



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Eric Abetz MP

Thursday 4 June 2026

MEMBERS

Rob Fairs MP (Chair)

Hon Josh Willie MP

Vica Bayley MP

George Razay MP

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Mr George

Ms Badger

Dr Woodruff

Ms Finlay

Ms Burnet

Mr Mitchell

Mr Ferguson

Mrs Greene

Mr Vermey

Mr Garland

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. ERIC ABETZ MP

Minister for Community and Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy, Minister for the Environment, Minister for the Arts and Heritage

Environment (including Climate Change)

Jason Jacobi

Secretary

Louise Wilson

Deputy Secretary

Catherine Murdoch

CEO - Environment Protection Authority

(in the room)

Jo Crisp

General Manager, Environment

Holly Mackey

A/CEO - Tasmanian Waste and Resource Recovery Board

Daryl Cook

Director - Finfish Compliance - EPA

Cindy Ong

Director - Environmental Regulation - EPA

Raymond Bannister

Manager - Salmon Science and Standards - EPA

ReCFIT (Climate Change)

Vanessa Pinto

A/CEO, Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania

Dr Sarah Russell

Director, Climate Change

DSG (Climate Change)

Nikki Krushka

Assistant Director, Climate Change

Garth Dickinson

Senior Adviser

Angela Conway
Deputy Secretary, Business Services

Ministerial Office representatives

Tristan Bick
Chief of Staff

Alister Pearce
Senior Adviser

Kandace Gilligan
Senior Adviser

Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy

Department of State Growth

Mike Mogridge
Deputy Secretary

Ben Marquis
Director, Economic Strategy

Travis Boucher
Director, Finance

Sarah Thomson
Executive Director, Business Industry and Investment

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Noelene Kelly
Deputy Secretary

Dr Justin Thurley
Chief Information Officer

Ministerial Office

Tristan Bick
Chief of Staff

Jeremy Grey
Senior Advisor

Community and Multicultural Affairs

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Noelene Kelly
Deputy Secretary

Corrina Smith
Director, Community Services

Kristy Broomhall
Assistant Director, Community Services

Ministerial Office Representatives

Tristan Bick
Chief of Staff

Rosita Gallasch
Senior Adviser

Minister for Arts and Heritage

Department of State Growth (Arts)

Brett Stewart
Deputy Secretary

Dr David Sudmails
Director, Creative Tasmania

Mary Mulcahy
CEO, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Alex Sangston
Manager Screen Tasmania

Joe Kanizay
Budget Consultant

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (Heritage)

Jason Jacobi
Secretary

Louise Wilson
Deputy Secretary

Will Joscelyne
General Manager, Heritage Tasmania

Melissa Ford
Director, Heritage Tasmania

Deidre Wilson
A/Chief Operations Officer

Anita Yan
Deputy Chief Operations Officer

Adrian Pearce
Manager (Finance)

Josh Brown
Manager (Budget Services)

Ministerial Office

Tristan Bick
Chief of Staff

Kandace Giligan
Senior Adviser

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Environment

The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

CHAIR - Before we go to questions. I want to remind members of the order of the House Establishing Estimates Committee, which provides questions must be relevant to the portfolio and outputs of a particular session. However, as with other sessions, I will permit broad questions about the minister's role as a member of the Cabinet in relation to issues of public concern in relation to former minister Ogilvie, if the Minister chooses to answer them.

The time now being 9.00 a.m., the scrutiny of the Environment portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the Committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions, please, for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr ABETZ - That is going to test me, Chair, but delighted to be here. Jason Jacobi, Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania(NRE), Tasmania; Louise Wilson, Deputy Secretary, Environment, Heritage and Land; Catherine Murdoch, Director of the EPA; Cindy Ong, Director of environment Regulation; Vanessa Pinto, Deputy Secretary, Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania (ReCFIT) and Resources; Dr Sarah Russell, Director of Climate Change.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Time schedule for the estimates of the Minister for Environment is 3.5 hours. We will take a short break for morning tea at 10.30a.m.-ish.

The resolution of the House provides for a minister provide additional information to a committee either later that day or in writing as an answer to a question taken on notice. To submit a question on notice, the member must first ask their question to the minister and the minister must indicate they will take it on notice. The member must then put the question in writing and hand it to the committee secretary before the end of the portfolio's examination so it can be included in correspondence to the minister to answer.

I remind you that microphones are sensitive, so I ask you to be mindful of Hansard and be careful when moving around your folders, documents and water glasses around the table. Also, it is difficult for Hansard to differentiate when people are talking over each other, so I would ask that members speak one at a time to assist with this.

Would the minister like to make an opening statement?

Mr ABETZ - No thanks, Chair.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay.

Ms FINLAY - Nice to have you here this morning, minister.

Mr ABETZ - The pleasure is all mine.

Ms FINLAY - I know that throughout the week there has been recognition that the matter of former minister Ogilvie did go to Cabinet, although sparse on details. I would just like to ask directly to you whether the matter, as you are aware, related to this portfolio?

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Mr ABETZ - I'm not going to disclose anything that may or may not have been said in Cabinet and Cabinet proceedings. I'm appearing here in my newly minted capacity.

Ms FINLAY - I understand that, but given that you are now the Minister for Environment, I think it's relevant as a member of Cabinet, given the significance of these details and the lack of transparency from this government, whether you can confirm for the committee that the matter was related to this portfolio?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not going to join issue and waste the time of the committee dealing with all -

Ms FINLAY - Do you think transparency is a waste of time, minister?

Mr ABETZ - If I can finish my sentence - with all the adjectives that you applied in your question. I will set that aside and then just deal with the actual issue at hand and that is whether or not I'm going to divulge that which occurred at Cabinet. It should not surprise you to learn that I won't be.

Ms FINLAY - You haven't given the importance to this portfolio to give any introductory statements. So, you can't say that there are things that are more important than the transparency in information to Tasmanians. I will ask again. Can you confirm the matter that you know that did go to cabinet, that you are party to where there's been a misleading of parliament, whether it had anything to do with this portfolio?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not going to add anything further that is already on the public record.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, through you, possibly to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) after you've heard the question. We still don't know the total amount of florfenicol that has been used in Tasmania's southern waterways during the emergency permit period. We have information of 3610.5 kilograms of florfenicol for the sites that have been released, but we don't know yet about Great Taylors Bay, Roaring Beach, The Shepherds and Roberts Point. Through you, minister. To the Director, the florfenicol monitoring schedule was set by you as the regulator. Why didn't you require companies to report the quantities of florfenicol to you contemporaneously, rather than months after the treatment event as the very last element of reporting?

Ms MURDOCH - I think it's important to note here that the integrity of the EPA is exceptionally important. Any information that the EPA releases needs to be factually correct, legally obtained, and comply with other regulations that I actually have to comply with, such as RTI acts. With regard to this matter, the EPA has followed the procedures in the parliamentary-endorsed environmental standards for marine fish farming. In there is outlined how we will require the companies to report.

I've discussed this matter also with the Ombudsman's Office. They agree that it is not in the public's best interest to release information that is factually incorrect. The procedure that we have put into place ensures that the amount we actually have in front of us is verified; it's actual; it is the amount that is factually correct at a time that I can release to the public; it is timely; and it is in within three months that the public is getting that. We have never previously reported antibiotics. I think at the last hearing it was rightfully pointed out that the oxytetracycline report was some 12 months after it occurred. We've improved those practices.

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I will release information to protect the integrity of the EPA and that's what it is about - our integrity. The public and you, Dr Woodruff, can trust that when it does come out it's factually correct.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, I'm not attacking the integrity of the EPA. I'm asking a question about, and I'll leave aside what the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) requires of salmon companies to do in terms of making sure that they know what they put into the water, but they do take bags of feed and put it into the water that has been covered with florfenicol, so they know how much has gone in. You, the EPA, set the regulations and the monitoring. I'll be precise, you set the monitoring -

Ms MURDOCH - Yes.

Dr WOODRUFF - for this emergency permit. Why didn't you require the companies to make the information available to you at the same time as they must have knowingly been putting a certain amount into the water? Why did you allow them to report three months at the end of the monitoring schedule?

Ms MURDOCH - It's not about me allowing them to report at the right time. The EPA's role, as I have absolutely outlined, and I think we have done a tremendous job of doing and I know you're not questioning, I just want to say my team did an amazing job over this summer. Our role is to set the antibiotic residue monitoring programs. That's what we did. That is what we have done. That is what we do.

Requiring the amount of florfenicol at the start - that actual amount - it might not be available yet, but it's not my role to administer the management and application of florfenicol in this state. My role is to ensure that residual antibiotic monitoring is done and is done to the best standards that we can. That is what I have done, so questioning as to why I didn't ask for information that I don't need or require to actually do that job - I need to ensure that anything I ask for, there's a legal reason for it. I can't just ask for it, there needs to be a legal requirement for it. It's for me to regulate. There was no requirement for that. We are, out of public interest, producing these reports on the amount and that is what we have done in an absolutely timely manner, and I think -

Dr WOODRUFF - Second question, Chair. Thank you. The question is: did you receive information from the companies about the amount that was intended to be used for each treatment?

Ms MURDOCH - Yes.

Dr WOODRUFF - Before it was used, you received information about how much was intended to be used? If so, can you table that information now for every single treatment site?

Ms MURDOCH - Minister, thank you for asking this question because I have discussed this matter directly with the Ombudsman's Office. Yes, we received proposed amounts to enable us, and it's a maximum amount potentially, to enable us to design our antibiotic residue monitor -

Dr WOODRUFF - To clarify, that's not what I mean. The maximum amount that was set by the APVMA.

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Ms MURDOCH - No, no.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm talking about every time a treatment occurred, because the Chief Veterinary Officer received that information. Did you get it too?

Mr ABETZ - How about we allow the director to respond?

Ms MURDOCH - Thank you. To clarify, that's exactly what I'm talking about. Before each treatment we are provided with that proposed amount so that we can design for that treatment an antibody residue monitoring program. What I can tell you is that the treatments as we're getting them in - and this is why this is important. Numbers are important in this public debate, and they need to be factual. The proposed amounts varied for all of the treatments that we've released so far for 2026, the full treatments, and out of seven treatments varied, and the range of that variation is 0.3 kilos to 777 kilos.

The Ombudsman has clearly said to me that putting out factually incorrect of such a public interest is not in the public's interest. We will release factually correct information. And that does go to our integrity. If I put out numbers that are incorrect to the public and then go, 'oops, sorry' a month later, it was 1000 kilos less, that is not in the public interest in this really critical debate. I am -

Dr WOODRUFF - So, through you, minister -

CHAIR - Sorry, Dr Woodruff, sorry -

Mr ABETZ - No, please let her continue.

Dr WOODRUFF - Could she just table that information -

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff.

Mr ABETZ - No, please let her continue. This is very important.

Ms MURDOCH - I am absolutely satisfied that we have followed a rigorous and an appropriate process here of releasing factually correct information. And it's really important for the public debate and for public interest that occurs. And we have legally done that appropriately.

Mr GEORGE - If you can't give us an up-to-date version of what florfenicol has been used up until today, or up until the end of the use of florfenicol, can you please give us the weight of antibiotics that the salmon industry has used in our waterways in the years 2023-24, 2024-25 and so far this year?

Ms MURDOCH - The previous years are already on our website. They're all continually up there. It's on our Therapeutants page. I can read them in if you like, but it is up there. I just don't have those numbers in front of me. But for 2022-23 to actually going right back.

Mr GEORGE - Okay, that's my error.

Ms MURDOCH - That's okay. We have a lot of information.

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Mr GEORGE - You do have a lot of information there. Can you tell us over that period when those antibiotics were administered, what the tonnage, going back, of salmon morts was during those disease periods?

Ms MURDOCH - No. The tonnage is one of the improvements in the regulatory framework. We only started receiving the tonnage in February of 2025, and that's what we're actively putting on our website. We do not have that data prior to that date. That's a new improvement in the regulatory framework.

Mr GEORGE - That seems an odd miss over such a long period of time.

CHAIR - That's another question, not a clarification.

Mr GARLAND - What is the total budget allocation over the forward Estimates for monitoring and enforcement of air quality and dust regulation in Tasmania? What has been the total cost over the past five years? Are companies that emit dust required to pay for any of the monitoring that is involved and, more specifically, what has been the total amount in annual fees, levies or cost recovery charges paid by Tasmania Advanced Minerals (TAM), to the EPA? And do those payments fully recover the cost of the EPA's compliance inspection and air quality monitoring activities associated with the TAM facility?

Mr ABETZ - I dare say that counts as one question. But possibly you might need to repeat aspects of it for the director. And, Chair, if I can intervene at this stage, people have been exceptionally polite, asking questions through the minister and then the officials through me. I'm relatively happy for the discourse to go straight to people. And if I consider it necessary, I'm more than ready to intervene and do what is needed to protect our officials. But if that is acceptable to the committee, I think it might be a smoother way forward.

CHAIR - I just ask that it's done with the utmost respect, please.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, have a shot at me, not at the officials.

Mr GEORGE - Good, thank you.

Ms MURDOCH - I just might need you to just - there's a lot in that one.

Mr ABETZ - One by one, possibly

Mr GARLAND - The total budget allocation over the forward Estimates for monitoring and enforcement of air quality and dust regulation in Tasmania. What has been the total cost over the past five years? Are companies that emit dust required to pay for any of the monitoring that is involved? And more specifically, what has been the total amount in annual fees, levies or cost recovery charges paid by TAM to the EPA? And do those payments fully recover the cost of the EPA's compliance inspection and air quality monitoring activities associated with the TAM facility?

Ms MURDOCH - Thank you and thank you for the question. Some of this I may have to take on notice for you to get that back to you. Yes, and my business manager is saying we might need to take that on notice. We'll try and get - the total for air monitoring, I'm hoping we can read that back in for you. For the five years total, I'll need to take on notice.

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Emitters paying for monitoring, so, they have to pay for - so, what happens when we set an environmental protection notice, or those things, we outline what monitoring is required to be done. That cost is fully for that facility to have to put in place and to upkeep and provide us with that data. We obviously apply various monitoring commensurate with the risk of that facility.

The TAM annual permit fees, we can get those for you as well and be able to provide those, I hope today. If not, on notice. I'll know at morning tea if I can read anything in.

Yeah, so I think I'll take one, two and four on notice, but yes, emitters, it varies. So, in TAM's circumstance, they are absolutely paying to have that monitoring on that site occur. If we determine that there's more monitoring required, they will be required to pay for that.

Whether or not it's cost recovery? How it works is our compliance and enforcement is based on risk and, obviously, I know you're aware, Mr Garland, I have staff right now looking into the air quality and things at that facility. It's within the budget. So, if we issue extra notices or things, we charge a fee for that, or investigations charge fees. It's within the budget so it's not really cost recovery, if that makes sense.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you for your work, acting Minister for Environment.

Ms FINLAY - Has he been sworn in or he's actually Minister for Environment.?

Mr ABETZ - No, no, fully fledged.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you for your work in this portfolio and to your teams who are at the table as well today. We appreciate what they all do in their different functions to care for our environment.

My question today is around waste management. It's been a big issue around the state, including in my electorate of Bass, with the introduction of the hard waste levy. I'm interested to know how it's being used to improve recycling generally, waste management specifically. A further part (b) of the question is around the way that that fund can be used for waste to gas, that is waste to energy.

Mr ABETZ - We've got a relatively lengthy brief on this that I will seek to go through. It was first introduced in 2022, bringing us into line with best practice across Australia and to encourage the diversion of valuable materials away from landfill. The levy is helping deliver the infrastructure, programs and data systems needed to support Tasmania's transition to a circular economy, where resources are kept in use for as long as possible. A key part of this work is through the Tasmanian Waste and Resource Recovery Board, which oversees the strategic reinvestment of levy funds.

One of the strongest examples is the board's High Priority Infrastructure Grant program. Demand for this funding has been exceptionally strong, with councils, business and community organisations seeking support for projects that will reduce waste, increase recycling and keep valuable materials out of landfill. In recognition of the strong demand, the board recently doubled the allocation for the latest funding round from \$5 million to \$10 million.

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The government has also invested directly in helping landfill and resource recovery operators transition to the new framework. As a government, we committed \$2 million, through the Waste Levy and Data Readiness Program, to assist facilities in meeting new reporting and operational requirements. Successful applicants have received support for equipment, systems and capability upgrades that improve waste tracking and resource recovery outcomes.

This year alone, the Waste and Resource Recovery Board has invested more than \$1.6 million into the Rethink Waste program, which helps Tasmanians better understand recycling, waste avoidance and resource recovery opportunities. More than 760 facilities are now reporting waste data, giving government and industry better information than ever before about what waste is being generated, where it's occurring and where future investment is needed. So, the levy has created a sustainable funding source that is helping build the infrastructure services and it's about ensuring that Tasmania has a modern waste and resource recovery system that delivers environmental benefits, supports jobs and investment, and helps create a cleaner and more sustainable future for our communities.

Mr FERGUSON - Excuse me, Chair, if I could just invite a quick response just to clarify on the progress of - waste to energy was part of my question.

CHAIR - I am allowing clarification for all members, as I have all week, so you can clarify.

Mr JACOBI - I might ask Holly Mackey, who's our CEO of the Waste and Resource Recovery Board, to come to the table. But if I could ask the member, is there a specific particular energy transition project that you're interested in?

Mr FERGUSON - Yes, Westbury.

Mr JACOBI - Westbury. I'm just checking whether Holly is comfortable to speak to Westbury.

Dr WOODRUFF - This is another question. I think that's really unfair for a Dorothy Dixer.

CHAIR - Order. Order, please. It was part of his original question. Again, I will allow clarification on questions as long as they're within reason. And very quickly, minister, can you please introduce the new person to the table?

Mr JACOBI - On behalf of the minister, I'll introduce Holly Mackey, CEO of the Waste and Resource Recovery Board.

Ms MACKEY - The Westbury Bio Hub, as you would remember, was an election commitment through the last election. The former minister for the environment asked the Waste and Resource Recovery Board to undertake a due diligence review of that project, of which is currently underway.

Mr FERGUSON - Terrific. Thank you. That wasn't so hard.

Ms FINLAY - I'm really interested in the relativity of what's happening with florfenicol in Tasmania compared to the rest of the world. I'm wondering whether you could, in context

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of the information that was released on 20 May, compare that research to research that's happening anywhere else in the world. And specifically compare that to florfenicol that's used in aquaculture and other primary production globally. So, how much are we're using here compared to other places? It seems to me that there's a lot of adjectives around what's happening in Tasmania and I'm really keen to understand that relativity in the research and in the amounts.

Mr ABETZ - We'll see how far the director can go, but possibly that should have been asked of Mr Pearce, Minister for Primary Industries and Water, I think. I don't want to stifle anything. I just want to let you know that I fear that may be the case. But over to the director.

Ms MURDOCH - The part of the risk assessment that we put out has got a front end of a really good literature review on florfenicol, and some of those matters are mentioned. In regards to the amounts that are used internationally, can I just turn around and ask a question, if that's okay?

Ms FINLAY - Please.

Ms MURDOCH - I just want to make sure I get this right for you. Numbers are important. In regards to Chile from 2015 - 2024, 3864.9 tonnes were used. Tasmania - we've obviously put the amounts out of 3610.5 - there were previous smaller amounts of florfenicol used in research trials as well. In regards to Norway, 3.9 tonnes. China is not on my list. I know the team has been crunching those numbers so I -

Ms FINLAY - Is that something you'd be open, minister, to take on notice?

Ms MURDOCH - I just want to clarify the number and make sure I'm reading the right things because I understand that's important. We're contemplating as to whether this goes up on our therapeutics page as well, just for that context, because I understand why you're asking what's important.

Ms FINLAY - Yes, thank you, because it leads into my next questions. The community understanding of the significance of the use in Tasmania compared to how it's used in other forms, either in Australia or in other primary production all around the world, I think is important to inform the community.

That comes to my next question, which is directly to you, minister: what are the communication protocols between the department, you, as minister, the department and the EPA when we're communicating these things to the public? Because it seems to me that there's a real void of information and therefore, in a void of information, the community make up the extreme concerns, and there's also a picture painted in other ways. I question whether the government's done enough to, communicate clearly around this to support industry, but also what the agreements are between the department and the EPA when the EPA - and I note that the comment this morning is that there is universal support for the EPA - but it feels like when they're under attack, there's not enough done either by the EPA or by the government to be clear about what's happening, to take away, and therefore avoid misinformation in the community.

Mr ABETZ - I hear what you say, and I reflect on that myself, just generally as a minister from time to time. It is just so easy to throw an allegation into the public domain and get a good

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headline for it, but a government and its authorities, when they go into the public domain, they want to ensure that everything is accurate, footnoted, et cetera. There was one occasion where certain allegations were made that certain things occurring naturally in our waters was as a result of salmon farming and -

Ms FINLAY - I'm not sure that's ever been corrected, has it?

Mr ABETZ - I don't want to get into that debate and get a debate happening on that issue, but for the authorities then to come back, it took, I think, a day or so to get back before being able to correct that. That is where government and authorities are bearing that, what might I call it, extra responsibility and often not as able to get back into the domain within the next half an hour or whatever. That said, I don't know what the protocols are. Secretary, director, are you able to clarify?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. We have a shared service level arrangement between my department and the EPA in relation to communications. The communications that occurs between our departments is really seamless. We also have regular meetings between both myself, or my department's communication specialists, the EPA director's communication specialists, and Health. We are always in communication about who is publishing what. We are very clean and measured about keeping the lines of separation between the various responsibilities, which is why you will see some information published on the EPA website that is not specifically published on my department's website, but which we refer to. So there is a very clear link between what I am providing on behalf of my department and then linking to the EPA website for further references.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you, but my question wasn't really going toward -

Mr ABETZ - It's not about timeliness.

Ms FINLAY - My question wasn't about timeliness, in fact, my question was about the actual void of information. I acknowledge and understand why there is a separation of where the information comes from, and that's important for it to be technically correct and relative to each area. But my concern is that, whatever industry it is, but industry can be left alone, or the EPA can be left alone, or others. In the absence of good information, my question to you is - do you think the community are well-enough informed to understand exactly what's happening and to what degree and scale it's happening to come to positive conclusions, or do you think the space is actually populated by incorrect or negative or over-inflated information?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not going to seek to pass judgement on that, but accept that I think in these areas, governments, agencies, departments can always do better and should be looking always to do better to fill the void. I'm not going to pass a judgement as to the extent of improvement that may be required in relation to the topic.

Ms FINLAY - As a former Primary Industries minister and now the sworn-in environment minister, will you seek for there to be? That's correct, isn't it? Former Primary Industries minister and currently -

Mr ABETZ - No. I was minister for Resources, which included fisheries.

Ms FINLAY - Anyway. are you committing to do better?

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Mr ABETZ - As a government we are always committed to seek to improve and do better wherever we can, and I dare say this area is no exception.

Ms FINLAY - Can I take you to a different matter now in terms of the *Climate Act* report that recently came to parliament? I'm interested in a couple of matters with that. How much did that review cost? Will you seek to engage with stakeholders in terms of informing your response to that report? When do you expect your response to come to parliament?

Mr ABETZ - Who can assist on the account?

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister, in relation to the first part of the question, which is the cost, I'm hoping my colleagues will be able to assist in that.

In terms of the second question, which is in relation to engagement and looking at the response. Under the act there was a climate reference group that has been formed, and I'll check in with my colleague about the membership of that so that we can share that with you. That's a really important reference group for this as an area of concern for the public; that reference group covers a lot of areas that are actively engaged in community business and across government to ensure that we're getting the right voice around these areas.

In engagement with that reference group, and I think the meeting - I will defer to my colleague to give a little bit more detail about that meeting - what the minister and our office did was to meet with that reference group and unpack the recommendations from the independent review. One of the things that I will note is that that independent review identified that we're in a really healthy position in Tasmania with the quality of our legislation; it creates a very robust environment. When the legislation was amended in November 2022, the committee may recall that that amendment established the 2030 Net Zero Emission Target for the state. It also embedded into that legislation obligations to prepare a Climate Change Action Plan, six sector-based Emission Reduction and Resilience plans and a statewide Climate Change Risk Assessment and to be reporting on those through a Climate Change Activity Statement.

What the independent reviewer determined is that we've actually got a very robust environment and a very mature stakeholder engagement relationship in our state.

In answering to the component of your question with regards to the areas of recommendation and response, there were seven recommendations and I won't go through each of them, but what we've sought to do is to look at what a pragmatic approach to each of those is.

Ms FINLAY - Specifically to the question, minister, through you. Will the consultation go broader than that committee that you've identified in terms of preparing your response firstly? And secondly, when do you expect that to come to the parliament, the response?

Ms PINTO - I might defer to -

Dr RUSSELL - The government has made a commitment to embed the recommendations of the independent review into the existing work program and framework that is currently in place, in addition to working with the members of the reference group. The members of the reference group reflect the consultation requirements that are outlined in the

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act, so they include representatives from the Australian Medical Association, Climate Tasmania, the Local Government Association of Tasmania, RACT, Tas Farmers, Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Tasmanian Forest Products Association, the Tasmanian Minerals Manufacturing and Energy Council, Unions Tasmania and the Tasmanian Policy Exchange.

There's broad representation. There is also a youth member on that, who co-chairs that group and that person rotates through and is selected from the Premier's Youth Advisory Council. That model has been working since the cessation of the last independent review

Ms FINLAY - Costs and when would it come back to parliament?

Dr RUSSELL - Initially the tender was for \$150,000. We had a variation to that particular piece because of the election period and requests from stakeholders for further consultation and engagement, so that went up to \$198,995 for the independent review.

Ms FINLAY - And the date when it will come to parliament?

Dr RUSSELL - The independent review has already been tabled. I'm not sure that date is.

Ms FINLAY - The government response?

Dr RUSSELL - The government has committed to taking that review and embedding it in its existing work program.

Ms FINLAY - Is that a confirmation that there won't be a response table to the parliament?

Dr RUSSELL - That's where we're at, at this point in time.

CHAIR - Can I remind members that when we're asking questions and if you're asking more than one answer in the question, time is going to get chewed up very, very quickly and we're not going to get through a lot of questions, so can I ask all members to please keep it in mind because the three-minute response times, and I am being lenient as I have all week, but we are going to chew up time very quickly and I really want to get through everything.

Ms FINLAY - Will you take that on notice?

Mr ABETZ - I'll take it on notice.

Dr WOODRUFF - Through you to the Director of the EPA, we know that the Tasmanian Salmon Industries in the process of applying for a minor-use permit to use for florfenicol on an ongoing basis. We've been hearing previously the conversation about the importance of transparency and the risks where there's a vacuum of information, and also about authorities having responsibility to provide that information. My question is: reflecting on the learnings of the emergency permit, will you require the companies to disclose in real time their antibiotic use? I'm not talking their intended use, but their actual use when they've actually done it. Will you require that to be disclosed in real time?

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Ms MURDOCH - I will release information, yes, it's factually correct, but also means that I comply with all other regular relevant legislation, such as yes, anti-competitive, but also RTI processes. I will not give a commitment that I will release that. I am satisfied that what the EPA is doing is legally appropriate, is timely, and it produces information that is factually correct. That's my answer to your question.

Dr WOODRUFF - That's hindcasting.

Mr ABETZ - Enough of the commentary to the officials.

Dr WOODRUFF - Sorry, that's not a negative comment. I'm saying that the comments I think as I interpreted is that that's what has happened. But now we're talking about the EPA designing a new set of regulations and monitoring regime and it will you be doing that in this instance you have an opportunity to do it differently.

Ms MURDOCH - Whether or not you call it hindcasting, I still have to right now comply with the same legislation that I had to in November. I will continue to do that and will not put the integrity of the EPA at risk by not absolutely complying with all the legislation and requirements that I have to do. I'm not hindcasting or forecasting, I will absolutely comply with the law.

Dr WOODRUFF - A general biosecurity direction was issued in February of this year, requiring the companies to report on mortalities and therapeutant use not less than 72 hours after they occur. Was that information provided to the EPA? Was it provided outside of Biosecurity Tasmania, and to whom was that information was provided?

Mr ABETZ - I understand that should be directed to the minister for Primary Industries.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. My question was to the director. Did the EPA receive that information as well?

Ms MURDOCH - I'm actually not sure what information. The biosecurity direction, as you know, is Biosecurity Tasmania. I am not privy to the information. I'm not sure what the information is you're asking about, and I just want to be really clear about that.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay, do you want to take it on notice and look into it? I can't be clearer than I am about the fact that there was a general biosecurity direction.

I'm going back to the comments that Mr Jacobi made earlier about 'seamless communication between the agencies', so my question is, and people in the community regularly ask this: how come one arm of government knows something and another arm says they don't? Is it because you've made a decision to have firewalls between agencies on certain issues? And can you change this practice because it's leading to misinformation and confusion in the community?

Ms MURDOCH - I think what you're asking is about the mortality notifications. Is that what you're asking?

Dr WOODRUFF - Mortality and therapeutant use.

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Ms MURDOCH - I think you might be misinterpreting what the therapeutic use is. We, obviously, are very aware of the GBD and we're making sure that our -

Dr WOODRUFF - For people who are listening, could you just say what that acronym means?

Ms MURDOCH - Or what you called it, the General Biosecurity Duty.

With regard to that, of course, we engage with that because our colleagues who are regulators around that ensure that the conditions that we put within our environmental licences were consistent. The changes around that, as I understand in the General Biosecurity Duty direction, the removal of mortalities out of pens; we wanted to make sure our licence changes are consistent with that, so we've done that. Mortality reporting of 0.25 mortality per day, and therapeutic use, I believe, is the notification to the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) that it would occur. We do the same thing. That's what we know, and I'm not sure that there's anything more to that question that Biosecurity is getting information that is outside that.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm trying to understand whether the independent EPA has this information about therapeutic use that's being used by salmon companies that must be reported, according to Biosecurity Tasmania's general duty within 72 hours, and if so, can you make that information publicly available, because I think you can understand the hunger Tasmanians have to understand what's actually going into the environment as it's actually going into the environment.

Ms MURDOCH - I can't answer that question because I don't believe the information you're trying to outline that Biosecurity is getting is what they're getting under that GBD.

CHAIR - We'll move on. Ms Burnet.

Dr WOODRUFF - You have agreed to take it on notice.

Ms MURDOCH - No, I have not agreed to take it on notice.

Mr ABETZ - Mr Jacobi might have something further.

Dr WOODRUFF - I did ask.

CHAIR - No. We've spent a lot of time on this. It's been asked and answered several times.

Dr WOODRUFF - Chair, for clarification, when Mr Ferguson asked to bring some to the table, you didn't shut them down.

Mr FERGUSON - I didn't ask anyone to come to the table.

CHAIR - No. You've had three goes at clarifying your last question

Dr WOODRUFF - And Mr Jacobi was just about to say something.

CHAIR - The director has answered you three times.

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Dr WOODRUFF - But the minister asked Mr Jacobi to say something.

CHAIR - Yes, but time is over four minutes for the response so we can go back to it if you want to ask it again.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay, so four minutes is the cut. We'll call it four minutes.

CHAIR - If you want to test me, all just go -

Dr WOODRUFF - I just want to understand -

CHAIR - Okay, fine. After the end of the rotation, we will revert to one minute questions, three minute answers. We'll move on. Ms Burnet.

Mr ABETZ - Look, with this interruption, at the moment, I understand the director has further information in response to Mr Garland.

Ms MURDOCH - Mr Garland, through you, minister, in regards to the five-year total for our air strategy plus monitoring, for over the forward Estimates from 20 is \$5.55 million. Prior costs from 2022 to 2026 was \$5.03 million. The Budget allocations and direct costs for air monitoring are funded out of the EPA's appropriation funding.

And we've also got \$1.5 million over four years as is in the budget papers to refurbish and upgrade the existing Tasmanian air-quality monitoring network. The fees for TAM, we will take - they're just adding all those up as well. That's all that's outstanding; the TAM amount for you.

Ms BURNET - I'm glad that you've taken on these roles albeit maybe for the short term, but they're very important functions and it certainly seems like you're the minister for everything. It's a bit like shades of Scott Morrison, but that's for another time.

Mr ABETZ - Not self-appointed, I'd hasten to add.

Ms BURNET - On 15 April, when then-minister Ogilvie delivered her contribution to my private members motion on your government's inaction on climate change, she said that your government was pursuing 98 climate actions supported by more than \$250 million in committed funding. I ask that those 98 climate actions be tabled and also just a bit of a breakdown of that \$250 million in committed funding.

Mr ABETZ - I did see something on that yesterday, member for Clark. I'm just wondering if it is still in my folders. It looks as though it is not. I have seen the breakdown, so possibly, if it's not handy immediately - or was it I think I even had copies for the Legislative Council. This is the table that adds up, I think at the end, to \$251 million. I can table that.

Ms BURNET - Do you want to just give a bit of a précis of the important issues, not all 98 climate actions? Presumably you're tabling that as part of that. Are you tabling the 98 climate actions as well as the -

Mr ABETZ - I'm sure that it's the 98, but it is the \$250 million table.

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Ms PINTO - Yes, certainly. Through you, minister. Just to clarify what the minister has provided is a table that outlines collectively - and it was determined at a point in time because as you would appreciate, climate, and climate change and adaptation is a government-wide concern. There are a lot of programs that are not necessarily just within the remit of the climate change output group, if you consider it from that perspective, not all funding that is necessarily there. There are a number of - I can, as my colleagues to the left - programs that Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania - so when you read that table you'll get that, equally in the Energy portfolio.

In relation to the question around the climate change action plan, I made reference earlier to the other honourable member, the changes that were made in 2021 with regards to the act and part of that is a requirement to publish a climate change activity statement. That was published - I'm looking to my colleague - just recently. It is available online and it takes you through all of the current climate change actions and the status on them. It's quite a comprehensive report.

Some of the areas that I might just refer to for the benefit of the committee. There's a really exciting program that the University of Tasmania is undertaking to develop a new set of fine-scale climate projections. That is being undertaken by UTAS's Climate Futures research group. Importantly, it will provide far more granular detail around the changes that are occurring in the climate across a number of the different aspects. That's a body of work that's being undertaken.

I'll refer to one that is very pertinent for a lot of people in the transport space, that's one of the key areas that Tasmania is leaning into in terms of its Transport Emission Reduction Plan and looking at ways to support business and individuals to adapt to electrification options versus fuels. So there's been also a really exciting e-transport package that we ran that was very much targeted at businesses. As we all know, we all live very busy lives and we often - I do know I picked up takeaway last night, but you can also get takeaway delivered - as a part of that e-Transport package, there was a number of e-Mobility rebates that were offered that enabled businesses to invest in e-bikes and the like, to bring down that use of fossil fuel. Noting the fuel situation that we have globally, and particularly in Australia, that's a really exciting package that's been undertaken.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable Minister for the Environment, Tasmania attracted more than 1.3 million visitors last year. Eco-tourism has become a major contributor to our state's economy. However, concerns are growing about the impact of increasing visitor numbers on the environment. An example of this is Maria Island where visitor numbers have almost doubled since 2019-20, going from 38,000 to a record-breaking 74,000 in 2024-25, placing greater demand on infrastructure. What measures is the government taking to assess and manage the risk of over-tourism? Is there a strategy in place to balance continued visitor growth with the protection of local community and Tasmanian natural assets?

Mr ABETZ - Thank you very much, Professor Razay, for that question. It's sort of encompasses a whole host of government areas, and there is no doubt that Maria Island has been put under some pressure. As I understand it, there have been some developments there in recent times. The issues for Maria Island, for example, and our national parks is a matter for minister Duigan as Minister for Parks.

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The tourism aspect, and there's no doubt that tourism is very important, we do have a nature-based tourism strategy, I'm advised, published by Tourism Tasmania, so I assume that's available on the website. Tasmania has a whole host of offerings and eco-tourism clearly is one of them. You know, mountain bike riding is another, our heritage buildings another. We have a whole lot of attractions, be it MONA as well, shortly we're going to have a chocolate experience out at Claremont, and so the list goes on. As a state, we have to ensure that all our offerings are kept to a very high level to ensure that our reputation is maintained, and if I can go to my area and that of - let me go around the table - Mr George and Ms Woodruff as well, namely Bruny Island, that is a loved destination for tourists and it is hugely under pressure without having sufficient disposal facilities, which we are looking at and working on. So, fully take the point of Professor Razay. It encompasses a whole lot of areas of government and we may - and I just bounce this as a hypothetical at this stage, but we may have to look at what we charge for visitation to certain areas to get some degree of cost recovery if we can. That is something I might be talking about with my Treasurer's hat on. I suppose the point I'm trying to make these matters - Parks, Tourism, Treasury. Secretary, do you want to add anything?

