

Wednesday 11 July 2018

The President, **Mr Wilkinson**, took the Chair and read Prayers.

QUESTION UPON NOTICE

The following answer was given to a question upon notice:

1. HARTZ MOUNTAIN ROAD-WYENA ROAD

[11.03 a.m.]

Mr DEAN asked the Leader of Government Business in the Legislative Council -

With regard to the Hartz Road-Wyena Road and a former forestry spur road named Wyena 2-2, which is approximately 2.2 kilometres long and provided access to the former forestry coupe Arve 009B (one of many coupes located in the 2013 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area extension) located to the west of Geeveston -

- (1) Is the Government aware that -
 - (a) Wyena Spur 2-2 has been completely ripped up along its entire length;
 - (b) approximately the last kilometre of it is covered with logs;
 - (c) any access for beekeepers or firefighting vehicles has been completely lost; and
 - (d) the old road is a mess, with many weeds growing on it?
- (2)
 - (a) Which department approved the ripping up of Wyena Spur 2-2 from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area - TWWHA - boundary to the road end over Foaming Creek?
 - (b) On what recommendation?
- (3) When was this work conducted and by whom?
- (4)
 - (a) What was the cost of the operation?
 - (b) Who funded the activity?
- (5) What consideration was given by government regarding removing road access to the former coupe Arve 009B and the subsequent impact on beekeepers and firefighting vehicles?
- (6) Was the use of a gate on the road to prevent vehicle access considered; if not, why?

Ms HISCUTT replied -

- (1) (a) The Government is aware the Wyena Spur 2-2 has been ripped along its entire length. This work was undertaken as part of a strategic approach to rehabilitating previously harvested forest areas that now form part of the 2013 extensions to the TWWHA and, in this case, are within a national park.

(b) Ripping, along with the use of logs, was used as the most effective method to close the road.

(c) and (d)

Weed growth is common in rehabilitation projects and to be expected given the harvesting operations and disturbance of the soil profile in the past. Ongoing monitoring of weeds and regrowth is part of this strategic rehabilitation program.

(2) (a) and (b)

The works were approved by the Parks and Wildlife Service - PWS - as the land manager and by the Forest Practices Authority, by virtue of a certified forest practices plan - FPP - covering parts of the area.

AR009B was one of a number of forestry coupes that became part of the TWWHA in 2013 upon the extension of the World Heritage boundary. The coupe had been harvested but not rehabilitated and now falls within the Hartz Mountains National Park.

In early 2014, shortly after PWS inherited the transferred parcels as national park, a steering committee comprising Forestry Tasmania, PWS and other stakeholders was formed to commence a project titled 'Ecological Restoration of Logging Coupes in the TWWHA'. The decision to close and rehabilitate the access road was made after considering many issues such as tenure, fire risk, apiary industry and tourism stakeholders, and after noting that FT advised there were no apiary licences or approvals to access this road. All works were delivered in consultation with FT as the previous land manager and in accordance with the outstanding FPP obligations within the site.

(3) (a) The works were delivered by Environment Tasmania Incorporated - ETI - on behalf of PWS as the new land manager.

(b) FT was contracted to undertake rehabilitation works on behalf of ETI within AR009B and along Wyena 2-2 in 2015-16.

(4) (a) Initial estimates for the works proposed by ETI were for ripping of approximately 800 metres of the Wyena 2-2 road and approximately 180 m of the Wyena 2-2-1 road at an approximate cost of \$16 700. This represented the length of the Wyena 2-2 road that occurred within the coupe AR009B.

(b) All works were funded by the Australian Government and in December 2014 the ETI was successful in securing an additional \$105 641 in Landcare funding via the Australian Government's 20 Million Trees Program. Funding from this source was used in the rehabilitation of AR009B and the Wyena 2-2 and 2-2-1 roads.

(5) A range of factors were taken into account in determining how areas within the TWWHA extension should be rehabilitated. I am advised the decision to close the road was made in consultation with steering committee representatives and on advice from FT. I am advised no apiarists were active on the road or in the coupe, and that the road was not required for firefighting purposes.

- (6) A gate and continued maintenance of the road were not considered cost-effective or long-term solutions to the successful rehabilitation of the coupe. The PWS carefully balances the needs of industry and endeavours to unlock areas for sensitive and sustainable use, wherever practical. However, given the priority to rehabilitate the coupe as national park, in some cases, such as this, there was no compelling argument for access to persist and closure was deemed to be the most appropriate action in this situation to enhance the World Heritage values.

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2018 (No. 16)

In Committee

Resumed from 10 July (page 57)

DIVISION 9

(Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment)

Output Group 1

Lands Tasmania -

1.2 Valuation Services -

Mr DEAN - This matter was left open because a question was taken on notice relating to the valuation of the Treasury building. A response has been received and accepted. I think the building was valued at \$16 million; from memory, that was the valuation from the Valuer-General.

Mrs Hiscutt - While the member is on his feet, I can say it was \$18 million as at 30 June 2015.

Mr DEAN - Thank you. That answer provided by the Premier satisfied that matter.

Item agreed to.

Output group 1 agreed to.

Output group 2

Primary Industries

2.1 AgriGrowth Tasmania -

Mr DEAN - This matter was left open because of an issue involving the Cressy Research Station. A number of questions were raised about this issue. We have set up a meeting with the minister for later this week, and I do not propose to pursue or follow up any matters here today because of that. Hopefully the meeting can resolve a number of outstanding issues.

Item agreed to.

2.2 Marine Resources

Mr DEAN - The question taken on notice for this matter relates to the provision of a breakdown by fishery of revenue received from commercial fishing licences for 2016-17. We have been

provided with a table of revenue received from commercial fishing licences for 2016-17. I note some of the returns are huge. I have a question on the abalone quota under deed. The Government received \$7,161,299.19 as a result of that deed. How many people operating in this area does this relate to? Where in the state are the abalone productive areas that cover the number of people involved?

Mrs Hiscutt - For clarification, do you mean how many licences have been issued?

Mr DEAN - How many licences have been issued under the abalone quota under deed and where are those licences operating? Rock lobster is \$3 695 754. It would be helpful to know the number of licences issued in that area as well.

Mrs HISCUTT - The figure the member first quoted is the current beach price, which is what drives it. The \$7 million-odd dollars the member talked about is the current beach price, and the farmer receives \$70 a kilogram.

As to the member's specific questions about how many licences there are and where they are, we do not have that information available at the moment. Is the member happy to put it as a question without notice?

Mr Dean - I have so many questions I have to put on notice, I am not sure I will have the time to do it. You know what the question is; I would have thought the Committee could be provided with the information you already have.

Madam CHAIR - Order, the question for the member is whether he wants to put it on notice. You make the decision.

Mr DEAN - I hear what the Leader is saying and I hear what the Chair is saying, but you know what the question is. I would have thought it would be sufficient for the Leader to come back with an answer in due course. I am happy for that to be the case. I am not going to hold proceedings up today.

With the abalone quota under the deed, where it says the revenue is \$7 161 299.19, is that the landed price of abalone?

Mrs HISCUTT - It is driven by the beach price. The beach price means that is what the fisherman receives for it - \$70 a kilo at the moment. That is how they make up that figure.

Mr DEAN - What is the revenue received by the Government as a result of the licences? Is that a question you have on notice?

Mrs Hiscutt - That figure is the Government's revenue.

Mr DEAN - Is that what the Government receives in relation to the abalone quota under the deed?

Mrs Hiscutt - Yes, and that is what it is based on - the beach price.

Mr DEAN - I take it the Government receives the amounts of money identified in the table in all the other areas - for instance, the abalone divers licence?

Mrs Hiscutt - I may have misunderstood before. It is not what the farmer receives; that is what the farmer gives to the Government based on that.

Mr DEAN - I might need to put this on notice: what is it worth to the farmers, the people who take these abalone?

Mrs Hiscutt - No, we don't have that at the moment.

Mr DEAN - If it is worth \$7 million-plus revenue to the state Government, the revenue to the farmer is quite huge.

Item agreed to.

Output group 2 agreed to.

Output group 6 Biosecurity Tasmania

6.1 Biosecurity -

Mr DEAN - During the Estimates, a question was taken on notice to provide a breakdown of the species of declared weeds for which infringement notices were issued in 2016-17. At that time there were two infringement notices, but the answer that came back was that two infringement notices under the Weed Management Act 1999 were served in 2016-17. Both were for Paterson's curse in Launceston.

What infringement notices were issued in the financial year 2017-18? What follow-up occurred as a result of the two infringement notices issued by the department during 2016-17? What follow-up was there to ensure those infringement notices were heeded and the weed, Paterson's curse, was eliminated? I would appreciate being given some detail.

Mrs HISCUTT - With regard to the two infringement notices, we have had no notification from Monetary Penalties Enforcement Service - MPES - that the fines have not been paid, so they have been paid.

Your other question was about follow-up. The flowering season is the best time to follow these up to make sure notices have been complied with. They are followed up during flowering season in November-December the next year, to make sure that has happened.

In 2017-18, five requirement notices were issued. If something is spotted or reported, the farmer or whoever has the weeds will be given a requirement notice. That means they need to act. Biosecurity follows up the requirement notice to make sure something has happened. If nothing has happened, an infringement notice is issued. No infringement notices were issued for last financial year to date.

Mr DEAN - Of the infringement notices we were told about in the answer, two were issued for 2016-17. If the best time to follow up is about the December period, were the matters for which those two infringement notices were issued followed up at the appropriate time? If so, was the area declared weed-free and had the person receiving those infringement notices done the job? Prior to the issue of these infringement notices, I take it the department speaks with the people on the land

where the weed is and asks them to remove it. I take it the infringement notices are issued after cautions are given or assistance is provided. I would appreciate it if that could be confirmed. If the answer to the previous question was not followed up in December 2017, why not?

Mrs HISCUTT - Yes, they are followed up and the two were followed up. They have to be followed up in more than just a year. I think the general term is that if you have a weed seed bank in your soil, it lasts at least seven years. I am not saying it is followed up for seven years, but it is followed up for a continuous time afterwards to make sure it is addressed properly. Does that answer your question?

Mr Dean - No, it doesn't. The question I asked was, was it followed up in 2017 and was it declared weed-free? Was the infringement notice followed up?

Mrs HISCUTT - It was followed up but the land cannot be declared weed-free because it has to be followed up year after year. If it drops seeds, there is the next year's strike so you have to follow it up continuously for numerous years to make sure it is okay. But yes, it is being addressed.

Mr Dean - Paterson's curse is a problem in the Launceston area - there is a lot of it - and therefore I raised this issue.

Mrs HISCUTT - It is not something that can be solved in one season, as you would know being a farmer. It is a consistent thing for many years and it is monitored for quite a while. Paterson's curse is a priority for Biosecurity.

Mr FARRELL - We had some information back on the use of 1080 poison. I am happy to put a question on notice to get more detail around the amounts and where 1080 is currently being laid because it is an issue at the moment in the Upper Derwent area. I would appreciate some more detail on that. With its usage having increased over the past couple of years, could you give an indication whether it is becoming the preferred method of controlling grazing wildlife?

Mrs HISCUTT - In answer to your question, 1080 is a useful item in the farmers' toolboxes. It is not handed out willy-nilly; without a doubt, it is a very controlled substance. Many notifications go into it and much background work is done before permission is given to use it. Specifically on your questions, we do not have a particular answer here on how many or where it is being used. It is an ongoing thing; sometimes it is withdrawn if there are objections, so it is very fluid. We can probably give you the answers to a particular point in time but that might not be relevant for the month after or the month after that. Are you happy if we think about that?

Mr FARRELL - Good.

Item agreed to.

Output group 6 agreed to.

Output group 7 Environment Protection and Analytical Services

7.1 Environmental Management and Pollution Control -

Ms ARMITAGE - In regard to pollution, particularly in the Tamar Valley, it did not really come under the area the minister was looking at. The minister was going to seek further information

to see whether there might be any proposed initiatives to encourage the use of cleaner and more efficient forms of heating as we had in conjunction with the federal government and the buyback schemes. The minister was going to see whether anything like that was happening with regard to air pollution in the Tamar Valley.

