



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

REPORT OF DEBATES

Thursday 2 June 2022

REVISED EDITION

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Thursday 2 June 2022

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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL 2022 (No. 28)

LAND TAX AMENDMENT (FOREIGN INVESTORS) BILL 2022 (No. 17)

**LAND TAX RATING AMENDMENT (FOREIGN INVESTORS)
BILL 2022 (No. 16)**

DUTIES AMENDMENT BILL 2022 (No. 18)

Third Readings

[11.05 a.m.]

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

That the bills be now read the third time

Bills read the third time.

MOTION

Budget Papers and Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2) 2022 - Noting

Continued from 31 May 2022 (page 113).

[11.06 a.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I believe I have concluded the remarks I had to make on the Budget. I note the Budget and look forward to further contributions.

Mr PRESIDENT - I ask that all members provide courtesy to the member for Huon during his first speech. It is customary to listen in silence. If there are parts where you need to be involved by a 'hear, hear' or a laugh, that is fine, otherwise we do not interrupt the inaugural speech.

[11.07 a.m.]

Mr HARRISS (Huon)(Inaugural) - Mr President, I consider it an honour in this National Reconciliation Week to acknowledge the traditional and original owners of the land on which we meet today. I recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture, and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I congratulate the member for McIntyre and the member for Elwick on their return to this place, both with majority votes, which is the strongest endorsement of the service they have given to their electorates. I also express my gratitude for the representation provided to the electorate by Dr Bastian Seidel over the 18 months he was the member. I know that Bastian

was well regarded by members and he made a real mark during his time here. His expertise, knowledge and decency on a range of issues that came through here were of immense value.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the former premier for his 20 years of service to the state. When my campaign started, back in February, he was still premier. Mr Gutwein led with strength and compassion from the onset of the pandemic. Tasmanians, by and large, trusted his judgment and his leadership.

As I stand in this Chamber today giving my inaugural speech, it is very important to me that I honour my mother, Michele, who left this life almost 14 years ago at a young age of 52 after bravely fighting cancer for eight years. I know she would have done all she could to help me on this journey, and she would have been so proud when the results of the election fell my way.

I had a very small group of helpers throughout the campaign. I suspect, like most Independent candidates, mine were predominantly family. I am very thankful for the hours my wife, Melinda, put in to keep me focused, and the hundreds of kilometres she walked around the electorate letterboxing while I was able to concentrate on visiting people, which, as a matter of necessity, I did on my own. This is not a reflection at all on candidates who represent political parties, as I have the greatest respect for our electoral system, where the people elect those they wish to represent them, party-supported or non-party.

Members would not be surprised to hear that my father was pivotal to the campaign. I am very grateful for the many hours he spent giving advice - some was not always asked for - and for the planning he put in and for the physical work he did. Likewise, my father-in-law, Ross Seabourne, who once we got him started and charged his batteries, we could not stop him. He was of such immense support and assistance.

Our four children, Brady, Ruby, Lyla and Harvey, had their patience tested when I would come home pretty late some nights, after spending mornings every day managing construction sites and then hitting the hustings. I thank each of them from the bottom of my heart for their love and support.

After the election Melinda and I told the kids that I had been elected and would start a new job. They all asked what I would be doing and what the new job involved. I did not really know how to explain it. Albert Einstein best described my inability to satisfy the children's interest:

If you cannot explain it to a six-year-old, you do not understand it yourself.

Clearly, I have a fair bit of learning to do.

You may notice, Mr President, that my wife, Melinda, is not here today. That is because she is looking after a couple of pretty sick children, and is also struggling with a bit of sickness herself, but I am sure she will be watching online - possibly the last time that she will put herself through the pain of watching me speak in this place.

There are a few others who so kindly gave their time letterboxing: my good mate, Mitch Sullivan, my aunt and uncle, Wendy and Craig Bradburn; and friends, Andrew and Bec Bone. That was the team. I am grateful for their help.

I am grateful for the welcome and assistance I have received from honourable members and staff to help my transition from being on building sites for over the past 25 years to this place. I look forward to the warmer surroundings of the office through winter, and my workload into the future, both in this place, and around the entire electorate.

The Huon electorate from Cockle Creek through the Huon Valley, Bruny Island, the Channel and Blackmans Bay encompasses the very best part of Tasmania. Because I am protected, as you mentioned, Mr President, from interjections in my inaugural speech, the public record will show that my claim to the best part of Tasmania was not contested by any member.

Members will appreciate this journey I now travel with them, as a representative of the community - it is rather different than my entire working life to this point. I hope I can bring to the parliament and to my community a practical can-do approach to the role, which has been forged in the somewhat stressful fires of the building trades. I shall do my best to also adhere to some guiding principles or philosophies that have moulded my life, often learnt from the school of hard knocks.

I have the greatest respect for the important contributions that local sporting clubs make to our communities - the thousands of volunteers involved make Tasmania a better place. In particular, many young people have their lives changed by being around a sporting club.

Additionally, I value enduring mateship in a way that is somewhat unique to Australians - values that have taught me by participating most of my life in team sports. I understood very early in my sporting pursuit that in any team, today's top performer will have a bad day. So, it is pointless consistently blaming others for a team's failures when we have a clouded view of our own stand-out brilliance. We will fall quickly and heavily.

In that context, I reflect on one of the great speeches of the 20th century, delivered by Franklin D Roosevelt in Portland, Oregon. He said:

I have come, not primarily to speak but, rather, to hear; not to teach, but to learn. I want to hear your problems, to understand them and to consider them as they bear on the larger scene of national interest.

President Roosevelt further said:

... the object of Government is the welfare of the people. The liberty of people to carry on their business should not be abridged unless the larger interests of the many are concerned. When the interests of the many are concerned, the interests of the few must yield. It is the purpose of the Government to see not only that the legitimate interests of the few are protected but that the welfare and rights of the many are conserved. ... This, I take it, is sound Government - not politics.

I believe they are sound guiding principles. I give this assurance to my electorate that I will never abandon my independence, for that has been my conviction about this place from the time I started taking an interest, some 20 years ago.

In this National Reconciliation Week I wish to state my pride in my Indigenous heritage. I have had the incredible privilege of representing Tasmania at the National Indigenous Cricket Championships in Alice Springs over a decade through my 20s. At the championships there was a day devoted for players from all states to connect with our culture by meeting locals and sharing stories. For me and my teammates, these experiences deepened a resolve to be better and do better in taking opportunities to advance the cause of reconciliation and the understanding that the wrongs of the past need to be addressed.

It would do all Tasmanians well to understand the horror of the Black War in Tasmania between 1824 and 1831. Nicholas Clements, in his scholarly book, reprinted in 2021, indicates this conflict saw the most intense fighting of any Australian frontier, yet has largely been forgotten. I shall not go into detail, but if one understands the manner in which our Indigenous forebears were described and treated, one would better understand why Tasmanians need to move more swiftly than has been the case until now to truth in storytelling and true reconciliation.

I will conclude with a few comments on the Budget. I have appreciated the considered contributions of all members, drawing on their experience and grasp of matters financial in what I find daunting volumes of 'economic speak' as I participate in my first exposure to such matters. I have had to google the definition of more words in one week in this place than I have over 20 years on building sites.

I note there is substantial, but dare I say it, ambitious investment in infrastructure over the coming year and the out-years. While it may be appropriate in a very favourable financial environment to debt fund infrastructure developments, the real test is actually getting the rubber to hit the road. The emerging debt has drawn comments of concern from far more qualified commentators than me, but it is worth mentioning again. I recall when the Liberal government came to office in 2014, the treasurer identified net debt and accumulative deficit to be in a seriously bad position, and to his credit, immediately set about turning things around.

What was the net debt at the time? Around \$400 million - most interesting, when at 30 June next year the number is forecast to be \$3 billion. I am interested in the strategy that will be applied, at some stage, to rein in the state's debt, particularly as interest rates take off on the back of significant inflation pressures.

Finally, I turn my mind to a component of the Budget that will always draw my attention, the building industry generally, and specifically, the housing sector. Ensuring the family, in its many forms, has a safe place to call home on a long-term basis is surely one of the most fundamental things any government can do for its people. Commendably, the Government aspires to build 10 000 social and affordable homes over the next 10 years. The program is to be managed by the new housing authority. I look forward to understanding what the role of that new authority will be.

Here is the rub, 1000 homes per year every year over the next decade. This is a massive ask against the backdrop of performance over the last eight years and possibly, even more particularly, against the backdrop of the immensely constrained industry in terms of labour and product supply chains. That is to say nothing of land availability and the inordinate cost planning constraints that confront every building around the state.

Additionally, I am reminded of a prominent, commendable economic plank of the New Zealand Labour Party during their 2017 election campaign to build 1000 homes in the first full financial year, rising to 5000 in their second year of government, and 10 000 every year thereafter to deliver 100 000 affordable new homes in a decade. The policy was called KiwiBuild. They built 1058 by May 2021 - well short of the target of 16 000. The policy was reset in 2019 and the target scrapped. I hope we can deliver and get thousands of Tasmanians into affordable homes over coming years and the aspirations set out in the Budget transform into reality.

Mr President, I am looking forward to the steep learning experience of participating in the Estimates committees next week and I note the Budget.

Members - Hear, hear.

[11.21 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - I congratulate the member for Huon for his very thoughtful, honest and heartfelt inaugural speech. I know all members in this Chamber are looking forward to working with you. I am sure members who have been here for some time would have appreciated the term 'turn your mind to'. It was a popular term for a previous member for Huon. He addressed his mind to many issues. That was a lovely link back.

We also welcome your wife, Melinda and your family, and know that all members wish you a rewarding and enjoyable time as the member for Huon in the Legislative Council.

Members - Hear, hear.

Recognition of Visitors

[11.22 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - I also welcome Goulburn Primary School classes 5 and 6 to the Chamber, who came along to witness the member for Huon's very first speech. That is not something that everyone gets to see.

At the moment, we are noting the budget papers. Now that the member for Huon has completed his first speech in this place, we will continue to note the recent Budget papers.

[11.22 a.m.]

Ms HOWLETT (Prosser) - I also congratulate the member for Huon on his inaugural speech. I very much look forward to your contributions in this place.

I rise to make my contribution to the 2022-23 Tasmanian state Budget reply.

I wish to begin by thanking the former premier/treasurer Peter Gutwein for his 20 years of service and for delivering successive strong budgets and for guiding the Tasmanian people and Tasmanian economy through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I also acknowledge the contributions of Sarah Courtney in her position as Liberal member for Bass and for the contributions she made to the numerous ministerial portfolios she held over the years. I wish Sarah and Peter very well in their life after politics.

I wish to acknowledge our new Premier, Jeremy Rockliff, a man who is greatly respected around Tasmania. I know he will lead a government with heart, one that is courageous, accountable and delivers on its commitments.

To our new Treasurer, Michael Ferguson, congratulations for delivering your first Budget. Under your stewardship, the Tasmanian economy is definitely in very good hands. For nine consecutive quarters, the Tasmanian economy has led the nation, ranking as the best performing economy and scoring highly in the key economic indicators. A strong economy has allowed the Government to invest more into things that Tasmanians care about.

The 2022-23 state Budget is about strengthening Tasmania's future. It makes the priorities of Tasmanians our priorities. This Budget takes action on the cost of living, keeps Tasmanians safe and invests more into health and mental health, education and housing than ever before. It includes a record \$5.6 billion to continue building the infrastructure our communities need, increases health expenditure to a third of the entire budget, with \$11.2 billion across the budget and forward Estimates, and provides \$583 million over the next four years, which is part of our record \$1.5 billion over 10 years to build 10 000 new homes for Tasmanians.