Mr JACOBI - The only thing I would add, Mr Razay, is that the draft Maria Island management plan is due for release very soon. It's currently with the Commonwealth government to be approved. That process was over three years in the making, and it significantly looked at all the issues around visitation and growth on the island and sustainable use. I think the plan has landed in a very good spot. It very much acknowledges the importance of preserving the experience in places like Maria Island, and the plan will set the framework for how that is managed forwards.

Mr FERGUSON - This may be a question that you'd be happy for the director and your secretary to respond to.

Mr ABETZ - Nearly always, I think.

Mr FERGUSON - Because I can see that the policy areas and the enforcement areas are both highly relevant in relation to Recycal. It's located around the state. In my electorate of Bass, it's located at Rocherlea-Newnham area. I see it as a good business, good people. But they've had challenges. Even with modern facilities that are only recently constructed and permitted, they've had fire at Rocherlea. I think they've had a fire in the south as well, but I just want to focus on Rocherlea. There's was also the issue with the shredder and concern around dust.

Ms FINLAY - I'd say that this is a Dorothy Dixier.

Mr ABETZ - No, it's not.

Mr FERGUSON - What we need is respect and allow members to ask their questions.

Ms FINLAY - You should have longer legs, minister Abetz.

CHAIR - Mr Ferguson, please get back to your question.

Mr FERGUSON - They've also had issues around the shredder. There was concern about lead entering the atmosphere in dust, and there was public health testing.

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My question is both in enforcement and in policy. How can we ensure that we have strong and successful businesses that are charged with the responsibilities to help us recycle and look after our waste in an appropriate way, while also managing the public health interest that's at play so that we can all win and that these outcomes can be successful for all concerned?

Mr ABETZ - A very good question and, for what it's worth, I've paid, I think, two visits to Recycal at Rocherlea to get an understanding of their issues and their waste product, which is called flock.

Mr FERGUSON - From the shredder, it's called flock, yes.

Mr ABETZ - The shredder is one huge item and very impressive how it shreds up cars et cetera. It's just astounding. But with that said, let's go to the expert.

Ms MURDOCH - A rather large topic and something I'm very passionate about, I have to say. To be honest, it's kind of timely after us issuing new EPNs (environmental protection notices) to the Rocherlea site yesterday. In regard to, this is something that the EPA over the last 12 months has got a focus on. If you focus on lead in dust as the first process, we've obviously got monitoring happening around Nyrstar with that as well. The lead in dust issue was also at Rocherlea. For Rocherlea, for the first time, and with our colleagues in Public Health agreeing with this, we have - because there is no lead in dust standard nationally. I'm working with my heads of agency across the country to do that. But we have implemented the use of what's called the Luft Standard for the first time in Australia. It's the first standard to be used for lead in dust. Tasmania are leading the way here. That has been imposed yesterday.

Mr ABETZ - Luft - a good German word.

Ms MURDOCH - That is the first time that site will be regulated against a standard for lead in dust. We've required lead monitoring stations to be put in and meteorological.

We also have - so for the shredder to restart, which we understand the importance of that, we've got a stockpile on site that does need to become [inaudible] the shredder is not to start until the monitoring is in place and we have this. We have also established shutdown limits: that if the air quality monitoring actually reaches those triggers, there will be an immediate shutdown on site.

Our aim over the next 12 months is to actually get that site to within the requirements. We've got a stockpile reduction plan in place to get that massive fire risk off the site to a sustainable 6000 metres cubed of metal to go through the shredder on site. There will be no new waste accumulating for the shredder on site until that has stockpile is into a sustainable limit.

We have worked really hard with Recycal to get this site. We understand the importance of the business as well. But it has to be environmentally compliant. And so, this is a massive steps change in how we're regulating in regard to lead in dust and human health. And this site will, hopefully, in 12 months will be in a very different state.

Ms FINLAY - I want to loop back onto my questions in regards to the report and government response. The information around the consultation group. How many times has that group has met since the report was finalised?

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And I wasn't clear about whether the consultation in terms of responding to those recommendations was going to be broader than that committee, that reference group. And is there a scheduled set of meetings? Do they meet in a scheduled rotation, or is it random? What are the expectations of how often that group will meet in response to those recommendations?

Dr RUSSELL - The reference group met twice during the independent review period. And that was specifically in relation to providing input into that independent review, so it was an almost an out-of-session meeting and the minister wasn't directly involved because to try and maintain an independence of that review.

They also had opportunity to participate in the broader consultation set out in the independent review, which included a workshops and ideas wall, written submission process and individual meetings if requested. There was a lot of opportunity for those groups to consult, in addition to the general public.

Since the report was tabled in March, I think it was at the end of March, the reference group has met once in April. And the core topic of conversation during that meeting was the independent review findings and the various views around the table. A summary of that meeting is published on the ReCFIT website.

Ms FINLAY - The minutes are published to the website?

Dr RUSSELL - It's a summary of the meeting, a high-level summary of the meeting and what was discussed. The specific minutes aren't publicly available.

Ms FINLAY - Is there information in the minutes that would prevent them from being publicly available? I know there's a lot of other reference committees and other committees that do publish their minutes. Is there a reason why these minutes aren't published?

Dr RUSSELL - As you would be aware, one of the recommendations in the independent review was to look at the governance model around climate change and decision making. The government, when they tabled the review, did commit at that point in time to look at the terms of reference of the reference group and consider how that might be strengthened. One of the suggestions is to look at papers and minutes being publicly available in that context.

Ms FINLAY - Part of my question was also about the meeting rotation going forward, and a comment about the reference group as it is now and the proposed legislative climate advisory panel. Whether you see those as interchangeable and transferrable, or whether they're going to be significantly different?

Dr RUSSELL - I think that's something we might have to work through with not only the reference group, but potentially and without wanting to step out of the bounds with whoever might be the next minister. At this point in time, we've got the reference group established. The government has committed to looking at the terms of reference in relation to that reference group in response to recommendation 1 in the independent review. I think we just need to work through what that looks like.

Ms FINLAY - One of the questions that I've been asking is about the schedule of meetings going forward.

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Dr RUSSELL - Yeah, so that's currently in the terms of reference. I think it's scheduled to meet three to four times per annum. It was just a weird year last year because of the independent review process.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, you made, quite rightly, a reflection on climate being across all of government. I'm interested in the restructuring and that climate ends up going to State Growth. It sort of fit with Energy and it made sense that it was there. But it would actually, based on the document that you tabled and showing how many different areas of responsibility it is, it would have, for instance, made more sense to maybe go to DPAC. Is there a confidence in government of the resourcing and the positioning of climate, that it will continue to be able to play its role across all of government in an appropriate way, given this restructure and also the reduction in the budget allocation?

Mr ABETZ - Well, given that the Premier's in charge of machinery of government matters, I'm sure the government has full confidence in its allocation.

Ms FINLAY - It seems contrary to the statements made in terms of how important it is. Perhaps it's a reflection on the importance of previous ministers or the Premier around climate. But given it is a whole-of-government area of responsibility and importance to Tasmania, as the now sworn-in minister, would you give further consideration to its positioning within government? As minister, do you feel confident with the resource allocations that have been made to climate?

Mr ABETZ - Look, as it stands, more than confident in the Premier's determinations, which, of course, Cabinet endorses, in relation to its allocation. And the allocation of funds is, like all budget allocations, a Cabinet decision. And, it might surprise you, I support Cabinet decisions.

Ms FINLAY - Just circling back to the conversation that I opened up this - you're happy to make comments and reflections around Cabinet in this area. A Cabinet decision would have been to approve the legal fees to the former environment minister, yet you're silent on that. It was a Cabinet decision. You've indicated that it was a Cabinet decision. You've indicated that you knew about it when you were a member of Cabinet. My question to you earlier was, was it relevant to this portfolio? Are you now in a position, given your comfort in reflecting on Cabinet, to confirm that?

Mr ABETZ - You're trying to bring two things together which logically do not flow, and I've got nothing further to say on that.

Ms Finlay - They do logically flow, minister.

Dr WOODRUFF - It was a good question. Under section 42ZA of the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act* (EMPCA), the director may require any information to be provided added as a condition of an environmental licence. Will you undertake to vary environmental licence conditions if florfenicol is approved for full use to require the real-time notification of therapeutic quantities to be provided to the EPA?

Ms MURDOCH - I'm very aware of that clause. No matter how I apply that clause, which I'm sure my legal people will tell me, I still have to apply that clause and ensure that, in doing so, I'm complying with other legislation as well. So I can't just willy-nilly request stuff.

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Even if I do get reporting, the receipt of information and its release also has to comply with legislation. Even if I asked for that, number one, would it be factually correct at the time? What we've seen this year, we'd say no. And would I be able to release that? I'd suggest also no, not legally. I am very aware of the legislation and the clause. I think I've answered this question three times. I am, at this stage, not looking to introduce that requirement to therapeutant use.

Dr WOODRUFF - Can you just clarify, when you said other legislation, what other legislation are you talking about that would bind you or prevent you from doing what I've just said that 42ZA of EMPCA can do?

Ms MURDOCH - Obviously, there is anti-competitive legislation. There's also RTI legislation which I do have to comply with, that legislation.

Dr WOODRUFF - You also have reasonable discretion under section 23AA of EMPCA to make environmental monitoring information available. I acknowledge that you have to consider whether or not information is appropriate to be exempt under the *Right to Information Act*. But currently the information is made publicly available at the end of the residue monitoring program, so I don't know how providing the information at the beginning of the monitoring program would be in violation of the act. And just so you understand, I'm not talking about the intended amount of florfenicol that would be used, but the actual amount that has been used, which companies would know as soon as they've used it.

Ms MURDOCH - I'm not sure how to answer that question differently. My answer is the same. REMI, absolutely, you're correct. We have that and you'll see that we release - we don't have to do active disclosure on waste, but like - and we're actively looking how we can release more information under the Release of Environmental Monitoring Information (REMI) to minimise, because we've already had 37 RTIs this year. It's to support the clause you read out. We've got a portal on our website that people can apply through there. And we release information through that portal. And anyone can search that portal to see what information we've released.

But, as you are absolutely correct, I think you'll find that what that clause states is that we do have to give consideration to, yes, RTI processes and consideration of not disclosing commercial information. So, I have to apply that, which we rigorously apply. And my legal team assist me in that.

Dr WOODRUFF - The question still remains. The question is: given that you do ultimately provide that information and make it available at the end of the monitoring period, why can't you require companies to provide the amount to you at the beginning of the period before you've done the monitoring, but after they have put the florfenicol through feed into the waterways? Why can't you require that through an environmental licence to happen?

Ms MURDOCH - I don't require it. I'm not going to use it in a regulatory sense at that stage. I'm not requiring it for a purpose that I don't need, number one. I'm struggling to understand why you're wanting me to require it at this time when I couldn't release it under law anyway, to be honest, probably, if I had it because of those reasons around other legislation, I'm releasing it within a three-month period.

I'm struggling to understand what the issue is, to be honest. And I'm not requiring it at the start. I'm not going to change our process because it's supporting our regulatory process;

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we're getting timely information out to the public. I'm not going to do that. I don't know how many times I need to answer this question.

Dr WOODRUFF - Why you would do it is because the EPA also has a commitment to transparency and honesty with Tasmanians, and because there's a void. And because the reflections and learnings from the emergency permit shows Tasmanians with an absence of information don't know what to read. They read a whole range of confusing and sometimes incorrect things. Surely, we want to prevent this happening by treating people with the respect that they deserve, getting the information at the beginning. Multinational corporations have got it. The CVO have got it. The EPA could get it, but you're not doing it. And people require this to happen if there were to be a permit -

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff, thank you. Your -

Dr WOODRUFF - Well, it was still the question, to ask the clarification. I mean, isn't that-

Mr ABETZ - It's more a comment, I think.

Dr WOODRUFF - But that is your duty, isn't it? Isn't that your duty as well, as the EPA?

Mr FERGUSON - Gee, you howl when other people ask for clarifying questions. Two sets of rules.

CHAIR - Mr George.

Mr GEORGE - This may be beyond your remit as a brand-new Environment minister, so perhaps to the EPA, if I may. The final version of the environmental standards for finfish farming was released more than two years ago and they rely heavily on a series of 11 technical standards to be developed by the EPA. These include baseline environmental assessments, broad-scale environmental monitoring, detailed sediment surveys, and so on. These technical standards have progressed very slowly. As far as we can tell, none has been finalised in the past two years. Few of them have commenced. This really raises the question that the EPA and the government constantly claim that this is world's best practice and world's best regulation. Why aren't they finished? Why haven't they been introduced?

Ms MURDOCH - Absolutely, and you're correct. The environmental standards do put out for the technical standards. When the finfish standards were put out, I don't think it was ever anticipated how complicated finalising the technical standards would be. What I can tell you is the timetable for completing these that we currently have. Why it ended up taking more time to get these done is that due to community interest in them, we've added a consultation phase as well. So my team actually develop up the draft standards, work with industry, and they also do community consultation on them. That, to be honest, has meant adding probably at least 6 to twelve months to process to go through that. So we've added rigour to this.

The soft sediment video surveys have been completed. That was the first technical standard and that requires current environmental licences to require all finfish farms to undertake the soft sediment surveys under pens, which we obviously utilise in our regulatory framework. The reef habitat surveys are the next-important one to be getting underway. We do

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have in our timeline there for that to be available for consultation in 2026. We've also commenced the technical standard for TPD and O.

I have five people in my scientific team. Obviously, florfenicol has consumed us over summer. Dr Raymond Bannister obviously has been a little bit offline doing the risk assessment and things as well. It is a matter of balance. But what I can absolutely outline is what we're doing is prioritising the standards that all inform our regulatory framework, but obviously the reef standard is really important for us to get in and so is TPD and O followed by water quality. We've prioritised in order of how we will use those to regulate. They are underway, but I have a team of five and it's taking longer to get them done as well because we're involving that consultation process as well, Mr George.

Mr GEORGE - It seems like you don't have enough resources to do this. They are important things. For instance, when will - I mean, therapeutant management - that's one of the technical ones. That would seem to be absolutely top of the list at the moment, broad-scale environmental monitoring programs. How long is it going to take to get these 11 technical standards in place? What's your target dates for getting it all done? Accepting the fact that you've had an unusual year.

Ms MURDOCH - But also each of them take a long time to do to get them right. 2028 is our timeline to have them all completed. What I will say, though, whilst we're still waiting for the technical standards, within the licences themselves - so for instance, you mentioned the environmental monitoring and water quality, that is still all happening. It's not that it's not happening. So under Baseline Environmental Monitoring Programs (BEMP) so all that water quality monitoring is all still being done and being required. The standard just hasn't been written. This is no indication that this work isn't happening; the sediment surveys, all of those are happening, it's just we don't have the standard in place. I don't want to give any impression whatsoever that this isn't being looked at.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, in February, Worksafe Tasmania stated that respirable crystalline silica levels are well below harmful thresholds following preliminary testing at the TAM site. Can you confirm what the harmful level of respirable crystalline silica dust in the general open environment is? Is it particle sizes of 10 micrometres or less? Five, four or three micrometres? What is the actual number or measurement that your office and the EPA use?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, such an easy question. I'll hand it over.

Ms MURDOCH - Just in regards - are you happy if I?

Ms ONG - Yes.

Ms MURDOCH - Through you, minister. I might hand over to Cindy Ong to answer that one.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, of course. Whoever is best qualified.

Ms ONG - Thanks for the question. Currently there is a Tasmanian standard of 100 milligrams per cubic metre, under the Tasmanian Environmental Protection Policy for air of 2004. TAM implements a standard of 10 milligrams per cubic metre - this is one-tenth of

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the usual limit that we apply to particulates in the air. They do that in recognition of the material that they're handling at their facility at Wynyard.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, thank you to you and the director for your previous answers on my question about Recycal, particularly in the north. I appreciate those issues that are being tackled. What I'd ask you to do, as we go forward, is a commitment that you and/or your department from a policy, not an enforcement point of view, but from a policy and business support point of view, keep an active mind to the question of how can government departments, like NRE, strongly support those enterprises that we rely on to provide our recycling needs, while also meeting their environmental responsibilities. Because if we were to lose one of those businesses, it really does compromise the state's ability to look after our waste.

My question, however, is on Recycle Rewards. I'd like to hear from you an update on what's been a very positive program developed by previous ministers Jaensch and Oglivie.

Mr ABETZ - In relation to Recycal, I'll take that on board and the importance - and I often have a little phrase that I use to departmental officials, that we should try to facilitate rather than frustrate and if we can somehow get a path that that's the best approach. But look, in relation to Recycle Rewards, I have had great fun with my grandson putting the bottles and bits and pieces through and seeing the \$0.10 rewards coming up. But Recycle Rewards has been one of Tasmania's most successful environmental initiatives. We're celebrating the Tasmanian - with the community, particularly for World Environment Day, for officially reducing littered containers by an incredible 50 per cent. If there was something to look at, it seems to be the Recycle Rewards.

According to the department annual litter survey, drink containers counted in the 2025-26 survey are down 50 per cent since 2024-25, and that's broken up: soft drink cans down 61 per cent; beer cans, 58 per cent; and plastic bottles, 48 per cent. Since launching on 1 May, more than 130 million eligible containers have been returned through the scheme, putting millions of dollars back into the pockets of Tasmanians while delivering real environmental benefits. The scheme now operates through 46 refund points across the state, supported by mobile collection points, with around 85 per cent of Tasmanians able to access a refund point within 10 kilometres of their home. It's working exceptionally well and more than 60 direct jobs have been created through it. Over 600 charity, schools, sporting clubs and community groups have registered as donation partners, and more than \$310,000 has already been donated through the scheme. The success of the scheme has exceeded expectations, and Tasmania has had the fastest uptake of any state, demonstrating strong participation from households, schools, businesses and community groups right across the state.

The environmental benefits are significant, and Recycle Rewards was established to reduce litter and increase recycling and that clearly has been the case. A great practical example of this is Hazel Brothers in Leslie Vale diverting thousands of tonnes of recycled glass from landfill each year by producing synthetic glass sand, so that's being reused at its resource recovery facility. The material is processed into a high-quality sand substitute that reduces reliance on virgin quarry sand and supports more sustainable resource use in Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Just before we move on, we are at the end of the rotation, so if the committee wants to we can have a quick break for morning tea now, or we can go for a couple more minutes before we get closer to 10.30 a.m. Okay, let's take a quick break. Just a reminder because breaks taken have to be made up. Let's be as quick as possible. Thank you.

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The committee suspended from 10.25 a.m. to 10.26 a.m.

CHAIR - Minister, you'd like to clarify and add some more information to previous questions and answers?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. The Director of the EPA has further information for Mr Garland.

Ms MURDOCH - Through you, minister. Mr Garland, we've assumed you were talking about the Stennings Road facility that you were particularly after. For 2025-26, the fees were \$24,803.68, and 2026-27, \$25,334.24. Just in relation to fees, though, the EPA doesn't retain those fees. They go straight into - we don't retain any of that money -

Mr ABETZ - Into consolidated.

Ms MURDOCH - Thank you, Treasurer. Into consolidated revenue.

Ms FINLAY - Chair, interested in the - minister, in the table that was document - I am hesitant in using the reference to the former minister misleading and perhaps it being tricky to accept the information now that it's in front of us, what was presented at the time that she was speaking to the motion and in fact what's been distributed here. If you read the fine, fine, fine print at the end: 'I acknowledge and respect that it was suggested that it was a point in time,' but in fact the point in time was 2023. Note that the list was compiled when the action plan was released in 2023. That's some time ago now.

Minister, I'm hoping that you'll be able to table an updated schedule given that you were committed to tabling this with an additional column which for each of the items identifies the current funding allocation, given that there's been significant cuts to the overall budget and particularly to the climate budget, recognising that a lot of these are across other departments, so what the current allocation is, and additional rows for any new projects that might be there given that we're in 2026. Is that something that you commit to doing, minister?

Mr ABETZ - I won't commit to doing it, but I will take it on notice to see what the workload that creates from a departmental point of view. Happy to take it on notice, but -

Ms FINLAY - The information must be available in terms of -

Mr ABETZ - You are making that assertion, and if it is freely and quickly available, then I'm sure the department can provide it. I'm just concerned about resource, that's all.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. I just want to clarify, you're taking on notice that it might take time to populate the table, not that you couldn't find the information as Treasurer. The information you would understand will be clearly available. Are these things funded or not and to what level and what additional projects are there? Thank you for taking that on notice.

Just another piece of information that I'd like clarified. I'm really interested in this report and the government's response to the report and the timeliness of that and the engagement around that. There was a comment that legislatively it's required that that committee meet three times a year, I think it was three or four times a year. I note in reviewing the publicly available information that there were no meetings between, I think it's August 24 and 26.

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Can you, Minister, confirm that the committee has actually met? The department, the government, has met the expectations of convening meetings of that committee consistent with the requirements of legislation?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I can't. Not within my knowledge or remit.

Dr RUSSELL - Thank you for the question. The reference group meeting: there is an overall sense that we try and meet three to four times a year. During the year that the independent review was in play, and we were consulting, we were ensuring the reference group had an ability to engage in the independent review without having any departmental or ministerial focus. They met twice during that period with the independent reviewers specifically. Outside of those years since there has been other timeframes which have not enabled the climate change reference group to meet. As soon as the independent review period was finished, we scheduled a meeting as soon as we were able to. For example, election periods and caretaker periods. The reference group wouldn't meet.

Ms FINLAY - For the period that you've indicated through the review that it didn't meet, was that a decision of the committee or a decision of the department or minister?

Dr RUSSELL - It was the decision of the department to try and keep the independent review process separate to the departmental administrative arrangements.

Ms FINLAY - I'm interested: you sent us to a link on the website, and I appreciate that, of the activity statement. The purposes of the previous questions were about understanding the action plan now won't be updated until 2028. There's some significant time that will lapse between now and then. The previous one finished in 2025. Going and having a look at the activity statement, there doesn't seem to be any new activities, new dates, new implementations for the dates between 2025 and 2028, which makes it appear as though that comes to a halt. Can you explain why that gap would be there? This is not a question to you, minister, but I'm assuming you can't explain that.

Dr RUSSELL - The action plan was initially put in place and released. Taking a step back: the act was amended in 2022; there was a series of measures put in place. In a perfect world, that's a five-year cycle and you would take your time to implement those over time. In reality, what happened was that there was a requirement which was changed on the floor of parliament to release the action plan within six months of the act being enacted, in addition to releasing six sectoral Emissions Reduction Resilience plans and also a climate change risk assessment.

The way that we have managed those measures is that we committed to the action plan. The action plan, as we've said, has 98 actions across government. Some of those actions included the measures that were in the legislative changes, for example, the sectoral emissions reduction resilience plans. There are a number of actions within that action plan currently, which will just be continuous and ongoing or in progress. For example, we flagged the climate change projections project in the action plan and it's also informing the sectoral plans, and it will also inform the next action plan.

We have a series of plans and activities around that. If you can think about the action plan as the high-level piece, the sectoral plans sit underneath that, and they also have funded actions within them and future funding priorities, and also the risk assessment as well and the

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response in relation to that. A number of those programs will roll out across the next few years until 2028.

Ms FINLAY - Is that consolidated in one place, so the action plan was a consolidation of activities and things to be met in a period of time? It was easy to go and see that and understand what was expected between those dates up to 2025. It feels as though in the community and stakeholders, there's a void of understanding of what commitments there are between 2025 and 2028. Is that consolidated anywhere where it's easy to understand and interrogate, to give confidence to the community that there are ongoing actions and there isn't a gap in that period of time?

Dr RUSSELL - That's a really good question. We have the activity statement which we report annually. In the next activity statement, we'll be able to do a status report on the sectoral Emissions Reduction Resilience plans, because they will have been in play for around 12 months, probably 18 months by that time, and the outcomes of the climate change risk assessment and we'll be able to identify those points. All the actions that are continuing within the action plan.

Ms FINLAY - And the date that that will be due?

Dr RUSSELL - We do it on a financial year basis. It will be in the coming months, but there's a requirement to table that activity statement. Having said that, there's no timeframe. It just has to be an annual requirement.

Dr WOODRUFF - At the last round of questions you chose not to answer a question about whether the EPA has responsibility to Tasmanians to be as transparent as possible about the use of antibiotics being used in the environment. You said to the minister, 'I don't want to answer that question'. Do you want to rethink that and provide us an answer now, please? The question is to the director of the EPA, as the independent body.

Mr ABETZ - It is but I'm getting towards the level of badgering the witnesses and officials. It's okay to do that to me, but asking witnesses to reconsider answers, et cetera, is getting very close to the line. That is not as respectful as we might be. But over to the director.

Ms MURDOCH - Through you, minister. Yes, thank you.

I want to answer this because I do not want that premise to be unanswered on the record.

Dr WOODRUFF - Good.

Ms MURDOCH - Yes. The transparency of the EPA is absolutely critical. How you judge me, how I do my job, I can't control that. What I can guarantee is I will do my job to the very best of my ability. That includes ensuring that any regulation that we are responsible for that we will administer that to the highest standards as possible. Any decisions that I make will be absolutely based in science, will be completely evidentiary-based and will be transparent and factually correct.

To put on the record that I don't support transparency. I'm sorry, that is an attack on my integrity, and I don't think it is appropriate for that to be stated to me at this table.

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Dr WOODRUFF - Well, I think unfortunately the director is taking it personally. It was in relation to section 23AA.

CHAIR - Order.

Dr WOODRUFF - Please, I have the call. It's in relation to section 23AA of EMCA. That was where the genesis of this question came from, which does provide an opportunity for the director to make an environmental licence that would require environmental monitoring to give information to Tasmanians about florfenicol.

I have another question, director. Last year at this table, you confirmed that Huon Aquaculture has applied to lift the biomass in their Storm Bay lease to stage 2 of the TPDNO cap. Was their application successful? If so, which leases are now allowed to operate under the stage 2 cap? Has Tassal also made an application for their Storm Bay leases?

Ms MURDOCH - Thank you. I can absolutely answer that question. In regard to - yes, they did apply. Huon met the requirements to progress from stage 1 to stage 2 in December 2025. Obviously, as you're probably aware, to meet that they need to show in compliance with their licence conditions and that they had been at the top of there previous.

Tassal have not applied. They have not yet reached their top of stage 1, and Petuna are not using any of their allocated TPDNO, in that.

With the increase of Huon to their second stage, we still haven't yet met the cap of stage 1, if that makes sense of all the companies.

Sorry, I'm just struggling to find - so I don't waste your time, may I just find the leases for you and read that back in, Dr Woodruff?

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes, sure. What do you mean?

Ms MURDOCH - I just need clarification as to each lease.

Dr WOODRUFF - Just clarifying. In relation to that, there's been an application by Huon -

Ms MURDOCH - It was approved in December 2025.

Dr WOODRUFF - Approved to move to stage 2. On what basis was that approved, given that there's already been a lot of science about the levels of pollution going in being dangerously high for the ecosystem of Storm Bay, and given the El Niño, which is on the horizon, which is predicted to be a Godzilla El Niño with warming waters. Are you not concerned about the impact this will have on the ecosystem - jellyfish blooms, toxic algal blooms, et cetera?

Mr ABETZ - First of all, is there evidence that it is dangerously high? Some of these adjectives load the questions and make it very difficult for the officials to answer.

Dr WOODRUFF - The original Storm Bay modelling did show that, minister, the scientific panel.

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Ms MURDOCH - I'm comfortable. I think with regard to this, as you're probably aware, the total permissible, the TPDNO - can I please use that instead of reading the whole thing out all the time - for Storm Bay was determined by the EPA director in January 2025. That original decision of the phase 1 to phase 2 TPDNO was made in January 2025 and that was that two-stage approach. That approach was done with biochemical modelling by CSIRO, so it's completely scientifically based with regard to that. That is the level of TPDNO that ecosystem could - that's what CSIRO's monitoring -

Dr WOODRUFF - Without a baseline which was always the critical issue with Storm Bay. But yes, please go on.

Ms MURDOCH - The conditions to enable Huon to go up to theirs was that they had to have utilised at least 80 per cent of their stage 1 TPDNO for several consecutive rolling 12 months, which they obviously could demonstrate.

We, obviously, do water-quality monitoring in those areas as well but the fact is this was based on a scientific agreed approach that was signed off on in 2025, and we've followed the regulations with regard to making that decision.

Dr WOODRUFF - That wasn't in the context of an El Niño with the warming waters, so that's the problem, isn't it?

Ms BURNET - I just want to make the point, because I have read about the impending El Niño as well that climate change is real. I thank you for tabling the information I asked for before.

I note in the budget papers that there's very little reference to climate but you've mentioned in the information table 98 actions your government is undertaking through the Climate Change Action Plan. According to the activity statement published a couple of months ago, only 16 are complete despite your Climate Change Action Plan expiring.

Given the output for ReCFIT on table 11.2, page 262, output group 7 of the Budget, the estimated outcome was less than budgeted - a bit of a saving there - for 2025-26, so it's \$8.5 million.

Over the forward Estimates, it's down to \$1.74 million, so from budgeted in 2025-26 \$9.5 million down to \$1.74 million in the forward Estimates. Where is the money in the Budget to fund the remaining 82 actions which are incomplete?

Ms PINTO - I thank you member for the question. What I might do is talk through a little bit of the what is in the papers just to understand them a bit better and then to talk through the approach for addressing the actions that we still have as a part of the action plan, noting Dr Russell's note earlier to the other honourable member that a lot of the actions we have are ongoing and involve other agencies across government.

In relation to the amounts that are in the budget chapter, the member noted the \$8.5 million in this current year and a reference to there being some funding that we may not have expended in this financial year. That's not unusual that that can occur and there is -

Ms BURNET - It's \$1 million out of a tiny budget really.

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Ms PINTO - Yes, so what can occur with activities, and there are a number of activities that we've had during the year - I'll give you an example of some activities that are associated and the specific funding envelope I'm referring to is for the Climate Change Action Plan which had an allocation of \$4.5 million in the current financial year that we're in.

To date, we have spent just over \$3.3 million and that's been across a number of areas. I made reference a bit earlier to the committee, the fine projections work that is being done by UTAS, that comprises of that \$1.9 million, so I'm just giving you an example of what's included in that. We also have some other work that's occurring in the month that we are currently in at the moment. I'll give reference to a coastal program of funding for the Local Government Association, so that is another example.

Ms BURNET - I suppose, minister, it's really a question for you. The forward Estimates is \$1.74 million. I mean, it's a tiny amount. How will you prioritise this as a government?

Mr ABETZ - Well, I think you've just had an explanation provided to you for the variation in the figures and that answer stands. We were given the task by the parliament and you were one of them, member for Clark, that sent us off to an early election on the pretext of budget repair. There are consequences with budget repair and that means rightsizing and getting us back to, to use the term that environmentalists like yourself love and I support, and that is sustainability, and we need a sustainable budget as well as a sustainable environment.

As to the specifics in this particular area, I'm not sort of qualified to give a very specific answer, but the overall answer is that when you send the government out to an election on the basis of budget repair, I would have hoped that these Estimates would have brought up some opportunities for rightsizing and I don't think anybody in any of the committees I've sat in has actually come up with an idea as yet, but I live in hope.

CHAIR - Professor Razay.

Prof RAZAY - Thank you very much, honourable minister. Launceston and the north of Tasmania are concerned about the worsening air pollution from wood heaters, smoke in the winter and also bushfires in the summer. This is because of the topography of the Tamar Valley, where the air circulation is limited, which has impacts on health, such as higher levels of chronic lung disease and lung cancer, but also on the agricultural sector. For example, blueberries are sensitive to smoke, as is the wine industry.

I know that EPA are monitoring air quality including PM 2.5 and 10. I would like to look at what the level of these are, and are you concerned that there is worsening air quality in the north, and if so what's the reason? Because it's important to try to address it as we have addressed them in the past where, in 2001, we had a buybacks scheme which had made a significant improvement by replacing wood heater with air conditioning-

Mr FERGUSON - Voluntary buyback, yes.

Prof RAZAY - And that helped greatly in reducing lung diseases, for example.

Ms MURDOCH - Thank you, Dr Razay. In regards to are we seeing any exceedances or increase in those exceedances? So, in regards to PM 10, the number of days of exceedance is across 2023-24-

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Mr ABETZ - Sorry, for people like me, what does PM 10 stand for?

Ms MURDOCH - It's a national standard in regards to particulates in the air, and I've had this discussion with Dr Razay before and he understands this. So, there was no exceedances over those-

Mr ABETZ - Good to know somebody does.

Ms MURDOCH - Yes. Those three years of PM 10. In terms of PM 2.5, there was, in 2023, only one day of exceedance, two in 2024, and in 2025, three. We don't yet have the 2026 figures. There were only three days of exceedances of those limits in 2025.

Mr ABETZ - Do we have any clarity as to whether we believe that was from bushfires or from wood heaters? Excuse me asking a question, Chair.

Ms MURDOCH - I should have clarified. That is in regards to Launceston. Where we do this air monitoring, and this is why the air monitoring network upgrades are so important for us to keep this network contemporary, which is what we have funding to do. There was no exceedances in Hobart or Devonport at all, and so, it's only Launceston that has exceeded and it was only three days of that year. We'll continue to monitor, but at this point in time across those urban centres, we're not seeing that great an impact.

Prof RAZAY - But is it significant to make people worried about it?

Ms MURDOCH - Well, I don't think - obviously, our data is used by public health and that goes straight live to their - sorry, through you, minister - to their portal and they look at that data and issue if there are any health warnings associated with that. There's been minimal, as I understand, this year.

Mr ABETZ - Just before, I think the secretary might be able to answer something in relation to bushfires.

Mr JACOBI - Thank you, through you, minister. I thank the member for the question. It's important to also distinguish between bushfires and planned burns. Planned burns are conducted across the state annually by Parks and Wildlife Service, by Sustainable Timber Tasmania, by local government. All of those burns have what's called prescriptions in them, and some of the prescriptions often talk to air quality. The burn can only be conducted in certain climatic conditions to prevent health concerns emerging, to mitigate against the risk of impacts to grapes, or to agriculture. I think that's a really important context in terms of how those planned burns are managed and delivered, which helps to mitigate obviously the risk to health.

Bushfires are, however, a different scenario, you know, bushfires often occur in an uncontrolled environment, they occur in particular climatic conditions and all the departments and agencies do their best to suppress those fires as quickly as possible.

Mr ABETZ - Before we go to Mr Ferguson, the director has some answers for Dr Woodruff in her absence.

Ms FINLAY - You've had the government's allocation of questions, minister.

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Ms MURDOCH - Just finalising the questions around total permissible dissolved nitrogen output (TPDNO). I can confirm that stage 2 TPDNO increases apply to lease 261 Trumpeter and lease 281 Yellow Bluff.

Mr FERGUSON - We're on a roll with air quality. I've already asked about some issues in my electorate. Dr Razay, again, just like you did yesterday, stealing my questions on air quality, so I might continue with that, minister and to your team.

Good decisions that support our environment depend on having good data from our environment. Informed by these previous questions, would you please update the community on what are, not just investments, but also policies in environmental monitoring, and how can this support our enforcement body and monitoring body, the EPA's air quality monitoring network? And my second part of this question is how can we get that information into the public so that confidence in our independent regulator can grow?

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for that question. As the government, we are committed to ensuring environmental decisions are supported by high-quality science and that requires monitoring and transparent public reporting. That's why we continue to invest in the EPA's environmental monitoring capability, including a significant program to refurbish, replace and enhance Tasmania's air quality monitoring network.

In this Budget, we continue funding of the EPA's Air Quality Monitoring Network Refurbishment and Upgrade Program - don't you like these program titles - with \$350,000 allocated this year as part of a four-year \$1.4 million investment to modernise and strengthen the network.

The EPA operates Tasmania's statewide Base Line Air Network of EPA Tasmania (BLANkET) air monitoring network, which provides real-time information on particulate pollution such as smoke and dust. The network is complemented by reference-grade monitoring stations in Hobart, Launceston and Devonport, which support Tasmania's compliance with national air quality standards and provide trusted data for scientific analysis and public reporting. Information collected plays an important role during bushfires and planned burns, helping authorities monitor smoke movement and air quality impacts across communities. It supports advice issued by Tasmania Fire Service and public health authorities, particularly for vulnerable Tasmanians, such as people with asthma, respiratory conditions and other health concerns. I might leave it at that.

Mr FERGUSON - I would like to know if we can find a way to get that into the community. I think the EPA is constantly undermined by sectional interests. I'd like to see a way to grow confidence in our independent EPA. Maybe you take that on board.

Ms Finlay - Now you're stealing my questions. That's what I said this morning.

Mr ABETZ - That's a good comment.

Mr FERGUSON - If we can agree, let's agree.