Mrs HISCUTT - The energy efficiency of wood heaters is being addressed through amendments made to the Environmental Management and Pollution Control (Distributed Atmospheric Emissions) Regulations 2018. These introduce requirements for the sale of wood heaters in Tasmania to move to new Australian standards for wood heater efficiency. I have a point of clarification here: the response provided to members indicates the Tasmanian Government has committed to delivering the \$10 million Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme - TEELS - to promote uptake by consumers of energy-efficient products. Due to the popularity of the scheme, it has been increased to \$40 million as of April 2018. Further discussions and consultations on this will take place in the near future.

Ms Armitage - Is that advertised widely for people to know about this scheme?

Mrs HISCUTT - TEELS is advertised. There will be broad consultation on smoke regulations in the near future.

Item agreed to.

Output group 7 agreed to.

Output group 5 Racing Regulation and Policy

5.1 Racing Regulation and Policy -

Ms RATTRAY - We may have missed a couple of output groups. Again, that is because of the issue of some information coming in late so we do not have enough time to cross-reference the answers we received against the questions we submitted; obviously members are satisfied with what they have received.

My question relates to the percentage of the grant provided to Tasracing and its indexation. It is something people involved in the racing industry, unfortunately, do not seem to have a real handle on. It was suggested to me that they were expecting a 3 per cent increase. There could well have been a 3 per cent increase in the past. When I saw the figures, back in 2015-16, it was 0.33 per cent indexation; in 2016-17, it was 0.31 per cent; and in 2017-18, it was 1.13 per cent.

The money going into the racing industry is a moveable feast, but the indexation is not giving the industry a lot of confidence.

I am interested in what indexation is predicted to be for 2018-19. Is there some idea of what it will be for this financial year, given the industry is very reliant on money that comes through the deed? The deed is \$20-something million?

Mr Dean - A bit over that \$20 million now.

Ms RATTRAY - Then the indexation that sits alongside that. I am interested in whether we have some idea of what it will be.

My other question comes from the codes not having a great understanding about what the index is likely to be and what that equates to in dollars and cents. What sort of communication is there from the department to the industry and to the codes about what they can expect to see in the future?

It is always a difficult area. We know that some in our community believe the industry should not be as well subsidised as it is. That was one of the then government's main arguments at the time the sale of Tote Tasmania took place.

Mr Dean - Are you saying the Tote was sold?

Ms RATTRAY - No, actually it was given away. I apologise; I take that back. When Tote was given away for a very small amount of money by this state, it was a challenge for the industry to make ends meet.

Interestingly, I noticed a report in one of the newspapers earlier this week when I looked at the racing results - because I am always interested in what is going on - that they had to cancel an Elwick meet only last week because of the state of the track. The rescheduling of that meeting interfered with some jockeys who had to race elsewhere.

We are continually putting up challenges for the industry because they do not have fit-for-purpose infrastructure. They are always interested in the indexation and the total amount coming into the industry.

There are a number of questions there, Leader. I will certainly be interested in the responses.

Mrs HISCUTT - The indexation factor applied to the Tasracing administrative grant is based on the movement of the consumer price index - CPI - from the quarter ending 31 March 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Consequently the indexation will vary between financial years. The actual indexation applied in 2018-19 is 1.9 per cent.

Ms Rattray - Was that 1.9?

Mrs HISCUTT - It is 1.9, yes.

Mr Dean - In money terms, what does that mean?

Mrs HISCUTT - I will read this other question while we get that answer.

In previous years the indexation factor was reduced by an efficiency dividend. This had the impact of a 1 per cent reduction, an equivalent to around \$300 000. In the 2018-19 Budget the efficiency dividend was removed. The funding deed is reported upon in the financial papers of the Tasracing annual report. The indexation amount provided in 2018-19 is calculated as \$566 000.

Mr DEAN - A number of questions were raised during the Estimates in relation to the Office of Racing Integrity. It was made fairly clear at the time by the minister that she was not fully across

that area at that time. Where are we now? I take it that the minister is now right across that area? The question asked on the number of Office of Racing Integrity staff who had been on sick leave in the past year as well as the number of staff currently on long-term sick leave. The answer was that 10 staff were on sick leave in the past year, and that currently no staff are on long-term sick leave.

That indicates there are problems within that area. The organisation now has drawn into it a police officer, an inspector of police, who has been seconded into ORI for the purposes, I would think, of getting it moving in the right direction. What types of sick leave were occurring? What is happening in ORI now? What will happen to get ORI working the way it ought to, and should be? What were all the big problems in it?

We asked some of these questions at Estimates but we did not get the answers. The minister said those questions would be taken on notice. The police officer who was seconded was anxious to answer, but he was cut off.

Ms Rattray - It appeared that way.

Mr DEAN - He was cut off. To me, this filtering of the answers we are getting is one of the obstacles and problems with the Estimates process. Can we be given some detail on what is happening in ORI to get it right, to get it moving in the right direction?

I have the greatest of admiration for John King, the police officer seconded to that job, and I believe he will get it moving in the right direction. Can you give me some detail on what the leave is all about, the sick leave, and whether it is straightening itself out right now?

Mrs HISCUTT - Ten staff were on sick leave over the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2018. Currently no staff are on sick leave. Four ORI employees were absent on sick leave for a period exceeding five consecutive days during the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. This is in line with managing absences in accordance with ED 29 -

- 1.2 This ED is focused on employees who are likely to be absent from work for a significant period of time, commencing from an absence exceeding five working days.

There was an acknowledgement of historical issues that have now been resolved. The department continues to support ORI under the direction of John King in ensuring supportive and appropriate people management practices.

Mr DEAN - How long will John King be seconded to this area? How long is it likely to take to put ORI back on its feet and will a full-time position be advertised to take over from John King when his secondment is completed?

Mrs HISCUTT - He is currently seconded for at least six months and there are negotiations underway towards a longer term contract.

Item agreed to.

Output 5 agreed to.

Division 9 agreed to.

DIVISION 10

(Department of State Growth)

Output group 2

Infrastructure

2.1 Infrastructure Tasmania -

Ms RATTRAY - This area is always of interest to me and to members of the Estimates committees because we know that without infrastructure - good and appropriate infrastructure - it is difficult for our state to move ahead and grow. Expenditure on consultants was the question asked and it came back as \$85 160, but that was the only information we received. I should have asked if we could have a breakdown of whether it was a Tasmanian or mainland consultancy. I do not think it is an exceedingly large number. I am not disputing the number.

Do we have the expertise Infrastructure Tasmania needs when it is looking at projects or do we have to buy in that expertise? When you buy in expertise from mainland Australia, they do not always understand the workings of our state. We are a bit different and we usually wear being a bit different to the rest of the states as a badge of honour. Is what we need available? Is that the normal requirement or was it a lighter year? Can we expect a larger quantum next financial year, because a number of projects may be ready to go? I think 'shovel-ready' is the term. We often see a number of gold shovels out and about. I would like to see plenty more gold shovels, particularly in my patch - it would be very exciting.

Mrs HISCUTT - When you are looking for a service provider, the person has to have the expertise. In line with our policy to shop local, we use as many as we can locally, but there are some who are not available here. I have a list, which I will read out to you, of what they were. They are from the mainland. They are specialist experts in their field and the expertise was not available here.

Ms Rattray - In the field of?

Mrs HISCUTT - Rail, mainly. The organisation is Raylink Consulting, which provided the North East Rail Line and co-located bike path assessment report for \$9500. The same company was used for the Tasmanian north-east rail line assessment for establishing a heritage rail operation - that was for \$27 000. Raylink also completed a light rail corridor protection report for the Macquarie Point site, for \$9540. Another mainland company, Linqage International - Proposed Passenger Rail Experience between Launceston and Scottsdale Assessment, which was \$25 000. Those I mentioned were specialists in their field and were not available in Tasmania.

In Tasmania we have pitt&sherry. Its service provision was for a review of the Water and Sewerage Accelerated Infrastructure Plan, for \$4120. Deloitte Access Economics, which are Tasmanian and national - they are everywhere - provision of independent expert advice to support the development of the Tasmanian Rail Access Framework policy, for \$10 000.

Ms RATTRAY - I am exceedingly pleased I asked the question. I have done the figures and the Tasmanian Government, on behalf of the Tasmania people, has spent \$61 000 on reports for the North East Rail Trail proposal or initiative, and we still do not have a decision. We are still waiting for a Treasury assessment. Treasury will look at the reports made available at a cost of \$61 000 to decide whether we have rail or bikes.

A couple of years ago in this place there was an amount of urgency to get the infrastructure bill through this Chamber.

Madam CHAIR - Strategic corridor bill; I remember it well.

Ms RATTRAY - Strategic corridor - the railroad bill - because if this Chamber did not pass that legislation, the Dorset Council would lose the funding. Two years on, a lot of heartache, a lot of hard work and \$61 000, and we are still waiting for an assessment or still waiting on a report, or for somebody to make a decision. To be perfectly honest, I do not know how much longer this is going to go on, but somebody needs to make a decision. You cannot keep people waiting and holding on, wondering whether it is their project or the other project. It appears you cannot do both - and that will be a question. You cannot do both, so somebody has to make a decision. Through the strategic infrastructure legislation we know that the minister was very keen to make those decisions.

So we have a number of reports - \$61 000 out of that \$85 000 Infrastructure Tasmania spent in 2017-18 - and still we do not have a decision. When are we going to have a decision?

Mrs HISCUTT - I wish I could answer that for you. I have been informed that the assessment is very complex and it has many facets, and that it is still with Treasury. However -

Mr Dean - We knew that at the time the bill came through.

Mrs HISCUTT - The Treasurer will make a decision as soon as possible. I believe it will be in the near future, but whether that is next week, next month or a couple of months, I am not sure. It is just the process that is happening. It needs to be worked through properly. I am sure the Treasurer will let everybody know as soon as possible.

Ms RATTRAY - What approach is Treasury going to take when you have expertise in rail - which is why these consultants were used and why the \$61 000 was spent from consolidated revenue - to undertake these reports? What is Treasury's role in assessing whether rail gets the nod? Does it make a recommendation to the minister in regard to this? Does it decide? I mean, with all due respect, Treasury looks at numbers. These are community people. Whether you support rail or whether you support bikes, they are community groups who believe their initiative is the one. That is why they have been so passionate for so long. I am interested in what Treasury is going to do: What is its role? What is the process around the decision it will put to the minister to make a decision on who gets the green light?

From reading the report - and I know the member for Derwent will have a better understanding of what it costs to put in railway crossings - various numbers have been put forward by organisations - one says it will cost \$300 000 to install a railway crossing, while the Launceston and North East Railway Group says it can do it for \$15 000. How does Treasury make that determination? I am very interested to know.

Mrs HISCUTT - We all know this is a very divisive subject among the north-east community, and that there will be winners and losers. It does not matter what decision is made; if no decision is made, everybody will be upset. Treasury will make a decision and the Treasurer will give that decision when the thorough groundwork has been done. Treasury is looking at the cost-benefit analysis and it will take into account financial considerations and the economic and social benefits of the decision. It is not a simple question of looking at the numbers. There is a lot in it and

Treasury will not rush; it will get it right. When it is done, the Treasurer will make an announcement as soon as he has the report.

Mr DEAN - The list of consultants we have been provided with, as the member for McIntyre indicated, I do not think it is probably excessive, but there is a question around whether we consult for the sake of consulting at times.

The consultants referred to and the costs of their activities and actions - I take it that is done on quote? Is it done on quote or does the department simply go to a firm, a company, and simply say, 'This is what we want: what will you charge us to do it?' Is that the way it is done or is it done by tender?

What is the case - and we can use the north-east rail as a good example here - when we get a consultant's report that differs considerably from another consultant's report? What is the department's action and attitude in relation to that situation? Does it go back and question the department's consultant and say, 'What has gone wrong?' Or, 'Are you right and are they wrong?'

What follow-up is there? Was money not paid out for a consultant's report because the report was felt to be inadequate? Does that happen? Who assesses the adequacy or the benefits of these consultants' reports? Are the reports accepted as being accurate and up-front, and is money paid out without any further discussions between the groups?

Mrs HISCUTT - I suppose, as you are alluding to, these reports are like that for anybody, anywhere, who is getting a report. You are asking a specialist to give you a report on a particular subject and you will hope to get the best advice. That is why we have sought the different specialists in their field to report upon these things.

