



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

REPORT OF DEBATES

Tuesday 15 November 2022

REVISED EDITION

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Tuesday 15 November 2022

The President, **Mr Farrell** took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

PETITION

Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility

[11.01 a.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I seek leave to table a petition which does not conform to our Standing Order provisions and relates to raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14.

Leave granted.

Ms Webb presented a non-conforming petition from approximately 4381 citizens of Tasmania calling on the Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14.

Petition received.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[11.06 a.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I have answers to question no. 6 on the Notice Paper for the member for Nelson.

6. TASMANIA LAW REFORM INSTITUTE (TLRI)

Ms WEBB asked the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, Mrs Hiscutt:

With regard to the ongoing uncertainty of the future of the Tasmania Law Reform Institute (TLRI), and in light of the following considerations:

- (a) The establishing agreement between the founding partners of the University of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Government and the Law Society of Tasmania is due for renewal in November this year;
- (b) the Legislative Council's affirmative vote on Tuesday 27 September this year in support of a motion calling for the Government to prioritise delivering in full, and in good faith, the recommendations of the review of the TLRI final report; and commit to ensuring Tasmania's acclaimed premier law reform agency is sufficiently resourced to place it on a 'secure and sustainable footing into the future' as recommended by the 2022 TLRI review final report; and
- (c) my correspondence dated 28 July this year to the Attorney-General on this matter, which remains outstanding to date:

Can the Government provide the requested information for the following outstanding matters:

- (1) The Government's formal response to the findings and 20 recommendations made in the South Australian Law Reform Institute (SALRI) final report of the Review of the Tasmania Law Reform Institute, which was publicly released on 20 July this year;
- (2) (a) whether the founding partners agreement will be renewed in November this year; and
(b) if so, can the Government provide a copy of the new agreement once finalised and signed;
- (3) details of any new governance and structural reforms made to the TLRI, and how they are intended to secure a contemporary and sustainable TLRI into the future;
- (4) the Government's ongoing funding commitment to the TLRI, noting the TLRI review's recommendation no. 19 that the annual baseline or recurrent funding from the Government be increased to at least \$200 000 per annum, to support the institute's work program;
- (5) the process and the role of the Government in securing a permanent director of the TLRI; and
- (6) the expected tenure of current acting director, Associate Professor Jeremy Prichard, and what role the Government had in that appointment?

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I seek leave to table the answers.

Leave granted.

See Appendix 1 on page 92 for incorporated answer.

SPECIAL INTEREST MATTERS

International Men's Day

[11.07 a.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - Mr President, this morning I acknowledge this coming Saturday's International Men's Day and take a few moments to inform the members about the need for this day and the ways it will be celebrated around Tasmania and the country as a whole.

International Men's Day was founded by Dr Jerome Teelucksingh, a lecturer at the University of the West Indies in the Caribbean. While some may ask why we need such a day, we know there are many barriers and inequalities experienced by men, as well as women, and this day seeks to acknowledge some of these and more importantly to celebrate good things about our men and boys together with the positive contributions they make to our society.

For the last several years, Men's Resources Tasmania has run a breakfast on the Hobart waterfront to acknowledge the occasion. While this year other events have meant the breakfast will be postponed, MRT and other grassroots organisations will be celebrating in various ways.

The Australian Men's Health Forum, the national peak body for men's health and wellbeing, hosts an International Men's Day website with a calendar of events, many of which are already underway. There are also posters, social media graphics and other resources freely available.

I urge all members to consider downloading and sharing some of these resources. Please find out what events are on in your electorate and attend where possible, or at least raise the topic of International Men's Day in your work with constituents and communities. For those listening, it is www.internationalmensday.info.

This year, the theme for International Men's Day is celebrating mateship, an idea that needs little explanation in Australia and one that is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of men and boys.

We know loneliness and isolation are significant contributors to illness and poor health outcomes, with health systems and services struggling to cope with increasing demand in our community. With the huge and growing shortage of GPs and three-month-long waiting lists for psychologists and counsellors, our mates have never been more important for support in tough times.

International Men's Day is a day where, in this House, we can make a small difference for the men and boys in our community by acknowledging that not all men are on top of the world today. Unfortunately, men seem to be particularly good at living shorter lives.

Another concern is the poor educational outcomes for some boys. According to the latest National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) reports, nearly one in seven Year 9 boys - or 13.5 per cent - did not reach the national minimum standard age for reading. This rate is nearly twice as high as the figure for Year 9 girls, at 7.1 per cent.

We hope the increasing focus on literacy skills can identify students who will benefit from additional resources, together with the growing recognition of the importance of good mental health and wellbeing and improving student outcomes.

Currently, the biggest challenge in Tasmania is acknowledging that there are areas where men and boys experience poorer outcomes. Men account for two in three potentially avoidable deaths, and four out of five deaths from heart disease in people under the age of 65. Yet, there are few strategies and policy documents that acknowledge men as a priority population - and less than adequate allocated resources towards addressing this.

At a time when Tasmania can celebrate nation-leading statistics, such as generating all our electricity from renewable energy and being a net carbon-negative economy, for the first time we now have the highest rate of male suicide in Australia. To summarise an article by Glen Poole of the Australian Men's Health Forum website, suicide killed 87 people in Tasmania in 2020. There were 71 male and 16 female suicides. In total, 82.6 per cent of suicides were male. The number of male suicides in Tasmania has risen by 40 per cent in the

past decade, and the rate of male suicide is nearly 40 per cent higher in Tasmania than the national average.

Our Premier is a life member of Lifeline and is the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and I am sure he is only too aware of the huge damage these losses have on families where someone has died by suicide.

Indeed, a women's health and wellbeing fact sheet on the Department of Premier and Cabinet's website highlights statistics where men are faring far worse. One statistic I can quote:

10.5 per cent or more than one in ten Tasmanian women are risky drinkers compared to one in four males at 26.6 per cent.

To my knowledge, there are no male-specific strategies or policies in place in Tasmania, other than our criminal justice system and our Men's Sheds.

The difficulty in accessing timely health care, when added into the natural stoicism of men in seeking help, does them few favours; especially so when chewing concrete and being seen to get along with it is almost the definition of Tassie grit.

The growing cost-of-living pressure only adds to the reluctance of many men to risk what they might view as 'wasting time and money' to seek help.

Given this nature, it is now the time for the Government to consider an additional focus on men's health and wellbeing.

If we look for a moment at the Government's ministerial portfolios, we see a minister for almost every section of our community - be they children, youth, women, veteran's affairs and a number of others too.

It is time - given the cost of losing so many so early and so silently - that there should be a ministerial portfolio responsibility to represent the health and wellbeing interests of the male half of our community. Addressing male wellbeing outcomes is good for all of us. If we fail to include the areas where men do poorer in our general analysis we fail to provide the best outcomes for women, let alone our children.

Mr President, we can also celebrate that around the state men are supporting each other through local community-based activities. Men's Sheds around Tasmania will no doubt have an extra cuppa in light of the occasion. Local men's groups will connect. One will meet for a sunrise swim at Carlton Beach; another will see mates from across the state meet on one man's property in St Marys - continuing a tradition that has seen the group meeting quarterly for over 20 years. The Man Walk will commence at 9 a.m. this Saturday from McCarthy's Bread Lounge in Ulverstone. These are some of the many unheard stories of men challenging the traditional macho stereotypes and caring for their families and community, and clearly demonstrate some of the good things men do and bring to our society as a whole.

On this International Men's Day I acknowledge the work of the various funded and unfunded voluntary grassroots and community-based organisations around Tasmania. I genuinely believe that this Government, and future governments, could show support of the

inequity regarding the financial commitment of our men's organisations, which proactively look at bettering the lives of the somewhat neglected section of the community.

I celebrate the mateship they bring to their communities and wish them all the best on this International Men's Day. I look forward to seeing progress in male wellbeing and I hope that we can report new men's health initiatives on International Men's Day in 2023.

Scottsdale High School Centenary

[11.15 a.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre) - Mr President, recently I had the great pleasure of being invited to attend the centenary celebration of our alma mater, Scottsdale High School. The Education department initially turned down the request to establish a high school because the town did not have the minimum number of students which, at the time, was 25. So local identity, Alex Coplestone donated three acres for the purpose of establishing a secondary education facility. At the opening in 1922, he stated:

If they wanted to get to the top, and there was not much use getting anywhere else, they must have a good education. There was not one position in Australia that was not open to them.

While the school has had many changes and additions since my time in the early 1970s, it still provides to today's students what it did for the first students a hundred years ago. Like many of our rural centres, many generations of local families have passed through the front gates of Coplestone Street and many spoke of their mothers' and fathers' time at the school and some even spoke of their grandparents attending as well.

One particular case of a long-term teacher, Mrs Ruby Dickson, who had been a teacher during my years at Scottsdale High School and over many years and then returned to do some relief work in the 1970s, she would often address students by their parents' names, as she had taught the previous generations of those families. This was never pointed out to her as the new generation understood this was how it was and just went on as usual, as did you, young Craig Maxwell Farrell.

Other stories were recalled and former staff and students shared their memories and enjoyed the display in the library that was a comprehensive record of years past. During the presentation, the three guest speakers talked about their time at the school and how it had shaped their lives. Terry Aulich, a former education minister, gave a very entertaining address and he was followed by Ian Farquhar, who challenged the audience to do more to address climate change. We had a lesson there.

John Beswick recounted his memories of his years at the school. Interestingly, each speaker spoke about their school experience and how the school farm was a lifelong positive influence as they journeyed through life. It is noteworthy how many Scottsdale High School students went on to a career in politics. Apart from many who went into local government, Bill Beattie was a long-term member for Bass and deputy leader of the Liberal Party. John Beswick was also a long-term member for Bass and deputy premier in the Gray government. Terry Aulich was firstly, a Labor member for Wilmot, which is now Lyons, in the Tasmanian House of Assembly and then a federal senator for Tasmania.

Mr President, yourself, the member for Derwent and myself, formerly the member for Apsley, now McIntyre, all Scottsdale High students.

As former students, we made our way around the school and it was clear that a number of the buildings were pretty much the same as they were 20 or 30 years ago or more, very tired and not fit for contemporary learning in this modern world.

Now, that is an issue for another day and my role is to advocate for upgrades to support the school community. Our colleagues can expect to hear more of that.

Congratulations to the centenary celebrations committee, consisting of principal Elizabeth Williams, what a delight; Paige Howard, Karen Rainbow, Jenny Bicanic and Fiona Bennett on bringing the celebrations together and inviting our President of the Legislative Council, Craig Farrell, to officially open the proceedings. I was awarded the privilege of closing the official program.

The event was hosted by three of the student leadership team: Jayda Hopkins, Bridie Mather and Abbi Young and from a proud nan, it was wonderful to see my granddaughter, Abbi, in her leadership role.

On behalf of Mr President, who was a co-contributor to today's special interest offering - I had to remove a couple of his lines - and myself, we sincerely wish Scottsdale High School a very successful future.

Mr PRESIDENT - There was nothing to do with smoking behind the bike shed or anything like that.

George Town Business Excellence Awards

[11.20 p.m.]

Mr DUIGAN (Windermere) - Mr President, I am very pleased to rise today to give some further recognition to some outstanding members of the Tasmanian business and service community. A little over a week ago I attended a sizeable gathering at the George Town Memorial Hall for the 10th instalment of the highly coveted George Town Business Excellence Awards, an annual event staged by the very active George Town Chamber of Commerce. I am not sure how familiar some members may be with George Town, so I will quickly paint a picture.

Ms Rattray - I lived there in the 1970s. I am very familiar.

Mr DUIGAN - There we are; well, this will be instructive for you also because it has changed. It is the eastern shore of the lower reaches of beautiful kanamaluka, the Tamar Estuary. The sun is shining, the seabirds are circling, the King George whiting are leaping, the mountain bikers are carving, newly revamped Regent Square is gleaming. Modern George Town is a far cry from its roots as a worker's dormitory for the nearby industries at Bell Bay.

It is a vibrant, growing, and increasingly sought-after place to live and to visit. I have had it explained to me, in relatively coherent terms, as to why George Town is the logical place to have the state capital if we ever do a redesign of Tasmania.

Back to the Business Excellence Awards. I will start with the Tourism and Hospitality Award, which is sponsored by the local MLC, and for the second year in succession, the Low Head Pilot Station Maritime Museum has taken out the gong. This award has been dedicated to the late Peter Cox, who gave many years of service and leadership to the museum and I have spoken before about this attraction. The 40-strong volunteer staff at the museum continue to expand its offerings and bring value to the community.

Now, as I alluded, George Town is rapidly emerging as a destination for mountain bikers from across the country and the Best New Business Award went to Send It MTB Shuttles. The Mount George and soon-to-be opened Tippigoree Hills represent 80 kilometres in trails. Ranging in difficulty and duration, they go from green - that is good - blue, black, double black - not so good. Local couple, Fiona and Jason Hills, saw the opportunity and took a punt, setting up Send It MTB Shuttles and, in doing so, provided an even better experience for mountain bikers on the George Town trails.

If bikes are not your thing, do not worry, on the first Sunday of every month, George Town comes alive to the burble of classic cars, new and old. Don Mario's Italian Restaurant is known and loved across the north and Don Mario's Classic Cars and Coffee has grown into a genuine phenomenon. As many as 300 classic cars regularly converge on the town, bringing with them a buzz of excitement and a boost in business activity. As the 'godfathers' of this event and the couple behind Don Mario's Restaurant, Ollie and Rob Macedon are popular winners of the Community Contribution Award.

Customer service is acknowledged as the key to generating repeat business and I can attest to that on a couple of fronts. On the road into George Town, there at the Bridport turn-off you will usually find a collection of cars and often a couple of trucks parked around a little blue van and that is the Coffee Devil Van. Inside that van, Kate and Tim Dunne make excellent hot beverages and visitors to the van are usually greeted by name and always with a smile. Irrespective of my caffeine levels, I find it almost impossible to drive past the Coffee Devil due to the excellent service provided.

So if it is around lunchtime, if I am in the vicinity of George Town Seafoods - fresh or cooked, caught with its own vessel, beautiful Tasmanian seafood - and for more than 20 years behind the counter has been the irrepressible Pam Edson. I have known Pam for a long time, both of us having been of Flinders Island extraction. Pam is a force, with a wicked sense of humour. Pam conducts the lunchtime goings on at George Town Seafood like she was conducting an orchestra.

I was pleased to see Pam received the judges award for Excellence in Customer Service. For full disclosure, I usually go for five crumbed scallops, three calamari rings and a minimum chips.

Ms Rattray - Few chips?

Mr DUIGAN - Minimum chips. Sadly, time does not permit me to mention everyone but I extend my congratulations to the George Town Chamber of Commerce, to all nominees and to all winners and encourage all members to add George Town to their must-do lists.

Ms Rattray - You will not be surprised to know I worked at the shoe shop at George Town.

Mr PRESIDENT - That sounds like the foundation for our next electorate tour at some stage in the future.

Clown Doctors Appeal

[11.26 a.m.]

Ms PALMER (Rosevears) - I ask members, what do you think of when you combine coloured wigs, white coats, stethoscopes and red noses? Hopefully, it is the crazy fun and fabulous Clown Doctors who pop up in our hospitals across Tasmania.

The launch of the 2023 Clown Doctors Appeal took place only a couple of weeks ago at the Launceston General Hospital. While the weather outside was a tad miserable, there was plenty of warmth indoors with many turning out to support and to celebrate the work of our amazing Clown Doctors. The Clown Doctors movement began more than 20 years ago when it was born out of tragedy in 1996. From the devastating event of Port Arthur came something very special.

Imagine being a sick child in hospital in need of a friend to play, laugh and smile with, well that is the magic of the Clown Doctors. Clown Doctors do play, Clown Doctors bring magic moments, they engage and empower and Clown Doctors distract and divert. They show us that laughter is the best medicine. Having these amazing people in our hospitals, provides a different kind of medicine for those who need it most. It can turn what is often a traumatic experience into something positive while also supporting staff to perform their treatments effectively.

They are not only for the children. The Clown Doctors can also take an anxious parent or grandparent, wrap them in toilet paper, spin them around the room, bring shrieks of laughter into a tense environment.

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, it was fantastic to be part of the Clown Doctors Roadside Appeal that worked its way across Tasmania. I was honoured to join our fabulous volunteers, shaking cans in my electorate of Rosevears on the West Tamar Highway. The response from the local community was overwhelming and my electorate, in particular, is to be congratulated for its generosity and its willingness to give.

Funds raised during the appeal will be put back into our Tasmanian hospitals to support the much-needed clown rounds and help keep Clown Doctors at the bedside of sick children and running amok in the corridors of our local hospitals throughout the state.

The work of corporate fundraising manager Ian Doig, program manager Dani Barnett and long-time volunteer Paul Martin have been exceptional to be able to coordinate the appeal as well as ensuring there were plenty of volunteers on the ground. It is always a pleasure to receive a call from Ian to ensure that I am back on board for the appeal each year.

It takes a special person to be a Clown Doctor and the enthusiasm and fun that Dr Wing It and Dr Saurus Rex bring to the faces of not only our children but their families, is one to treasure. To know there is some light in times of darkness and how these doctors do everything they can to help families, is simply gorgeous to witness. They truly are heroes.

I wish to acknowledge the ongoing support from Lou Partridge and Jen Duncan from the Launceston General Hospital and 4K Children's Ward, along with the president of the Children's Ward Auxiliary, Margaret Kirkup. Without the continued support of our hospital, programs like this would not be able to succeed.

A big thank you also to the staff within our hospitals for making sure our little people are looked after and kept safe in times that can be scary. Thank you also, for being involved with the fun that our Clown Doctors bring to the wards. Our community is so grateful.

I congratulate Ian, Dani, Paul and the team of volunteers for the amount of the work that they have done, ensuring the fundraising goal of \$50 000 is reached. A huge shout-out must go to Summerdale Primary School. We had the pleasure of welcoming 56 Summerdale students to our launch at the Clown Doctors for 2022 and, my word, can those children sing. We were so fortunate to watch the Summerdale Primary School Choir present two songs for the launch and, in true Clown Doctor-style, Dr Wing It and Dr Saurus Rex were up to their old tricks, misbehaving atrociously while the children were trying to sing. Although you could see on their faces how proud they were to be representing their school.

I can confirm that the 2022 roadside appeal has been a huge success and the target of \$50 000 has almost been reached. Can I encourage anyone who wishes to donate, to do so online via the Humour Foundation?

I am a very proud ambassador for Clown Doctors here in Tasmania and take great comfort in knowing children and their families can receive this incredible support during challenging times. I will always be a huge advocate for this program and I thank everyone involved for their support.

To our Clown Doctors, we thank you for everything you do because, for sure, laughter will always be the best medicine.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mural Fest Sheffield

[11.31 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I will talk about Mural Fest today. Last week from Monday 7 November until Friday 11 November was Mural Fest in Sheffield, the town of murals. I am sure everyone here knows or has heard of Mural Fest.

Mural Fest started in 2003 and has grown in leaps and bounds over the years. This year the theme was 'location or town' and there were nine enthusiastic artists competing, plus a guest artist on site. Mural Fest is run and coordinated by Kentish Arts, Commerce and Tourism. It is led by Sandy Brattstrom, who is the president, and the arts manager, Mr Julian Bale.

A few years back, the Kentish Council made the decision to renovate an old, cold hall which used to be the Senior Citizens Hall in Sheffield and modernise it. They lowered the ceilings, plastered the walls, created a few rooms and turned it into a warm, vibrant arts display area and an artists' working space right next to Mural Park in Sheffield.

I encourage anyone to go to Sheffield to visit this amazing space, view and possibly purchase some of their spectacular artwork, which also includes handmade pottery and clothing. It also has a great outside covered area where all the officialdom took place for Mural Fest.

On Friday 5 November, Mural Fest was launched with the unveiling of the miniatures and the introduction of the artists. All the finalists have to do a miniature version - it is about one metre by 50 centimetres - and talk about their vision, then spend until brushes down on Friday next to replicate it onto the huge mural which is then judged.

As I mentioned, this year's theme was 'location or town' and the nine finalists were: the first one was entitled, 'A Place I Call Home' by John Eathorne, who was representing West Tamar; number two was, 'A Place I Call Home - Ulverstone to Leven Canyon Lookout' by Allison Pryer, representing the Central Coast. Number three was, 'Day and Night', by Fong-Jhu Wu and Fangzhou Li, representing Hobart. Number four was, 'A Walk Through the Forest', by Fereleth Lee and Gillian Robnik, representing Latrobe. Number five was, 'Aurora @ Opossum Bay' by Gren Freeman, representing Clarence. Number six was, 'Promised Land', by Shasa Bolton and Jan Rigden-Clay, representing Promised Land, of course - Mr President, this one won the highly commended and was also a first-time finalist. Number seven was, 'Belonging to Nature', by Alicja Swiderska, assisted by Dorata Swiderska, representing Sheffield.

Alicja turned 80 while she was doing her mural and we all sang 'Happy Birthday' to her on the day. Number eight was, 'Nature's Frequency', by Brooklyn Jaxx who was representing the Central Coast and, finally, number nine, 'A Generous Gift' by Janine Poke, assisted by Zeenah Mamonski, representing Railton.

The artist noted that her mural was inspired by Sykes Sanctuary at Railton. I am not familiar with it, although the member for McIntyre may be. It is a recreation of Sykes' small shack with a dirt floor, no power, just the essentials. Walkers and bike riders enjoy the area and you can also see lots of wildlife.

Mr Norman Sykes was a World War I pilot and a World War II aeronautical engineer and was a recluse, a resident at Railton, and left this peaceful place for all to enjoy.

Mr President, I mention this because this one was the winner. Janine was overwhelmed when her name was called out at the event. I was amazed to view her mural and see the tiny bees with every little aspect of the bees on it. It was quite amazing.

The four judges are world renowned. I have pages on their qualifications. They are Heesco Khosnaran, who lives and works in Melbourne; Hamish Hall from Hobart; Damien Mitchell from Wagga Wagga and Marc Spijkerbosch from New Zealand. Their long list of qualifications are easy enough to Google for anyone who is interested. These four judges selected the nine finalists and the winner was a People's Choice selection.

Sheffield ACT also had a guest artist, Mr Fabian Micali. Mr Micali came from Italy, moved to Queensland and now resides in Deloraine.

My heartfelt congratulations go out to the team at Sheffield ACT. They created a marvellous week of artistic entertainment, ably lead by Sandy Brattstrom and Julian Bale and well done to the team at Sheffield ACT.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Stepping Up Program

[11.37 a.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President. Most, if not all, members would know that the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) is an integral part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). The CWP works for the better representation of women in legislatures and the furtherance of gender equality across the Commonwealth.

The strategic purpose of CWP is: to increase female representation in parliaments and legislatures in the Commonwealth; provide a means for building the capacity of women elected to parliament to be more effective in their roles; to improve the awareness and ability of all parliamentarians, male and female, encouraging them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation; and helping parliaments become gender-sensitive institutions.

The CWP has an active presence in all Australian parliaments and members use various methods, such as motions, parliamentary debates, hosting forums and inter-parliamentary events to raise awareness of the work and focus of CWP.

Along with the strategic purpose of CWP, overall, our Australian branch of CWP aims to: increase the number of women in Australian parliaments - we have done that reasonably successfully in recent times; to provide a network of current women members of parliament; to encourage young women to engage with democratic processes, build careers in the political sphere and learn more about the Commonwealth; educate all members of parliament on the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians; and encourage them to get involved in such activities.

The CWP is a nonpartisan network of women parliamentarians who are committed to the advancement of women in politics. Each of the states and territories and the federal parliament elect a representative to the CWP, who then make up the Australia Region Steering Committee. The steering committee is a body of 10 women MPs, representing each of Australia's federal, state and territory parliaments, plus the Chair.

I have been fortunate enough to serve on the steering committee on behalf of the Tasmanian Parliament for a total of six years, with my second three-year term finishing this year. It has been a little bit frustrating for this last term, with COVID-19 resulting in the cancellation of a number of events that were planned, including educational functions for our members; the 2021 conference - which was successfully held in July this year; and two previous Stepping Up events. Stepping Up is the CWP Young Women in Leadership day, and that is today. Each school - public and private - and homeschooled students are invited to send two Year 9 students to parliament with support staff, to spend a day in our workplace under the excellent guidance of our parliamentary education service and education officers Colette Goyne and Kimbra McCormack. I sincerely thank them both, in particular Colette who has done a lot of behind-the-scenes work to make this event such a success; and I am privileged to welcome the students to our parliament this morning.

This year we have students from 12 schools; actually, it is 11 schools because Leighland Christian School, Ulverstone, had to turn it down due to weather conditions on the highway and illness. The schools that are in attendance are: the Australian Christian College, Hobart; Calvin Christian School, Kingston; Cape Barren Island School; Clarence High School; Hobart City High School; the Indie School, Burnie; New Norfolk High School; Scotch Oakburn College, Launceston; Southern Christian College, Kingston; St Michael's Collegiate, Hobart; and the Tasman District School, Nubeena.

Stepping Up is an event to encourage young women to attend our parliament to meet as many female MPs as they can; to learn about the importance of parliament in our democracy; and to introduce young women to some of the skills required to be an effective member of parliament. As we know, these skills will be useful in leadership positions and generally in the workplace. The young women will also learn about various aspects of an MP's role and that of parliamentary staff and electorate officers.

Mr President, the commonly stated reality - 'You can't be what you can't see', is a reality the Stepping Up program seeks to address and to encourage young women to consider engagement with and involvement in politics.

I was hoping they would join us in the Chamber, but they are obviously tied up elsewhere; but you will see them here later in the morning when they finish what they are doing.

I appreciate that due to cost and time away from school and other issues, it is not an easy program for our rural and regional students to attend. I hope we can find some way to fund these opportunities for schools from our regional areas, to enable equity of access in the future.

I encourage all members who see the young women around the parliament today to warmly welcome them, and let them know a bit about why you put yourself forward for election - whether you are male or female. I also suggest you encourage them to consider engagement in politics and democracy as an important part of our society and a role where they can make a change and make a difference.