Ms FINLAY - Out of the recommendations from the climate report, one area where all stakeholders are consistent is adaption and adaption planning. Given the significant fall-off of

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funding in the forwards for climate, how do you intend to prioritise adaption planning in the years to come?

Mr ABETZ - We are confident that we can do that with the amounts allocated.

Ms FINLAY - What are those amounts allocated to adaption planning?

Mr ABETZ - That'd be for you, Ms Pinto.

Ms PINTO - Certainly, and I'll refer to my colleague if we've got anything additional to make. Adaptation planning is, as you've pointed out, a really key and important element. I would note that it sort of sits embedded in a lot of the actions that are already being undertaken. One of the things that Tasmania has done, and dare I say it, compared to other jurisdictions, having come off the back of the 2021 legislation, and as my colleague referred to, the timeframes set to ensure we had actions, we've undertaken the risk assessment and the government's response to those risk assessments and also the six sectoral emission reduction plans.

Embedded in that has been a lot of adaptation work. As an example, again in my colleagues to the left, in the agricultural area, I'll use a perhaps an impolite way of referring to it, but our meat industry, cows and the like do - I don't know how to do it. My mother's going to be most upset with me if I -

Ms FINLAY - Emissions?

Ms PINTO - They emit in a very -

Mr GEORGE - Methane.

Ms PINTO - Yes, thank you. I was going to use perhaps more of a layperson's term, but it's not appropriate at the table. There are opportunities that we can adapt our agricultural practices. So, we have one of the initiatives. And that's one of the things with the funding that I was making reference to the other honourable member. A lot of that funding, we have passed over grants and it's then working with those organisations.

TasFarmers has received a grant and I'm going to call on my colleague because I never pronounce this. Well, it's seaweed that is -

Witness and committee members - Asparagopsis?

Ms PINTO - Thank you. I don't know if I'll ever get that one quite correctly. So, there is a lot of research that's been undertaken that utilising that and replacing that with other forms does reduce those emissions.

My longer answer to your question, apologies that I have done that, is there is a lot of adaptation work that is already being undertaken as a part of our plans. We will continue to look at that work, and we'll continue to engage across government as to how that is buried in.

I also make note of my colleague, the secretary of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, made reference just before to bushfires and planned bushfire management. That is

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continuously being adapted. I make note also, for the record, the comprehensive program that's undertaken with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community to ensure cultural burns is included in the way we adapt.

I'll go back to my earlier comment to the committee. This isn't just about one component or one part of government, being the Climate Change Office. This is a holistic approach. And I also note it is holistic across not just government, it's local government, it's community, it's businesses, et cetera. That is where we need to sit in terms of adaptation.

Ms FINLAY - I appreciate the answer to the question. Given the comments about bushfire, which is one of those risks, and also emissions reduction, outside those areas, there's also adaption required to support community safety and those sorts of things.

My interest is in - and it would be appropriately described not with an inflated adjective, but it's seriously declined funding for climate in the forward years. I get that there's program funding. The table previously distributed doesn't really help to understand that allocation. Adaption was identified as one of the key priority areas in those recommendations. Is it possible for you to outline or table, or have prepared a specific budget allocation response across all of those areas for adaptation work?

Ms PINTO - Again, I'll go back to the earlier comment that the funding that was allocated by the government, the Climate Change Action Plan funding as well as funding that was provided for the sectoral emission reduction plans, embedded in that is adaptation work. There is not a distinct - and again, as I noted earlier, there is allocations across government that is delivering adaptation outcomes.

It would be an extremely challenging task, should I say. And dare I say it, it would probably not be accurate to reflect how the government is investing across this because, again, I - on behalf of, and I've got an extremely competent and outstanding Climate Change Office, headed by Dr Sarah Russell. We have individuals there that are seeking on working in a partnering way to bring up the level of understanding, comprehension and responsibility across government, across local government, across business, across community. We've all got to be in this together. So, respectfully, that would be very challenging to do that, and I think I wouldn't probably have the resources to do that to a level of accuracy.

Ms FINLAY - That final comment is of interest and thank you and I appreciate and acknowledge the answer. I also appreciate the quality of the people in the team and the work that's being done.

But I suppose to you, minister, because it's unfair to go then to your colleagues, given the significant reduction in allocation of funding to the office - and we will get a more realistic indication from the updated table of investment in climate, how do you expect it is realistic to address the recommendations, particularly around adaptation, with the increasing demand, with such drastic budget reductions?

Mr ABETZ - I'll take that more as a comment rather than a question.

Ms FINLAY - It's a serious and genuine question. How on earth does the government expect to meet its responsibilities in addressing climate pressures when there's been such a drastic reduction in the Budget?

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Mr ABETZ - We believe that we can deal with these matters within the funding envelope.

Ms FINLAY - Do you believe in climate?

Mr ABETZ - I think we all believe in climate. It's been there from day one.

Ms FINLAY - OK, let's not be tricky with the question. You have just been sworn in as Environment minister. You're on the record challenging the thinking of many people around the pressures of climate change. Is your influence as Treasurer and your influence over the former minister reflected in these drastic cuts in the Budget?

Mr ABETZ - I can't see how this falls into this output in any way, shape or form.

Mr BAYLEY - My office has had contact regarding reports of unauthorised reclamation of land in the Derwent River adjacent to an industrial site at Derwent Park potentially involving contaminated materials. Can you confirm if this is an issue that you or your colleagues at the table are aware of? And is the EPA, the department or any other entity investigating?

Mr ABETZ - Well, I wasn't aware, but the EPA is aware, so I will hand over.

Ms MURDOCH - I might get Cindy Ong to answer because this is a live matter that I'm sure you realise we're dealing with.

Mr BAYLEY - Well, I've heard of it. I'd love to have it confirmed and some more details please, including who it is and what's going on?

Ms ONG - We are aware of those allegations, and we have been working with the council for some time now to gather the facts on what has happened. Most recently we've agreed with council to lead an investigation into that situation, and that's underway now.

Mr BAYLEY - Can you inform the committee about who's being investigated, what is the investigation? My office has been informed it potentially includes contaminated materials, including asbestos. Can you confirm that that's the case, and I guess in the interest of transparency, give us a little bit more detail?

Ms ONG - These are the facts that we're trying to establish now. But, yes, the allegations are around contaminants.

Mr BAYLEY - What's the contaminated material?

Ms ONG - This is what we're trying to establish, the exact nature of the contaminants.

Mr BAYLEY - In the interest of transparency and accountability, what's the EPA's intention in terms of public statements and informing the public about this particular issue?

Ms ONG - That depends on what the investigation finds. If we do find some breaches of the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act*, as a result of the allegations that have been put forward, we will make a public statement.

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Mr BAYLEY - How long do you expect that investigation to take? When do you expect to be in a position to make a statement?

Ms ONG - For this investigation, it's hard sometimes to give an indication of how long because you let the investigation take you where it takes you.

Mr BAYLEY - Can you tell us the address of the site or the name of the entity that's involved? I'm sure a lot of people, particularly in the Derwent Park-Lutana area, are really interested in this.

Ms MURDOCH - Because this is an active investigation, we want to make sure that we investigate appropriately and don't jeopardise if there's a case. I think what we've said is we're aware of it. We are absolutely investigating it at the moment, trying to determine what is the contamination and what is the extent and what we're investigating. So, it's live, we are absolutely doing that now, Mr Bayley. But I don't want to jeopardise that investigation by giving out too much detail at the table.

Mr BAYLEY - Just to confirm the information checks out, it is in relation to unauthorised reclamation of land in the Derwent River, is that correct? That's the allegation I'm hearing.

Ms MURDOCH - That's the allegation we're investigating, and it is absolutely live with us right now.

Mr BAYLEY - Just to be clear, I understand the contamination is asbestos, so it's a significant public concern.

Mr GEORGE - Over the 2024-25 summer, there was a mass outbreak of disease and salmon deaths with rotten salmon flesh washing up on the beaches on the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and Huon Estuary. Since then, total silence about what penalties have been imposed on the multinationals for regulatory breaches.

There must be regulations against allowing dead salmon to wash out of pens, failure to clean up salmon morts and allowing rotten salmon to pollute our beaches. In every other jurisdiction I've been in around the world, there is punishment. There are regulatory breaches that are prosecuted to reassure the public that the industry is held accountable, just like any land-based industry.

So, why is there no prosecution? And if there is, why is it delayed? Or are the salmon companies fighting back against prosecution?

Ms MURDOCH - Thank you for the question, Mr George. In regards to this matter, we have a statute, obviously, of three years under *EMPCA* to bring proceedings. This is absolutely being investigated, as I've said to you before, by the EPA. It's currently with my legal team. It's a complex case and we want to make sure, once we pass that on to the DPP, we have a case that the DPP can properly look at. In regards to this, it is still with my internal legal team, finalising briefs, determining if we need to follow any other lines of investigation. Once we have concluded that process, it will absolutely go to the DPP.

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We have a lot of other matters on foot as well, which my legal team and my investigations team are competently handling. It's not a matter of not progressing it; it's about getting an appropriate brief done and my team having the resource to be able to do that at that time.

Can absolutely guarantee the investigation will be closed out. So, there's nothing except us going through our due process here and, once we have completed that, we will absolutely forward the case brief to the DPP to make a decision as to whether prosecution will occur.

Mr GEORGE - Well, it's been 18 months now. How much longer is it going to take? Do you have a final date when you'd expect to be able to tell the Tasmanian public that you are proceeding through court?

Mr ABETZ - Through court? I think that'll be a matter for the DPP to determine.

Mr GEORGE - All right. Then when would you expect it to be in the hands of the DPP?

Ms MURDOCH - I can't give an exact date and, as you've just heard, we've got other investigations away as well. I can absolutely guarantee that my team will focus on this and ensure that it is provided to the DPP in a time that ensures our statutes do not lapse or anything. But it is absolutely on the list for my legal team, and it will get there as quickly as we can get the brief finalised.

Mr GEORGE - Right. So, those other cases -

CHAIR - Sorry, Mr George.

Mr GEORGE - are they salmon?

CHAIR - Mr George.

Ms MURDOCH - Well, it depends.

Mr GEORGE - No?

CHAIR - Mr Garland.

Mr GARLAND - Following on from my previous question, PM 10 is particular matter that are particulates with a diameter of 10 micrometres or less and PM 2.5 is 2.5 micrometres or less in diameter: It is critical that you understand this with the questions I'm asking.

In the response to the last question, there was no talk about respirable crystalline silica dust, there was no talk about harmful levels and no talk about particle size. A 2004 quantity standard of dust per cubic metre is irrelevant to the issue of respirable crystalline silica.

Regarding the TAM silica processing facility emissions stack, what types of particulate emissions are emitted out of the TAM emissions stack into the environment under the current EPA-issued permit? The managing director of TAM said they monitor any emissions that come out of the stack. Does silica dust come out of the emissions stack? And what are the minimum and maximum size of the particles that come out of the stack?

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Ms MURDOCH - I will hand over to Cindy to talk that through.

Ms ONG - It might be helpful if I give just a bit of a timeline which explains what we're measuring at that facility, if that's all right.

Mr GARLAND - Yes.

Ms ONG - Okay. So, Tasmanian Advanced Minerals commenced operations in 2008. At that time, after they commissioned the plant, stack tests were conducted. That tests the efficiency of the dust control equipment that they have in place, and that included particle size distribution.

As I said before, TAM has implemented 10 milligrams per cubic metre as a standard that they work to because that's what the facility's pollution control system is designed to achieve; and relative to the Tasmanian environmental protection air policy, it's one-tenth of that limit.

When TAM applied in 2019 for an increase in production, the EPA board assessed that and the conclusion of that was that those settings were appropriate. The board did recognise that respirable crystalline silica is a likely issue and they took that into account in their assessment.

You'll be aware, Mr Garland, that we have received some complaints and concerns from neighbours more recently, and since 2023. In response to that, we've been working with TAM ever since to clearly check and see that their emissions control equipment is working. What we've done, as a result of that, is gone over the records that we could obtain for previous monitoring from their continuous emissions monitoring system. We did find that there was an issue with maintaining a probe, which is part of that, which was likely leading to elevated readings at that time.

Another thing that we discovered is that they had a kind of inadequate means of being notified themselves when they got emissions over that 10 milligram per cubic metre limit that they're working to.

Since then, we directed TAM to undertake dust deposition monitoring at three boundary locations for three months. That happened in early 2024. And the results of that deposition monitoring were below what we call the adopted nuisance standard for deposited dust, which is 4 grams per square metre per month. So, they came in under that at all those sites across each of those three months.

We also required them to undertake another stack test in 2023. That's the test that checks whether the emissions control equipment is working. And that also demonstrated that emissions were below that 10 milligrams per cubic metre as a one-hour average.

The third thing that we required at that time is that they took the results from that stack testing in 2023 and conducted some air dispersion modelling, just to see what the impacts might be on the surrounding community. The predicted concentrations of particulate matter and also respirable crystalline silica comply with the relevant limits set out in an EPA Board statement of 2022, which concerns pollution design criteria.

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CHAIR - Time's expired. Again, I will allow all members, as I have all week, to clarify something with their question, but I won't allow new questions.

Mr ABETZ - Can I quickly suggest, were you going to provide further information? And if so, can that be provided on notice to Mr Garland?

Ms ONG - Yes, happy to.

Mr GARLAND - Thank you.

Mr FERGUSON - A quick review of the threatened species pages on NRE reflects that there are more than 650 species of plants and animals that are currently listed as threatened in Tasmania. It's obviously a concern, and I know that governments current and past have worked very hard to save species and help them to recover wherever possible. Would you outline how the Budget will support recovery and conservation efforts in relation to those species.

The second part of the question may be for your secretary. How do we best apportion limited funds in accordance with the risk of losing a species in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for our ecosystem? So, to state the obvious, we could all list probably a good half-dozen or more species that are top of mind. But with such a large number, how do we apportion the Budget so that the resource goes where the risk is?

Mr ABETZ - We've invested \$8 million in the Threatened Species Fund to be delivered over four years from 2024-25 to 2027-28. This dedicated fund is supporting practical conservation projects that deliver real outcomes for our threatened species. The fund demonstrates our commitment.

The investment is in addition to the substantial funding already provided by government to threatened species conservation. This includes ongoing support for flagship recovery programs such as the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program and the internationally recognised orange-bellied parrot program, which continue to play a critical role in securing the future of these iconic species.

The government also supports a broad range of threatened species outcomes through partnerships with Tasmania's three regional natural resource management organisations, private landholders, community groups, researchers and conservation organisations across the state. This investment is supporting habitat protection and restoration, species monitoring, conservation science, threat management and ongoing recovery actions.

As an example, the government continues to support recovery efforts for species such as the swift parrot, including habitat protection, improved ecological mapping and population monitoring. On King Island work is underway with partners to improve habitat and conservation outcomes for the endangered King Island brown thornbill and the critically endangered King Island scrub tit.

Trying to determine as to which ones get what amount of funding with limited resources, undoubtedly, we are guided by some good advice, secretary.

Mr JACOBI - Species listings are very dynamic. Situations change rapidly and we've seen that with Maugean skate. But one of the exciting things, I think, with the Threatened

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Species Fund has been that we've been able to deploy funding from that program, as the minister outlined, to rapidly respond to emerging threatened species issues.

The other probably most important thing, I think, to mention is that we have a dedicated Threatened Species team in my department and we recently appointed a director of Threatened Species to give appropriate relevance and attention to this matter. That has enabled us to work on a number of different programs across the department which are specifically addressing the prioritisation of threatened species. 'Prioritisation' is an important word in this space because you can't do everything for every species all at the one time. It is very much a case of aligning our actions with those of most importance and the draft threatened species strategy, which has been out for public consultation, it's a really important whole of government prioritisation tool which will guide our investment and our action.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, it was noted before that one of the clear partners, if not lead agencies in climate response, is local government. It's a really important partnership there, and I note that between 2023 and 2025 local government emissions reduction and climate resilience was funded through the action plan, but I can't see that there are any programs, grants or any other things funded now beyond 2025. Given how connected local government is to that work and that's where this funding comes from. It could be an error or an oversight that I can't see that, but I can't see where any ongoing work is for the implementation of those resilience plans that have been developed. Is that something that you could clarify for me, minister?

Dr RUSSELL - The Climate Change Office has been working with local government for a long period of time, and we have regular engagement with three regional climate change organisations represented around the state. The Local Government Association of Tasmania and the Climate Change Office have been working on the local government climate capability program, which you've been referring to, which was \$0.5 million in the action plan. That program has actually gone over a number of years and is about to finish up. As previously with local government, we continue to engage and work with them and meet with them as a key stakeholder and support them to implement their plans.

Ms FINLAY - But there's no specific allocation of grants or funding to support the implementation of the plans that have been developed?

Dr RUSSELL - Not at this point in time, no.

Ms FINLAY - Is it anticipated that there would be a call on funds to support the implementation of those plans?

Dr RUSSELL - We will always look to put forward future funding priorities to support all of our stakeholders to do their work.

Ms FINLAY - One of the things that I've been critical of over different outputs has been the reality of the Budget as forecast - I'm not asking you questions; I'm now asking the minister questions - it is very easy for the government to misrepresent the real costs of delivering services to Tasmania and the out-years are often reduced because things that are currently funded don't continue to be funded.

My question to you, particularly as minister, given that there's likely to be a call on funds to support local government to deliver their implementation plans, where would the money

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come from for that? Do you have an allocation? If there is not an allocation, why is it not an allocation, knowing that that money will be called on in the future?

Mr ABETZ - A whole host of questions in that one question. Local government might like to reflect on its responsibility as well and make a contribution in this area.

Ms FINLAY - That's a bit rough, minister. You know that local government do fund and prioritise this work.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay.

Ms FINLAY - I think it is rough, Chair, but historically it has actually been a partnered funding delivery in terms of these plans and responses. You have heard from your colleagues that it's likely that money will be called on, yet it doesn't appear in the forward Estimates. How do you explain, again, where the forward years are showing reduced amounts of money where you know there will be money required to deliver?

Mr ABETZ - Clearly a social media grab is being sought here by the member -

Ms FINLAY - You will note I haven't done any social media from Estimates this year. This is actually genuine and serious on behalf of Tasmanians that you would diminish a serious question because you as Treasurer -

CHAIR - Ms Finlay, please let the minister answer the question.

Ms FINLAY - He has by making a personal attack on me.

CHAIR - He was only three seconds -

Ms FINLAY - I'm offended by that and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr ABETZ - What?

Ms FINLAY - I'm offended by your suggestion that I ask you a genuine question simply for a social media grab where you can on record see that I've made no references to social media from Estimates at all this week because I've been working hard in Estimates. It is a genuine question that I expect a response from. As Treasurer and Minister for the Environment you intentionally diminish the out-years. How do you justify that?

CHAIR - The member was offended by your comment. I would ask you to withdraw, please.

Mr ABETZ - All right. The sensitivity of the member is noted.

Ms FINLAY - Get out of here. Without condition, withdraw your offence.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay, please.

Ms FINLAY - It needs to be unconditional.

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CHAIR - Minister, please withdraw without qualification.

Mr ABETZ - I have not been able to finish a single sentence without the member interrupting. What I was about to say given the sensitivity of the member -

Ms FINLAY - Get out of here, without condition. Withdraw your offence.

CHAIR - Minister, please.

Mr ABETZ - Given the sensitivity of the member, I will -

Ms FINLAY - Chair, this is not acceptable. I have taken offence. I expect a withdrawal without conditional commentary.

CHAIR - Minister, please withdraw without qualification.

Mr ABETZ - withdraw.

Ms FINLAY - Now answer the question.

Mr ABETZ - I have now finished the sentence, and I dare say that these interruptions have more than consumed your allocated time.

Ms FINLAY - It's not for you to choose that, that's for the Chair. I ask a question. How dare you as Treasurer intentionally reduce the out-years to make the budget look better than it is.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay, you can ask a new question?

Ms FINLAY - This is my question that I was offended by within it. It is as Treasurer and Minister in the environment.

CHAIR - The minister has apologised.

Ms FINLAY - This is the question. The question is how dare you reflect, reduce, intentionally reduced out-years in the Budget to make your Budget look better when you know those funds will need to be called on.

Mr ABETZ - The question is being asked in my capacity as Treasurer -

Ms FINLAY - And Minister for the Environment, I said, particular to this out-years, the out-years in this output are significantly -

Mr ABETZ - Another sentence that I have been unable to complete. The *Hansard* will now show -

Ms FINLAY - Because -

CHAIR - The minister has provided an answer,

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Ms FINLAY - He hasn't, Chair.

CHAIR - If the minister doesn't want to add anything else, we will move on to your final question.

Ms FINLAY - The table that was distributed earlier, I'm really interested in one of the allocations. There's over \$10 million allocated to a government boiler replacement program. Can you please detail the fossil fuel boilers that have been replaced as a part of that program and the reductions that have been achieved as a result?

Mr ABETZ - I personally would need to take that on notice unless somebody has the information. We will take that on notice, Chair.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay, are you happy to write that in.

Ms FINLAY - I am more than happy to write that in.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, perhaps through you to the EPA, just one more question. Thank you for confirming that there's an active investigation in relation to unauthorised reclamation of land on the Derwent River and its potentially contaminated.

Mr ABETZ - An allegation, just to be clear.

Mr BAYLEY - An allegation, absolutely. I accept that you're not going to go into any more detail about it. I completely accept that. I do think it's reasonable for me to ask when you became aware of this allegation and when the investigation commenced?

Ms MURDOCH - Through you, minister. We don't want to give you the wrong times

Mr BAYLEY - We are prepared to take that on notice, through you, minister?

Ms MURDOCH - Yes, absolutely. I will just get that read in for you.

Mr BAYLEY - Great, thank you very much, minister. I want to move on to land conservation, threatened species in particular. I don't want at this point to talk about the Threatened Species Fund or funding. I want to talk about the reservation of land, whether it be the State of the Environment Report, whether it be Swift Parrot Management Plan, it repeatedly recommends an expansion of the reserve estate, be the private or the public reserve estate. When it comes to the State of the Environment Report, when it comes to threatened fauna, it notes that the condition is poor and that the trend is getting worse. This is a significant issue, and money alone can't fix it. I note from the State of the Environment report that pressures including farming on land and in the sea, urban development and forestry are causing habitat loss, fragmentation and habitat degradation. It also highlights that pressures for terrestrial native birds, the most significant threat is the clearing of nesting and foraging habitats on public and private lands.

Habitat protection is a key action that needs to happen. Despite this, your threatened species strategy seems to be completely devoid of any level of commitment around action to protect land apart from on private land, and I'll come to that later.

PUBLIC

I want to ask the minister whether you can commit in the final threatened species strategy, a clear commitment to the protection of threatened species habitat on public land, including through formal reservation?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, and I thank the member for the question, the protection of threatened species habitat on reserved land is in essence achieved through the objectives of each reserve type. For a national park or a state reserve or any of those reserve tenures, we are required and obligated to meet the objectives for the reserve land.

Mr BAYLEY - That's why it's so valuable to expand the reserve estate.

Mr JACOBI - If it's simply a case of recognising that in the final strategy, I think that's a good suggestion. I'd be more than happy to take that on board - in terms of just acknowledging that our reserve estate is critical to the protection of habitat.

Mr BAYLEY - Well, I guess the question is more around - I think it's well accepted and acknowledged that the reserve estate is critical to protecting and safeguarding species - but the action that needs to happen, clearly, when the recommendation is around the loss of habitat outside of the reserve estate, the recommendation, including in the swift parrot recovery plan, is to expand the reserve estate to accommodate known swift parrot habitat and other habitats to increase the chances of survival. And the question really was for the minister about a commitment to that in the final strategy.

Mr JACOBI - If I can, through you, minister. I think this is a really good news story because conservation covenants on private land are absolutely fundamental to both climate change mitigation, which we've been talking about -

Mr BAYLEY - Secretary, with respect, my question to the minister was around public land. I do want to come to private land later, but it was explicitly around public land.

Mr ABETZ - Look, I personally will not make a commitment without having sufficient knowledge in this area.

Mr BAYLEY - And to the secretary, would you envisage a final threatened species plan making actual recommendations around the protection of additional habitat on public land and expansion of the reserve estate to accommodate and take in important areas of threatened species habitat?

Mr JACOBI - I would be prepared to acknowledge the fact that, depending on the type of land tenure - because I suspect you're talking specifically about forestry land or Future Potential Production Forest Land (FPPFL), for example - each of those different land types, whether it's protected under the *Nature Conservation Act* or administered under the *Forestry Act* or under the *Crown Lands Act*, there are different obligations imposed on various government departments and statutory authorities for the management of threatened species.

Mr BAYLEY - Which is clearly not working because it says here:

Urban development, forestry are causing habitat loss, fragmentation and habitat degradation.

PUBLIC

It's really clear that whatever prescriptions you refer to aren't adequate and things like the State of the Environment Report are picking up the fact that more needs to be done to protect habitats.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister: in response to that, I think one of the most important recommendations that came out of the State of the Environment Report was in relation to covenants on private land. And we have a very good news story, which I'm happy to share at the table today, in terms of the work that's being done and the investment that will be made over the next few years to significantly increase and expand covenants on private land in partnership with landholders.

Ms BURNET - Thank you and I thank Mr Bayley for bringing up the State of the Environment Report because there's a lot of things that need action from that report. Everything is lagging.

Minister, one of the recommendations from the State of the Environment Report was to urgently review the *Environment Management and Pollution Control Act*. It's an act which, much like the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBCA), has become a point of immense dissatisfaction and frustration amongst both environmentalists and industry alike. Yet two years later, there is still no sign of any such review. So noting the negotiations are currently underway in relation to bilateral arrangements from the amendments to the EPBC act, can you provide an indication on when the long overdue review of EMPCA might occur?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, and I thank the member for the question, if you will indulge me, I think this is a really important issue that goes to the EPBC act reforms and the bilateral agreements. So I would, if I may, just take a few minutes to talk through how those two things intersect and our approach to that.

At the time of the government's response to the State of Environment Report, the Commonwealth government was already progressing an ambitious EPBC act reform agenda through the Nature Positive Plan. Given the interrelationship between the EPBC act and EMPCA, the response from this government was to prioritise environmental legislative reforms. At the time we were focused on EMPCA because we knew that EMPCA is not perfect. The amendments that were introduced in 2021 to support the creation of an independent EPA were important, but we knew that there were other additional works that were required. EMPCA, as you probably are well aware, is a complex piece of legislation. It's very broad in scope and its application and the iterative amendments to such acts need to be very carefully considered, particularly in relation to the risk of unanticipated or undesired consequences. Of course, with the finite resources that we do have, we have to prioritise our investment, particularly in a small jurisdiction like Tasmania.

In collaboration with our colleagues in EPA and other departments, our department did a stocktake of recent amendments to the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994* (EMCA) and identified additional amendments or issues that had been raised in previous years, as well as options and priorities that were available to us to resolve those issues. That work, importantly, continues, but we have also identified a number of minor and more substantive legislative amendments including though non-statutory reforms that do in fact respond to the issues that have been identified. That is set in the backdrop of the EPBC reforms that are underway.

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To clarify, EMCA is a key law within Tasmania's resource management and planning system. It provides the framework for controlling pollution and managing environmental impacts, and whilst the Resource Management and Planning System (RMPS) sets the broader goals of sustainable development that underpins what the act is actually used to implement.

The EPBC reforms are very important in this context, and are very relevant to the EMCA reforms (that is, the national environmental reforms) that we might consider because they dictate how EMCA will or should need to change to ensure that Tasmania is accredited under the bilateral for environmental assessments and approvals.

Accreditation, as you would be well aware, is very important to enabling a single touch to approvals, so having a bilateral in place is important from a red tape reduction perspective and it avoids duplication of effort, and it also avoids unnecessary delays to sustainable development projects.

Since the government's response to the State of the Environment Report was released, we have been focused very much on providing advice and responding to the consultation to the federal Minister for Environment on the EPBC reforms. They have been provided to us with very ambitious goals and very ambitious timeframes. In many cases, we've had less than 20 days in which to respond to the National Environmental Standards.

Ms BURNET - Can I just ask a question to the minister about the finite resources? This is really important work. Minister, why isn't this a priority for your government to fund?

Mr ABETZ - It's another one of these loaded questions. There are a lot of priorities for the government. One of them is for a sustainable budget, which you voted for, sent us to an early election, and we are now delivering on that requirement, and it stands to reason that certain areas need to be rightsized. As to whether that specifically applies in this area I'm not able to comment on because I'm not as fully across the detail as possibly I otherwise might be.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, I've been listening to the debate of the use of florfenicol antibiotics in salmon farming and I feel that the main public concern is whether the fish they eat and salmon is safe and it's free from antibiotics because of the increased risk of antibiotic resistance.

Is the EPA monitoring or going to monitor the presence of antibiotics in the salmon that's on sale, because we heard that debate with the chicken meat a few years ago which led to improving the processing of meat and now it's labelled as 'hormone free' or 'antibiotic free' or 'there are no unsafe traces of antibiotics'.

Mr ABETZ - That has been a matter of very close monitoring and assurance to ensure that any fish that are harvested are free of traces. Any fish that are processed in Tasmania have to meet the standards of the federal export licencing, so that standard applies to that which is sold locally, so people can be absolutely satisfied there's only one, if you like, processing arrangement. There's not one for Tasmanian consumption and one for international consumption; it is the one process. As I understand it, after the administration of this antibiotic, there is a particular timeframe during which the fish cannot be harvested and that timeframe was established to ensure that any antibiotic in the fish would be expelled from the fish during, I think, is it six weeks or something? I can't remember-

PUBLIC

Ms MURDOCH - It's a degree-day thing, that's Jason's bag.

Mr JACOBI - It's a scientific figure, but through you, minister, both the export control frameworks and the primary projects safety regulatory frameworks, which sit largely within my department, ensure that any material foods that are sold to people for consumption are safe. There's a significant auditing framework that sits around that and my staff in the food safety regulation area undertake regular audits also. They do those in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry as the Commonwealth entity and we are satisfied that all of the reports and audits that have been conducted have clearly demonstrated that the food that is sold is safe to eat.

Prof RAZAY - In the future, are we going to have like even labelling just for public, you know, safety like what we have in chicken, for example?

Mr JACOBI - In terms of in terms of the labelling, I'm not in a position to comment on that but I can assure you, and I can assure the Tasmanian community, that the food that is sold on our shelves is absolutely safe to eat and that our audit process, both at a statewide level and at a national level, provide absolute confidence in that space.

Mr ABETZ - And our chief health officer has indicated that to be the case.

CHAIR - Mr Ferguson.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Chair. Minister, and to your team, the Maugean skate, we've talked about it, heard about it, a very large amount of public discourse around that species, one of our threatened species, even endangered. It's one of Tasmania's most unique and endangered species. I would appreciate an update on the work that's been undertaken by our government to support the recovery of the species and improve conditions within Macquarie Harbour, which by the way, I understand it's the only place in the world where the Maugean skate is known to exist, a place where there is fish farming going on, is the only place in the world it exists, is there.

That's interesting. Also, I understand from a recent report two adult skates have been released back into the Macquarie Harbour. Is it true that they have been nicknamed Adam and Eve?

Mr ABETZ - No, because Adam and Eve in the Maugean skate population existed a long, long time ago and they are believed to have existed in Port Davey and Bathurst Harbour as well, apparently no longer there, and as most people would know, no fish farms have ever existed in either Port Davey or Bathurst-

Mr BAYLEY - There is a scientific explanation for that, minister.

Mr ABETZ - A scientific explanation? Of course there is, and that is why nature sometimes has seen the decline of particular species, et cetera but I won't go there, but those two that you refer to as Adam and Eve, whatever they may have been named, but in April of this year they were successfully returned to Macquarie Harbour after more than two years in captivity as part of our world-leading captive intervention program. During their time in captivity, the two of them, Adam and Eve, contributed significantly to research into breeding,

husbandry and species recovery techniques, with one female producing hundreds of eggs that have helped establish a growing captive population.

The successful release followed extensive conditioning and monitoring and represents an important step forward in our ability to support the species. The government continues to invest heavily in monitoring and recovery efforts. Since 2014, we've invested more than \$5.4 million in the Maugean skate conservation, supporting expanded scientific surveys, acoustic tracking, captive breeding facilities and environmental monitoring. We're also seeing encouraging signs in the harbour itself, and I think the counts of the various Maugean skates would indicate that the population is relatively, well, higher than previously asserted and the relative abundance has increased for a second consecutive year. The latest population modelling estimates approximately 4000 individuals in Macquarie Harbour, but acknowledging the very wide confidence intervals, give or take is in that figure, but it's an approximate figure.

We understand there is more exciting work being undertaken to fully understand population distribution, age profile and behaviour of the skate. IMAS researchers with support from NRE and Hydro Tasmania are trialling an ARIS sonar, an acoustic imaging tool converting sound waves to images, to survey and monitor the skate population on the seafloor in a non-invasive way. It's hoped that this will elicit a greater understanding of juvenile recruitment and range distribution. This is being continued. The government's conservation action plan contains 35 actions across monitoring, habitat management, captive intervention, water quality and community engagement, with more than 90 per cent of priority actions already complete or on track.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Time's expired.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, as of June 2025, the government's reported that out of their 230 vehicles, 30 were battery electric and 27 were plug-in hybrids. Can you please give an indication of the total number of vehicles expected in the fleet for the BEVs and the PHEVs to be implemented through this budget period?

Mr ABETZ - Look, that I think is general procurement under the Treasury portfolio. That's the -

Ms FINLAY - Nobody here with that information?

Mr ABETZ - Well, the procurement of vehicles, be it fully electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles, et cetera, that is for government procurement across the board -

Ms FINLAY - But not a policy area for your area of responsibility?

Mr ABETZ - Can I finish just one sentence, please? That is in Treasury. Happy to try to get that information for you from the Treasury portfolio.

Ms FINLAY - Are you happy to take that on notice?

Mr ABETZ - Yep, and we can then put that - if the secretariat could flick that through, please, to Treasury and Finance and I will ensure an answer is provided.

PUBLIC

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. I do have another question in this area because it is a priority of the climate actions.

It's been reported in recent months that more than - or around, I won't say more than - but close to half of the new vehicle sales have been zero- and low-emission vehicles. Dealers actually managing this uptake of zero- and low-emission vehicles are having challenges with TasNetworks in terms of connecting fast chargers on their properties. It's been estimated that it could be up to a million dollars per dealership to TasNetworks to get those fast-charging assets allocated to the dealerships. I'm just wondering whether the government has a priority to support, through TasNetworks, the infrastructure required in the state to support the uptake of purchases of zero- and low-emission vehicles.

Mr ABETZ - Look, that would be an Energy portfolio question. I'm happy to take that on notice and have it flicked past to the appropriate ministry.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you, minister. Changing focus, to do with Energy, but also in this portfolio, the offsets that are required to support transmission approvals are being tricky to deliver. I'm wondering what the status is of the state offset policy that was due to be developed. When will it be delivered to support a better understanding of these decisions and planning outcomes for transmission programs in Tasmania? The offset part of it is in your area.

Mr ABETZ - Look, offsets, that is an area that we are dealing with I think also with the EPBC and the federal discussions that are taking place at the moment, because for other states that don't have as much of their land reserved as we currently do, it becomes more difficult for us in comparison to other states that don't have to deal with that -

Mr BAYLEY - Plenty more you can reserve, minister.

Ms FINLAY - My question is specifically: what's the status of the policy development?

Mr ABETZ - but I will hand over -

Mr JACOBI - This is very much alive and very current discussion at the moment. The national environmental standards are out for consultation. That also includes the development of offsets standard at a national level. We are working very closely with our colleagues across government to provide advice to that consultation document. As the minister correctly pointed out, over 50 per cent of Tasmania is already reserved. We believe that there needs to be a more flexible approach by the Commonwealth to how offsets are applied in the Tasmanian context. That is not to diminish in any way the need to provide offsets, but the fundamental objective of only accepting land-based offsets in the context of Tasmania I don't believe is sustainable.

There are much better potential environmental outcomes for both species, fauna and flora, an environmental condition that could be achieved through an environmental offset fund for example, and it would also be much more appropriate and flexible for proponents in terms of meeting their offset obligations where they cannot find a direct land-based offset in Tasmania.

Mr BAYLEY - I'm willing to indulge Mr Jacobi on telling us your good news about private land conservation, if you don't mind. But as part of that, I would like also details on what funding has been allocated to the private land conservation program within this year's

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Budget, what the staffing levels have been in that program for the last five years, and I'd like an explanation around incentive and stewardship payments and whether they are still available to private landholders as part of this program.

Mr JACOBI - OK, so that was?

Mr BAYLEY - Funding and staffing and incentives and stewardship payments.

Mr JACOBI - There is no dedicated fund for the private land conservation program in the state Budget because it has historically been supported by Commonwealth funding.