To your specific question: consulting is done by Treasurer's Instruction. If it is under \$10 000 it is via Treasurer's Instruction. If it is over \$10 000, it is either done by quote or tender.

Mr Dean - I accept that. I understand what you are saying there, but in relation to consultants' reports coming back at loggerheads, what is the situation?

Mrs HISCUTT - It is a bit like lawyers. You can get one opinion and another and whatever. In this particular circumstance the consultants looked at different aspects of the operations; the Government was satisfied the consultants met the requirements, and all were paid.

Mr DEAN - I am not saying the department has done the wrong thing - I am not saying that at all, I am not casting aspersions. The north-east rail is a good example to identify the position I am putting forward.

What was the action taken when the consultants came back and the departments realised there was a vast difference in some of their findings and the findings of another consultancy group that was involved? Good money was paid here. Did they ask them to check their figures as they were written in the report? Were they asked if they were satisfied their report was accurate? I want to know what happened as a result of the process. I am not saying they have done anything wrong.

Mrs HISCUTT - I understand what you are talking about now. There was no duplication of a particular section. Each consultant looked at a different aspect; one looked at track and another looked at the infrastructure. There was no doubling up of consultants. Is that what you are saying?

None of the reports were competing. Do I understand what you are saying? Every consultant was reporting upon a different aspect.

Mr Dean - I have not read both the reports. I have read pieces of them. I understood they were looking at the North East Line.

Mrs HISCUTT - Yes, but different aspects of the line.

Mr Dean - A lot of the aspects they were looking at were similar, to look at the cost of a cycling and walking track as opposed to rail.

Mrs HISCUTT - Some were looking at track; some were looking at infrastructure; others looked at business operations and whether they were viable. Each consultant I mentioned earlier was looking at a different aspect of the project.

Mr FARRELL - Going back to the strategic infrastructure corridors bill, when we were debating we were told there was some urgency because the federal funding allocated to the Dorset Council was to expire in December. There has since been, over the last two years -

Ms Rattray - Maybe three -

Mr FARRELL - There have been recent reports that money is still there. We pushed the bill through because we were told there was an urgency based on federal funding. We were told that funding would disappear. Recent reports from the Dorset mayor indicate the funding is still there. That would be part of the business case for the bicycle trail. There is much questioning going on in the communities of the north-east about whether that money is still there, whether it disappeared or whether we were not told the truth when we were debating that legislation.

Mrs HISCUTT - At the time, it was a genuine concern of the Government that the money would be lost. That was the information given to us.

Mr FARRELL - When the bill was before us, Leader, we were told that was the case. It was not a genuine concern. We were told funding would disappear if we did not work through it. It seems magically now that a threat might not have been as strong as it was communicated and that money has been sitting somewhere, allocated by the federal government and waiting on a decision of the bike track. It seems, once again, we have had legislation brought to us, been told it was an urgent requirement but have not been given the absolute true picture.

Mrs HISCUTT - That is a bit harsh. At the time, we believed there was a need to complete it. We understood they would lose those funds. Since then, the council has sought a number of extensions and the funds are still available. At the time, that was the understanding - that the money would be gone unless it was done there and then. We could say the Government was misled.

Madam CHAIR - I ask members to stick to the budget we are scrutinising. This is a matter that may need to be pursued in adjournment or some other time.

Mr FARRELL - I will not talk about the pressure applied to people to make decisions on that bill. When does that federal funding expire, or will it hang around forever?

Mrs HISCUTT - It is up to the federal government to make a decision on if and when it will continue to make that money available.

Mr DEAN - I would like a yes/no answer. I am now being told the two consultants' reports on the North East Rail Trial did not look at similar areas; they looked at different areas. I want to know the areas the consultants were required to consider. I will then look at one and the previous consultant and see where the differences are.

Mrs HISCUTT - They were looking at different things. I will not read them out again. The reports are available on the website if you want them. Would you like us to send you a link to them?

Mr Dean - If you can send a link, it would make it easier.

Mrs HISCUTT - One was looking at track, another at infrastructure; others looked at the business operations and whether they were viable. I have already spoken about the cycle pathway assessment, line assessment and heritage rail. Look at those and we will have another look at it if you are not satisfied.

Item agreed to.

2.5 Traffic Management and Engineering Services -

Mr DEAN - During the Estimates process a number of questions were asking on the Mowbray Connector and the Mowbray junction. We were told traffic lights were accepted by the department to be put in place at that location. I asserted fairly strongly that traffic lights were not the way to go, but a roundabout was the way to go. Questions were asked on whether a plan had been done for the roundabout and the question was never answered.

I am pleased the Government has made a change; I think it is the right decision. The Tasmanian Transport Association, which supports all the big truckers in the state, are delighted that is the case. We are disappointed the Tasmania Transport Association was never consulted. It was disappointed and wants to know what has happened between it and the department.

I thank the minister's office for apologising to me for not involving me in the process or notifying me of the change before I read about it in the paper. As a result of this, the Government has listened to the community. I do not see this as a backflip or anything else. I see it as the department and the Government listening to the people, and there is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing wrong with making a change in the circumstances and I give them credit for that.

I indicated I would ask this question so I hope I can get an answer. When will progress be made on the roundabout? When are we likely to see the first sod turned in that area? It is a very dangerous area. There were two deaths on that junction two years ago. When are we now likely to see movement on it? What stage are we moving forward to with the planning? Could I have some confirmation of whether the roundabout planning done a number of years ago will be used? It will help to speed this process up.

It is an important matter. I thank *The Examiner* for the way it took this matter up. It did a superb job in getting the community involved in this.

Mrs HISCUTT - The Minister for Infrastructure has announced that the Department of State Growth is developing plans for the roundabout at the East Tamar Highway-Mowbray Connector intersection following feedback regarding the traffic signal-controlled upgrade design which had been released for public comment.

The Government looks forward to the new design being released for community feedback. The tender will be issued in autumn 2019. Hopefully construction will start in summer 2019. The work for the new design is starting straightaway. Local stakeholders will be kept in the loop.

Item agreed to.

Output group 2 agreed to.

Output group 6 Subsidies and Concessions

6.1 Shipping and Ferry Subsidies -

Mr FARRELL - Madam Chair, the committee was disappointed that after having the minister at the table for Estimates the changes to the Bruny Island ferry were announced. Had we known about the proposed changes, it would have helped us ask some questions on that at the table. It may have been of some benefit to the Government as well because now it has been played out very much in the media and in the public arena. It could have been quite foolish not to bring it up in Estimates. No doubt it would have raised some questions. It is important to note that in the Legislative Council Estimates committees, the questions are of a probing nature to get details and facts, and wherever possible politics is kept to a bare minimum. It was disappointing we were not told about the proposed changes.

I suppose our only way now to find out about subsidies and changes to them with a privatised ferry system will be to put questions on notice, unless there are some answers now.

Mrs HISCUTT - The current budget allocation included in output 6.1, Shipping and Ferry Subsidies provides the source of the annual payments of up to \$640 000 ex-GST to the Bruny Island Ferry Company to subsidise the Bruny Island ferry service, and that will be ongoing.

Mr FARRELL - Following from that, because there have been differing reports, will the Government support any infrastructure projects associated with the ferry service?

Mrs HISCUTT - Currently the new operator does not require any special infrastructure projects. The Government has committed \$8 million to Bruny Island roads, which includes some funding towards local toilets and such general projects.

Item agreed to.

Output group 6 agreed to.

Output group 3 Energy Policy and Advice

3.1 Energy Policy and Advice -

Ms FORREST - I have some comments in this output group about questions asked and information provided.

To give some context, I asked about the decision to review the price-linking policy with Victoria's wholesale energy market. The committee was particularly interested, and I know other members were also, in who the Government had consulted with throughout the process. This is the minister who was in the portfolio before the election, admittedly not for long after Mr Groom stepped down, but he has been in the position for a while. It was not like he had just come into the position. He was very evasive and basically refused to answer questions specifically, even though the questions were very specific. It was a pretty appalling display and you only have to read *Hansard* to see the number of times a specific question was answered with a non-answer.

I am going to just repeat some of what was said in *Hansard*. I could read the whole lot to demonstrate how bad it was, but I will not do that. When I asked about the policy decision and who was consulted, the minister said -

We believed in our policy and received feedback from a range of stakeholders and based on advice.

When asked again about who specifically had been consulted, he said -

I can assure you we had a very broad range of feedback ... from important stakeholders in the mining sector, the energy sector, the business sector, the small business sector and the agricultural sector, and across the productive industries, certainly all of my portfolio areas.

He would not identify which particular groups in the mining sector or the energy sector or the business sector or the agriculture sector. I put it to you, Madam Deputy Chair, that if you asked any person in the TFGA if they want cheaper energy prices, they would not say no. A question was asked: who was consulted? The answer provided regarding this - this was particularly on the policy to delink from the Victorian energy price - was -

A broad range of stakeholders are consulted on energy matters.

Again, he said -

The terms of reference for the review of the Tasmanian wholesale electricity market regulatory pricing framework were released in August 2017 and submissions were invited from interested parties. Details can be found on the website of the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Of course I have been to the Department of Treasury and Finance website. It is one of my favourite government websites - I understand I am a tragic individual. However, when I went there I found four submissions - one from the Australian Energy Council, one from Climate Capital, one from Hydro Tasmania and one from Aurora Energy. None from anyone in the mining sector, none from the business sector, none from the small business sector and none from the agricultural sector or productive industries, whatever they are. None. Just after he made that comment about the number of groups he had engaged with, the minister went on to say -

The feedback I am getting from all quarters is very positive.

Let me read you a small section from the four that were on the website. I am not going to read them all, but I want to indicate I am not sure that is the truth. The Australian Energy Council -

The Energy Council is the industry body representing 21 electricity and downstream natural gas businesses operating in the competitive wholesale and retail energy markets. These businesses collectively generate the overwhelming majority of electricity in Australia and sell gas and electricity to over ten million homes and businesses.

Further its submission says -

The Energy Council represents all the major existing Tasmanian wholesale market participants and the most likely entrants.

Its comment was -

The Energy Council understands the Government's concerns about vulnerable and otherwise price-sensitive customers. However, it is important to avoid distorting the efficient operation of the broader market in order to deliver a preferred outcome. Where there is a desire to intervene in respect of these concerns, it should occur by direct rebates from Government, rather than any intervention in market arrangements.

That was the Energy Council. Climate Capital -

Climate Capital is a developer and adviser specialising in renewable energy generation development and investment.

It says -

The core principles that I wish to emphasise are: it is essential that Tasmania retains a market-based wholesale pricing framework to provide price signals and confidence for new investment; the market-based price should remain linked to the Victorian price, or the long run marginal costs for a notional new generation fleet to meet the Tasmanian load ...

Further on it says -

the Wholesale Contract Regulatory Instrument -

That is what we have been operating under -

should be retained as it provides transparency and supports contract liquidity in the absence of a more competitive wholesale market and/or access to Tasmanian futures via ASX Energy ...

In conclusion, it says -

Climate Capital's strong view is that a market-based wholesale price, linked to Victorian prices, is the best mechanism for wholesale pricing in Tasmania.

It has vested interest. The minister said -

It was positive from all quarters.

Hydro -

Hydro Tasmania recognises that the recent increase in wholesale prices is the primary driver for the WCRI review and acknowledges that change to the WCRI may be necessary.

Acknowledging this, it is also important to note that the current elevated wholesale prices may be temporary and there are strong mechanisms available to address these variations.

In addition to elevated prices, there is a significant degree of uncertainty about the future direction of policy and regulatory framework nationally and the implications this might have for Tasmania.

This is an important part here -

A review of the proposed National Energy Guarantee (NEG) may provide entirely different outcomes, with potentially a 'reliability premium' in Victoria with implications for Tasmania.

Any proposed changes to WCRI should be cognisant of potential NEG design and/or implementation elements.

If you have been watching the news, you will understand that is not going particularly well in the Commonwealth.

Conclusion from Hydro Tasmania -

Hydro Tasmania believes that the WCRI has performed well and has provided regulatory certainty since its introduction in 2014.

...

Hydro Tasmania acknowledges that change to the WCRI may be necessary. We would like to ensure, however, that the benefits of the current approach are fully considered alongside the significant risks associated with making changes.