The Budget also provides over \$305 million in concessions to support vulnerable Tasmanians to meet essential costs of living, including the cost of water and sewerage, electricity and council rates. This is a budget that balances providing support to help Tasmanians who need it most while maintaining a strong pace of delivery and investing to strengthen Tasmania's future.

I will now discuss how this Budget delivers for my electorate of Prosser, starting with this Budget's landmark infrastructure investment. We are investing \$731 million towards the construction of the new \$786 million Bridgewater bridge. We promised to build a new Bridgewater bridge and we are delivering on that promise. On 18 May it was announced that the independent major project assessment panel appointed by the Tasmanian Planning Commission had approved the construction of the bridge. The project is the first to utilise the Tasmanian Government's new major projects assessment process. Major construction will begin this year and the new bridge is expected to be open to traffic by the end of 2024. I am extremely excited about this.

This Budget continues our investment in the \$350 million South East Traffic Solution between Sorell and Hobart. If you have not been to Sorell lately, the next time you go you will notice that a lot has changed. There is a hive of workers and machines working day and night. The airport roundabout has been replaced with a flyover that recently opened to traffic. The Midway Point roundabout is no longer there and is being replaced by a multi-lane intersection controlled by traffic lights. There are now two new roundabouts in the Sorell township that will provide access to the Sorell Southern Bypass.

The next projects in the South East Traffic Solution pipeline are the duplication of the Tasman Highway between the airport and Midway Point, which will begin this year, and the duplication of the Midway Point and Sorell causeways, which will commence in 2023.

We are investing \$50 million for upgrades to the Arthur Highway. The Arthur Highway is a key tourist route with a significant level of visitation to the Port Arthur Historic Site, Eaglehawk Neck, Pennicott cruises, the wonderful Three Capes Walk and the Tasman National

Park. This investment will include upgrades along the length of the highway between the connection with the Sorell Southern Bypass and Port Arthur. The upgrades will deliver wider road shoulders, junction upgrades and new overtaking lane opportunities, making the drive to the Tasman Peninsula more enjoyable and safer for residents and visitors.

Funding of the \$565 million Midland Highway Action Plan is continuing, with upgrades currently underway at Ross, Oatlands and Campbell Town. The action plan will see more than 20 individual projects completed along the Midland Highway that have improved safety, convenience and have reduced travel times.

When it comes to education, the Tasmanian Liberal Government is investing \$46.1 million towards the construction of the new \$50 million Brighton High School and \$18.5 million towards the construction of a \$22 million kinder to year 12 Sorell school. These investments will address the future education needs that the rapidly growing municipalities of Brighton and Sorell will require to educate young people from the start of kinder to the end of college.

Sorell will also benefit from the \$23.8 million investment in six new child and family centres statewide. Dodges Ferry Primary and Campbell Town District schools will share in the \$6.95 million investment towards upgrading outdated classrooms across Tasmania. Campbell Town District school is receiving \$1.95 million for the agriculture in schools program.

Prosser is also a major beneficiary of this Budget's investment in health and emergency services. There is \$3.3 million provided by this Budget over four years to provide four additional paramedics to the Sorell Ambulance Station. This will deliver for Sorell a career station, with fully qualified paramedic crews on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This Budget commits \$8.1 million to complete the \$12 million Sorell Emergency Services Hub. This state-of-the-art facility will house Tasmania Police and volunteer members of the Tasmania Fire Service and State Emergency Service in one central location, providing a valued 24/7 emergency response to the greater Sorell community. It will allow SES personnel to be permanently stationed in Sorell, and will provide the infrastructure needed to call for volunteers to join the service. Construction of the hub commenced in April. The recruitment of new local TFS and SES volunteers is currently underway.

This Budget is committing \$7.5 million as part of the \$10 million regional health and ambulance facility fund to construct new ambulance stations across Tasmania. In Prosser, this will see a new ambulance station constructed in Oatlands. Also in Oatlands, \$3.5 million is being provided to upgrade the Midlands Multi-Purpose Health Centre. The upgrade to the centre will be focused on increasing the comforts of the facility for patients and residents, including delivering improved bathroom access and privacy. Additionally, the police housing in Oatlands will be upgraded as part of the \$3.25 million investment for the new upgrade of police housing statewide. Nubeena will also benefit from this, with an upgrade to its police housing.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government has year after year invested in our tourism infrastructure in order to grow and strengthen the industry, additionally helping our tourism industry recover from the impacts of COVID-19, which is vitally important, especially for jobs in our regional areas and for the broader economy. We must ensure that we continue to invest in tourism so that we can continue to attract visitors while delivering high-quality experiences

well into the future. The 2022-23 Budget continues this investment and Prosser is a major beneficiary.

This Budget continues the \$131 million investment for upgrading the Great Eastern Drive. Since 2018, numerous projects have been started and completed with the aim of improving the driver experience, overall safety and travel time along the sections of the Great Eastern Drive. These upgrades have included numerous junction upgrades, turning lanes, overtaking lanes and new sections of road.

The Freycinet National Park has been one of the fastest growing and most popular tourism destinations in Tasmania. The state Government is taking the responsible approach of improving infrastructure to meet the existing demands. Also, and more importantly, it is taking steps to ensure the benefits of tourism do not compromise the natural, cultural and social values of the Freycinet Peninsula. That is why in this Budget we will see an investment of \$14 million to develop a new visitor gateway adjacent to the Freycinet National Park. The visitor gateway will include: a transport hub with a shuttle bus to Wineglass Bay car park; realignment of the road to alleviate congestion on Freycinet Drive and the impact on residents; and a new state-of-the-art visitor centre facility, similar to the highly acclaimed and recently opened Cradle Mountain visitor centre. This adds to our \$8.4 million investment to deliver improved waste water treatment on the Freycinet Peninsula and other projects, such as the already completed shared-use track from the Freycinet National Park facility centre through to Wineglass Bay car park and the second lookout also at Wineglass Bay.

The Maria Island National Park is now one of the key attractions on the east coast, driving the regional tourism economy. A steadily increasing visitation is growing at 24 per cent in recent years.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government is committing \$6.8 million to stage 3 of the Maria Island Re-Discovered Project, providing ongoing certainty of experience to tourism operators and visitors to the island. It includes:

- completion of new waterways treatment facilities
- improved, reliable electricity generational infrastructure and power connection to all buildings in the Darlington Precinct
- additional heritage building upgrades
- improved rainwater capture, storage and delivery assets.

On the Tasman Peninsula, we are improving \$1.5 million from the Tasman Arch and Devils Kitchen Stage 2 project, which will now include a new iconic suspension bridge across the Devils Kitchen.

This is a Budget that is about listening to Tasmanians and making their priorities our priorities. This is a Budget that responds to the current pressures on household budgets that are being caused by world-wide pressure beyond our control. This is a Budget that makes the necessary investments to strengthen the Tasmanian economy by building on the strong foundations the Tasmanian Liberal Government has established since 2014. This is a Budget that is delivering for all Tasmanians.

Mr President, I note the Budget.

[11.37 a.m.]

Mr VALENTINE (Hobart) - Mr President, I too recognise the member for Huon and his inaugural speech. It is always interesting to find out what journey people have had. To listen to that was enlightening. Quite obviously with your background, you will bring a valuable opinion to this place we can listen to and contemplate. Well done. It was a great speech.

I also acknowledge the Premier, Mr Rockliff, in his new role as the head of government and the minister, Mr Ferguson, in his role as the Treasurer. No doubt he will have an interesting time coming before Committee A and having some of the Budget tested.

I wait to be able to read some of the responses we get through the Estimates process. It is an important process. In some ways I would like to think we have the opportunity to come and deal with our budget speeches after Estimates, but it is not the way bills are handled, is it? You do the second reading speeches first, then go into Committee, which is of course the Estimates process and then you have the third reading at the end. In relation to the way we deal with things, sometimes it is a little inconvenient and we might change our speeches accordingly - if we were to know what we find out during the Estimates process - but that is the way it is. I do not know there is any way we could change that.

As usual I had some analysis done on the Budget, for which I am very grateful, bringing some greater minds to the financials than I might be able to bring myself. I always like to be able to contemplate some of the findings.

Of course, with this particular Budget, we have had all sorts of opinions through the media and sent to us from Font PR, a so-called 'vanilla budget', and listening to the concerns of the community through TasCOSS. 'Responsible as Storm Clouds Gather' was the heading on the TasCOSS article in the *Mercury*, and 'Strengthening our Future', the Tasmanian Treasurer's opinion of what the Budget is expected to do going forward.

We have some varied opinions out there - situation normal, one might say. Which is it? Is this the budget to lead us out of COVID-19 as the Tasmanian economy reawakens after two years in hibernation? Whichever way you look at it, the Tasmanian economy appears to be in a strong position, but some say there are storm clouds on the horizon. What are those storm clouds? Rising inflation, increasing debt, rising interest rates, workforce capacity issues, reducing access to materials and commodities, supply chain impediments, housing problems - pointed out by the member for Huon in the supply chain issues - increasing inequity, increasing energy costs. This Budget again seeks to build on that strong foundation in the hope that Tasmania will weather the coming storms.

While the 2021-22 Budget presented an improved debt picture to that provided in November 2020 in the 2021-22 Budget, this Budget shows an increasing debt position across the forward Estimates. Just 273 days ago when the 2021-22 Budget was handed down, the projected net debt for 2024-25 was \$3.48 billion. In this Budget, net debt is projected to increase by \$1.3 billion by the end of 2024-25, and a further \$387 million in the following year. This takes net debt to nearly \$5.2 billion over the forward Estimates, an increase of \$3.65 billion, quite significant. This result highlights the illusion of the supposed improving debt situation presented in the 2021-22 Budget and confirms this illusion resulted from the inability of the Government to spend at its expected rate over the 2020-21 financial year.

Recognition of Visitors

[11.42 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - While the member for Hobart takes a sip of water to refresh his vocal chords, I welcome another group from the Goulburn Street Primary School grades 5 and 6 to the Legislative Council today. At the moment we are noting the budget papers. The Government has handed down a budget, and members all get to put their thoughts about the Budget on record. Then next week we examine the Budget in greater detail. The member for Hobart is suitably refreshed, and I am sure that members of this Chamber hope you enjoy your time in the parliament, and learn exactly what it is all about.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you, Mr President, they are - of course - in my electorate. So, they can hold me to account.

Mr PRESIDENT - Yes, they will be able to vote for you one day.

Mr VALENTINE - Well, I do not know if they will be able to vote for me one day, because I do not think I will be here after 24 May. Again, I will put that on the record for anyone who is listening who might be interested in putting their hand up for the position.

It appears these savings have simply been carried forward rather than banked. When compared to the outcome projected in November 2020 for the 2023-24 financial year, the net debt position shows a slight improvement of \$421 million. In 2021-22 the Government appears to have overcome its inability to meet its expenditure targets, and is now meeting the planned infrastructure investments and the planned expansion to programs.

The question is, apart from whether it is being spent in the right areas, can this continue with the skill shortages being experienced across most employment categories? Will this Budget further add to the shortages and exacerbate this trend? It comes down to the capacity to have the right people employed in the right spaces, adding things like supply chain issues, as has already been pointed out by the member for Huon in his speech on housing and the building of housing, and what happened in New Zealand. I thought that was an interesting look at that particular problem.

The Budget projects a significant increase in housing activity over the Budget in an industry already operating at capacity and experiencing increasing material shortages and rapidly increasing cost pressures. As previously highlighted, major infrastructure projects depend on significant levels of imported expertise and quite often skills from other parts of Australia.

The lower level of availability of skilled medical and other professionals may also continue to hold the Government up when trying to deliver on their promises in that sphere. Our medical staff, especially those at the coalface, have done an amazing job over the last few years. I do not think anyone would disagree with that but we must recognise they are but human and it is essential that they are very well supported for the critical role that they play. They are critical to our future as a state. They keep the workforce in an operational state, so to

speak. Holistically, it is really important that we have the right health services in the right places doing the jobs that are needed to keep people functioning.

