for is some of the detail of what projects have been undertaken, the costs and how much money is left in that program and where that is likely to be spent.

I suppose your report, too, on the success or otherwise of the project. Has it a good initiative? I am imagining so but I am wondering, Minister, if you could give me some detail please?

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

[4.30 p.m.]

**Mr COX** - I can do it one of two ways; I can go back to 2005-06 and give you the whole thing, I can go 2007 or, Mr Finch, I can table you the three pages of documentation.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, table those if you wouldn't mind, if you have them there and they are available.

**Mr COX** - I have them here.

**Mr FINCH** - That will let us know how the project has unfolded. I am interested to know how much of the program is left to go and how many of the funds are unexpended, and how the program is likely to be concluded.

**Mr COX** - There are three pages of them so rather than -

**Mr FINCH** - Go through them, yes, thanks.

**Ms BYRNE** - Under the program, in total the State Government has committed \$5.642 million to 22 councils and that covers 31 separate projects. The program itself was finalised in February. Originally \$6 million was actually allocated so \$357 000 of the original allocation has not gone forward. Just to let you know, of the money that has been allocated, not all has been spent at this stage because projects are still ongoing, people are still completing their projects.

We expect by the end of the coming financial year though that the remainder of that money will be expended, the other \$5.6 million -

**Mr COX** - Can I just interrupt and say that those councils have written and said, 'We're not quite where we should be, could we have just a little bit longer to finish this off', so there is nothing untoward in this. It is a straight-up process.

**Mr FINCH** - So the \$357 000 that you referred to, is that going to be left over from the program or is that what is going to be used up between now and when the project is completed?

**Ms BYRNE** - No, that money has been transferred back to Treasury for allocation elsewhere.

**Mr FINCH** - So will it be to local government projects?

**Ms BYRNE** - I cannot answer that on behalf of Treasury.

**Mr FINCH** - That just goes back to consolidated revenue?

**Mr COX** - It has gone back to Treasury.

**Mr FINCH** - How unfortunate.

*Laughter.*

**Mr COX** - We are hoping it goes to the Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund at this stage.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**CHAIR** - So if the program was such a success, why hasn't it been considered worthy of further funding?

**Mr COX** - It has been transferred now to be distributed from Treasury under what is called the Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund so, hopefully, it will continue as it was under a different name.

**CHAIR** - But nowhere near the level because there are no forward Estimates.

**Mr COX** - No. Let's say we were disappointed to lose it.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Through you, Minister, it would be handy to note that Latrobe went for dollar-for-dollar funding. We received \$250 000 from the State Government and we put \$250 000 into the project. I would imagine that there may be some funds left over because 22 councils had 30 projects, I think, so they may have found themselves in a position, 'We can't really afford to do another street scape because we have to try to match that dollar-for-dollar'. I would suggest that there were some funds left over because councils found it was too difficult to actually do another main street program. It was a very successful program.

**CHAIR** - They were all dollar-for-dollar matching fund programs, is that correct?

**Mr COX** - No.

**Ms BYRNE** - No. not at all.

**Mr FINCH** - So why would the Latrobe Council go for dollar-for-dollar, because they were such a big project?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - No, we thought it was responsible to go for dollar-for-dollar.

**Mr COX** - I think they did it on their own volition, to be honest.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - We thought it was responsible to go for dollar-for-dollar and the maximum was \$250 000 we could get and so we had a \$500 000 project. So the maximum we could get for the grant was \$250 000.

**Mr COX** - Some would say they played smart.

**CHAIR** - Some would say their streets are longer.

**Mr COX** - Some would say they played smart.

**Mr FINCH** - It is handy to have Mr Gaffney here.

**CHAIR** - Mr Dean, you had a question relating to the loans funds that were going to be available.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, free interest loans that were referred to in the budget papers. How will that operate? Is it that local government will put forward a project to government, to you or the minister, and a decision will be made then as to whether or not it will attract that loan?