The provision of discounts or rebates which are outside of the wholesale pricing framework may be useful measures to adopt to address short-term price fluctuations.

The last one, as there were only four, Aurora Energy -

These core elements of the Instrument have proved effective -

Talking about the elements of the instrument -

under a range of disrupting market conditions that have occurred since its inception on 1 January 2014. Examples of this include the impact to the National Market from the early closure of the Victorian Hazelwood power station in March 2017 and the supply blackout in South Australia in September 2016, and locally, the Energy Supply Event experienced in the summer of 2015-16.

It is important to retain the current regulatory framework, certainly until the potential impacts of broader national reforms are known and considered. In response to ongoing wholesale market volatility, regulatory reform at the National level is being implemented to ensure reliability of the supply at least cost.

...

Refining the Instrument to achieve Government Policy price outcomes in the short term may cause unintended consequences for retailers, customers and the broader market as these reforms are implemented.

That was all I want to read from there as that was the summary. That was the covering note.

The minister was being dishonest when he said the feedback was positive. It was not positive and there was not any feedback or submissions from any of the other people he said. Is he not across the issue?

Further to that - and this will be another opportunity to debate this at a further time when we get legislation back to extend the period of time to do this - in the national media today, in the *Australian* and the *Financial Review*, it is clear the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission - ACCC - has been tasked recently to commission a review of the national pricing.

From the *Australian* this morning -

The competition watchdog has called for radical reform of the National Electricity Market to bring down prices, claiming the gouging of households and business consumers has reached an 'unacceptable' level -

It is not ever acceptable, quite frankly, to gouge households -

with widespread abuse of market power by large energy companies.

It made a number of recommendations. It was commissioned by the Turnbull Government last year with the final report to be released today and it 'has savaged the sector and called for a "reset" of the market to bring down prices and restore confidence'.

It goes on to say -

Most of the reform recommended in the ACCC report would fall to state and territory governments.

We are going to have work to do. The ACCC was asked to investigate the impact of vertical integration, companies that own both generation and retail businesses, which are often called

'gentailers', and anti-competitive behaviour, price transparency and profits from power companies in relation to the consumer. In the *Australian Financial Review*, published yesterday but updated last night -

Warning the energy sector is facing its most challenging time, the ACCC argues that reforming the National Energy Market would "bring down prices and restore consumer confidence and Australia's competitive advantage".

... Taking aim at generators with retail operations - the so-called "gentailers" - the ACCC argues these players often charge a large premium on the sale of wholesale electricity to their retail arms and need to be reined in.

Among the recommendations is capping any further merger or acquisition by a company with more than 20 per cent generation market share. If they wanted to get bigger, they would have to build new generation capacity.

Such a restriction would capture AGL and Origin in NSW, AGL, Energy Australia and Snowy Hydro in Victoria, CS Energy and Stanwell in Queensland and Hydro Tasmania in Tasmania.

It was very disappointing to have a minister who was basically not telling the truth to the committee and initially seeking to refuse to answer questions. I will ask the questions again: Who has and will the minister consult with in preparing the legislation required to delink from the Victorian wholesale electricity market pricing arrangement? Why are we doing this now, when there are a lot of people saying we should not?

Some work is going on through the review done by the ACCC. Clearly, from that, if the Prime Minister accepts even a number of the recommendations - it says he may not accept all of them but who knows what he will accept - changes will be required at a state level. Why are we going down this path? The minister seems completely out of touch and has not answered the questions.

Mrs Hiscutt - The minister said he was referring to discussions he had with stakeholders and, as he explained on the day, he cannot speak for Treasury.

Ms FORREST - We asked him specifically. I will go to the question because it went on for a while prior. I cannot find it, there is so much of it. The question was specific: please provide a list of organisations and representative bodies that have been consulted with. That includes discussions. We did not ask who put in submissions; we asked who was consulted with in developing the policy to delink from Victorian energy pricing, and I received that guff I read out.

I want to know who the minister consulted with. Whether it was over a cup of coffee in a cafe, I do not care. What he is saying here is completely contrary to the advice received during the submission process in establishing this policy. I raised this point when we brought this bill in last year and sought the sunset clause for this very reason. Other things are going on and other factors are at play in a very complex industry that I do not know enough about. I am doing the best I can to understand it.

Mrs HISCUTT - The minister, when answering that question, was referring to general discussions with stakeholders and he did not have a list available because he said he could not speak for Treasury.

I can now tell you Treasury sought submissions to the review in 2017 from these stakeholders - AER, AEMO, AEMC, Goanna Energy Consulting Pty Ltd, ACCC, the Australian Energy Council, Hydro Tasmania, TasNetworks, Aurora Energy, ERM, Climate Capital and OTTER. Treasury wrote to these organisations but the review paper was on Treasury's website and any interested party was able to make a submission. The review is ongoing and Treasury will consult broadly on the legislation when it is drafted. Of those I have mentioned, those which you have received before were the ones that bothered to reply.

Ms FORREST - This output group is Energy Policy and Advice. We are looking at a policy the minister takes advice on. Surely he takes an interest in what Treasury is doing, who is receiving information to advise this policy, or does the minister take no notice? Does he wait for something to be handed to him? I do not know how this works, but it is a real concern when we are talking about a minister in charge of energy policy who seems not to be aware of advice and information provided in an area he is responsible for.

We still do not have an answer on whom the minister spoke to. I am sure the TFGA was positive about reduced energy prices. I am sure the TMEC would have been positive about energy prices coming down. I am sure if you ask any householder, they would agree. We are talking about a policy in the best interest of Tasmanians and Tasmania into the future. *The Australian* this morning has an article titled, 'Generators and retailers 'to blame for power prices"', which reads -

One of Australia's biggest electricity transmission companies has sought to blame power generators and retailers for rising household energy costs, pre-empting a report today by the competition watchdog that is expected to criticise the entire energy sector.

TransGrid, [which is effectively an equivalent of TasNetworks] which operates the high-voltage transmission network in NSW, told *The Australian*, network companies were being unfairly blamed for rising power bills.

We heard that in Tasmania too - that gold plating of infrastructure assets was the cause. Further down, this article says -

Data from AMEC confirms distribution and transmission prices in NSW have been falling, both in real terms and as a proportion of the total bill, for the last six years.

There is a lot going on to understand who is at fault here. I have not had a chance to read that report. It was tabled only today. I am sure people will. I hope the minister sees fit to read this as action will be required of the state once the federal government has decided what it is going to do. It is concerning the minister is unwilling to engage with the committee in a meaningful way on such an important issue. There will be another opportunity when we debate the bill in the other place, but I need to be convinced we are heading down the right path with this.

The last thing we want to see is energy prices in Tasmania rise. The minister kept saying Tasmania is going to have the lowest energy prices in the nation. It still costs money to generate electricity and to distribute it. It does not happen for nothing - it is not as if you can snap your fingers and there is energy at no cost to generate or distribute it. We see downward pressure on prices. If you read the media reports of the report, they indicate prices are coming down. I have talked to people who operate in this area and know it far better than me. They say there was some

volatility when Hazelwood closed down and there were other challenges, which I alluded to earlier, but we are seeing the Victorian wholesale price come back down.

Overall Tasmania has benefited in the past from being linked to Victoria. Are we putting the cart before the horse and trying to create another structure when we find it does not advantage us, as some of those submissions say? There will be another opportunity to debate this further but it was disappointing the minister seems to have no grip on what is going on in the bigger picture. This area is Energy Policy and Advice. It is disturbing.

I would still like the Leader to provide with the list of stakeholders the minister referred to. If it was in the agricultural sector, was it farmers, was it the TGFA? Who did he speak with in the business sector? He said he spoke with the major industry sector - who was that? What question did he ask them - do you want cheaper power? If that is what he was asking, of course he received a positive response.

Mrs HISCUTT - The minister said he had discussions, but he also said he would continue to consult with all stakeholders, including energy businesses and consumer groups. Sometimes some of those discussion are not done in a formal way nor are they formally taken. As a minister, it is his role to talk to all these people, whether it is on a list or not, and get their opinions. That is what he was referring to when he gave that answer. I have given you a list of stakeholders Treasury sought submissions from, and only four of those bothered to come back with anything. The review is there. Anyone who wanted to put a submission in was able to.

Item agreed to.

Output group 3 agreed to.

Output group 1 Industry, Skills Development and Business Growth

1.1 Coordinator-General -

Mr VALENTINE - I note the information provided. I will be looking at it more closely and asking questions later on, questions on notice or questions without notice.

Item agreed to.

1.2 Industry and Business Development -

Mr FINCH - I am going to echo what has been suggested here previously about the lateness of receiving information. I asked some questions about the breakdown of figures regarding completed programs. I assumed it would be a simple process to put that request together and it would be covered efficaciously. We have had to wait for that detail to come through to the point I have the information I require. I am critical of the lateness of receiving that in respect of getting ourselves prepared to come into the Chamber to ask our questions and to know where we need to go to get answers.

I add my voice to what we have heard here over the last couple of days about the lateness of information because this is budget Estimates time. People should be ready to swing into action. If we ask for information to come to us in respect of answers that cannot be provided by the minister

and by advisers on the day, people should be ready - not to drop everything and jump to it - but to be efficient in hunting down that information so when we come here, we have had time to go over it. The papers I have over here - I am not the only one making a mess all over the show - try to follow the program, and the procedures we have to embrace are not confusing, but we have minutiae to put in order.

I just checked with the Chair of Committees about the order in which we are running our program here today, and it is bobbing all over the show. It is hard to keep track of our program to make sure we keep up to speed with what is happening with the program.

Mr Dean - We probably will have tables next year to put it on, not on the floor.

Mr FINCH - That is right. I have been meaning to speak to you about that, member for Windermere. I have had my bellyache. It goes also for the next section, which is on the inclusion of apprentice and trainee information in performance information. The information is fantastic but leaving it to the last minute to provide us with that information has not been a good process.

Mrs HISCUTT - In response, I apologise.

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Relief Health Workers

Ms RATTRAY question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.31 p.m.]

- (1) How many health workers from mainland Australia are currently undertaking relief work in Tasmania?
- (2) How many are engaged in community nursing?
- (3) What is the total quantum of additional costs being paid over and above the normal salary of these positions?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for McIntyre for her question.

- (1) With regard to health workers in Tasmania, the Department of Health has advised it is not possible to provide a breakdown of health workers from interstate who are undertaking relief work. This is because locum staff are hired from external agencies, so the department does not have data on where these staff live.
- (2) and (3)

With regard to nursing, the Tasmanian Health Service uses agency nurses on occasions, but this would typically relate to acute hospital services and not community nursing.

Further, while the department does not have data on where agency nurses live, noting they are hired through external agencies, it is understood that the vast majority would reside in Tasmania.

It is important to note that the Tasmanian Health Service is only one of many organisations that provide community nursing in Tasmania, with several non-government organisations providing these services around Tasmania.

King Island Airport - Base Grant Recommendation 2018-19

Ms FORREST question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.33 p.m.]

According to the Treasury website, the State Grants Commission methodology page notes -

Current Assumed Allowances and Component Rates:

Underpinning the Commission's methodologies are some allowances and component rates that the Commission uses to help determine the allocation of the financial assistance grants. Some of the rates are updated annually to ensure they reflect current cost profiles, whereas others are updated periodically as determined appropriate by the Commission.

Rates used in the Base Grant Model:

The current Expenditure Allowances, and the recipient councils, that the Commission used for making its 2017-2018 Base Grant recommendations, were as follows:

There are a number. The one I am interested in is -

Provision of airport services (Airport allowance), \$70 000 ... [for] King Island

- (1) Has this allowance been reviewed in the last 12 months?
- (2) What is the 2018-19 Base Grant recommendation?
- (3) Has the King Island Council indicated to the Government, at any time in the last five years, that additional financial support is needed to ensure the financial sustainability of the King Island Airport? If so, what was the response from the Government?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

- (1) No. The current airport allowance has not been reviewed in the previous 12 months. According to the State Grants Commission's 2018-19 Triennium Work Plan - Progress Update 1 (Information Paper IP16-25), which is publicly available on the commission's

website, a review of allowances is planned for 2018. The review of allowances will include consideration of island public airport allowances.