The substantial real wage rises forecast last year remain a real issue for the Budget as pressure mounts on wages, with the pressure of inflation adding to labour shortages. Some might say that this Budget does not adequately provide a mechanism to engage the Tasmanian skill base of its local workforce. Will the skill base match the level of demand going forward? Has the analysis been deep enough to guarantee a good outcome in this regard? Is the restructure of TasTAFE going to deliver a sufficiently versatile workforce that can move with demand? Or is it going to deliver a more siloed workforce that is less flexible? I am not sure it is a great time to be experimenting, given the demand that we have. Nevertheless, that is the way it has gone.

It is critical that we are able to provide the workforce for our longer term needs but we cannot overcook it either, otherwise we simply add to the unemployment rate when projects come to an end. The level of workforce generation is a calculated risk. We have to get the balance right. The question is, is enough being done in this space this financial year and in the out-years, given the forecast infrastructure projects going forward?

The Government appears to abandon the prudent budget management which put Tasmania in a strong position as COVID-19 emerged in 2020. There does not appear to be any strategy to bring the net debt down or even to stabilise it over the forward Estimates. This could be a huge risk for Tasmania in the latter half of the decade with net debt projected to exceed \$5.1 billion. Our economy will become very sensitive to any external shocks, particularly interest rate rises. Even though some lower rates have been negotiated for a while - I believe that is the case - how long we manage to have such largesse support is the question.

Like the budgets from the previous two years, this Budget does not sugar-coat the challenge ahead but this Budget has not learnt from the past two and a half years. The Tasmanian Government must engage positively with its community. On 28 August 2021 Adrienne Picone, CEO of TasCOSS stated in her *Mercury* article that:

Most importantly, this budget [the 2021-22 Budget] demonstrates a commitment to doing things differently. But as welcome as the announcements and the investments are, it comes with a caveat: the true test of this budget is yet to come.

The onus is now on the government to measure the progress and effectiveness of funding allocations against metrics that matter, metrics that measure outcomes ...

... to ensure the Premier's words are translated into reality for every Tasmanian by making sure that every opportunity is a meaningful one.

So, let's embed these green shoots and work together, across government and with our communities, as we've successfully shown we can, to create opportunity and tap the potential of Tasmanians.

These words still ring true today. Adrienne highlights in an email to her network on 27 May 2022 this year that:

The Government announced its cost-of-living response in the form of \$305 million of support for concessions. However, this announcement is nothing more than a continuation of the existing concession scheme. In fact, in real terms this represents a cut to concessions funding over the forward Estimates.

The need to do things differently clearly remains. The Government must work more closely with communities and, perhaps most importantly, community groups and not-for-profit organisations. They are the people at the coalface. It reinforces the need for the Government to become a more informed client when engaging services from outside its ranks.

Last year and also in the year before it was noted that low interest rates mean that debt is affordable. This is no longer the case. Projected borrowing costs over the forward Estimates have grown from \$215.4 million in the 2020-21 Budget to \$610 million in this Budget. This cannot be sustained.

The deficit projected to be built up over the next four years will weigh heavily on the Government's spending capacity into the medium term and well beyond the end of the forward Estimates. The 2022-23 Budget continues the trend begun with the 2018-19 Budget and its significant infrastructure focus.

Like last year's Budget, there was better recognition of the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians, even if it is playing catch-up. However, this Budget continues the trend over recent years to adequately anticipate the workforce implications of this shift. The Budget recognises Tasmania must address issues associated with living with COVID-19, introducing new targeted services following major reviews, investing in community infrastructure, digital health transformation, increased roads maintenance, youth justice facilities, housing availability and unaffordability, improving the output of our primary industry sector, combating sexual assault and family violence, securing the recovery of our tourism sector from COVID-19 and supposedly creating a more contemporary public sector.

However, it seems there is a lesser emphasis on some of the specific focus areas from last year which are important, including energy costs, food security and emergency relief. I know there is \$300 000 for a food security action plan, but that is four years before we see anything on the ground, according to the Budget, but we can look into that further. Isolation and dislocation from services - apart from the digital health initiative, which is a good initiative, but we need to look more broadly there - children in out-of-home care and low income levels and the associated level of reliance upon welfare payments. These issues have not gone away. If anything, they are becoming more critical to Tasmanians, particularly those most in need of help and assistance.

There needs to be a better balance between fixed infrastructure investment and the critical social policy areas impacting negatively on Tasmanians if we are to see the Government demonstrate that it has a heart, as is the desire of the Premier. This Budget provided an opportunity to set such a direction, but it could be said it has regrettably fallen into the old ways. Spending needs to underpin the rebuilding of the community's health and wellbeing as

we emerge from COVID-19. There must be a focus on helping all Tasmanians to participate fully, both socially and economically.

As we face the future, and as it became evident during the earlier COVID-19 times, digital inclusion and the training skills and resources needed to support it increased as a critical area for investment. For those living on low incomes, those living with a disability, small to medium businesses, those in rural and regional areas and many others in our society, digital access to services became a critically important option to physical access, but it has been largely overlooked in this Budget outside the digital health initiative, which I say is welcome. We really need to continue to focus on those Tasmanians most in need.

How did we do in 2020-21? You will note I am saying 2020-21 rather than 2021 because you get confused as to whether you are talking about the year or you are talking about the financial year. Whenever I say a slash in the middle I am talking about the financial year.

Turning to General Government Income Statement, table A1.1 on page 153 of the Budget Paper No. 1, this table sets the basis for the development of the 2022-23 Budget. This table shows the preliminary net operating balance outcome for 2021-22 of minus \$456.3 million, an improvement on the negative \$689.9 million estimated in the 2021-22 Budget. This improvement in the net operating balance is primarily a result of a \$475.7 million increase in grants received by Tasmania, a \$101.6 million increase in state taxes and a \$42 million increase in other revenues. Eroding this improved revenue situation were significant increases in employee expenses of \$118.9 million, increased grants and subsidies of \$89.9 million, increased expenditure on supplies and consumables of \$63.2 million and an increase in the nominal superannuation expense of \$61.8 million.

The better than expected outcome on Tasmania's income statement is mirrored by the state's balance sheet, Budget Paper No.1, page 155. While the 2021-22 Budget predicted a decline in net assets to \$7.928 billion for 2021-22, the actual outcome has been an improvement to around \$10.96 billion. In contrast, the projected net asset position for 2022 from the 2021-22 budget paper is just less than \$6 billion.

Total assets increased by \$1.446 billion during the year, mainly due to an increase of \$281 million in the state's equity investments in public non-financial corporation and public financial corporation sectors, and a \$812 million increase in other financial assets.

Liabilities saw some significant changes including a \$250 million reduction in borrowings and a further reduction of \$1.482 billion, which is on top of the 2020-21 reduction of \$2.416 billion in the budget paper for that year, in the superannuation liability, which is largely due to an improvement in the discount and earnings rate from an estimated 1.5 per cent for 2022, to 2.5 per cent for 2023 and beyond. I have to say, that is welcome when you look at the overall superannuation liability. We know it is not dollars that are being paid up-front. It is a liability and it goes forward, but knowing that it has been reduced by \$2.416 billion from its heights is something we should be thankful for going forward.

In last year's budget, the Government projected a reduction in its net debt position over the four years of forward Estimates of around \$988 million. The 2022-23 Budget sharply reverses this position, and net debt is projected to increase substantially over the forward Estimates to \$5.179 billion. This is over \$1.3 billion more than provided for in last year's budget.

Rather than putting on the brakes, in the face of the gathering storm clouds, as I alluded to earlier, the Government appears to be accelerating headlong into them. The preliminary outcome in net debt for 2021-22 is about \$182 million, better than estimated in August 2021.

However, and unlike in the 2021-22 Budget, this improvement has not been carried forward over the forward Estimates. These results for 2021-22 again highlight the well-recognised sensitivity of Tasmania's financial position to external shocks, with COVID-19 being an extreme example of such a shock.

However, the results also illustrate how the normal course of events such as staffing demands, pay rises, emergency events, economic performance at a national level, the returns from state-owned corporations and the level of Commonwealth grants, impact on Tasmania's finances.

This Budget has not continued to bank the savings from 2020-21 as a result of underspending in that year. They have been spent and then the credit card has been used again. This leaves future governments with a significantly gloomier outlook and little room to manoeuvre as the storm clouds approach. Even the net operating balance moves back into the black in 2023-24, and then going forward to 2025-26 with small cash surpluses, this Budget has weakened the hand of future governments to address the issues which will arise as inflation and interest rates rise.

This apparent conflicting result, with net operating balance improving while net debt increases, is due to a continued level of borrowings over the forward Estimates with borrowings increasing significantly when compared to the position put 273 days ago in the 2021-22 Budget.

Borrowings in this Budget are projected to grow \$4.13 billion for 2022-23 to \$6.4 billion by 2025-26. Tasmania, like most economies, is in for a rocky and uncertain future. Any significant shock to our economy, such as experienced over the past two years, will be catastrophic for the Tasmanian Government. Given the gathering storm clouds mentioned earlier, a more conservative budget approach would have been prudent.

The forward program of borrowings outlined in the 2021-22 Budget was substantial. This Budget puts that program up a few notches in a more uncertain climate. To continue a headlong charge is perhaps a very risky venture for the state's new Treasurer.

In the previous five years it has been noted that strong revenue and expenditure management is a critical ongoing priority for the state. As we move through the COVID-19 recovery phase, this critical need increases exponentially, and the ability of the Tasmanian Government to continue its large spending turnaround will eventually end.

The key issue now is when will a future budget take on this reality, as this Budget appears blind to it.

Some highlights in the Budget: pages 4 and 5 of the budget papers detail the key budget priorities. While last year the Budget was focused on implementing the Government's election promises and this year's Budget continues that support, the 2022-23 Budget has directed additional funding towards the following areas - strengthening essential services to support living with COVID-19, introducing new targeted services and, as a result of recommendations made through major reviews, continuing to invest in community infrastructure.

With around \$1.2 billion in new investments and initiatives over the forward Estimates, included in this expenditure are, amongst other things:

- \$166 million for health services across the state, including \$50 million for continuing demand for major hospitals;
- \$150 million for the digital health transformation projects, including \$40 million reallocated from the Department of Health's existing budget allocation;
- \$81.5 million for increased roads maintenance;
- \$40 million for new youth justice facilities to replace the Ashley Youth Detention Centre;
- \$44 million as an additional state contribution to the new Bridgewater bridge;
- \$35 million as an initial allocation to deliver housing initiatives as part of the \$1.1 billion in new investment over 10 years through Housing Tasmania;
- \$32 million for contributions to major irrigation projects throughout the state;
- \$25 million for upgrades at the Dial Regional Sports Complex;
- \$18.9 million to continue the Derwent Ferry Service;
- \$15.1 million for a trial of multidisciplinary centres to support victims/survivors of sexual assault;
- \$13.8 million in additional funding to operate the Southern Remand Centre;
- \$12.5 million in 2022-23 for Tasmania's third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan to be finalised in 2022;
- \$11.3 million to continue fixed term COVID-19 housing support into 2022-23 and 2023-24;
- \$10 million for Tourism Tasmania to continue initiatives to secure a recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and maximise Tasmania's visitor economy future; and
- \$2 million for the implementation of recommendations made as part of the State Service Review.