Mr President, I warmly welcome the young women and their support staff who are participating in Stepping Up today and wish them well in the future as they embark on, or continue, their leadership journeys.

MOTION

Role of Men's Sheds in Tasmania

[11.42 a.m.]

Ms HOWLETT (Prosser) - Mr President, I move -
That the Legislative Council:

- (1) notes the important role that Men's Sheds play in the overall wellbeing of many Tasmanians;
- (2) notes the contributions that Men's Sheds make to the community;

- (3) acknowledges the role that volunteers play within Men's Sheds; and
- (4) thanks the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association for the work they do promoting and supporting Men's Sheds across the state.

Mr President, this coming Saturday 19 November, is International Men's Day - a day that recognises and celebrates the contributions of men and boys to society; recognises the important role that men play as role models within our society; highlights the social issues that men and boys face around the world; and promotes the health and wellbeing of men and boys.

Each November, the member for Elwick is sure to remind us of what November means for him. As we look at the member for Elwick, we must congratulate him for participating in Movember every November. For those in this Chamber who have not yet donated, let us put our hands in our pockets today and assist the member for Elwick in his annual fundraiser.

Movember is a month dedicated to raising awareness of men's health issues such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer, male mental health and suicide. Since it is the time of year that celebrates men and highlights the issues facing them, it is very appropriate to acknowledge the contribution of an institution that positively contributes to the wellbeing of many men across Tasmania, the Tasmanian Men's Shed movement.

Men's Sheds are a health program for men. Men thrive when they have a purpose and a place where they can enjoy the company of other men. The Tasmanian Men's Shed movement provides this place. They provide a dedicated space for men to socialise and to connect. It is widely accepted that women are much more effective at forming women's networks and supports as opposed to men. They are also more likely to seek help when they need it. Because of this, men's health outcomes are consistently worse compared to women.

Men, on average, have a life expectancy four to five years shorter than women and suicide rates three times higher for men. Recent studies into male suicide in Tasmania show that loneliness is high on the list of contributing factors. Older, isolated men especially those who have lost their wife or partner are at the highest risk in this group.

The traditional meeting places for men have diminished dramatically over recent decades and Men's Sheds have given men somewhere to gather. Men's Sheds provide a safe and friendly place where men can share and get support and advice where they might be reluctant to seek it elsewhere. They also fill a gap in men's lives left by retirement when men lose their camaraderie of their work colleagues and struggle to find a purpose following the conclusion of their working life.

Men's Sheds give men the opportunity to remain active, learn new skills and also pass on valuable skills of their own to others. Sheds provide an opportunity for connection but within the context of undertaking purposeful, tangible work. Many members of sheds talk about their sheds transforming their lives by giving them better physical and mental health outcomes, reducing isolation, reducing depression and also anxiety.

In short, Men's Sheds save lives by reducing social isolation and by giving members a purpose at a stage of their life where they may be searching for one. They also provide a safe space where men can openly discuss issues that may be affecting them.

Not only are Men's Sheds a place for men to socialise and work, they are a valuable asset for the whole community. Some sheds help with school mentoring and others intergenerational mentoring programs. Some run work for the dole programs and others produce furniture and items for local aged care facilities and community groups. Many also conduct fundraisers for their local charities within their communities.

In my electorate of Prosser, the Sorell Men's Shed not only has a full woodworking shop, it also has a mechanical workshop equipped with a vehicle hoist and tools necessary to mend cars and other machines. This wonderful group of guys who regularly attend the shed, happily assist locals by fixing down broken lawnmowers, appliances and by servicing cars for little to no cost at all. They also craft high-quality pieces of furniture, that will sell for a reasonable price to raise a few extra dollars for their shed.

Whilst all sheds make significant contributions to the lives of members in the community, it is important that we recognise that no two sheds in Tasmania are the same. Every shed has its own culture, routines and projects, shaped by their local members and reflecting the needs of their community.

One of the sheds I have been involved with, which is in the member for Rumney's electorate in Penna, the Hobart Vintage Machinery Society, specialises in restoring and maintaining vintage tractors, farming machinery and steam engines. I am sure many of us have seen this shed showcasing their machinery at many local shows around Tasmania.

The members of this society take great pride in the fact they are restoring and preserving history and as I said, they enjoy showcasing their collections and they also have an annual open day at Penna which I encourage all members to get along to and look at the history of some of the valuable machinery they have in their shed.

Two other sheds in Prosser are the Spring Bay Maritime and Discovery Centre Community Shed in Orford and the Spring Bay Community Boat Shed in Triabunna. They specialise in restoring classic wooden boats, in order to preserve the maritime history of the Tasmanian east coast. The member for Windermere, Mr Duigan, should duck along and have a look at the incredible restoration they have done on many boats there.

The number of Men's Sheds in Tasmania has grown by a third in three years, currently totalling 71 sheds across the state. This dramatic and rapid increase absolutely highlights the growing need for places where men can make mates.

At the core of every Men's Shed is a dedicated group of volunteers. These volunteers give an enormous amount of their own time to ensure their sheds meet the needs of their members and their local communities.

I take this opportunity to recognise and thank the volunteers who make up shed committees who organise the tools; the opening hours; the tea; the biscuits and the Milo and their famous barbecues. Not only do they do this, they also organise community events as well as many projects. Without these volunteers, Men's Sheds could not function and they would not be one of the key community pillars they are today.

On behalf of the Tasmanian Government and members of this Chamber, I thank all Men's Shed volunteers for all the hard work they do. I also wish to thank the Tasmanian Men's Shed

Association, the peak body that supports sheds throughout the state. I acknowledge the incredible hard work of the TMSA committee, including: president, David Seen; vice-president, Fred Wales; secretary, Bruce Weller; and treasurer, David Gray. I also acknowledge the incredible work that Wendy Kennedy does. Wendy is the executive officer of the TMSA. She works tirelessly around the state to provide the support to sheds and we all know how dedicated Wendy has been to the sheds for many years right now. I enjoy running into Wendy and hearing the stories - and she has many to share - about the incredible work and the great importance of sheds across the state.

The Tasmanian Government is proud to support the fantastic Tasmanian Men's Shed movement and the TMSA through the provision of funding as the annual TMSA Grants Program which provides support for sheds for purchasing tools and equipment and also funds wellbeing programs. This investment yields so many dividends for our communities. Working in partnership with the TMSA, we will continue to support Men's Sheds and the enormous and diverse benefits these sheds provide to local communities across our state.

Recognition of Visitors

[11.53 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - Honourable members, if we cast our mind back to the member for Murchison's contribution this morning about the Women in Leadership day organised through the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians movement, we welcome into our Chamber students from the - it was 12 but now it is 11 - schools around Tasmania who are joining us here today.

It might seem odd we are talking about Men's Sheds while you are present here, but you would have noticed in the contribution the Men's Sheds are being run very efficiently by a woman who is in charge, and you will probably also notice in our Chamber, if you do the numbers, we have more female members than male members in this Chamber and that is why we probably function so wonderfully well.

I am sure you will enjoy your time in the parliament and please feel free to talk to any members as you see them around the building today because we will have much more time. Normally the other place sits as well, but it is just the Legislative Council. I know all members will freely give their time and will warmly welcome you into the Tasmanian Parliament today.

Members - Hear, hear.

[11.55 a.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre) - I also add my welcome to those who are here for the Stepping Up event and we will see you around lunchtime, I look forward to that.

I rise and I have no hesitation in supporting the member's motion in regard to the important role of Men's Sheds, the contribution they make to our communities, the role of volunteers and also acknowledge the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association for the work they do in promoting and supporting Men's Sheds. As we do, Mr President, when we receive a notice of motion, we look to see how it interacts with the areas we represent.

I have a few official Men's Sheds or community sheds, as they are sometimes known as, in McIntyre. Dorsett Men's Shed, Furneaux Islands Community Shed, St Helens Men's Shed, Bridport Men's Shed, Longford Men's Shed, Deloraine Community Shed, Mole Creek Community Shed, St Marys Men's Shed. Some of those are not official ones. I expect you could say the Pearn's Steam World group are an unofficial men's shed for the work they do in restoring old machinery, particularly farm machinery through the Pearn's Steam World facility I have spoken previously about in this place.

That is a lot of morning teas, Mr President and as we know, morning tea usually goes from around 10.30 a.m. till approximately 4.00 p.m. and there might well be a barbeque thrown in the middle of that. However, you can absolutely guarantee that when you turn up to any one of the Men's Sheds in McIntyre that the kettle is hot and the biscuits, well you are supposed to bring the biscuits - if you do not have biscuits on board it is not a good look. You take the assorted creams, Mr President, as they are preferable. Do not be scummy and take the ones without the cream, take the cream biscuits. They usually go down very well.

I have had the opportunity to visit many a Men's Shed and I have had their services when something breaks or something needs repairing. I recently had a piece of timber that ended up being not required made into three very nice serving boards by the local Men's Shed. I saw a little tip recently on one of those home improvement shows where you can put some stoppers on the base of them, so I might take them back and get them to actually put some little doorknob stopper things on them and lift them up a little bit off the benches and off the tables. I thought, that is also a nice little ad for my Men's Shed. I have pot plant holders and various bits and bobs I purchase as I go around and visit those sheds.

Probably the newest and the one we will see when we head to the island, Mr President, the Furneaux Island Community Shed is going to welcome us. They are absolutely looking forward to hosting us when we are there in February, whereas I look forward to showing you that fairly new facility. They had a smaller facility at the high school at Whitemark in previous times I had visited. They are now in their new location, for which they received some funding through the Tasmanian Community Fund, which was very much appreciated. I know there will be other Men's Sheds, community sheds in our electorates that have been fortunate to have received some funding for buildings and various items.

Mr PRESIDENT - They will be right for biscuits for the next few months too if we all take a packet of cream biscuits.

Ms RATTRAY - We will have to buy them over there, Mr President. Taking biscuits with us probably will not work in amongst our luggage and a few other bits and bobs we will need to take with us but we will sort the biscuits, do not worry. They might even have the biscuits sorted for us that morning, as a once-off. We will check.

It has been very well supported by not only governments, but the Tasmanian Community Fund and communities in general for these Men's Sheds/community sheds. I acknowledge all the contributions by the member for Prosser in outlining the value of those Men's Sheds. When you visit, you see quite an array of people and a lot of them are retired people. Sometimes, they perhaps have lost partners and that connection with a group of people gives them something to look forward to, two or three days a week. Most of them are perhaps open three days a week and that works well.

A brief offering, but really to support the member's motion and also to acknowledge the work and the value of Men's Sheds/community sheds in our communities. We are fortunate, and there are a few she sheds as well being proposed around the community. That is also something that seems to be gaining some momentum as we look to support each other in our communities.

I congratulate the member for Prosser and look forward to other contributions and see how many men's/community sheds they have in their electorates.

[12.01 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery) - Besides my own mates here, I went to the Men's Shed website for a bit of a read but it was fairly well as much as I experienced with my own sheds. A lot of people think that Men's Sheds are places where old blokes go to make things.

Ms Rattray - They are right.

Mrs HISCUTT - That is right, but this is only the beginning of Men's Sheds.

Ms Rattray - They do make a lot of things though.

Mrs HISCUTT - They do make a lot of stuff and actually, the Men's Sheds are becoming the heart and hub for many communities right throughout Tasmania. Many men struggle as mentioned by the member for Prosser, with the transition from a working life to retirement. I often hear some wives - all in good nature - saying when he retires, I am going to pack his lunch and send him out to the shed anyway, so the Men's Shed is a good place for men who are retiring when they need something more to look forward to in their lives.

When you go to a Men's Shed you can learn new skills or pass on your skills to others. Many members simply like to drop in for a cuppa and a game of crib. That is one of the things the member for McIntyre has talked about, drop in for a cuppa, it is a great opportunity to sit, talk and to hear things that are going on. Some sit by the wood heater on a cold day as we have in Ulverstone. We have a good chat around that wood heater on those cold winter days.

It is now widely understood that men communicate in their own special way and the environment of a Men's Shed is a perfect place for men to off-load their worries and to feel safe and comfortable. Men's Sheds are not only for old blokes. We have some quite younger fellows who have joined the Men's Shed at Sheffield and that is very interesting to see the mentoring that goes on there. Each shed is different. Some offer woodwork, metal work, welding, car maintenance, computer skills, gardening and that is only the beginning.

Mr Gaffney - At Ulverstone they offer coffins.

Mrs HISCUTT - Yes, they have a Coffin Club there. They do have a she shed and a Coffin Club. It is an interesting look when you go to see it. The Coffin Club is good because you talk about things that are going to happen one day. Blokes prepare for it and they build their coffins and they put shelves in them if they wish and put them as a book case on their wall until such time as the coffin is required. It is a discussed topic, nothing to be afraid of, it is going to happen to everybody one day and this is how they go about that.

Mr Gaffney - They have pictures of their wives in that environment I would reckon.

Mrs HISCUTT - I was not going to go into all of that. The Tasmanian Men's Sheds are always ready to lend a helping hand in their communities, as has been mentioned, creating benches for public spaces, handmade trophies and souvenirs from Tasmanian timbers. As the Sheffield Men's Shed does, they collect and distribute firewood and, as we know, blokes are great at chopping up firewood. It is very good, very therapeutic, and then they deliver it to members in the community who need that.

The most important thing about Men's Sheds, is that there is no pressure when they get in there. They do not have to do this or have to do that, if they just want to sit and talk, that is quite acceptable. The committee is very good, as the member for Prosser pointed out, the president is David Seen. Mr Seen lives in Penguin, and at every Men's Shed that I visit, he seems to be there. He takes a very active interest in his position in the TMSA.

Also, on the committee, and I will mention Lyndley Chopping, who is the southern representative. Lyndley was the president of the Poppy Growers association when I was on that committee and he was a very good man to get on with, very interested in people, and he would make a wonderful representative from the southern areas. I also note that Terry Hughes is a committee member, and he is also the president of the Kentish Men's Shed. I used to be in the Army Reserve with him many years ago. It is interesting that I come across all these people who get into these positions.

I have four Men's Sheds in my area, not nearly as many as the member for McIntyre. I have Kentish, Ulverstone, Penguin and Burnie.

Ms Rattray - I probably share Kentish in some respects as well.

Mrs HISCUTT - I was looking at the member for Murchison when I said Burnie.

Ms Forrest - Burnie is in Wivenhoe so it is technically in your electorate, but everyone who goes there is from mine.

Mrs HISCUTT - You know, Mr President, I took the opportunity to print out the boundaries on LIST, in case I was challenged.

Ms Forrest - No she is right, I am not disputing that, but we did have an argument the other day about how far it went to the river. We share the bridge over the Emu River, that is what we share.

Mrs HISCUTT - So, the Kentish Men's Shed is ably led by Terry Hughes. As I said before, it is not always old blokes. These older members of this club are mentoring some young blokes who are turning up to their shed. It is very good to see. You told about the Arnott's Assorted Cream Biscuits, well they are not permitted at the Kentish Shed, well, from me anyway. I am under strict instructions to bring Tim Tams, so somebody else must be taking care of the Arnott's Cream Biscuits. I bring my Tim Tams along, and then we discuss recipes.

Ms Rattray - Not enough in a packet for my Men's Sheds.

Mrs HISCUTT - I have to take two. Then we talk about recipes on how you can incorporate Tim Tams into desserts and things, it is all very good. In Ulverstone, we have Rob McKenzie who is the president, and as the member for Mersey pointed out, they also have the

Coffin Club there and they do have a ladies group meet as well. They are a very cohesive group of blokes, mostly, who are there. Every time you walk in the shed it is just, 'Oh, come and sit down around the wood fire, and have a chat, Leonie'. It is so welcoming.

Penguin is a smaller group, but they are ably led by John Reed. They build things, and I will put this on *Hansard*, I am going to buy a wishing well that they make very well for my daughter-in-law for Christmas to put in her garden. Now she knows what she is going to get. They are always very welcoming.

I will make a special mention of Maurice Jones. He is a very staunch supporter of the Penguin Men's Shed and he is there all the time, doing everything that needs to be done. If nobody is around to do it, he will do it.

The one in Burnie is ably led by 'Jewls' Raimondo. He is a younger man too, which is good. I imagine the member for Murchison has been to the Burnie Men's Shed and would have noted the skeleton in the cage hanging from the centre of the roof of the shed. I took my grandson, who is five years old, with me to the AGM recently, and he was fascinated by this skeleton in the cage hanging from the roof. There is a story with it, I said to him, 'Of course, you know the joke about why the skeleton burped, don't you?' He looked at me and did not know. I gave him the answer, but I will not answer that riddle here because it may not be appropriate for this situation. If anyone wants to know why the skeleton burped, I can tell them later.

I was at the Maskells Road Miniature Railway track the other day, Mr President. You may be aware of that? It is a miniature track.

Mr PRESIDENT - Yes.

Mrs HISCUTT - The new leader there, who has been there for only three years. He says there are blokes who like to play with engines, tinker with train engines. I said, 'Yes, I know one or two'. He is also thinking about how he can incorporate his setup with a Men's Shed or turn it into a Men's Shed. Everybody is thinking they are a great thing and a great thing to do.

I am very pleased with the Men's Sheds in my area. I do know that the Coroneagh Park Auxiliary ladies, when I was there at a meeting one day, were looking for a happy hour trolley for the aged residents at Coroneagh Park, and I said, 'Why don't you asked the Penguin Men's Shed to build you one?' and they did and they were very happy with the outcome. There was a wonky wheel at one stage, but the men took it back and fixed it up, it was absolutely wonderful. So, now they have happy hour Coroneagh Park at about 2 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon in a trolley that has been built by the Penguin Men's Shed. It is really good.

There is not much more I can say, except that Men's Sheds are great, and I say 'blokes', because they talk about blokes. They are a good place for blokes to hang out together. The same as women need a space to chat and talk, men need that also, and the Tasmanian Men's Sheds provide that. I am more than happy to support and note the motion from the member for Prosser.

[12.11 p.m.]

Ms LOVELL (Rumney) - Mr President, I will make a few brief comments in support of the motion. Thank you to the member for Prosser for bringing the motion to the Chamber so

that we can all have this opportunity to acknowledge the work that Men's Sheds do in each of our electorates and our communities.

I also acknowledge that it is International Men's Day this coming Saturday, and I also acknowledge the member for Elwick and his annual commitment to Movember and raising the money for men's health, much to the pain and suffering of the rest of us. I would also encourage members to donate to support that worthy cause.

I support the motion and acknowledge the role that Men's Sheds play in our communities and right across the state. I had a look at some of the online material available about Men's Sheds to see what is out there. One of the things that struck me, you could call it a motto of the Australian Men's Shed Association, which says:

Men don't talk face to face, they talk shoulder to shoulder.

That captures what Men's Sheds provide in our communities. It is that opportunity for men to stand side by side and have conversations and have connection with somebody where it is not as confronting as it might be to reach out through a service provider or to their GP.

Statistics show that men are not the best at maintaining their regular health check-ups with their GP. They tend to leave it until something is really wrong before they go, particularly men who are living in rural and regional areas. None of us need to talk about this, but we know because of the expectations that society places on men and on all of us, that it is often difficult for men to reach out for help. That is reflected in those distressing statistics that members have spoken about already with the suicide rate being three times higher than that for women.

This is an important service that our Men's Sheds are providing, a role they are playing in our local communities. Without these informal opportunities for men to make those connections with each other, those statistics could well be much worse.

The Leader spoke about the Men's Sheds providing an opportunity for men to engage with their local community in retirement, and that was something that I wanted to touch on as well. This comes back to the society that we live in and have lived in for the last 100 years, the expectation that men would be a breadwinner and a provider for the family, that gave them a sense of value in their family and when they are in a position where they have to leave that role, that can be confronting for a lot of men. So, to provide an opportunity where they can still be giving back to their community in a way that they are comfortable with and feels safe for them is an important role.

It is not just men who are in retirement. We are seeing a lot of people across Tasmania not working for various reasons and we saw that through COVID-19 where many people had their work taken away from them for lots of various reasons. There are men of all ages who are now not working and looking for that opportunity to give back to their community and that is something that Men's Sheds can provide.

I note the contributions that Men's Sheds make to the community. The Leader also spoke about the Coffin Club, was that mentioned in Ulverstone? I know various Men's Sheds around the state have - one of the Men's Sheds in my electorate, the Clarence Plains Community Shed has a similar service that they provide but they make coffins for stillborn and miscarried babies. They have shown me this project and they treat it with a huge amount of reverence and

compassion and that is one of the things that they do in their shed that they hold most dear to them. They take that incredibly seriously and they know the level of dignity and comfort that something like that can provide to a family at one of the worst times of their lives, how important that is. I recognise the fact that they do that because they do it beautifully and I can only imagine the level of comfort that provides to families at that time.

The Clarence Plains Community Shed also engages with the local school community and I have been there to visit them while they have had groups of schoolchildren there and they do woodwork with those children. They have projects that they work on throughout the term and it is often kids who are less engaged with formal schooling and might be looking for something to do outside of normal classes who love coming to the Men's Shed. They like to sit around with these men who are able to teach them skills and show them what they can do and what they are capable of doing and at the end of it, they walk away with something they have built with their hands. That is hugely valuable as well.

I have a number of Men's Sheds in my electorate that I wanted to mention. I have already spoken about the Clarence Plains Community Shed. There is also the Risdon Vale Community Shed. As the member for Prosser mentioned, the Hobart Vintage Machinery Society has relocated to Penna and a couple of years ago set up a new home there.

It is probably a bit of an unofficial Men's Shed but an important one nonetheless, and that is Monty's Community Hobby Shed in Rokeby, close to the Neighbourhood Centre. They identified a need in their community and have established a shed, a place for people to come and do all the things that we do at the official Men's Sheds around the state, which is as important.

I also acknowledge the South Arm Peninsula Men's Shed because they have spent the last couple of years establishing their own shed. I know how hard that committee has worked to lobby for funding, they secured funding commitments from both parties at the last state election. They have had a number of working bees. They have fundraised. They have had the whole community involved and seeing that community come together to build this shed - literally build the shed, they are in the process of building it now - and provide that place for men in their community, that has been inspiring. I know how hard they have worked and they are very close to having that up and running. I wanted to acknowledge them and the work they have put in there.

I also thank the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association for the work they do, the committee and their general manager. I know how hard that association works to support Men's Sheds across the state. Like all of these things, volunteers can only do so much and that support that is provided through the association is hugely important. I wanted to thank them as well for the work they do.

I thank the member for Prosser for giving us this opportunity to acknowledge Men's Sheds and all of the men and women in our communities who work hard to provide this safe place for men - and women and children and other members of the community - to come and take part in activities that they might not get the opportunity to do otherwise. They provide that social connection and a way for people to feel valued and to give back to their community. I support the motion.

Recognition of visitors

[12.19 p.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - Before I give the call, I welcome to the Chamber our second group today that are here from the Stepping Up event. These young ladies are from various schools around Tasmania and are attending the Stepping Up event that has been organised by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. They are here to witness the role of parliament.

We mentioned before to the other group how in our Chamber here we have a majority of female members. You might wonder why we are talking about Men's Sheds but that is because today, it is a motion that has been brought on by one of our members and all the members on the Floor get the chance to respond to that motion.

You will enjoy your time in parliament and well done on being part of this important program, run through the CWP. I extended to the previous group, any member who you wish to speak to about our role in the parliament, be it male or female, we will happily engage with you, so do not be shy to talk to us. All the members in this Chamber will welcome you warmly to the Tasmanian Parliament.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.21 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - I thank the member for Prosser for bringing this motion to the Chamber. The benefit that Men's Sheds bring to the mental health and wellbeing of many men across Tasmania and Australia is well understood.

While many people think that Men's Sheds are places where older men meet to make things and use tools and equipment they might not have at home, that is only part of what Men's Sheds do and it is not only older men who access them, particularly those that are available on weekends where other men can go. They offer much broader support, services and opportunities.

I will speak fairly broadly about the benefits of Men's Sheds rather than focus on particular ones as such. I also acknowledge, as other members have, the great work of the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association who help facilitate a lot of the engagement with the Men's Sheds around the state and provide avenues to support the purchase of tools and other equipment that the sheds may need. They are also great for helping the volunteers who run our sheds to connect around the state and around the communities they represent and work in.

I have personally referred people to the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association who are looking to establish a Men's Shed because they have a lot of information and support there available. Not all Men's Sheds are actually members of the TMSA either. I went to this website to have a look and there are lots of them in my area that are not actually on their list of members. Other members have spoken about the informal Men's Sheds or they have not felt the need to be a member of the association as such and they are getting on and doing their own thing.

In any event, regardless of whether they are members of the association or not, Men's Sheds generally provide a wonderful gathering place for men to chat and have access to

equipment that they might not have at home and to meet people who they may not have met through any other avenue. This is particularly the case when men age and they seek to downsize their family home. It often means moving to a smaller home where they might have had a shed and they no longer have a shed and the best they have maybe is a small garden shed. That is a fairly big transition for a lot of men who spent a lot of time in their shed.

I know how important my Dad's many sheds were to him and a key must-have for my brother when he was looking to buy a new home. He did find a home with an enormous shed and it is completely full with his machinery and other equipment that some may say are the toys that he has, but that was a prerequisite. It had to have a big shed. When you look around for properties to buy, not on a farm which was what he was doing, there are limited properties with big sheds. Men's Sheds can provide an enormous source of relief and benefit to these men who no longer have their own very big shed or big sheds.

For men like my brother, sheds are crucial, not least for their mental health and wellbeing. Many men have told me how many problems, not necessarily related to the machinery in the shed, have been solved just by going to the shed. It is an opportunity where it is safe. You add to this the camaraderie the Men's Shed creates and you do not have to wonder why these facilities are vital for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of men.

Men's Sheds truly are the heart and the hub of many communities right throughout Tasmania and through their work they give back to the community which they represent. As other members have mentioned, each shed is unique; it meets the needs of its particular community; and some of them, as has been alluded to, have particular focuses around things that are particularly important to that community. It is right they are community-centred and community-focused because what is the point of them otherwise? They need to meet the needs of their local community. Obviously, they will ebb and flow and change as perhaps their membership changes too.