- (2) The 2018-19 Base Grant recommendations have not yet been made by the State Grants Commission. The 2018-19 Base Grant allocation information will not be publicly available until the recommendations are approved by the federal Minister for Regional Development, Territories and Local Government, Doctor John McVeigh MP.
- (3) The Government engages with the King Island Council and other councils on a regular basis in relation to a wide range of matters. The Government is not in a position to say what discussions may or may not have been held with the council by the previous government. It is also not clear precisely what the member is specifically referring to in relation to ensuring financial sustainability. It can be advised, however, that the following approaches by the council have been made or support has been provided by the Government in relation to the King Island Airport -
 - First, the King Island Council requested borrowings of \$1 million in its 2013-14 loan council application to meet the cost of an upgrade to the airport terminal. This was subsequently deferred to 2014-15 and the borrowing request was reduced to \$500 000. This request was approved.
 - Second, the council applied in June 2016 for a grant under the competitive Regional Revival Fund program for funding for some infrastructure improvements, but was not successful. However, the council was subsequently successful in a funding application to the Commonwealth Building Better Regions Fund in 2017 for a similar set of improvements.
 - Third, funding of \$220 000 allocated in the 2018-19 Budget for the King Island Airport as part of the Government's Taking King Island to the next level policy. This funding will be provided as a grant to the King Island Council through the Department of Communities Tasmania.

Road Infrastructure - Estimated Costs

Ms ARMITAGE question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.37 p.m.]

With regard to road infrastructure costs, can the Leader advise -

- (1) What is the estimated cost of a roundabout - for example, as proposed for the Mowbray Connector?
- (2) What is the estimated cost of the annual maintenance of such a roundabout?
- (3) What is the estimated cost of traffic lights - for example, as proposed, or would have been proposed, for the Mowbray Connector - and what is the estimated cost of the annual maintenance of such traffic lights?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Launceston for her question.

(1) to (3)

The Minister for Infrastructure has announced that the Department of State Growth is developing plans for a roundabout at the East Tamar Highway-Mowbray Connector intersection following feedback regarding the traffic signal-controlled upgrade design, which was released for public comment. The Government looks forward to the new design being released for community feedback. Installation of standalone traffic signal infrastructure for a pre-existing junction site, such as Mowbray Connector, is approximately \$500 000. Provision for the associated civil works required to optimise the efficiency for the signals - for example, turn lane widening, traffic island adjustments and realignment of lanes to contemporary standards - is in the order of \$2 million, making a total estimated cost of around \$2.5 million.

The cost of a typical dual lane highway roundabout design in accordance with the minimum requirements of national guidelines and at the size required to cater for current and future heavy vehicles using a category 1 road network will vary based on the design, but will be materially more than a signal junction. The average annual maintenance cost of a typical dual lane highway roundabout is estimated to be in the order of three to four times that of a similar junction with traffic signals. This is based on average minor maintenance tasks such as mowing, maintenance of sightlines, damage to island noses and traffic signs at a roundabout, the cost of power, replacement of occasional faulty lanterns, damage to island noses at the signal junction, maintenance of pavement markings on the road surface and resealing. Costs are similar for both roundabout and traffic signals. Possible crash costs, such as the replacement of a traffic signal pole or a street light pole at a roundabout damaged by an errant vehicle, are not included as these costs can usually be recovered through insurance processes.

Campbell Street - Common Ground - Funding

Mr WILLIE question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.40 p.m.]

- (1) What is the total funding allocated to the Salvation Army to operate the Campbell Street Common Ground site for 2018-19?
- (2) Does the funding allocation include maintenance?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Elwick for his question.

- (1) Funding for Salvation Army housing to deliver services to the Tasmanian Government's Campbell Street supported accommodation facility in 2018-19 is \$235 186, including indexation but excluding GST.
- (2) Yes.

King Island Airport - Financial Loss

Ms FORREST question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.41 p.m.]

- (1) Regarding a recent media release by Regional Express that the King Island Council claims King Island Airport is making a \$470 000 loss on airport operations, does the Treasurer and Minister for Local Government have any concerns regarding the council's financial management?
- (2) Has the Treasurer initiated any discussions with the King Island Council regarding the claims made by Regional Express last week? If not, in light of the serious allegations made by Regional Express, would the Treasurer and minister investigate these claims?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

- (1) The King Island Council endorsed its 2018-19 budget at its 26 June 2018 meeting. The budget includes a planned underlying deficit of \$703 000 which the council attributes to significant one-off regulatory compliance costs in 2018-19 that relate to its airport, quarry and waste management operations. The council's new general manager, Mr Troy Brice, is leading a review of key strategic council documents to ensure the council is compliant with all relevant regulatory and financial management requirements. Mr Brice was appointed general manager in April 2018 following a period of acting general manager arrangements at the council. Mr Brice has advised the council will have a long-term financial management plan in place by October 2018 and a new 10-year strategic plan completed by November 2018. The minister is confident the council is managing its affairs appropriately.
- (2) Yes, the Treasurer has spoken directly with the mayor and the council, and the council will be providing further information on this matter.

Employee Relocation Expenses

Ms RATTRAY question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.43 p.m.]

During the Estimates process information was provided to the committee regarding relocation expenses for employees of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment to support the move of departmental positions to the north and north-west, including stamp duty costs, removalist costs and school uniforms.

What is the complete list of those relocation expenses covered for employees under this government initiative?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for McIntyre for her question. The initiative is funded through the \$2.4 million commitment made by the Government to move 100 Department of Primary

Industries, Parks, Water and Environment - DPIPWE - positions north. Of this \$2.4 million commitment, \$1.6 million will be available over the course of the four-year initiative to support the relocation of southern-based employees who express an interest in moving to the north. No employees will be forced to relocate because of this initiative.

Following formal consultation with employees and the union, DPIPWE has recently finalised and released a northern recruitment policy developed to enable the delivery of this initiative. A relocation assistance policy to support the relocation of southern-based employees who express an interest in moving to the north has been drafted and will soon be released for consultation with employees and the union. The draft policy is based on Ministerial Direction No. 21 under which incentives such as stamp duty and the cost of removalists are currently discretionarily available. The department is committed to supporting employees who wish to relocate to the north as part of the Government's Moving DPIPWE to Northern Tasmania initiative, as illustrated through the pending release of this policy.

Pain Management Services - Lack - Northern Tasmania

Ms ARMITAGE question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.45 p.m.]

On 23 May 2018, in answer to my questions on notice, it was acknowledged there are service gaps in north and north-west Tasmania with regard to a persistent pain service and that the THS is working to address these with focus on developing a statewide model of care. While a steering committee has been established to look at a number of recommendations put forward by the Musculoskeletal Clinical Advisory Group in 2016, no time frame has been set for this.

- (1) What is the Government doing in the interim to address the issue of no pain service in the north and north-west of the state?
- (2) What is the time frame for the steering committee to finalise its work and a statewide service to be provided?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Launceston for her question.

- (1) While the THS continues to progress planning for improved pain services in the north and the north-west as soon as possible, care is mostly managed by patients' local general practitioners with specialist referral relevant to the condition, including referral to the multidisciplinary statewide pain service in Hobart if appropriate.
- (2) Members should be assured the Government has a strong commitment to improve its services in the north and the north-west as part of its six-year \$757 million health plan, including for pain. For the north-west, key initiatives include funding to establish community rapid response in the north-west, a full rehabilitation ward, dedicated palliative care rooms, a greater range of outpatient services at the Mersey, and eight new beds at the North West Regional Hospital. In the north we are moving on with the job of redeveloping Ward 4K and the broader hospital, easing the car parking pressures and establishing a new 32-bed ward.

Non-Financial Government Businesses - Projected Borrowings

Ms FORREST question to the LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL Mrs HISCUTT

[2.47 p.m.]

The balance sheet on page 143 of the budget paper 1 for 2018-19 notes that the non-financial government businesses were being asked to borrow an extra \$1 billion between now and the end of the forward Estimates, with borrowings for non-financial businesses increasing from \$2.681 billion to \$3.684 billion, an increase of \$1 billion. Last year's budget papers identified that the borrowings for the non-financial corporations were going to fall by \$111 million over four years, a turnaround in the levels of borrowing by government businesses of \$1.111 billion.

- (1) Why was there no footnote to describe this extraordinary change?
- (2) Which companies are projected to increase their borrowing over the four years? In each case, what are the projected borrowings over each of the forward Estimates?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

- (1) As indicated in the table below, the increase in borrowings is primarily due to estimated borrowings for TT-Line replacement vessels. As previously advised, the value of the construction contract and the associated borrowings have been publicly reported. The information reported on page 143 of budget paper 1, together with the entirety of that appendix, is presented in accordance with the uniform presentation framework, which does not require the presentation of commentary on changes in budget Estimates.
- (2) Borrowings for the public non-financial corporation sector are budgeted to increase by \$900.37 million between the 30 June 2018 estimated outcome, and 30 June 2022.

A breakdown of borrowings by entity is provided in the table below. I seek leave to table that document.

Leave granted.

Local Government Grants - Entitlement

Ms FORREST question to the LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.49 p.m.]

Page 103 of the budget paper 1 for 2018-19 notes that local government grants are \$45 million in 2018-19, down from \$77.2 million in the 2017-18 year, mostly due to a \$36.8 million entitlement paid to councils in 2017-18 -

- (1) (a) What was this entitlement for?
(b) What is the estimated outcome for 2017-18, as that year's budget said \$77 million?

- (c) Why the large increases from 2019-20 onwards?
- (2) (a) With regard to water and sewerage, are the costs of the TasWater proposals included in the Budget? If so, where?
- (b) How and where will the funds be recorded? Will they be equity contributions? I note they are mentioned in Treasury and Finance and there is a footnote on page 332 of budget paper 1 saying it will be funded by Finance General, so where is it?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

- (1) (a) The Australian Government provides financial assistance grants to local government under the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995 to improve the capacity of local government to provide equitable levels of service to its residents, including general purpose funding and local road funding. Finance-General forwards funds received from the Australian Government to local government.
- (b) The decrease in the 2018-19 Budget reflects an advance payment of \$36.8 million relating to the 2018-19 budgeted entitlement. The Australian Government paid an advance of \$37.9 million of the 2018-19 entitlement on 20 June 2018, which takes into account current population estimates. The 2017-18 estimated outcomes for local government grants is \$39.4 million. This decrease from the original budget reflects an advance payment of 50 per cent of the 2017-18 entitlement in 2016-17.
- (c) The increase from 2019-20 onwards reflects the full local government grant entitlement being received in the relevant financial year.
- (2) (a) and (b)

The 2018-19 Budget and forward Estimates include equity funding of \$20 million in each year as a contribution from the state and TasWater over a 10-year period from 2018-19 to implement the new shared ownership model and support the objectives in the MOU of an accelerated infrastructure investment program and lower prices to customers.

As this is an equity contribution it is included in equity investments within the statement of financial positions for Finance-General.

Launceston General Hospital - Bed Availability - Flu Season

Ms ARMITAGE question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.53 p.m.]

- (1) In the immediate future what will the Government do to cater for the demand for beds in the Launceston General Hospital with the flu season just upon us?

- (2) If there are no beds available at the Launceston General Hospital - for example, because of bed block or ambulance ramping - with patients admitted, but no assigned beds, will the Government buy beds from the private hospitals for these patients?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Launceston for her question.

- (1) The Government is delivering the comprehensive Tasmanian Winter Plan 2018, the Government's strategy to ensure Tasmania is better prepared than ever before the seasonal increase in demand on our health services.

The Winter Plan identifies a range of key focal areas within the health system to help manage increased demand, including hospital bed management, effective staff management and patient flow optimisation in our hospitals. Under the Winter Plan, eight overflow beds are available at the Launceston General Hospital in Ward 4D. This is five more beds than there were available last winter. Patient flow is also being further improved with the new LGH patient transit lounge coming into operation. Importantly, there has been a record uptake of flu vaccine this year, ensuring that more Tasmanians are better protected than ever before.

- (2) The LGH has previously purchased beds from the private sector on a case-by-case basis and as the patient acuity allows. This will continue to be an option throughout the winter in line with regular process.

Batman Bridge - Name Change

Mr FINCH question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.55 p.m.]

Given that the Victorian federal electorate of Batman has been renamed after Aboriginal activist William Cooper, are there any plans to change the name of the Batman Bridge over the Tamar? The announcement of the Victorian change said the name Batman was not appropriate because he was a controversial colonial figure.