In addition to these expenditure priorities, the 2022-23 Budget continues the Government's ambitious infrastructure investment program with a record investment in infrastructure of \$5.6 billion. No doubt this program is expected to secure a better future for Tasmanians by maintaining a growing pipeline of projects that increase the confidence of Tasmanian businesses to invest, employ and grow over the short and medium term. The 2022-23 Budget outlines over \$4.8 billion of investment by the General Government sector over the forward Estimates which includes roads and bridges; human services and housing; hospitals and health; schools, education and skills; ICT support for service delivery; law and order; and tourism, recreation and culture.

Additionally, the Budget provides additional equity injections of \$736.9 million to government businesses and other entities, including Tasmanian Railway Pty Ltd for rail infrastructure projects; Tasmanian Irrigation Pty Ltd for tranche 3 of the irrigation projects and energy on farms initiatives; Tasmanian Water and Sewage Corporation Pty Ltd; and Hydro Tasmania to support the redevelopment of the Tarraleah power plant.

As with last year's program, it is fair to say this Budget continues to miss the mark in effectively supporting the Tasmanian community. It is again disappointing the Budget fails to adequately recognise the significant social effects of COVID-19 on those Tasmanians most in need of support. This includes our rapidly ageing population and those partially dependent on

a range of state and Commonwealth support programs. As with last year, there is significant spending on ICT programs in support of service delivery but no mention of including digital inclusion for Tasmanians in need, something I will follow up on during Estimates. There is a strong element of infrastructure spending on crime and punishment but little to alleviate crime levels.

In the largest budget area, again there is limited spending and strategy in preventive health with the aim of reducing the demand for acute services in the medium term. This should be a long-term strategy, otherwise we will continue to see the Health budget demand an increasing percentage of the budget. It is something I have noted before and certainly the member for Murchison has noted and preventive health is so important. The programs are so important. They are long term. They are not election grabbers, but they are needed.

Ms Forrest - Also your comment about digital literacy and digital inclusion fits right into that.

Mr VALENTINE - It absolutely does. We have to bite the bullet and do that stuff and include it.

This Budget continues with the old ways. It seeks to build a way out of problems, a solution which is no longer sustainable, especially given the budget task ahead. It is surely time to adopt an approach to the delivery of government service programs and investment with a stronger focus on health and wellbeing. I realise the promotion of infrastructure projects might be argued to reduce unemployment but there is not much use in it if the health of the workforce is deteriorating, as I noted earlier. There is a balance.

While last year's budget represented a significant challenge for the Government, this year's Budget doubles down on that challenge. It represents a significantly greater spending commitment than any prior Tasmanian government, as far as I am aware. This Budget increases the need for the Tasmanian Government to apply the high standards of project management if the funds are to be effectively spent and deliver value for money outcomes for the community.

It is all right to set the aspirations but if you cannot meet them then quite clearly you have to rethink it. Is this a way of Government banking some money to take forward and have to spend more effectively as they see fit? I am not saying it is just this government. I am sure other governments of other colours and persuasions have done exactly the same sort of thing in the past. But it seems to be significant over the last few years. Coupled with strong project management will be a need for those seeking to deliver these programs to be skilled, knowledgeable and well informed. That is in the project management area.

This challenge for the public sector is now critical, given the loss of many skilled and knowledgeable staff over recent years. Outsourcing these skills does not come without its problems. Perhaps learning from the COVID-19 experience there are a wide range of changes that could take place across the government sector that would result in stronger community interaction and engagement. Organisations such as COTA, TasCOSS and Health Consumers Tasmania must be more fully engaged with government to better design and deliver programs that reduce the demand for services over the medium to longer term through targeted initiatives that help to change people's behaviours.

It is called working more effectively with community organisations to decide the best strategies to come forward. Governments quite often feel that they have to be the original thinkers, it has to be their thought. No, there are people on the ground out there doing the work, working with the people at the coalface and they are the ones who understand. They are the ones who know where the dollar would be best spent. Yes, there will be some self-interest in that, in promoting their own organisation and how their own organisation operates. But we need to listen to them. We need to plan accordingly. A specific budget initiative which looks more strategically at how demand for services can be better managed through preventive measures is now obvious by its absence.

Apart from its COVID-19 response, where the Tasmanian Government has been highly proactive, it continues to prefer acute interventions, that is firefighting over early intervention - which you might term as back-burning - to stop problems. The daily trial by media which the Government experiences simply adds to this problem. There are some examples of the Government seeking to engage with communities at the earliest possible stage when identifying and addressing issues, but these are the exception. The current reluctance to work with communities in seeking preventive solutions dominates public administration in Tasmania.

This Budget provides funding to implement the recommendations made as part of the State Service review. It will be extremely important when implementing the road map provided by the review, and the root and branch reform recommended, to now consider a stronger focus on actual service delivery and the outcomes provided. The implementation of the review needs a strong element of early and strong community engagement at all stages, basically working with the community sector once more.

The Government has continued the current practice where each agency reports to multiple ministers. I expect a number of members will agree this is a recipe for inefficiency and the loss of clear lines of accountability, both within government and the public sector. How often have we heard a response at Estimates, sorry, that is minister such and such's jurisdiction and it just happens to be in the other administration committee? The recent announcement by the Premier to restore the lower House to 35 members is perhaps a reflection of this current inefficiency. It will be interesting to see how that goes. At this point in time, you would have to convince me why not to vote for that. In my experience, with the way backbenchers down there - even from that perspective - are across so many different committees, they can only do so much. The ministers have too many portfolios for an individual to really drill down. At the end of the day, the bureaucrats end up providing advice. And that is not a disrespect to the bureaucrats - they are doing their job and they have to provide advice - but it is the minister who has been elected. It is the minister who should be able to drill down to see if the expected outcomes are going to meet the policy direction that they are going in. You cannot do that when you simply have too much work - you have to take other people's advice.

That is where the extra members might come in. I realise we are not to comment too much about the other place; that is for their business. We will deal with that legislation as it comes forward but, at this point, I remain to be convinced that it should not happen, not that it should happen.

Despite it being a generation ago that Tasmania moved to a streamlined agency structure, the ministry remains basically tied to the past. Perhaps now is the time to review the need for the 40 separate portfolios which ministers hold. Perhaps now is the time to recognise that if a

departmental head can manage work across a range of portfolios, a minister can do likewise and not be burdened with a range of titles. It is an interesting thought.

This portfolio structure perhaps reflects the influence of various lobby groups rather than the need of an efficient public administration. Perhaps it is time to review the recommendations of the Nixon review on the parliamentary system and the structure of executive government and the bureaucracy. I am told that that review holds some answers, and the recommendations have not withered with the passage of time and are as relevant today as we seek to implement the findings of the State Service Review as they were in the mid-1990s. Quite clearly, there is some homework.

With COVID-19 changing all our lives, and the Budget focused on recovery and infrastructure investment, it appears the loss of focus on the cost of living continues. With inflation now rearing its head, cost of living will catapult into prominence over the coming year. With the provision of many critical services in Tasmania via government businesses, there will be increasing pressure on government to forgo the strong dividend flows which underpin the budget projections over the forward Estimates. Compared to last year, the 2022-23 budget Estimates dividends tax and rate equivalent payments are some \$32 million greater over the period 2022-23 to 2024-25 than estimated in last year's budget.

This is clearly the dog chasing its tail; higher prices to gain stronger profits and good dividends result in greater pressures on those most affected, and unable to avoid those ever-higher prices. The recent decision from the Energy Regulator on retail price levels for Aurora is an example of how the pressure of competition is not being applied to government business. The regulator's final determination, while insulating Aurora from taking corporate action to better deliver its retail services, leaves Tasmanian consumers - particularly those on low and fixed incomes - facing higher power bills than they should. It supports the monopoly pricing behaviour of government business, rather than requiring it to implement the operational efficiencies all energy retailers across Australia have found in the more competitive environment they face.

The regulator went part of the way but fell short of the final hurdle in its final determination. As I see it, if there is money to be made in private windfarms, why is the Government not investing in this space, reducing the need for consumers to pay for the profit margin? Risk sharing is probably the first response that we would hear back, but it always bemuses me that there is an encouragement for private enterprise to get into the power generation game when private enterprise expects a profit. That is going to have to come out of the pockets of those who use that electricity, clearly it is not going to be as low as if it was a government business, so I query that.

The focus on better transit for Tasmania appears to be continuing, and successful implementation of improved transit should reduce car dependency, provide better linkages for Tasmanian residents to the services they need to access and offset the need for increased roads expenditure. It is well recognised that more road infrastructure for private cars only exacerbates traffic problems rather than solves them. As such, road infrastructure investment must be highly strategic and, in the Tasmanian context, it must facilitate improved transit outcomes.

Transport and energy are but two examples of where a strong focus on integrated, smart infrastructure and services by the Government would deliver better outcomes for the

community and also lower costs for government. Similar thinking could be applied across the board by considering smarter approaches to housing investment; a strong emphasis on preventive health; better parenting support; better support and supporting of prisoners on their release to disrupt the networks they make when inside, which gives them a greater chance of them reoffending; and providing better supports for older Tasmanians seeking to age in place by having a stronger focus on aged-friendly communities and businesses.

To take these steps requires a government and a bureaucracy that is open, transparent and willing to engage with new and innovative ideas and to engage more strongly with the Tasmanian community and with some organisations in the public domain and non-government sector.

Budget Estimates summary: delivering the Budget, there is always a trade-off between income, expenditure and debt. The five budgets prior to 2019-20 have done a reasonable job in getting this balance appropriate. However, the 2019-20 Budget abandoned the cautious and responsible approach of previous years. In response to COVID-19, the approach of 2020-21 verged on reckless, in respect to its treatment of debt and maintaining the delicate balance of the Government's previous budgets. The environment of 2020-21 required this approach. The uncertainty was unprecedented and governments needed to act with strong resolve. That is appreciated. The 2021-22 Budget continued down the path set in 2020-21 with largely unwavering determination. The 2022-23 Budget accelerates this approach.

The idea of trade-offs between expenditure, revenue and debt have been abandoned over the forward Estimates. The caution of the five budgets prior to 2019-20 is forgotten by this government. While the 2021-22 Budget indicated that the deterioration of net debt would be significantly less than projected in 2020-21, this was an illusion.

The 2022-23 Budget highlights this illusion and continues to base its dependence upon an ever-increasing debt burden over the forward Estimates. It seems the Tasmanian Government has learned how to spend and is now wedded to ever-increasing spending, rather than embarking on a forward program that is underpinned by better financial management. Tasmania will remain reliant upon increased borrowings over the forward Estimates to support both the operations of government and also the spend in support of the COVID-19 recovery.

While this expenditure and debt build-up was necessary over the past two budget cycles we cannot lose sight of the longer term implications of this debt load on the Tasmanian economy. Low interest rates have reduced the impact of debt on the Budget, but given the Government has seemed to have secured a lower interest rate for their borrowings in the mid-term, it is when they start to rise it will feel the heat of that debt burden.

Many still see the approach of increased government spending and increased debt as not being a problem, as evidenced by the support being gained for modern monetary theory. While in times of low inflation and low interest rates, debt is less of an issue, as interest rates rise and inflation again gathers pace, the accumulation of debt will become a serious issue for the Tasmanian Government. This will be exacerbated for Tasmania should exchange rates fall as money supply increases due to the actions of the Commonwealth Government, following the recent election, as it addresses the national issues associated with COVID-19 recovery.

Last year, the Government's actions were low risk in the short term but we are now in the third year of a strong budgetary stimulus and the stimulus is increasing, it would seem, despite

the gathering storm clouds. This Budget shows even less appetite for the budget discipline that was seen during the early years of the Liberal government and which put Tasmania on a good footing to address COVID-19.