Mr BAYLEY - There has been in the past though, hasn't there, like dedicated funding?

Mr JACOBI - Not that I'm aware of. It's always been a program that has been actively supported through Commonwealth funding, and the Australian Government protecting important biodiversity areas funding has recently announced a \$1.56 million program to help contemporise the private land conservation program and as part of that to secure an additional 2500 hectares into conservation covenants.

Mr BAYLEY - What period is that?

Mr JACOBI - That funding, that \$1.56 million will be at least over the next two financial years. It might be possible that the funding would roll over into a third financial year.

Mr BAYLEY - So the 2500 hectare target is within those two years?

Mr JACOBI - I believe we are aiming to conserve actually more than that. We're, hoping to conserve approximately 15,000 hectares of land through that program by the end of 2030. This funding, and we have been lobbying the Commonwealth for a long time to provide assurances and guarantees around this funding, it's fantastic that the Australian Government has come and stepped forward with that. The 15,000 hectares I think goes by 2030 goes a long way towards meeting our SOE recommendation target.

We've also been successful in my department through the Australian Bushland Program. We will be the recipient of an additional \$5.5 million over four years through that program of funding. All of that work and funding particularly, it's a major uplift to the PLC program. It enables us to engage directly with private landholders across the state in areas where we know there are threatened species targets to be achieved.

In terms of the actual staffing for the team, I'm advised that there are currently six staff comprising a program manager, a team leader, three field staff and an administration officer.

Your last question was around incentives. I can't talk specifically to the incentives and stewardship, other than landholders often approach us directly about wanting to secure their particular private land parcel. We have done a lot of work in the space of identifying areas of private land which contain habitat which is of particular importance to certain threatened species like swift parrot, as you raised earlier. This funding enables us to be very proactive in that space and engage with landholders, not just the ones who have already come forward and identified that they want to secure parts of their properties but actively engage with landholders

PUBLIC

who we know have habitat on their properties to see if we can get amalgamation of properties and critical mass, I suppose, in protections as well.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. So through you, Minister, perhaps to the secretary again. That's very welcome and I certainly applaud those targets and acknowledge we do need to do more on private land.

My question goes to you in relation to public land. When we have things like the national recovery plan for the swift parrot, which we are a signatory to, that says we need to identify and protect remnants of state- and Commonwealth-owned land in areas of habitat crucial for survival for the swift parrot. When you've got the State of the Environment Report saying that many threatened species populations also occur outside of reserves on private and public land and that the most significant threat is the clearing of nesting and foraging habitats on public and private lands. When we're celebrating and putting all of this pressure on the private sector to meet these targets, I find it unacceptable, I know a lot of people find it unacceptable, that the government is not stepping up to the plate to meet its obligations to protect land on public land because only the government can protect land on public land. This smacks of land justice issues and the private land sector stepping up to return parcels of land to the Aboriginal community because the government won't. Only the government can protect public.

Why are we putting so much pressure on the private sector to meet the needs of species and yet the government is getting off scot-free?

Mr ABETZ - I just confirmed that the private area to which you referred, that is all voluntary. So we aren't putting any pressure on them. They are either convinced it's a good idea or not, and that is a way that one hopefully deals with property rights in a democracy, that people do have property rights and the government will seek to encourage certain good public outcomes, but at the end of the day, it's for the individual landholders. That said, there seems to have been quite an uptake.

Mr BAYLEY - With respect though, minister, it's clear that you're pointing towards these outcomes as a justification for action in the threatened species space. You're celebrating these outcomes and it's clearly the private land sector that's expected to do the heavy lifting, while the government does nothing and completely refuses the recommendations of, whether it be the national recovery plan for the swift parrot, or whether it be the state of the environment report.

Why is the government not voluntarily stepping up to protect more public land of critical importance to species?

Mr ABETZ - I completely reject all the adjectives and other hyperbole -

Mr BAYLEY - It's a fact, isn't it though, minister?

Mr ABETZ - embedded in the question. The government does have its regulations which will impact on forest areas and public areas in relation to harvesting and even, indeed, on private land, there are the requirements to have forest practices plans, et cetera. To assert that the government is not doing anything is one of these things where we unfortunately have it as stated time and time again that nothing is being done, when in fact -

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Mr BAYLEY - Minister, you just rejected taking more action on private land.

CHAIR - Mr Bayley.

Mr ABETZ - something is being done and I accept you would want even more done but the debate isn't nothing being done and what you might want. Something is being done. I accept you would want more to be done. We think we're getting the balance pretty right.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, I think maybe afterwards Ms Murdoch might have an updated figure on antibiotic-use last financial year. But may I ask, through you -

Mr ABETZ - Look, she has that now, should you wish it?

Mr GEORGE - I'd like it if I may, but I don't want it to take up this question. It's important.

Mr ABETZ - Ask your question, Mr George, and we'll get the answer in later on.

Mr GEORGE - Thank you. As you know, the Bureau of Meteorology says that the waters are already two degrees above average for this time of year, so that is a concern for future mortalities. Can I take you to the question of Long Bay please, minister, or through you, Ms Murdoch. It's arguably the worst-cited salmon lease in the state - shallow, poorly flushed with 16 pens at the entrance to the bay, further reducing flushing. Independent scientists report these pens are discharging the equivalent of nitrogen pollution as sewage of around 10,000 people, which is roughly three times the size of the population of the Tasman Peninsula.

The Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) has identified degraded water quality, severe and chronic algal blooms and major loss of seagrass beds over the past seven years. Tassal's environment licence expired last November and people are holding their breath on the peninsula to know what the EPA is going to do about it, so may I ask Ms Murdoch, what is the delay? When will the decision be made? And how could the EPA possibly allow pens to continue operating in that bay?

Ms MURDOCH - Thank you for the question. With regard to that, and as we've been actively communicating, with the interest groups in that area, you are correct, a valid application has been received for the renewal of that licence and the current licence stands in place until I make a decision.

With regard to that matter, yes, why it's taking longer is, as I'm sure you're aware, we allowed for community groups and interest groups in that area to make representations to us with regard to putting their science forward to my team. In response to that, to enable fair justice, we also allowed Tassal, the company, to put their science to us as well.

My team is now, yes, reviewing all of that information. I expect a package for me to consider is imminent. With regard to that, any decision that we make will be, as you're probably aware, under the conditions for how I'm able to approve that licence, the director can take other things into consideration.

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Other things taken into consideration are science, water quality, reef monitoring and data that has been presented to us. I'll be making a decision that will be based on the best contemporary science. It will be absolutely evidentiary-based that will be made transparent as to my decision-making process in that space, but I do expect that decision to be within this month.

Mr GEORGE - This month?

Ms MURDOCH - Yes.

Mr ABETZ - Can I confirm that the TPDNO cap imposed in 2023 reduced the scale of the operations by 20 per cent.

Mr GEORGE - I know that.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, right.

Mr GEORGE - We wanted it reduced by 100 per cent.

Mr ABETZ - Of course, you want to get rid of fish farms. Other people don't. Some people are concerned about jobs.

Mr GEORGE - So am I, minister. That's a ridiculous statement and I reject that as a point of order. No-one can accuse me of wanting to get rid of jobs.

Mr FERGUSON - He didn't say that; he said some people want jobs.

Mr ABETZ - Well, if the hat fits, wear it.

Mr GEORGE - You do that, minister, because they will be lost.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, have you received information that a certified environmental practitioner in site contamination has recently advised the EPA that available monitoring data indicates the potential for unacceptable public health risks associated with respiratory crystalline silica exposure near the Tasmanian Advanced Minerals (TAM) facility in Wynyard?

And if you have, what action has the EPA taken in response to that professional advice and what action are you or your office taking in response to this information?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not aware but that mightn't be surprising given my short tenure in the role, but I understand the EPA is aware.

Ms MURDOCH - The correspondence was to me directly from Scott Leonard this week. We received that report last Friday. I responded to Mr Leonard asking if we could have not just the report but the data behind that so we can investigate that further. I have let him know that I have referred that to my air specialist team, and we are looking at his report in detail and cross referencing with that. We're currently reviewing that report, taking it seriously and we'll take any action required once we've finished our review.

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Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I want to ask about budget funding for the EPA itself and I'd like to ask you to outline how the Budget is supporting the EPA in carrying out its responsibilities effectively and independently. One of the concerns that I hold is that, despite the fact that the EPA have always appeared at budget Estimates, it's only been in recent years that it's been made entirely independent as a regulator under the law. I'm concerned that we have the regulator represented at the table and being treated so shamelessly by the Greens, including a media release that's just gone out attacking the integrity of the EPA and misrepresenting statements that have been made in good faith by the EPA today.

I'd ask you to take that part of the question on notice because I think it's an abuse of this process, having a regulator at the table and treating the regulator like just a part of government. I think that's a problem. I ask you to take that on notice if you'd be good enough to do that. Or to seek an opportunity to respond.

But I also ask about how we're supporting the EPA to do its job and hopefully uphold its reputation in the public.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for the question. For what it's worth, the other place has the EPA appearing by itself without a minister at the table. And the same with the Auditor-General, so the independent statutory authorities, I think.

For what it's worth, Chair, some gratuitous advice to my colleagues in the House: that might be a better practice to try to get the politics out of the questioning so we don't get to see - and I haven't read the media release to which you refer to, member for Bass, Mr Ferguson. But attacks on the EPA and our statutory authorities, they are legally bound to do their task and should be looked after and protected.

In that vein, it was this government that created the EPA as an independent statutory authority to ensure integrity in matters environmental protection. We acknowledge the critical role that they play. In their current Budget, more than \$17.5 million has been allocated to support their operations, representing a significant investment in environmental regulation, scientific capability, environmental monitoring and risk-based compliance activities across the state. This funding supports the EPA's oversight of major developments, environmental assessment processes, contaminated land management and the regulation of finfish farming.

Importantly, the Budget continues investment in the EPA's air quality monitoring that I've referred to before, and refurbishing, maintaining and upgrading critical air quality infrastructure. The Budget also continues investment in modernising the EPA's information management and digital system. So, we are delivering practical investment in science, in monitoring the regulation and capability, ensuring Tasmania continues to benefit from a strong and independent EPA. And being a strong and independent EPA, one, is vital. But in doing their job, they should be protected from gratuitous attacks.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you for that answer. I would ask you, in your role as Leader of the House, to reflect on the circumstances of today and to give thought about a recommendation to our House about how to better manage this in the future.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you.

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Ms FINLAY - Thank you, and for the benefit of the committee, I think it's important that we all make a positive statement about how the EPA has conducted themselves today, the role of the EPA and the importance of that in Tasmania.

Minister, I want to loop you back to my questions around EVs. You dismissed those as not relevant to the committee. I note that you took the questions on notice, but you referred them to Procurement and others. The document that you tabled earlier today actually includes the exact matter that I was asking questions about, which is the progress of the fleet. There's a commitment by government that the fleet will be 100 per cent by 2030.

So, I would like you to reflect, rather than tabling, if there is someone at the table that would confirm it's likely that the government will meet that commitment within the allocations in the Budget.

Also within this document that you circulated earlier, there is a commitment to planning for the charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, again through ReCFIT. A previous one was allocated to ReCFIT. In fact, curiously, there's a working group that is meant to work to develop a coordinated approach to the uptake of EVs. So, my question is: will the government transition the fleet to 100 per cent by 2030? And will the government undertake its commitment to consider how charging infrastructure will be developed across Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - A lot of questions there, Chair. First of all, completely and utterly reject the assertion that I dismissed a question. I would have thought taking a question on notice is the exact opposite of dismissing a question. The document that I tabled is an all-of-government document in various portfolio areas and sought to bring everything together.

Ms FINLAY - ReCFIT, ReCFIT, ReCFIT, allocated directly. You said that there was nobody here that had an answer to the EV fleet question, but it is in your portfolio area, not Treasury.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay, you've asked the question. The minister was only 40 seconds into the answer. Give him some time please.

Mr ABETZ - As I was saying, it's an all-of-government document, and the procurement activities of the government are undertaken through Treasury, as I understand it. They have those figures and that is why I took that question on notice, not dismissed it.

In relation to the government policy, I think that is still extant. Yes, still in existence. And so, that remains government policy.

Ms FINLAY - How far progressed are the plans for government to support charging infrastructure across Tasmania, given the increase in uptake of electric vehicles?

Ms PINTO - I'll give a little bit of background on the policy and the program. In 2020, the government announced the target to transition and that was looking at fleet across, as we've described, across all of government. The government includes pool cars. You've got vehicles that are used at work and then, of course, you've got tools-of-trade vehicles. It's been looking at that across that extent. In addition, there are vehicles that are associated with different roles. That target was looking at all of those categories.

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The funding you were referring to, there was some initial funding provided, \$2.3 million over three years. It was included in the original Budget, and then a further funding allocation of \$2.25 million in the 2022-2023 Budget. So, that sort of is the total.

As we have noted, ReCFIT, which includes the Climate Change Office, has been working really collaboratively with the Department of Treasury and Finance, being that Treasury and Finance, as the procurer, manages that mechanism.

Ms FINLAY - But is it policy position of ReCFIT?

Ms PINTO - Absolutely, yes, yes. The new Tasmanian government vehicle contract commenced on 1 July 2024. Under that contract, the number of electric vehicle options increased. What you're looking to do is to ensure that what you're making available includes - and that's working with providers, suppliers.

And noting, as we would all acknowledge, there has been, over time, an increased range available in the market. Back when this was initially established as a policy position, the range that was available was a lot less. So, that's has increased. And my understanding - again, I'm speaking on behalf of another department, but my understanding is that as part of their good practice, they're continuingly looking at those options to make those further available.

As a part of that program, the agencies were able to access subsidies to purchase battery electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. And that started from 2023 across to 2023-2025; and funding was again offered in March of '26.

So, the piece of information we do again need to call on our colleagues in Treasury and Finance to provide is, being that they keep central information, is how that's been applied across all the agencies because we don't carry that information within our unit.

The other thing that I wanted to make reference to: it's all very well to have vehicles, but you've got to be able to charge them. The other thing that I wanted to make reference to is that our unit, so within ReCFIT, manage a consultancy to assess the agency charging infrastructure needs. There's a total of 110 sites that were assessed. So, if you imagine each agency - again, I'll refer to my colleagues down the end of the table. NRE Tas has sites all round the state, and those sites would have cars, they'd have tools of trade, they'd have vehicles. It's about understanding where all their sites are and the ability for charging stations. That work has been undertaken, and we're continuing to work with agencies on that.

The other - and I might refer to my colleague because it might not be quite in front of me, but we have also been running grant schemes because it's - as you would appreciate, if you're out, whether it's a government-owned vehicle or it's a privately owned vehicle or a business vehicle, it's about that ready access to charging stations. So, the publicly available charging station is important. The government has also been running grants for those of which - Sarah, we just recently had another grant scheme, which we're implementing at the moment.

Dr RUSSELL - In addition to supporting fleets in relation to electric vehicles, we have had a really strong focus sort of outwards in the public sphere. We've had three rounds of ChargeSmart grants which have supported a statewide fast-charging network in Tasmania. The third round of fast chargers has just been finalised.

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Ms FINLAY - How much have those grant rounds been?

Dr RUSSELL - Round 1 was \$773,000 in round 1; the second round was \$600,000; and the third round was \$567,000.

Ms FINLAY - And they're all fast-charging?

Dr RUSSELL - Yes, the majority are.

Ms FINLAY - Do you know how many have been delivered in those grant rounds?

Dr RUSSELL - I think round 1 and round 2 have all been delivered. I think there were 33 chargers there. And round 3, there's 11 new chargers and one upgrade. I think they're just in progress, as you would imagine. There's planning approvals, development, liaison with TasNetworks to get those implemented, and they'll be coming online soon.

Ms FINLAY - I appreciate the information. Thank you.

Mr ABETZ - Do we finish at 12.30 sharp?

CHAIR - No, 12.41.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, 12.41. Because the director has further information for Mr Bayley.

CHAIR - Yes, sure. If the director would like to do it now before we go to the questions.

Ms MURDOCH - In regard to the matter that you raised, my team was contacted by Glenorchy City Council in December for technical advice. At that time, it was their responsibilities under EMCA that they were investigating in regard to planning matters, and my team supported them with the investigations.

As that progressed, the Glenorchy council formally referred that to me on 21 May 2026 due to the complexity of the matter, asking that we take over the investigations. I wrote back to the council on 27 May, outlining that we would absolutely do that, and we had already commenced preliminary inquiries in regard to that.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. Are you able to table that letter for the benefit of the committee?

Ms MURDOCH - I've scribbled all over it and it isn't my signed one.

Mr BAYLEY - I'm happy for you to get a clean copy.

Mr ABETZ - We'll take it on notice.

Ms MURDOCH - Which letter? The request from the council to me, plus the response?

Mr BAYLEY - I don't think I am asking you to table one of the council's letters. It's only fair to ask you -

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Mr ABETZ - Is that okay? Does it -

Ms MURDOCH - No, I'm sure it's fine. I just don't have a formal final -

Mr BAYLEY - I am happy to take it on notice.

I have some questions to the EPA, I think, around land spreading, noting I made a statement in the House a week or two ago about a personal interest in this matter.

The environmental manager at the Southern Midlands Council inspected sites at St Peters Pass in 2025 and Interlaken where salmon mortalities were dumped without proper authority, noting that the land spreading at those sites caused runoff into paddocks, was deposited near a winter water source and to quote, the report:

The odour is something else.

The industry has subsequently developed waste management plans in relation to this and they've been approved by the EPA. I think a lot of us would be shocked that those regulations weren't in place already. My question for you, director, is whether you still consider this a trial? If so, what are you doing to monitor it? And what's the transparency around that trial? When can we expect results to be published, et cetera?

Ms MURDOCH - Just for clarification, are you talking about the land spreading?

Mr BAYLEY - Land spreading, yes.

Ms MURDOCH - The land spreading is not regulated by the EPA. We were onsite there and that's what those documents are. We're supporting the council -

Mr BAYLEY - The councils are regulating it?

Ms MURDOCH - - in their role. We regulate the infrastructure such as the ensilers, the rendering plants, obviously the landfills. That's our role and responsibility.

Mr BAYLEY - Shallow disposal as well?

Ms MURDOCH - No. In regards to the land spreading, obviously Jason's department and Biosecurity has a role as well in regards to if it's about waste, animal waste, and making sure it complies with biosecurity.

We're continuing to support the council though. And I think also in that story was in regards to Spectran. Whilst we don't have - my team could have said we don't have a role, but they didn't. What we did was work with Spectran and the council to ensure they've developed their own guidelines for that land spreading, which the council, I understand, is happy with and we've had input into that. And I do believe Biosecurity had input into that as well.

In regards to land spreading, we're still checking in with council, so we do understand the network. And we know which sites land spreading is going to, but we don't regulate them.

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Mr BAYLEY - Some RTI documents that were released a few months ago showed that EPA investigators commented that some of the environmental protection notices for the previous land spreading were often poorly written or, in some cases, absent. Are you working with councils to develop statewide regulations or guidelines? And if so, when can they be expected to be completed?

Ms MURDOCH - We're not working to have guidelines. Obviously, the Southern Midlands, the main company there, Spectran, we've got those guidelines are in place.

Mr BAYLEY - In the environmental management plans?

Ms MURDOCH - No. Council regulate those. So, when it says about the EPNs, the environmental protection notices, we offer and do assist in helping them to craft - so, those EPNs that weren't written well, they were council EPNs. We do offer that support through my legal team and through my regulatory team to assist them to write EPNs that are of a better standard. And we've been doing that.

Mr BAYLEY - Do you see a need for, and are you working on statewide guidelines or regulations?

Ms MURDOCH - We don't regulate guidelines. Biosecurity does have standards around that. We're not working on statewide guidelines at this point. Because we don't regulate it, I'm focusing on things like the Quarry Code of Practice upgrade and I committed to Cassy O'Connor as well in regards to landfill sustainability. We're working on updating the policies that we're responsible for. So at the moment, no, we're not developing a statewide land spreading guide.

Mr JACOBI - If I may, through you, minister, Biosecurity Tasmania, under the Biosecurity Regulations 2022, is responsible for waste material comprising whole finfish or parts of finfish, which is specified as a restricted animal material. And feeding of RAM to ruminant animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, deer, alpacas is an offence under the *Biosecurity Act 2019*. So, we have worked through Biosecurity Tasmania to prepare a fact sheet for farmers and that outlines how finfish waste should be managed on their property to ensure that the waste is managed appropriately and in compliance with the biosecurity regulations.

Ms BURNET - Before I ask my question, I just wanted to ask that the information Mr Jacobi was going through before around EMPCA was quite lengthy and I just wondered, minister, if you're happy for that to be tabled?

Mr JACOBI - We'll take that on notice and we'll summarise that.

Ms BURNET - Thank you. Really following up from Mr Bayley's question about monitoring of things like biosolids or these things that either are land spread or end up in facilities like compost facilities, what are you doing in relation to monitoring of contaminants such as PFAS?

Ms MURDOCH - In regards to that PFAS, again, because nothing's simple and not complex, is it? In regards to PFAS - and you're probably aware that the NEMP 3.1 for PFAS was released yesterday. So, it's out nationally as of yesterday. So, the EPA doesn't have a policy-setting role in regards to PFAS. That sits with our colleagues in NRE Tas. But we're

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working to implement that NEMP that came out yesterday as it applies to land contamination, effluent biosolids from the state's level two wastewater treatment plants, landfills and industrial facilities, and other regulated environmental activities.

Our focus is to review PFAS monitoring requirements at wastewater treatment plants and associated recycled water schemes and biosolids applications. Requirements for each premises will need to be case by case due to EMCA because that's how we regulate, and a risk-based approach is being applied.

So, in regards to the biosolids, we regulate via the approved management methods for the reuse of biosolids and the Tasmanian Biosolids Reuse Guidelines. That act contains the testing requirements but no limitations for some PFAS compounds. And we've added further limitations are being applied to those due to the implementation of that PFAS.

And then TasWater has analysed raw effluent and treated effluent for PFAS. They did that between 2020 and 2023 and we detected some levels of PFAS, but the concentrations were often really low, in the parts per trillion range. So, that focus has been, and it's been primarily - no surprise - linked to legacy firefighting foam near Cambridge, Hobart and Launceston airports.

So, the focus is definitely- so, from our perspective, TasWater is doing that that work and those priority areas. And we're also satisfied that TasWater's PFAS biosolids framework, which they now have, adequately addresses any risks associated with the land application of the biosolids, and that PFAS risk in effluent, are also being adequately managed at this point for what's around in Tasmania.

Ms BURNET - Okay, I think it needs further questioning, but I don't have questions to ask right now.

CHAIR - Professor Razay.

Prof RAZAY - Transport has contributed to air pollution and it accounts for 21 per cent of total carbon emission. Do we measure the pollutant which comes from a fuel such as nitrogen oxide, dioxide or carbon monoxide because that's quite relevant, especially in Tasmania with increased use of cars. I think that's very important in monitoring air pollution.

Ms MURDOCH - I think, in regards to this, because there is a national air standard around that - was it five years? When did we do the first set of research? We did do the NOx, I just don't have a date. So, 2022. We did do investigations and it was determined that, at that stage, we weren't breaching any national standards and to continue to monitor. We focused instead on the wood smoke because that was the priority. So, we have looked at it.

If we need to review it in the in the future, which my air team, I no doubt, will tell me that, we'll put those stations back out. But we have done that initial risk analysis in 2022 and determined it wasn't to continue: The monitoring wasn't cost-effective for the state.

Mr GEORGE - Can you give us the 2025 usage of antibiotics in the salmon industry? Just the figure. Thank you.

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Ms MURDOCH - This will be up on our website, everyone, next week. We probably want this information together. So, 2025 - and just noting that it also includes two treatments of oxytetracycline, it's not just florfenicol, the total amount for 2025 was 3948.1 kilos.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired.

The committee suspended from 12.41 p.m. to 1.30 p.m.

Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy

CHAIR - Before we go to questions, I want to remind members of the order of the House establishing Estimates committees which provides that questions must be relevant to the portfolio and outputs of a particular session. However, as with other sessions, I will permit broad questions about the minister's role as a member of the Cabinet in relation to issues of public concern in relation to former minister Oglvie if the minister chooses to answer them.

The scrutiny of Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I now invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions, please, for the benefit of *Hansard*.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you, Chair. To my right is Dr Justin Thurley, chief information officer, Department of Premier and Cabinet. To his right is Mat Healey, deputy secretary, Strategy and Delivery, Department of Premier and Cabinet. To my left is Mike Mogridge, deputy secretary, Economic Growth, Department of State Growth.

CHAIR - Thank you. Just before we get into the questions, can we make sure all the microphones are pulled down so Hansard can pick everything up?

Ms FINLAY - I was hopeful that there might have been an opening statement outlining the government's position around a whole lot of things that have been happening recently, particularly with the recent news about the subsea cable. Minister, in the absence of an opening statement, maybe you could indicate to the committee the government's role in the securing of the cable and particularly if there's any public money guarantees or in-kind support related to that particular part of the Firmus project in Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - I'm delighted to answer that question. It was in the other place that I was able to say it's amazing what happens when you get a new minister into the portfolio because it was announced simultaneously as me being sworn in. I cannot lay any claim to it, I hasten to add, but it was just one of those circumstances. As I understand it, there is no state government money or federal government money. It is fully privately funded for a cable to Melbourne and Sydney, and I think that about stretches my knowledge of it. Who can flesh that out a bit further for me? Mr Mogridge, thank you.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Minister, just reiterating your comments there, through previous government policy there's been an indication of support and advocacy for a subsea cable. Through various frameworks and strategies, the state government has been developing, it is creating an open door for facilitating private investment, particularly with this opportunity where the government hasn't provided a commitment in relation to the subsea cable. This is

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something being driven by the private market, but I would expect that on the other side of that will be broad benefits for Tasmania, because the surplus capacity of that subsea cable, as we understand it, should be available for other opportunities in Tasmania.

Ms FINLAY - There'll be a series of questions in this area. There are a couple of things. I want to stay on the Tasmanian financial impact at the moment. You said that there hasn't been any money committed. Have there been any requests for money for the cable?

Mr MOGRIDGE - I'm not aware of any requests in relation to this at all.

Ms FINLAY - Great. Often when there's a project, the project is defined and that may or might not have public or private investment in partnership or in isolation, but then there is all the ancillary works and infrastructure that might be required to support it. In terms of supporting the cable to be delivered, it's connections and the way it fits into our system, what would be the anticipated associated costs for that, whether through TasNetworks or other mechanisms or entities?

Mr MOGRIDGE - I think there's a range of discussions that are yet to be had in relation to all of those points. There'd be broad regulatory and permitting considerations for a subsea cable. Some of those would concern the Tasmanian government and I suspect some of them would concern the federal government as well, but at this juncture there's been an announcement by the private parties and I think in due course there'd be further conversations to understand the exact parameters of what that looks like for delivery.

Ms FINLAY - When was the first engagement with the government around their intention to deliver a private cable? When did that conversation first commence?

Mr MOGRIDGE - I believe very recently, potentially last week, and that's really the extent of my knowledge.

Ms FINLAY - Okay, so given that -

CHAIR - Sorry, you've had three, Ms Badger.

Ms BADGER - I'm continuing on the exact same theme, so that's all good. I'm interested in what conversations you will now be picking up in terms of what this cable will deliver for the Tasmanian community - notwithstanding as a part of Marinus there's also a cable there, but that's not, as far as the Tasmanian public has been able to see, part of the Marinus business case that's available to us.

So I'd be interested to hear how you will then be engaging as to what that means, not only for Tasmania's data capacity, but also for the economic viability and anything that might change in that space in relation to the Marinus cable.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister: I think Marinus, the combined effect of Marinus coming online and this additional SUBCO cable means that we're not only increasing capacity for all Tasmanians, but we're actually increasing resilience. This was one of the strong drivers in relation to the government's advocacy to the Commonwealth in relation to having an additional subsea cable. So, I think, my understanding of Marinus is it will deliver a capacity that's somewhere in the vicinity of 150 times what we've currently got, with regard to data

capacity itself. With this new cable, I think the speed is around 60 terabits per second, and our present understanding of that - that's a very material allocation for Tasmania in the context of increasing our productivity as an economy and introducing new and different business models within the state. And our current understanding, accepting the fact that it's early days, is that there would be, you know, significant additional capacity for broader economic benefit across communities.

Ms BADGER - So the cable that's been proposed at the moment that Firmus is underwriting - I don't know if you can enlighten us as to the specifics of that underwriting, but I suspect not - that's planning to come online a lot sooner than what the Marinus cable would. So, obviously, it's kind of urgent to have the discussions around the other on-island infrastructure to support those cables. Have you started to arrange what that would look like, setting up associated GBEs and other facilities to have those discussions? So that, you know, if the cable comes on a lot sooner than 2032, that it is then actually functioning for all of Tasmania, and we're not just seeing it connected to say, the Bell Bay and Wesley Vale AI factory sites.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister: I think, you know, given how recent this information is, that would absolutely be the next step for the government. Obviously talking across a range of portfolios, and I would expect the government to be looking to support a project like this, that's being fully funded by private investment, as much as it possibly can. So, really, I think all I could say is that I would expect the government to be looking to support that process of understanding what permitting, what approvals, and how we can distribute the benefit of that to the broader Tasmanian community.

Prof RAZAY - With the growing AI technology, it's causing enormous concern among the small business community. They need a lot of support and education regarding knowing the risk about literacy, safety code and cybersecurity. What's our government doing regarding supporting our small businesses and minimising the potential risks with the digital economy?

Mr ABETZ - We do have a Digital Strategy 2026-31. The details of that, Mr Mogridge, I'm sure you can outline. I'm just wondering out aloud whether the Small Business portfolio might have something in this area as well, but just to put that on the table.

Mr MOGRIDGE - You're quite correct, and a really good question. We had some discussions about this with the Deputy Premier earlier in the week. Through this portfolio and, I guess, taking a strategic lens around the levers of government, there has been an Advanced Technology Strategy that was released earlier in this year, and really, one of the foundational components of that technology, one of the actions falling behind it, is supporting small business with digital uplift. As part of that, the small business team, through Business Tasmania, are delivering a wonderful program of services. That commenced actually earlier this year, including cybersecurity training, understanding AI and digital uplift within small business, and how to compete, sort of globally in a rapidly changing market. So there's very active support from Business Tasmania in that respect.

And I would just say, in relation to digital uplift more generally, we have been facilitating some work with Telstra and RDA Tasmania, who are rolling out, in the context of broader inclusivity but also capability for our workforce, a digital uplift program. That's harnessing our jobs hubs across the state as a training facility, for those people that unfortunately fall out of the workforce, to provide digital uplift in relation to bringing their skill sets up to a space where

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they can compete in a wider range of jobs and then enter the workforce. So, we are really trying to take a sort of root-and-branch approach to supporting small business.

Mr ABETZ - If I may briefly, Chair. I'm happy to table Digital Tasmania 2026-2031, which is a document from government for the benefit of the member for Bass, Professor Razay.

Mr GEORGE - Look, I accept this is a difficult one.

Mr ABETZ - That's what Dr Thurley said.

Mr GEORGE - That's right. In light of the lawsuits being brought against the progenitors of ChatGPT in the United States and community concerns in Australia, and accepting that there is going to be some overlap with federal authorities on questions of data crime, abuse and immoral behaviour, what, if any, provisions have the Tasmanian Government put in place, or will the state government consider, when contracting with data centres that are built in Tasmania, to assure Tasmanians that the risk of immoral criminal damaging behaviour can't pass through a Tasmanian data centre? I'm referring to a wide range of actions - nonconsensual intimate imagery all the way through to support of foreign governments in war and genocide.

Mr ABETZ - I will pass to Dr Thurley.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister: Primarily and in recent times, it comes around to our procurement methods. When we're contracting with data centres or even any software providers, we look at the way we provide terms and conditions in our contracts. Recently, due to some of the risks that were emerging both in cyber and in AI, we've recently updated the Tasmanian technology terms and conditions contracts to bring in clauses that are aligned with some of the risks associated with AI procurement and the use of a AI by third parties and in the supply chain as well. So, it's a considerable area of concern. These new provisions need to be negotiated within the contracts, and they do explicitly spell out cyber data and AI-type issues.

Just broadening to where you started to head with the ethical components as well, the Tasmanian Procurement Framework and the TIs expressly have information in those spaces around ethical procurements and code of conduct for suppliers as well. That also covers off on aspects of the areas that you mentioned.

Mr GEORGE - Briefly, what sort of resources are you able to bring to better regulate it?

CHAIR - Mr George, is this clarification?

Mr GEORGE - Yes. I just wanted to know what sort of resources they can bring to bear to regulate the contract.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister: that's a fair enough question. Contract management, vendor management and making sure that our vendors are in line with our contract terms and conditions. We continuously monitor the contracts that we have in place, particularly the whole-of-government ones with significant offloadings and those sort of areas. So, I feel that it's actively monitored and the controls that we put in place to monitor and observe any outcomes in that space are there.

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We have more in-depth sort of intelligence, or threat intelligence, that we keep an eye on as well that actually helps us understand if there are emerging threats or vulnerabilities in that space, which falls into the cyber category. But AI is a big part of what we're doing now.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I welcome you to this portfolio and your team. I recognise it's only been a few days in the new role, and I want to extend my appreciation to you, but also take this opportunity to acknowledge former minister, Ms Ogilvie. She followed me in this portfolio and I know that she's been an exceptional ICT minister and greatly appreciated by the science -

Ms FINLAY - Except the minister -

Mr FERGUSON - Let's be courteous, please, and respectful. I know that people in the science and IT community have really appreciated her work.

My question's about the Digital Transformation Priority Expenditure Program. It has funding to continue 14 existing, and new funding for four, new initiatives. I'll invite you to outline to the committee the practical benefits that these investments will deliver for our Tasmanian community, but also, secondly, efficiency of government.

Mr ABETZ - The program is focused on making it easier, faster and more secure for our fellow Tasmanians to interact with government. The government has committed \$40.5 million in this year to support, as I understand, 24 ICT initiatives to enhance the government's digital capability. The government's modernising services by reducing manual processes and improving digital platforms.

The program is also improving how agencies work behind the scenes by replacing ageing systems, strengthening data sharing and improving digital capability across the public sector. That's leading to more efficient service delivery, better use of public resources and faster decision-making. Importantly, the program has a strong focus on security and resilience.

Investments are being made to ensure digital services are safe, reliable and able to protect Tasmanians' personal information as more services move online. Overall, the program is delivering practical improvements that Tasmanians can see and feel, simpler services, better access and a more modern, responsive government.

Ms FINLAY - I'm interested to explore as much as you know about the cable, acknowledging that it's all fairly recent. Firmus obviously have a number of sites proposed to develop in Tasmania, and this cable has been identified with certain capacity. In the recent first points of contact that they've had with you about the cable, has there been an indication in that of further cables that might support their other developments? They've got the significant one happening in St Leonards, one proposed at Bell Bay, and then one at Wesley Vale. Has there been any indication that there may be additional cable infrastructure considered?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, I'm not aware of any discussions in that respect.

Ms FINLAY - One of the reasons why I ask is I'm particularly interested in the resilience of our capabilities here in Tasmania and, as I understand it, resilience only helps certain people that have got agreements to carry on certain cables. So if, you know, you're with the Bass Link

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or you're going to be through future with Marinus, and then we have this having three isolated cables, then that limits the individual's capacity to have resilience in terms of redundancy. So, of course, if they were proposing another one, that would be useful, because you would have one carrier with two cables that then actually does provide that level of redundancy. At this stage, there's no indication of there being further - I think it was maybe the minister said to Melbourne and Sydney, but it is only one proposed connection, isn't it, to the existing sub?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, I think at this juncture it's making a connection that has a direct line into New South Wales and also South Australia and Western Australia. It is absolutely increasing resilience in the context of connectivity for Tasmania, which is a very profound step forward for the state. I think the extent to which there might be subsequent cables in the future is probably a matter for further discussion, and I would suspect also, understanding the forward-facing economy for Tasmania and the utilisation of an opportunity like that, you know, I do think that a private investment of this significance into the state, that I would imagine the government would give due consideration to how the local network would be augmented to support the broader benefit for industry and communities generally. But I think that's something that needs to be stepped through at the appropriate time.

Mr ABETZ - Was I incorrect to say Melbourne?

Mr MOGRIDGE - No.

Dr THURLEY - They also have cables running into Adelaide and Perth.

Mr ABETZ - Right. In the previous answer to the Legislative Council, I also said Melbourne, but I wanted to make sure that that was correct, in case I had to correct the record elsewhere.

Ms FINLAY - And I was just using that to clarify whether there was a suggestion of it being another connection at another point with another cable.