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Rosevears for his question. There are no current plans to change the name of the Batman Bridge. The name registered with the Nomenclature Board reflects not only the bridge but also the highway leading to the bridge. Respectfully, any proposals made to the Government for name changes would be considered on their merits.

Modern Slavery Bill

Ms FORREST question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Mrs HISCUTT

[2.55 pm.]

With the introduction and expected passage of the Modern Slavery Bill 2018 in the federal parliament -

- (1) Will this legislation capture all Tasmanian businesses and require them to ensure their business and supply chains will be required to undertake an audit to identify any modern slavery within their organisation and/or supply chains?
- (2) Will this legislation capture all Tasmanian Government entities, including all departments, agencies and government businesses, and require them to ensure all activity, including procurement, will be required to undertake an audit to identify any modern slavery within their organisation and/or supply chains?
- (3) If nationally consistent legislation is required at a state level, noting New South Wales has passed its own legislation, will the Attorney-General commit to prioritising any necessary legislation?
- (4) Does the Attorney-General support the inclusion of an independent commissioner to provide oversight and advice to governments and business to ensure consistent communication and efficiency of assessment and actions to address and end modern slavery?

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

(1) to (4)

The Modern Slavery Bill 2018 is currently before the House of Representatives and was referred to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry on 28 June 2018. The committee's report is due on 24 August 2018.

It would be premature for the Attorney-General to make any formal comment on this matter as it may pre-empt the Senate committee's consideration of the issue.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING Briefing - Housing Land Supply Bill 2018 (No. 19)

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) -
Mr President, I move -

That the sitting be suspended until the ringing of the division bells.

This is for a briefing on the Housing Land Supply Bill.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 2.59 p.m. to 4.05 p.m.

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2018 (No. 16)

In Committee

Resumed from above.

Output group 1 Industry, Skills Development and Business Growth

1.2 Industry and Business Development -

Mrs HISCUTT - To the member for Rosevears and all members of the Council, I apologise for some of the things that have happened here in the last couple of days. I am making note of things that could make it better next year.

Mr Dean - I think it is the first time it has happened in about 15 years.

Mrs HISCUTT - Yes, there has been a change of staff. I am putting together some constructive feedback to take back to the ministers, departments and the Premier. I apologise for that.

Item agreed to.

Output group 1 agreed to.

Output group 4 Resources Policy and Regulatory Services

4.1 Forestry Policy and Reform -

Mr FINCH - Under this item there is an allocation of \$12 million for some CSO compliance in the area of resources. It became confused because we moved into the realm of Sustainable Timber Tasmania and we were told this would need to be requested by the minister through Sustainable Timber Tasmania. We had the minister sitting in our briefing and we had this request for information about \$12 million in this area of policy and reform. I would like some detail on how it is expended. Could I have a breakdown of how this \$12 million is being utilised for this CSO obligation? I have been through the *Hansard* and we were given generalisations - it is for roads and it is for this and that.

I left it open because I was not satisfied and I wanted more detail. A \$15 a hectare allocation was made by the department for this CSO obligation. That is fine, but I want to know some details of how that \$12 million is being spent. I requested a breakdown of the programs funded through a CSO payment of \$12 million, noting this will need to be requested by the minister through Sustainable Timber Tasmania. It is a general question. I am curious because that is our job.

I would have thought there might be some focus on that. I was after some detail, a breakdown of the programs, but what did I get back? The answer was -

Sustainable Timber Tasmania manages Permanent Timber Production Zone land and ensures it remains accessible and available for multiple uses.

That is good -

The activities supported through the CSO payment of \$12 million include:

- maintenance of the forestry road network to allow for continued community, tourism and firefighting access;
- management of public recreation sites;
- provision of forest education activities; and
- Special Species timber management and ongoing facilitation of forestry research.

That does not approximate to what I am after. I want to know about the maintenance of the forestry road network to allow continued community, tourism and blah blah. I want to know the detail of how much was spent on that out of that \$12 million.

Managing public recreation sites - how much was being used for that particular area of activity? Forest education activities - how much was used to provide that service to the operation? The same with special species timber management.

I am being duckshoved in respect of a request I am making out of genuine curiosity. There is no plan here, no track. I am not waiting to catch somebody out. I want the information that should have been forthcoming during the budget Estimates process.

If it is not available on the day, I can understand that - not all the information is available on the day - but with the request made, I would have thought giving me more detail would have been focused on by the minister and the people in his department.

Mrs HISCUTT - I am advised that the pattern of expenditure varies from year to year. Based on last year, for example, the Mersey Forest Road was a washout. That put the price up.

Treasury does not hand this money out willy-nilly as you could imagine. The \$12 million in the forward Estimates is what may be anticipated to be used for some of these things. That may change or you may see a request for additional funds - RAF - come through if there is a washout or some other disaster. It was hard to put actual detail on where that money will be spent because it has not been spent yet.

Mr FINCH - Do we have any details about what was spent in the previous year or is that not applicable to this particular budget Estimates program?

It was interesting, going back through the *Hansard*, Mr Evans, in a reply to me, said -

No, it can't be broken down. The use of that CSO is implemented through CSO direction issued to the corporation by the ministers.

You could inquire about how that CSO is applied through GBE scrutiny, but we don't hold that level of detail. That level of detail is an operational matter held

by STT. I am sure that they would be able to provide that detail in the GBE scrutiny committee but we don't have access to it.

Why would we not have access to that during the budget Estimates scrutiny? Why would that level of detail not be available to us, if in fact the CSO was used over the previous 12 months?

Mrs HISCUTT - So we could inquire about the previous year.

Mr FINCH - How did the previous 12 months stack up? I understand we may not have details about how it will be spent or suggested to be spent this year, but what was the CSO spent on in the previous 12 months?

Mrs HISCUTT - I am assured that is a question to be raised at GBE scrutiny committees. Your other alternative is to put it as a question without notice.

Mr Finch - Duckshoving.

Ms FORREST - I want to follow up on the point raised by the member for Rosevears. I pointed out to the minister during Estimates that there was a descriptive note on page 324 of budget paper 2 on this, which he basically spouted back to me in his answer. He just repeated what was already noted in the budget papers - there it was. We asked for a breakdown of how much is allocated from that \$12 million to each of those output groups, as the member for Rosevears alluded to. As the member for Rosevears read out, he said that Mr Evans had said that it cannot be broken down, but then he went onto say, as the member for Rosevears quoted, that use of that CSO is implemented through a CSO direction issued to the corporation by the ministers. What is the direction issued to the corporation?

The minister is in front of us. The minister issues the direction; the direction is \$12 million of CSO funding to fund forestry road networks to allow for, as the budget papers say -

continued community, tourism and firefighting access; management of public recreation sites; provision of forest education activities; and special species timber management and ongoing facilitation of forest research.

There is a direction issued, so surely the minister would know what direction he has issued, or does he not know this either?

Mrs HISCUTT -We have a copy of the ministerial direction for government business enterprises, which sets out how the money should be spent. It does not include figures. There may be an update but it is unlikely. I seek leave to table this document for the use of members and to have it incorporated in the *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Tabled by
Hon. L. Hiscutt MLC
11/7/18.

TABLED / TO BE
INCORPORATED INTO THE
HANSAID RECORD.
11/7/18

**FORESTRY CORPORATION
DIRECTION UNDER SECTION 65 OF THE
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS ENTERPRISES ACT 1995**

As Portfolio Minister of the Forestry corporation continued under the *Forest Management Act 2013* (the corporation), I, the Honourable Guy Barnett MP and, as Treasurer, I, the Honourable Peter Gutwein MP, pursuant to section 65(3) of the *Government Business Enterprises Act 1995*, hereby revoke all previous directions issued to the corporation from 30 June 2017 and pursuant to section 65(1) of the *Government Business Enterprises Act 1995*, hereby direct the corporation to:

- Undertake hazard reduction burns and provide assistance with hazard reduction burns coordinated by other State entities, at the request of the Government for whole of State purposes, that the corporation would not undertake as part of its commercial or good neighbour activities.
- Provide assistance with State fire management in the prevention, preparation and detection of wildfires including:
 - providing specialised training for staff and maintaining specialist plant, communications equipment and other equipment;
 - maintaining access and signage to water intake locations;
 - manning fire tower lookouts and conducting regular aerial surveillance during the high fire danger period, as well as maintaining appropriate weather records at each relevant location;
 - preparation of annual fire management plans for each region;
 - research into emerging fire fighting techniques and equipment, relative to vegetation fires and (in particular) to forest fires; and
 - participation in inter-agency committees to develop communication protocols and tactical/operational policies for forest fire fighting.
- Supervise and conduct wildfire suppression on non production forest and on adjoining lands in accordance with the Inter-Agency Fire Management Protocol, including coordinating the use of contractors' heavy ground equipment and operators and, where relevant, aircraft operations.
- Ensure that permanent timber production zone land continues to be managed, accessible and available for multiple uses.



Hon Peter Gutwein MP
Treasurer



Hon Guy Barnett MP
Minister for Resources

Mr FINCH - Leader, thank you for the information, which will help to unravel this. It is part of the way, but it is not what I was seeking. My comment about duckshoving is not directed at the officers now at the table, it is about the system not allowing me to make what I thought was a budgetary request about how that money is being spent. Had it not been planned for in the Estimates Committee A meeting, I would not have expected those figures to be forthcoming. Since the request went in separately, I thought some effort would be made to provide me with that information in the spirit of transparency.

What is the issue with revealing how that money is going to be spent and the quantum? I said in the meeting that I was likely to ask these questions during budget Estimates and at the GBEs.

Ms Forrest - Hopefully we will have STT in front of Estimates Committee A this year. I have already made that request.

Mr FINCH - I did not want to cast aspersions on the members here; it was about the system not being transparent and giving the full information. It did not need to be that full; it needed to be some idea of where that money was going.

Mrs HISCUTT - I am sure no offence was taken by anyone here. We understand your frustrations. The ministerial direction that was tabled would have been tabled ahead of GBEs anyway, so if you were to get that and then ask the specific questions, you should have a better result.

Ms FORREST - Following on from that point before I go to my next point, GBEs are only fronting up every second year to the Legislative Council and we do not know who is going to be scrutinising whom at this stage. I made the request that Estimates Committee A, being the resource committee, would have Sustainable Timber Tasmania - STT - this year.

The member for Rosevears has made a relevant point and asked a relevant question because it was not that long ago the CSO was removed altogether. Those who have been here for a while will remember the whole sorry saga about the former Forestry Tasmania having to fund all these activities out of its own operating budget. That was part of the reason for its decline and the real financial challenges it found itself facing. That was a decision of government, but FT could have gone back and asked for it but it did not. That was part of a government administration committee A inquiry a few years ago.

I also believe that previously the CSO had been around the level of \$7 million so it is a relevant question as to what is being spent where. It is helpful for the people of Tasmania to understand how many millions of dollars are spent on upgrading their picnic areas, and how much is being spent maintaining those roads so that we can access those areas to fight fires when we need to. It is not information we are seeking because we want to get some numbers - it is because it helps us to communicate with our constituents about why this money is being paid to Sustainable Timber Tasmania to undertake a role that is important.

The Government clearly stated it is not using taxpayers' money to prop up STT anymore, but if we cannot get the information that shows how the money is being used, I can understand that criticism being made.

Mrs Hiscutt - Point taken.

Ms FORREST - The other questions asked of the minister in this output group related to the value of the trees. I asked about the current value of the biological asset which is the trees - it is the only biological asset we own - so the figure reflects that: the breakdown of the \$93.4 million biological assets between plantation and native assets and the breakdown of the percentage of the entire biological asset between native and plantation resources and why there has been a substantial drop between the 2018 budget figure of \$201 million and the estimated outcome of \$93.4 million for the asset.

The answers that came back - and I am reading these in because this is the way it was responded to, Madam Deputy Chair. This is the answer that was provided -

The current value is \$93.4 million -

which we know -

which is the estimate by Sustainable Timber Tasmania of the value of the biological assets for the purposes of the State Budget. It takes into consideration the independent valuation of the forest estate as at 30 June 2017 and the financial impact of the subsequent hardwood plantation sale. The next independent valuation of the forest estate will be undertaken in the near future to determine the value as at 30 June 2018.