Many of these sheds make equipment, as the Leader spoke about with the Penguin Men's Shed making the happy hour trolley. I know a lot of them, including the Burnie Men's Shed which is in the member for Montgomery's electorate, but a lot of people from my electorate go across the road. Yes, I know exactly where it is over the boundary. They make picnic tables and the sorts of facilities that are used right throughout the community. They will also do custom pieces if someone has a particular need. That helps to maintain the skills the men may have developed prior to losing their own shed, potentially, and be able to continue to use those. They do give back and also share their skills, as other members have mentioned, with women and children in the community, and some of them have women's days where they invite the women who are in their life or other women to come and have a turn in the shed and experience the joys of the shed, or to sit beside the fire and have a chat.

I mentioned the impact on some men downsizing their home as they age. Many men also struggle, as some women do too, with the transition from a working life to retirement, even if they still have their own shed, because it is the lack of regular contact with other people and they can become isolated without something like a Men's Shed. They can miss the camaraderie of their former workplace and workmates and may feel a lack of purpose. Whilst I know it is not just men who experience this, we know that women are much more able to join and create groups and that sort of thing. Men often find that more difficult, so the Men's Shed is a safe place to do that. You turn up and there is no expectation you will build or make something, you are welcome to sit and chat.

This is particularly an issue for men as they are retiring or ageing that they might also lose their life partner around that time and then be at an increased risk of loneliness. When we look at loneliness and the impact on people's mental health, it is profound and significant. Loneliness is an increasing problem generally for society and Men's Sheds play a crucial role in helping to overcome this, making new friends and mates and being active within the community.

We know many men find it harder to reach out for help when feeling low or depressed. We know there is a worrying number of older men with mental health problems who often do not seek help until it is really late and, sadly, we have a higher rate of male-completed suicide. Men's Sheds can play a role in the early intervention and recognition of men who may be struggling with loneliness, depression and with poor mental health. Some of those issues may have been unrecognised or untreated for years and sitting beside the fire or sitting in the shed, even working, as the member for Rumney said, shoulder to shoulder rather than face to face is much easier to have a conversation. Anyone who has kids will know that. Driving in the car is the best place to have one of those conversations, because you cannot look at them, other than a quick glance at, 'Did you just say that?' The shoulder-to-shoulder chat is much less threatening for people who do not like the face-to-face and make eye contact as readily. It can be very empowering and an important aspect of our communities and the Men's Sheds play an important role in that shoulder-to-shoulder chat.

Men's Sheds provide a safe and respectful place to have a chat, a game of cards or whatever other activity there is in the confines of the shed, where additional support services can be recommended or identified, if needed, and a listening ear is there whenever needed. It is an easy place to hand them a brochure or to say 'Look, I had the same sort of problem and I went here,' or whatever, and it is those sorts of things that will save men's lives. I do not think we can underestimate the importance of that.

As noted in the motion, Men's Sheds rely on and are fully supported by volunteers. This volunteer work is highly valued and does reduce the overall burden on our health services, such is the positive impact that those who engage with the Men's Shed as either a participant or a volunteer can have. I thank them all and acknowledge the enormous contribution of all our volunteers, we could not do what we do without them. As other members have said, and I will reiterate: all sheds are different.

To speak about one I have visited quite regularly, the King Island Men's Shed is one of the best equipped I have ever seen. I went there on my electorate tour and met a lot of the men who are regular attenders. It is a great Men's Shed because it is a new shed, really well equipped. People have provided tools and equipment to the shed when they have had to downsize themselves.

Mr PRESIDENT - They were building a cannon dolly.

Ms FORREST - That is right, they were at the time. It has been physically connected to the community house, Phoenix House, which we spoke about recently on the community houses and the community garden which means that all these groups work together for the benefit of the island. There is a lot of work going on in the community garden, which we also visited, but you probably would not recognise it now with the work that has been done since we were there. The Men's Shed has been integral in building garden beds and shelters and that sort of thing in the community gardens. That one in particular, with co-location, had real added

benefits for the island and it makes it safe for men to go to the Men's Shed, but also perhaps pop into Phoenix House if they might need support for other things, it is right there.

When I visit, I always seek approval. I do not just drop in, it is their shed and their right to not have someone walk in on them, but I am always warmly welcomed. Jim Ben particularly, we all met him over there, is the main contact, he is always on for a chat, you have to make sure you have plenty of time when you are invited to a Men's Shed.

As I said, I will not name all the Men's Sheds in my electorate as I know there are likely to be some I will miss, there are so many and sometimes they pop up when you do not necessarily know they are there straightaway, so to avoid missing any, I will talk broadly about them across the electorate. There are a lot that I know of that are not on the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association website, and that is not even picking up any that I may not even be aware of at this stage.

Suffice to say, they come in all areas and corners of my electorate, from King Island to several towns on the west coast through Circular Head, Wynyard, Somerset, Waratah and Burnie. There is a range of Men's Sheds, some of them are more formal and registered with the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association, others do their own thing but still provide a community focus and community-centred approach to supporting men in their capacity to meet up, have a chat, make some things, use some tools they may or may not have, and actually look after their general mental health and wellbeing, even though they may not know that is what is happening at the time.

Men's Sheds play a very important role in our community and I thank them all for what they do to support each other, for the work they do and what they do for the community.

[12.34 p.m.]

Mr WILLIE (Elwick) - Mr President, I, too, thank the member for Prosser for bringing this motion forward so we can have this discussion. Men's Sheds are important to our communities and we know men generally do not like to talk about their feelings much. We know that stigma and culture are a big part of this and men tend to hide their vulnerabilities. I acknowledge what other members have said in terms of shoulder-to-shoulder mentoring and friendship. Something that I used to do mentoring kids at risk with the youth justice system where often, we would have conversations in the car or doing an activity like playing golf or going for a walk along the beach. People will open up if they are distracted by something else. My therapy is playing golf with my friends. We talk about all sorts of things on the golf course while we chase a little ball around.

Ms Forrest - Is that why you play so badly?

Mr WILLIE - Some days, yes. You have a deep conversation and some days you get a bit distracted.

Mr PRESIDENT - You have quite a lot of therapy then?

Mr WILLIE - It is a significant factor to the health and wellbeing of men, particularly as we age, and our social and family networks grow smaller. Other members have also acknowledged that.

The Men's Shed is a very simple concept, and it is proven to break down these barriers through easy conversation and mateship. There is also a strong sense of giving back to the community, which is important.

Other members have talked about how they have integrated into the community and making a difference, particularly for those who are transitioning from the workplace into retirement. For an ageing population like Tasmania, Men's Sheds are vital community assets with ability to influence initiatives that ensure men, of all ages, are not disproportionately impacted by mental health and wellbeing.

In the electorate of Elwick, I have a few Men's Sheds. There is the Central Men's Shed - I have not had much to do with that one. Ella Haddad, our colleague, is often there and supporting it.

Mr Valentine - It is in my electorate.

Mr WILLIE - No, it has moved. It is in St John's Park. The boundary has moved.

Mr Valentine - Oh right, in your electorate.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, the boundary has moved. St John's Park is in my electorate.

Mr Valentine - Yes, it is.

Mr WILLIE - There is also the West Moonah Community Shed, which I have had quite a lot to do with. Some members may recall that I hosted volunteers of the West Moonah Community Shed to this House a few years ago.

The West Moonah Shed is unique in operation, being one of the few sheds that welcomes everyone, regardless of gender. It was a well-considered decision made at the time in response to the diversity in the northern suburbs community. It is a focal point of the shed, which includes and promotes inclusivity to anyone, regardless of their sex, race, religion or ability, and every member has an equal opportunity to create and contribute.

One of the features of visiting the West Moonah Community Shed is mixing with a diverse range of dedicated members and volunteers, locals - young and old - migrants, men and women of all abilities, social groups whose paths may not otherwise cross, building relationships and collaborating with the community. This does not detract from the original Men's Shed concept. It has enhanced it, allowing shed participants and volunteers to further engage with the greater community and each other.

For example, shed volunteers maintain the West Moonah Community Garden and assist in coordinating the in-demand First Choice Food Co-op initiative. That is an initiative that I have supported over many years, providing much-needed food security for many members of our community in the northern suburbs. In fact, Mr President, earlier this year, I was contacted by a constituent who had to isolate for COVID-19. It was during the mandated isolation period. He had no access to food or sanitary products. My office called West Moonah Community House and they delivered a parcel, free of charge, to this person in need.

Another popular program operated by the West Moonah Community Shed is the Coffin Club, which allows participants and their family members to build a coffin together and, in doing so, generates a healthy conversation about mortality and death. We have previously spoken about in this Chamber about how important those conversations are. The fluid structure of Men's Sheds across communities is one reason why the initiative has proven so successful.

You will know about this one, Mr President, if you have ever been to an event at Collinsvale, chances are you have wandered through the Collinsvale Men's Shed. The Collinsvale Social and Machinery Shed is unique to the Men's Shed model. It is key to the Collinsvale community social network but also important to Tasmania's agricultural history. At the shed, volunteers used their skills to restore agricultural equipment from bygone eras. There are some absolute treasures found nowhere else in Tasmania and they are found in the hills of Collinsvale, Mr President, as you know; you could probably talk about the machinery more than I can. They are painstakingly restored by shed volunteers, who are immensely proud of their work.

The Tasmanian Men's Shed Association highlight that by engaging with the shed, there is no pressure to do anything aside from leaving your house and finding a group that you enjoy spending time with - a place to meet friends, share stories, contribute to our communities and enjoy each other's company. May they continue and prosper into the future.

[12.40 p.m.]

Mr VALENTINE (Hobart) - Mr President, clearly, members around this Chamber highly value their Men's Sheds, because there has been a fair bit of competition about who has the most and whose electorate they are in.

Ms Forrest - How many do you have?

Mr VALENTINE - I have none. At the last boundary move, the member for Elwick has not only taken over four schools of mine -

Mr Willie - Four. Actually, one has merged, so it is three now.

Ms Rattray - The member should have put in a submission. I am not sure why he did not.

Mr VALENTINE - Maybe I should have. Doing some research for this, it appears that there are 1200 men's, women's and community sheds across Australia. That gives you an understanding as to how valued these facilities and these organisations are by the community. I thank the member for Prosser for highlighting it today and in recognition of International Men's Day on Saturday. It is very timely.

The Tasmanian Men's Shed Association has been going since 2009 - 13 years of involvement. It was noted that Wendy Kennedy has been a very positive force in the Men's Shed Association and she is to be congratulated for putting her effort and time in and making a difference there. It is good to see that collaboration.

I note, as did the member for Rumney, the statement on the Australian Men's Shed Association: that men do not talk face to face, they talk shoulder to shoulder. Never a truer word spoken there. For some reason, when we are brought up as males in this society, it used

to be 'stiff upper lip' and 'get on with life' and the like. That has been the case for a lot of men. Obviously, it is very important that men do get the opportunity to share with each other in a non-threatening way. That shoulder-to-shoulder bit is the way that happens, it is so important.

The statistics that the member for Prosser read out, with regard to men's suicide, are sobering statistics, unfortunately. It is either older or isolated men who are at the highest risk in that particular category. These Men's Sheds are so important to address that particular issue and I thank her for highlighting that and for giving it some profile. It helps us to think about how we might be able to help address that circumstance.

Men's Sheds provide the opportunity for men to remain active, to learn those new skills, to be purposeful, and to have tangible work, which reduces the isolation and depression. These Men's Sheds take all sorts of shapes and sizes. There is one in the member for Elwick's electorate which is associated with the Men's Sheds movement - the Hobart Hackerspace, which is in St Johns Park, St Johns Avenue, New Town. That particular organisation does things like 3D printing, laser cutting and engraving, robotics, CNC routing, amateur radio and other electronic pursuits. So, it is not all about carpentry and welding or metalwork. This particular space, Hobart Hackerspace, provides an environment where younger people might wish to hang out and communicate with each other.

Ms Howlett - Perhaps I can send my husband there.

Mr VALENTINE - I will leave it to you to have that discussion. However, a sense of purpose is so very important; the feeling of being useful and, indeed, wanted and appreciated. It does wonders for a person's self-esteem, and that is what these spaces do. We all know the adage of 'a problem shared is a problem halved', and that is so important for these sorts of spaces.

Not only is a problem shared and a problem halved, the sheds provide that sense of purpose and contribute to the community, and help those people involved to feel wanted and valued. That is the important aspect to it, and many members have brought that to our attention today.

On one International Men's Day event at the RACV Hobart Hotel, a couple of years back now, I happened to run into the West Moonah Men's Shed representative. We started talking about front fences. I have a particularly difficult front fence that I have to replace and it is not an easy solution. It is made out of celery top pine, of all things, and he immediately said to me, 'don't throw it away; send it out to us because we can use that. We can recycle that front fence for you'.

Mr Willie - It might not be there when you get home.

Mr VALENTINE - I thought about that before mentioning it; but I figured the fact that I have mentioned it now, might dissuade people from stealing my front fence. It might make me pay attention to it in timelier manner.

Mr Willie - They might make some good cheese boards.

Mr VALENTINE - They could make cheese boards out of it, but nevertheless. They are always looking for opportunities and I take my hat off to them for that. I support what

everyone has been saying - how valuable they are and how valuable the concept is. It is not just about men either. As the Australian Men's Shed Association shows, there are women's and community sheds across Australia. It is a very good concept that somebody has come up with from way back when, and I salute them for what they do for the community, for all of the volunteers involved and I thank the member for Prosser for bringing it forward.

[12.48 p.m.]

Mr DUIGAN (Windermere) - Mr President, my thanks to the member for Prosser for bringing this forward, in a similar vein to the motion we recently spoke about on neighbourhood houses. I could not let this opportunity pass without a bit of a shout-out to some of the great Men's Sheds in the division of Windermere, and also recognising International Men's Day coming up on Saturday. A fantastic event.

I would say that in the division of Windermere, officially there are four men's and community sheds, but the reality, as people have alluded to, is that there are thousands. Any old workshop or garage or garden shed has the potential to be a Men's Shed. In fact, I built myself my very own Men's Shed a few years ago and it happened to time nicely with the onset of the COVID-19 lockdowns and I thought, this is perfect. I will do my COVID-19 isolation in my men's shed. For the first few days, it was pretty good and then, slowly, the walls started to close in on me, Mr President, and it dawned on me that clearly my men's shed was lacking something.

Ms Rattray - More men.

Mr DUIGAN - More men. As the motion notes, Men's Sheds play an important role in the overall wellbeing of many Tasmanians. That is true, but it is important to recognise that all the lathes and the woodworking tools, the chisels, taps and dyes do not provide wellbeing on their own, maybe for a couple of days.

The real wellbeing benefit comes from the shared experience, the getting together with like minds to enjoy a common interest. Typically, what holds my shed back is that it usually only has me in it, notwithstanding I do take visitors and I will give you a cup of instant coffee which is another cornerstone of the Men's Shed.

Ms Rattray - What about biscuits?

Mr DUIGAN - No biscuits. I fear it might attract vermin.

Mr Willie - It is always good to call in advance and ask what they want, then you go with the right things.

Mr DUIGAN - Somewhere where you can get plenty of biscuits, although like members have acknowledged, I bring biscuits when I visit, is the Ravenswood Men's and Community Shed. MACS is an important asset in Ravenswood and more than 50 people every week turn up and it produces a lot of projects. It cuts oyster sticks, a lot of the oyster sticks you see about the place come from MACS. It restores furniture, mantelpieces, school drama sets coming out of MACS, bird houses.

Ms Rattray - Important. The last bag of sticks I delivered for Mr President came from the local Men's Shed.

Mr PRESIDENT - Very good sticks they were too, like Mr Valentine's fence will be shortly.

Mr DUGAN - Another more recent branch of MACS is hosting mental health and wellbeing workshops, barbeques, lunches and also people living with disability are able to come too, with a support person. People on community corrections orders visit MACS, so you meet all sorts of people. In its own words, MACS is a vibrant and important part of the community in Ravenswood. It provides a safe space for skill building and social connection, contributing to positive health and wellbeing outcomes for members and the community.

When I first came to this role a little over 18 months ago, MACS was one of the very few if not the only shed across the state that employed a facilitator, a paid staff member. This was always intended as a temporary measure, but as the impending date of that funding being withdrawn loomed, I like lots of other people held serious concerns for the future of MACS and what the loss of that important person might mean for the ongoing success of the shed.

I am pleased to say more than a year down the track, MACS continues to thrive and offer its variety of activities and benefits to the community. The reason for that is the sensational group of volunteers who have stepped up to fill that leadership gap, and like so many of our community institutions, they simply would not happen without the volunteers. I take this opportunity to add my thanks to those people.

Up the road is the Northern Suburbs Community Centre which has attached to it another very active Men's Shed. Like MACS, it is not only for blokes, there are some girls and ladies that get along to the shed. They have the Polished Nails Project where they have 40 ladies and women who are involved who come along to the shed and make things.

As mentioned, the mentoring aspect of the shed is really important. The men's biz management team is five of the senior volunteer managers of the shed and they have more than 20 younger blokes who they mentor in a variety of life skills in building things. Another good thing they do at the Northern Suburbs Community shed is the Gear for Life program which is supporting young people in the area get their motor bike licenses - which is obviously difficult - and they do an eight-week intensive course on safe driving.

Various other things go on and are currently in planning for a big Christmas do up in Rocherlea. There are 500 community members who have accessed the shed over the past year and a range of things, obviously, have been covered in other members' contributions about things that go on at community sheds, they are all different.

One of the interesting initiatives of the Northern Suburbs Community shed that launched a week or two ago is the idea of the mobile shed - the shed does not move, but the projects contained within do. The Northern Suburbs Community Centre has three sites: Newnham, Mowbray and the shed at Rocherlea. They have put together their more portable projects and they bring them to the other sites on a weekly basis, so there is a rotation.

For the launch event, we did some laser cutting, some pyrography, and we made bird houses, and there were hammers and nails and pre-cut timber. I must admit when I went there, it took a little while for everybody seated around the place to get involved, but by the end of the event, or an hour in, there were bird houses everywhere and everybody was reaping the benefits of the community activity.

Ms Rattray - Great Christmas gift.

Mr DUIGAN - Indeed, yes. Well, I have you covered. The Men's Shed, as mentioned, is not a one-size-fits-all. The couple I have mentioned are adjuncts to neighbourhood houses, but that is not always the case. The East Tamar Men's Shed at Dilston is a shed for blokes, so the member for Murchison, who is not here at the moment, would need an invitation to visit there - biscuits or not - and the She Shed in Invermay is a shed for women.

It is clear the shed concept though brings value and fills a variety of community needs and as such, the Tasmanian Men's Shed Association does a great job promoting the benefits of Men's Sheds, along with identifying gaps that exist in the network. I am hopeful the network will soon be further expanded in my neck of the woods, with work continuing to deliver a community shed tied to the Neighbourhood House in George Town. We are some way down the track with that one and also with the Lions Club of Lilydale, which is looking at putting a shed up in the beautiful township of Lilydale to bring the benefits there.

I thank the member for Prosser for bringing this on and I note the motion.

[12.58 p.m.]

Ms ARMITAGE (Launceston) - Mr President, I, too, thank the member for Prosser for bringing on this very important motion. We know many men love this shed, the place where they can create, be inspired, be left alone sometimes and to chill out with their mates. The Kings Meadows Men's Shed started in 2009 and since then, it has gone from strength to strength as a truly grassroots organisation. It provides support and a place of refuge for men of all ages to come together, relax and build their skills to make wonderful pieces of furniture and art. I have one of their lovely tables made out of Huon pine in my office. They do some wonderful work at very reasonable prices and it is great for people to purchase from them.

As a joint project by the Rotary Clubs of Youngtown and Kings Meadows, this Men's Shed is truly a place run by the community for the community. The absolutely gorgeous craftsmanship that goes into the furniture and other objects made at the Men's Shed emphasises the way that men can channel their energy into creating beautiful things. The connections that are made at the shed are even more valuable than the things they make. It is so important to have a place of safety and refuge, free of judgment, that provides men with the opportunity to feel understood and to connect with other men. When men have a place to go where they feel welcome and included, it benefits everyone. It refutes the narrative that men do not have the need to express themselves or connect with others and provides an opportunity for intervention for men of all ages at risk of poor mental and emotional health outcomes.

Members at the Kings Meadows Men's Shed include former police officers, veterans, armed services, plumbers, surveyors, mechanics and all walks of life. According to David Brooks, the shed's president, this experience is enabled to be given back to the community. It cannot be understated how vital the Kings Meadows Men's Shed and -

Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. until 2.30 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Mt Horror Lookout

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

[2.31 p.m.]

There has been recent advice, to the dismay of the north-east community, that Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) intends to remove the Mount Horror lookout, which has been used for decades as an important part of fire spotting through the summer months, along with the lookout being an important tourist experience as well as being enjoyed by locals due to the panoramic views from the lookout.

Can the Minister please advise what discussions have been carried out with Dorset Council and the north-east tourism group to find a solution to once again allow access to the public, remove the boom gate and upgrade the current infrastructure? If I have to thump, Mr President, I will.

ANSWER

Mr President, I thank the member for her question. Hopefully, this answer might calm her a little. Public access to Mount Horror by vehicle was restricted with a lockable boom gate in 2017, primarily due to the site housing strategic and critical telecommunications infrastructure, a Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) fire tower, and ongoing concerns of vandalism to those assets arising from unrestricted vehicle access.

The lookout was built by the then Forestry Tasmania and transferred to PWS as a part of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement in 2014. At the time of transfer, the lookout was nearing end of life and was listed for removal by PWS. This lookout has since been deemed a safety risk due to deterioration of the structure. The decision not to promote public use of the site was agreed to by the general manager of the Dorset Council at the time. The boom gate lock and gate itself are periodically vandalised and left opened without it being reported to PWS.

The PWS has only been made aware of a new community concern to retain the lookout following the article in the *North-Eastern Advertiser* associated with a request to restore signage. Obviously, nobody had approached before.

The PWS is open to discussions with all interested parties on the future management of the site and the area, noting that communications entities have raised concerns about public access and would need to be consulted before any undertaking is given to reopen the site to the public and vehicles. PWS will, therefore, arrange a meeting with key stakeholders. This will include the Dorset Council, North East Tasmania and Dorset Destination Action Plan representatives, STT, Telstra and the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management.

Ms Rattray - You might like to add the local member to that list.

Answers to Questions

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

[2.34 p.m.]

Mr President, it is disappointing that several of my questions have been there for weeks, and are still not answered. I sent through a couple of new ones this week but there are questions that have been there for some time. I ask the Leader, when can I expect answers to these questions that are legitimate and are important to my community?

ANSWER

I do apologise to the member, I have been pushing for your questions that have been in the pipeline for a little while. I know that one of them was missed by one of the departments. It has only just been regathered after you mentioned it a couple of days ago. There are a few answers in the works and we are chasing ministers who are not here at the moment.

Ms Forrest - However, they still should be doing the work that this House relies on.

Mrs HISCUTT - I think the chasing is in the pipeline and I apologise. I hope to push that again. I am sorry about that.

MOTION

Role of Men's Sheds in Tasmania

Resumed from page 32.

[2.35 p.m.]

Ms ARMITAGE (Launceston) - As I was saying about Men's Sheds, their focus is on camaraderie, friendship and woodwork but they are also widely credited with encouraging men to talk. Opening up about your problems in front of others is difficult for some men but doing it in a non-judgmental place, like a shed, where you can be creative, have a laugh and a chat and enjoy a hot cuppa, helps to make their conversation a little easier.

The shed in Launceston in Nunamina Avenue has been successful beyond the wildest dreams of its founder, David Brooks. He says it is a place where men, young and old and in between, can come together and do their thing without pressure from anyone else. They can work on a project if they wish or watch others create and hang out with the fellows.

It cannot be overstated how vital Men's Sheds are, all Men's Sheds, and how important they are in our communities. I thank the member for Prosser for bringing this motion on and I support it entirely.

[2.36 p.m.]

Ms HOWLETT (Prosser) - What an interesting debate. I thank all members of the Chamber for contributing to the motion. It is interesting to hear what a lot of members take in relation to biscuits and bits and pieces when they go and visit a Men's Shed.

I note that the member for McIntyre mentioned that you must take biscuits with cream in them. Biscuits without cream will not be accepted. It is interesting how each shed is different and has different requirements. For me, I was fortunate enough my husband won the Milo competition in Australia, so I have an abundance of Milo, tins and tins everywhere, so I often take tins of Milo to a Men's Shed.

Mr PRESIDENT - You are not the only one. I have been told not to take any Milo to my Men's Shed because one particular member is very generous with Milo.

Ms HOWLETT - On my side, I would imagine.

Mr PRESIDENT - Could be.

Ms HOWLETT - I think I know who you are referring to, Mr President. It has been wonderful to hear how everyone's sheds are different in the community and the different things they provide to our local community members as well.

The member for Murchison mentioned how a lot of people have been downsizing and we have all witnessed that during COVID-19. We will see a lot more of that now with the increase in the cost of living. We will see people who will sell their house, their acreage, and who will, unfortunately, lose the big shed that they love. We will see them reaching out to the community and playing an active role within their local Men's Shed.

I note that Men's Sheds - a lot of the sheds are very good for women also. We all know that there are days that Men's Sheds have for women to chat and learn new skills but also it is wonderful for women to be able to move their spouse on for the day to have a free day, so they can go into town and do some shopping or catch up with their friends too. I know my mother has been encouraging my father to partake in the one at Sorell. We are still trying to get him there but I know that we will do that in the coming weeks, no doubt.

I thank all members for participating in the debate and on behalf of all members in this Chamber, we extend our sincere thanks to all the volunteers who work in the Men's Sheds and the organisation, and to Wendy Kennedy also for her wonderful work. Thank you to all members for their contributions.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION

Consideration and Noting - Report of the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee A Inquiry into Rural Health Services in Tasmania

[2.40 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I move -

That the report of the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee A inquiry into Rural Health Services in Tasmania be considered and noted.