With the capacity that's been indicated at this stage, you're talking about the potential of spare capacity, which is - it's exciting, right? This is all positive and exciting subject to the consequences for Tasmanians. There's the Tasmanian public, whether that be household or business benefit from that capacity and then there's the state government. Have the state immediately put your mind to whether you might seek to capture a significant amount of that spare capacity?

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, look, it's correct and it's good to have more contended capacity within the state. We currently utilise continued capacity to create resilience for government and that's using the Bass Link in combination with Telstra. Now we see another party coming to the, you know, play as well, which can only work in everyone's favour, also knowing and understanding that the commercial operatives will be looking to maximise their, you know, their outputs et cetera as well. Having, you know, three different companies competing for the interests of data capacity into Tasmania is very good. It's very good for opportunities for resilience and in particular for us to be able to make sure that we have not everybody running off the same cable.

Ms FINLAY - There has been previously allocations in the Budget for Tasmania to invest in a cable. We missed the last, most immediate opportunity, which is probably a couple

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of Estimates back that it landed on at the same time curiously as this has landed on the same time. When you were approached recently around this private investment, has the government put to mind whether they would have or would like to approach the private investor to participate in a partnered way in terms of securing, you know, government allocation that you can then manage costs and things in terms of that partnering? Because there has been that previously. I think it was 10 or \$11 million.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, anything we would do, we'd do under the procurement arrangements that government uses. We would, you know, look at our requirements, our needs, and we haven't, you know, looked at this in any way further than what we've seen the other day, so it's very new to us. For me it's a matter of procurement. We have contracts that come and get renewed to provide that level of resilience. We would, obviously, see them in the market in that -

Ms FINLAY - That will be as a customer though as opposed to an asset partner. It was more my question whether you'd put your mind to that.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, I can't speak to being an asset partner.

Ms BADGER - During the debate on the motion to get some more clarity and transparency around Firmus that we had in the House not long ago, as a part of the minister's response several times, then Minister Ogilvie stated that there were some regulations for AI and data facilities coming to Tasmania. Beyond what exists in the planning scheme for any kind of big business, industry, existing environmental legislation, that's all that we can see publicly. We asked the minister to, you know, table them to come back on the adjournment and tell us specifically what those regulations' requirements might be. We haven't got them. Can we, even if they're taken on notice, get those requirements for AI and data facilities coming to Tasmania now?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, I can't speak to that specific comment. I can say at a high level and I think nationally there's broad consideration around, you know, opportunities to leverage data investment in the context of greater public benefit, be that through, you know, VRE (variable renewable energy) development to support sustainability of energy systems or otherwise, so that is a live discussion, I think, but something that is sort of not specifically a regulatory requirement at this juncture.

Ms BADGER - Just to clarify, at the current time, there are no specific regulations for AI and data facilities who want to have a footprint in Tasmania beyond the existing planning scheme and environmental regulations?

Mr MOGRIDGE - That's my understanding, but I can take that on notice.

Ms BADGER - Yeah, that would be great. Thank you.

The other part of that question, you touched on it a little bit as well. The federal government's released their expectations of data centres, which is great to have expectations, but we do need legislation and regulation put in place. We've asked this to the previous minister as well and not received a response, so I'm hoping you could please enlighten us today of what work the Tasmanian government has begun doing on regulation and legislation, because as we've seen with Firmus alone, they're now set to be the biggest energy consumer in this state.

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We are aware of other AI and data facilities talking to the Office of the Coordinator-General, so there's a lot of angst in the community about what's going to happen and we need to get that work happening at the same pace that these centres are being rolled out.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, I'm happy to talk to this at a more macro level rather than necessarily reaching to legislation or regulatory functions, I think what the government is looking to do through a commitment for an economic diversification and investment strategy as part of a broader economic statement, is really build a strategic understanding of facilitating private investment in Tasmania and at the same time having a more nuanced and transparent understanding of the benefit of businesses investing and developing in Tasmania. For example, understanding the workforce implications, understanding the energy requirements of a particular business, understanding the secondary economy implications, the stickiness of that business in remaining in Tasmania, et cetera.

As part of that piece of work, I expect the government will be actively turning its mind to how these sorts of decisions can be made in a structured way where the implications of a particular business can be fleshed out.

Ms BURNET - I also want to continue on this theme of AI data centres because I think it's very topical at the moment. I'm not convinced that we do have everything in place that we need and, as Ms Badger has said, it's going to be a huge use of energy, but also of water.

My question is following on from what Ms Badger's touched on, the sorts of regulations that might be in place. What regulations will be around the use of backup generators should the energy go down? Will it be diesel or what sort of power will be provided to the centre?

Mr ABETZ - That's getting into the detail.

Mr MOGRIDGE - We might be venturing into the energy portfolio in some respects but I think certainly to acknowledge your point, obviously, there are community concerns around a range of issues in relation to data centres. We've discussed Firmus, I think.

Without venturing into a debate, my understanding and Firmus is it uses materially less water by a very significant margin than many traditional data centres due to their immersion technology that's not utilising water for their present technology.

Ms BADGER - It is using some, though, we should put on the record, especially what they're bringing next.

Mr MOGRIDGE - We're certainly not looking to venture into a debate about that.

Ms BADGER - Just for the record, sorry.

Mr ABETZ - If it's saying less water, it does suggest that water is being used.

Mr GEORGE - We all agree on that.

CHAIR - Please continue.

Ms BURNET - Water is definitely being used. We all agree on that.

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Mr MOGRIDGE - To your point around the specifics of requirements in relation to backup systems, data centres use a range of different technologies. You mentioned diesel. There are also battery technologies. I think we've seen in recent years 10 gigawatts of batteries come online in the electricity grid, so there is a material uplift in that technology and it's getting cheaper and cheaper as an offsetting system.

I think we need to work through those issues with proponents as they arrive and to your point, understanding the implications of different sorts of backup systems in framing a government perspective.

Ms BURNET - I think it's of huge interest to community members.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, a fairly straightforward question. How many startups supported by the government directly or through GBE sponsorship, have gone on to secure private investment or generated substantial revenue within three years? And if the answer is none, which I suspect it is, how would the government change its approach to support for startups?

Ms FINLAY - Do you mean startups through enterprise or in Tasmania generally?

Mr GEORGE - Tasmanian startups. Digital startups.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Can you repeat that?

Mr GEORGE - Sure. How many digital startups have been supported by the government directly or through GBE sponsorship that have gone on to secure private investment or generated substantial revenue within the past three years? If the answer is none, which I understand it may be, I'm wondering whether a change of approach would be considered.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister. I'm not sure whether you could categorically track every instance. I'm happy to sort of take that away with consideration, but I think the Tasmanian government has provided a range of sort of different support mechanisms. One of those is Enterprise Tasmania, which facilitates entrepreneurial activity. I'm reaching for examples. I will take this on notice, but through Enterprise Opportunities, businesses like Geoneon have been quite successful in developing technologies and they're an example of a digital satellite tech automation system that's used for emergency response, which is Tasmanian and a successful story for Tasmania. So, you know, without sort of quantifying your question, I think anecdotally there are examples of success stories in Tasmania that have flourished by virtue of institutions like Enterprise.

Mr GEORGE - OK, and you say you'll take that on notice?

Mr MOGRIDGE - I will take it on notice in my capacity to answer it.

CHAIR - Mr Ferguson.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Chair. Minister, cybersecurity is like insurance, people don't think about it when everything's working well, but when something goes wrong, especially in government with the provision of services and confidential information that we hold on behalf of the Tasmanian people, everyone wants to know that the right protections were

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put in place. That's why as a government we've worked very hard to, I would say, build and rebuild systems to be more cyber secure, particularly as the environment around us has been changing. I'd invite your response to that risk more generally and what the government is doing to protect against the risk of cybersecurity events, negative events.

Mr ABETZ - Look, cybersecurity, big issue, it impacts a lot of government activities, the private sector and indeed our own universities are subject to cybersecurity attacks. Central to the government's strategy, which sets consistent requirements across agencies and information security risks, the government's committed nearly \$1 million dollars - \$955,000 - for Cyber Hubs for this financial year, and that brings its total contribution to \$3.2 million for this project.

The framework ensures security is embedded into the design and delivery of digital services, supports strong governance and risk management, and aligns government practices. With recognised national standards, Cyber Hubs are building local cyber-capability, supporting workforce development, and strengthening collaboration between government, industry and the education sector. These hubs are helping grow a skilled cyber-workforce while improving Tasmania's ability to prevent, detect and respond to cyber-threats. The work is supported by Digital Tasmania, which is driving consistent cybersecurity practices across government, modernising systems, strengthening identity and access management, and ensuring personal information is handled securely and responsibly. Do you want to add anything to that?

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, if you'd like. One of the other things that we've really been successful in engaging with is just the full uplift across government. We now have a connected approach to cybersecurity that is integrated with our Emergency Management Framework. So under the Emergency Management Framework, we have a cybersecurity Emergency Management plan, that is now being effectively tested and exercised, we also have used it in scenarios as well. We feel that we're in a lot better position than we have been in the last five years. There's been a major uplift in our capabilities in that space, the ability to manage incidents in a qualified way.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you, Chair. Minister, through you, I appreciate that there's a lot of knowledge at the table around the data factory, particularly the Firmus project, and we've explored the cable. I'm interested in understanding the assessments that have been done, or the level of confidence that there is, that the load coming online from the data factory, which is significant, will likely come online in advance of any new generation coming online and whether there can be a guarantee from government that this additional load won't interrupt household or small business power use or interrupt price, in terms of while there's always going to be a low generation seesaw as we develop new renewable energy. With your level of understanding of the project and its pressure in the system, whether there is a confidence that government can guarantee no interruptions in that, until new generation comes online?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister. I think we are probably venturing into the domain of the GBES and also the Minister for Energy. I'm not sure I could adequately speak to matters of specific load in relation to the grid and the ways in which the GBEs might independently maintain that. Certainly, happy to talk broadly about Firmus and I suppose in this portfolio AI uplift and digital inclusivity and connectivity. I think some of those questions are probably best directed to the appropriate minister.

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Ms FINLAY - I appreciate that, it's probably true. One of my concerns I suppose, is that often what happens is there's something happening in one department area and something happened in another. Obviously, this is being welcomed and embraced and it's exciting. We're positive about these opportunities for Tasmania, the opportunities with the cable, but we want to know that Tasmanians aren't impacted along the way.

What are the protocols of engagement between your areas of responsibility and the area of responsibility for the minister for Energy, to make sure that these things are in balance and that the seesaw doesn't get out of control between load and generation with new projects like this?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister. I think there is an electricity or an energy Cabinet subcommittee and that's the forum in which I think ministers from different components of the portfolios have an opportunity to think about those strategic issues in relation to understanding grid implications, understanding onboarding of new load and understanding implications for communities as well. I think that is the forum you know where ministers in their governing capacity have that opportunity to understand and explore the implications of these sorts of industries.

Ms FINLAY - Newly minted Minister for Innovation Science and I'm not sure of your particular title, which is different to our title, would be a member of that subcommittee and I suspect you'll probably also be a member in another life in that subcommittee.

Are you able to provide confidence to Tasmanians that there is an understanding of the balance happening between bringing on new load and generation that it won't be disruptive either to power or impactful in terms of price to Tasmanians?

Mr ABETZ - I'm confident that that will be managed to the very best of our ability and

Ms FINLAY – Your abilities aren't on great show recently, is there beyond that?

Mr ABETZ - other than that, I'm not prepared to comment at this stage, but you know, happy to take it on notice.

Ms FINLAY - Could I enforce it in the immediate term, that's actually a really essential piece of work and the Tasmanian community needs to be assured of the Tasmanian costs associated with bringing on this type of new technology into Tasmania, their cables and all of the associated, they might not be direct costs for Tasmanians in these projects, but the indirect costs and the indirect burdens that we carry, there will be benefits. That needs to be understood, and I think Tasmanians need to have a confidence about that in the immediate term.

Mr ABETZ - I'm sure people are working on that in the energy sector, be it Hydro and others. I'm happy to take that on notice, Chair, and see if other portfolio areas are able to provide some information in that regard.

Ms BADGER - There's been a lot of questions and almost scepticism that's come from the financial investment world around Firmus's IPO and also around some of the technical claims such as their power efficiency and the scalability of those from their current AI factory, which is obviously a lot smaller than what they're planning to roll out. Despite that scepticism

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from elsewhere, the Tasmanian government jumped straight in and backed them during caretaker mode, with the Premier announcing the world's first AI factory zone. Although I note that zone has no regulatory powers.

What confidence did the Tasmanian government receive from Firmus that there wouldn't be any issues that the power efficiency would be as they claim that the water usage would be as is suggested, and fiscally of course, that this would be up and running and economically fine for Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - That's a good question. I don't know any of that.

Ms BADGER - Sorry, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Is there somebody who can answer that at the table? Mr Mogridge is willing to have a crack.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Just to say broadly that when Hydro Tasmania is entering into contracts - and again, this is in many respects their domain - in the ordinary course they are looking to explore creditworthiness of a particular business in understanding any sort of long-term commitment in relation to energy, so be it Firmus or any other particular business, these are the sort of standard protocols that Hydro Tasmania would be looking to understand. I think it's broadly fair to say that as part of their due process and governance frameworks they would be taking into account those matters.

Ms BADGER - Is that also confirmation that there are long-term deals done by Hydro with Firmus, because currently they have a three-year tenure? On the basis of what you just said, I wasn't sure if there was further information than what we have.

Mr MOGRIDGE - I was merely making the observation that in relation to any contract you would enter into, you would be typically considering things like creditworthiness.

Prof RAZAY - The UK parliament has introduced strict legislation to criminalise the creation, adaptation, possession and distribution of AI tools designed to generate sexualised imagery of children. What is the government's policy regarding the misuse of AI in creating child sexual abuse material and how can we regulate to stop it in order to protect our children?

Mr ABETZ - That is a very important question. I don't know if that's in the federal domain more than the state domain. I've just had confirmed with me that it is in the federal domain, but you can be assured that the Tasmanian government - and I would hazard a guess that everybody sitting around this table and in our state parliament - would be backing in whatever might be required to be done to ensure that of which you spoke hopefully can be completely stopped. I take your issue on board very much and I trust everybody would be so-minded.

Prof RAZAY - Do we know that they are doing that now?

Dr THURLEY - What I can add to the general aspects of what you've just presented is that at the federal government level there is work undertaken in that space. There is some pretty serious work, as you can imagine, with Home Affairs and the Australian Federal Police. I can't

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go into exactly what they're doing, that's for them to answer, but I know there is activity in that space.

If you're looking at how we address those issues and the seriousness with which it's taken, there's many steps that have been taken. A question just recently asked what are we doing with the AI safety, et cetera, even just from a government perspective? To be honest, our obligations don't change. The seriousness of the obligations that you've just brought forward are very much front of mind for government at the moment given the previous inquiries. Our code of conduct and our policies and procedures around information management and also the use of artificial intelligence or the misuse of technology in any way is certainly covered under policies across all the agencies in government.

Ms BURNET - I think we know that the energy outputs or the requirements of the three Firmus sites and the energy use is going to be massive, but I am wondering about the data outputs of the three Firmus sites. Do we have that?

Mr MOGRIDGE - To confirm, do you mean how much information it is sending out?

Ms BURNET - Yes.

Mr MOGRIDGE - I don't think I could quantify that currently. I think that's probably subject to a range of variables such as the level of GPUs they'll be putting in every facility and the technology at the time of installation. I think it would be very difficult to give you any specificity there.

Ms BURNET - It certainly doesn't have any bearing on Tasmania's needs, does it? It's all about-

Ms FINLAY - It must be less than the capacity of the cable, but I'd be interested in what the spare capacity is and that might give you an indication. It'd be a maths question there.

Mr MOGRIDGE - I can't really comment further in relation to sort of anticipated outputs. It could vary at particular times and it could vary on the level of investment in relation to GPUs, as I said. In relation to the new subsea cable, again it's very early days, but I think the indicative indication is that there would be capacity in the vicinity of 50 per cent of it. We just need to gain some further understanding in relation to this particular project and that's going to come with the fullness of time. Obviously this news is very fresh.

Mr FERGUSON - I'm going to stay with Firmus and SUMCO for now and also give a big compliment to the partners of this project, not just Firmus but also Bevan Slattery of SUMCO. He is a pioneer and veteran of this sector and he's got runs on the board all over the place, so congratulations to them. I'm so pleased that it's commercial and didn't require taxpayer input.

Minister, with the considerable interest we all have, I think we should explore what its potential implications are for Tasmania's digital sector, because we understand the data factory. I think we're interested in what other benefits are going to be available to the Tasmanian community. For me, it's very obvious that it will be a very welcome additional link across Bass Strait in addition to Telstra 1 and 2, Basslink, the future Marinus and now an additional one with SUMCO. So that's a lot of redundancy and I would welcome your views and those of your

officials as to how we can capitalise on this for jobs here in Tasmania outside of the data centre industry.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for the question and the developments that are taking place are very exciting. We had the announcement on 2 June from Firmus and SUMCO announcing a commercial agreement to construct a new subsea cable. The announcement's broadly consistent with the Tasmanian government's longstanding objective of strengthening telecommunications resilience, competition, capacity and connectivity. Proposals are at an early stage but subject to further technical, regulatory and commercial development, and I'm now pleased to confirm that the brief does talk about Melbourne.

To put the importance of this project in perspective, the new fibre cable connecting Tasmania with Melbourne and Sydney will add 60-plus terabits per second of capacity, exceeding the total of existing Bass Strait cables combined and effectively more than doubling Tasmania's data throughput capability. That will support growth in data-intensive industries such as cloud computing, fintech, digital media and advanced manufacturing by removing a key infrastructure bottleneck that has historically constrained large-scale digital investment, improve business continuity for government services, critical infrastructure and export-oriented digital businesses.

It will make Tasmania more attractive for data-critical operations with new infrastructure, which introduces greater competition in wholesale connectivity markets, expanding options for service providers and customers, placing downward pressure on internet and data costs and encouraging innovation at the entry of new digital businesses. We continue to build investor and industry confidence through a combination of policy certainty, strong investment signals and a supportive operating environment. Large private infrastructure projects of this scale are only possible when companies have confidence and this government is seeking to provide exactly that.

Ms FINLAY - This is the opportunity for scrutiny, right? Our position on data factories, cables and things is all positive, as is our use of AI in government done well. This series of questions is about understanding where you're at with the rollout of AI and where the equal and balanced opportunity is for people in the public service. There's been an announcement of the \$4 million in terms of further developing AI work across government and there was a commitment to that foundational work. Can you confirm that all of that first-step work has been done, completed, audited, understood, before that further work is done? There was sort of baseline policy work that was due to be rolled out and there was a suggestion that maybe that hadn't run its full course yet before this new allocation was made in the budget.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, Minister. Yes, you're absolutely correct. There's quite a lot of - we had a road map we developed back in 2024. We ran AI with a working group put down to establish what we needed to do for responsible and ethical use of AI. Clearly, that was where the emergence of some of the large language models that occurred. So that sent us on a journey to understand what we really need to do as a priority to get in place. The result of that was working with other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth. We put in the guidelines, which you'd be aware of, and part of the guidelines, once we put them in place, was to then move on to what's our next road map. We established another two-year road map to understand what we need to do. The priority area for that road map was AI policy. We're moving from guidance to policy. So we have gone through the process of establishing that policy.

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We've actually set out to do, you know, like a comprehensive job on the policy and also to make it useful for agencies, individuals in government to support them and build the right framework for guidance, et cetera. Because if we're going to see this technology emerge and diffuse across a government - it already has, it's done it while we're watching it - then we need to be prepared as well as we could be. So we have invested quite a lot of time and effort with the working group to develop this new policy framework. This new policy framework is at its final draft and preparing to be hopefully endorsed and approved by the Secretary's board, the Tasmanian Government. That's where we find ourselves now.

Mr ABETZ - Does Mr Healey want to add anything?

Mr HEALEY - Yes, I will, because I think it's a really good question and we're really heavily focused on the fact that because of the rapid emergence of AI, we do have to learn by doing. But we also have to make sure that what we're doing is safe, is ethical, is appropriately constrained or guided by all of the policies that are being developed at the moment. So we are actively working with Justin, working with the university - so the AI accelerator is a three-way partnership between the state, the university and the private sector. Part of the role in engaging with the university is to make sure that we can apply a really sort of ethical lens to the use of AI and we can continue to learn on how it can be applied safely across services. Enormous opportunity, but we're certainly not blind to the fact that we need to be really responsible in how we roll it out.

Ms FINLAY - It seems to me that there's opportunity for the government in a positive way. There's a lot of talk about efficiencies at the moment and there is a lot of, you know, a lot of positive and reinforcing empowering benefits from using AI in the delivery of services. I'm interested in how decisions are made on how opportunities within government and the public sector are used to use AI. So there's the policies and the governance about what and how, but then on who does it? Because one of the things that's emerging is imbalances between people who are given the opportunity to evolve, engage and work with AI and those perhaps who aren't, and then that becomes imbalances in workforce and work opportunity. How's the government exploring that?

Mr HEALEY - Maybe in answering that, can I maybe provide a little bit of sort of foundational context. When we look at AI, we're probably looking at three streams of AI. One is how we're embedding AI into the everyday workplace of the State Service, so embedded within desktops and the like. The second is how do we use AI to make systems more efficient and make decision-making and service delivery better for the Tasmanian community and the third is how do we use AI to improve the relationship between the Tasmanian community and the Tasmanian Government. The things that you need to put in place are quite different across all three.

The AI accelerator is really looking at that second space on how do we actually improve government systems and government decision-making, particularly in the regulatory space. Enormous opportunities in AI helping regulators to regulate in a much more efficient and much more accurate way. So that there, in terms of prioritising those, we will be working with all agencies to understand where regulatory effort is already relatively well codified, because where it is well codified, it's very right for getting AI to assist, not the decision-making, but the analysis part of decision-making to enable a decision maker to make a decision. That's probably one of the areas where we'll start to look in the first place.

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System-wide, we are prioritising where the greatest benefit will be for government and the community. There is a broader issue around the first stream in getting AI into desktops and that is a discussion that is very active across all agencies on how we support each other to do that responsibly. We have the CIO, the chief information officers' network, that's actively considering security and policy and the like and we also have the policy deputy secretaries actively talking about, what does this mean for how we manage our workplace and support our workplace? How do we get uplift in terms of capability across all of our state servants? It's a really active discussion. I can't say we have all of the answers, but we certainly understand the sorts of issues that you're raising the question.

CHAIR - Minister, we have to get it on the record that you are happy for members to go direct to members of the table?

Mr ABETZ - Absolutely, as indicated earlier.

Ms BADGER - One of the key aspects of AI is, of course, the transparency and education of the community to understand how that is being rolled out across the state service, how it's used in different departments. Previously, the state government had committed to a register so that all of that was put forward. We now understand that's possibly not happening. Can you confirm whether or not that is the case and exactly how Tasmanians can see and engage and understand exactly how AI is being used, by who and importantly what AI is being used? What the program is, the companies behind it and that sort of thing. Because obviously there's additional concerns around sovereign risk and different backing of different companies as well.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, I can answer parts of that. I want to set a clarification on the transparency component of the AI register that's been in the conversations and recently. When we first established the guidelines back in 2024, there was an element in it which was recommendation No. 7, which was primarily around knowledge sharing, collaboration amongst the agencies to understand where we were going with AI, what was being done with AI and whether we could learn from each other. The register formed part of that conversation. So, recommendation 7, you'll notice it says we will actively produce an AI initiative register.

The purpose of that register was not as a transparency instrument at all, but the idea was to share amongst each other -

Ms BADGER - That's a shame, it was so good.

Dr THURLEY - No, but, as you've pointed out, we learnt the same way many people have is that when we did that in 2024, at the end of it I should say 2025, we're looking: 'oh, people are starting to use registers as a way of committing to transparency' – 'Oh, that's a good idea'. So, we established with the working group that this was an essential component that needed to be brought into our policy moving forward.

I can safely say that at the moment in our draft policy, there is a section in there which talks about an AI register being used for transparency purposes. In other words, the ability to identify high-risk or medium-to-high-risk AI applications or use cases and potentially even publish those for transparency purposes, so that's just on the AI register and its definitely part of our thinking, and our thinking has emerged into the same place that I believe you're alluding to as well. So, we absolutely agree, at least internally we've had that conversation.

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The second part of it on transparency, we are also moving in towards standardising the way that we talk about how we use AI. The use of AI transparency statements is well into the policy thinking. We've seen how other jurisdictions and particularly the federal government have produced some what I think are good standards around treating transparency and AI. We intend to align with that. We have done the work with them over the past, aligned with a lot of the framework that's been developed, and we would probably be looking to create the same scenario under our new policy that actually sees transparency statements being used as a way of declaring where AI has been used and how it's been used.

For that purpose, we agree that people need to know where it's been used and how it's been used and to set a way of communicating that, so I would completely agree.

Ms BADGER - Can I just clarify, in terms of, you mentioned that that idea is mentioned in the draft policy document, timewise what does that mean in terms of the policy document coming out, the work starting and what's your intentions there?

Dr THURLEY - To be quite frank, most of the agencies have got registers of what they potentially could be using. I can't quote them exactly who's got what, but we have seen, you know we've shared information, so to produce the register would be not long after the period of time. We've actually got a set time-frame in the policy for when that all had to be completed, I'd have to quickly look at that policy in there to get you that time-frame, but understanding that we'd see it as a priority to establish.

Mr HEALEY - Through you, minister, can I just provide the assurance that any of the work that we're doing is having regard to the draft policy and the work that they're already doing. Even though the final policy might not be out there, many of the principles embedded in the policy are guiding the work that we're already doing.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. My second question regards - we've got talk of this new fantastic data cable, that's great but Tasmania continues to be the worst performing state in terms of digital inclusion. We've seen multiple Online Access Centres either close or be amalgamated with libraries, which means they can't perform exactly the same tasks that they were for the community beforehand. We've got a lot of Tasmanian communities that can't get adequate telecommunication, such as at The Great Lake and tourist populations, when there's a satellite population that pops up; there are shops and small businesses that can't use their EFTPOS systems. There's a lot of inequality in the digital space in this state that needs to be addressed. We haven't had a digital inclusion announcement off the back of this budget. So what is the government actually going to do to upscale Tasmania's performance and inclusion in the digital space?

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, we've recognised the digital inclusion issues as well and we have done in the past. The real focus at the moment is that we are in the process of developing a digital inclusion framework to work with the community, industry and government together, to collaborate on various factors in terms of what we can improve and how we can improve digital inclusion across the state, including how we design services, et cetera in government, to respect the digital aspects of that. Because it's what we call a complex and cross-cutting issue involving multiple factors, including the connectivity, affordability, skills, design and trust et cetera. We see there's existing activity across government, but also that industry and the community sector has had a fairly significant play

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in the space. We're not the only people doing work in this area and we're trying to acknowledge and see that and try and defragment the scenario that we have.

With this framework, which we hope to release soon, we have a structured approach to how we will look at access to reliable connectivity, the affordability of devices and services, digital skills and capability, inclusive government service design, trust, safety and transparency in those spaces. We're aiming to deliver better outcomes through collaboration across industry, government and the community.

The role of government in that space we see: we recognise our role as an enabler for connectivity and infrastructure where we can, a provider of accessible services, a regulator ensuring safety and trust. We have roles in those spaces. We are also a partner working with the community and industry. We've had some really good feedback on our early consultations in with the Digital Tasmania Strategy about how we could do that and what we would, how we would go about that with the community groups and also industry being prepared to commit into that as well.

Ms BADGER - That framework coming out soon, this year maybe?

Dr THURLEY -It's part of the 100-day plans requirements. So it's probably imminent -

Ms FINLAY - Which 100 days?

Ms BADGER - Definitely not the 100-day plan.

Mr HEALEY - Through you, minister, can I just can I just add something to that? This is not taking away the challenges that we have with access to devices or access to data connectivity. But I just wanted to point out that I think AI will be quite valuable in dealing with the digital divide issues associated with skills and capability, and associated with the design of government services. AI can actually make systems a lot more accessible for people that have lower levels of skill -

Ms BADGER - Not if people don't have the internet.

Mr HEALEY - No, no, and that's what I've set up. That's what I said, not -

Ms BADGER -That's the problem, we're missing the core infrastructure and essential equality.

CHAIR - Ms Badger.

Mr HEALEY - Agreed, but there's multiple components of the digital divide. Some of them are made better by AI. Absolutely agree that it doesn't address the other ones.

Mr ABETZ - Dr Thurley has some information.

Dr THURLEY - I was trying to find my exact date for you. It's part of the 100 day plan, part of the 2030 plan. 19 June is our target date to try and get that out.

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Mr GEORGE - Minister, we know from reports that we have a shortfall of about 300 information and communications technology graduates per year, against demand obviously. What new training or job programs are the government funding to ensure cybersecurity analysts, data scientists, AI engineers and so on, which are roles critical to the digital economy, are being developed in Tasmania? How many people are we going to be able to drive into that area of the workforce per year? I think that was the KPMG report that was done for Tasmania.

Mr HEALEY - Excellent question. I think through this portfolio, there's a number of activities that are being explored in relation to supporting the ICT sector moving forward. You've rightly identified a growing need for the workforce in this respect.

One particular action that I would like to draw your attention to coming out of the Advanced Technology Strategy which was recently released by the government in this portfolio, is working in close partnership with the University of Tasmania in relation to STEM and associated capabilities. We're expecting that partnership to roll out in the near future and that will really be about ensuring students have a really clear through-line from studies to jobs and also having a partnership program with the universities in the STEM space where government is tangibly supporting the sorts of research and investment which can go to the ICT space; building our ongoing understanding of the successes of things like the Blue Economy CRC, et cetera with collaborative designs. That's a partnership that the government has is actively mentioned as part of the advanced Technology Strategy.

Also under this portfolio is an ongoing close partnership with TasICT and that's where we will continue to progress partnerships in relation to understanding digital uplift across all businesses in Tasmania, standing on the shoulders of giants in relation to the IT community that are well advanced in some of these spaces to support uplift in some of the smaller businesses.

There's a range of augments going on as well through our Business Tasmania team, as I alluded to earlier, which are being supported under the Advanced Technology Strategy as well. There's a couple of different levers being explored in that respect. I'm not sure whether the DPAC team has something to add in that regard as well.

Mr HEALEY - What I will add is the AI accelerator has four objectives. One of them is to ensure that we can leverage off government investment in AI to strengthen our broader economic and innovation capability. That's one of the really constructive and exciting opportunities that we have in partnering with the university around the AI accelerator. We said before that we have to learn while we do; we want our graduates and under graduates and the university to learn as we do, to not only make us better, but also to improve their capability within the university.

I think having one university and having a really constructive and growing relationship between the university and the state can really help in this space with practical skills development.

Mr GEORGE - In total, what sort of investment is the government making in making sure that these skills are developed and expanded and that we're starting to get people into the workforce? I mean, overall, what sort of money goes into it in the end?

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Mr HEALEY - I can only talk about the money that we're putting into the AI accelerator. There's \$4 million a year for two years that will go into the practical delivery of that. If that money can be invested in a way that is also transferring new skills into undergraduates and graduates, then that makes that capability of the university that lifts that capability within the university that helps them to attract graduates. It helps them to offer a really positive product, practical product to new graduates entering into the system. We hope that that lifts capability for everyone.

Ms BURNET - Minister, the Cybersecurity Strategy 2024 - 28 was tabled in the other place by former minister Ogilvie in Estimates in December 2025. I've searched the government website and cannot find it and I'm sent to the 2022 strategy. I'm not sure if that's some kind of glitch and I would hope that it would be not a permanent glitch, but I have been looking and it's not coming up with an easy Google search, so just to let you know about that.

Mr ABETZ - If you like we can try a table search with Dr Thurley.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister. So it should be available on the DPAC website.

Ms BURNET - I've got the 2022 one but not the latest one, so it's a bit of a strange thing for -

Dr THURLEY - I can say that recently there was an update to the website, the Google search indexing may not be giving you the right link. I can make sure that you have access to the right link and possibly even get you a copy of it if you like.

Ms BURNET - Thank you, that would be great. My question is: in this Digital Tasmania 2026-31 strategy, which you tabled before, it puts a great deal of emphasis on the issue of cybersecurity, for obvious reasons, so I'm just wondering - because I couldn't see the outputs, now it's not a bad day for me, I assure you - how many government departments have suffered data security breaches, significant ones, in the past 12 to 24 months? How do you categorise the seriousness of those breaches?

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, I can help with that. Obviously, the cybersecurity touches all departments in some way. Even when they're not impacted by incidents, they can be impacted in different ways. What I can say is, in terms of giving you a feel for the stats, that from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, which is the reporting period here, we responded to approximately - and this is the whole-of-government cyber team so we get a fair bit of visibility of just about every incident - 541 incidents. Which has basically been an increase of about 70 per cent since the 2024-25 season.

However, there is a different way we've been classifying incidents which has probably led to a little bit of the uplift, if we normalise for that, then there's been a small increase in cyber security incidents. That's that side of it.

In terms of categorising cyber security incidents and their seriousness; there are obviously various degrees of seriousness. Under the State Emergency Management Plan, we have a risk framework that actually helps to identify when we classify an incident that requires broad-level coordination beyond a particular agency, so if an agency is not able to cope with the resourcing required to respond or they need to coordinate across multiple agencies. Then we start to classify the incident higher and higher each time and there's an escalation process

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in the State Emergency Management arrangements that we use as well in our cyber that allows us to build up the coordination based on the need and requirements of the incident.

Typically, it starts with an agency struggling with a problem. We classify that, we talk about whether they need additional help, we often provide resources centrally to help with that. Then as it moves into an escalated scenario, we actually start to use the provisions in the playbooks within the cybersecurity Emergency Management Plan.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I want to return back to the economic and job outcomes from our digital industry in Tasmania. I don't have to tell you what wonderful and enterprising people that they are that we have in TasICT community. It's becoming an increasingly important source of high-skilled jobs and investment for our state. Would you update the committee on how the government is supporting the growth of this sector and helping Tasmanian businesses? Not just to employ more people, that's great too, but how they are being supported to commercialise new ideas and of course to create employment opportunities.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for the question. The government's got its Advanced Technology Strategy which is positioning us as a leader in areas such as advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, data-driven industries, and applied research. The work is reinforced by Digital Tasmania which is strengthening the digital foundations of government.

The government is working very closely with the University of Tasmania to ensure UTAS, government and industry are working together to boost economic growth and with that, jobs growth. The partnership is strengthening research collaboration, aligning skills and workforce development with industry needs and accelerating the translation of research and innovation into commercial outcomes and new jobs.

Ms FINLAY - I appreciate you outlining the three streams of work where AI preparedness is happening across government and can see that they're neat packets of work. I'm interested in the operational efficiencies that are expected as a result of the budget outcomes across the entire government and wondering if you could highlight - because I'm interested, not because I want to be negative - any sort of particular creative or expansive projects that might be happening with the use of AI to address some of these issues. You identified that AI is beyond emerging, it's happening and we're in a race to keep up and do as we go. Are there any interesting projects you're doing to actively address the operational efficiencies that have been required as a part of the Budget?

Mr ABETZ - It depends on your definition of 'interesting'. Over to you, Mr Healey.

Ms FINLAY - I have a highly elevated definition of 'interesting' because there are so many things that are happening worldwide and it's great Tasmania is on the path. I always worry that we might be behind the path, but are there identified teams that have been isolated and verified to do some sort of extension work that could look at the challenges Tasmania faces?

Mr HEALEY - I probably can't give you any direct linkages between the work on AI and the operational efficiencies that are outlined in the Budget. Obviously the operational efficiencies are the responsibility of individual agencies and I'd hate to go into how they're delivering on those, other than to say that one of the absolute opportunities and intentions for the AI accelerator is to say, 'Okay, here is our challenge that we need to deliver on over the

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next four years. How do we deliver on those operational efficiencies with the least impact on service delivery as we can?', and that will be one of the prioritising principles that will go into the support of the AI accelerator.

Ms FINLAY - Conversely, the greatest positive impact.

Mr HEALEY - You are absolutely right. The absolute demonstration of the opportunities of AI I think is being effectively demonstrated most clearly with the work Huon Valley is doing on their planning system. It's bringing very real benefits, creating efficiencies in an area where there is absolutely constraint in skills in terms of planners and it's allowing them to do their core role more effectively by lessening the administrative burden.

With police it is very similar. We have supported Tasmania Police through our unit to develop an AI agent that allows their constables, when preparing for court, to inform themselves as to whether or not they're ready before they go into court. AI is not making decisions for them or doing anything other than saying, 'We've looked at your prosecution files -

Ms FINLAY - Maybe you should give that to your ministers before they say things in parliament.