The forest estate is valued as a whole incorporating land and roads. There is no split made between the value of plantation forest assets and native forest assets.

I found this interesting, Madam Deputy Chair. I thought there would have been a split. I am not sure whether they use the same discount factor or what, but it is surprising we do not have a split between our native forest assets and our plantation assets. Maybe, again, it is a question we can ask of STT at a later time.

The answer goes on -

The reduction in the estimate provided for the 2017-18 State Budget and the estimate provided for the 2018-19 State Budget is due to a combination of the decrease in value of the forest estate recognised as at 30 June 2017 (due to changes in assumptions for rate of harvest, plantation growth rates and earnings of southern pulpwood) and the hardwood plantation sale.

That answer was in the letter from the minister, which is not dated, but it was late after we requested it. I asked: what was the value of the hardwood plantations as at 30 June 2017, including the biological assets of \$201 million, and subsequently sold during the 2017-18 year?

Mrs HISCUTT - It appears no presale valuation was done. It was put on the open market and advertised internationally. It was eventually sold for a price of \$60.7 million.

Item agreed to.

Output group 4 agreed to.

Division 10 agreed to.

DIVISION 11

(Tourism Tasmania)

Output group 1

Tourism

1.1 Tourism -

Mr DEAN - This question was directed to Tourism Tasmania and the response was provided by the Parks and Wildlife Service: can you advise whether there have been any initiatives or developments regarding the provision of access to the South East Cape? The answer provided was -

Access to South East Cape is currently on a rough bushwalking track. Anecdotally, the PWS understands the number of walkers to the South Cape Bay area is likely increasing and we have determined to undertake an assessment of access to South East Cape.

Thank you very much for allowing Parks to answer that question for us.

Item agreed to.

Output group 1 agreed to.

Division 11 agreed to.

DIVISION 12

(Department of Treasury and Finance)

1.3 Shareholder Advice on Government Businesses -

Ms FORREST - These questions and answers were received late, as were most from the Treasurer. I acknowledged in my previous contribution that there were a lot of questions and some of them received quite detailed answers. This document is tabled and is part of the public record, which is helpful.

I asked about the deposit made by the TT-Line for the new vessels. The deposit payable is €87.68 million. It will be paid once certain contract preconditions have been met by the company, whose name is interesting to read. I will leave that to the Leader to pronounce. What sort of conditions have to be met and how long is this likely to take? Are we looking at one, six or 12 months before the deposit needs to be paid? The answer also went on to say that the deposit amount is fully hedged by TT-Line and the approximate value in Australian dollars is \$140 million. It says -

As has been publicly reported, the total construction contract value is €219 million per vessel.

That is €438 million for both. Where is the public report? I was unable to find public reporting of these details.

Mrs Hiscutt - What was that question, public reporting?

Ms FORREST - Yes, where was it publicly reported? I could not find it.

Mrs Hiscutt - What were you looking for, the contract conditions or -

Ms FORREST - No, the total construction contract value. It may be buried in the Treasury website somewhere. I have not managed to find it.

Mrs HISCUTT - The deposit for the two new boats will be paid when the FSG has in place the required refund guarantees. Are you talking about contract details about the deposit, what conditions and how long it will take?

Ms Forrest - I am not asking for details of that. I am asking what time frame we might expect before those conditions have been met, such as when a deposit will be required to be paid.

Mrs HISCUTT - I think that is all probably part of the contract which TT-Line has with the build company. We do not have that contract here. Do I understand what your questions are? The contract is between the company and TT-Line.

Ms Forrest - It said the deposit will be paid once certain contract preconditions have been met. Do you have an idea of how long it will take for the preconditions to be met? That is the question.

Mrs HISCUTT - I still think it is part of the contract between TT-Line and the build company. I do not think we can answer that question here because we do not have the contract and are not party to it.

Ms FORREST - This is a bit frustrating because I put a question on the Notice Paper; it was answered yesterday basically saying 'How long is a piece of string?' It will be paid once the certain contract preconditions are met. The contract would stipulate what the preconditions are but is there an expectation it will take days, months, years? That is the question. I will let you ponder that one and go onto the other one.

Mrs Hiscutt - Other than what I have already said, we cannot add a lot more because they are contract conditions.

Ms FORREST - Maybe we need to have TT-Line in front of us at the end of the year. That is number two - STT, TT-Line. Committee A will be on song for knowing what we are doing at the end of the year.

Regarding the Mersey money, that is the money to operate the Mersey Hospital paid in one lump sum by the federal government last year and then put over with TASCORP along with the money for new *Spirits*. I asked some questions regarding the interest earned on the fund, the expected balance and the interest earned, and that information was provided. The other question was: how much return is needed to make the bucket of money last 10 years?

Reading from the Treasurer's response -

The Mersey Community Hospital Funds are being invested by TASCORP in market assets that take into account the known pattern of future dividend obligations. Returns are not certain -

which we know -

however, TASCORP has forecast in its most recent corporate plan for an average return of 3.5 per cent over the life of the Fund. At this time it is expected that a dividend will be paid from the Fund in the 10th year.

Are the dividends paid on an annual or a monthly basis? When are the drawdowns done to fund the Mersey? How much is expected to be left in year 10 under the current projections? Under current projections, is it going to last the whole of the tenth year or just cover the first six months of the tenth year or, perhaps, just the first month of the tenth year?

When we dealt with this bill I had a briefing with the TASCORP chair, which I appreciated, and I asked: where are they going to invest the money to get the rate of return necessary to make it last? They were ambitiously saying it might last 12 years. I said, 'When you find that investment portfolio, let me know and we will all put our money in there.'

I hope your advisers can assist with these questions.

Mrs HISCUTT - The dividends are paid annually. As to how much time is left, we cannot provide that answer here and now.

Ms Forrest - Annually at the beginning of the financial year or the end?

Mrs HISCUTT - At the moment we can say that it is probably at the end of the financial year. That is not a certainty, it is a guess at the moment.

Item agreed to.

1.4 Government Property and Accommodation Services -

Mr VALENTINE - I take the opportunity to correct *Hansard* during Estimates. We were dealing with the Treasury building and Mr Ferrall said one of the challenges with the Treasury building is that everybody seems to know much about it and yet most people have not been through it.

I said I had been through it. Then there is the following statement -

I've even seen the tunnels that come up from the wharf, which not many people know about.

It should have been, 'I even know of those who have seen the tunnels'. I did not actually see the tunnels myself and I wanted to correct the record. I will gladly talk about that subject another time.

Moving from tunnels to government property and accommodation services - electric charge points for cars. I thank the minister for the answer he has provided. It says -

It is anticipated that these negotiations will result in electric vehicle charging points ...

I hope they could say they will be installed. Is it possible to make that statement?

Mrs HISCUTT - We will use our best endeavours. I will take your comment as a statement.

Mr VALENTINE - I have a degree of interest.

Item agreed to.

Output group 1 agreed to.

Output group 2 Economic and Fiscal Policy Advice

2.1 Economic Policy Advice

Ms FORREST - I asked some questions in this output area about participation rates. Often in the budget papers there are actual numbers that tell us what our participation rate is and how it compares nationally.

It did say it was not good and that may be why the figures were not published, because they are not good.

I asked for it to be broken up by region. There was some explanation in the budget papers why that might be the case - people moving away from the north-west coast seeking employment in other parts.

The comparative figures were for May each year. In May 2016, in the west and north-west of Tasmania, the participation rate was 60.7 per cent against the national average of 65.1 per cent. In May 2017, it was 59.7 per cent, dropping further against the national average of 64.8 per cent. This year was 58.2 per cent, dropping even further against the national average of 65.5 per cent. That is a huge difference in participation rates on the north-west coast. The Government has a duty to look at how it can increase the participation rates in the north and north-west.

The other parts of the state also lag, certainly behind the national average. Hobart and the south-east is above the Tasmanian average for this current year, as at May 2018, with 62.7 per cent. The state average is 61.2 per cent. Launceston and the north-east is also below the Tasmanian average, with 60.7 per cent. Both lag significantly behind the Australian participation percentage rate of 65.5 per cent.

While the economy is doing okay in Tasmania - we all acknowledge it and I acknowledged it in my budget reply - we have some real work to do on workforce participation in Tasmania, particularly in the north and north-west. I encourage those responsible for the budget papers to include the figures next year, saving us from going to all this trouble. I will ask again if it is not in there next year. I hope we see some improvement. If we see things such as the Avebury mine up and running within 12 months, Copper Mines recommence operations in Queenstown and some of the other things begin in the mining sector, I think it will change. It is easy to report good news but, even if it is not, I hope we see it clearly in the budget papers. It has been there before and it would be good to see it again. It was a comment and a request, not so much of you, Leader, but the people who are listening.

Mr WILLIE - I thank the member for Mersey for the prompt in relation to a question on the KPMG report on the needs-based funding model that will soon be delivered to Government. This was a discussion between the Treasurer and me during Estimates. I highlighted the potential for this new scheme, and it is very much needed, to cost up to three times as much as the existing scheme. The Treasurer said that if that is required, it will be considered as part of the normal budget process. Perhaps that should have been listed in the risks of the Budget, which was not at all. There is potentially a budget black hole, given the Government may need to adjust its funding for next year and future years.

Mrs Hiscutt - Noted.

Item agreed to.

2.2 Regulatory Policy -

Mr GAFFNEY - I thank the staff of the Department of Treasury and Finance for their work. Many extra questions were asked, requiring extra work and information. The time they have put in is appreciated.

Regarding the future gaming market implementation, I asked: What action has been taken toward each of the 23 recommendations of that report? Why is there no budget item in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 forward financials? The response to my second question is thorough and justifiable and involves the establishment of a dedicated project team for the FGM implementations to undertake the development of regulatory and taxation frameworks, consultation legislation and related tasks.

They then explain that further implementation work is anticipated in 2020-21 and 2022-23, but this later work cannot be accurately costed at this time, because it will depend on the results they receive in the first part. I appreciate that response. It makes sense. They also acknowledged Treasury may be able to accommodate that at a later date or the Government may have to find funds for that extra work. It was a reasonable response, and I thank the Treasurer for that information.

Unfortunately, the response we received regarding each of the 23 recommendations is not so glowing. The response received only outlines the Government's policy position and addresses only four of the 23 recommendations. In the correspondence received, the Treasurer states -

In preparing the Government's Future Gaming Market policy, released in January 2018, the recommendations from the final report of the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets were considered, along with feedback from other stakeholders.

Two questions can be asked from the response. First, if the recommendations - and I am assuming here all 23 of them - from the inquiry were considered, surely the Government can give a written response on each of those 23 recommendations, not just the four their dot point policy positions cover?

Second, can the Treasurer table a list of the stakeholders who provided feedback after the release of the report from last September - that is, between October and January - which has also helped to assist them with the policy? While you are looking at this, the four recommendations covered in the Treasury response - and you can see the dot points there - being the only four they

answered, are recommendations numbers 7, 11, 13 and 20 of the 23 recommendations made by the gaming inquiry.

I point out here that the inquiry was initiated by the Government to get some feedback from all the stakeholders and come back to the table with recommendations, which is what we did.

I am not certain how I should proceed here, Madam Chair. Should I put on the record the 19 recommendations that have not been covered in the Treasury response, even though the preamble clearly says these were the ones that started the inquiry? Or should I put it on notice? I expected the Government to come back with the 23 recommendations saying agree, disagree, not yet to be looked at, tick - that sort of thing - but they have not.

Madam CHAIR - The best option is to give the Leader the opportunity to answer, if she can. If she is unable to, I suggest the most appropriate option is to put them on notice to the Government. You do not need to spell them out as they are in the report and you have already identified the ones that are covered. See how the Leader goes with an answer - you have another couple of calls - and then you may need to do that as the final resort.

Mrs HISCUTT - I think that is probably not a question for budget papers; it is more looking for a response from the Treasurer about his thoughts on a particular committee's report. Having said that, we cannot answer that here today because it would take a long time. That is about the sum of it at the moment, so it might be worth your while putting it directly to the Treasurer in the form of correspondence. See how you go, or put a question on the Notice Paper.