It is my pleasure to speak to this report and I particularly thank all those who provided evidence by way of written submissions and verbal evidence to the committee. Their valuable insights and varied experiences within health care in rural and regional Tasmania and beyond has informed the committee's work.

Many who contributed are very busy doing the best they can in very challenging circumstances to deliver quality health care to those Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas. I thank them for their contributions and hope that we have captured the key messages and provided some clarity about the very real challenges and inequity experienced by Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas and those who provide health care to them.

On behalf of the committee, I also acknowledge the dedication and hard work of all our health professionals who go above and beyond to deliver the best health care they can. I know and understand their deep frustration when working in situations of workforce shortages and increasing demand.

These workforce shortages are compounded in rural and regional Tasmania by a range of factors including a maldistribution across the state, the capacity to cover periods of leave, ill health and professional development. Some of those things they actually miss out on because they simply cannot get the coverage to enable them to participate in professional development, for example. This makes it extremely difficult because you are required to do a certain amount of continuous professional development to maintain your registration under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

I sincerely thank all our health workforce members for their ongoing dedication and commitment to the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians in the face of so many challenges, particularly those who live and work and care for people in our rural and regional areas. In addition, the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health workforce and delivery of health services has been exhausting. This includes impacts on the provision of timely health care in both the primary and acute health care settings. These challenges have been compounded by workforce shortages, some related to COVID-19 isolation requirements and the temporary suspension of non-urgent surgeries.

This inquiry is the first conducted by a Tasmanian parliamentary committee into rural and regional health services. There have been a number of previous inquiries into acute health services and into preventive health, which I have also participated in, but this is the first that was dedicated entirely to looking at rural and regional health in Tasmania.

Health and health care are areas where there are more acronyms and abbreviations used than in almost any other. For those outside the profession understanding these and the various roles of a range of health professionals and practitioners can be quite daunting. For this reason, the committee attached an appendix, Appendix A, which contains definitions and a glossary related to the health-related terminology and a description of the roles of health professionals referred to throughout the report. I hope members and others will find that helpful when reading the report. This is in addition to the usual page of abbreviations. In this report, that alone runs to four pages, all there to help the reader.

In this inquiry, the focus was on health outcomes of Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas and the barriers to, and opportunities to improve, access to health care and thus improve their health outcomes. Whilst not a surprise to many of us, this type of inquiry has

confirmed a number of concerning realities regarding access to health services and health outcomes for individuals and families living in rural and regional areas of Tasmania.

Tasmanians experience poorer health outcomes than those living in most other regions of Australia. Furthermore, when compared to Tasmanians living in urban areas, those living in rural and remote areas are older, sicker, poorer and experience more negative health outcomes related to the social determinants of health. I will let that sink in a little bit because that is an important point: Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas are far worse off in relation to their health outcomes than Tasmanians living in Hobart and Launceston, for example.

These social determinants of health include factors of low socio-economic circumstances, higher rates of smoking, obesity, poor nutrition, low physical activity levels and chronic disease. They have longer wait times and limited access to many healthcare services including allied health professionals and Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas have less access to multidisciplinary care. They have higher rates of disability and poorer mental health outcomes. These factors in addition to the geographic isolation result in the greater need to access a range of health services - many of which are not locally available.

Tasmanians living in rural and regional Tasmania also have poorer health outcomes, particularly with regard to mental health and these poorer outcomes are exacerbated for some groups, including the members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

I draw members' attention to finding number 8. This finding notes that barriers to access of health care in rural and regional Tasmania are multifaceted and relate to a range of matters including:

- a higher percentage of residents living in low socio-economic circumstances and poverty;
- lower levels of literacy, including health and digital literacy;
- the higher cost of health services; transport to access services; and digital technology and access;
- the geographical distance to metropolitan health services;
- a lack of suitable housing for health professionals in rural and remote areas;
- inadequate access to high-speed internet and lack of access to modern digital infrastructure and associated technology in rural health facilities;
- a lack of community awareness of all available allied health services and programs;
- the stigma experienced by people, including sex workers, LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians, culturally and linguistically diverse Tasmanians and those with mental health conditions, intellectual disability and dementia;
- the lack of dedicated and inclusive services to meet the specific needs of women, including sexual and reproductive health care and pregnancy termination services and the needs of LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians; and also

- the inability to self-refer for mental health services.

These are some of the additional challenges that people in rural and regional Tasmania face and our findings and recommendations revolve around these very real and lived realities.

It is vital these very real barriers that those living in our urban areas may not appreciate or ever experience, are understood by all of us and the policy and decision-makers.

As many of the matters raised with the committee crossed over a number of terms of reference, the findings and recommendations of the committee were consolidated and relate to the need for direct action to address all areas raised with the committee and thus, there are not findings or recommendations related to each particular term of reference or subsection of a term of reference, but rather consolidated to give a comprehensive and fairly succinct set of findings and recommendations for the Government to consider.

The evidence received identified the clear links between lack of access to health care and poorer health outcomes. If you cannot get access to health care, your outcomes are going to be worse. It seems like a no-brainer but we seem to continue to overlook that fact. These poorer health outcomes are further exacerbated in marginal groups of people within rural and regional areas, including members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Our recommendations are inclusive of all Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas. I note actions taken to address inequities need to include additional supports to groups of people at increased risk within these communities.

As noted in the report, the poorer health outcomes of those living in rural and regional Tasmania are linked to multiple issues of access-related barriers across a number of underlying factors. These factors include:

- a high percentage of residents living in lower socio-economic circumstances and poverty. We know the data clearly shows that people living in rural and regional Tasmania have a higher percentage of people living in low socio-economic circumstance.
- lower levels of literacy - we continue to see that as a problem which includes health literacy and digital literacy. If these things are not addressed then you cannot access even digital health if people are not digitally literate.
- the high costs associated with access to health care and stigma experienced by marginalised Tasmanians.

As a result of the barriers experienced in accessing timely health care, Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas often delay seeking care and have more complex health care needs when they do seek care.

We heard a lot about this, not just in Tasmania. This also occurs in other remote and rural areas in Australia. If people cannot get access to their health care promptly, they put it off and put it off until they are really sick. Then often they will either be very complicated when they see their health professionals - whether it is the doctor or another allied health

professional - when they are much worse than they would have been if they had had access to early care.

When that happens, they have more complex health care needs when they do finally get to see a health professional. This then requires longer consultations with what might have been dealt with in a standard consultation but no longer can be - it requires a longer consultation and nearly always more follow-up care that our current Medicare Benefits Schedule does not adequately financially support. That is a matter we spoke a lot about in the report but I will come back to that.

This is particularly important as almost 50 per cent of rural or regionally based Tasmanian adults have three or more chronic health conditions, all of which will take some time to manage and monitor. Referring back to the preventative health committee, if you do not intervene early and manage chronic health conditions well, they escalate and the person becomes sicker and ends up in the acute health system.

I have said this for some time now and when the media asked me about it, I reiterated it: the way to fix and address acute health service workload, ambulance ramping, bed block and all that is to prevent people going to hospital in the first place; the way to prevent people going to hospital in the first place is to keep them well in the community. The way to keep them well in the community is to ensure that they have access to health care in a timely manner.

That is not just the GP. The GP plays an important role. It is a range of other health care providers that mean that person can be cared for outside the hospital system; otherwise, they end up back in the hospital system again. They are often sicker when they get there, they end up staying longer in the hospital, taking up a bed longer and the problem goes on in the acute service. They keep throwing buckets of money at acute health services, but what do we throw at primary health? Less than 5 per cent of our budget.

If we can deal with this, over time we would see a reduction in pressure on these acute health services. However, no government is willing to bite the bullet - this is federal as well state - to fully invest in the front end because it takes time to see the result, many years in some cases.

The interaction between the conditions and medications that may be needed to treat these people with the chronic conditions, noting that almost 50 per cent of people living in rural and regional Tasmania have three or more chronic health conditions, also adds time to their care to ensure a patient is getting the best possible care.

The Medicare Benefits Schedule does not recognise this additional burden which is much greater in the rural and regional areas. The Medicare Benefits Schedule is the same, whether you are in an urban practice or a rural practice, and it clearly does not work that way.

It is noted in the report that unless specific action is taken, health outcomes, including mental health outcomes for Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas, are likely to keep getting worse. It is already worse than everybody else. It will get even worse. Are we happy to accept that? I hope none of us is and I hope the Government certainly is not.

I am sure all of us in this place fully appreciate the need for a trauma-informed approach to care in all areas. The committee received evidence related to this matter and particularly

with regard to the provision of mental health care. It is also important for us to raise community awareness of the importance of trauma-informed care, as well as encouraging the delivery of trauma-informed services. Both aspects are integral to improving health outcomes for all Tasmanians.

A key finding of related recommendations relates to the availability of integrated and multidisciplinary healthcare services. Integrated and multidisciplinary healthcare services are important parts of overcoming access barriers. These services require an approach that is informed by local community needs. We heard in our debate earlier today with the Men's Sheds, every community is different. Every community has different needs and if you want to look at how to structure health services in a community, you have to look at the community, and talk to the community. You have to see what the community needs. You cannot assume what will work in one part of Tasmania, particularly an urban setting, will be the same as what is needed in a rural or regional part of Tasmania. It most likely is not, and you may have services that are under-utilised, and then massive gaps in the areas that actually need care.

Local community needs also include the needs of cohorts within any particular community. We all know that the healthcare needs on King and Flinders islands, for example, will be different than the needs in the west coast or east coast communities. We know, on King Island for example, people are generally better off. Everyone is pretty much employed with two or three jobs; generally, that comes with better education access. They are not living in poverty and so, their healthcare needs will be different than the general west coast community, where we do not see that.

The decision as to what integrated and multi-healthcare services are put into a community, or included in a community, requires an approach that is informed by local community needs, and local community engagement that is focused on the community and led by the community. Individuals and groups within those communities that are culturally and linguistically diverse, or members of the LGBTIQ+ community, or those who have experience of a disability and so on, will often have additional challenges in seeking and accessing health care. On top of the community consultation and engagement in terms of what services need to be where, you also need to dig a bit deeper into some of the specific needs within a community.

These groups of communities within a community also need to be included in the determination of what a community-centred approach will look like. To address the inequity in health outcomes for Tasmanians living in rural and remote areas, the committee found a holistic, intergenerational wellbeing approach to the delivery of health services is essential. When you have intergenerational factors, that is when you need to talk about taking an intergenerational approach. You have intergenerational poverty, intergenerational family smoking and, perhaps, other unhealthy activities that, unless we directly -

Mr Willie - Intergenerational poor educational attainment.

Ms FORREST - Yes, poor education attainment and lack of engagement with education generally. All of those things will have a negative impact on the health outcomes of that community. Unless you look at some of those intergenerational factors, you will not necessarily fully address them. For those with an interest in understanding more fully the extent of the challenge in ensuring all Tasmanians have equity of access to quality health care and similar health outcomes, the committee and I encourage further reading of the submissions and

transcripts of evidence that are contained in the report. The rest of them are all published on the committee website.

The committee heard significant evidence of barriers to access of timely care throughout rural and regional Tasmania. The overarching themes related to these barriers include workforce shortages and recruitment challenges - and I keep hearing from around my community, and I am sure it is the same in other rural and regional areas, about the number of unfilled positions in some of these areas in our health workforce. I am not suggesting it is easy, by any stretch, at the moment; there is a lot of demand. However, you have to look at why that is, what are the underlying factors that are contributing to our workforce shortage? The inability of some health professionals to work across the full scope of practice for which they are qualified. This is the beauty of having a committee of inquiry, because some of these things sharpen the focus of the government of the day and they address some of these things. For example, we saw legislation brought into this place during the year to basically remove any restrictions for paramedics to enable them to work in settings outside of Ambulance Tasmania; and we are seeing a slightly greater focus on nurse practitioners and expanding their role.

There was a recent announcement around dealing with the massive outpatient clinic waiting list and extraordinarily long waiting times by using nurse-led clinics. Some things do, perhaps, resonate. Some will say they were happening anyway; maybe they were, maybe they were not - but certainly, it helps to focus the attention.

One of the other themes included the inability of some health professionals to work across the full scope of practice for which they are qualified. This is an ongoing challenge, to ensure that we fully utilise the health workforce we have. If you have health professionals who are qualified and able to work in an area where they are perhaps limited because of some other barrier, then we are not doing the best we can. There are mechanisms and back stories to all of that that need to be addressed. Some of them are a federal government responsibility, some of them are state; but we need to make sure that we remove any of those barriers that falsely prevent health professionals across the whole gamut of health professions to work fully across their scope of practice. I am not suggesting for a second here, and nor did the committee, that we encourage people to work outside of their scope of practice. That is not what we are saying. We heard there were limitations on a number of health professionals to work across the full scope for which they were qualified.

Particularly in rural and regional Tasmania, there is a lack of integrated, community-centred, multidisciplinary care. The previous comment I made feeds straight into this. If you are going to fully utilise your health workforce and you do it in a multidisciplinary community-centred centre, you will get better health outcomes and more access to care because it will be targeted to the needs of the particular community - which varies around the state - and you will have a range of health services there. You are then not just using your GP to do things that a GP can do, because they are qualified to do a lot, but there are other people in the health professions that can do some of that care. You use the skills you have to free up those to maximise their capacity to work to the top of their scope and across their full scope as well.

We also heard of inflexible funding and employment arrangements, which make it difficult for some of our doctors - particularly GPs - to work across a range of areas, like working in a hospital in the ED, as a rural generalist, but also working in private practice. There were some barriers that are described in the report around that.

As you will see in the recommendations, a lot of this requires collaborative work between the state and federal governments to address them. It is not just a state government problem. When we started looking at rural and regional health, we knew that much of it is the responsibility of the federal government.

As noted in the report, a one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the health needs of rural and regional communities, nor will it enhance the recruitment and retention of health practitioners to rural and regional Tasmania. Whilst not a new problem, and perhaps one that is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, high staff turnovers and a reliance on locums to deliver health services in rural and regional areas limit access to continuity of care and the positive health outcomes associated with continuity and timely access to care.

We constantly hear, and I am sure any member in a rural electorate will understand, that people find it very difficult to have to tell their health story - which can be quite complicated - time and again to each new locum who turns up. That is when mistakes are made. That is when medications are changed without, necessarily, full consideration of all the other factors that a GP who has provided continuity of care would have understood of that person. They probably understand their social circumstance, they may understand their other family challenges, because they are part of that community. You do not get that with locums. Whilst locums form a very important part of our health service, they should not be relied upon. They should be a stopgap, or a fill-in, if you like, for allowing that health professional to undergo professional development or take a break, like annual leave. There should not be a revolving door of locums. If that is occurring, we are not delivering the best health care we can over a period of time.

The findings in this report clearly articulate the underlying challenges that contribute to poorer health outcomes. I note the Government and Department of Health have been working to deliver some alternative and innovative models of care with some success, particularly in the mental health space; and the committee did acknowledge that. For example, this includes the Police, Ambulance and Clinician Emergency Response (PACER) service, which has been implemented in southern Tasmania to support people experiencing mental ill health, with a community-based response to avoid acute care admission. That is a positive thing. The last place a person with a subacute or acute mental health experience needs to be is in an emergency department of a major hospital. It is the absolute worst place for them. This has been an effective model and due to the success of PACER, it is now being expanded statewide, first up in the north-west and then going to the north at some later time. The Leader may refer more to that.

This success reinforces the need for innovation across a broad range of healthcare services. These types of healthcare delivery models need to be considered across all areas of health care, and how we could do things differently is important. In all areas of our care, how do we promote hospital avoidance and improve patient outcomes at the same time? For most people, hospital is not the right place for them. However, for some, that is where they end up because of lack of other opportunity and services.

There is a growing recognition that the capacity for health professionals to work across their full scope of practice is crucial to effective delivery of health services particularly in rural and regional areas.

Failure to facilitate this results in the lack of full utilisation and deployment of the human resources and skills available to meet community needs. I think this is changing. In the past we have had professional turf wars. Everyone understands what professional turf wars are and look like and these have limited the full utilisation of the skills a range of health professionals have. Thankfully we are seeing a reduction of this resistance because people have seen the benefits of working together across available resources and we know when we do that, we do get a better outcome.

Having pharmacists in GP surgeries. Having pharmacists in emergency departments to prevent medication errors in the acute sector. Enabling pharmacists to do more in their practices with vaccination and other care. However, where they are providing some of that care, pharmacists do not get remunerated for it and that is a problem. It is a federal government matter, but it adds to the whole picture.

The professional turf war is reducing. Everyone is seeing that if we do not all work together, we are not going to make any difference to the very real challenges we face.

Professionals including paramedics, nurses and nurse practitioners, pharmacists and allied health professionals have a vast range of knowledge and skills that can complement and not compete with medical care or each other. Working together will create better health outcomes and will lead to a much better utilisation of what are pretty scarce human resources.

The committee found nurse practitioner and paramedic practitioner workforces are not as broadly utilised in Tasmania as in some other jurisdictions. There has been much more work done in other parts. We even talked to people in New Zealand about their use of nurse practitioners, which is more advanced than ours. It would be wise to look at other states and other jurisdictions, like New Zealand, where they have actually progressed this much more quickly than we have.

An expansion of these roles should be progressed to support the health workforce, particularly in rural and regional Tasmania. The report provides significant evidence of these matters and describes models where broadly utilisation of all available health care professionals, across a whole scope of practice, reduces workload pressures and can improve timely access to care and thus patient outcomes.

The expansion of pathways for general practitioners, such as rural generalist, are recognised as vital to health and wellbeing of Tasmanians in rural and regional Tasmania.

We need to remember and remind ourselves that general practitioners are specialists. People talk about getting a referral to your specialist from your GP. Your GP is a specialist. Rural generalists who are GPs who also have another level of a qualification on top of their general practice qualification can also hold their own in an emergency department. They have emergency department skills as well general practice skills. General practitioners deal with everything that walks in the door. They do it in a place where they do not have backup to the same degree a person in the emergency department has. They are having to make decisions about whoever person presents to them with whatever condition they have. If that person is unable to communicate very well, they have to try to figure out what could be underlying that.

I recently went to the Rural Health Conference and to a session about rural generalism and the role in emergency departments. They did a few case scenarios. Imagine what came

back to me? We were working in pairs and I was working with a wonderful GP from a very rural and regional practice. We discussed these case scenarios that were put to us and it reminded me how difficult it is when you have limited facts. You have a person who fronts up with what might appear to be not a huge range of obvious issues and you are trying to find out what is wrong with this person. They are obviously not well, but what could it be?

We are often quick to criticise health professionals when they do not get it right the first time. Where you can have someone present with apparently normal, say, an ECG that subsequently changes and you have looked at the first one and not the second one until perhaps a little bit later and things have happened in the interim - we need to cut health practitioners a bit of slack sometimes and work with them.

It is important to recognise the very important contribution general practitioners make to our community and the expansion into rural generalism is a positive thing for this state. It has a while to get there. This training is based at the Mersey Community Hospital and it will be a valuable part of our response to this. Rural generalism has demonstrated benefits related to the delivery of timely and accessible health care in many parts of Australia in rural and regional areas.

The Rural Generalist program initiated at the Mersey Community Hospital is still relatively new, but an important aspect of improving rural and regional medical workforce issues. I commend the Government for their work on this and encourage ongoing support and expansion, that is both federal and state.

It is of particular note that other professionals, including nurse practitioners, paramedics, pharmacists and other allied health professionals faced limitations on the full utilisation of their skills within the health workforce.

It is important to remember that paramedics are the only health professional who are trained to work in the community. Nurses are trained to work in hospitals. They may go there to work as a community nurse, for example, but paramedics are trained not to work in hospitals but to work in the community. Yes, they have an ambulance to back them up with a lot of equipment but they are trained to work in the community. They are also professionals who turn up to whatever they are called to not knowing exactly what they will have when they arrive. Sometimes, the description of the person who has made the call may be less than helpful but at least they have called them.

The full utilisation of the available workforce is particularly important and this needs to be fully progressed by the government - both state and federal.

The committee, through this report and the evidence that sits behind it, urges the state Government to identify and remove any other barriers relating to legislative limitations, employment arrangements and education and training across identified areas of workforce shortage. You will see in the report there is quite a list of workforce shortage areas. You can just about choose any of them.

Mr President, this includes real and serious consideration of policies - such as was recently announced by the Victorian Government to fund the Higher Education Contribution Scheme or HECS costs of nursing and midwifery undergraduate students and to provide scholarships for postgraduate studies in areas of need, including intensive care, cancer care,

paediatrics and nurse practitioner specialties. That is in Victoria, and the committee recommended the state Government considers such an approach, particularly where we have large areas of identified need and particularly because we know that graduates in health - particularly nurses and nurse practitioners and others who we educate and train in the state - if they are educated and trained in Tasmania, they are more likely to remain and work within the Tasmanian Health Service post graduation, provided we pay them a commensurate wage. There is that.

As a committee, we agreed a similar approach to support the training and education of health professionals in other areas of identified work shortages, including nurse practitioners, paramedics and allied health professionals should also be considered for subsidised education and training. We heard time after time that we cannot get occupational therapists and the importance of occupational therapists. We cannot get social workers and the importance of social workers, and others like physiotherapists. Some of them are not trained currently in the state, but UTAS has actually introduced some allied health programs into their offerings now, which is great. Where there are real areas of shortage, let us talk about it. How do we make it easier for people to get into these?

There are probably some great people who would love to work in those areas but they cannot afford the HECS fee, particularly if they are adult students or mature age students. Most students are probably adult by the time they get to there. Let us look at how we can encourage and facilitate that because the cost of not having them is greater than the cost of providing the HECS relief.

Whilst the Government has strategies related to the delivery of health care in Tasmania, the committee also recommends the adoption of a long-term strategy specifically focusing on the poorer health outcomes experienced by Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas.

This strategy, and we do note the other strategy that the Department of Health has, and what we are saying here is that it needs to have a particular focus on Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas, because there is a difference. If you do not look at that difference and focus on it, it gets swept into the overall figures, which gives a very unclear and inaccurate picture of the health outcomes for Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas.

The committee felt this strategy should take a person-centred holistic approach with a particular focus on preventive health and wellbeing that considers and responds to intergenerational factors, as I referred to earlier. As with any strategy, it is essential that the Government monitors, measures and reports the progress of health outcomes against both the recommended long-term strategy focused on Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas as well as all existing Department of Health strategies. Improving outcomes should be the priority in reviewing those.

One of the frustrations for those working in primary health, especially in rural and regional areas, is the reality that only a very small percentage of the overall health budget is allocated to this area. I did allude to that earlier. It is also important to note - and not forget - that the Australian Government is primarily responsible for funding general practice and primary health care. Despite this, the committee received evidence that the Tasmanian Government, and to a lesser degree, local government, have stepped in to provide some services to rural and regional Tasmania where services that should be funded by the Australian Government have not met the health needs of the community or they have failed. Whilst

I commend the Government - and this is laudable of the state Government to do this - it does not ultimately address the underlying problem and is effectively a bandaid solution. Whilst I thank them for doing that, this cannot be the long-term solution.

Many general practices in rural and regional Tasmania no longer offer bulk-billing of GP care. This is predominantly because the current Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) rebates are insufficient to provide financial sustainability for many rural and regional general practices. General practice is a business after all. They are in the business of providing care to people, but you have to run the business; you have overheads, you have the staff, the administrative staff; you have practice nurses who do not attract an MBS rebate. So, if the Medicare Benefits Schedule is not making it financially viable, why would they do it?

After years of training, why would they continue to do it in that sort of setting? This is compounded by the complexity of the patient's health status. The lack of access to GPs in many areas creates longer waiting times to receive care and the greater deterioration of the health of the patient as they wait to access care. This lack of access to Medicare provider numbers for general practice nurses and thus the capacity to fund essential health care provided by them has resulted in inadequate funding to cover administrative costs associated with operating many of our rural and regional general practices. Anyone who lives in a rural or regional area, when you go to your GP and have a chat about this, they will tell you. My general practice visits usually are taken up by quite a discussion about these things after we have dealt with whatever I am there for and I am quite happy to talk about it with them. I am not charged double. My consultation is usually as long as a double appointment, but I usually only get charged for the one because most of my issues are dealt with in that short time.

A GP practice that is expected to revolve around a six-minute consultation simply is not viable or even realistic in a rural setting and that is how it is designed to work.

I am sure any of us who visit general practices where practice nurses work as well - who do not get any remuneration other than what the whole practice can provide to them - would know the enormous and important role they play as part of the healthcare team in a general practice. This could be addressed by appropriate remuneration of practice nurses for the work they do within their scope that frees up the GP to focus on the medical issues that they are qualified to treat.

In the practice I go to, practice nurses are flat out the whole time and they provide a lot of the care that I go there for. This lack of financial support has contributed to the reduction of bulk-billing of patients attending general practices in rural and regional Tasmania. This is where the rubber hits the road. Without bulk-billing, the impact of the financial burden for those patients can, and does, further delay seeking care, resulting in more complex health conditions when care is sought. The alternative option for these patients is that they may attend the local hospital to avoid out-of-pocket expenses.

These factors contribute to the inequity of access to timely health care; they contribute to financial hardship for patients and families; they contribute to poorer health outcomes and an avoidable increase in demand on our acute health services. As the Australian Government is responsible for funding of the majority of primary health care provided in rural and regional Tasmania, the challenge is related to the inadequacy of the Medicare Benefits Schedule and the impact of the Modified Monash Model and thus the cauterisation of many GP practices in rural

and regional areas of Tasmania. This highlights the need for ongoing collaboration between the state and Australian governments and I would suggest, direct lobbying to try to address this.

A collaborative and innovative approach that is community-informed is needed to address poorer health outcomes and access barriers and to meet specific needs of Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas. In this area, the committee recommends the Tasmanian government continues to seek adequate funding to meet the needs of rural and regional Tasmanians, including lobbying for a dedicated rural health fund. I want to repeat that because this is something that could really make a difference.