Mr HEALEY - It's allowing them to say, 'We've looked at your files'. Let me take a step back. In the development of the agent we had consultants work with the most senior prosecutors in Police to understand how they would assess whether a file is ready for court. We've built that into an agent that every constable can now use to say, 'Is my file ready for court?'. What Police is excited about is that they believe that will significantly reduce the wasted time of police officers going to court and having their case adjourned. It reduces the enormous waste in the court system by having cases adjourned and it makes the whole system more effective.

Ms FINLAY - And more than likely make that process more successful.

Mr HEALEY - And it makes the process more successful. They're able to run that function more efficiently and get better outcomes from it. I have to say that agent cost us about \$10,000 to build. It will cost a little bit more to roll out, but you're talking about really significant efficiencies with not a lot of investment, provided that we can work across government in a really collaborative and safe way to identify those opportunities. The difference with the AI accelerator than perhaps some other whole-of-government programs is that our entire objective is to support agencies to identify opportunities and deliver on those opportunities that they want to prioritise in order to deliver their operational efficiencies. We're not picking winners, we're just lifting the capability of agencies to do it.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. I didn't know about that and that's exactly the sort of answer I was looking for. That's given me two other questions. Was the agent developed in Tasmania?

Mr HEALEY - Yes, by a Tasmanian company.

Ms FINLAY - Great, probably a good outcome.

Mr ABETZ - The Huon Valley Council one was also developed in Tasmania.

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Ms FINLAY - Yes, I'm familiar with that project. How many agents have been developed that you're aware of? Obviously each department might be procuring and doing that work, but it sounds like you've got an overall sort of understanding of this. Are there other agents that have been developed?

Mr HEALEY - We're stepping into this space. We have some funding that was provided to us for efficiency and productivity generally which we've been applying to get some early engagement going in advance of the AI accelerator being established. On 19 June we've got all agencies coming together for a full-day workshop to design how the accelerator is going to work and how we start doing that right across government and getting everyone benefiting from that sort of work. We have had some early discussions with a number of parts of government, for example, around where there is pressure on them on information coming into their systems that they struggle to prioritise and analyse, so we've got some early work on potentially developing some assistance in that space, but it's very early days. Probably the Police one is the most advanced.

Ms FINLAY - Interesting, Thank you.

Ms BADGER - There's sort of a new emerging psychosocial hazard that workplaces around the world are facing referred to as the AI brain fry, and I know the *Australian Financial Review* reported on that earlier this week. As a part of rolling out AI across the State Service - I think it's \$500,000 a year for two years in that program - what's going to be put in place to help facilitate the State Service to help them deal with that load? It's mainly around having to manage a lot of new systems that are coming into place and learning that AI space, and the fear that that system that people are training and working with could actually eventually take their job.

Dr THURLEY - I would put that into the category of education and awareness to help build capability and familiarity with the technology as being the primary mechanism for getting the confidence and reducing anxiety for use with any sort of tool or solution you might be using. It's not the full gamut. We've already got in place programs where we look at how we look after workplace safety and wellness in the in the workplace and understanding that using change management is a major paradigm for making those changes. I think the education and awareness component is probably our next move to relieve that anxiety and to build up the literacy first and then move on to fluency along those channels. We've got a few ideas in place there. We've had some venture into some areas of how we're going to do that but this is a journey that we're on as part of this program and it is a change, a transformation, and it's not just in government, it's across the full economy.

Ms BADGER - Yes, absolutely.

Mr HEALEY - The only thing I was going to add is that these are very active discussions across agencies. At the deputy secretary level we certainly understand that AI is not just some tool that's going to come in and make everyone's world great. It's going to require adjustments in the workplace. It will require a cultural shift within the workplace that we absolutely need to manage. I know there are anxieties around AI taking people's jobs. That's not the experience of AI. The experience is that AI is making people more effective in their roles. Certainly there'll be changes in what people do within the workplace, but I think we'll find that AI will make people's roles more effective as opposed to just wholesale taking people's jobs.

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Ms BADGER - That might not be people in Tasmania's experience with AI yet, but it has been elsewhere and I think we should acknowledge that there are people who have lost their jobs and that is important. I just want to go back to some of the regulatory considerations for AI and data centres in Tasmania, and I note in one of the ministerial briefings that was provided talking about Firmus' expansion in Tasmania, it talks about - and this is from within the last 12 months - that the OCG was still working through the economic impacts and benefits for Tasmania. That's despite, obviously, decisions currently being made on that project and the Premier's glowing endorsement. It also outlines how they looked to Singapore, where they're currently based, for further expansion, which was not possible given the Singaporean government has placed limits due to availability of appropriate land and power usage as well. Is that a priority piece of work for a place like Tasmania as well, where we have Firmus alone about to become the biggest energy consumer, plus other data centres? Unfortunately, we don't have infinite space for these facilities here. Is that the top priority, to work with and across other government departments to come up with what it would best look like for Tasmania to ensure that we are clean, green and connected?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, I think that these are sorts of live questions that the Coordinator-General's office is sort of actively considering, and the Coordinator-General is the primary conduit for exploring some of the points that you're making and working directly with Firmus. I am mindful minister Ellis does have Estimates later today and that might be an opportunity to talk to that as well.

Mr GEORGE - I'm slightly concerned that this may prove to be a Dorothy Dixier, somewhat like my Liberal colleagues like to present to the minister, but I'm actually very curious personally about what specific roles Tasmania and the Tasmanian government aims to create through its innovation spending. Does Tasmania have particular focuses on particular areas that may be different from the rest of the nation? Are there any specific roles specifically to Tasmania?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, excellent question and I suspect this is front of mind for the government, particularly as we step forward in relation to the forward years. What I think is being explored firstly with the economic diversification and investment strategy is a firm understanding for the state of the areas where Tasmania can continue to credibly compete, and really understanding how we can support those areas moving into the future, and without sort of cherry picking particular areas, we have seen a lot of successes in spaces of natural advantage.

Obviously we are an Antarctic gateway, for example. What we've seen through the successes of the Tasmanian Antarctic gateway is very high-productivity workforce in relation to research and support for gateway initiatives, and we're also looking to build more broadly on some of our bespoke maritime research and advanced manufacturing and so on. Through the advanced technology strategy that's been released under this particular portfolio, and that overarching piece of work which I expect will soon to be released to the community, is that very active understanding of how are we looking to build a framework where we are supporting businesses and enterprises moving into the future that have that genuine competitive edge, understanding our natural benefits and some of our growing capabilities and looking to support them moving forward.

Prof RAZAY - With the report that Firmus Technologies will underwrite the creation of the first fibre optic cable to Tasmania as part of a deal with the undersea cable company

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SUBCO, will Firmus have priority use of the new cable at the expense of other Tasmanian commercial enterprises and the wider community if demand outstrips supply, and how will priority use be determined?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, in this instance, this is a wonderful private investment in relation to both resilience and capacity. Being a private investment, I think obviously Firmus will be looking to have capacity through it themselves. Notwithstanding that, our present understanding - and I must stress, you know, this is an active discussion, and I'm sure we will be developing our understanding moving forward - is that there will be significant capacity. I would expect as part of understanding that capacity moving forward, it would be how do we utilise that capacity in providing additional connectivity to Tasmania. Whilst it is a private investment, I think in the fullness of time we will build an understanding of how that opportunity benefits Tasmania more broadly.

Mr FERGUSON - I'd like to move back to digital transformation. Minister, I'd be grateful if your officials could assist in answering this as well: technology, especially the forms of technology that government is sponsoring, should be making life easier not just for our public servants but for Tasmanians; that's our principal focus. One of the key promises of digital transformation - and this goes back really for the life of our government - is in reducing red tape, making it easier for Tasmanians to interact with government with the simple ambition, for example, of getting rid of paper-based forms or at least giving people the choice of a digital option.

I'd ask if you could provide some examples of how digital initiatives are already simplifying processes and improving access to services, particularly for people living in regional communities. I'd love to hear from your officials about the next projects that they see, regardless of which agency is the sponsor, which will actually help improve the lives of Tasmanians, and a quick shout-out to the excellent work of Dr Thurley and the DPAC team around the Service Tasmania portal. I think we've got the beginnings of something really positive here, but there's a limited number of - the Service Tasmania portal doesn't have a lot of services on it right now, but it's the backbone that will allow a lot more to come, and that's really where I'd like to learn about next steps.

Mr ABETZ - Look, if I may, Chair, I will table data and digital government highlights for 2025-26. The government continues to deliver strong outcomes in digital government with significant progress across service platforms and cyber resilience. The report highlights the scale and growing uptake of Tasmanian government digital services. The launch of the myServiceTas app in December 2025 marked an important step towards more accessible and convenient government services, with more than 89,000 new accounts created and over 210,000 transactions completed since April 2025. The TasALERT platform recorded more than 90,000 additional app downloads and delivered over 15.4 million emergency notifications to the community. Across core service delivery, government processed more than 1.1 million payslips worth over \$2 billion, supported more than 53,000 voice endpoints, and maintained network infrastructure across 960 locations in 128 towns.

Cyber resilience remained a key priority with a whole-of-government cyber team responding to 541 incidents over the reporting period. We also continue to strengthen whole-of-government cyber-capability training and coordinated response arrangements. We also progressed major strategic initiatives including the launch of Digital Tasmania 2026-2031, the development of responsible AI frameworks and continued national collaboration on digital

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identity, data and cyber security. Together these achievements reflect a more mature, coordinated and resilient digital capability focused on delivering secure, inclusive and high-quality services for Tasmanians.

Mr FERGUSON - If it's okay, I did just invite to test the officials about what's next for the Service Tasmania website and app. That's what the voters, the people of our state are probably looking for here.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, yes, so I've got here the road map, detailed road map, here for Service Tasmania. We've completed recently the upgrade permits for registrations and licensing. We've got the Marine and Safety Tasmania dashboard and ability to log into that system through Service Tas, the next part is - for the MyTas - to develop an online application process with the ability to update details to replace deactivated cards for Property Identification Codes and the seniors companion. We also have the myServiceTas app, the mobile app, which is going to have verifiable cards available to customer via the myServiceTas app.

Mr FERGUSON - What cards, please?

Dr THURLEY - Sorry, I needed to confirm that. It is the Seniors Card, potentially - well, we haven't agreed on exactly what's going on it - and the personal information identification card as the starting point. The development of the wallet and the ability to use that, we also have the ability to allow the customer - a bit of an identity uplift in myServiceTas, which will allow the customer to verify their identity through one of three levels via the myServiceTas and using the DVS sort of environment, which is the digital verification services. We have a migrate to new payment gateways to improve the way the payments are processed.

Mr FERGUSON - That's fantastic. Thank you very much.

Ms FINLAY - Just getting a little more practical now about the actual Budget. The Digital Tasmania strategy here - there's quite a lot of work and things to be implemented. Can you detail how that specifically aligns with the budget allocations? Are there sufficient allocations made to actually do the work that's identified?

Dr THURLEY - Sorry, could you rephrase that?

Mr ABETZ - Not all at once.

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister. Could I just ask you to clarify that question again, sorry?

Ms FINLAY - Sure. So, the Digital Tasmania strategy has been rolled out and, within it, it identifies a range of work that needs to be done. I want to check, with the allocation within this actual budget, that there are sufficient funds in there for the works that have been identified because it appears as though there will be significant effort required and projects to be delivered.

Dr THURLEY - Thank you. Through you, minister. As you can imagine, we established this plan as a framework for a combination of existing programs we have and also new programs that will be developed in time. Some things will be funded, some won't be funded.

But under the program we have, at the moment, there's the Digital Transformation Priority Expenditure Fund, which has \$40 million in it, which includes digital health. Sorry, \$40.5 million for the Digital Transformation Priority Expenditure Fund, which has a group of projects in it that have either new or funded, and I will go into that in a minute. But we have also \$40 million for the digital health transformation, which is coming under the government systems. We've got \$16 million for project unifying in police. We also have the \$24.8 million for the human resources transformation project. They're the broader-level initiatives for modernising government in there.

I think the big takeaways under the Digital Transformation Fund are the AI accelerator, which we've spoken about. There's also work in NRET with the electronic survey data lodgement side of things. Also PlanBuild in Justice. Also, at this point, [inaudible] as well, the parliamentary audio broadcasting system upgrades as well. They're the sort of new additions to it, but quite a number of projects are already funded in there that have been in previous budgets that are still ongoing.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. You mentioned some things that won't be funded. By exception, could identify the items that are included in the strategy that aren't funded?

Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister. Just give me a chance to bring up - under the outcomes we're looking for, we have for digital inclusion and access, we've obviously some programs that are in play there, but not everything is funded yet. We may be looking at new programs or new opportunities as they be coordinated through industry community dialogue. That's one area we don't have funding for, but we are looking to pull the framework together to see what's needed. There's skills and capabilities. We obviously want to uplift digital capability across government and make sure there's a sustainable talent sort of environment for not just government, but for the economy in general.

Government understands it has a leadership role in that area and that leadership role we've been working with through existing resources. But there may be future scenarios where we are looking to join up with the higher education sector or the education sector to promote skills and capabilities. We've been a big advocate of the Skills Framework for the Information Age, and we've been working with the Australian Computer Society in that space. There's some really grand work that's been done in that space I feel on behalf of industry. We are putting an effort in the resources into that. The other area in the trust, safety and transparency side of things, we've got the Cyber Hubs program that is still ongoing. We will obviously be looking to leverage the work that we do there and if we require additional change, we will look at that also.

Ms FINLAY - For clarification, when I go back and read the *Hansard*, which will be my note stream for my next activities, there were sort of three broad categories of activity. They are things that are either ongoing or with resource but not fully funded in terms of projects that might come out. They're the ones that are would be seeking future funding. Just so I'm clear.

Mr HEALEY - Minister, I just want to add to what Justin said that there is \$1.5 million allocated to efficiency and productivity in next year's budget. Part of that, one of the streams in terms of efficiency and productivity is AI and digitalisation. We will be using some of that resource to explore some of the activity within that strategy and potentially coming up with new investment opportunities.

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Dr THURLEY - Through you, minister, I will also clarify that a lot of what we've been doing in the last five years or so has been building capabilities to try and leverage those capabilities we've already built. The greatest example I could probably use is the Service Tasmania platform that we've built now as a platform for digital government, the ability to add to that at low cost or some minor less cost than what would have to be invested at a large scale. It could be something we're obviously also looking to leverage, so it's a lot about that.

Ms FINLAY - How many people would you identify as directly involved in your team? What's your ecosystem?

Dr THURLEY - My responsibilities as the CEO of government is I look after digital strategy and services which encompasses policy for our government, so ICT and digital policy for government, cybersecurity and also whole of government services. We also look after corporate IT services for DPAC. In that group, the staffing numbers as of March was 81.5 FTE, 85 headcount to give you a feel for that.

Ms FINLAY - Are you imagining with any of the operational efficiencies you could cope with any reduction of numbers there or are you expecting that would be a direction for reductions in those numbers?

Mr THURLEY - Through you, minister, our progress - and this has been noted with DPACs progress - that we've been pretty proactive in identifying efficiencies and where we can lean up our processes we have. We have particularly looked at, and one thing about the whole of government services, is as we identify savings within government then the demand for those services flow and ebb with the services because we recoup our costs and our revenues for most of our services through the other agencies. Where we identify large scale changes or productivity improvements then it flows through to our staffing numbers. We ebb and flow with those staffing numbers and always have done and how we've operated under that model. That's a big part of what we do.

The forthcoming machinery of government changes, obviously we inherit services into new agencies that we are probably involved in shared services almost definitely, that will change the equation a bit. We're obviously in the design phase for that to understand what the implications of that one. How to rightsize and build efficiencies into that process. I imagine that we will be establishing those services and delivering more efficiency through that mechanism through the scales of economy.

Ms BADGER - In terms of the AI program that's been rolled out specifically for the \$4 million over two years, is it possible to get a breakdown of which department specifically that is going to be directed towards? Certainly, we've heard a lot about justice and that's what's highlighted perhaps the most throughout the budget, but it would be great to understand where else that investment is going across the state service.

Mr HEALEY - We can't because we haven't done that prioritisation work. In terms of the AI accelerator, we've engaged a coordinator to start to bring all of this work together. I've talked about some of the work that we've done pre-accelerator in terms of working with some of the agencies. The workshop in June will be entirely to start to identify the areas that we want to target in terms of prioritisation. I mentioned before that I think regulatory decision makers that are already heavily codified will probably be an area that we will be looking closely at.

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There will probably be some other priorities. Once we have that, then we can do the work with the agencies and build that list of where we're investing across government.

Certainly, we would be expecting we would be transparent about how that's being allocated, but at the moment it's very much an ongoing piece of work.

Ms BADGER - We will take that on notice in the future months, perhaps.

For clarity on that question before I move on to my second question, I assume that will also then look at an emerging issue which is a lot of companies - not necessarily governments - signing up to certain AI programs and then using it for efficiencies and it then exceeding the Budget. Of course, that would be the worst-case scenario we would want to see with the current state finances.

My second question is on the future of this ministry, in terms of what might happen from Friday, I see that TasICT put out a statement looking for reassurances that this would still be a stand-alone and not be absorbed into any sort of more generic department. I'm not sure if you can offer us any assurances or future directions there, minister, but we'd appreciate it.

Mr ABETZ - I can't give you any assurance about the minister, as to the ministry, you would have to ask the Premier.

Ms BADGER - I will have to wait till Friday.

CHAIR - Mr George.

Mr GEORGE - I pass. I'm sated with technology.

Mr ABETZ - Chair, it might be appropriate in the absence of a question to say that it's not everyday people have the privilege to celebrate a birthday at Estimates, but I understand Mr George is today, so happy birthday!

Mr GEORGE - And I cannot think of a nicer way to spend my birthday than with you minister and your staff and my colleagues. Thank you. It's only an estimated 75 years.

CHAIR - Many happy returns.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, I hope I can get an answer from this committee. I did ask the Minister for Energy and Renewables about the health and safety impact of the AI factories in St Leonard. The reason I ask about it is because we know that with a major project like that you do conduct health and safety procedures. I'm asking whether you have conducted or are going to conduct these because cooling systems and heavy backups of generators of data centres create constant low frequency noise and light pollution that might disrupt community sleep. And the high voltage electrical substation required to power the facility has increased local exposure to electromagnetic fields. The intense continuous heat which is expelled from the servers and cooling towers can create a localised heat island raising nearby neighbourhood temperatures. Have studies been or are going to done to reassure the community.

Mr ABETZ - A good question. I assume they have to go through the planning processes and that would be with local government mainly. The question then is whether the body on

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which you used to sit, if I recall correctly, Prof Razay, is including those sorts of issues in their planning requirements, but I cannot answer any further in relation to that.

I don't know if anybody at the table has further information. No.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, in the 2025-26 Budget, start-up hub, Enterprize, was provided with funding of \$306,000 under the line item, Innovation Hub Hobart and Launceston. There's no similar line item in the 2026-2027 Budget, nor anything that is supporting the Tasmanian startup sector. Can you confirm that the government have withdrawn all financial support for Enterprize and the Tasmanian startup sector?

Mr BANNISTER - Through you, minister. Certainly can confirm there's no funding in the immediate future in relation to the Enterprize. However, I will just observe what is happening in relation to small business more broadly is consultation on a growth strategy. Part of that building and understanding of the sorts of needs and opportunities in relation to businesses and startups moving forward. I think that will be an important point of reflection in relation to understanding forward budget and the opportunities to continue to support fledgling businesses and enterprises moving forward. I think Enterprize had a lot of success, and it will be good to continue to see its success moving forward.

Mrs GREENE - When were they advised they wouldn't be receiving any further funding?

Mr BANNISTER - Through you, minister. I can't comment on that.

Mrs GREENE - Can we take that on notice, Chair?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, fair enough. Take that on notice.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you, minister. I would just like to comment that it was a pretty small amount in the budget, quite minuscule compared to other state governments investments in the startup sector. The value provided to the economy by the organisation activities over the past decade have far exceeded the government's investment. It also seems like there aren't any other initiatives in the budget to support early-stage startups. Is the government giving up on Tasmanians who are just trying to have a go at creating new jobs and the jobs of tomorrow really?

Mr ABETZ - No.

Mrs GREENE - You don't wish to elaborate on that. That's quite a disappointing answer.

Mr ABETZ - It was mainly commentary. And with the final question, no, we have not given up.

Mrs GREENE - Can you point to anything in the Budget then that would support it?

Mr ABETZ - There are many initiatives throughout the Budget that support the small business sector.

Mrs GREENE - I'm talking about the startup sector here though.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister. If I can add to that. As part of supporting startups, one of the initiatives of the government is the single use permit process, which is about cutting red tape in relation to business startups. The purpose and thrust of that objective is really to build an understanding of the blockers for businesses that are looking to commence within Tasmania and then providing a more holistic concierge service to support them as they're moving forward into the economy.

The other component of this that probably bears observation is a New Business Starter Support Service that's provided directly out of Business Tasmania that provides bespoke direct free services to businesses that are looking to start up. It provides the opportunity to understand permitting implications, regulatory implications and the like and then support them as they move forward with their business.

Ms BADGER - Minister, can you outline what funding in the Budget there is for the movement of mobile telecommunication towers around the state? Certainly last summer there was one trial in St Helens over the busy summer period to mitigate that seasonal satellite population that come. It worked with a degree of success. It's better than nothing. What funding specifically is there for other similar programmes to be rolled out and where?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister. The St Helens Tower is now proceeding to construction in the near future. That will provide important capacity for the east coast. One of the important functions of this portfolio is strong advocacy to the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth Government under the Constitution has some very significant obligations regarding regulatory functions and broader capacity to support broad wholesale investment in telecommunications technologies.

We have actively supported, for example, a campaign to increase connectivity and capacity for the west coast. What has very recently been announced in relation to the west coast is a \$9.8 million funding package from the Commonwealth to provide for services in the west coast across the three local government areas. We recently participated in some input regarding the guidelines for that.

The other important component of advocacy that we've provided mindful of the Commonwealth's overarching, you know, participation in this space is a submission that the then minister provided for the universal obligations for mobile connectivity, which will be an important transition really for regional Tasmanians, as much as all regional Australians, where there will be compulsory connectivity from 2027. We provided a lot of feedback around the importance of that for Tasmanians in those regional areas, but also in making sure that they're not disadvantaged by any inequity in relation to the pricing of that obligation to provide that low-earth-orbit satellite connectivity or otherwise. So, certainly, there's a fair bit of activity there.

Ms BADGER - Yeah, fantastic. Two things. I'll just follow up on the original part of the question - honestly, I'm not sure if it is this portfolio, it might fall under Infrastructure - about the mobile telecommunication towers that St Helens had prior to the one that's currently under construction, if it's not online already. Is there a public submission available from the Tasmanian government to the universal connectivity, like the feedback that the federal government was seeking, is that something that's publicly available to read?

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Mr MOGRIDGE - I would imagine so. Certainly the submission from the minister, I believe, is public, so I would expect that to be something that's available, but I couldn't tell you at the table.

Prof RAZAY - Thank you honourable minister. Science is so important for the community and for the world because it's helps solve real-world problems and empowers communities to make informed decisions about public health, environmental safety and technological progress. What we are seeing, however, is that our young generation don't take science seriously and we have a lack of skilled workers in science fields. We need to motivate our kids because I think what we do now with technology is so important. How can we motivate our kids at schools to take science?

Mr ABETZ - Look, chances are this is more of an Education question rather than a question here. Nevertheless, the import of the question is accepted and you're sitting next to a former maths teacher who's undoubtedly very supportive of your assertions about all matters STEM, and the University is hoping to concentrate and develop a larger school or - what do we call it, what they're doing? But they've got a \$500 million STEM precinct. A precinct that will hopefully excite students to study there and then provide the necessary capacity for our community to benefit from people qualified in the sciences, engineering and mathematics.

CHAIR - Mr Ferguson.

Mr FERGUSON - I'm happy, Chair.

Mr ABETZ - Look, if I may though, if you were to ask me, because I didn't provide that to you before, but the actual businesses who have benefited and been assisted by the Tasmanian government -

Mr FERGUSON - That was Mr George's question.

Mr ABETZ - Was it?

Mr FERGUSON - Yes. He asserted that there weren't any.

Mr ABETZ - Right, well, businesses assisted by Tasmanian government with grants and trade: Fulcrum Robotics, Taz Drone Solutions, Odyssey Geophysics, SUBCO underwater robotics, Currawong Engineering UAVs, Marinova biotech, Bitwise Agronomy, and Humaie - so, there's a few that we have been able to assist, there's quite a list.

CHAIR - Mrs Greene, you might have time to get at least on the record.

Mrs GREENE - That's okay, I'll pass. Thank you.

CHAIR - Okay, we're almost at 3.30 p.m., but if the committee is happy -

Mr ABETZ - People are going soft on me.

Ms BADGER - Can we just put on the record our thanks for being able to have two hours for the committee because last year definitely showed that we needed it, and this is such an

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important emerging space and obviously the minister before us had a big job to do, being in the chair only for a few days, but it is genuinely appreciated that we got the extra time for it.

CHAIR - Duly noted. The time for scrutiny has now expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Community and Multicultural Events. It will now take a short break. Time taken for breaks must be made up and I encourage members to be as quick as possible. Thank you.

The Committee suspended at 3.30 p.m. to 3.37 p.m.

Community and Multicultural Affairs

CHAIR - Before we go to questions, I want to remind members of the order of the House Establishing Estimates Committee, which provides: questions must be relevant to the portfolio and outputs of a particular session. However, as with other sessions, I will permit broad questions about the minister's role as a member of the Cabinet in relation to the issues of public concern in relation to the former minister, Ms Ogilvie, if the minister chooses to answer them.

The Scrutiny of the Community and Multicultural Affairs portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions, please, for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you, Chair. On my immediate right is Noelene Kelly, Deputy Secretary, Community and Government Services, DPAC and to her immediate right is Corrina Smith, Director, Community Services, DPAC, and no opening statement.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, the former minister announced \$150,000 for a needs analysis for Neighbourhood Houses in late 2025 and six months later finally announced the appointment of KPMG, .id (informed decisions), and 3P Consulting, will be conducting that review. Can you outline the total contract value awarded to each of those organisations?

Mr ABETZ - I can confirm that we have got such an analysis underway, the extent of that I'm unable to - are you able to assist? Good. Thank you, deputy secretary.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, the amount awarded to KPMG is \$99,000. There's another contractor called profile.id and that was \$72,000 and the amount for 3P Consulting is on an as-needs basis, an hourly amount, so it's a little bit over \$150,000. That's something that we're exploring within our budget at the moment.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Minister, when will the report be due and can you commit to publicly releasing the needs analysis in full when it's received?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, I can actually give a quick overview of the timeline for the project, if you'd like me to run through that.

Mrs GREENE - That would be very helpful. Thank you.

Ms KELLY - So, we had one-on-one sessions with - the time that's taken from the announcement last year to now has been looking at our requirements, consulting on that and

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engaging the contractors and going through procurement process for that. We now have contracts in place for those three providers.

In early May, we had sessions with the contractors and then sessions with NHT, particularly, with KPMG. In June, we'll be running regional round tables with the houses and that will include members and non-members of the Neighbourhood House Tasmania Network. There'll be one in each region, so north, south and north-west. There will also be an online forum that will include opportunities for engagement of board members, House managers or key personnel who want to be involved. At the at the same time, through May and June - actually it was just launched yesterday, I think - is an online survey for Houses so that they can promote that within their Houses, but their staff, managers and boards can fill that in as well. That was launched yesterday and that's open for about four weeks.

There's also an online community survey that was launched yesterday as well and that will also be open for four weeks and that is an opportunity for anyone in the community to be able to have input into this work. The consultants will also undertake, in July, targeted interviews. They'll be one-on-one interviews with particular Houses, not every House because it would take too long to do the now 35 Houses. Again, that will include a mix of board members, staff and also lived experience people that visit our Neighbourhood Houses.

Our community sector experts are 3P Consulting, we're working with Kym Goodes throughout the whole stage. She's been involved in terms of consultation around the requirements, working with KPMG about understanding the industry, and also looking at things like the consultation framework and having input into that. In terms of when the report will be due, we're expecting that in October, and the reason for that is that we will need that in time for the government to consider that in preparation for the next budget cycle, 2027-28 budget cycle.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you, Ms Kelly, for that fulsome response. Minister, Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania have welcomed the needs analysis work but have also been very clear that houses are facing cost pressures and increasing demand right now. If the needs analysis identifies that the current funding model is inadequate, has the government set aside any additional funding to respond to the recommendations of the needs analysis, or is it simply just another consultant report that you will sit on?

Mr ABETZ - Didn't like the last part of the question, because if the needs analysis, for example, were to say less funding was required, would you anticipate that we would have put a lesser amount in the Budget? So the counterfactual to your question is not a very clever one, with respect. However, as a government we have undertaken the needs analysis because we want to know what the needs are, and we will inform ourselves of that analysis and then make appropriate decisions thereafter.

CHAIR - Before we go to Ms Rosol: minister, in the previous hearings you've been happy for members to go straight to your other committee members. Are you happy for that?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, absolutely.

Ms ROSOL - I'd like to follow on those questions around needs analysis. Just to clarify the timing of the surveys: I think you said that the surveys would be open for four weeks, but I have information, or an email that came through today, saying 15 June, so only 11 days,

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12 days. I'm wondering which one's correct, four weeks or two weeks, and would that be extended to the four weeks?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, I acknowledge what you're saying there and that's not very long to respond to something that's really important. We will look at that. I think the original timeframe we were looking at four weeks, and certainly we want to time this so that everything is arriving in time ready for the government to consider the recommendations and then to be able to feed that into the budget process. I absolutely take on board what you're saying, and 11 days is not very long, and particularly given as well that throughout June we will be undertaking those individual roundtables and things like that, so thank you for that.

Ms ROSOL - That's for the community survey, and I can imagine that getting people involved in it and participating, the longer length of time will mean more people can contribute to it. I did just want to follow up on the minister's comments around us assuming that the needs would be greater. I know this is not your area where you have been working, but the cry from the community sector for a very long time has been that they are not receiving enough funding and that they are barely able to offer the services that they do, so this needs analysis is very important for them. At the moment the Budget over the forward Estimates shows significant cuts in the community services sector to their funding and I think it's therefore only natural that the community services sector would be very concerned, and Neighbourhood Houses will be concerned, that whatever the needs analysis shows, they won't get the funding, so just asking, if you can be really clear, that if the needs analysis results show that Neighbourhood Houses do need more funding to be able to safely provide the services that they do, do you commit to finding that funding in future budgets so that they are able to provide services to the level that matches the needs?

Mr ABETZ - They're safely providing services as we speak; the analysis will show what it shows and then the government will make its determinations as to funding based on that analysis, monies available, et cetera. It will be a whole-of-government consideration, but we are also hoping that potentially, with this analysis, we can see how services might be able to deliver - be delivered more effectively.

Ms ROSOL - So, you are not able or willing to confirm today that you will commit to more funding, and you've thrown a little bit of a judgement in there on them -

CHAIR - Sorry, Ms Rosol, is this like a clarifying question?

Ms ROSOL - This is a clarifying statement. There's this -

CHAIR - No, no. Well, I need a question.

Ms ROSOL - As a clarifying question: do you think that community services are not providing efficient services already?

Mr ABETZ - Well, look, one of the things that I stumbled across, as it happens, is that, as I understand it, all our community Neighbourhood Houses have their own individual insurance policy. If they were to combine them together and go to an insurance agent and put the - what is it, 35, 36, 37 now, with Ash in the Central Highlands, each house might be able to get a better, cheaper insurance deal and, as a result of which, have extra money available to them without an extra demand on the Tasmanian taxpayer. So, they're the sort of things that

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I think can be looked at and so, that is what the analysis will undoubtedly say; whether that which I've just said is a possibility, whether it's already being done, those sorts of things, and I think that is where potential savings might be able to be made, and I would never, from basically any organisation, say that it's not worthy of analysis to see if you can deliver the same services more effectively and potentially cheaper than you are at the moment. You should always be looking to see if efficiencies can be made.

Ms ROSOL - It's so offensive. I will follow up on my next round.

Mr ABETZ - Why is that offensive?

CHAIR - I just want to remind members that I am allowing you to clarify -

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - questions, but not statements or new questions, but clarifying is fine.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, this is probably stretching friendships and ideas, but don't you think it's time that this government and other governments, for that matter, other parties in government, start thinking much longer term for organisations like Neighbourhood Houses? They are thrown into panic before just about every budget cycle and this needs analysis, I know causes them great concern, because some do see this as potentially actually cutting their resources rather than necessarily matching resources to their needs. So, could I propose that it is possible to work across the parliament and come up with a better funding mechanism, a guarantee of not only indexation, but a funding cycle that might stretch beyond the term of a parliament for, say, five years or so, that they can operate with security, make sure that their staff actually have jobs which are secure and sustainable and produce a better sustainable funding model; as Tasmanians, apparently, need greater assistance as life gets harder, prices get higher, wages.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, there's a project going on at the moment that's been in training for a number of years: we call it the longer-term funding agreement project, which is a long title and it's got three components to it. The first component is around indexation and the first sort of tranche of that has been done, and there's indexation that's been applied to core-based funding for organisations that were identified through that process through until 2027-28. So, the longer-term funding agreement project, in sort of late 2026-27 into 2027-28, we will revisit that and look at that for the longer term. The second part of the project is around longer-term funding, and often we sort of use the figure of five years, and that is well and truly underway. That's got three parts to it as well.

The first part was looking at the peak body funding across the community services industry, so that's not just within Department of Premier and Cabinet, but the Department for Education, Children and Young People, Department of Health and so on, and that was looking at the peak bodies and moving them to five-year funding agreements. That went through to Cabinet, and Cabinet signed off on the list of peak bodies that were defined, so that as those organisations' grant deeds come up for renewal, they will be transitioned to five-year funding agreements, so within DPAC we've got a number of those peak bodies that will go to that five-year funding agreement.

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The second stage of that particular project is actually looking at those organisations that have received recurrent funding for more than 10 years and looking at those. We're at the stage at the moment where each agency is undertaking an audit of those, and they will work on a subset of that audit for the first tranche of that stage, too. The reason for that is we don't have an updated number, but back in 2023-24 there were about 430-odd different agreements in place across that community services industry -

Mr ABETZ - 434, to be exact.

Ms KELLY - 434, that's right, minister; and also with that particular stage, or that particular tranche, we're going to be looking at those organisations on a case-by-case basis. An example of that, without talking about the particular organisation, but there are some organisations where they've had core-based funding, and then they have project funding in the one deed, so their core funding gets indexation and we've had agreement that we can move to a five-year funding agreement, but not the project funding. We're trying to tidy all that up. The third part, sorry, it's a long answer -

CHAIR - It is.

Ms KELLY - there's a lot of work going on. The third part of the original longer-term agreement project is looking at an outcomes framework, so that's really about working with the industry and working across government, around rather than procuring services or providing funding for output-based programs, actually looking more broadly at outcomes and how can we ensure that we're working in the industry and the industry is working to those better outcomes for Tasmanians as well.

Mr GEORGE - Long answer, so I will return to it at the next round, if I may. Thank you.

Prof RAZAY - Many skilled migrants come to Tasmania with qualifications in areas of workforce shortages, including health and education, but face difficulty in getting those qualification recognised. I'm sure you will recognise that this represents a great opportunity for Tasmania to build a strong workforce and address shortages. What is the Multicultural Affairs portfolio doing with Health, Education and the Teachers Registration Board to reduce unnecessary barriers, improve bridging pathways, and help skilled migrants already in Tasmania to work in the field they are trained for?

Mr ABETZ - Look, a very good question. My presence here today is because there was a job vacancy all those years ago that my father took up with the Hydro-Electric Commission, not sitting at the table here as minister. That is something that as a community we have benefited from. There have been certain professions where - and I won't pass comment, but there seems to have been a reluctance to accept the qualifications from elsewhere, and that's for the various registration boards to justify, but yes, I will leave it at that and pass over to the deputy secretary.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, the multicultural action plan was released last year and there're a number of actions that sort of touch broadly on that. One of the things to highlight through that is that the multicultural action plan is a whole-of-government action plan; it's not just about Department of Premier and Cabinet delivering those, it crosses areas like Department

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of State Growth with Skills Tasmania, Department for Education, Children and Young People. So, we get that that interaction and that collaboration between agencies.