Since the 2019-20 Budget the infrastructure demands for 2022-23 have increased from \$695 million to \$982 million and \$1.324 billion. These levels of infrastructure expenditure are well in excess of levels prior to 2019-20 when the big spending infrastructure budgets were introduced. Comparing the budgeted infrastructure expenditure to actual expenditure over these three budget cycles highlights a critical issue for the Government. In 2018-19 the shortfall was just \$33 million. In 2019-20 however, \$202 million of budget expenditure remained unspent. In 2020-21 this shortfall against budget had grown to \$431 million.

However, in 2021-22 the infrastructure spend exceeded the budget by \$22.9 million, as Communities Tasmania and State Growth ramped up their spending to unprecedented levels. This raises a critical question about the Government's ability to deliver such large infrastructure programs and ensure it is getting value for money in a tight infrastructure marketplace. The money is getting out the door but are the deliverables being achieved? That is the question.

The quantum of this increase in infrastructure spending within four budget cycles puts into question the strategy underlying these infrastructure investments, raising questions about the need for such a high level of infrastructure expenditure, the ability of the expenditure to be effectively delivered and managed and whether preventive programs would deliver better long-term value. This Budget, like the previous three, is based on the perceived economic injection that infrastructure expenditure provides for the Tasmanian economy.

Given the above, the ability of such expenditure to provide the best value to the Tasmanian economy and local sustainable jobs growth in the Government sector is questioned. Preventive measures which limit demand for services do not appear to be a strong priority area for government spending. As I said before, in nearly every portfolio area there would appear to be clear preventive pathways that could be followed and which could deliver significant returns on investment and, at the same time, involve much lower outlays of government.

More sustainable jobs could be created elsewhere in the economy that are perhaps better suited to the characteristics of the local labour market. However, such approaches involve spending on soft infrastructure and it is much harder to identify and measure short-term outcomes from such programs. They do not suit the 'firefighter' approach dominating government operations as we address the COVID-19 recovery and beyond. In fact, the approach to COVID-19 over the last three budgets has tended to supercharge what might be seen as an outdated approach to addressing the economic and social issues induced by COVID-19.

Ever-increasing infrastructure expenditure was the wrong approach in 2019-20 before COVID-19, let alone basing a budget on substantial infrastructure spending today, three years later. Change takes strong leadership and listening to a new cohort of advisers and community interests.

Ms Forrest - I would be happy if they spent more on Montello Primary School.

Mr VALENTINE - No doubt there are needs out there. Education spending is important. We have to have the facilities that encourage kids to study, if not anything else in effect. If they are not enjoying their time in school, then we are not hitting the right buttons.

A budget focused on soft infrastructure would deliver a budget less focused on fixed infrastructure and more focused on long-term sustainable social policy expenditure and the jobs that would bring. Such expenditure would also be likely to have a higher jobs multiplier for each dollar invested by government and the jobs would also be likely to be more sustainable, given the current skill base of the Tasmanian workforce.

With more expenditure from the Tasmanian Government circulating locally, a better and more sustainable base for local development would be created. Hard infrastructure expenditure is obvious, as are the short-term jobs it brings. But how many of these jobs come from outside Tasmania might be the question, and the level of investment that delivers with few longer-term jobs locally. Treasuries tend to be more favourably inclined to hard infrastructure expenditure. These investments are treated as one-off expenditures in the Budget, whereas social policy expenditures tend to become recurrent expenditures unless managed carefully.

It is easier to slow down or defer infrastructure expenditure than it is to put a halt to recurrent programs focused on particular issues within society. That basically is half the problem.

Debate adjourned.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

[12.24 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - I do appreciate your cooperation, member for Hobart. At this morning's briefing - for members who may be watching from their television - it was requested that Mr Barnett come in to give us a briefing about his workplace protection bill. Unfortunately, when we come back to sit to do this bill the other House is not sitting. I have checked the diary and Mr Barnett is happy to come and do that briefing now. That briefing will be in Committee Room 1, as Committee Room 2 is occupied. I ask all members in this Chamber and those listening in if they can make their way to Committee Room 1 now for that briefing.

Mr President, I move -

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

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.24 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Cressy Research Station - Funding

Ms RATTRAY question to MINISTER for PRIMARY INDUSTRIES and WATER, Ms PALMER

[2.32 p.m.]

Before I ask my question, I thank the minister in this place for putting on my seat the supplementary question I asked twice yesterday. You get busy in this place and to have that put on my seat so I can ask again today - and it is not a Dorothy Dixier. It is a genuine interest in a \$700 000 commitment given to the Cressy Research Station.

We heard yesterday from the minister there is a renewing of the lease licence arrangement for that research station. Will that firm commitment of \$700 000 stay with the facility, regardless of who has that renewed licence to this important research station?

ANSWER

Further to my response provided yesterday, I can confirm the Government has committed to invest \$700 000 on upgrades of core infrastructure at the Cressy Research and Demonstration Station. In addition, up to \$50 000 was allocated for technical advice and independent reporting to comply with relevant accountability requirements. This funding was committed by the Government in the 2018-19 Budget and announced under the Plan for Tasmania's Research Farm Capacity by then minister Guy Barnett in December 2020.

I can confirm for the member that this funding will be available regardless of who holds the lease and the Government will seek to leverage this funding with the successful lessee following the public expression of interest process currently underway.

The successful lessee will be expected to work with the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture in the delivery of their research plan for the site. The lessee will also be expected to undertake co-investment on the site in partnership with the Crown regarding infrastructure upgrades as detailed within the Plan for Tasmania's Research Farm Capacity.

Burnie Court Complex - Relocation

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

[2.35 p.m.]

Can the Leader please outline:

- (1) the amount spent by the Tasmanian Government on plans, including consultants and community engagement to relocate the Burnie Court to Mooreville Road;
- (2) the amount spent on the existing Burnie Court Complex in the last three years, broken down by year;

- (3) the anticipated cost of the recently announced expression of interest process in alternative sites for the Burnie Court Complex in the Burnie CBD; and
- (4) an outline of efficiencies anticipated by the relocation of the Burnie Court Complex?

ANSWER

The total expenditure as at 30 April 2022 on the replacement Burnie Court Complex project is \$1.931 million. This cost has been expended across the existing court site and the Mooreville Road site and includes consultant and project management costs. The amount spent on building maintenance and works for the existing Burnie Court Complex in the last three financial years broken down year by year are:

2019-20	\$75 282.67
2020-21	\$107 407.01
2021-22 YTD	\$59 501.33
Total	\$242 191.01

Please note that these include costs to make the court useable during the COVID-19 response.

The efficiencies anticipated by the relocation of the Burnie Court Complex to a new site include the following:

- continued occupancy and operation of the existing courts during the construction phase of the new court complex, resulting in no impact to the functions of the existing courts, both the Magistrates and the Supreme courts;
- the opportunity to develop a modern, fit-for-purpose court complex that is fully accessible for all court users;
- a bespoke, contemporary facility design for judicial officers, court staff, lawyers, court agencies, parties, witnesses, including vulnerable witnesses, and members of the public across a range of the court's services; and
- the inclusion of modern technologies that improve court operations through enhanced information transfer and electronic security systems.

The expression of interest process for sites for the Burnie Court Complex in the Burnie CBD costs to date are expected to be \$5273, comprising newspaper advertising costs incurred to advertise the EOI process and estimated costs for the services of a probity adviser. Any other costs are internal to Treasury and met from their existing resources.

Department of Communities Tasmania - Establishment Costs

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

[2.38 p.m.]

What was the total cost to government of establishing the Department of Communities Tasmania broken down as follows:

- (a) the cost to the Department of Health and Human Services of splitting human services from health functions and the transfer of the former to the Department of Communities Tasmania;
- (b) the cost to the Department of Premier and Cabinet of the splitting and transfer of the Communities, Sport and Recreation Division to the Department of Communities Tasmania;
- (c) the cost of physically transferring staff from their previous agencies to the Department of Communities Tasmania; and
- (d) the cost of branding and any other establishment costs of the Department of Communities Tasmania?

ANSWER

No additional funding was provided to establish the Department of Communities Tasmania. The creation of the department was achieved within existing budget allocations. Costs incurred within existing budget allocations were minimal for new identification cards, an interim agency strategic plan, signage and new agency templates.

MOTION

Budget Papers and Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2) 2022 - Noting

Resumed from above (page 21).

[2.40 p.m.]

Mr VALENTINE (Hobart) - Mr President, I completed my offering prior to lunch talking about hard infrastructure expenditure and I will continue from that point.

We are now seeing hard infrastructure expenditure factored into the Government's longer term outlook, and the debt which is piling up on the state's balance sheet will become a drag on the Government's ability to introduce any remedial action which will become inevitable as higher interest rates impact on the budget outcomes. The upward and positive trend in net operating surplus which was projected in 2019-20 is a distant memory, and now only minor changes in any of the underlying budget assumptions will wipe out any chance of a positive net operating surplus in the out-years of this 2022-23 Budget.

It really is important that there is strong budget management going forward. This Budget now supercharges the need for effective budget management at a time when our net debt position is forecast to balloon substantially and expenditure pressures dominate the forward Estimates. As is normal for a Tasmanian budget, the major source of revenue is the Commonwealth Government, followed by state taxation, sale of goods and services and dividends and tax equivalents. Health, education and public safety dominate the expenditure side of the budget.

This Budget shows a slight decline in the reliance on revenue from the Commonwealth over the forward Estimates as grants fall slightly from 65 per cent of total revenue to 64.3 per cent. However, the reliance upon state taxation is increased by 1.5 percentage points to 22.1 per cent over the forward Estimates. Contrasting this dependence upon grants and taxation is the decline in the income provided from dividends, tax and rate equivalents, which are projected to fall from 4.8 per cent of total receipts this year in 2021-22 to 3.9 per cent in 2025-26.

The budget outcomes projected in this Budget depend on continued strong growth in revenue from state taxation, with it projected to increase by \$321 million over the period 2021-22 to 2025-26. While last year the pressure for dividends indicated the move away from the energy businesses and towards the Government's monopoly no-fault motor accidents insurer, this year the trend is back toward the energy sector, particularly Aurora and TasNetworks. The dividend contribution of Hydro Tasmania continues to decline, which underlies the overall decline in dividends.

What is happening is a swap in pricing pressure from one government monopoly to two others. Either way, consumers are largely unable to escape the cost pressures associated with the pricing decisions of these monopoly businesses. Tax equivalents paid by Hydro Tasmania are also projected to fall substantially. The marked decline in the contribution being provided by Hydro Tasmania may be an indication of less favourable trading conditions as the impact of the National Electricity Market affects its returns, and it returns to the long-run average levels of generation. TasNetworks and Aurora are forecast to provide a steady stream of dividends and tax equivalent payments reflective of the highly regulated and monopolistic nature of their pricing and returns.

Where the Government seeks to increase dividends and tax equivalent payments, the higher prices these organisations then seek to charge in order to maintain such higher returns to government - and I say seek to charge, because there is a regulator involved - places significant pressure on Tasmania's most vulnerable consumers, results in higher costs for social support to those sections of the community, and dampens spending elsewhere in the economy as these organisations supply essential services.

As the higher prices for these services impact more heavily on lower income earners, in reality it is a hidden, more regressive tax. Let us not forget the feelings of low self-worth it might engender in those receiving assistance, because they feel they are not coping as they should, or that they are not providing for their family well enough. They might then need to access other support services in the mental health space. The Government needs to think more holistically about the possible impacts before going down these paths.

We were on track to see an extra \$40 or so added to Aurora's domestic power bills per annum, to basically provide information to consumers via the aurora+ app, when the

information is already available through an online forms-based approach for free. It is something I brought up in Estimates a couple of years back. Every aurora+ app installed and used saves Aurora the cost of providing the same information via the time-consuming and comparatively expensive forms-based approach. So it would be in Aurora's interest to provide the app as a free service and not add a charge for the app onto a customer's power bill. I know that that is not going to be factored in now by the regulator, which is one good thing. It really is a bit of double dipping. We should understand the impact that even small amounts can have on someone with a meagre salary.