Mr GAFFNEY - I know where the Leader is coming from. When we get the budget papers, which have the policy position - this will affect the budget because the future gaming market implementation has a big impact on the budget because of the funds it receives from it - and it says, 'This is the task' and the response I get is 'Oh well, the policy says we have considered all of the recommendations' when they have not been, then the information contained in the budget papers does not make a lot of sense if you cannot answer each of the 23 recommendations that will impact on the future funding of both this one - a significant line item - and the income that comes to the Government from gaming markets.

Madam CHAIR - The member also has an opportunity to put a question on this on notice, but also by way of a motion before the House to ask for a response from the Government and debate it. There are a couple of options if you do not have any satisfaction here. I acknowledge the connection to the budget, but as the Leader said, the detail of the question is probably broader than the budget itself.

Mr GAFFNEY - I asked for some advice because I was not quite sure how to proceed with this. I will, for *Hansard*, give an example of one of the recommendations answered by the Treasurer's response. The response I received says that the Government's policy provides that the Federal Group will retain its two casino licences and operate Keno in Tasmania. Tick off this one because our recommendation 13 was that the Federal Group retain the licence to operate its two existing casinos. That one I can tick off because you have given me the answer. Recommendation 12 says that if the casino licence is to be exclusive, it should not be in perpetuity, the annual licence fee should be reassessed and should reflect the value and worth of the licence if it was put onto the open market. I expected the Treasurer's response to be, 'Yes, they are going to have that', and, for recommendation 12, 'No, we don't agree with that' or 'Yes, we agree with it'. As I indicated, I will be happy to look at those two avenues to get that information from the Government.

Mrs HISCUTT - I reiterate there is no budget impact until the year 2023, other than that the policy is more the other issue - the answering of questions. I think answering all your recommendations probably should be addressed in another forum.

Item agreed to.

Division 12 agreed to.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Postponed clauses 3 and 4 agreed to and bill taken through the remainder of the Committee stage.

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2018 (No. 17)

Second Reading

[5.05 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council - 2R) -
Mr President, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

Mr President, this second appropriation bill recognises the unique role of parliament and independent statutory offices in Tasmania's parliamentary and democratic system.

It appropriates \$31 795 000 from the Consolidated Fund in 2017-18. Of this amount, \$31 095 000 is appropriated for Recurrent Services and \$700 000 is appropriated for Works and Services.

I commend the bill to the House.

Bill read the second time.

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2018 (No. 17)

In Committee

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clauses 3 and 4 postponed.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Divisions 1 to 6 agreed to.

DIVISION 7

(The Office of the Ombudsman)

Output group 1

The Office of the Ombudsman

1.1 Decisions on complaints referred to the Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner and Right to Information -

Ms RATTRAY - Before I ask my question, Madam Chair, on behalf of Estimates Committee B we would particularly like to thank the Leader and the departments and staff who have assisted over the last couple of weeks. This has been two days we probably have not seen for a while. Certainly there were many questions and many answers to be compiled.

At times we show a level of frustration but we are just trying to undertake our role to the best possible level that we can, so I thank everyone for their support now that we are getting close to the end.

Madam Chair, as a committee we were concerned about the increase in the budget - a paltry \$15 000 - for this very important office. The question was asked to provide data on the number of RTI cases referred to the Office of the Ombudsman in 2017-18. I asked that because we were particularly keen to see how much work this office was receiving because my office received some information that people were not receiving their requests in a timely manner. This alerted me to the fact that it was not well resourced.

Across the state, including councils, 43 right to information cases were referred to the Office of the Ombudsman from 1 July 2017 to 27 June 2018. With that extensive number of referrals, does the Government consider a budgetary line item for this office at \$2.321 million is adequate to resource this very important office to do its job? We are talking about RTI, and the office has also taken on the role of the Health Complaints Commissioner, another very important area, particularly when we know some of the issues we hear about on a day-to-day basis within our health system.

We are concerned about what is considered to be a lack of adequate resourcing for a very important area, considering there have been 43 additional RTI cases referred to the Ombudsman. Apparently there is a 12-month waitlist - 12 months. It has been suggested by many that it is not good for our democracy to have a 12-month wait so we really need some additional answers.

Mrs HISCUTT - As the minister said in the other place, she has every faith in the Office of the Ombudsman to carry out the duties and functions required of it and, in doing so, the work that it is able to do. On top of that, the Ombudsman makes requests for extra funding through the Department of Treasury and Finance. The Department of Justice is at arm's length from that, but the Department of Justice continues to support the Ombudsman.

We need to bear in mind that the workload for the Ombudsman varies from year to year, so some years it might be up and some years it might be down.

Ms RATTRAY - I want to make it very clear that my comments were no reflection on the work of the Office of the Ombudsman, none whatsoever.

My assessment from the outside is that this is a very poorly resourced office for the amount of work - and very important work - it does on complaints from and referrals for people in our state. When you are looking at councils as well, many people in our communities have a level of frustration around some of the roles and functions of local government.

I do not have the breakdown here. It is something I will, as you will suggest to me, put on the Notice Paper for a discussion at another time. Certainly I make no slight on the work of the office.

In your answer you said the workload fluctuates. I have only seen it increase over the last few years. There are more people who are prepared to take their issue to the Ombudsman for some degree of scrutiny and a result.

We want to impress upon the Government that the office does not have enough resources. If it needs more resources, the Government needs to seriously look at that. I will be watching as will plenty of other people, particularly members in this place. I hope you will support that.

Mrs HISCUTT - The member's comments are noted.

Mr DEAN - It is a perennial question in statements we have made here. With the greatest respect to the member for McIntyre, we have raised this same issue year in, year out. The understaffing, the under-resourcing, of this office. The position of the 43 RTI applications and the appeals taken to the Ombudsman's office: how many of those matters were actioned within the prescribed time frame? The time frame of 12 months was given.

I am one of those frustrated people. I have an appeal to the Ombudsman's office. I have an RTI application that is now almost 12 months old. By the time I get the information back, it will be of no value to me or anybody else. That is the sad thing about it.

Is the Government seriously looking at the resourcing of this office? It either needs to resource it properly or get rid of some of the functions of the Ombudsman.

It is creating issues and frustrations. I have an application. There was a letter in the *Examiner* not long ago by another person who had two matters before the Ombudsman's office, RTI applications on appeal. That person indicated in the *Examiner* - I take it that it was right, as it was not amended in any way - that both of his matters had taken a long time without any response from the Ombudsman's office.

I am told there is only one person in the Ombudsman's office who is able to do this because of the other functions this office has to do. The Government needs to be serious. I am surprised we do not have more officers in that area going on stress leave or sick leave.

If I can be given an answer to those questions, I would appreciate it.

Mrs HISCUTT - First, the backlog. There is no time frame. It is not a 12-month time frame. It has to be done as soon as practicable. It was noted that the Ombudsman had two RTI officers helping at some stage, but the work fluctuates. There is not much more we can add that was not added during the Estimates process, except to say that your comments and the comments of the member for McIntyre have been noted.

Mr DEAN - If there is no time frame for that and if it as soon as is practicable, I understand the Ombudsman's office attempts to complete them within a 12-month period. Of those matters referred to, the 43 applications, how many were dealt with within that 12-month period and how many matters are still outstanding and not completed to date? I ask that question because of the frustration being felt by many people. Half the time, the RTIs become obsolete. In fairness, I should contact the Ombudsman's office and simply say my matter is now of no value. It is not going to help me at all and I should not spend any more time on it. It is frustrating and really was of concern at one stage.

Mrs Hiscutt - Your question is of the 43 RTIs; how many of them are still outstanding?

Mr DEAN - How many are still there and not dealt with?

Mrs Hiscutt - Of these 43?

Mr DEAN - Of these 43. What is the longest time a request has not been actioned to date? What is the expectation of that office to have these matters concluded in a reasonable period of time?

Mrs HISCUTT - I cannot give specific answers but at this time last year, the financial year to June 2017, the number received was 43 but they cleared 49. You could say they were six in front.

Mr Dean - Is that the backlog from the year before?

Mrs HISCUTT - The figure seems to be steady coming in and going out.

Mr DEAN - They cleared 49, 43 came in: what is the current number with the Ombudsman's office requiring attention today?

Mrs Hiscutt - Forty currently, so something must have cleared in the meantime.

Mr DEAN - There are 40 to be cleared at this present time.

Item agreed to.

Output group 1 agreed to.

Division 7 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Postponed clauses 3 and 4 agreed to and bill taken through the remainder of the Committee stage.

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council - Motion) - Mr President, I move -

That the Council at its rising adjourn until 11 a.m. on Thursday 12 July 2018.

Motion agreed to.

Estimates Committees - Lack of Information Provided by Ministers

[5.25 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I will make a brief contribution and suggest members might like to listen to it.

It has been a frustrating period in many respects, the last few weeks, in terms of receiving answers to questions. The Leader committed to providing the table related to workplace injuries and has not done so. I assume we will receive it at a later time. The request was for workplace injuries based on the industry sector and not public or private sector, which was never mentioned during the debate. The reason this became a problem was because we received a distinct lack of answers from one minister. When written answers were received, they did not answer the questions asked. I hope we see a greater improvement in that.

If this is an example of the spirit of cooperation the Premier talks about, maybe he has a little to learn. The Government, last week, released a media release stating the parliament had passed the Budget, the fifth budget of the Liberal Party. I am sorry, Premier, it had not. It has now, or will tomorrow morning when we do the third reading. It had not. The Legislative Council is part of the Parliament of Tasmania. I thought he would have known that. It is such disrespect being shown to this House that he would put out a media release saying, the Budget has passed the parliament. It passed the lower House but not the parliament. Is this the spirit of cooperation? I do not think so.

We had the Leader doing her best to answer questions this week in the budget wrap-up. Half the ministers and many of the advisers are on leave, it seems - disrespectful again, when we are still sitting and dealing with the state Budget; \$6 billion of expenditure and they leave. It is not our fault this ran into the winter break. It is later than usual but that is not our fault.

Another example of a lack of a spirit of cooperation: twice I requested a briefing on the Police Offences Amendment (Prohibited Insignia) Bill, to no avail. I wanted this briefing and I know other members were also keen. I had requests from other members asking if I had I asked for one, and I said, 'Yes, I have, twice'. This is contentious legislation. It would have been helpful to have the briefing prior to the winter break so we could undertake to consult with other people in our communities about it. I am receiving a lot of emails in opposition to it, as I am sure other members are. I have not had anyone saying they support it, but that may come and that is okay. It frustrates me. We will come back after the winter break, it will be dealt with in the lower House and it will come to us. We are given briefings but that is not the point; it is the time available to consult following the briefings. If this is the spirit of cooperation it is another failing.

It has been frustrating and it has been difficult. The answers were very late this year and the member for McIntyre mentioned the Premier's answers to Committee B - he was with us on Tuesday and his answers did not arrive until Tuesday this week at 9.27 a.m. The Treasurer's answers came to us late in the afternoon on Monday and we accept there were some complex questions. How many pages was the Premier's Discretionary Fund? How hard is it to cut and paste from the upcoming DPAC annual report?

This House is being treated with a level of disrespect we have not seen for some time and I hope that changes. If the Premier is talking about the spirit of cooperation, let us see examples of it.

Timing of Briefings

[5.29 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her contribution.

Mr PRESIDENT - Adjournment speeches are not to debate issues or concerns.

Mrs HISCUTT - Okay. I need to defend the Government only on one issue. How do I do that?

Mr PRESIDENT - My advice is that you are able to do that.

Mrs HISCUTT - Your comments will be noted and certainly taken to the appropriate people.

With regard to briefings, there is nothing to stop any honourable member over the break from consulting on any of those bills. They have been put in your in-basket so you would have them. I am told from time to time that briefings should be closer to the actual debate of the bill, plus that bill is not in our House yet. We do not have a bill before us yet to debate.

There will be briefings in due course. If any honourable members wish to consult on that bill or any particular bill during the break or any time, please feel free to do so.

Timing of Briefings

[5.31 p.m.]

Mr FINCH (Rosevears) - Mr President, the suggestion I would make to the honourable Leader is that, with the suggestion coming to you that the briefings be closer to the time when we have the debate, sometimes that is not as advantageous if you are doing your research, if you want to go out and find out more about what is unfolding in the community and how your community leaders or the people affected feel about it. If you have that information from the horse's mouth, you are better equipped to do your research.

The Council adjourned at 5.32 p.m.