The other new initiative, which is actually an action within the action plan, is the establishment of the Minister's Advisory Council that is due to commence later this year. We've been through a process to call for expressions-of-interest for members of that, and we have been through the selection process. We will be advising the successful members in the coming weeks. And we're just working through at the moment, given that the people that will be joining the council will be lived-experience members, whether we make their names public or not. But certainly that process is well underway and we'll have that established and be meeting later in the year, I expect around September or so.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Chair, and thank you, minister, for you stepping into this role and to your wonderful team in the department. I want to acknowledge the previous minister, Madeleine Ogilvie, for her wonderful and genuinely, you know, engaging efforts that she made in this portfolio across all of those responsibilities. It's a real credit to her.

To give another credit, as my question is about Neighbourhood Houses, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the late Vicki Knight, who for many years was the coordinator at the Dorset Community House. A wonderful lady. She passed away recently and unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend her funeral owing to a parliamentary sitting, but she's just one of so many who have given so much of their professional working life, and no doubt extra hours, for free as well to our Neighbourhood Houses.

To the needs analysis - what I would like to know, as a Liberal member for Bass, is how can your local MPs help to be a part of informing the needs analysis, the review that's going to be done? I think we heard the names of the consultants a moment ago. And what role can the houses themselves expect to play, so that we can get a needs analysis done that's truly well informed?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I would encourage local members to partake and how they might be able to be involved, Ms Kelly might be able to assist in that regard. But I think every member of parliament worth his or her salt would have visited at least one, if not all, the neighbourhood houses in their electorate. They do provide an exceptionally good service overall. One assumes with, what, 30-plus, there are some better than others. That said, the feedback seems to be that all of them are performing relatively well for the benefit of the community. Over to Ms Kelly.

Ms KELLY - Thank you, minister. Through you: I mentioned before that there's the community survey, and that's just been released, and that's available. There's a link to that on the Department of Premier and Cabinet website. There's a page that talks about Neighbourhood Houses, and within that there's a needs analysis consultation area on there.

If there are members of the community that want to participate but find it difficult to connect online, then their Neighbourhood House is a great place to go and to get support there, or Libraries Tasmania or a Service Tasmania service centre. And we realised today that there's no phone number on there, so we'll add a phone number there as well for our team, if there are members of the community that want to do that.

The other thing I might mention, that the minister talked about there, is that I imagine that most members of parliament have a connection to their local Neighbourhood Houses. It

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would be a good opportunity for members to go and visit their particular Neighbourhood House and have a discussion with them, because often those discussions can lead to identifying things that may be issues for the Neighbourhood Houses that they want to highlight. So, visits from members of parliament to their local Neighbourhood House might also be a good way to encourage that discussion.

Mr FERGUSON - If I may, would it be welcome if, for example, MPs could help to circulate the link to more people to please jump on and talk about - Yes?

Ms KELLY - Absolutely. That would be great.

Mr FERGUSON - Alright, well if you would be good enough to perhaps send something around, minister, I'm sure we'll all use it and distribute that advice on our social media and other places.

Ms KELLY - That's fantastic. Thank you.

Mr FERGUSON - Okay, we'll do that. Well, I will.

Mr ABETZ - Great idea, and something that's definitely worthwhile. For MPs that haven't availed themselves of the opportunity, having sort of outreach sessions in the various Neighbourhood Houses enables people to see their MP without needing to travel to the electorate office or to the city. So, the MP then has a base. I know I have availed myself of that opportunity with various Neighbourhood Houses in my electorate and whilst I was a senator around the state. It's a great community service and, of course, they do it irrespective of one's political colouring.

Mrs GREENE - Minister, if bringing forward two years of the Community Connector funding was necessary to provide what the sector describes as safer staffing levels in Neighbourhood Houses, does that not amount to an admission that current funding levels in Neighbourhood Houses are insufficient? Perhaps Ms Kelly could let us know which Neighbourhood Houses have advised the department if they were struggling to maintain staffing or services under the existing funding model.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, the Community Connector program funding was brought forward and that was through a request of the network. So, that means that, at this point, the funding available in the following financial year isn't available there. I think the thinking around that from the sector was that the needs analysis would at least consider the Community Connector program going forward. Also keeping in mind that that Community Connector program was a pilot and we haven't really done a review of that. And the success of that - I think if you talk to probably every Neighbourhood House, they would say it was really valuable. It has been really valuable and successful, and part of the needs analysis will be looking at the programs that each of the Neighbourhood Houses offer and getting feedback from the community and from the houses about the value of that.

In regards to your second question, I can't actually answer that, in terms of I haven't visited every Neighbourhood House. Certainly, I've visited a few of them. I think that the balance there, and what will be really interesting out of the needs analysis, is that Neighbourhood Houses are often a point for people to come to regardless of what circumstances they're in and what life experiences that they're having. The nature of

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Neighbourhood Houses is that they're there to help, so they do whatever they can to be able to provide the support that's needed for each individual as they come through the door. So, what you sometimes find with that is that the breadth of services that are on offer grow and grow and grow as needs change in the community and those sorts of things. I think the needs analysis is really about looking at that and saying, okay, so what are the services that are being offered? What are the priority ones? And how much does it cost to actually deliver those?

Certainly, there was a campaign, around the 2025 state election, around the number of staff that Neighbourhood Houses might need. I think there were varying numbers that were being talked about and, really, the needs analysis will consider that as well, or at least provide some information back for government to consider around that.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you, Ms Kelly. My second question has come from Jordan River Service. The figures published on the Budget for the Bridgewater Community House and the Gagebrook Community House, collectively known as Jordan River Services, approximately \$1.3 million per house in the forward Estimates compared with current funding of approximately \$1.4 million per house. This represents a reduction of approximately \$100,000 per house or \$200,000 across JRS, and I just note that that's one of the most disadvantaged communities, certainly, in Tasmania.

Minister, will funding for the Bridgewater Community House and the Gagebrook Community House be maintained at current levels with indexation pending on completion of the needs analysis?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister: the total funding of \$2.8 million is allocated to Jordan River Service for Bridgewater and Gagebrook Community Houses for the period 2026-27 to 2029-30. So, their amount for 2026-27, for their base core funding, is \$588,666. That includes the indexation. Then on top of that, they'll have booster funding of \$100,000 - that's \$50,000 for each of the houses. The Community Connector program for Bridgewater is \$129,358 and the same for Gagebrook. So, effectively, the total amount is \$947,382 for the collective of both of those houses.

Mrs GREENE - Just to clarify, because I want to make this really clear for the organisation. It's my understanding they've been in contact with the minister's office and were first advised that perhaps there was a typo, so I'm glad that we've got that on the record now. I just want to make sure that we're very clear on that response.

Ms KELLY - Okay, thank you. Through you, minister: so the media release said that they were to receive \$2.6 million over the forward Estimates, but it's actually \$2.8 million. But we can clarify that with a letter so they've got that in writing.

Mrs GREENE - That would be very helpful, thank you.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for drawing that to our attention.

Mrs GREENE - That's okay. I just wanted to be clear, because there's been some uncertainty around that. Just moving away from neighbourhood houses briefly, I want to ask about Carers Week, minister. There's \$20,000 in the Budget this year for Carers Week, but I can't see it in the forward Estimates. Can you provide an explanation?

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Ms KELLY - There was a key deliverables commitment for another three years, so we've got another year of that, and then ongoing funding for that will have to be considered as part of the budget cycle.

Mrs GREENE - Okay, thank you.

Ms ROSOL - I just want to come back to funding for the community sector and the comments that the minister made before, and just to talk briefly about what the community sector does and what Neighbourhood Houses do. The reason I said that your comments are offensive is because community sector organisations, Neighbourhood Houses, run, I would say, on the smell of an oily rag. They get very little funding to do amazing work in their communities for a lot of people, and they've had these things said to them multiple times over the last few years, about how they should find efficiencies and they should be smarter with the way they use their money. I've worked in a Neighbourhood House, and I've never seen organisations that are smarter with their money. They manage to get little bits of money from everywhere to make things happen in an incredible way.

So, in terms of what was just said now about the Community Connector program, the money being brought forward in recognition that Neighbourhood Houses need more money to be able to fulfil the role they're playing in the community, and that then might be included in their future budgets as part of the needs analysis, minister, will you commit to increasing funding for Neighbourhood Houses based on what the needs analysis will show, given that community connectors are helping them provide their service. If that needs analysis says community connectors should be a permanent thing, will you commit to increasing funding for Neighbourhood Houses? That will change the forward Estimates, but making that increased funding a long-term commitment to Neighbourhood Houses.

Mr ABETZ - The government's commitment to Neighbourhood Houses, is pretty clear, and most people would not and should not feel it offensive if they are asked, no matter what organisation, is it possible to potentially find a saving here or there? It's not a reflection on them, but it is good for every individual, every organisation to see whether or not they can run their show more effectively and efficiently. That said, it does not in any way derogate from the need for funding for Neighbourhood Houses, and we will inform ourselves from the needs analysis to ascertain what may or may not be required in response to that analysis, but I'm not going to commit myself or any future minister to funding levels.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, minister, for your answer. I think you might have missed the point that Neighbourhood Houses are already incredibly efficient. To follow up on the question about the Neighbourhood Houses that have two sites, because Jordan River is not the only Neighbourhood House that runs two sites, the Northern Suburbs Community Centre in Launceston in Bass also has two sites and they were also affected by that. I'm just wondering if that letter you send to Jordan River to clarify things might also be able to be sent to Northern Suburbs Community Centre to clarify the funding amount for them also and correct that figure, please.

Mr ABETZ - Before Ms Kelly answers that, organisations that are incredibly efficient, and I would be willing to accept that Neighbourhood Houses are incredibly efficient, that does not deny the possibility they could be even more efficient. That is for every efficient organisation, Neighbourhood Houses or other, it stands to reason, no matter how efficient you are, you can potentially always be more efficient. Any good steward of money would be having

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his or her eye out to see whether further efficiencies can be driven. If you note they are incredibly efficient, then that must be in their DNA. Therefore they won't find it strange to be on the ongoing lookout for more efficiencies. With that said, over to Ms Kelly.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. Yes, that's absolutely fine. We will organise that letter to go out.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, on 1 June, the Fair Work Commission handed down its decision in review of Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Awards finding that the sector's workforce has been subject to gender-based undervaluation and mandating significant change to paying classifications. Among the changes, home care and disability workers are set to receive an interim pay rise of around 15 per cent from 1 October 2026, with a new classification structure from 1 October 2027. This is a workforce that's overwhelmingly female, low paid and delivers community home care and disability services that many Tasmanians depend on. Many of those organisations that provide those services are government funded. Community sector organisations, where those agreements do not automatically pass through wage increases, organisations will face funding shortfalls they can't absorb. Will the government commit to funding the full cost of the award changes if that pay rise reaches workers without forcing cuts to services?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, just a couple of things to mention there. I mentioned before about the indexation that's provided to organisation-based funding. That is due for review in about 12 months, and so what you mentioned there as well as the changes to the SCHADS award more broadly, is still being worked through at a federal level and will feed into that work. The other thing to mention there is we're working with what's called- and some members might have heard before- the Coalition of the Community Services Peaks. We have been actively engaging with them more recently and meeting to talk about things like those longer-term funding agreements that I was talking about before. We would see that this is a core thing for them to be advising on. There's two ways that happens through the budget cycle.

The department and the sort of broader government, through the work we're doing on indexation and so on, can feed through the budget cycle in terms of providing that information through to government. There is also the community services industry and how they engage through that process.

Mr GEORGE - Minister can go back to the subject we got such a fulsome answer from before. It clearly falls into your role both as brand new minister for community affairs however short lived that may be and also as Treasurer; would you consider - since you do hold both roles at the moment - working across parties and crossbenches to expedite the proposals for indexation five-year funding. This seems an opportunity to commit to some work across parties in a more collaborative rather than adversarial nature.

Mr ABETZ - We are prepared to look at it at face value. It makes some good administrative sense to have longer term arrangements. I know that's what the sector wants, I know the treasury advisors against these things. There's that sort of creative tension within government. If I might opine from my sort of years in public life, that many community organisations say that when funding the rollover, towards the end of it, often they lose their

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better staff who are able to get work elsewhere. This is because of the uncertainty and the need for them to feed their families, pay mortgage, all those sorts of expenses that most have.

I can understand the rationale of your question, and I must say, instinctively, I personally- and I'm speaking personally now- have been attracted to that proposition, but I do know that it does cause issues for those that seek to balance budgets over the forward years. Yes, I think I will leave my commentary at that without giving you a specific answer.

Mr GEORGE - I think there is a cross-party concern on this matter. It is something we can work on, I would think. Thank you.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I'm a very big fan of Men's Sheds. Some of them are called Community Sheds because they're for men and women. I like the Men's Sheds because they're a great place for our men in our community to gather and look after each other and receive feedback, guidance, support, health support, mental health support.

It's hard to pick a winner, but I think Flinders Men's Shed could actually be the best one in the country. I recommend a visit as what they've done there is amazing. Minister, to the future, what are your plans and aspirations for more support from Men's Sheds, not just the association centrally but, more importantly, the actual sheds on the ground.

Mr ABETZ - I declare an interest, a member of the Channel Men's Shed that's situated at Margate, and very impressed by the Men's Shed all over the state that I have visited over the years. They run a tremendous service and, once again, they do so on a very small budget.

Mr FERGUSON - Volunteer run.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, volunteer run. Incredibly efficient, but I know, taking up a point earlier on, that they continually looking to drive further efficiencies if they can, they always have an eye out to see how they can do things better. That is something I would encourage all community organisations to do. There are now 76 in Tasmania, and they provide the services you've outlined. Government funding includes \$560,500 to the peak body, the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association and across the forward Estimates and \$100,000 peak body uplift in 2026-27. The government's also committed to fund a number of individual sheds across the state, \$550,000 for a new Sorell Men's Shed, \$220,000 to relocate the Westbury Men's Shed, \$15,000 towards the purchase of the Longford Men's Shed of which I know recently celebrated its 15 anniversary and \$12,000 for new equipment at the Dorset Men's Shed which is in your electorate, member for Bass.

We've also been delivering on a \$1 million capital investment program which has been offered across two grant rounds, with sheds advised of the success in the second-round last week. This includes \$115,000 round figures for Swansea Community and Men's Shed to upgrade and expand the current facility, \$220,000 in Ms Brown and my neck of the woods, and Peter George for the Kingston Men's Shed to expand the current facility and \$11,000 for the Devonport Men's Shed to invest in solar energy and expansion of the internal area. Right around the state, providing support for individual Men's Sheds and for the overarching body of Men's Shed. They do a great job, and we are most appreciative of the work they do and the volunteer effort they're able to get from the community.

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Mr FERGUSON - Thank you for that and I hope you will accept mine and Mr Fair's invitation to join us at Whitemark soon, and Ms Green, and Ms Rosol. The whole table is invited.

Mrs GREENE - Further on from Mr George's comment where you said you had received advice from Treasury advising against longer funding contracts for community services organisations, was that just a turn of phrase or is there some advice?

Mr ABETZ - That was just a turn of phrase that those that are in Treasury and Finance areas in general terms don't like long forward commitments just in general terms. Do I have an exact brief, et cetera? No, I haven't.

Mrs GREENE - That's good to hear. I would like to ask around the \$300,000 that's been allocated in budget paper No. 2 for the implementation of Tasmania's first volunteering strategy. That was to commence subsidisation of the Registration to Work with Vulnerable People check for volunteers. Can you provide a detailed breakdown of the \$300,000 specifically. I assume there was some for the strategy implementation and then the other part for the Registration to Work with Vulnerable People?

Ms KELLY - Yes, \$300,000 over two years. The subsidy commenced on 1 January 2026 and goes until 31 December 2027. Out of the first-year funding of \$300,000, \$250,000 was provided to the Department of Justice to enable that subsidy to occur, and \$50,000 was retained for delivery of actions and to support the delivery of the volunteer action plan for that initial phase. In terms of the second \$300,000, that will be going fully to Department of Justice to fund that. Karina's just messaged we've had 10,500 applications supported to date through that funding.

Mrs GREENE - That's good, that was going to be my next question, you've read my mind. Now I don't need to ask that question.

Ms KELLY - That's 10 500 instances where Tasmanians haven't had to pay as a volunteer for a Work with Vulnerable People check.

Mrs GREENE - That's good, sounds like there's been a strong uptake of that then, that's very good. I'd like to ask about digital inclusion, minister. TasCOSS and other organisations have consistently called for increased investment in digital inclusion, including a proposal to double funding for the Digital Ready for Daily Life program. Instead, the program has been discontinued. Why was funding for the Digital Ready for Daily Life not continued in the 2026-27 budget and what assessment did the department undertake on the impact of the decision?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. The Digital Ready for Daily Life program is one that is run by Department of State Growth. Mike Mogridge, who was sitting in the last session, would have been able to give you a better answer than probably I'm able to give. My understanding is that the Digital Ready for Daily life program has developed a template or a framework that can be used for delivery through other means. My understanding is that is being explored but can't give much more detail because it's not a Department Premier and Cabinet program. I'm sorry.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, the government launched Building Food Resilient Community Tasmania Food Resilience Strategy 2025-2031 in November 25 supported by \$8.9 million over four years to implement strategy and continue community food relief services. Previous food relief funding included community food relief grant and the capital investment grant program. Can the minister advise whether the \$8.9 million implementation funding will include any future grant round. If so, whether productive community gardens that grow food for the nation to charity will be eligible for capital support, such as replacement garden beds, greenhouses and related infrastructures?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. That might have been the funding from 2024-25 and then the new funding of \$7.1 million in 2025-26 through the forward Estimates. Last year we released the strategy. We are in the process at the moment of developing the underpinning action plan in consultation with other government agencies. It's whole of government, like the other ones that I talked about and also in consultation with the sector. Certainly, we will use that to help inform how we allocate that money to particular actions, and so on.

Ms ROSOL - Minister, the pensioners Heating Allowance currently sits at \$56 per year. This figure is paltry, particularly when you compare it to similar allowances administered by other states. In New South Wales, they offer up to \$313.50, South Australia offers up to \$281.78, and that's indexed each financial year. Tasmania's pensioner Heating Allowance was originally introduced in 1971 at \$30 a year. If that figure had been indexed, the allowance would now be over \$400 a year compared to the \$56 that it is. Minister, why has the pensioners Heating Allowance barely increased since it was introduced and will you consider raising the payment of this allowance?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, the pensioner's Heating Allowance is a really interesting program and if you actually read the act, it's very out of date, including- I think- that if you're a female, you can only receive it through your husband and other elements like that. Recognising the amount, the government has a number of programs in place to subsidise energy for Tasmanians, including the Energy Hardship Fund that's delivered through the Salvation Army and so on. If we're going to look at - if the government's going to consider increased funding through the pensioners heating allowance, I think it's actually probably a bigger question around what's the better way to deliver this -

Ms ROSOL - The whole package.

Ms KELLY - and actually if you were going to modernise that legislation, is it better to take that money and put it into something that's maybe a bit more contemporary?

Ms ROSOL - Can I just ask then, how many people actually access that allowance?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, we don't actually have that number but we will try and get that while we're continuing ahead -

Ms ROSOL - I'm about to duck out, but if you could give it to - and, can we take it on notice if you can't find it before the end, please, minister?

Mr ABETZ - Consider it taken on notice if we can't get the information back during this hearing.

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Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I wanted to just shift focus to Multicultural Affairs with that portfolio hat on and note, and I'm sure you would agree, it's a really important portfolio. There's 15 per cent of Tasmanians who are born overseas. One in 10 speak a language other than English, and we clearly have some challenges in our community. We've had racial attacks that have left some multicultural community members permanently incapacitated; one actually died. There're community cohesion issues in relation to attacks on businesses and the like, so it's a really important portfolio. The multicultural action plan, one of the key priorities that was found in the community-led discussions was that there should be clear ministerial focus on multicultural affairs, either through a specifically appointed ministerial position or a community-led advisory group.

Now, I will come to the community-led advisory group later, because I've got some real questions about that, but I'm just really interested - it shouldn't be an either-or proposition, surely you could have a dedicated ministry and an advisory council. I'm just interested in the arguments against a dedicated ministry. I guess we've got an opportunity tomorrow - as in a standalone ministry, minister, not Communities and Multicultural Affairs, but a minister for multicultural affairs. We've got an opportunity tomorrow with a reshuffle and the Premier making some decisions. What are the arguments against a standalone multicultural affairs portfolio and would you, with your new Communities and Multicultural Affairs portfolio hat on, advocate to the Premier ahead of tomorrow for a standalone ministry that looks at multicultural affairs?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I will declare that I'm one of those one in 15 to whom you referred. As a government we are actively involved with the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion. In relation to the racial attacks to which you refer, they are matters that I am sure everybody in our Chamber and the other Chamber would condemn -

Mr BAYLEY - And have done.

Mr ABETZ - and the vast bulk of our fellow Tasmanians I'm sure would as well. Racism has no place, and you may have heard me talk from time to time that identity politics I find to be very divisive. What we need is to treat every human being the same, irrespective of race or any other identifying feature that you might want to apply. In relation to ministries, that will be up to the Premier to determine and the names allocated, but I remember in a former life, it was agreed that we would try to shorten the names of ministries. I was minister for employment in Canberra, as opposed to employment and all sorts of industrial relations, et cetera. I remember when I was made minister for resources here. You know, you could have said I'm the minister for mining, I'm minister for forestry, I'm minister for fisheries and you can have a whole host of things. I must say, when I have a look at Tasmanian ministerial letterheads, I sort of sometimes wonder why we have quite a few breakouts in relation to descriptors.

I suppose I'm one of these pretty practical people: if government is doing the job, if you just call it community services only, I personally would be happy, because I know that under community services our multicultural community would be looked after as well; but we are giving special recognition, and I remember when I was minister for business, industry and resources, the digital economy was part of business but was not specifically mentioned, and a certain cohort got upset about that and wanted a special ministry line on a letterhead, which then was given to minister Ogilvie; but was digital economy and technology, et cetera, information technology looked after? I would like to think it was, irrespective of the title of the

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minister, so, with that answer, it is up to the Premier, and his thinking will be shown undoubtedly -

Mr BAYLEY - Well, ahead of tomorrow, would you advocate to him around a standalone multicultural affairs portfolio? It's a clear priority that's been reflected from a vulnerable cohort, an important cohort, in our community.

Mr ABETZ - Look, it's already in a name, and from my perspective that is - what we're trying to do is ensure that as much resource as possible is delivered to the coalface and if we can combine things in ministerial offices, et cetera, with community and multicultural, then that is good, and I'm undoubtedly going to be corrected now - no? That's all good, excellent.

Mr BAYLEY - Please correct him.

Mr ABETZ - But no, I won't be making representation. Who was asking about the heating allowance?

Mr BAYLEY - That was Cecily, thanks.

Mr ABETZ - The number is 3700, is that right?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, that's the approximate number.

Mr BAYLEY - The number of 3700 approximately: that's applicants or recipients of the grant?

Mr ABETZ - Recipients.

Mr GEORGE - Well, I'll refer to you as minister for everything, I think. That's nice and short.

Mr ABETZ - Nice and short.

Mr GEORGE - Now, I've been a carer for two aged relatives in Tasmania, so I do thoroughly understand what carers give and how uplifting that can be, but also what the burden of weight of looking after aged and infirm people can be. I am deeply concerned that the Budget provides scant funding for carers and, as far as I can see, there is no carer action plan in place at the moment, and the 2026 carer action plan seems to be running behind, which means that there are 87,000 carers, I believe, across Tasmania who will be disappointed. So can you explain why the new carer action plan isn't ready, in place, and why there's no funding for it yet?

Mr ABETZ - There was a former action plan, but I will allow - 2025, I think it was - yes.

Mr GEORGE - There was an action plan, but that was lapsed. Hasn't it? It's gone. It's really important.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, yes, there was a 2020 up to 2021-2025, and we're just in the process of doing an analysis of that and effectively signing that off and that will be

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ready in June, ready for our new minister to present to that. We have commenced development of the new action plan, and we have been engaging with the Minister's Carer Advisory Council, which is already well established, around that new action plan. In 2025 we delivered, I think it was six new strategies, and we're developing about six new action plans this year to accompany those, and the carers action plan is one of those. Ideally, yes, absolutely, we would have liked to have done that and had that done in 2025; but certainly there are a couple of actions from the previous action plan that will likely continue through to the new one, and we're also working closely with Carers Tas on that new action plan as well.

Mr GEORGE - So can I ask: why the delay, because if it's not ready before the budget, it's not going to get funded, is it?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, certainly the delay has been about the breadth of what we're covering and the number of actions, and certainly we will be looking, and I expect that Carers Tasmania will be looking through to the 2027-28 Budget for funding.

Mr ABETZ - For the record, the Tasmanian state service recently gained accreditation as a carer-friendly employer through the Carers + Employers program.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I think I can speak for all of us that we want to encourage our volunteers and to support them. Volunteers collectively perform an incredible contribution to the Australian way of life and that's certainly amplified here in Tasmania where I believe we have stronger family and community connections than much of the rest of our country, good as it is. In this portfolio there are opportunities for you and the government to support volunteers and those who support those volunteers themselves, so I'd invite you to speak to that, and also encourage you in the work that you do, both as minister and as Treasurer, to grab those opportunities; because where there is a willing appetite by people to support their community locally, that may well be a great relief for government-funded services that might have otherwise been avoidable. I will just give one example: as much as we look to our emergency services, first responders, and the volunteer ambulance officers that we have in regional centres, there's just no way we could replace them all. So, with that sort of context, I'd appreciate your contribution on this.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you, member for Bass. The spirit of the volunteer is what really provides a social cohesion within the community. You can try to buy in services, et cetera, but where people volunteer, I think there's always that added value, that greater degree of, what - I don't know what it is, commitment, drive. Some of my personal experiences volunteering in setting up a women's shelter and then a youth shelter, and even when I was a lawyer doing voluntary work for Riding for the Disabled, RSPCA, et cetera, things like that, I often found more rewarding, albeit the bank balance didn't necessarily find it as rewarding, but the spirit of the volunteer has to be celebrated and enhanced. As a government, we have to make sure that we don't put too many obstacles in the way for people to be able to volunteer and there's always that balance of making sure they have a certificate for a this or a that, which is important, so don't get me wrong, but getting the balance right is very important.

In November last year, the government launched Valuing Our Volunteers: Tasmania's Volunteering Strategy 2025-30, and this is Tasmania's first volunteering strategy and it will be underpinned by an action plan. We work closely with the peak body, Volunteering Tasmania, in the development of the strategy and doing so again with the action plan. We are finalising consultation on that, and we anticipate it being released this year; and across 2025-26 and this

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coming financial year, the government has invested 300,000 to support the implementation of the strategy. This has included funding the subsidisation - and I must say, I was always somewhat amazed that volunteers had to pay for their registration to work with vulnerable children, and that was what I saw as one of those obstacles that government, possibly for the right reason, wanted volunteers to have that registration, but then having a fee attached to it was a disincentive and it hardly incentivises volunteerism in our community.

Across the forward Estimates we're funding Volunteering Tasmania, and I don't know how we come to these figures from time to time, but the exact figure of \$952,528, so who sorted out the last \$28.00? I don't know, but I'm sure there's a reason for it. But this is inclusive of peak body and uplift funding, volunteering awards and future of volunteering funds. I think, everybody that sits in the parliament has, at some stage or another, given a fair degree of effort to volunteering in one way or another, be it to their political party, be it to the community groups. As a result, I think there is a good strong representation in our parliament, right across it, for the volunteer community because I think most of us have been genuinely and actively involved in it.

Mrs GREENE - Treasurer, you're asking each department to find efficiencies and seeking to reduce the size of the State Service. Do you envisage that the projected reduction in the community services output funding will result in any reduction in staffing within community services? Are there any roles within the team that are considered backline?

Mr ABETZ - Just quickly for the record, I understand the question, but I'm appearing here in my ministerial capacity, not as Treasurer, but with that said over to Ms Kelly.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. Department of Premier and Cabinet is considering the budget efficiencies requirement at a whole-of-agency level. We're doing that in a number of different ways, but we have an Establishment Management Committee (EMC) that meets on a fortnightly basis to review positions that are vacant that managers choose to put up for consideration for filling. That committee considers the role and also how we can best fill that role, because it's not necessarily a like-for-like replacement; sometimes we might have people working in other areas that are a better fit or something like that.

But within the community services area we have also undertaken a line-by-line review of our expenditure. We get monthly expenditure reports and that enables us to go through and look at how we're spending our money and whether we're spending it in the most effective and efficient way. It's been a really valuable exercise because there have been things in there that we wouldn't have realised unless we had done that exercise.

We're certainly looking at broad, non-salaries elements around travel and those sorts of things, how we can be more efficient in the way that we use that non-salaries funding. But then by doing that sort of more forensic analysis, we've been able to go through and identify some things within our back-office area, if you like, that are no longer needed or we can do without.

Mrs GREENE -. Minister, has the community services area put forward any requests through to DPAC for additional staffing resources? Given that there's a lot of need in the community for our Community Services, do you have sufficient staffing, I guess, to deliver what you need to?

Mr ABETZ - They've never asked me.

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Mrs GREENE - I think you can say that with some confidence. That's probably correct. Perhaps Ms Kelly might be able to outline. How busy are the staff in your team? Do they need any extra resources, or are you okay?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. I think that if you ask most people that you would say 'could you do with more' and go 'yes, absolutely'. But I think that comes back to the fundamentals of an efficiency ask on government. I've been in the public service for 35 years now and it's usually these times where this comes into place that you actually get really innovative changes in the way you operate, and also it really asks you to prioritise what you're doing and how you're doing it, and whether it is the most effective and efficient way to do that.

In answer to your question, could we do with more additional staff, I think, as Treasurer, you would get a lot of requests like that, but certainly what it's required us to do is to prioritise what we're doing and really look at the way we address things and how we collaborate with the industry and what they what they need from us. But also how we collaborate across our department and also with the other government agencies as well. The discussion we were having before around longer-term funding agreements was a really nice example. That's something that's been asked for years and years and we're now progressing that and we're doing it in that collaborative way with other government agencies and with the industry. So we're not doing it on our own. We were able to share that load, if you like.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you. Minister, community organisations report growing demand linked to cost-of-living pressures. What new measures in this budget are specifically intended to reduce financial hardship for low-income Tasmanian households?

Mr ABETZ - Free public transport that comes to mind immediately. The ongoing commitment to the, I think, it's 100 concessions that we have in relation to all sorts of fees and charges which benefits, if I recall, 70,000 of our fellow Tasmanians. That's another cost-of-living measure that, as a government, we are looking at and -

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. There are a few things over the last financial year and this financial year that have been new commitments. Also some ongoing commitments as well, like the family assistance program that's delivered across the state to provide immediate relief to people who might be doing it tough where they can attend, for example, Launceston City Mission and get support through vouchers and so on.

There was the \$150,000 last year to the Energy Hardship Fund that the Salvation Army delivers. There was also an increase to a no-interest loan scheme to enable them to be able to provide more loans. More recently, we had the announcement of the funding for food relief as a result of the fuel supply. So they're just some examples.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you for that, Ms Kelly. I note some of those specific ones you mentioned, particularly the family assistance programs, when there's no indexation in the forward years. Looking at the one here for Hobart City Mission, St Vincent De Paul and the Salvos. Was there a reason why there wasn't indexation provided in the forward Estimates?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. As to the history of that, I can't comment on that, but it's a great example through the longer-term funding agreement program that we've been talking about. That is one and I think it might be on the DPAC list for that first tranche that

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we're going to do over the coming months to look at that and to put up for consideration to government around whether that funding can be locked into a five-year agreement and, as a result of that, whether it receives indexation going forward.

Mrs GREENE - That would be great.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I'm not sure that I expect you to answer this given you've been in the job a couple of days, but perhaps Ms Kelly can help. I mentioned before about the multicultural communities desire for a standalone ministry. Alongside that, it was also the key recommendation was for the establishment of a ministerial multicultural advisory group. In calling around a range of stakeholders in the lead up to Estimates to get their read on the Budget and where things are at, I guess I was hearing a bit of frustration and concern, and also just shrugging of shoulders of where that is at.

Applications closed on 16 January this year, and my understanding is people submitted their application to a portal and they just have not heard back. There wasn't even an acknowledgement necessarily that their application had been received. I am keen for an update on where that advisory -

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. I thank you for providing that feedback because that is disappointing if that's the case that applicants haven't received notification.

We have conducted interviews. We had applications from 26 Tasmanians with lived experience and 9 organisational representatives. We convened a panel to shortlist, and we had Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCOT) on that committee, and we were expecting to announce the suitable lived experience candidates prior to 19 June. I expect that that will happen soon.

Through you, minister. There was an acknowledgement of applications on receipt and there has been an update on progress since that time.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you, I'll withdraw that then. I must have got my wires crossed with someone.

My flow-on question was in relation to interaction with the Australian Multicultural Council where we have a couple of representatives, including a community rep and a government appointee. There were questions raised about: how do you expect these two effectively advisory bodies to talk to each other and cross reference what they're doing? Is there anything formal in place in terms of governance and communication that allows them to make sure that they are as coordinated as they possibly can be?

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister. That's something that we absolutely acknowledge and will consider as part of the terms of reference and making sure that there's that connection. We also do have on the committee representatives from organisations that work with the multicultural community as well. We also have MCOT on that committee as well. We also have a number of government agencies and it's also something that we'll work through with members as part of their induction as well in terms of that connection through to the National Council and also through our new minister.

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Mr BAYLEY - Is there a place we can go to find an exact breakdown of where the funding in the multicultural line item can be identified? It's not in the Budget, obviously, it doesn't go to that level of specificity. Is that able to be tabled or provided to members just so that we are really clear and don't have to go and ask every individual group how successful they were otherwise?

Mr ABETZ - It has been indicated that that's available.

Mr BAYLEY - There it is there.

Mr ABETZ - Look at this. We have it.

Ms KELLY - Through you, minister, we have a document here that goes through how much is provided to each organisation. We will get the multicultural component out of that and table that.

Mr ABETZ - We will take it on notice and then table the appropriate elements out of that table.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you very much, Chair. My question is around multicultural communities and the support that the government provides in this portfolio. Minister, I'm sure your electorate's much like mine. In my community we have - excluding people who were born and have been raised here - people who have come to our state from South Africa, British Isles, India, Nepal, New Zealanders who one day I hope will be Australians as they're allowed to.

Mr ABETZ - There is room for them in the constitution.

Mr FERGUSON - That's right, as allowed for under our constitution. China, Afghanistan, people from the Qin community, Sierra Leone and Sudan, just to name a small number. Across the board, we're looking for people to feel welcome, included, but also to be engaged with those of us who would like to welcome them as future fellow Australians. So, I'd invite your response about what support and what strategy sits behind that support for multicultural communities here in Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - Look, very important question, and I sort of feel somewhat restricted, but I have found myself to be exceptionally welcomed in this state as a migrant myself, and I think my experience is overwhelmingly the experience that migrants and new arrivals receive. But, that said, there are elements to which I think the member for Clark Vica Bayley referred to and, indeed, the fact that our nation is currently having a royal commission into anti-Semitism and social cohesion is indicative that not all is as it should be.

As a government, we committed to a harmonious, inclusive and respectful multicultural island. In March, last year, the government released Embracing Diversity, Fostering Belonging: Tasmania's Multicultural Action Plan 2025-2029, and that was informed by over 1000 Tasmanians from culturally and linguistically diverse families that focuses on addressing racism and discrimination and strengthening social cohesion. As part of the action plan, there will be a specific ministerial multicultural advisory council, which was referenced earlier, to be announced in - whatever it is - 15 days' time.

A witness - Or less.

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Mr ABETZ - Or less, indeed - and the process to determine who will sit on it is well underway. Across 2024-25 and 2025-26, the government invested more than \$2 million to support culturally and linguistically diverse Tasmanians. We have a strong partnership with MCOT and peak funding totals approximately \$175,000 per annum and the peak body will also oversee \$30,000 for Harmony Week.

The government has committed \$200,000 for the multicultural action plan, including \$10,000 to establish the new advisory council. We've also written to the Glenorchy City Council and MCOT to advise that funding of \$75,000 for the Moonah Multicultural Hub would continue this year - this coming financial year. To continue to foster our multicultural festivals, \$15,000 per annum over four years has been committed to our Festa Italia, Estia Greek Festival, Lunar New Year Festival, the Glenorchy City Council Multicultural Festival and a Nepalese community event and, further to this, the Diwali Festival will receive \$35,000 in this coming year. To work with our CALD communities, the government has provided \$50,000 each to the Migrant Resource Centre and Welcome Cultural Services for important elder abuse prevention programs. We also have the government retaining its membership to the National Accreditation Authority for Translators of approximately \$15,000 per annum. We've also recently announced the 10 successful organisations who will share in \$40,000 as part of the second part of the Multicultural Community Festival Small Grants Program.