To risk some sensitivities, this Budget incurs significant risk in sensitivities beyond the control of the Tasmanian Government than previous budgets delivered by this Government. While last year the most obvious risk was associated with the future of COVID-19 and the impact of border openings, this year it is the reality of changes in a number of critical economic conditions which have been stable for many years. We are well past the point where we had a financial buffer to protect us from these risks.

Revenue from the Commonwealth continues to dominate the Budget. Changes to the GST distribution and the way the Commonwealth is applying grants under a range of agreements are reducing the budget flexibility available to the Tasmanian Government. This reduced flexibility is likely to increase with the election of a Labor Government in Canberra for the next three years and possibly beyond. The nature of tied grants and specific-purpose funds for Tasmania are becoming critical. The trend for funding from the Commonwealth to come with specific strings attached is increasing. One might expect it to be more so under the Albanese Government, as it wrestles with the various strictures it is presented with.

Funding from Canberra seeks to address national problems. This constrains the manner in which Tasmania's specific problems can be addressed and can lead to less than optimal outcomes for the Tasmanian community. In particular, such programs place a large administrative burden on a small jurisdiction, further limiting our ability to address local issues.

State taxation is the next most important source of revenue for this Government. In this Budget there are many risks associated with the estimates provided. Most critically, significant revenue flows continue to be derived from the property sector, with revenues expected to increase from \$608.8 million to \$849.2 million over the forward Estimates. Any slowdown in the property market, such as that which may result from increasing interest rates, could have significant implications for the state's Budget.

The Government's Battery of the Nation initiative is gaining momentum. This momentum continues to accelerate. The key aspect of this is the development of Marinus Link at an expected cost of some \$3.5 billion. Studies into the link show little direct benefit to local energy consumers, with most benefits being experienced by interstate consumers having access to our secure renewable power sources. I expect it also provides a conduit for the power from on island's privately owned windfarms to access mainland markets. Who funds the construction of Marinus Link and who pays for its operation are a critical risk for Tasmania over these forward Estimates, in the period out to 2030. A solution to this problem remains unresolved and I expect also the amount private enterprise will be expected to pay for the use of the cable.

That is something for Estimates or GBEs at a later date. I hope I do not hear the state has a significant stake in Marinus Link. It is a case of information not being able to be revealed due to some aspect of commercial confidentiality. We need to know the make-up.

The ambitious program for Government reflected in the last two budgets, together with the underlying cost of living and wage pressures, will place significant pressure on agency costs. These will need increasingly close management and oversight.

Critical to the Budget outcome sought will be the impact of salaries and wages which are projected to increase to 44.2 per cent of outlays over the forward Estimates. The flat wage profile of recent years is unlikely to continue as inflationary pressures bite and demands for improvements in real wage levels mount.

Given the strong performance of our housing sector over recent years, Tasmania can no longer rely on lower living costs to offset lower wage levels. There will be significant increasing wage pressure over the forward Estimates. Other significant risks to this Budget outlook come from the significant infrastructure spend and the ability to effectively deliver such a large increase; the continued threat of a major natural disaster in addition to the impact of COVID-19; the outcome from the TT-Line Vessel Replacement Taskforce; the claims that may be made against the budget from the survivors of institutional child abuse; and the outcomes flowing from the royal commissions into aged care, also people with a disability, to mention a few.

I have some areas of interest, in particular the Government's continuing engagement with the Aboriginal community to deliver true progress toward reconciliation and sincere consideration of treaty. I acknowledge the significant work undertaken by our past governor, Professor Kate Warner, and Professor Tim McCormack in consultation with the Aboriginal community. I look forward to the next steps the Government takes, hopefully together with the Aboriginal community across our state. I look forward to the Estimates process for further detail that may be able to be shared by the minister, Mr Jaensch, in that regard.

With regard to climate change, needless to say this is a very important area for this state to apply itself to. We have received briefings from a number of groups and the university, including the Government, on the forthcoming bill. We have significant documents from the University of Tasmania, and from Climate Tasmania. I will not go into too deeply here, except to say, from the briefing and submissions we received, it will be an opportunity to see an essential and much-overdue focus on this critical area, which I personally hope will see some important amendments being considered by the Government to their legislation. How far will an extra \$2.4 million - \$8.4 million in total - how far will that go when dealing with such a wide area of potential impact and with such potential for actions to mitigate climate change?

Given the community conversations going on out there, I was surprised not to see anything of significance being expressed by the Government when I read through the Tasmanian budget overview paper. Yes, we are a tiny component of the emissions on a global scale, but the leadership we can provide in this space and the attention we can bring to our tiny little island can have a major impact on those nations observing our actions and can also deliver benefits back to our island. Why more was not made of it is a little concerning. We have one of the world's most respected institutions not 400 metres from here in the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. The Government must engage with them as much as possible to see

important steps being taken to help educate, not only our state, but also our nation, and the rest of this globe that we all share.

Consideration of climate change across the spectrum of government business would be a wise investment in time. I will leave further comment until we deal with the bill, except to say that the community is watching, and as we have seen in our national election, it is high on the radar for many. I am sure most would believe it was a major catalyst in the change of government. There may be varying opinions on that, but I believe so.

Short stay accommodation for whole homes must impact on the available stock of rental housing. I clearly recall before the Government brought in its changes to allow whole house short stay accommodation, asking the Treasurer across the Estimates table in this Chamber whether the Government would entertain limiting short stay accommodation to only those hosted situations where owners lived on the premises. The answer basically came back that the Government would not interfere in the market in such a way.

If only that stricture had been applied we may not be in such a rental deficit situation as we are currently in today, and not just in Hobart. I am making a point on that, but also in places like St Helens on the east coast, I believe, and the member for McIntyre will back this up.

In Hobart, a vacancy rate of 0.3 per cent at one point was experienced and I believe the member for McIntyre informed me it is closer to zero per cent in St Helens.

Ms Rattray - That is correct and remains the situation, that is my understanding.

Mr VALENTINE - How tradies from out of town who are travelling to St Helens manage to house themselves, if they are doing a longer term project, I will never know, but it all adds to the cost of the job. At the end of the day, you have to get your costs back. I am sure the member for Huon knows that.

Which leads me to housing and homelessness. The reality of people needing to sleep in their cars or couch-surf or sleep under a tree on the Domain, as I saw on Sunday when I was laying a wreath at the commemoration for the Battle of Crete, these are ways people are coping - or not - with their circumstance. Mental health becomes the companion for many, and those services become stretched and stressed for staff as well.

Now that the rent subsidies are about to end, it will become even worse. Today's *Examiner* points to one such case, and we hear on recent news bulletins that caravan parks are becoming the last resort for people. Kids are sleeping in cars and needing to go to school from there. We need to do better. It needs a multi-partisan approach to fix. It is one of those things where we need to come together as a parliament to fix it.

Having the aspiration of delivering 1160 houses this year, but only achieving an average of 72 a year, previously, was one figure I read in the media a couple of days ago. It does not make it accurate, but it has to be down there. It will not cut the mustard, if that is true.

Providing money for Safe Spaces is certainly welcomed, but we simply must concentrate on seeing that people are not forced into a position of needing to resort to such measures.

I congratulate Julie Collins on her elevation as minister to the portfolio of Housing and Homelessness. I urge our new housing minister, Mr Guy Barnett, to work constructively with the federal minister in a nonpartisan way to find the solutions, and I believe he will. We need a nonpartisan approach for the sake of all our constituents.

One thing I firmly believe is that providing hundreds or even thousands of so-called affordable homes, depending on the circumstances, they will be affordable only once. Given some form of assistance is provided for people to inhabit them, when they are sold they will want to make as much profit as they can, naturally enough, so they can move onto their next, more desirable dwelling, wherever that may be. The Government partnering with first homebuyers to get them into housing and then receiving cash back for new investment is certainly a step in the right direction. I congratulate them for that. However, providing developers with the opportunity to build houses in bulk on Crown land? Those developers will want to make the best return. And 'affordable' then becomes a mere catchphrase. There must be strictures around the Crown land deals to make sure the bulk of the profit flows back to the cause.

I have seen it all before, and I have mentioned in this Chamber before with the Brian Howe Better Cities money, and the Wapping precinct. It is now a gated community, basically. That is not a comment on the residents, and it is not of their doing, but the final product failed to meet the original objective that was expected to be a degree of social and affordable housing. That one did not work. Enough said on that.

The arts - an important aspect of our community's life is wrapped up in the arts, not just in capital cities but also in more regional centres. The Theatre Council of Tasmania award night profiles a very vibrant arts sector. How this is dealt with going forward is important to the health and wellbeing of the community across the state. Commitment to the sector is waning under the present Budget to a significant degree, reducing from \$12.6 million to \$7.5 million in 2025-26. I will be keen to explore that during Estimates. Perhaps there could be a study undertaken to discover the overall benefit that the sector brings to the community here in Tasmania, not in some other jurisdiction. I expect the findings might be very significant indeed, and I encourage that step if it has not happened already.

With regard to the stadium, I will not comment too much on the stadium as I chair the Public Works Committee, which will need to deal with it in a fair and unbiased manner, except to say I believe it came as quite a shock to some, and is not universally accepted, especially in the way it was introduced out of left field. The level of consultation that has occurred to this point I am unsure of, but no doubt will become clear through that Public Works Committee process. I will be interested to see the attitude of the veteran community in relation to the impact of the development on the Cenotaph, given its current prominence on such a magnificent site. As I have said, I will await that project to make its way to the Public Works Committee.

Greyhound racing is increasingly controversial and I will be drilling down on that. I have been to the races a number of times as a representative of the people when I was lord mayor and I know that people enjoy their sport. We had a parliamentary inquiry here some years back in 2015. It brought to light many things that were appalling. Our community is becoming increasingly concerned with this particular activity and industry given the greyhound deaths that result. This has reached the point where the RSPCA wants it banned, as is the case in some other parts of the globe, and indeed the ACT here in Australia.

Given the international condemnation of the sport - and there are fewer than 10 nations that allow it, I believe. I might stand to be corrected on that, but I believe it is something in that vicinity, seven, eight, nine? - we do need to consider what path our state might next take. I look forward to Estimates to explore that further.

The other aspect is the change to the EPA and its governance arrangements. One can hope that that will be important for us. It is important that we have an organisation like the Environment Protection Authority to make sure that our environment is cared for and decisions are made at arm's length from government. I look forward to drilling down on that as well.

In conclusion, just because ours is the lowest net debt is nothing to crow about. I know that was in the paper today. Every state has a huge debt crisis, especially Victoria. What we need to worry about is there is no strategy to address the debt pile that is accumulating. The Budget should have outlined how, say over a decade, debt will be reduced. By staying silent, it risks debt continuing to accumulate and that is the real problem.

I offer my thoughts and some analysis that I had done on it. I am very appreciative of that analysis. Some very important points have been made. I hope that the Government cares to listen to not only to my offering but the offerings of all the members of this Chamber. We are here to review what the Government does, to make sure how money is spent and that it is spent in a reasonable way. I know we cannot change the budget that much because of our powers under the Constitution.

Ms Forrest - We can request a change.

Mr VALENTINE - We can request a change but we cannot physically send it down and say 'amend this'. Someone said something about you can change it to a dollar or something.

Ms Forrest - You request that change of a dollar.

Mr VALENTINE - Anyway, that is my offering. Mr President, I note the Budget.

[3.01 p.m.]

Mrs HISCUTT (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - I thank all members for their contributions, some lengthy and some not but all very detailed. It all helps towards the Estimates process next week for the ministers. My office has been listening very closely looking for questions. Most of the questions that have come forward have been rhetorical ones and then followed up with, 'I am going to ask that at Estimates'.