If there was a rural health fund - this is predominantly from the Commonwealth and I am asking the state to really work on achieving this - that could be dedicated to dealing with and addressing these inequities of access, barriers to care and the inequities in health outcomes, that is what we need. A dedicated health fund or a single-funded model, where the Commonwealth gives us the money and the state - as long as there is some dedicated to rural and regional services - delivers the primary health care as well. I do not know how many years we have been talking about the dual funding model and how problematic that is. It has been ever since I have been in this place. I think someone really needs to have it. We do not want the federal government running our hospitals, we absolutely do not want that. The state runs services; the state runs hospitals but they can provide the funding to do it, particularly the rural and regional health care.

A dedicated rural health fund would go some way, not all the way, but some way to ensuring that the very real inequity of access and much poorer health outcomes for rural and regionally based Tasmanians could help close that gap. I expect many of us would have seen recent media coverage regarding the Medicare Benefits Schedule and alleged misuse. That is a matter that will be investigated more fully, no doubt, but I know that there are very real challenges in the way the Medicare Benefits Scheduling currently works - or does not work - for rural and regional general practice.

The MBS did have a review, it was commenced in 2015 and was completed in 2020. We had a look at the size and scale of that and it was enormous. It resulted in many reports and recommendations, too many to sit through for the committee. It was impossible to tell what had been implemented and what had not because there was a report for every section of the process.

However, the committee believes these reports and recommendations should be examined to ensure MBS rebates are fit for purpose and meet the increasing and unique needs of rural and regional Tasmanians. If funding gaps continue to persist and the needs of rural and regional Tasmanians are not adequately met, the Tasmanian Government should encourage further review of the MPS-related barriers to workable health care in rural and regional Tasmania.

That needs to happen anyway because a one-size-fits-all approach to the MBS does not work. It might work in an urban clinic like in Melbourne and Sydney where you can ram through six-minute appointments and get the outcomes you need for those patients, but you cannot do it in a rural and regional setting. People are often too sick and have too many complex health conditions to do that.

I noted the additional challenge for healthcare workers and service due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as with all major challenges, different ways of doing things can emerge and some of these should be maintained to assist timely access to care. For example, a number of healthcare innovations - such as expansion of digital health services and expansion of the scope of practice for some healthcare professionals in response to the COVID-19 pandemic - should be maintained to promote timely access to care and vaccinations beyond the COVID-19 emergency response.

This report contains comprehensive evidence, clearly describing the inequity related to the lack of access to care and the resultant poor health outcomes faced by Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas. The evidence is captured in the findings of the committee and they were consolidated, and I have spoken about most of those in broad terms.

There are a number of findings that I have not mentioned here. They are all equally important and I urge the Government and policymakers to consider and reflect on each one of those. The findings are organised into key themes and contain a succinct summary of the evidence.

Before concluding, I will refer to our recommendations. The recommendations have been consolidated to ensure action taken to address barriers to health care, timeliness of access, equity of access with a focus on improving health care and health outcomes for all Tasmanians. Clearly, there are marginalised groups within those communities that experience even greater barriers, access issues and poorer health outcomes. Actions taken as a result of these recommendations need to ensure the additional needs of specific communities, often within communities, are considered as part of that action, and require deep and meaningful community engagement to achieve.

The committee made 13 comprehensive and inclusive recommendations to the Government, and I will briefly comment on each one. The first one is to adopt a long-term strategy to address the poorer health outcomes experienced by Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas, with a particular focus on preventative health and wellbeing; a person-centred and holistic approach; local community health needs; intergenerational factors; removing access barriers; and the delivery of trauma-informed care. The Government should monitor, measure and report health outcomes and progress against this strategy.

I have spoken about this previously. It is about monitoring these aspects, but reporting against it - with an additional focus on Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas. As we have seen from the evidence, having a statewide summation of the data does not paint a true picture.

The second recommendation was that the Government works with the Australian Government to establish collaborative and innovative funding models to meet the specific needs of individuals living in rural and regional areas. I mentioned this previously, particularly the consideration of a dedicated rural health fund; active support of multidisciplinary models of care; and avoidance of duplication of services and/or costs in areas where health services attract both Tasmanian and Australian government funding. This is where we can see double ups, gaps and less efficient use of the available funding.

Number three: to take an evidence-based approach to identify health care needs in rural and regional Tasmania and strongly advocate for additional Australian Government funding to support the delivery of viable primary health services.

It is, after all, the Commonwealth's job but the way it is working at the moment - these primary health services like GP practices are not going to continue to be viable. That is why we have seen some close in our regional areas. Also, the additional funding to deliver community-centred alternative models of care and that includes multidisciplinary centres and other models such as PACER. That was a state government initiative. To support the recruitment and retention of primary health care providers: this is where the federal government can be involved but also the state Government, in supporting the HECs fees of some of our identified levels of workforce shortages and, importantly, avoiding shifting of costs and responsibility for these services to the Tasmanian Government.

I have spoken to the minister and Premier about this a number of times. The Australian Government should be funding these things but we are being almost forced to step in because, as a state government, you want people to have access to services. Hopefully, we will have a better response from the current federal government.

The fourth one: monitor, measure and report health outcomes to Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas against the Department of Health Strategic Priorities 2021-23. I have referred to that one already, in the first recommendation; to adopt a strategic approach to deliver integrated, multidisciplinary models of care, including mental health services that are community-centred and specific, support health practitioners to work collaboratively, include the delivery of after-hours care, and do not rely on a fee for service. I have covered those in my contribution as being the important things that will make a difference and they should be a focus of the Government.

In collaboration with the Australian Government - there is a lot of crossover here - address barriers preventing the full utilisation of the workforce. I will cover that in fair detail, particularly looking at any relevant legislation that may create legislative barriers; employment arrangements; funding arrangements; and ensuring that the scope of practice with regard to all health professionals is that people are able to work across their full scope. That includes nurse practitioners - noting that a nurse practitioner has an identified scope within their practice; rural generalists; and paramedics, including paramedic practitioners; and pharmacists.

Recommendation 7 was that, where appropriate, the Tasmanian Health Service adopt a single employer model that encompasses hospital, rural generalist and general practice services. I alluded to this, in that if a GP is working in general practice, working as a rural generalist and thus employed in the hospital as well, they have different employers. That makes it even more difficult. That could be addressed with collaboration with the federal government.

As I have mentioned, we continually need to advocate and work to ensure the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) supports the financial viability of rural and regional general practices. That is outlined in recommendation eight, and I have described what that looks like.

Recommendation 9 - to address specific workforce shortages in rural and regional Tasmania. That includes updating the Health Workforce 2040 strategy, which is an ongoing work - and making sure there is a focus on rural and regional areas, not just Tasmania as a

whole - to develop flexible working arrangements to enhance worker retention, including an adequate time away from active duty; guaranteed peer support; and access to continuous professional development. You have to have so many hours of CPD, depending on your profession, to maintain your registration and licence to practice. We visited some of the hospitals around the state - the rural and regional hospitals and health centres - prior to commencing the inquiry. We went to St Marys where there is one GP. What happens if he is sick? What happens if his kids are unwell? What happens? There is no doctor to cover the hospital there. He needs time off, he needs a break. We know what can happen to people who do not take a break and burn out.

Ms Rattray - Even if they cannot take a break, you will recall what happened to Dr McGinity. He was struggling to be able to take a break.

Ms FORREST - Yes, single practices are no longer the way to go. That is the point here. Consider alternative models of funding and remuneration of health professionals in areas of high workforce shortage; address any career pathway limitations; and work collaboratively with UTAS, TasTAFE or other registered training authorities to identify and address key areas of workforce shortages. If you look at the list, there are 13. Take your pick. There are workforce shortages everywhere in health.

Recommendation 10: to actively consider funding the Higher Education Contribution Scheme costs of nursing, midwifery and allied health undergraduate students; and provide scholarships for postgraduate studies, including nurse practitioner specialties and allied health professionals, in areas of identified workforce shortage.

That is broader than what the Victorian Government announced a while ago, but we have much greater challenges in our rural and regional areas in accessing allied health and other professionals beyond nurses and midwives.

Recommendation 11: work with the federal government to improve access to digital health care in rural and regional Tasmania. Digital health is a very important part of the future; but where you do not have good internet connection or you do not have the set-up in a rural hospital to have cameras over the bed in the emergency or urgent care rooms, that can then be linked back to a specialist in some other place - it could be Hobart, Launceston, Melbourne, it does not matter where they are - that can observe the patient and what is going on in live time, then you may not get the best outcome you could for that patient. So, we need to support our doctors and health professionals who choose to work for us in our regions, by making sure they have good equipment and good connectivity. Then we need to help the communities in rural and regional Tasmania, who have low levels of digital literacy, to also be able to engage with and use it.

That is a big body of work that requires social as well as physical infrastructure; but it will make a significant difference. We also need to ensure communications related to the availability of health services in rural or regional areas are clear, contemporary and accessible. Sadly, some of the websites are not kept up to date and people find it hard to find out where they can access services. It is a pretty simple thing but it would make a difference.

The last recommendation was to consider the employment of health systems navigators, particularly in rural and regional Tasmania, to assist individuals and families to find and engage with appropriate health professionals and services. Mr President, any of you who have helped

someone navigate a health system - as I did with my elderly parents a number of times - know how difficult it must be for people who do not know the system, or who to go to next, or how to access care, or where they can get a particular service, or do not know how to argue the point about a particular decision that might be suggested or made.

I see a role here, perhaps for retired nurses and other health professionals who may wish to assist patients to know where to go next to get reliable, accurate information - not necessarily information from the neighbour or the person at the post office who might think they know best, and that may send them off in a path that does not help them in a timely manner.

I know I have said a lot about it, but it is a big report and it is very important. I acknowledge that a number of actions have been taken by the Tasmanian Government in response to growing demand in health care. I am not saying otherwise; and it is an ongoing challenge with demand continuing to grow. This is particularly the case in rural and regional areas.

We know that initiating an inquiry into matters can help focus the attention of Government and we look forward to the Leader's response on behalf of the Government as to what is being done during, and since the work of the committee commenced, as well as the plans for the future. However, the evidence is clear: a dedicated focus on and direct action to address the lived experience of Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas who, at times, face insurmountable barriers to access timely and quality health care, must be a priority. As I noted earlier, without specific and targeted urgent action, the comparatively poorer health outcomes and mental health outcomes for those Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas is likely to get worse, and Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas deserve better.

[3.38 p.m.]

Ms LOVELL (Rumney) - Mr President, I will not revisit much of what the member for Murchison has read because she has gone through that in a great amount of detail. I thank her for that, and wholeheartedly endorse those comments. I acknowledge the process, the report and the members of the committee.

I thank all those who gave evidence to the committee. It was extensive. There were 81 written submissions. We also heard extensive evidence through about 14 or 15 days of hearings - many of those were from people who were from interstate and even overseas. We had a lot of Webex hearings; we went around the state. It was a somewhat unconventional committee of inquiry. We had two prorogations and a suspension of parliament to deal with. However, that did allow us to take our time with this, and that has worked to the benefit of everyone who will read the report and, indeed, the Government - should they pay attention to those recommendations - because it allowed us to hear from a great number of people who we might not otherwise have heard from and to take our time considering all the evidence that was put to the committee. I thank everyone who put in a submission and appeared at a hearing and gave evidence in any form.

I acknowledge the former member for Huon, Dr Bastian Seidel, who was the member who instigated this committee of inquiry. I know that this is a real passion of Bastian's and I remember when he came to me and said, 'I would like to propose the committee of inquiry, what do you think?' Anyone who knows Bastian knows that his passion for rural health is second to none. You only need to look at the steps he has taken within his own practice in the Huon Valley and indeed now the practice he is working within to bring in innovative ways of

providing that health service to his community, to know how important this is to him and what a passion it is for him. I was happy to support that, as were the other members of the committee, because we all recognised not only was this something Bastian was passionate about, but it was something of critical importance to the community and Tasmania. Something that deserved that interrogation and a good look. I wanted to acknowledge Bastian and thank him for instigating this committee of inquiry.

I also acknowledge the members of the subcommittee, the member for Mersey and the member for Windermere. We spent many hours deliberating over this report and the evidence. This is actually one of the committees I have been on that I have enjoyed the most. There was a real diversity of views around the table and in the evidence that we heard. I appreciated the way the committee took those different views into consideration and were able to have robust and respectful discussions to reach a point where we were able to write a report, agree on that report and those recommendations. I wanted to acknowledge that because I enjoyed this committee, I loved being part of it. I know you look surprised.

Ms Rattray - I was thinking back to the TasWater inquiry.

Ms LOVELL - Another excellent inquiry I was a part of. I have been very lucky.

Mr PRESIDENT - That is why I was looking surprised.

Ms LOVELL - I thank the member for Murchison also for the work she put in as Chair of the inquiry, because I know there was an enormous amount of work involved in writing the report and wrangling the committee at various times. The member did an excellent job of that and that is evident in the report and the recommendations. Also, our secretary Jenny Mannering who provided incredible secretariat support to us throughout the whole process.

Ms Forrest - The ever-patient Jenny Mannering.

Ms LOVELL - We very much appreciate her and her work. It is an extensive report and the member for Murchison has spoken at length about the detail of the report. There are a number of recommendations there for the Government to consider.

For those members who have a chance to read the report, I understand that it is extensive, it does go into details about the health challenges facing those Tasmanians living in rural and regional parts of our state, and those challenges can be confronting. A lot of those experiences can be very confronting. There were times on that committee after hearing evidence we had to take a moment and think, this is people's lives we are talking about and personal stuff they are sharing with us. We all felt the weight of that through that process. However, it should be confronting because we are talking about people's lives, health and dignity and the bottom line is, people's lives are at risk when we are talking about the access to health services. That is something we were all in agreement on.

There are complexities in the health system, we all know that. It is one of the most complex systems we deal with in the state and certainly in the country. There are complexities on scope of practice and who should be responsible for delivering which services, who should be allowed to do what. Even today, there were conversations around that this morning on radio on extending scope of practice to pharmacists to enable them to provide prescriptions and vaccinations and things they have been allowed to do at various times.

Ms Rattray - The New South Wales proposed model was going to include a bigger variety of options for pharmacists to undertake.

Ms LOVELL - Exactly right. I know there are some people who approach that with a sense of reluctance. There are complexities around funding and there are different levels of responsibility for funding different parts of the system.

None of us is pretending this is not a complex issue, but at the end of the day while we are having these conversations about who is responsible for what and who should be doing what and who should be allowed to do what, people die, that is the bottom line. If people cannot access the health services they need, people die and there are people in Tasmania who are dying because they cannot access the health care they need. At some point, we have to stop, take a step back and ask, what is really important here?

The solutions are there. That is clear in the report and certainly clear from the extensive evidence we heard from people right around the country. There are solutions there ready to be embraced. They only need to be embraced and put into place. We can improve people's access to health care in rural and regional Tasmania, if we only start to look at some of those solutions and think about things differently than we may have thought about things in the past.

We were very careful in our recommendations to ensure what we were recommending were things that the Government could do. I sincerely hope the Government do pay close attention to this report, because the system is not working and we have to do something. We heard some heartbreaking stories from people. I know that each of us hear those stories every day and those members in this place who represent those rural and regional communities probably hear them more than any of us. Things are not working, people are suffering and we have to do better.

Finally, I thank those people who gave evidence to the committee and shared those really personal stories. Something that has always struck me about health in the various times when I have been talking to people about health systems and what needs to be done, is the real unlimited generosity of people with their time, knowledge, experience and their willingness to share personal stories. Hours of their time preparing submissions, sitting in hearings, giving us evidence because they know how important this is. That is something most people - if you have had anything to do with particularly people working in the health system, they are so willing to share with anyone who might listen, because they know the solutions are there and they only want to be heard. I thank people for their generosity in both their time and knowledge and what they shared with us through this inquiry process.

The solutions are there, they need to be embraced. We might need to think about things a little differently than we have done in the past, but there is nothing stopping us from doing that. I sincerely hope the Government reads the report and pays attention to those recommendations, and I note the report.

[3.48 p.m.]

Mr DUIGAN (Windermere) - It is a great pleasure for me to speak to the report. I, like the member for Rumney, will not go through it line by line, as the member for Murchison, the Chair, has done a great job of that. I concur with many of the remarks that have been made.

It was a great pleasure for me to be part of the committee and to hear from service providers across the state and the country with regard to how they provide services to rural and regional communities in Tasmania. This was my first encounter with the committee system and my first inquiry I have taken part in. I take this opportunity to thank members of the committee for their patience, guidance and a special mention to the member for Murchison for her work as Chair in guiding me through the relatively detailed -

Ms Forrest - A very valuable member of our committee. I often said that.

Mr DUIGAN - In case members are not aware, the member has a background in the medical field and is quite knowledgeable in some aspects and it was great to have her on board.

Ms Forrest - That does not mean I know everything.

Mrs Hiscutt - Did you find your first committee a pleasurable experience?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, eminently.

Ms Rattray - He did not have the privilege of being on the TasWater inquiry.

Mr DUIGAN - No, it was good and I have learned a great deal about the Tasmanian health system, that is fair to say. I also extend my thanks to the secretary, Jenny Mannering, who did an extraordinary job, and also to those groups and individuals who made submissions and came in and gave evidence to the committee. It is difficult to develop an understanding of the issues without hearing the firsthand experiences of those who are at the coalface. I add my thanks to those people who are out there today and tomorrow, delivering health care in Tasmania's rural and regional areas. It is an important job.

There were some common themes that emerged during the course of the committee hearings. Our diverse population spread, being one; workforce recruitment and retention challenges; scope of practice constraints. However, the challenges relating to access to primary health and the inadequacies of Medicare were key parts of many of the discussions we had with those who appeared before the committee. Timely and affordable access to care in our regions is a clear and growing problem and has flow-on effects through the Tasmanian health system.

Primary health and Medicare are basically the responsibility of the federal government. However, the Tasmanian Government has begun to step into the primary health care space because primary health, as the name suggests, is the foundation stone of good health care, not only in rural settings but the health system more generally.

In terms of general practitioners, I am sure many members have constituents who are struggling to gain an appointment with a GP. That problem only gets worse in rural and remote areas of Tasmania, with the notable exception of Flinders Island, which has three GPs at the moment, so it is ticking along nicely.

Ms Rattray - Punching above our weight.

Mr DUIGAN - Well, you can get in to see the doctor, which is very good. Notwithstanding Flinders Island, this is why the Premier recently announced a vision for reforms to primary health that is all about ensuring the community has better access to primary

care. The Tasmanian Government is engaging with the federal government on a new and innovative model for the provision of GP services in Tasmania. In view of this report, it is important to note that any pilot program will be focused on rural and remote areas where we have seen all too often that providing sustainable GP services is difficult.

This issue is not isolated to Tasmania, so it is pleasing to note that the state Government has committed \$4.3 million towards the establishment of the Rural Medical Workforce Centre at the Mersey Community Hospital, which includes capital work and funding to support the recruitment and retention of permanent doctors for the region. The 2022-23 state Budget commits a further \$1 million of ongoing funding to this important work.

As mentioned, given primary health care is a key element of the health system, it was somewhat disappointing to see in the October federal budget that there was no major reform to Medicare. That is not anything new from budgets of recent times. No-one has been able to grapple with that very difficult issue. The committee heard that Medicare does not reflect the increasing costs of delivering primary care services and the October federal budget does not provide the needed increases to those Medicare rebates to put GP services on a sustainable footing.

The biggest challenge in health for Tasmanians is access to an affordable general practitioner and we know that all jurisdictions are experiencing a dire situation in respect of the sustainability of general practice. As a result of that predicament, we are seeing consistently high and increasing demand on our state-delivered health services in our hospitals, through our ambulance services, in our emergency departments.

In response to this demand, in August, Ambulance Tasmania deployed nine community paramedics across the state to care for patients who present with minor illness or injury at their call-out location. This has the effect of freeing up ambulances to deal with urgent calls more quickly. Since starting, Ambulance Tasmania's new community paramedics have attended more than 570 cases across Tasmania, with a high percentage of these patients receiving appropriate care in the community and not requiring a trip to the hospital.

Ms Forrest - Paramedics are trained to work in the community. It is an excellent approach.

Mr DUIGAN - Indeed they are. They are perhaps the only healthcare providers trained to deal in the community.

Ms Forrest - They are. They are the only ones. Yes.

Mr DUIGAN - I learned something. While the state Government is committed to continuing to lobby the federal government for further support for primary health care, it is acting where it can. For example, the Government has established an \$8 million GP After Hours Support Initiative offering support for GPs to provide after-hours services and support to their local communities. Funding has already been issued through two funding rounds and the Government recently conducted a third round, seeking proposals with a key focus on supporting vulnerable Tasmanians across the state.

The Tasmanian state Government is being proactive on these issues and we are looking forward to developing innovative solutions to improve service delivery for Tasmanians in rural and regional areas. I very much look forward to the Premier having more to say in this space.

Mr President, I thank the members of the committee for their patience and I note the report.

[3.56 p.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - For those people who may be watching from home, it is a very sizeable report. Like the members from Rumney, Windermere and Murchison, I enjoyed this committee. You learn a lot when you are doing committee work and that is good. I was not on the water and sewerage one but that has followed me for many years. I was pleased I was not on that one.

A few comments as my fellow committee members have covered in great detail the inquiry findings and recommendations. I enjoyed the inquiry and whilst there are obvious challenges and numerous issues, I take it to heart that the health leadership team is working hard to get better outcomes for Tasmanians. I have confidence that the group is looking at ways and means of making the dollar go further. They are looking for better outcomes for those who live in our cities as well - Hobart and Launceston - and for those who reside outside of those areas.

Obviously, there are more issues in areas away from Launceston and Hobart. However, there is a degree of practicality and accountability and a desire to use each dollar effectively. Whilst people might live in Hobart and Launceston, most of those people in Tasmania have relatives and friends who live in the rural and regional areas and they are concerned with their health and wellbeing as well. That is the one good thing about having a small state like Tasmania.

It is also notable that our current Premier, Mr Jeremy Rockliff, also retained the important portfolio of Minister for Health. That is to be acknowledged and I thank him for that. Although there are many areas I feel quite passionate about, it would be wrong of me not to highlight the importance of nurse practitioners. I am not going to repeat some of the information from the member, but it is something that I have been involved with for quite some time now, having given previous speeches in this place. I have attended their annual general meetings; I have spoken at their conferences or their meetings about different aspects. We cannot shy away now from the lack of GPs. For a number of years there was, 'Oh, yes, we are short of GPs'. That is going to happen even more now so when we are saying it is not working the way it is, we have to do something. The member for Rumney was very clear in saying that we have to work more effectively. Everybody recognises that now.

It is interesting to see that the member for Murchison spoke about retired nurses being utilised further. I was very pleased to hear our ambulance drivers and paramedics and the high stress levels they have in those positions - there has to be a way of retaining those people within the health workforce but in a different role. Their experience is too valuable for us to say, 'Well thanks, but there are no more jobs for you'. It is better off to say, 'We know that you are tired now; you are drained in that role; here is something that might suit your capacity and capabilities'. That happens to nurses in all areas, that there is a certain time and energy and charge they have to work in one space. They need to be able to transfer those caring skills and

the knowledge to another space to effectively allow the continuity of professionalism. That is something that will be looked at and I am sure it is being looked at.

I am not going to go over a lot that we have heard but as the member for Murchison noted about nurse practitioners and I will read it in, the late Mr Bill -

Sitting suspended from 4.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

MOTION

Consideration and Noting - Report of the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee A Inquiry into Rural Health Services in Tasmania

Resumed from above.

[4.31 p.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - Mr President. Just to read in, because members have covered it very well, but the late Mr Bill Dermody was a retired nurse and he made the following comment and it was really good. He said:

I spoke with the Secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Association, Queensland Branch and investigated the implementation of nurse practitioners 24/7 in regional hospitals and most regional health centres in all other states. This is the only state where there are no nurse practitioners in regional hospitals 24/7 and in regional health centres and, therefore, people are unable to present. In other states, it has reduced the need for people who are unable to see a GP to have to call an ambulance or attend a major hospital emergency department, because they can be seen by a nurse practitioner.

This is one of the major contributing factors as to why, compared to other states, Tasmania has the worse waiting times in the emergency departments and ambulance ramping. If nurse practitioners were introduced 24/7 at the New Norfolk Hospital, this would present specific challenges there. Also, responding to challenges as they arise and some of the opportunities that we have in front of us, including building our Aboriginal Health workforce. This will mean that when they are not able to see a GP, people can present at the New Norfolk Hospital and a nurse practitioner would be able to diagnose their health issue, then either liaise with the Derwent Valley or Central Highlands Medical Centres, whichever medical centre that they attend; or if necessary, admit the person to the New Norfolk Hospital and intervene with the patient until they are able to liaise with the person's general practitioner or the general practitioner is able to attend to the patient at the hospital.

Nurse practitioners through their training in Tasmania are able to do 99 per cent of what a GP can do.

Now, sometimes we get presented with information that is from the person's own experiences and they reflect and see it the way they see it, that is fine. That is what is good

about committee work, that we get a wide range of submissions. Committees usually invite a different - I am not saying variety but a different cross-section of experiences and professionals so we can have a good rounded assessment of how it is travelling. I put that on the record because it did reinforce a lot of the information we were hearing about nurse practitioners in other places, especially in New Zealand, as was mentioned; especially now in other parts of Queensland, for example. There is a real chance here.

We had representatives from numerous groups mention with positivity the work medical practitioners could do within the Tasmanian health system, particularly in rural and regional Tasmania. The success of the Cygnet practice is well known; however, the unbelievable challenges and workloads, complicated by a number of factors including the Medicare Benefits Schedule issues, the legislative restrictions, misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities, all combine to put extra added pressure and sometimes unnecessary pressure on the NP-coordinated services for the Cygnet Health Service. I say that, because you do not always come across as passionate people as that who would stick it out for the long road. If in that situation, if Kerrie Duggan had not taken up the challenge, that area would not have the substantial health service that it does now. She is always battling to actually keep it there, keep it in a good state for the community. Help me here members, I could be wrong. When she first inherited it, it went down to something like 230 or so clients or patients and now they service about 2000 in that area because of what she has been able to draw in. A lot of the doctors who utilise that building and business do not want to have to worry about the business side of it and, therefore she has filled that gap. She stresses that there is some legislation that means that they cannot work to their full scope of practice.