So, very comprehensive. The government can seek to do what it does, very mindful of the fact that, when it does so, it does so with our fellow Tasmanians' money and, at the end of the day, it's not only the government's responsibility, it is every single individual Tasmanian's responsibility to make sure that we have a good, harmonious society.

CHAIR - Time has expired, minister.

Mrs GREENE - Just a quick one. Will the government commit that all major changes affecting older Tasmanians will be communicated through plain language letters, phone support and printed materials, not just web updates and QR codes?

Mr ABETZ - That is under the Ageing portfolio, which is in Health. But I must say that that sounds like a good idea to me and we'll see if that can be flick passed through to our minister for Health.

Mrs GREENE - Thank you.

Ms KELLY - And through you, minister, it's part of the older Tasmanian Action Plan that was released last year as well.

Mrs GREENE - Wonderful, thank you.

CHAIR - Okay, we're just about there.

Mrs GREENE - Oh, I just logged out. I can log back in, hang on a ticket. There we go.

CHAIR - Nope. Time has now expired.

Mrs GREENE - I was so expedient, sorry.

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CHAIR - The next portfolio to appear is Arts and Heritage.

The committee suspended from 5.08 p.m. to 5.14 p.m.

Arts and Heritage

CHAIR - Before we go to questions, I want to remind members of the Order of the House Establishing Estimates Committee, which provides questions must be relevant to the portfolio and outputs of a particular session. However, as with other sessions, I will permit broad questions about the minister's role as a member of the Cabinet in relation to issues of public concern in relation to former minister Ms Ogilvie, if the minister chooses to do so.

The scrutiny of the Arts and Heritage portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee and the table. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions, please, for the benefits of Hansard.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you, Chair. To my immediate right from the Department of State Growth we have Brett Stewart, Deputy Secretary Creative Industry, Sport and Visitor Economy; David Sudmalis, Director Creative Tasmania; and Mary Mulcahy, Director Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. On my immediate left from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, we have the Secretary, Jason Jacobi; Will Joscelyne, General Manager, Heritage; and Melissa Ford, Director, Heritage Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. The time scheduled for the estimates for the Minister for the Arts and Heritage is one hour. Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Mr ABETZ - Not even a short one.

CHAIR - Minister, just before we go to questions, are you happy for the committee to ask questions to anyone at the table?

Mr ABETZ - Yep. If I consider there is a need to intervene, I will, but so far committee members have been exceptionally good, other than one occasion earlier this morning.

CHAIR - No worries. Thank you, minister.

Ms BROWN - Welcome, minister, to the wonderful portfolio of Heritage and Arts.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you.

Ms BROWN - Minister, have any current or former members of the Tasmanian Heritage Council had legal fees paid by the taxpayer since 1 July 2022. If so, how many members and what has been the cost?

Mr ABETZ - Look, what I'll do is I'll take that question on notice.

Ms BROWN - Sure. Following on from that, are there any ongoing legal matters through the Heritage Council that have perhaps even not had their fees paid by the taxpayer?

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Mr ABETZ - Look, I'll take that on notice as well, but I think you heard the secretary indicate that he wasn't aware, but for absolute certainty we'll take it on notice.

Ms BROWN - Thank you, minister, I appreciate that. Minister, how much has Heritage Tasmania spent on consultancy fees since 1 July 2022 and what have they been for and has the work been completed?

Mr ABETZ - That might be one for the secretary, is it?

Mr JACOBI - That is one for me. Thank you, minister. It's an easy one to report on, too. It was just consultancy fees?

Ms BROWN - Consultancy fees, thank you.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, there have been no payments to consultants to report for the financial year.

Mr ABETZ - From 2022, I think.

Ms BROWN - 2022.

Mr JACOBI - Oh, 2022?

Ms BROWN - Since 1 July 2022.

Mr JACOBI - We'd have to take that on notice.

Ms BROWN - Thanks. I'll pop all three on notice.

Mr ABETZ - I thought the initial answer was a bit strange that you knew it from 2022.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you, minister, for coming and all of your team. I appreciate it. I want to start with some questions around the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, but I don't know that they're necessarily for Mary, I think they're for you.

There seems to be some relatively heroic expectations of TMAG in terms of its performance targets of visitor engagement and physical visitors to TMAG, from this year, up 11,000 engagements, digital and physical. The next year, 21,000 physical visitors up 8000 in this year. In 2026-27, up 18,000. That's a significant amount of people, but the Budget allocation as I can see and read it has a small uptick this coming year from \$13 million to \$13.5 million, but then it drops significantly to below \$10 million and then it sits at around \$10 million. So, my question is really how do you come to these engagement and visitation expectations when you have budget cuts of that extent to an organisation that I think is probably already significantly underfunded and, I wouldn't say struggling to meet its expectations, but certainly not doing it comfortably with the budget that it's already given?

Mr STEWART - Thanks, minister, and through you, part of the challenge with the sequencing of working with Treasury on setting those performance indicators is the timing of when we have to provide those to Treasury. With that sitting next to the state of the state address

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that announced the operational efficiencies, et cetera, those timings didn't necessarily line up. What I would say, in general terms, is that when we're working through our performance indicators, we take a relatively conservative approach, normally, but I am happy to pass to Mary.

Mr BAYLEY - Can I just get a clarification on that? So, what are you saying? So the performance measures are sort of set back at state of the state time, are you saying these may be incorrect in the budget papers and they're not necessarily a true reflection of government's expectations in terms of performance?

Mr STEWART - Through you, minister, performance indicators are point in time, so, obviously, things change as we move forward but, as I said, normally we set performance indicators relatively conservatively. Again, I'm happy to pass to Mary for any detail around how we set those indicators and whether or not they're realistic.

Ms MULCAHY - Through you minister, look, we're still not back to pre-COVID numbers. So, when we set the performance indicators, we look at a small and what we believe is an achievable target for those increases in attendance. But also, with a new website that we've got with TMAG, we're hoping that that will increase the visitor - because that's a total visitor, including physical and online. So, we're hoping that that will actually increase participation, at least in the virtual space. So, we believe they're realistic targets.

Mr BAYLEY - Including the physical ones? There are targets for physical as well?

Ms MULCAHY - Yes, because it's pre-COVID, that's around to get back to what it was pre-COVID, so not quite there yet.

Mr BAYLEY - What's your funding like by comparison to pre-COVID?

Ms MULCAHY - Pre-my-time, but maybe I'll pass back to Brett for that.

Mr BAYLEY - Significantly down, I would imagine?

Mr STEWART - Thanks, Mary. Look, it's fair to say that the operational efficiency measures have been applied proportionally across all parts of the department. That's been talked about in many previous hearings, but I'd have to, in terms of exact numbers and how they match up pre-COVID, I'd probably have to take that on notice and look at budgets because that's going back quite a few years now.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you, okay. I want to turn to something that was reported in the *Mercury* on 9 May, which is that a Sydney-based consulting firm are doing a review to investigate all reasonable opportunities for TMAG to grow its revenue. It was a \$77,000 contract to Sandwalk Partners to deliver a commercial strategy and opportunity assessment for the museum. I'm keen on an update on that project and when we can see the results of it. Also, alarm bells did ring when I read the words that it needed to investigate 'appropriate monetisation of assets,' I'm keen to get clarification on exactly what that means and, particularly, ruling out of, I guess, selling any of the state collection and whether or not that fits under the notion of monetising assets?

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Mr STEWART - So, through you, minister, the review's actually been commissioned by the independent board of trustees with the support of the former minister and the department. It's quite normal practice for institutions like TMAG to undertake this type of review and Sandwalk Partners are very qualified in this space. So, we're comfortable with those arrangements.

Mr BAYLEY - Do you expect it to be made public?

Mr STEWART - I think that's a matter we'd have to consider. There may be elements that we would need to be careful around, in terms of commercial activity, but I think what we need to be really clear on is that we're looking at ways to optimise and grow the access for the public to the collection. There's already a number of public-facing commercial elements to the activities of the museum and this work will look to optimise those and build on them. In terms of ruling things in or out, I don't think it would be wise to speculate at all prior to the review having been done.

Mr BAYLEY - Perhaps I'll put that question to the minister seeing as you are the Treasurer and minister, as it stands at the moment, would you think the monetisation of assets, if that was to include the sale of parts of the state collection, would that be appropriate? Appropriate is the word that has been used in the question. Do you think it's appropriate to monetise assets and include the state collection as part of that?

Mr ABETZ - I would have to reflect on that, in fairness. I would have thought there is an imperative for us to try to keep the state collection as much as we possibly can. I don't know what the total holdings are of TMAG and whether there are - I'm just hypothesising now and possibly Ms Mulcahy might be better - but I don't know if certain things have been delivered to TMAG, of which they have custody, that may not have any particular value. I'm just speculating. But, in general terms, I'd say we want to keep our collection.

Ms MULCAHY - Through you minister, we're trying to keep it as broad as possible and not constrain any of the process at this point, and as Brett said, we already have commercial elements to TMAG, so the monetisation, it could be things like selling images, which we already do. We already have an image service. Its looking at any of those opportunities.

Mr BAYLEY - In the board's mind, does it mean that state collection in any way, shape or form?

CHAIR - Mr Bayley, we're going to have to keep moving because it's only a short session.

Mr GEORGE - I have a few questions.

CHAIR - I will allow one.

Mr GEORGE - At a time? Okay. The \$10 million screen arts allocation is currently administered piecemeal for individual people and projects, as I understand it. Putting the whole industry on a more secure footing could be achieved by promoting investments in infrastructure such as small studios, complete with postproduction facilities, props, costumes, set design, and the rest of production. Furthermore, the facilities could then provide training pathways into work and better attract interstate or foreign productions. Even Tasmanian-based productions

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often don't get much of the work done here, they might do some filming here, but a lot of the postproduction happens on the mainland. I'm wondering if you would at least commit to looking into the feasibility or making a study for a small studio and postproduction facilities based somewhere in Tasmania? And, I'm only thinking of a feasibility study.

Mr STEWART - Through you, minister, I think this is probably a good one for David Sudmalis, who's the director of Creative Tasmania, which includes screen.

Dr SUDMALIS - Through you, minister, it's a very astute observation that Arts and screen funding is invariably not applied to issues of infrastructure. They are supported through different lines in the Budget, and we will, at different times, have a role to play in that. The screen team, in its internal assessment of the efficacy of its programs, have, like you, identified the need for infrastructure to keep jobs in the screen sector in Tasmania and to maintain the economic viability of screen professionals in the state. Whilst we have not yet landed what that might look like, we have identified a number of areas that are worth further investigation. One of those is a post-production facility, and you may know that, as part of the animal sanctuary project, a post-production facility, a pop-up one, essentially, has been established as a test case to start looking at the viability and how that might roll out, where it is best to roll out and what scaffolding it needs in order to ensure that it is fit for purpose for Tasmania. We haven't completed that work yet, though it is work that is ongoing.

Mr GEORGE - So, you're suggesting that there is a sort of feasibility study in a sort of strange way.

Dr SUDMALIS - Well, I think feasibility study is probably over-egging the omelette a little bit in terms of what we're doing. It's an open discussion amongst the team, and the team is actively engaged in benchmarking facilities in other jurisdictions and what might work in ours.

Mr GEORGE - Let me know if I can help.

Dr SUDMALIS - Thank you.

Prof RAZAY - Engaging with art helps young people to motivate themselves, express themselves, and motivate them and improve their mental health. We have one of the highest proportion of young people dropping out after year 10, and, last year, or this year, we have several, well, the TAFE courses in arts were closed. What's the government initiative we have for young people to pursue their interests in art?

Mr ABETZ - Look, that might be better to the minister for Education and the minister for Skills, Minister Ellis. Do we have any responses?

Mr STEWART - Yeah, I think David could probably provide some information around what we do through the Arts portfolio.

Dr SUDMALIS - Thanks Brett. Yes, there is complete concurrence in the value of the arts and other creative pursuits in the social health and wellbeing of young people, indeed, a person of any age who engages in that suite of active engagement through to a professional, a pro-am development, and then again into professional development. The arts and screen teams alike are working assiduously on a suite of professional development activities that we look to

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launch in 2027. They are not yet ready. We are in negotiation, but it will be around ensuring that those Tasmanians who are either entry level or emerging practitioners do have a pathway into interprofessional practice.

There is already a number of examples in the art space: the Australian Society of Authors and Arts Tasmania have an agreement around capacity development and mentoring workshops. They come and visit and people of a literary bent develop their capacity and capability. Similarly, a program around public art has just wrapped up, the Building Blocks program, which saw 20 - Kate, if you can let me know if that's the right number - 20 individuals go through a professional development program. We are looking at pathways that involve technical expertise, so, what we might call backline support services for our festivals, for theatre, for live music. Music Tasmania have an agreement with us where they develop music workshops for those that are interested. Similarly, the visual arts, dance and music also have a range of youth arts engagement programs that're supported through youth arts funding.

Prof RAZAY - Wonderful

Mr VERMEY - Minister in his 2026 state of the state address, the Premier highlighted creative industries and how vital it is for community development, emphasising government investment in the sector that drives diversity, creativity, cultural identity and fuels our visitor economy. How does this Budget back this and provide a secure future for the arts sector?

Mr ABETZ - I couldn't have said it better myself given that that's what the Premier said. The Budget backs that vision with both certainty and new investment, which includes a significant \$10 million funding commitment to the creative industries. This uplift over forward estimates will be shared equally across Arts Tasmania and Screen Tasmania. This will assist in the delivery of programs that support Tasmanian artists, film makers, art workers, screen and games professionals to develop their work here and take it to market. Arts Tasmania's grant programs and industry development initiatives have been designed to strengthen the state's vibrant arts and cultural heritage sectors, creating opportunities across the state.

The impact of these programs and initiatives is substantial, creating paid work for more than 2400 artists, art workers and cultural workers while supporting more than 450,000 attendances at arts and cultural events across the state. That, of course, helps drive our economy and job opportunities.

The government, through Screen Tasmania, invested \$400,000 in the production of The Animal Sanctuary after providing development support of \$20,000 in , and the Budget supports TMAG, the leading natural and cultural heritage organisation and custodian of the state collection, with \$13.515 million in this coming budget year, and in the Budget we continue to back in our Symphony Orchestra, Theatre Royal, Ten Days on the Island and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, so, a comprehensive suite of initiatives backing in that which the Premier announced in the state of the state address.

Ms BROWN - Minister, with the restructure of the Department of State Growth into separate entities, including one for tourism, events and creative industries, with the potential loss of 250 plus jobs, will there be any staff cuts from Screen Tasmania?

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Mr STEWART - The way that the operational efficiencies have been apportioned is proportionate across the outputs and you can see that in the different outputs in the budget paper.

It's not possible at the moment for me to be specific about certain levels of cuts in certain areas. The announcement has been made quite publicly around the 250 FTE reduction which will happen as a result of the machinery of government change. At the same time, there is a budget efficiency of \$250 million over five years.

We're obviously working through a targeted negotiated voluntary redundancy program at the moment. That's live at the moment, well, it's closed, but in terms of the assessment of that program. So, it's not really possible for the department to be specific at the moment about levels of cuts to certain areas.

Ms BROWN - Okay. You spoke about voluntary redundancies. If there aren't adequate voluntary redundancies, would you then move to forced redundancies in this portfolio area?

Mr ABETZ - That's an all-of-government issue, and we have said no forced redundancies. That's our policy position. We believe natural attrition will also achieve the right sizing of the public service across the board, but trying to apply to a particular agency does become difficult and, just because people have put their hand up for a redundancy, doesn't mean that their hand will be accepted.

Ms BROWN - Thank you, minister. Minister, we've been told that there is a strategic plan being developed for the arts sector. When should we expect to see this?

Mr ABETZ - That's a very good question.

Ms BROWN - All of mine are, minister.

Mr ABETZ - I shouldn't be surprised.

Ms BROWN - No, you shouldn't, actually. It's quite offensive.

Mr STEWART - Thanks, minister, and through you: off the back of the announcement in the Budget for the additional funding for arts and screen, and the announcement by the Premier earlier in the year around the development of a creative industries strategy, we're currently working through a scoping exercise of what that strategy might look like. It's difficult for me to give you an exact time frame.

It's important to note, though, that that strategy isn't a completely new piece of work. It's actually the bringing together of a number of really important, strategic pieces of work that are either already underway or have been done, for example, in the music space. It's also going to be an exercise in looking at where there may be some gaps and where we can find some opportunities where those gaps are.

We would expect to advise the minister on that strategy in the coming weeks, in terms of what it might look like, and then undertake that work. So, I can't give you an exact timeframe, but these things generally take months.

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Mr BAYLEY - Minister, or perhaps one of the officials, I was going to ask about the announced strategic plan to boost arts and culture as well, and try to understand how it dovetails with the \$10 million investment claim - or announcement - noting that the most significant part of that \$10 million, 70 per cent, is in the out-years of the Budget. My question is: have you got a breakdown of the \$10 million and how that's intended to be spent? Can you table it for the committee - as much detail as you have? And, I guess, how can we expect the strategic plan to inform the decisions that are going to be made about the expenditure of that money?

Mr STEWART - Thank you. Through you, minister, I'll start but probably throw to David for some more detail. The decision to profile that additional funding predominantly in the forward Estimates was quite a deliberate one, for two reasons: (a) we need to develop the strategy and then utilise the funding post that, and (b) that will line up with the next round of multi-year funding. We've structured it so that funding is equally split across screen and arts, but it's also going to become available to us - and to the sector, importantly - when those next rounds of multi-year funding opportunities come up.

In terms of a breakdown, obviously until we have the strategy developed, we can't provide a breakdown, but we can certainly say - and David can build on this, I think - that all of our existing programs we'd look to either continue or, where they've been successful, enhance. Then we'd also be looking to be filling some gaps off the back of what's informed from the development of the strategy. But I'd hand to David to add any further comments.

Dr SUDMALIS - Only one or two very small comments, Brett, and, through you, minister: the very welcome news around the phased uplift to both arts and screen provides us with a couple of really unique opportunities. To have program enhancement intersect with the development of frameworks, art form-specific frameworks, under a strategy means we can actually apply new funds to existing gaps in a way that tactically operates in that environment. The way that the - the broad brushstrokes of the strategy are distinct from a range of other strategies in this space that have gone before.

Typically, we've had what I would call art form-specific or practice area strategies. This doesn't do that. This looks at frameworks and ambition in each art form and practice area, and then looks at the way that these actually provide distinct benefits to the state across a number of domains. These domains - and you'll have to forgive me, I need to refer to my paper here - knowledge and information domains are critical around that. Now, that's around intellectual property, of course, artificial intelligence and the impact that will have on the creative sector. Also skills development, which is something that is top of mind. The other area that we also need to work on is economic and community domains. So, I'm very keen to continue our work around measuring the value of the arts and screen to the Tasmanian GSP, to look at the Creative Trident model to determine what the actual numbers are in the creative workforce in Tasmania, because we've been - how can I put this - under-reporting on those for years, because we haven't had the tools at our disposal to be able to dive deeply into that.

You might see on page 85 or 86 of budget paper 4 the change in methodology around the value of the Tasmanian Arts sector to Tasmanian GSP, and -

CHAIR - Time has expired on that question. We only have an hour; we need to keep it brief.

Mr BAYLEY - It begs a couple of questions. You talked a bit about existing programs, about gaps, and about GSP. I think one of the things that I hear consistently from the arts sector is, I guess, a lamentation around perhaps a skewed focus of government into more of the economic driver, as opposed to the creative side of things. If we talk about existing programs, obviously we've lost some really significant arts organisations in this state over recent years, whether it be Blue Cow Theatre or whether it be Wide Angle Tasmania. And we have others that are still doing really good work, but there's a concern that the screen industry investment, in particular, is about attracting big, glossy productions that promote Tasmania and inject a sort of sugar hit into the economy. But it's doing a limited amount of building capacity within the industry and funding artists themselves and funding producers and all the others that go with it. A lot of people come in, there's a big injection of interest and finance, but then they will leave again.

What I'm looking for is how much of this funding and how much of a commitment do you support in the strategy going forward of actually investing in community arts organisations in the state that are delivering fantastic productions, employing fantastic people and giving opportunities to others? Ones like Second Echo Ensemble that are actually building capacity within our community and our arts sector, as opposed to simply driving economic activity and promotion and brand promotion for the state?

Dr SUDMALIS - Through you, minister: job creation is economic, of course, is the first thing I would say. So that's an important driver. We look to support Tasmanian workers through these programs. I concur with your statement around 'out of island' productions happening in Tasmania. This is an important way that elements of the Tasmanian workforce can continue to work. With the uplift - and I might just note that under the terms of the *Cultural and Creative Industries Act 2017*, any new programs need to have ministerial approval before we can implement those. Obviously, we've not had the opportunity to seek that authorisation yet.

But the focus in screen, in particular, will be different. It will align to a Tasmanian industry. It will align to building capacity. Conversations within the team as we assess and evaluate existing programs, where the important gaps are, are nearing completion, and we'll be able to promote, I hope, new programs for the enhancement of the Tasmanian industry and a consistently working sector from 1 January 2027.

Mr GEORGE - Thank you, Chair. I don't want to get too philosophical, but a civilisation isn't built on buildings and infrastructure. It evolves from our very human and unique creative instinct, and I think our society is driven forward not by economic imperatives, but by the pursuit that we severely underrate today, which is philosophy, that helps us understand our place in the world.

I think we're losing touch with that inner life, and I'm seriously concerned when the arts, which is our inner life projected into public life, is bundled in with Tourism and Sport and the new tourism events and Creative Tasmania. I would dearly like to have my concerns alleviated by hearing that government support for the arts will not diminish, as it has diminished, and we're not going to lose even more of our extraordinary creatives to the mainland.

So, can I get a reassurance that eliminating jobs and budget repair in this new organisation will not fall even more heavily on the creative arts than it already has? I don't even know if there's an answer to that.

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Mr STEWART - Through you, Minister. The decision to group the creative functions of government with along with TMAG, with sport, and the visitor economy, including tourism and events, doesn't actually constitute a change of how it's grouped now because those functions are all grouped together within my area within state growth. As to the benefits, or otherwise, of that, I think that there are some clear synergies between the creative sector, indeed across into our heritage - the second-most popular reason cited for people visiting Tasmania is heritage - and indeed the role of TMAG in that is really important. I think there are some synergies, but I guess that's just an opinion.

In terms of the funding, clearly the budget efficiencies, the operational efficiencies have been apportioned across the department and the addition of an additional \$10 million in funding is very welcome in the creative sector.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, the benefit of music, including choirs, learning instruments or dancing, have profound benefit for the ageing brain and body. If you engage into music regularly, it will lower the risk of dementia, improve your memory but improve your mental and physical well-being. Last weekend, I joined the 120 people at choir and we razzle-dazzled 500 people in Launceston. We have a government initiative to support elderly people to engage in physical activities. Why don't we have initiatives to support seniors to learn musical instrument, go to dancing classes, the same way?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I was 'Razay-dazzled' on Good Friday, if I recall correctly, with my wife at St. John's Anglican for the Good Friday service. Only to find that the wonderful choir had in its midst none other than Professor Razay. So, I can vouch for the fact of your interest, active involvement in all things choirs and music. And so, not surprising to hear that you were involved in another choir and you do it exceptionally well. I'm not sure if there is a particular fund to encourage choirs singing but any such activity - and the good news, I suppose, is if there was no government support for this, somehow it grew organically, did it? Out of the volunteer community and long may that last. But I will have to ask officials whether there is a particular program.

Dr SUDMALIS - Thank you, minister, and through you. There is no current program that is aimed at a particular demographic other than a youth demographic, but I think I can say with confidence we would welcome a conversation with any organisations that are working with older Tasmanians, or even just any Tasmanians - I don't want to use the word elderly because it's not about -

Prof RAZAY - Senior.

Dr SUDMALIS - Thank you very much, Professor. Senior Tasmanians to enhance engagement.

Mr ABETZ - So we're looking after your demographic with the youth, by the sounds of that.

Dr SUDMALIS - That's correct.

Mr VERMEY - Minister, the gaming sector has certainly changed from Pac-Man and TV tennis to a very exciting industry in Tasmania. Can you outline the support that the

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government is showing towards the Tasmanian gaming sector initiatives to encourage local gaming development that builds skills within the state and creates industry here?

Mr ABETZ - Just to be completely clear, we're talking about video games?

Mr VERMEY - Absolutely.

Mr ABETZ - Because with my hat on as Treasurer, I get a bit twitchy when I'm asked about gaming because it would trigger the member for Clark, Ms Johnston as well, no doubt.

The Tasmanian government has provided significant support to our burgeoning video game sector. They make up the largest entertainment sector in the world with the ability to be developed anywhere. Tasmania's video game developers are exceeding expectations with the state's small but talented industry making a significant mark on the global stage.

The Tasmanian government, through Screen Tasmania, is a strong supporter of games development, noting that several high-profile games have already been released with several more in active development or soon to be debuted. We have assisted this development when we announced, in 2024, that the government was dedicating \$500,000 to support video game development in the state. This resulted in the inaugural Level Up Tasmania video game showcase held in September 2024. The showcase was the first of its kind in the state and it was, by all accounts, a complete success, drawing more than 1500 attendees and raised the profile of video games.

The second Level Up Tasmania video game showcase took place in April this year and that event grew 2500, a thousand more attendees than the previous showcase. It clearly demonstrates the interest and enthusiasm in the field and the growing interest and enthusiasm. More than 40 games were demonstrated at the Level Up showcase industry day, and there's more work being done, which included a showcase of work created by UTAS students. A developing area, global interest and Tasmania's making its mark in that area.

Ms BROWN - Minister, Stephen Parry was recently appointed chair of the Heritage Council. There are serious concerns about the integrity of this process and several other Liberal-aligned appointments to taxpayer-funded board positions. Why was Mr Parry handpicked for the role? Was he encouraged to before it was advertised? And was he appointed to this position in exchange for running as candidate during the election?

Mr ABETZ - Look, those sort of questions are demeaning -

Ms BROWN - Are reasonable, minister. This is taxpayer-funded positions and they deserve an answer.

Mr ABETZ - You can ask those questions, they will be answered, but you demean yourself.

Ms BROWN - I don't think so, minister. These are really important questions.

Mr ABETZ - Mr Parry's appointment went through the normal processes. He was appointed on merit and somebody with his CV, which includes being the president of the Australian senate and his involvement in professional organisations prior to his entry into politics. Politics should not disqualify somebody who is capable and competent from taking on

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a job and nobody from your side of politics has ever asked the question about the appointment to various boards in Tasmania of a former Labor minister from the state of New South Wales, appointed on the basis of merit and did not disqualify her in that particular circumstance just because she happened to have previously been a Labor minister; nor should somebody be disqualified just because they happened to be a Liberal senator; and is somebody able to tell us what the process was?

Mr JACOBI - Yes, through you, minister, I can confirm that Mr Parry certainly was not handpicked for the role. There was an open EOI process conducted. The process was completely independent of the then-minister and independent of me. An independent panel was formed and they went through a selection process. They shortlisted candidates, interviews were undertaken. The panel's assessment and shortlisted candidates for suitability were provided to the minister via a formally-written minute seeking her preferred nominee, and the minister indicated her preferred nominee via notation on the signed returned minute.

Mr ABETZ - Look, just for completeness, more than happy to table Mr Parry's curriculum vitae. On the basis of that, I would defy anybody to say how he was not qualified to take on the task.

Ms BROWN - Since the appointment of Mr Parry to chair, what expenses have been incurred by him, including accommodation, meals, flights and training?

Mr ABETZ - We will have to take that on notice.

Mr JACOBI - We can answer that.

Mr ABETZ - We can answer it, I've just been told.

Mr JACOBI - None that we're aware of, through you, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Not handpicked, no expenses: what's the third one?

Ms BROWN - Minister, we can see by - the Heritage budget halves over the forward Estimates, some of that will be from the closure of grant programs. Where is the rest coming from? How many staff will lose their jobs? You've spoken about redundancies; have they been offered to the department at large or specific areas?

Mr ABETZ - That is for the various secretaries and agencies to determine. I hand to the secretary.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, since March 2025, when an initial right-sizing of the public service was announced, I established what's called an executive management recruitment committee in the department and we have been assessing each and every position that has been sought to be recruited to. Since March 2025, we have achieved a reduction in our paid equivalent FTEs of approximately 60 positions across the whole department. The majority - well, almost all of those positions were achieved through vacancies, so this is the resignation of employees -

Ms BROWN - Vacancy control.

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Mr JACOBI - Vacancy management and natural attrition: and natural attrition still - and will continue to serve as a key aspect of our savings strategy and operational efficiencies going forward. Every time a position across the whole department is vacated, we will assess the position on its criticality to delivering services. We are incredibly mindful of small teams like that of Heritage Tasmania which deliver essential advice and service support to people undertaking heritage works across the state, but there will always be cases where a particular position in Heritage Tasmania or any other part of the department will be vacated and may no longer be critical to a particular service delivery. At that point in time my committee and myself will make a decision on that. In the meantime, earlier this week, we announced TNVR, so the targeted negotiated voluntary redundancy process, across the whole department. That process will solicit interest from employees who would like to receive a voluntary redundancy. Again, I will consider each of those positions on a case-by-case basis.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I want to ask a little bit about building maintenance across both the Arts and the Heritage portfolios, and I acknowledge that one of these also sort of crosses into the Parks space. The Budget describes a \$4 million project for TMAG building maintenance, but it's funded to the extent of \$2.9 million this year, \$0.5 million next year, and then there's nothing for building maintenance in the out years in the Budget. Also in discussions with the Salamanca Arts Centre and looking at their building, there's visible water damage on the frontage of that building because of water running down from running down from stormwater down pipes and the like, and the Salamanca Arts Centre, as I understand it, has had, not this year but over recent years, a \$50,000 annual allocation withdrawn or cut, and that's presenting challenges to them to actually maintain their buildings. So, I'm just seeking some kind of explanation about those kind of projects and what the government thinks needs and can be done to improve funding for building maintenance for arts organisations, be it TMAG or be it Salamanca Arts Centre, or others?

Mr ABETZ - Mr Jacobi.

Mr JACOBI - Well, through you, minister, I am happy to talk to the Salamanca Arts Centre, even though it sits in the Minister for Parks portfolio -

Mr BAYLEY - I appreciate that, thank you.

Mr JACOBI - I'm in a position to speak to that. I think there's a couple of things, and I do recognise your interest in the lift and the replacement of the lift. That has been a substantial body of work to get to a point, and in fact -

Mr BAYLEY - I appreciate that's largely resolved. So that's not my question at this point.

Mr JACOBI - It's being resolved. We're about to - I signed off on a contract only today -

Mr BAYLEY - Good on you, congratulations

Mr JACOBI - just to continue with the with getting the lift replaced and fixed, which is being entirely funded from the state government.

Mr BAYLEY - I guess my observations of visiting the building was visible water damage literally on the Salamanca frontage, you know, access still to the roof, which is really dangerous for kids climbing on it on Friday nights, and that sort of stuff.

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Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, there is no roof leakage concern. Let's be very clear about that. We also had a complete audit report done on the whole of the Salamanca complex to give everybody, both the Salamanca Arts Centre and my department, a very thorough understanding about all of the maintenance issues that might be required. I think it's really important to point out that the lease with the Salamanca Arts Centre apportions almost all of the responsibilities for that maintenance to the Salamanca Art Centre, and it's up to the Salamanca Art Centre, through their business planning, to make sure that they get an appropriate revenue which can actually address all of those maintenance activities over time. We now know the quantum of the work -

Mr BAYLEY - They used to be funded annually though, didn't they, or get an annual allocation?

Mr JACOBI - There was a very notional - there was a process in place by which they could apply to the property services section of my department to get approval for very basic maintenance works, and it was a very nominal amount. What we have learned by interrogating the lease, is that actually many of the responsibilities rest with the Salamanca Arts Centre. So we've been very clear in trying to support them with better understanding the scope and the extent of the work that's required, and now it's really up to the Salamanca Arts Centre, apart from the small issues that do rest with my department. We're there and we stand by the Salamanca Arts Centre to assist them with making sure that they can keep on top of those maintenance obligations.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you.

Mr STEWART - Through you, minister, just in regard to the question around the TMAG building maintenance funding, that funding was actually provided over two budgets, 2023-24 and 2024-25. The reason it appears as it does in this Budget, which I completely acknowledge is a little confusing, is that some of that money has already been expended, some of it has been rolled forward; but I can confirm that that \$4 million hasn't been reduced and is being spent on that project.

Mr BAYLEY - There's nothing in the out-years for whatever else is needed?

Mr STEWARD - That will be a consideration for future budgets.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. Chair, our last question and I appreciate I did ask this after the last budget, but I think I will probably end up asking it every single year: Ms Mulcahy, I'm really interested in Aboriginal cultural and human remains returns. Last year I think you acknowledged that TMAG still holds human remains from Tasmanian Aboriginal people, Palawa and Pakana people; I know they want them back, and I'm interested in what you've done since, and what are the obstacles to making that happen, because I'm sure we can all understand and appreciate at the moment that holding those remains is no longer acceptable in the 21st century. We have to find a solution to this issue, and I will keep asking until we do see them returned and appropriately managed by the community.

Ms MULCAHY - Through you, minister, so repatriation, as you know, is a very complicated and incredibly sensitive matter. We do hold some Aboriginal remains still; they have very little provenance with them, and so we've been working very closely with the

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Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, working on the provenance of those remaining ancestral remains. We've had some success in the last few years of being able to identify where those ancestors came from and have returned them to the TAC, but it's an ongoing bit of work and a lot of that has to do with actually working out where they came from and appropriately returning them to their country.

Mr BAYLEY - And what about cultural objects?

Ms MULCAHY - So, I think last year when we spoke about this, and through you, minister, the return of the Greens Creek petroglyph is - we're seeking what I hope is the last piece of advice about how to return those. So, hopefully by the end of this year, we will have returned - that is definitely a commitment of the board, to return the petroglyphs to the Aboriginal community, we're just, from a legal perspective and a legislative perspective, trying to find out the final answers to that for how we can do that.

CHAIR - Mr George.

Mr GEORGE - I pass, thank you. Fascinating conversation, but a lot of my questions have already been answered.

CHAIR - Mr Vermey, do you have a question?

Mr VERMEY - Yes, thank you. Lucky last: can the Minister for Arts and Heritage please outline how the government is supporting Tasmania's music sector, including incentives to assist local artists, strengthening live music venues and promote Tasmanian music, please?

Mr ABETZ - It's a pity Professor Razay isn't here for this answer, but yes, the government does understand and is keenly aware of the importance of music to our island. Creative Tasmania has embarked on a work to examine our music ecology and explore programs of development that would lead to sustainable music careers in Tasmania. We've got a \$10 million uplift to the arts that will assist this particular work of feeding into a new strategic plan to boost arts and culture in Tasmania.

Arts Tasmania currently provides support for musicians and groups, such as Van Diemen's Band, to develop work and build careers. We want to encourage these musicians and understand how best to assist them. The Tasmanian and federal governments jointly funded a \$150,000 music feasibility study announced in June 2025 to establish dedicated live music precincts in Hobart and Launceston; this study, to be released in the early part of next year, will examine barriers facing the sector and provide recommendations. In addition, the government is supporting sector advocacy and capacity building through its invest in Music Tasmania, which received \$150,000 over 2025-26, to deliver strategic services for the contemporary music industry, and this includes advocacy for live music venues, engagement with national bodies, and initiatives to help artists and industry workers build sustainable careers.

Ms BROWN - Minister, the former chair, Ms Torossi, secured funding for an online project called Tasmanac. The visibility around this funding is a bit mysterious. There was money provided as part of Better Cities funding for Hobart, but the Tasmanac website seems to have disappeared. Can you provide a breakdown of the expenses from TMAG and Heritage Tasmania to date on this project, including consultants and where the end product is, and has

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the product been included in this year's Budget? I understand that was a lot of questions, but I'm trying to roll it into one for you.

Mr ABETZ - And I usually have all that information in my back pocket, but today I don't.

Ms BROWN - I can pop it on notice if we need.

Mr ABETZ - So, I will rely on somebody to assist: Ms Mulcahy.

Ms MULCAHY - Through you, Minister. Look, Tasmanac was a pilot project. Look, I don't have the breakdown, we can take that on notice around the spending on it, but it's not up because, yes, it was a pilot project, and we haven't had the funding to continue that, and I'm not going speak for Heritage Tasmania, but from a TMAG perspective, some of the work we're doing around the digitisation of the collection will mean we will end up with a product very similar. It's probably going to take us about five years, but yes, beta project, tested it and that's - yes.

Ms BROWN - Okay, and so, the rest of those questions I will just pop on notice. Are you happy for that, minister?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms BROWN - Did you want to take the last minute, Vica?

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired.

The committee adjourned at 6.14 p.m.