I do have one here that is probably not an Estimates question that was asked by the member for Mersey about the Youth Parliament, which I thought I should deliver. We have looked into the Youth Parliament and the 2022 Youth Parliament will not be going ahead, and there are some good reasons. I want to put them into *Hansard*.

We have spoken to the TYGA, Briar Walker, who provided an update. Originally, we looked at their Facebook page to get some information and then followed up on that. The Facebook post from 29 March 2022 is out of date. They confirmed that the July 2022 Youth Parliament will not be going ahead due to the lack of volunteers in the task force to deliver the project. They are going to update their Facebook post so that people know that. They only received three applications for the task force, not enough for a quorum or to deliver the project.

The Chair, Claire Vickers, lives in Melbourne and is difficult to reach. However, we have been informed that she is going to meet with Phil Venables from the YMCA to discuss a plan for Youth Parliament to go ahead in 2023 and to make it more suitable. The YMCA provided a bit of information.

The division has spoken to Phil Venables from the YMCA who confirmed that the 2022 event would not be going ahead. Youth Parliament did not go ahead in 2020, which meant that there were no new volunteers. This left the people who ran the 2021 Youth Parliament exhausted, with no new volunteers coming through. He received an email on Sunday from the TYGA requesting a meeting to discuss the YMCA having a more hands-on role going into the future.

The YMCA is keen to work with the TYGA on a more suitable model and focusing on the 2023 event. The YMCA nationally is lobbying for a federal youth parliament as well, and they are keen for each state, including Tasmania, to participate through the involvement of the Youth Parliament in Tasmania. They are keen to have something in place by end of calendar year but need to also ensure that they can cover their costs. They said that they will continue to work with the YMCA and the TYGA to develop a new grant deed and to factor changes into the time line of delivery. The member for Mersey would be interested.

Budget papers noted.

MOTION

Appropriation Bills - Referral to Estimates Committees

[3.14 p.m.]

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

That the budget papers and the Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2) for 2022 be referred to Estimates Committee A and Committee B of this Council.

Motion agreed to.

TABLED PAPER

Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation Report - Inquiry into Crown Land Regulations 2021

[3.05 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre)(by leave) - Mr President, I have the honour to present a report of the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation in relation to an Inquiry into the Crown Land Regulations 2021 (S.R. 2021, No. 87).

Report received and printed.

MOTION

Joint Sessional Gender and Equality Committee

[3.06 p.m.]

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

That a Joint Sessional Gender and Equality Committee be appointed with power to send for persons and papers, with leave to sit during any adjournment of either House and with leave to adjourn from place to place to inquire into and report upon -

- (1)
 - (a) Any bill referred to it by either House in order to examine gender and equality impacts;
 - (b) Any matter related to gender and equality referred to it by either House; and
 - (c) Any matter related to gender and equality, initiated by its own motion; and
- (2) That notice of any own motion inquiry shall be reported to both Houses within two (2) sitting days of the Committee's Resolution; and
- (3) That the number of Members to serve on the said Committee on the part of the Legislative Council be four.

I want to inform members of the process I want to take around this because members have had an amendment circulated.

I wish to speak briefly around the overall intent of this effectively self-explanatory motion. I will then move the amendment that was circulated yesterday. In this way, if the amendment is supported, we can then promptly move on to the debating the amended motion.

I also note that this Chamber has, over recent years, debated similar matters by way of motion, noting matters related to promotion of equality for all Tasmanians, and gender equality in particular. Furthermore, gender and equality committees are not unique or revolutionary. There are at least 30 parliaments worldwide with dedicated equality committees, including the ACT in Australia. Parliamentary committees have an important role to play in informing parliamentary decision-making and debate, as well as government policy. We have seen this happen regularly across both Houses of Parliament.

Importantly, what I propose here is a joint House committee to ensure both Houses are directly engaged and involved in this important work. If we look to the recent federal election result, we know that people want the issues of gender equality, respect and equality more broadly front and centre of policy decisions. This committee would be able to support that approach, provide important scrutiny and work with the government of the day to promote and support informed decision-making in these important areas.

Support for the establishment of this joint House committee would clearly show the intent of all parties in this parliament to work together to address matters of inclusion and equality, to assist the work of the government of the day in these areas. Whilst one other Australian jurisdiction has such a committee, we can be one of the leaders in Australia, rather than a follower, especially in light of the recent federal election results.

I will read that amendment now and then I will speak to it.

Mr President, I move -

That paragraph (1)(a), *leave out* all the words after 'equality'

Insert instead

'impacts and any such Bill so referred shall be reported upon within 10 sitting days of its referral by report back to the referring House;'

In speaking to this amendment, it is important to note the intent of the overall motion, including this amendment, and thus the establishment of the committee. It is not, and would not be, a mechanism to delay the progress of bills through parliament. This amendment that I have proposed to insert into the motion adds clarity around that intent. After consultation with the Minister for Women, the honourable Jo Palmer, who has been very open to frank discussion around the benefits of such a committee - and I thank her for that - I decided to include the amendment to put some parameters around the reporting time for any bills referred to the committee for consideration on matters relating to gender and/or equality to ensure timely scrutiny. Such a move does not prevent the Government progressing their agenda, but it does make it clear the committee will undertake its work in a timely manner to avoid delays when it comes to bills before parliament.

We have evidence of this form of use in the Legislative Council Government Administration committees. These committees have done some great work over many years, and have not been used to delay bills or deny progress of government legislation. This would be no different. The same approach would occur with such a joint committee with broad membership. I therefore move that motion, as I have spoken to, and want to reiterate in doing that this specifically relates to part (1)(a) of the motion only. It clearly states the referral relates to any bill referred to either House in order to examine the issues of gender inequality and the impacts there. Therefore the review, if it was referred, is limited to these aspects. It is not a broad, open review. It would obviously also require the agreement of the House.

If it was deemed by the Government as a time-critical bill and we have seen how they have occurred sometimes - not always in the most effective manner - but if it was, the mover of the motion or the government of the day could insert a provision requiring a tighter reporting time frame if that was deemed necessary and supported by the House. It does not prevent that. It is more appropriate to do on a case-by-case basis and not as a broad, some might say, heavy-handed approach.

I am confident that most, if not all members here do not wish to hold up or delay the work of government. They are elected to do their job, and we support them to do that. Unless there are crucial matters that do need additional consideration, we would not be referring bills. We would be looking into other matters under the other terms of reference. If a bill did need

additional consideration that cannot be achieved in the Committee stage of the bill, this would be the most effective and timely process.

I have observed in my time in this place that this has been the case and I am confident it will continue to be. If any bill referred to this committee did have genuine time sensitivities, as I said, the Government could insert that shorter reporting time frame reflecting this. I ask members to support this motion that provides some parameters on time frames and reporting back to parliament of bills referred to it. If any members have any questions on that, I am happy to speak to them, but I urge them to support this amendment. Then we can move to potentially an amended motion.

Amendment agreed to.

[3.12 p.m.]

Ms FORREST - To turn to the amended motion and I thank members for their agreement to include that provision.

This is a proposal to enable informed debate of matters regarding gender and equality in all areas of our society and within our communities, to promote and support government decisions and policies that promote and broadly support equality. It is a process to work with and assist the Government to progress equality throughout our community. This is good for all of us.

This motion seeks the support of this House and subsequently the House of Assembly to establish a joint House committee to enable more targeted and specific scrutiny of matters related to equality, including gender equality, in areas of government administration, services, policy and budgeting.

I reiterate, it is not a process to delay legislation or budgets. It is a process to support the work of government. The committee will provide additional oversight to these matters and not be used as a mechanism to delay matters. Rather, it would scrutinise and assess the impacts of decisions made by way of government policy or budgeting where necessary.

For example, such a committee could inquire into the high rates of male suicide. Clearly, there is a gendered impact there and we need to ensure our policies and mechanisms in place actually address that very real gendered difference. The committee could look at aspects such as the growing and concerning experience of single women over 50 becoming homeless. It could look at equitable access to an experience of health care by members of the LGBTIQ+ community. All these areas are real and known and considering any one of these would assist the government in developing their policy and projects that would in the future address and identify inequality or inequity.

The work of the committee could also assist in the development of future policy and budgets, as well as to enable and inform direct government action if and when needed.

The U.K. House of Commons first established a Women and Equalities committee in June 2015.

I have directly called for a gender and equalities approach as there are issues such as suicide that disproportionately impact men. If we do not fully consider the gendered impact of

decision-making, policy development, budgeting and research to name a few, important differences may be overlooked and negative outcomes experienced.

Many other jurisdictions around the world and in Australia have made significant inroads into identifying and addressing gender inequality, including the introduction of equality-based legislation to guide policy development, service delivery and so on.

I am not calling for the introduction of such legislation, but if it were asked for by the community, a committee could look at such a matter. Regardless, this is not, and would not be, the primary focus of a committee. It is a process to look at areas of inequality in our community and state that could be addressed. This is a proposal to assist government, not hamper its work.

The motion calls for a joint House sessional committee as I believe this a whole-of-parliament matter, and by extension, a whole-of-government matter. The motion describes the referral mechanisms as well as enabling inquiries via an own motion of the committee. This is very similar to how our own government administration and joint standing committees operate.

The Tasmanian Parliament has achieved gender equality with regards to members of parliament. We have overdone it really, but it has been a long time since the equality was the other way. This is a noteworthy achievement indeed. However, we have only ever had one senior presiding female member in this House, and only two in the House of Assembly, and only one female premier. Our senior parliamentary staff are predominately male. The gender pay gap that I and others have spoken about in this place is not closing despite some gains in recent years.

The business world has more recently largely grasped that gender balance is good for overall performance and this knowledge needs to be applied to all areas of society.

I commend the Government for the work it has done on government board appointments, for example. It has had a particular focus on that and done well.

Our parliament needs to be representative of the state it serves - a place where anyone from any background can aspire to serve as a member of parliament. As key decisions in the state determine what services are provided and where, how services will be delivered and assessed for their impact, and how scarce resources will be deployed, we, the parliament, owe it to the people of Tasmania to ensure consideration of gender and/or other equality impacts have a direct, open and transparent means of scrutiny.

I welcome the new member for Huon in this aspect, bringing that Aboriginal background to our parliament that we have lacked. At times, we have had members with Aboriginal heritage, so it is really great to have you in our House, who can speak more directly to those matters.

As leaders in the state, we need to lead by example and ensure inequality is exposed and mitigated as much and as quickly as possible. This results in better outcomes for the whole state and all Tasmanians.

In terms of our role in this place, and in support of the establishment of the proposed committee, I will read an excerpt from a paper given in 2020 at the Communities in Control conference by Dr Ramona Vijayarasa, a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Law at the University of Technology Sydney, whom I have mentioned in this place before.

In her presentation, Dr Vijayarasa was focusing on progressing gender equality with a view on not only how our laws are drafted, but also how they are applied. She also refers to the Gender Legislative Index, a tool that Dr Vijayarasa is a chief designer of and that is used to rank and score legislation against global standards for women's rights. It is certainly a tool that the Government could adopt and apply. It would be very useful. This approach can be taken not only to gender equality; it can be taken to any aspect of equality.

With regard to Dr Vijayarasa's work it says on the UTS website:

The laws of a country shape and change traditions and culture and can play an important role in advancing and ensuring gender equality.

But when we analyse different laws, how do we determine which laws are effective in advancing women's rights and which are not, which ones work and which ones fail?

Through her research, UTS Law's Dr Ramona Vijayarasa has come up with a unique way to answer these questions with the help of data science.