One she mentioned was the workers compensation form. They can do all the work to fix the person who might come in with a cut finger or whatever, but they cannot sign off on the workers compensation form. That has to be done by a GP. That reflects that the legislation is not keeping pace with the New Zealand situation where they changed seven or eight pieces of legislation back in 2006 or 2007. It took some years for that to happen, but it has enabled their nurse practitioners to now work to their scope. We can learn from our Kiwi neighbours, because they had the same issues on their two islands that we have here; they do not have enough GPs. They have put a lot of funding into the nurse practitioners to allow them to work to their scope of practice.

I will leave it at that. I said along with other members of the committee, it leaves no doubt in members' minds that nurse practitioners and other allied health practitioners could play a much more influential role in our health system, if given the support they deserve.

I thank all those involved with the inquiry, those who provided submissions, who attended the hearings and assisted us with tours across the state. One of the good things about going through all the different areas, was having a look at the different services provided and how innovative some practices can be in areas - because they have shortages. They ask 'just because we have a shortage of this, how are we going to deal and cope with it?' I was impressed with the way that happened.

You see some areas and ask, 'Why are they not doing that there, because we have seen it work over here?'. It is that lack of capacity to share that information in a timely manner. As the member for Murchison said, the one GP on the east coast was flat out and had no spare time for their own life circumstances.

I also acknowledge the great chair work by the member for Murchison; my fellow colleagues who worked very hard; Jenny, who is always so pleasant and approachable; and also Ali who worked behind the scenes a lot to help me try to figure out how to work my computer. I appreciate that and I accept the report.

[4.38 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, the Tasmanian Government welcomes the report from the Legislative Council inquiry into Rural Health Services across Tasmania. I thank the members of the committee for their work, and those who provided a written submission to the inquiry or appeared in front of the committee, and the member for Murchison for bringing it on for noting.

The Government continues to prioritise health, and the 2022-23 state Budget includes record health funding of \$11.2 billion over four years which will see an average spend - and this figure amazed me when you put it down like this - of \$7.25 million per day. It is representing one-third of the budget's total operating expenditure.

We acknowledge the importance of rural health services to local communities, which is reflected in the investments we have made to date and in our recent election commitments. This includes funding of 42 paramedics based in rural and regional areas across Tasmania, as well as the construction of new ambulance stations in locations such as Beaconsfield and Queenstown. In addition to this, the 2022-23 state Budget permanently funds another 11 paramedics across the Sorell and Huonville stations in recognition of the increasing demand in these locations.

The Government is also providing an additional \$8.4 million to boost rural hospital staffing and to support the purchase of new equipment for our rural facilities. Importantly, this is in addition to the \$18.3 million announced for the safe staffing model for Tasmanian district hospitals. Implementation of the safe staffing model will result in a net increase in staff statewide, as well as an increase in the mix of skills available to those seeking care in regional locations.

The Government has also committed an additional \$3.5 million to further upgrade the Midlands Multi-purpose Health Centre. The plans for this redevelopment were recently unveiled by the Premier, alongside the member for Prosser. I understand that this was well received by the community. The upgrades provide for a stage 3 development and expansion of the aged care facilities, initially focusing on increasing the comfort of facilities for current patients and residents.

The member for Windermere has outlined the Government's funding support to GPs around the state, to assist them in offering additional services to their local communities. In recognition of the critical role that digital infrastructure plays in health service delivery, the Government is investing significant funding to achieve a digitally connected network that will transform patient experience, improve patient care and ensure greater equity in health outcomes across Tasmania's dispersed population.

Tasmania's Digital Health Transformation is anticipated to include a \$475 million allocation over 10 years, to deliver a fully integrated health care system, including a centralised electronic medical records and e-referrals system.

This investment will see the launch of a new statewide, fully integrated care platform that will enable our hospitals, GPs, community health, allied health and other specialist providers to seamlessly communicate and share information with each other, regardless of their location.

We will also upgrade existing virtual care technologies, including telehealth, to enable more patients to receive care in their home or in their community; streamline the referral and appointment process for patients; and enhance clinical decision-making through access to advanced patient information.

The Government also acknowledges that those who live in our rural and regional areas will still, at times, need to travel to hospital in metro areas to receive care. To support this, the Government's Patient Travel Assistance Scheme provides important financial assistance to eligible Tasmanian residents who are required to travel to access specialised medical care. The scheme has recently been reviewed and the Government has accepted all the recommendations made by the independent consultant. Some of the key changes that we are making include:

- concession card holders will no longer have to make co-contributions to their travel costs;
- increased travel and accommodation subsidy rates and indexation of rates every three years;
- reduced up-front costs for patients by having PTAS arrange bookings and travel;
- improvements to the PTAS application process to make it simpler for Tasmanians.
- importantly, in recognition of the unique health care access needs of our remote island communities such as King Island, we are expanding the eligibility criteria for our residents.

Ms Forrest - That is very welcome, Mr President, because that was raised as a serious problem in the committee. It happened concurrently when the committee worked on this, and I was watching with great interest and participated in it.

Mrs HISCUTT - There are many more things also, Mr President. These improvements will ensure patients living in remote and regional areas have access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time. The Government is also focused on developing the health workforce we need now, and into the future. Last year, the Minister for Health released the Tasmanian Government's long-term strategy, Health Workforce 2040, which aims to help shape recruitment priorities and determine Tasmania's education and training needs for the service, over the next 20 years.

The strategy has been developed through extensive consultation with clinicians, stakeholders, education providers and consumers, and aims to improve our workforce through strategies to develop staff, targeted recruitment, and building a positive workplace environment. The Government has provided \$15.7 million over four years to implement the strategy.

We also recognise that students who train locally are more likely to work locally when they graduate, which is why we have welcomed the University of Tasmania's move to expand the number of allied health courses offered here in Tasmania. Previously, students across a range of allied health disciplines were required to leave Tasmania and attend university on the mainland to train in their chosen field. It is great to see that from next year, some of those Tasmanians will be able to train locally. To support this, the 2022-23 Budget provides \$6 million across four years to fund additional allied health training positions across the Tasmanian Health Service to complement UTAS's allied health expansion program.

The Government is also working to develop a long-term plan for health care in Tasmania through the Our Healthcare Future reforms. We are co-designing a new long-term plan for health care in Tasmania for a more sustainable health system for the future, focused on better health outcomes. The plan will consider community care, digital health, infrastructure and ensure we have a sustainable workforce.

To inform the long-term plan, regional clinical service planning is underway across the state encompassing primary and acute, subacute and community health services. From this, a regional clinical service plan for each region will be developed and will be a critical input into the co-designed long-term plan for health care in Tasmania. Currently, it is envisaged this work will be finalised by the end of the year for release early in 2023.

There was one comment about the Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response program (PACER) in response to the member for Murchison's comments. The expansion of PACER to the north-west is the next stage of a statewide rollout, noting the service will be tailored to the needs and unique characteristics of each region.

Ms Forrest - As it should, and I appreciate that comment.

Mrs HISCUTT - Good.

Once again, the Government thanks the committee for its work and the dedicated and detailed report which has been tabled. A formal Government response will be provided following consideration of the recommendations made.

The Government notes the report.

[4.47 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - I appreciate the members of the committee and the Leader of the Government who spoke on the committee's work.

I will add a couple of other comments I held onto to see if anyone else picked them up in the debate. I also wish to thank the other members of the committee. It was a good committee to be on. In spite of the member for Windermere's inexperience he was fabulous and everyone worked well together and made themselves available which was important in this process.

I acknowledge the work of our very hardworking and long-suffering and eternally patient secretary, Jenny Mannering. She is a power of work and she was always very responsive to me when I needed her to follow up or to amend things as we worked through the committee report.

I also mention the former member of Huon - I know the member for Rumney did that - and I still am a little bit dark on Bastian; he promised to do all the work on the committee. He even provided me with a summary of everything before he left so I remained dark on him for a little while and then I had to get on with it myself. I thank him for raising it because it is a very important work that had not been previously done in this parliament. There are other parliaments - New South Wales has a pretty extensive report. The reality is that many of the findings that you will see in other jurisdictions are pretty similar to our own. It is not like we have unique challenges.

Tasmania is a little unique in that we have such a dispersed population whereas when we are talking about New South Wales and other jurisdictions, the vast majority of their population lives in urban centres and their remote communities are much smaller and more remote, a long way from services. They rely on things like the Royal Flying Doctor Service to access more urgent care. I thank him for his work prior to his resignation from the parliament, which led to his resignation from the committee.

I agree with the member for Rumney that these are complex issues. There is no one simple quick fix; otherwise, I am sure we would have done it. Health is a very hungry beast in terms of resources, both human and financial, and will continue to be so. The only way we are going to stem the growth in the acute health sector is to ensure that the primary health sector does actually get adequately funded and resourced to keep people well and avoid hospital admission. It is the only way it is going to take any pressure off, over time.

I wanted to refer to a couple of pieces that will reiterate these points in the report. The member for Rumney made the point, it was frustrating having two prorogations that cancelled hearings and scheduled meeting dates every time, and then the suspension with the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. It did give us that little bit of extra time to find some other experts in the field so that we could reach our evidence a bit more broadly. There were a couple we spoke to from other jurisdictions, and one was Dr Denis Lennox, who is a retired executive director of rural and remote medical services. He was talking about how we almost accept that if you live in a rural area, things are going to be worse, a suck-it-up approach. That is not his approach at all. I will read you a little from his evidence. This is in the transcript of *Hansard*, on page 22 if anyone wants to follow along.

I have concluded that we are plagued by a syndrome that affects every part of our society from executive government to rural communities themselves and I refer to it as the 'frontier syndrome', this sense that because a small community is remote and distant from major centres then you simply cannot expect to have a good health service. In fact, that has been presented to me on numerous occasions.

Any of us who live in rural areas often have that said, either implied or actually spoken. Back to Dr Lennox's comments:

They'll name a particular location, 'Denis this is ... [whatever the location is] don't you realise ...' and implied in that statement is 'we can't expect a good service'. I think this is a sad resignation to a reality that we have poorly risk-managed rural health services in Australia for a very long period of time and this has become accepted that that is the way it is.

I share Dr Lennox's view that this not the way it should be. We are all Tasmanians and, in his case, we are all Australians. We deserve to have equity of access, particularly in Tasmania where we have more than half of our population living outside of the Greater Hobart area and provide a significant benefit to the state as a whole.

Dr Lennox also referred to Professor Andrew Wilson, and he made some comments in relation to the Queensland model, regarding the number of GPs per head of population. Figures were bandied about as to how many GPs you need per head of population, but it is not that simple in terms of community need. He said this is on page 54:

Queensland has this model which allows people in those sorts of settings to have a mix of payments. They get a salary from Government, but they also got a proportion of the earnings that they had through MBS billing, through private practice billing as part of that, and it also made it very attractive.

There needs to be some creativity in the way we start to think about funding this -

This is GP practices and general practice in rural areas:

It has certainly moved a long way, from when I had similar sorts of responsibilities here in New South Wales in the late 1990s and early 2000s. There was a situation in far western New South Wales where there was a small number of doctors - I can't remember the exact number, but we are talking fewer than 20 doctors - who worked in that area. When you looked at the MBS billings and what they were getting, and special payment arrangements and what they were getting from the state government, a large amount of money was being paid into those areas. There is no doubt in my mind, that if we had been able to find a way to bring the Commonwealth and the states together to fund those positions - if we found some way to get that shared funding arrangement - that we could create very attractive remuneration for people to work in those rural areas. Not necessarily aiming for people to be there forever, but building packages which incentivise them to stay for periods like five or ten years. There could be a remuneration which may have a bonus, for example, at the end of that time. Not a \$20 000 bonus but a \$100 000 or \$200 000 bonus - the sort of thing -

It goes on a bit further to say:

The other thing is that we need to be flexible and we need to think more broadly about how we utilise the available health staff. At the moment, our system is built around doctor billing. If your system, if your town, is staffed by a private practitioner then basically most of his or her income has to come from billing arrangements. If you have other competent primary health care practitioners in that town, how do they get paid? Who is going to pay them? We need more flexible arrangements for remuneration which allow for other people to provide those services in conjunction with whatever medical staff are there.

I urge members to look at their evidence because they have a lot of experience in this area and come up with a number of good comments on how, if you invest in an area and use your available health resources within a region or a larger area, then everyone benefits and you actually attract more workers as a result.

We need to think a bit differently and I did not hear it from the Government - and I appreciate that - that just because you live in those remote areas you should deserve something less. I do not agree with that and I do not think that is a reasonable approach to take and the Leader, on behalf of the Government, did not say that.

Ms Rattray - I did appreciate the last line in your executive summary where it said:

Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas deserve better.

Ms FORREST - Yes, we do.

Ms Rattray - I was going to say that but most things had been said, and I did also make a submission to your inquiry.

Ms FORREST - Yes. We do have a shortage of GPs, broadly, which exacerbates the need to look at those alternative models. How do we attract the people we need to a community? It does need to be community-focused and centred because that community knows what that community needs.

Ms Rattray - Hear, hear.

Ms FORREST - I appreciate the brief contribution from the Leader and I look forward to a more comprehensive response. I know it has not been a lot of time since the report was tabled until today, but it is important to debate these things while they are fresh in our minds and to get the information out into the public. I look forward to the response from the Government and maybe further opportunity to comment on that at a later time.

As the member for Rumney alluded to, there are solutions here. Not all of them are the state Government's responsibility and we make that really clear. What we did make clear is we want our state Government to lobby hard on our behalf to the federal government to ensure we can improve the patient outcomes in our rural and regional areas. We can have a much more equitable health outcome profile and one way of doing that is a look at the funding model with particular focus on a dedicated rural health fund.

I look forward to the Government's response in due course.

Ms Rattray - Do you think that members should be individually lobbying the federal members as well in our respectful areas around that approach?

Ms FORREST - I think we all should. There are many things we should, as members on behalf of our constituents and on behalf of Tasmania, lobby the federal government on and one is the shocking GST deal that is coming down the line.

There are a number of things. That is one that we will continue with, but in terms of addressing rural health issues, it is not just Tasmania, but Tasmania is a bit unique in our very dispersed population which is a little bit different from most other centres.

Tasmanians living in rural and regional areas have the poorest outcomes of all Tasmanians and Tasmanians, generally, have poorer outcomes than other Australians outside perhaps some Aboriginal communities where they have terrible health outcomes, and we acknowledge that.

We do need to do better. The people we represent need us to do better and I look forward to the Government focusing on and addressing that before too much longer because, as we said in the report, without direct and fairly urgent action, the situation is going to get worse. It is already bad and we do not want things to get any worse. I tire of having to try to support people in my community who do not have access to the health care they need, and they certainly do not in a timely manner.

I am sure many members around this Chamber have constituents coming to them with very similar stories, not just in the rural areas. I know it also happens in the urban centres. It is particularly an issue in our rural and regional areas.

Mr President, I move -

That the report be noted.

We look forward to the Government's complete response to the recommendations.

Report considered and noted.

MOTION

Consideration and Noting - Report of the Select Committee on Road Safety in Tasmania

[5.01 p.m.]

Ms ARMITAGE (Launceston) - Mr President, I move

That the report of the Legislative Council Select Committee on Road Safety in Tasmania be considered and noted.

Mr President, road safety is one of the most important issues in our community. Just about everyone has a story about road safety with many families in communities sadly touched by a serious crash or a fatality, while on average 300 people are killed or seriously injured on Tasmanian roads each year. The committee noted that up until 14 October 2022 there had been a 10-year high on road fatalities on Tasmanian roads and sadly, these statistics have continued to climb. I believe there was another fatality today.

In 2021, Tasmania failed to meet its National Road Safety Strategy targets. In 2011, 24 people lost their lives on our roads, while there were 272 serious crashes. In 2020, 36 people died and 283 were seriously injured, while in 2021, 35 people died with 242 seriously injured.

The impact of these deaths on our roads goes far beyond those killed. It affects families, friends and entire communities. The National Road Safety Strategy 2011-20 targeted a 30 per cent reduction in fatalities and serious crashes in all jurisdictions. In Tasmania, the rate of fatalities and serious crashes went up. During that time technology and infrastructure all improved, driver training and licensing were improved and police were given better, more targeted enforcement options. At the time the inquiry commenced, Tasmania had the worst road safety record of any state, with 6.6 deaths per 100 000 population, compared with the best performing state Victoria which had 3.7 deaths per 100 000. If we could have matched Victoria, we could have saved 19 lives a year.

We know the Government is doing everything it can to keep Tasmanians safe on our roads, but for some reason, that is not reflected in the figures. This inquiry was set up to take a closer look at this issue and provide sound, evidence-based and data-driven recommendations to help the Government tackle this issue. The committee received 94 submissions and undertook three hearings from a broad cross-section of the community. The submissions covered a wide scope including very sad, confronting submissions of personal experience from some people. Looking at some of the submissions and the people who sent them in, while there are a lot of individual submissions, we also received submissions - I had put everything away, when we were going to hold this off, now I have to -

Mrs Hiscutt - Yes, I do apologise.

Ms ARMITAGE - That is alright, I had to find everything again.

Apart from personal experiences and many individual submissions, we also received submissions from emergency services, from former police officers, transport areas, local government, Motorcycle Council, bicycle organisations, Kidsafe Tasmania, Performance Driving, a former legal practitioner, crossing guard, Australasian New Car Assessment Program, International Road Assessment Program, South Hobart Sustainable Community and the list goes on. As I said 94 submissions in all, over a wide range of different groups.

Going through some of the submissions, one that comes to mind was from Adrian Gill, and Adrian will not mind me mentioning his name, he is very proactive, he is a firefighter and was very keen to actually have training in schools. He felt there was not enough training in Years 11 and 12. He has actually taken it upon himself now to conduct training and paying for it as well, going into private schools. The concern was that the Rotary Youth Driver Awareness (RYDA), while it went into some schools, was not compulsory and he questioned whether it actually reached enough students and whether it provided enough training for them. Adrian, a career firefighter, felt it is probably much better for someone like a firefighter to go into schools rather than police. Firefighters are seen in a different light to a police officer. We probably all agree there. Firefighters going into schools to teach, for example, driver education. Everyone loves a fire. He is still looking at ways of conducting this training, and he recently told me in an email that he has about seven or eight schools that he is looking to go into, Years 11 and 12, and provide some of this training, hopefully with other firefighters. That is absolutely commendable, for someone in the community who felt there were areas out there that were not covered.

He also presented to us, and he brought with him the PowerPoint he presented - I think it was from Queensland - on what was done in some of the schools and what he thought we could do here, to teach our students better.

Something that was raised in our committee was whether we should be providing more education for students in the curriculum. Not only for Years 11 and 12 but perhaps junior students as well, so they have an understanding of what signs mean and driver training. They are all out there with Mum and Dad in the car and it does not hurt for them to say to Mum and Dad - who probably got their license quite a long time ago - what is happening and what they should be doing. Adrian was fabulous, and he is continuing with it and doing his bit to try to make our roads safer for all of us.

We also had a retired legal practitioner, who presented some very interesting information. Everyone provided different aspects, and that was very important. All our presenters who came in to our hearings covered a variety of different areas. This gentleman felt that our roads must be crash-tolerant; roads should be treated as an industrial workplace with similar protections; and traffic barriers should be installed on all high-risk roads. He recommended the installation of rumble strips, speed humps and decreasing speed limits.

A lot more roads could have rumble strips on the edge. When you are driving along and you hit a rumble strip, it certainly reminds you. You can get yourself back to the centre of the road if you are feeling tired and for some reason you happen to veer off.

Another submission and hearing came from a crossing guard. We see crossing guards all the time - lollipop people, as we call them. They said they are sometimes quite concerned by driver behaviour around schools. Speeding and mobile phone use were common; failure to stop when directed is frequent; and disregard and abuse of the crossing guard is a feature of the job. One of the recommendations from one crossing guard was whether they could have body cameras. The member for Rosevears was very keen on the idea of a light on the end of a pole. They thought that it would stand out much better if a crossing guard could have a pole with a flashing light to show that they were there to help our children get across the road safer.

Another submission came from an engineering officer in traffic infrastructure and assets at one of our larger councils. He was unhappy with the crash data available from the Department of State Growth in recent years. It simply had not been available to them to access and to look at areas of roads, whether it be for blackspots or other problems. Local councils were no longer able to access the Road Incident Management System (RIMS), inhibiting ability to understand crash patterns at intersections. He proposed a dedicated crash investigation unit so the causes of crashes are better understood. That was a recommendation that came up, and I will get to those recommendations shortly.

Some of the submissions bear mentioning. The Tasmanian Motorcycle Council was concerned that sometimes there is a lack of consultation with the motorcycle community. Motorcyclists are continually being told by government departments that they are over-represented in accidents compared to other road users, but those same government departments will not assist them in providing road safety programs for motorcyclists. Advertising and education need to be improved. They considered that wire rope barriers were dangerous and expensive. They also had correspondence relating to a funding dispute with RSAC about a planned commercial.

They had many areas included, but one of the other issues that was discovered was about motorcycles and motorcycle licensing, and this came into our recommendations as well. Many states have a three-tier motorcycle registration, whereas in Tasmania, it is two-tier. You either have a small bike or you have a large bike. In many of the states, you can have a small bike, a

medium bike or a large bike. At the moment, in Tasmania, you either have a small bike and pay a registration fee, or you have a 500cc or 1000cc and you pay the same. There is no real benefit. The three-tier system seems to be a more sensible option to, hopefully, encourage people not to go for that larger bike if they do not need to. They will save money by staying on a smaller cc bike. We also learned that the member for McIntyre has a bike license and -

Ms Rattray - No bike.

Ms ARMITAGE - No bike, but a bike license.

Mr Willie - We also learned about some of her driving habits. I will not say any more.

Ms Forrest - It is a surprise she can get back on a bike until she has had some practice.

Ms ARMITAGE - We have not included those. We removed them from the report.

Ms Rattray - Through you, Mr President, from time to time I have added it up, and I have done well over a million kilometres in my role; so I think I can speak with experience.

Ms ARMITAGE - Authoritatively.

Ms Rattray - Yes, that too.

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely. We also heard from the Bicycle Network Tasmania, with nearly 50 000 members. The Bicycle Network is one of the top five member-based riding organisations in the world. They put forward many recommendations, including that the Tasmanian Government fund new camera technology that detects mobile phone use, as well as speeding and seatbelt use. We are very pleased to see that they were obviously taking note of our committee as it went along, and they now do have this technology installed; I think it is four cars and four trailers. That is very pleasing to see.

They also recommended Government support funding for a road safety campaign and improved driver testing, focusing on the need for drivers to pay attention at all times to all road users. They also recommended funding for Tasmania Police to include minimum passing distance enforcement in its operations; and we have all seen the figures of one metre.

ANCAP also provided a submission and recommended that the purchase and use of the newest vehicles, with the highest possible ANCAP rating, should be encouraged for everyone. In Tasmania, we have the oldest fleet. The majority of our fleet was 13 years old; but from memory, there was quite a proportion, it might have been 82 000, that were 18 years old. It is a difficult issue in Tasmania when you look at the technology that is in the newer vehicles and the technology in the older vehicles. The other evident problem is that a lot of younger people have older cars. They are obviously cheaper, but they do not have the safety features of the newer vehicles. ANCAP had recommended the use of newer vehicles, but it is not always possible for many people.

Ms Rattray - Through you, Mr President, you provide to your children or help them buy the safest vehicle you can, but there is often a cost involved in that. You do the best you can as a parent or a carer.

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely. We even had a submission from the International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP). iRAP is a UK-registered global charity with the vision for a world free of high-risk roads. They also had a summary of key recommendations for us to consider, including formally establishing an AusRAP leadership team in Tasmania with the Department of State Growth, Transport Tasmania, LGAT, Tasmania Police, MAIB, RACT, ARRB and others, to contribute to the national program chaired by Austroads. It was great to see that we had representation and submissions from all around Australia and from overseas.

Several councils took the time as well to put in submissions, which was pleasing. We discovered that sometimes the speed limits where council areas and state roads meet are not always consistent, and that was another problem that occurred for many road users.

The Police Association of Tasmania put in a submission and they strongly recommended having a fully funded and dedicated traffic section. I am pleased to say that having spoken to Jonathan Higgins recently, he tells me that they now do have a fully funded and dedicated traffic section and they have been spending a lot more time on the roads in their marked cars. It is more about safety as opposed to revenue. It is about people seeing the cars and slowing down rather than the unmarked cars - we have all seen those, the little black Subarus or different cars parked on the side of the road -

Ms Rattray - Except the one that crashed.

Ms ARMITAGE - I think it was a marked car. The ones with their little flashing lights in their grill. Now it is more about having the officers on the road in their marked cars, so that people slow down rather than necessarily getting booked. That was one of the things that we raised in the committee. It was safety over revenue.

The Police Association report also recommends more driver education and retraining and the adoption of more technology. As they said, trauma is relived multiple times in the course of duties and many members are impacted by this stress. That was something that came up also, we tend to think of police, but there are so many emergency responders who are impacted including paramedics, fireies. They are all there at the scenes of accidents and we were told that they do relive the trauma many times.

Speed creep was an interesting one that we heard about. Speed creep is where vehicles gradually start to go a little faster. They might do 60 then 61 kilometres per hour, maybe 62 to 63 kilometres per hour or 110 to 111 kilometres per hour, where you get booked at 112 or 113 kilometres per hour. People where at the stage over COVID-19 where there were not a lot of police around, many police were deployed in other areas and it was interesting to see the analysis of traffic data show that compliance with posted speed limits, the number of vehicles driving at or below the speed limit on the state's roads, had fallen over the period from 2016-2021. The data also indicates that the average vehicle speed on these roads has risen over the same period.

Importantly, national and international research has shown that speed is directly linked to road trauma. A one kilometre an hour increase in average vehicle speed across the road network is expected to result in an increase of about 4 per cent in road trauma, those killed and seriously injured.