**Mr COX** - Can I pre-empt this by saying this is not mine, this is now out of Department of Economic Development and Treasury and Finance, but I can give you a breakdown. It consists of up to \$20 million in loans granted to councils for spending on infrastructure projects and jobs in local communities. Interest and administration costs on these loans will be rebated to councils over a three-year period. It is expected that these rebates will be drawn down at the beginning of the 2010-11 financial year once projects have been approved and costs have been incurred in relation to the loans. West Coast apparently will be the first region to benefit from the program. It is likely to support several local infrastructure projects representing the possible investment of more than \$1.7 million. The targeted projects are expected to create more than 30 jobs on the west coast over the next 12 months. West Coast Council is considering projects including an upgrade at the Queenstown main street. All further relevant questions go to the Treasurer.

**CHAIR** - I have a question in relation to the partnership agreements. Have any local government areas threatened to tear up their local government partnership agreement with the State over the community service obligation that was touted in the recent -

**Mr COX** - The short answer to that is no.

**CHAIR** - Not one?

**Mr COX** - Not to my knowledge.

**CHAIR** - I was surprised there were not 29 down here on the front steps of Parliament House saying, 'This is what you can do with your partnership agreement'.

**Mr COX** - Not one.

**CHAIR** - Surprise, surprise.

**Mr COX** - It is hard to read them, isn't it?

**Mr DEAN** - Some of them have been torn up but they have not been -

**Mr WING** - I think *Hansard* should record that both hands were indicating a tearing up position in case it is misinterpreted.

*Laughter.*

**Mr COX** - The answer is no.

**CHAIR** - Not one came and said -

**Mr COX** - I will get Mr Greg Brown to answer. He does all the partnership agreements.

**Mr BROWN** - We are still negotiating strongly with councils around the State.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**CHAIR** - Even though there is what I call a 'Mexican stand-off' with Government and local government over the CSO?

**Mr BROWN** - This current financial year we had seven partnership agreements signed, including two statewide agreements. We have a further seven planned for this year, so it is all going well.

**CHAIR** - It is surprising. If I had still been in local government, I would have been here on your doorstep, Minister.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Minister, would you agree that the breadth of issues, activities and events and the partnership agreement are this wide. Water and sewerage and the CSO is this little bit, and I do not think in the two partnership agreements we have had with the State Government we have ever mentioned water and sewerage and the partnership agreement. I would not think it would be wise to tear up all these other great things that are happening just because we have a blip on the radar here.

**Mr COX** - I think that is good counselling.

**CHAIR** - Dorset may well be pleased to think they have good things to come then, Minister.

**Mr COX** - I cannot imagine that Mayor Partridge would ever think that!

**CHAIR** - It is an interesting exercise when we go through partnership agreements. I take on board what the member for Mersey has said, that there is much more to a partnership agreement than one aspect, but if you are trying to make a point I think that would be a handy thing to use. In light of that, it is at times very useful to be the chair and have the last word.

If there are no other questions from the committee, I would like to officially thank the minister. On behalf of the committee we would like to wish you the very best. Thank you for the amount of work and effort that you have put into today's presentation. Police is an enormous portfolio and then you have your other hats on as well. The contribution you have made today and in the past to the people of Tasmania has been outstanding and we want to congratulate you and wish you all the best for the future, as you will not be joining us next year for budget Estimates, I believe. I would like you to confirm that. This is the third year I have been asking that question.

**Mr COX** - Madam Chair has said to me for I don't know how long now, 'Are we going to see you next year?' I will not be back next year, Madam Chair. This is my last Estimates. Can I sincerely thank members of the Legislative Council, past and present, for the way you conduct your Estimates hearings. I cannot speak for other ministers, but as pleasurable as this experience can be, it is as good as it gets here. I thank you for your civility and the way you make life for us just a little bit easier. I will be around for a bit longer - I still have a job to do until March.

**CHAIR** - I want to thank everyone who has been part of this process today. We wish local government all the best, also yourself, Minister.

I would like to place on the public record out thanks to Debra, who has looked after us kindly with Hansard, and of course our ever-efficient madam secretary, Ms McLeod. As support in the

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

back row here as well we have Tom Wise. It certainly makes our job a lot easier when we have terrific support around us. Thank you everyone.

**The committee adjourned at 4.42 p.m.**