It is said many times - but it is true - there are those silver bullets and the fatal five continue to remain significant contributors to Tasmanian road deaths and serious injuries. They are speed, non-use of seatbelts, misuse of alcohol and drugs, driver distraction and driver fatigue. Sadly, between 2012-21, 336 lives were lost on Tasmanian roads and 2678 people were seriously injured.

In 2022, our road statistics have spiralled out of control. The question remains, what do we do?

We had hoped for a short sharp inquiry, but with two prorogues and a parliamentary suspension when committee work cannot be undertaken and a final membership of three members, we were very pleased to finally table our report on 25 October 2022.

Our final committee of Tania Rattray, Josh Willie and myself made 94 findings and 49 overarching recommendations about road safety governance, road safety management, safer roads and mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users, post-crash responses and other road safety related matters.

Some of the other findings that we came across during the inquiry. Apart from the fatal five - speed; seatbelts; alcohol; drugs; distraction and driver fatigue - the other areas and some of the recommendations that we looked at included the installation of median and road strip barriers on Tasmania's high-speed and high-volume roads. That was reported by the Government to prevent or reduce the severity of run-off and head-on crashes. The average age of the Tasmanian vehicle fleet of over 13.3 years compared to the average age of 10.6 years and that continues to increase. The slow take-up of new vehicles in Tasmania means the adoption of the latest vehicle safety features is not being attained.

Concern was also raised with regard to the Road Safety Advisory Council. It provides advice to government; however, there is no accountability for the government to deliver on their recommendations. A recommendation was that the Government consider whether the Road Safety Advisory Council (RSAC) should be more independent of government. There are quite a few members from State Growth and others sitting on the committee but there is no accountability for them to deliver on the recommendations that they have.

A recommendation was also that they improve the transparency of their decision-making, including their subcommittee decisions and that all RSAC recommendations to government should be publicly reported and tracked.

With regard to transport services, it was noted that there was a lack of coordination between the relevant road safety stakeholders who deal with road safety matters; that speed and not driving to the conditions on suboptimal road infrastructure contributed to Tasmanian rural road deaths and serious injury. We need to improve road safety outcomes. There is a need for professional people, independent of government, to carry out and make recommendations from road safety audits.

We discovered there is a lack of trained people in this area which certainly is not easy but the Government should consider resourcing the state to have these professionals trained in conducting road safety audits on behalf of the state and the local councils. They all say, consider investigating a mechanism for mandatory road safety audits to be undertaken around all road accidents involving a fatality and/or serious injury. Many states now have these road

safety audits which certainly makes it easier for them to understand the reason behind the crashes and the accidents. A further recommendation was that the Government consider a mechanism for information sharing as well between the relevant third parties. For example, Tasmania Police, Transport Tasmania and the affected local councils relating to the investigation of the serious road crashes.

One of the main findings in my mind was with respect to fines collected from Tasmanian road safety enforcement measures. It was not clear whether that revenue was readily available for safe system road safety infrastructure improvements. It was felt a recommendation that the Government allocate the revenue collected from road safety enforcement to road safety improvements - no-one likes to be booked but at least if the money was actually going back into road safety, while it is still not nice, it is a better place for it to go, back into making our roads and our highways safer places.

It was felt that there need to be clearer, consistent road markings to highlight the direction of traffic, particularly for short sections of dual highways. We all know when you are driving along on two lanes and then all of a sudden it is one lane and you think - is this still two lanes, or am I now on one lane? Even an arrow on the road would show you, particularly for people from the mainland who are used to dual highways, and all of a sudden, they go from dual to single and some of those sections can be quite short. It was felt that clearer, consistent road markings to highlight the direction was a good way to go.

Also, that the Government consider the feasibility of installing post-cushioning on the wire rope barriers to minimise the crash impact of those on motorcycles. We know that they are safer for cars - or we were told in the hearings from the Government that they prevent head-on crashes from cars, with the wire rope in the centre, but we also heard from the motorcycle community they can be dangerous. My thoughts always were that it was the wires that were a cheese cutter but we were actually told they were not, it is posts that are the problem. They can actually have some cushioning on them to improve them.

I do not want to go through all these because I want to leave something for the other members to speak about.

Ms Rattray - I have been ticking them off as you have been going, member.

Ms ARMITAGE - I will not do them all, I will leave some for the other members. The road safety maintenance budget was one of considerable importance, that consideration be given to increasing it from \$70 million to \$100 million. The thing we were told about the wire rope barriers is that they need regular maintenance. If they do not have regular maintenance, they need to be tensioned and they need to be checked to make sure they are in good condition. That was one of the other issues, particularly with the safety of avoiding the head-on crashes. It is all very well to have this and have it put in, but they need regular maintenance. The recommendation was that it increase from the \$70 million to \$100 million for the regular maintenance.

We have 94 findings, quite a few. The fitting and use of after-market LED lights was another one that was brought up. Many people have mentioned you drive along and you see a car coming towards you with particularly the after-market lights that might have been installed and they can be extremely bright. Concern was raised there about the fact that people can buy them and put them on their vehicle and they can be quite blinding. My Mum hated driving at

night and had difficulty seeing and that is an issue for a lot of people. If they are already having trouble driving, their eyesight probably getting a little worse as they are getting older, to all of a sudden have these extremely bright after-market lights can be very difficult for people.

The current government fleet was another one that was raised. The fact that with the newer cars, they go into the second-hand market which was worthwhile considering the age of the cars we had. As mentioned earlier, 82 vehicles, one-fifth of Tasmania's fleet are more than 18-years old which is quite frightening when you consider particularly our young people who tend to drive our older cars because they are less expensive.

Mr Willie - It is not an easy solution though, is it?

Ms ARMITAGE - It is not an easy solution at all, because they are expensive and people simply cannot afford them.

Another recommendation was to do with road worthiness checks. I do not know how many members here can remember the last time they might have been pulled over and had their tyres, their brakes or the lights checked. I certainly cannot, it would probably be 20 years ago. I do not remember the last time you saw the police on the side of the road pulling everyone over and checking their registration, tyres, brakes, lights, going around your car and then putting defect stickers on some people's cars.

The feeling was that something like that, particularly with our older fleet, is worthwhile and is something that should be happening and they should actually be looking at.

Another one was safety over revenue. It was not about booking someone. It was not about saying 'okay, you have two bald tyres, we are going to fine you \$300', it was about putting a defect sticker on the car and saying you have three or four weeks to get those tyres repaired. Using that money that the fine would have been to actually get it fixed rather than all of a sudden people have to find the money they do not have to pay the fine and they still have bald tyres. It was all about getting some of these cars that might not be roadworthy - their brakes might not be working and they have to stop suddenly on the road - trying to get them safe and that they can afford to have them fixed. Money is very tight for a lot of people, but unsafe cars on the road add to the risk of accidents.

You might find this an interesting one, but one of our recommendations was to increase the speed for motorcyclists. Probationary motorcyclists at the moment have to go at 80 kilometres an hour, yet a car or a vehicle motorist can do 100 kilometres an hour. It was felt that it was not in line and the Government should consider raising the maximum speed for probationary motorcyclists to the same as a vehicle. They are driving along at 80 kilometres per hour, vehicles are going at 100 kilometres per hour. It was only reasonable they should actually be at the same speed, they are both probationary. They should be going 100 kilometres per hour. That was the recommendation made, which seems probably a little odd to increase the speed but it did not seem consistent they should be going at a lower speed.

The Government to consider re-establishing a dedicated, centralised traffic enforcement command for Tasmania Police to increase their efforts of effectively policing road rules. I have spoken to Jonathan Higgins, Deputy Commissioner who pointed out they certainly are doing that now and having many more of his officers out on the roads, in their marked vehicles.

Senior traffic police should conduct more frequent high-profile media and messaging on enforcement activities. That was another issue that came up, that marketing, advertisements, signage have been lacking over the last few years. COVID-19 advertising was excellent. People saw it, listened to it, understood it and realistically, we should be using that same marketing to work with road safety. We have fallen behind quite a lot with road safety marketing and the signage and it was time now to get back out there, whether it be on TV, radio, or on the side of the road, to actually indicate the signage along the lines we did with the COVID-19 signage, which worked extremely well.

The other one was the Government continues its intended rollout and use of traffic enforcement cameras throughout Tasmania. We were very pleased when we saw the Government had obviously listened to our committee hearings during the term of our committee and now has the four vehicles and the four trailers. Obviously, when you are driving along and you see one of those trailers there, I am sure we all get that guilty feeling. I saw one the other day along Sandy Bay Road and you automatically look down at your speedo and are very pleased you are not going 51 kilometres per hour and still doing 50 kilometres per hour.

They will pick up a lot of people, particularly the trailers with the pole that sees into the car and pick up people who are on their mobile phones. It is distracting to have a mobile phone in your hand. It is also worth bearing in mind you cannot have it on your lap or be touching it. You can have it in your pocket, but if it is sitting on your lap, then you will be fined. The same goes for seatbelts. A seatbelt must be properly done up. It must be across your shoulder and around the waist. I could not understand how you could not put a seatbelt on properly, but they tell me that many people do not like the shoulder strap and they simply put it around their waist. If you do that, you will be booked. It is worth recalling what you can and cannot do.

There is also the point-to-point cameras they will have where if you go past one camera and then it could be two kilometres or it could be 200 kilometres down the road, you go past the second, it is worth stopping for that coffee and taking your time rather than getting a fine at the other end because you have gotten there too quickly. These new cameras are obviously going to help with road safety, but it would be good if the funding from these cameras actually went back into road safety, as opposed to going back into consolidated revenue.

In Queensland, from memory, in their first or last three months last year, they made several million dollars and they put it all back into road safety. It is good to think of the money going back into making our roads safer with some of the areas that are important.

The Government continued to invest in ongoing community education of Tasmanian road rules and road safety. We thought that was an important area for the Government to continue to allocate additional funding to provide road safety education messaging through a variety of media channels and that the road attitude and awareness program may be of benefit in complementing existing youth driver awareness programs in Tasmania.

Obviously, education for young drivers and older drivers as well, but particularly for people who are learning to drive and also in the school-based, the feeling was the Government should continue to support evidence-based, general road safety education and explore additional initiatives to reach more school-based children. The younger they learn about signs, about driving, the better drivers they will be when they get to that age. It would be wonderful to have a world without serious road crashes.

I have mentioned the post-crash considerations and that was one of our recommendations: that the Government explore the feasibility of adopting an independent body to oversee investigation of road crashes and that the Government collaborate with road safety organisations to provide support networks for road crash victims and their families. As I mentioned, many other states do that. They have the investigation to find out the reasons behind the crashes, which gives them information going forward, particularly with roads and other areas.

There are many areas to be covered in the report, and as I said with the other two committee members, I need to leave some areas. They have worked very hard during our time on the committee. It is sincerely hoped that the report's recommendations on behalf of the community are supported in action by the Government and other responsible parties. The improvements to road safety matters combined is envisioned over time to reduce road safety trauma in Tasmania.

I was very pleased to read the response from the RACT, with regard to our report. This was dated 27 October 2022, so some of the figures with regard to accidents are not correct, but I will read it as it is:

The RACT has welcomed the final report handed down by the Legislative Council Select Committee Report on Road Safety in Tasmania, calling for urgent action in implementing its findings and addressing Tasmania's road safety woes. Tasmania is the state with the nation's worst road safety record. The Legislative Council Select Committee Report on Road Safety in Tasmania is the blueprint that can make us the best-performing state in Australia, said RACT group CEO, Mark Mugnaioni.

So far this year, 46 people have died on Tasmanian roads and 214 have been injured. That is a legacy no parliament, no government, no local government authority, all of whom have the responsibility for the health and wellbeing of their citizens want to leave. Now is the time for action. Now is the time for our parliament, not just our government, to leave a road safety legacy they can be proud of, not ashamed of.

It can do that by ensuring this report, with its 94 findings and 49 recommendations, remains the driving force for change, not just another tome consigned to a basement shelf. That requires the support, not just of every member of the Tasmanian Parliament and every elected official in local government, but every Tasmanian. It requires commitment from every government department and government business enterprise. The evidence gathered by this inquiry is clear and compelling, as it has always been for so many of the road safety initiatives the RACT and many other road safety advocates have consistently called for.

The report also reinforces what RACT members have been telling us for years through our regular surveys: we need more enforcement, better driver training, speed limits appropriate to road conditions, just to name a few. In fact, the RACT's new panels, established to deepen our advice from members, just this month reinforced again that they are their top road safety concerns. We thank Rosemary Armitage, MLC, for her tremendous work in

establishing and chairing this committee, as well as Tania Rattray and Josh Willie for their roles as members.

Mr Mugnaioni said:

The State Government, supported by the parliament, can act now, by bringing the best technology to bear on enforcement, deterrence and education on our roads; directing fines revenue back into road safety; rolling out road safety education in all our schools, not just those who request it; embedding the tried-and-tested safe systems design elements in every road project; setting speed limits appropriate to road conditions and apply that consistently across state and council roads; having a road safety regime as part of workplace health and safety in every business. After a decade of neglect, Tasmania has the first stage of that automated enforcement on our roads, eight mobile cameras, but we need more.

The State Government has committed to 16 mobile automated enforcement cameras by next year. We say that 32 cameras using the full suite of technology is the minimum required. We also strongly urge the Government to use the revenue from the camera network to maintain and expand it. The Government and the parliament must commit to every recommendation from the committee, many of which are RACT recommendations.

The RACT is heartened by the strong support for mobile automated enforcement technology from the Labor Party and the Greens. We urge them to extend that support to every road safety initiative that arises from the select committee report and not let it gather dust as the previous report did 10 years ago.

We can assure every elected member of state parliament and of every Tasmanian council that the RACT will keep its 210 000 members fully informed of the support this landmark report receives from their elected representatives.

Already the voice of our members is clear from our surveys. They support automated speed enforcement. They support revenue from the network being used to maintain and expand the network. They support better driver training. They want safer roads. They want to get home safely. They want action. Now is the time to deliver it.

Mark Mugnaioni
RACT

It is very pleasing to get a good report or a good result from our long-awaited report.

I thank all the individuals and organisations who participated in this inquiry for their time, their effort, their patience in making submissions and providing information during the public hearings.

I sincerely thank the members of the committee at the time of the report's completion, myself as inquiry Chair, Tania Rattray, Josh Willie, as well as our former member for Huon, Bastian Seidel and the member for Rosevears, Jo Palmer, who was with us for a considerable period and provided very valuable input, especially during the public hearings. I also extend sincere thanks to the inquiry secretary, Simon Scott, and executive assistant, Allison Scott, for their outstanding work and support to the committee.

The report was a long time coming. As I said, we had many delays. We would have liked to have finished much earlier. Often with three members of the committee, other inquiries and other committee work, it was not always easy finding time that we could meet. I am very pleased to say that we have put together what we believe to be a significant report with 94 findings and with 49 recommendations.

I have left a few of these for the other members. I thought it was only fair that they can speak to the report rather than me finalising the whole lot but I am very pleased to have the report and looking forward, in due course, to the Government's response.

[5.43 p.m.]

Mr WILLIE (Elwick) - Like the Rural Health committee, we found some challenges with this committee - two prorogations and also an adjournment of the parliament due to Queen Elizabeth's passing. It was a survival of the fittest too. I thank the Chair for her leadership and thank my other co-member, Tania Rattray, the member for McIntyre, and former members of the committee, Jo Palmer, who ended up in the ministry - her work no doubt continued extensively in another role - and the former member for Huon, Bastian Seidel.

Being left with three members provided some challenges. I know in the school holidays there was one meeting where we were trying to make a quorum and I was at a swimming lesson with both my boys on my computer at the edge of the pool trying to get the work done. You do what you have to do and my boys were certainly understanding. I am not sure the swimming teacher was that understanding but I think she worked out what was going on.

The subject matter is particularly tragic too. The current road toll death for Tasmania is 51, I am not sure whether that includes the one that has happened recently.

Mr Valentine - Too high, whatever it is.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, far too high, a 10-year high and, on average, over 300 people are killed or seriously injured on Tasmanian roads each year.

I do not think we probably envisaged the road toll being what it is when we embarked on this committee of inquiry. It highlights parliament's role and particularly the role of this House, to take a deep dive into an issue that the community is grappling with. There was strong interest from the community and a lot of evidence presented to us, because it impacts all of us. We all have a responsibility when we are on the roads. We share it with other people. Tasmania has the worst road safety record of any state, with 6.6 deaths per 100 000 in the population. So, it is something we do need to address. The Chair mentioned this, and I will read the follow-up talking point from the CEO in a minute, but in their submission, the RACT said that:

Failing to improve our current situation [this is nationally] will result in 12,000 people killed, 360,000 admitted to hospital at a cost of over

\$300 billion over the next decade alone. Why is this issue failing to get traction across the country? If that was a disease, governments would be throwing the kitchen sink at preventing that.

That was a particularly salient point from the RACT. Where is the resolve to look at this? Through the pandemic, we saw the way governments responded; and yet this unnecessary loss of life and the impact on people over a lifetime as well as their family members and friends in communities, just seems to be accepted.

That said, I acknowledge that this is not an easy issue to resolve. There are no silver bullets. We are talking about infrastructure; education; technology - which is improving all the time and it may provide many of the answers we need into the future; licensing; and policing.

There were 94 submissions, 94 findings - a bit of synergy there - and 49 recommendations. One of the biggest ringing endorsements, as the Chair said, was the endorsement from the RACT which has been campaigning on this issue for many years across all areas of road safety. As well as the story that was in the *Mercury*, the CEO, Mark Mugnaioni also wrote an opinion piece. There may be some repetition here but there were parts not covered by the member. The title was 'Blueprint to end carnage on our roads', and he said:

The findings of a safety report are a wake-up call for motorists, says Mark Mugnaioni. Every Tasmanian who wants to get home safely, should read the Legislative Council's Select Committee Report into Road Safety in Tasmania.

Its 94 findings and 49 recommendations make sobering reading. They are a wake-up call for anyone who does the most dangerous thing in their daily lives, getting behind the wheel of a car.

It is important to remember that when we do get behind the wheel.

When Launceston MLC, Rosemary Armitage pushed for, and secured, this inquiry, things were bad enough.

At that stage we were talking about a 10-year plateau in terms of the toll and serious crash statistics, yet we have a 10-year high this year.

Tasmania had the worst road safety record of any Australian state. We had not seen any improvement in a decade. There is now an even greater urgency for action than when the select committee began its work last year.

So far this year, 47 people ...

I have updated that - it is 51 now.

... have died on Tasmanian roads and 214 have been injured. If we were able to match Victoria's performance, 19 lives would have been saved. If we could match Sweden or Norway ...

Which are world-leading jurisdictions when it comes to road safety.

... we could cut our rate of road trauma by two-thirds.

They have a particular emphasis on safe systems. Human beings are going to make errors, but if you have a safe road network and safe systems it can mitigate some of that.

... The findings and recommendations align with the huge body of evidence nationally and globally.

That was a tick for the committee.

The actions outlined in the select committee report come as no surprise to people who have advocated for decades for tougher action. There is no silver bullet, but there is an arsenal of formidable initiatives that should be acted on from this landmark report.

It is a sad fact but too often it takes a crisis like this to get cultural, behavioural, and legislative change and broad community support for actions that will protect our citizens.

The response by Tasmanians to the pandemic in keeping each other safe should be a template for the same unity of purpose in road safety.

If there is a positive from a year when so many Tasmanian families have been shattered by that knock on the door by a police officer to tell them of the death of a loved one on our roads, it is that we have a blueprint for action with the select committee report.

We have unity across the parliament, with Labor - I was a member of the committee and I am sure that many of my colleagues support the recommendations - the Greens and the Legislative Council supporting the legislation to give full effect to a new generation of mobile automated enforcement cameras that are now on the roads.

I am sure all members here have experienced driving past those. They are pretty hard to miss. There does not seem to have been too much outrage from the community, either, about the introduction of those; which is a positive step. I have seen on various blogs and Facebook groups and things like that, community members who have said there is a speed camera at such and such location. I am not sure whether it is legal to do that, but plenty of people within those forums are saying 'well, isn't that great; it's keeping our community safe'. That is the sort of attitude we want.

Ms Forrest - It is only a problem if you are breaking the law.

Mr WILLIE - That is right; and I will get to that and some of the recommendations and findings.

There is also an emerging change in the attitude of Tasmanians to the need for more enforcement through new technology and greater police presence on our roads. The police presence came up consistently within our inquiry. The police and the Government were taking note of the evidence that was being presented to the committee, and they made changes through our inquiry time line.

The overwhelming message from RACT members who contacted us directly is that the rate of carnage cannot continue. There are over 200 000 members.

Ms Armitage - Yes.

Mr WILLIE - There is a mood for change in the community, and that has been reflected in the RACT's survey of its members on road safety. There was support from surveyed members of 83 per cent for the renewal of the automated enforcement camera network in their annual survey last year, and that was reinforced by a special survey they conducted in preparing their submission to the select committee.

The state government supported by the parliament can act now by: bringing the best technology to bear on enforcement, deterrence and education on our roads. Directing fines revenue back into road safety. Rolling out road safety education in our schools, not just to those who request it. Embedding the tried and tested Safe Systems design elements in every road project. Setting speed limits appropriate to road conditions and apply that consistently across state and council roads. Having a road safety regime as part of workplace health and safety in every business.

That is an important point too, Mr President. Transport is a key part of a number of businesses across Tasmania. They have their employees on the road and they are increasingly recognising their safety on the roads as an occupational health and safety issue, as part of their business.

After a decade of neglect, Tasmania has the first stage of that automated enforcement on our roads, eight mobile cameras, but we need more.

The state Government has committed to 16 mobile automated enforcement cameras by next year and that is to go along with the fixed cameras which have been in operation for many years and I am sure members know where some of those are in our electorates.

The RACT says that 32 cameras, using the full suite of technology, is the minimum required and we strongly urge the government to use the revenue from the camera network to maintain and expand it. The government and the parliament must commit to every recommendation from the committee, many of which are RACT recommendations.

Already, the voice of our members is clear from our surveys. They support automated speed enforcement, they support revenue from the network being used to maintain and expand the network, they support better driver training, they want safer roads, they want to get home safely, they want action.

The last part is, he urges the Government and the parliament and every responsible Tasmanian to extend support to every road safety initiative that arises from the select committee report and not let it gather dust like a previous report 10 years ago, as the Chair mentioned.

He goes on to express his support from his members.

That was a ringing endorsement from a key stakeholder when it comes to road safety and a stakeholder who has campaigned on this issue for many years. I was heartened to read the press release and also the opinion piece that followed the tabling of our report.

With regard to the findings and recommendations, we had some overarching findings that we thought were particularly important. The fatal five is something that comes up a lot in road safety and I am sure some members here could probably recite them. They are: speed; the non-use of seatbelts - which is pretty hard to fathom. About 10 per cent of serious crashes involved not using a seatbelt, even though we have had all of that education around how dangerous it is. The others are alcohol and drugs; distraction; and driver fatigue.

Between 2012 and 2021, a total of 336 lives were lost on Tasmanian roads and this is a pretty depressing statistic, 2678 people were seriously injured. No doubt some of them have ongoing impacts to their lives as well as the lives of their families and probably ongoing support from MAIB and other providers.

I will not go through all of those because the member has been through those. With regard to some of the other findings, the Road Safety Advisory Council provides advice to government but there is no accountability for government to deliver on their recommendations. That was not a criticism of the Road Safety Advisory Council or the people who serve on it. They do some very good work and some of them are very experienced in this area too. The Chair, Scott Tilyard, has had a long career in the police service and no doubt has experienced road trauma in many ways throughout his career and he is very dedicated.

The reports and recommendations they are producing are very good. That finding was about making governments accountable, probably a role for this House too

Ms Armitage - And for their recommendations.

Mr WILLIE - and the recommendations. The member for Murchison has been raising this a bit lately, but the Government Administration Committees can conduct short inquiries and maybe pull government departments in to answer questions. Perhaps that is a follow-up for some of the serving members on the committee down the track if we are not seeing a lot of action.

There is a lack of coordination between relevant road safety stakeholders who deal with road safety matters, and that was a lot of evidence that was presented to the committee with different authorities saying, 'Well this authority does not talk to us', 'this data is only available through this portal and we cannot access it'.

Ms Armitage - Particularly some of the councils.

Mr WILLIE - Particularly some of the councils. This is no criticism of local government either but a recurring theme was capacity in local government too, whether it was applying for blackspot funding or having the capacity to set speed limits for road conditions. We heard examples in your electorate, member for Huon, where a stretch of road would pass through a number of government areas and it would have a different speed limit even though it was the same stretch of road. That was not the only area in Tasmania where that was raised, which shows a lack of coordination between these authorities. That is what we found.

This was a big one. Speed and not driving to the conditions on suboptimal road infrastructure contributed to Tasmania's rural road deaths and serious injuries. Tasmania is a regionally dispersed population. We have a lot of rural roads that require care and caution when you are behind the wheel. They do not have the verges, or rumble strips, or sometimes the signage, the barriers and all of the other safety -

Mr Valentine - Deep gutters.

Mr WILLIE - Deep gutters, yes. It is easy to get in the gravel.

Ms Armitage - Some of them are gravel.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, some of them are gravel.

Ms Rattray - A lot of them are gravel.

Mr WILLIE - Driving to the conditions is particularly important, and that does come up in the fatal five as well, in terms of speed and not driving to the conditions. Even if you are driving on a major highway, driving to the conditions is important. I had to drive from Launceston to Hobart on Sunday, in the pouring rain, and I actually pulled over for a bit of a mental break.

Ms Lovell - That was not the weather.

Mr PRESIDENT - We have seen you drive. That was probably for the other drivers on the road.

Mr WILLIE - I was driving to the conditions, Mr President, and taking precautions and making sure I arrived home safe. My driving is not that bad, Mr President.

Mr PRESIDENT - All those of that opinion?

Mr WILLIE - Regarding fines collected on Tasmanian road safety enforcement measures, it is not clear whether the revenue is readily available for Safe System road safety infrastructure improvements. That does not mean the Government is not pouring in additional funds either, at times, for their infrastructure projects; and there are obviously levies and other revenue raising that happens, as well as enforcement.

I am interested in the Government shedding some light on that, if they are going to make a response today.

The Chair talked about a little bit about road design, but the motorcycle riding community is not supportive of the continued use of wire rope barriers. That is not to say they are not supportive of barriers; they would just like a different material to be used. As the member for Launceston said, it is not the wire barrier that is the issue, it is the posts that they have a problem with. That was a recurring theme from any motorcycle stakeholder that presented information to the committee. Some of them have been campaigning for many years to get the government to change the rollout of that program to a different material.

That said, Mr President, there was some discussion in some of the submissions and potentially some of the hearings too, about the costs involved. It is cheaper to install a wire rope barrier initially, but there is an ongoing maintenance cost. If you do not do the maintenance, they do not perform as expected at the critical time. It may be more expensive for, say, a concrete barrier but there is less ongoing maintenance; so it is a decision for the Government to make. Obviously, the wire rope barrier does perform in a way to stop head-on crashes, particularly for four-wheeled vehicles. It is obviously effective because the Government is rolling that out.

Mr Valentine - Through you, Mr President, another idea is that industrial belting be used on the bottom.

Mr WILLIE - Yes. That is one of our recommendations, that there is some padding that could be used on those barriers to make them safer for motorcyclists.

Mr Valentine - Yes. This was a continuous strip of industrial belting, as opposed to padded posts.

Mr WILLIE - Yes. Some of the gripe from the motorcycle stakeholders was also a lack of transparency with the crash data, and how many people have been injured.

Ms Armitage - Or lack of crash data.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, lack of crash data; lack of police reporting in the police reports for serious crashes and a lack of transparency on how many motorcyclists had been injured with these barriers. If the Government was more open about that, and it was not a huge number, then there may be more comfort. The fact that they are not revealing that, makes them question the Government, and it is quite right for them to do that.

Mr Valentine - Recording the type of barrier involved would be a start.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr Valentine - Not necessarily that difficult, I would have thought.

Mr WILLIE - No. Just because it is a concrete barrier, does not mean it is necessarily safer, either - depending on the angle you hit it. It depends on circumstances.

Mr Valentine - It can ricochet you back out into the traffic.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr Valentine - The idea is to stay upright.

Mr WILLIE - Road maintenance is a huge issue for all of us and the state road maintenance budget and delivery of it is of importance to the Tasmanian community. I was talking earlier about my trip down the Midland Highway on Sunday. It is amazing whenever there is heavy rainfall over a sustained period how our road network deteriorates. There were a lot of potholes, probably members from the north would know this better than me. A lot of potholes on the Midland Highway at the moment, probably from the groundwater.

Ms Rattray - Even on the stretch between Campbell Town and Ross, that long piece there, that had already started to disintegrate, break up with potholes but whether that is the final seal, I do not know.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, and it is a bit disheartening when you see extensive work going to a stretch of highway, knowing it has cost millions of dollars and then you see it breaking up a few years later and they are patching it up already. It is almost a constant issue, is it not?

The peak Tasmanian road safety stakeholders supported an increase in the road maintenance funding by state and federal governments, acknowledging there is a finite resource. It is one of the major inputs that can make roads safer and when you are talking about the Midland Highway or the Bass Highway, the significant upgrades that have happened over different persuasions of government have made those roads a lot safer over many years now.

This is one that came up too, a more prevalent and timely notification of planned road works would benefit Tasmanian road users. I am not sure whether the Government could develop an app that you could have a quick look at before you went on a trip but I know if you are going on a trip to the north of the state or the north-west or wherever else, the road works can severely impact the time of the trip. You may have meetings to get to or whatever else and that can cause issues because people do not drive to the conditions because they are running behind time, so having that information freely available - I acknowledge it is on the State Growth website and you can look that up but having that more accessible would be potentially beneficial to the Tasmanian community.

Sometimes from time to time, I remember on commercial radio they notify people on there of significant delays.

Ms Rattray - Listeners ring in and let you know.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, listeners ring in but when there have been rock blasts and things like that, where they have actually had to close the road for periods of time, they do advertise that in various forums.

Road signage and markings, a huge issue, particularly in rural areas. They may assist in minimising road safety incidents and crashes. I think the member for Launceston mentioned yellow centre lines to delineate roads. Did you mention that?

Ms Armitage - I did not mention it because it did not fare very well in our hearings.

Ms Rattray - The department does not like them.

Mr WILLIE - The department does not like it and the committee members thought it might be quite controversial because it is something foreign.

Ms Armitage - I thought it might be a good idea but I was not going to die in a ditch over it.

Mr WILLIE - The yellow centre line to delineate the road, particularly on dual carriageways. It is used successfully in some jurisdictions. I am not sure how expensive it would be to go and repaint all the roads. You would have to do it over a number of years,

I suspect, but we did make that finding, that other jurisdictions are using that. We know that can be an issue, with people who are new to the state, they do not know the roads and we have seen serious crashes occur where people are on the wrong side of the road.

Ms Armitage - We resolved that the Australian Standard was a white line.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, there is some work being done at a federal level on some of these things. An increase in the use of plateaus in urban areas. Some members may have experienced this. I know in in the heart of my electorate, you would have experienced this, the plateau that has gone into the Glenorchy Main Road there, which is a high pedestrian area. It has slowed down the traffic. You go up onto a plateau and you drive across it and you go down again. It has slowed the cars going through that area significantly and I am sure that could be used in other areas.

One other finding that I will mention is something I am particularly passionate about, which is the better integration of cycling and pedestrian needs. I noted that the Bicycle Network highlighted a number of our recommendations to their members and they were 14, 17, 18, and 19. We did find that there needs to be a balance for the competing safety interests of the various road users in Tasmania whilst maintaining road functionality.

Cyclists in Tasmania are a vulnerable road user group and targeted road planning is required to maintain their safety and the use of separated pathways in Tasmanian road design improves safety for active transport users. I know that is one that cyclists and active transport users are particularly passionate about. It would encourage more of their use which helps with traffic congestion, it helps with climate change because you do not have a fossil fuel engine on the road that day. I know the one in our electorate, Mr President, is heavily utilised along the old rail line which has become a track for the Intercity Cycleway. That is something I use quite a lot and you do feel a lot safer when you are on those compared to being on the road with vehicles. I have had some near misses on my e-bike.

One day there was a particularly impatient tradie trying to get around me on Argyle Street. I was in the cycle lane, there was no barrier, he decided to whip around me and try to go around the corner and I nearly clipped him and came off. So, I experience those issues that many cyclists and active transport users do as well.

Technology, this was mentioned in the RACT's opinion piece. The improvement in vehicle safety features has had a significant impact in minimising road trauma, things like ABS braking, airbags, traction control, a whole range of things, even getting in your car and the driving lights come on automatically now in modern cars. I know my car, if I am feeling fatigued, it asks me if I need a rest sometimes, so technology has improved in modern cars. However, as highlighted by the member for Launceston, our fleet is the oldest in the country and young people, in particular, are driving those older vehicles, they might be a hand-me-down through the family, and there is no easy solution to fixing that.

Particularly in the middle and post the pandemic, getting access to new cars and even the used car market for a while, was very difficult. As our fleet changes over, those safety features become more prevalent in all cars and make our roads safer for all users. The Government has a key role to play too, and I acknowledge the Government's policy regarding the ANCAP safety rating for their fleet. It has to be a five-star ANCAP rating for all government vehicles. They go into the used car market and are a significant contributor to improving safety and regarding

climate change, in reducing emissions. That is an area of government that will make an impact too. I notice the new car fleets, a lot of them are hybrids or electric plug-in vehicles and I am sure we will see that more and more.

As the member said, a fifth of Tasmania's fleet, which is 82 vehicles, is more than 18 years old, which is quite staggering. Some of those, no doubt, are classic cars and collectors' cars but I would assume quite a number of them are people's everyday vehicles as well. This is something that came up through the committee and it explains some of the terrible statistics and data. Over the past decade there has been an increase of 84 000, that is 19 per cent in the total of Tasmanian vehicle registrations, an average trend change of 2.1 per cent per annum.

Whilst we have all these inputs into infrastructure and driver education and technology and all of these improvements, we are not seeing any improvement in the road toll or serious crash data. Part of the explanation there is the number of vehicles on the road, and to have a 19 per cent increase over the last decade does explain some of that because there are more interactions between vehicles every day. Of course, humans make errors. As the member mentioned, other jurisdictions have stricter vehicle roadworthiness checks - we made that finding, I do not think we made a recommendation around that, did we?

Ms Armitage - I think it was that Tasmania Police -

Ms Rattray - Undertake more checks.

Mr WILLIE - You do have the transport authority that can make those checks too.

Ms Armitage - Yeah that is transport.

Ms Rattray - Reward good behaviour.

Mr WILLIE - This is the thing about the carrot and stick, it is a lot of stick, but carrot would be good as well. Maybe, in terms of incentives in renewing your licence or registration, for good behaviour if you had not had any demerit points in a number of years, you could potentially offer discounts and things like that to reward good driver behaviour.

Something that has not been mentioned, the rollout of e-scooters that happened throughout our inquiry. It was very controversial in Hobart when it first rolled out, over the summer last year, just before the festive period. There were a number of incidents but that has calmed down. As was explained to us by the Hobart City Council and some of the providers, there is an initial novelty factor where all sorts of people are using the e-scooters to start with - not necessarily appropriately - then it comes down and the people who are genuinely using them for transport tend to use them. If they are used appropriately and parked out of the way, then it is a good option for a lot of people. There are obviously safety issues too, but one of the biggest positives I hear about is independence for young people able to travel more places and do things, travel further. It will be interesting to see what happens with that trial, the first twelve months comes up at the end of this year and we will see what local government does.

Mr Valentine - There has been one parked outside my house for about the last four days.

Mr WILLIE - I did not leave it there, I often leave them on Creek Road if you see them, near the nursing home there, and I walk up the hill. In fact, I ran to Parliament one day, used

one on the way home and went past Donna Adams, just after she had been appointed, I said, 'Hi Donna', with my suit and gear on my shoulder.

Mr Valentine - And helmet.

Mr WILLIE - And helmet, I was doing all the right things. Quite an interesting point made by former Commander Brett Smith in Launceston.

Mrs Hiscutt - If the member is of a mind to keep your interesting point until next Tuesday, if you would mind adjourning the debate?

Mr WILLIE - I will adjourn the debate. This is a bit of penalty because you said I will be a short time, so I was just trying to prove a point.

I move -

That the debate stands adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

RECOGNITION OF VISITOR

Mr PRESIDENT - I welcome to the Chamber Sue Smith, the past member for Montgomery, and former president of the Legislative Council and in her role as current board member of the RACT, with a very strong interest in this debate that probably held through most of the member for Elwick's contribution.

ANIMAL WELFARE AMENDMENT BILL 2022 (No. 42)

Third Reading

[6.20 p.m.]

Ms PALMER (Rosevears - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - Mr President, I move -

That the bill be read the third time.

Bill read the third time.

ADJOURNMENT

[6.20 p.m.]

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

That at its rising that the Council does adjourn until 11 a.m. Wednesday 16 November 2022.

Motion agreed to.

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, reminding members of our briefings in the morning in Committee Room 2. We will start at 9.15 a.m. with the Appropriation Bill closely followed by Stadiums Tasmania, then Retail Leases Bill. We will not stop once we start, so the times there will only be a rough guide. We will keep rolling through.

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

That the Council do now adjourn.

**Amnesty International Tasmania -
Petition to Raise Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility**

[6.21 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I rise on adjournment to note briefly the petition I tabled this morning in this Chamber from Amnesty International Tasmania. The petition was delivered at a rally held last week on Thursday 10 November on the lawns out the front of this parliament. The petition is signed by over 4000 Tasmanians, calling on the Tasmanian Government to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility in this state to 14 years.

As members will recall, a little over 12 months ago this Chamber resoundingly passed a motion making the same call on the Government to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years, yet here we are 12 months later and these calls are only increasing in urgency as we see more evidence come to light about the terribly harmful impact of criminalising and incarcerating children.

Yesterday, on ABC radio, the National Children's Commissioner was making a strong case for reform of the minimum age of criminal responsibility describing the incarceration of children as a national shame and this morning on local ABC radio our state Commissioner for Children and Young People reinforced that call and emphasised the urgency of the need for reform.

Members may also have seen the *Four Corners* program on ABC TV last night which was a damning indictment of the incarceration of children in this country. Our motion, passed in this place a year ago and the Amnesty petition tabled today from the people of Tasmania, stands as a clear call on the Rockliff Government to act more quickly, to do the right thing and progress this reform.

While it is admirable that the Government has announced it will raise the age of detention in Tasmania to 14 years by the end of 2024, all expert stakeholders identified that this does not go far enough. Why would we aim for a lesser response to supporting the wellbeing of Tasmanian children? Why would we not be aiming to deliver the best evidence-based compassionate response to children in our state.

Our current minimum age of criminal responsibility and detention in this state and the system of youth justice that sits around it, is discriminatory and is failing. It is failing on every measure, first and foremost it is failing the children and young people who encounter it. This is a gross failure of our collective responsibility to our children because not only are we locking up children, we are locking up children who are more likely to be suffering from trauma, more

likely to have a disability and developmental delay, more likely to be suffering mental ill health, more likely to have been victims and witnesses of family violence, more likely to have had educational disadvantage, more likely to be experiencing drug and alcohol misuse and more likely to have been removed from their family by the state.

Our youth justice and detention system make all those things much worse and we are effectively criminalising disadvantage and we know that by doing so, we are entrenching poor outcomes for a lifetime. That is a rock-solid guarantee.

We are not only failing children in this, we are failing our community. Rather than make us safer, more cohesive and resilient, our current, ineffective youth justice system puts us more at risk and contributes to a community that is more divided. When we look at the current minimum age of criminal responsibility and the youth justice system that sits around it, we can clearly see that it is not smart justice, it is not compassionate justice and it does not serve our community.

We are at an ideal time for positive change. We have an opportunity to do better and we know what response is needed. Wraparound support and care, secure stable housing, effective and sustained family support, proactive health and mental health care, educational engagement and support, love and acceptance.

Here in Tasmania we could, and should, be at the forefront of this reform. The evidence supports it; the community wants it; and our children deserve it.

Mr President, it is time for action, now.

Sue Neill-Fraser Case

[6.25 p.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - Mr President, this is only my second adjournment of the debate contribution in my 14 years of representing Tasmanians in this place. I take the role of adjournment debate very seriously, and I see this issue as exceptionally important.

My first speech in August 2021 dealt with the very same justice issue. The soundness of the conviction of Sue Neill-Fraser, in light of new and compelling evidence, is exposed in the Etter Selby Papers tabled in this House. Unfortunately, the information contained in the Etter Selby Papers seems to have fallen on deaf ears, with no response to the substance of the issues raised from the Attorney-General or the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Now, Mr President, we have a former senior prosecutor, Mr Tony Jacobs, adding his weight to the concern a miscarriage of justice has taken place in the Sue Neill-Fraser case and calling for an independent inquiry into the entirety of the case.

Mr President, I wish to bring your attention the recent lengthy submission by Mr Jacobs to the Law Society and the Attorney-General, and a revised summary submission, addressing numerous issues with the 2010 trial which led to this miscarriage of justice. Tony Jacobs is a well-known lawyer and one who is highly experienced in criminal law, having spent over 30 years of his 50-year legal career at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. He retired from that office as recently as 2020. Mr Jacobs appeared before the High Court of

Australia six times and prosecuted some hundreds of trials, including about 30 murder cases - some with multiple accused. He had no direct involvement in the Sue Neill-Fraser case but has voiced concerns about the matter for some years now. So, why has Mr Jacobs spoken out?

Mr Jacobs initially wrote to the Attorney-General on 7 January 2022 in a two-page letter, and voiced his concerns following the outcome of the 2021 appeal to the Court of Criminal Appeal. He stated that he believed he had a moral duty to inform the Attorney-General that the combined effect of many of the actions and omissions of David Gunston SC constituted flagrant incompetence and accordingly, Ms Neill-Fraser was entitled to have her conviction overturned. Mr Jacobs suggested that the Attorney-General establish an inquiry panel with three retired mainland judges.

The Attorney-General replied to Mr Jacobs on 24 January 2022, and declined to take action on the basis of the separation of powers and the fact that legal proceedings were then on foot.

Ms Neill-Fraser subsequently failed in her application for special leave to appeal to the High Court on 12 August 2022.

There was increased attention in the media as to the soundness of the conviction.

The then president of the Law Society, Mr Simon Gates, wrote an article in the *Mercury* on 23 August 2022 headed: 'Neill-Fraser supporters risk undermining confidence in legal system'. He stated:

It is not enough that people speculate about other possible theories or explanations. Any such hypothesis must be considered in the context of the evidence as a whole.

Mr Jacobs, as a former member, then challenged the Law Society in a nine-page submission with a one-page attachment of the *Mercury* article dated 27 September 2022, saying that he:

... had done the groundwork and read all of the thousands of relevant pages of transcripts and judgements, some more than once.

He reiterated Emile Zola's famous challenge, *J'Accuse!*, from France in 1898 in the Dreyfus scandal, to challenge the Law Society and the broader profession to read what he had written and either show him he was wrong, or speak up for justice in Tasmania by publicly stating an agreement with his claim that Ms Neill-Fraser is the victim of failures by Tasmania lawyers.

Mr Jacobs also wrote again to the Attorney-General in a letter dated 28 September and provided a copy of his submission. He received a response from the Attorney-General dated 13 October 2022, which stated that:

Tasmania and Australia's highest courts had considered the case in great detail.

Ms Archer added that it was important the court's decision be respected as a cornerstone of our justice system and to not do so would undermine the rule of the law and the judiciary.

Mr President, the courts are only ever as good as the evidence put before them. Then appeal courts are only ever as good as the points of appeals put to them; and vulnerable witnesses are only as good as the protection and support provided to them. When the system fails or, more to the point, when lawyers fail, miscarriages of justice can occur. It is up to the first law officer of the land to recognise these failures and address them. To be deliberately blind to them is what will undermine confidence in our legal system.

No legal issue now exists before the courts anymore. The power rests with the Attorney-General to right a wrong. She can no longer hide behind the concept of the separation of powers. The ball is now firmly in her court and she must respond to the substance of the issues raised in the Etter Selby Papers and the Jacobs submission. Sadly, we know that no system is infallible and miscarriages of justice do occur, and often are not revealed by appeal processes.

The Andrew Mallard case in Western Australia and the Chamberlain case are classic examples of this. Mr Jacobs has shown incredible moral courage in speaking out and calling upon fellow members of Tasmanian legal profession to acknowledge serious issues in the way the matter was dealt with in the courts, including by some Tasmanian lawyers. A great many of the issues have not been aired in a courtroom.

The Law Society and its former president, Mr Gates, have declined to make any comment on the submission despite repeated requests for feedback from Mr Jacobs since late September 2022. In a last-ditch effort, Mr Jacobs again emailed the Law Society and Mr Gates on Monday 14 November, again seeking a response. It appears that the Law Society has now elected for Mr Gates to respond. One wonders whether the former president of the Law Society, after urging everyone else to read the whole of the evidence, took the time to read the thousands of pages of transcript and other materials that have been examined by Mr Jacobs. If he has, it is hard to understand his failure to defend his publicly stated position. Mr Jacobs is surprised and disappointed that the Law Society has failed over some seven weeks to even to attempt to rebut the submission in which he showed the Ms Sue Neill-Fraser murder conviction from 2010 should have been overturned on appeal because of serious mistakes in the trial, along with matters that should have been raised but were missed in the appeals.

Mr President, Mr Jacobs has focused on three issues which go to the heart of why Ms Neill-Fraser did not receive a fair trial:

- (1) The failure of the then DPP to fulfil his obligations to the court to disclose, prior to trial, three potentially decisive pieces of evidence.
 - (a) A significant electropherogram of the DNA sample of Ms Meghan Vass, which was found in the luminal positive area, 260 x 210 mm on the deck of the yacht;
 - (b) The forensic scientist's opinion in an email to police, that the relevant DNA sample was unlikely to walked on to the boat on a shoe; and

- (c) A record that Ms Vass told Nara House that she was spending the relevant night of 26 January 2009 at Sam's place, a non-existent Mt Nelson address.
- (2) The judge telling the jury in his summing up that Ms Vass might have urinated somewhere and a police officer had trodden on it and walked the DNA onto the boat, when urine has very little DNA and what it does have, deteriorates quickly.
- (3) The failings of the defence lawyer, Mr David Gunson SC, now deceased, necessitated that the conviction be overturned. 15 examples were eventually given, including: failing to take up offers to visit Forensic Science Service Tasmania and discuss the findings and results; failing to challenge the comment of the trial judge about urine and the possible transfer of the Meghan Vass DNA by way of foot traffic; and failing to properly cross-examine Ms Vass, including as to her friends and associates.

Mr Jacobs said that each of these three issues should have resulted in the 2011 appeal overturning the conviction. However, none of them were raised on that appeal or on the 2012 unsuccessful application for leave to appeal to the High Court.

Mr Jacobs stated that Ms Neill-Fraser was caught in a catch 22 situation. Her 2021 appeal needed to establish fresh and compelling evidence. The above issues were not fresh, they were there in 2010, but were missed. As I stated in August 2021, this case will not rest and for good reason. There are simply too many unanswered questions.

The Attorney-General has a duty to protect all Tasmanians, and to take steps to ensure there has not been a miscarriage of justice. Ms Neill-Fraser has spent 13 years of her life in jail, and will spend the next 10 as a parolee. It is not enough to say she is no longer in prison, so we should all rest easy now. Being a parolee impacts on her daily life. The reality is that she will never truly be free again while the label 'murderer' hangs over her head. I am informed that Ms Neill-Fraser is determined to clear her name and prevent the same thing happening to anybody else.

I am also advised that Mr Robert Richter KC and Mr David Edelson KC, the lawyer involved in the later Jeff Thompson surveillance device matter, wrote to the Attorney-General some four weeks ago a detailed letter also calling for a commission of inquiry. They are yet to receive a substantive response. I call upon the Attorney-General to provide a considered response to the submissions of Mr Jacobs. Moreover, I call upon the Attorney-General to establish a committee of inquiry into the Sue Neill-Fraser conviction, and wider systemic and entrenched issues in our justice system which may have led to other miscarriages of justice in Tasmania as well.

So that members can read for themselves the work of Mr Jacobs, I seek leave to lay upon the table the following associated papers, being the original submission to the Attorney-General and the Law Society, dated 27 September 2022, and the more recent revised summary submission, dated 9 November 2022, which includes some corrections and an additional important point related to the Meghan Vass issue. I also seek to table the two responses of the Attorney-General to Mr Jacobs, dated 24 January and 13 October 2022.

I appreciate the members giving me 13 minutes of their time here this evening, but I also have to reinforce that Sue Neill-Fraser has spent 13 years of her life in jail. I think a committee of inquiry is very important. Mr President, I ask that the members accept seeking leave to table the documents.

Leave granted.

The Council adjourned at 6.38 p.m.

Appendix 1

Member for Nelson (No. 6)

TASMANIA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SESSION 2022

NOTICE OF QUESTION

Tabled and incorporated
into Hansard
L. Hiscott

15.11.2022

26 October 2022

I (*Ms Webb*) tomorrow to ask the Honourable Leader of the Government —

With regard to the ongoing uncertainty of the future of the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute (TLRI), and in light of the following considerations:

- (a) The establishing Agreement between the Founding Partners of the University of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Government and the Law Society of Tasmania is due for renewal in November this year;
- (b) the Legislative Council's affirmative vote on Tuesday, 27 September this year in support of a motion calling for the Government to prioritise delivering in full, and in good faith, the recommendations of the Review of the TLRI Final Report; and commit to ensuring Tasmania's acclaimed premier law reform agency is sufficiently resourced to place it on a 'secure and sustainable footing into the future' as recommended by the 2022 TLRI Review Final Report; and
- (c) my correspondence dated 28 July this year to the Attorney-General on this matter, which remains outstanding to date —

can the Government provide the requested information for the following outstanding matters:

- (1) The Government's formal response to the findings and 20 recommendations made in the South Australian Law Reform Institute (SALRI) Final Report of the Review of the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute, which was publicly released on 20 July this year;
- (2)
 - (a) whether the Founding Partners Agreement will be renewed in November this year; and
 - (b) if so, can the Government provide a copy of the new Agreement once finalised and signed;
- (3) details of any new governance and structural reforms made to the TLRI, and how they are intended to secure a contemporary and sustainable TLRI into the future;
- (4) the Government's ongoing funding commitment to the TLRI, noting the TLRI Review's recommendation number 19 that the annual baseline or recurrent funding from the Government be increased to at least \$200 000 per annum, to support the Institute's work programme;

- (5) the process and the role of the Government in securing a permanent Director of the TLRI; and
- (6) the expected tenure of current Acting Director, Associate Professor Jeremy Prichard, and what role the Government had in that appointment.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Tasmania Law Reform Institute (TLRI) was established on 23 July 2001 by Agreement between the Tasmanian Government, the University of Tasmania (UTAS) and the Law Society of Tasmania (LST). That Agreement has been consistently renewed and supported by the Tasmanian Government, and all of the three Founding Partners since that time.

The TLRI is currently led by Associate Professor Jeremy Prichard as Acting Director. UTAS is responsible for appointing all Directors of the TLRI, including Directors appointed in an acting capacity.

The current foundation Agreement for the TLRI will expire on 23 November 2022. The Tasmanian Government, alongside UTAS and the LST, remain committed to ensuring that the TLRI can continue its important work and that it is appropriately resourced to do so.

On 20 July 2022, the South Australian Law Reform Institute released its Final Report from a review of the TLRI. That Report contains 20 recommendations, 19 of which recommend changes to terms of the Agreement underpinning the TLRI. The Tasmanian Government is working with the Founding Partners to ensure that the work of the TLRI continues and that the terms of a revised Agreement, preserve an independent and contemporary law reform body.



Hon Elise Archer MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Justice

Date: 7 November 2022