In collaboration with Rapido Social and the Connected Intelligence Centre (CIC) at UTS, she developed an analytic tool called the Gender Legislative Index (GLI) to benchmark, score and rank laws on a scale from gender regressive to gender responsive.

The website goes on to say: 'The GLI was founded on the premise that every area of law needs a gender perspective. The law is a powerful tool to transform society, to determine how our world functions and how people live by setting legal norms and establishing new trends. Laws can shift traditions, norms and cultural practices for the better or for the worse. It can be a vital entry point for advancing gender equality.'

She was speaking specifically about gender but those principles can apply to all areas of potential inequality that our legislation, our government service delivery and government policy can either create or improve, or ignore.

I share those insights to give more meaning to her comments in the conference in 2020, and when commenting on the role and function of parliaments and MPs, including when issuing drafting instructions, developing policy that requires legislative change, and scrutinising legislation, she said:

I've shared my views on why Australian laws need to be rewritten to remove gender stereotypes.

I commend the Government on doing some of this already, when we have had legislation come through where there has been that change. There was one we dealt with, it was something to do with land. Most of the bill was taking out gendered references. I am not saying we have

to do this right now, on every piece of legislation. We take the opportunities as they come and you get it done. She goes on:

Australian laws should not be gender-neutral where there are important differences between men and women that they need to take into account.

So, it is not always appropriate to do that. It should be specific at times.

According to Dr Vijayarasa, the Gender Legislative Index goes further by offering the seven questions which are key to drafting every law.

I will speak briefly about those seven questions, and I am going to paraphrase some of them, not all of them. She did say that these things are important to ask in terms of any service delivery, whether or not it requires legislation, and any policy decision whether or not that requires legislation. It is not just about legislative reform.

The questions that need to be asked: Does the government-delivered service, law or policy guarantee that women or others from marginalised groups can access non-discriminatory, accessible, affordable and acceptable services? For example, no discrimination based on age, sex, marital status, disability status or migrant status.

Does the government-delivered service, law or policy guarantee non-coerced and informed decision-making and, where relevant, protect the person's confidentiality?

Does the government-delivered service, law or policy promote equal relations between men and women or merely state that it aims to do this?

Does the government-delivered service, law or policy protect women or others from marginalised groups from situations of vulnerability linked to their gender or their other vulnerability? We know that recent research about our domestic violence laws and experiences show how often Indigenous women are falsely accused as perpetrators of violence at home.

Furthermore, does the government-delivered service, law or policy promote the comprehensive monitoring of the situation of women in these circumstances?

I note the Government has taken steps in several actions already. Legislation has been amended to remove gender references where it is appropriate to do so, and I commend them for that.

I also have no doubt many of the questions or processes included in the Gender Legislative Index are already being considered by MPs delivering policy, legislation and issuing drafting instructions. I am certainly not suggesting the Government is not aware of this, or currently not already seeking to ensure all legislation drafted does address a range of factors in relation to gender and equality. I have spoken particularly with these comments as they relate to part (1)(a) of the motion, that is the referral of bills. However, the other aspects that the committee certainly were looking at were much broader and in my view would have potentially a much greater role to play. So I suggest that that is not the key or potential key focus of the committee; it is more to look at areas of government service delivery, even access to this place, or anything that the committee felt was most appropriate to progress the matters of gender and equality for all of us.

The key focus is inquiring into areas where gender equality or other examples of inequality are identified, to provide information and recommendations to the government on areas where more may need to be done or other ways they could assess a matter.

The point is backed up by the fact that we have seen our first gender impact assessment delivered with the Budget this year, and whilst there has been criticism of it - and I made some criticisms myself in my Budget reply - I do acknowledge that we have our first gender budget statement. It may not be as broad or as deep as I may have liked. It may not cover the areas that perhaps it could have done. But I am pleased to work with the Government to progress that, and I am pleased to commend the Government for making a genuine start on this.

It is also important to note as I said, equality does not just relate to gender. We have an obligation to consider other barriers to participation and unequal impacts of legislative decisions related to other attributes or policy decisions or government service delivery decisions. It is only through a formalised process that some of the inequalities are clearly identified, and it is really helpful to have these identified earlier to ensure steps can be taken to avoid inequitable outcomes. The matter of intersectionality that exacerbates the risk of inequality for many people through their race, disability, gender, socio-economic circumstance or cultural diversity, to name a few, can also be considered through such a process. The remit of the committee would enable targeted inquiries into matters where inequality has been identified or suspected and recommend change when needed as well as commend decisions where equality is achieved, and inequality avoided.

Whilst the committee would be able to consider matters relating to equal opportunities and observance of equal opportunity within the parliament, the main focus would be to consider matters related to government policy and government service delivery. Matters would be referred by the parliament to the committee or inquired into under the committee's own motion.

This parliament should lead by example, and this committee would directly assist in the promotion of equality both inside and outside the parliament.

I am sure we are all very aware of the impact COVID-19 has had on our state, nation and the world. We also know there has been a disproportionately negative impact on some members of our community. As a result of measures taken we have reduced some harm. It is vital that the known inequalities are not exacerbated as we continue to deal with the ongoing impacts of the global pandemic. This work is just as, if not more, important now than it was in 2019.

I seek the support of members to establish this committee, a committee that would complement our role and function of our other joint House standing committees. I reiterate: the work of this committee would support and assist the government, where both Houses are represented with a diversity of views, life experience and knowledge. The committee would have the capacity to contribute very positively to the health and wellbeing of this state. We in this House and this parliament have shown through COVID-19 we can work together to achieve positive outcomes for all Tasmanians, and I see this as another step in that pathway. I commend the motion to the members and look forward to their contribution.

[3.29 p.m.]

Ms SIEJKA (Pembroke) - Mr President, I support the amended motion. I appreciate that the committee's intention is to increase informed debate on gender equality broadly, and

I strongly agree that inequality should be exposed and mitigated as quickly as possible. However, it is very easy for many of us to not always see some forms of inequality from positions of privilege that we might not even recognise we hold.

It can be difficult at times to truly understand the experiences of people who do experience inequality. Sometimes that means we may be experiencing it ourselves but are not necessarily aware of it. It follows therefore that the implications of decisions are not always immediately obvious either. This is the case regardless of the form of inequality. We do know, however, that without truly understanding a problem through research and evaluation, it is very difficult to find appropriate solutions and to improve situations.

Given that inequalities are not always immediately obvious to everyone, this proposed committee could form an important role to inform decision-making and debate for our state. I appreciated the example from the member that gender equality is not the remit of women exclusively, and that everyone can benefit. Of the examples that are used, mainly the male suicide rate was very important. I do appreciate the intention of the committee as you set it out.

I also appreciate the intention is not to hold up progression of the bill, but to provide parameters for the committee work. If I understood your explanation, as I hope I did, it did sound like there was room for some flexibility in times of urgency and other limitations on it and think it was a sensible inclusion.

[3.31 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for bringing the motion and providing the opportunity for us to debate it in this place and, I hope, to support it. Thank you also to other members who have spoken on the motion and who may add to their contributions. I will be listening to them carefully as we consider the motion. At the outset let me say that I support the motion, certainly its intent and tenor.

In detailing some comments on it, I will cover the area of necessity for it, then also a couple of more specific items on the points of the motion. Then I have a couple of very basic procedural questions, which I am sure the member for Murchison will be able to assist me with when she does her summing up.

A good starting point in our consideration of a proposal such as this for a new committee to be formed, is what is the necessity? We have to ask ourselves is there an identifiable gap which the proposed committee would fill? Why do we need the proposed committee? In this case we are all well aware of institutionalised bias we see around us in relation to gender. We see that in the prevalence of both conscious and unconscious bias in decision-making, policy development and delivery across both public and private sectors. For example, gender bias is recognised in the Tasmanian Government's draft Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-2027, which states this:

Gender inequality is a product of cultural beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Dominant beliefs about female and male characteristics create a culture of gender stereotyping that limits opportunities for women and gender diverse people, as well as men.

However, it is increasingly apparent that being aware of the existence of gender bias is insufficient to challenge and to confront and change those entrenched structural real obstacles to gender equity. For example, we know in Tasmania the gender pay gap is not closing across a broad range of sectors and industries. In fact, according to DPAC's own website:

On average and in the majority of industries women earn less than men as of November 2016.

Slightly old figures.

Tasmanian women earn \$1238.60 per week, based on average full-time earnings for adults. In contrast to this, Tasmanian men earned an average of \$1401.00 per week, that is a difference of \$160.40 per week.

In fact, the DPAC site states women are earning less than men currently than they were 20 years ago. The same website goes on to detail additional barriers that occur at stages of women's lives. Yes, it is alarming, Mr President. At a state level, there is and has been formal recognition of severe embedded and institutionalised gender inequality in many ways and that was one example. It is clear that being aware of a gender inequality is not sufficient. Being aspirational towards gender equality is not effective in and of itself. We need to critically examine how our institutional framework may or may not be perpetuating or compounding the causes of gender inequality.

We have now achieved a mainstream recognition of this issue, which is very pleasing. However, we need to tackle this class of entrenched gender inequity in other ways additional to increasing, say, the number of women on boards or other leadership positions. Those measures in themselves will not break down and reform those recognised institutional barriers. We now need to develop coherent and transparent response evaluation mechanisms. One example of such examination mechanisms is a gender-responsive budget and analytical gender budget impact statement, as recently acknowledged by this place and the Government, and the beginnings of work in the area in this state. It is very pleasing to see also.

That is only one piece of the puzzle, focused on one particular government tool, which brings us up to this proposed joint committee motion before us. We have established that there is a gap confirming the identified need for further action and for some form of additional formal mechanism to tackle the manifestations of gender inequality. We would next ask ourselves, how well does the proposal outlined in the motion before the Chamber meet and address the identified gap and need? Spoiler alert, it does it quite well. I will speak about that for a moment.

Globally there has been a growing movement in establishing parliamentary committees similar to the committee proposed in this motion. According to the widely acclaimed Australian feminist academic Emeritus Professor Marian Sawer - who is in Australia and has been for a long time but she was born in New Zealand; I note that in case any New Zealanders are watching and would like to claim her - by 2020 there were 89 parliaments around the globe that had 'at least one specialised body on gender equity'. However, at the time of that report, those 89 parliaments did not include any in Australia. In her report in 2020 Professor Sawer asked:

Why is it then that Australian parliaments do not have, like parliaments in other democracies, standing committees or other specialised bodies to ensure that legislation promotes gender equality rather than undermining it?

Professor Sawyer also reflected on the importance of specialised parliamentary bodies in a post-COVID-19 period. And again, in 2020 she said this:

Specialised parliamentary bodies with a mandate to promote gender equality are of particular importance in providing a focal point and legitimacy for debate on the gender implications of policy. This will again be of crucial significance in debate over post-COVID-19 economic reconstruction and proposals for tax and industrial relations reform. Without it, it is all too likely that changes to the tax and industrial relations systems will increase rather than decrease gender gaps.

Of the 89 international permanent dedicated gender equality committees she included some examples include the following: the Belgian Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men; the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women; the Indian Committee on Empowerment of Women; the Spanish Committee on Equality; and the French Senate and National Assembly Task Forces on the Rights of Women and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women.

Clearly, the role, function, mandates and structural relationships within their respective institutions will vary across these forms of gender-focused parliamentary bodies. However, the takeaway message in the context of today's debate is the fact that these parliaments recognise the need to carve out a dedicated gender equality-related forum. Additionally, assessments of the operations and impact of established gender equality-focused parliamentary bodies agree that the strength of such committees is that they are, and I quote:

... all permanent committees of their respective parliaments. That is, each of these parliaments has chosen to dedicate resources to the issue of gender equality, rather than appoint a select or ad hoc committee to deal with issues on an as-needs basis.

I am quoting that from a conference paper from March 2013 authored by Professors Sawyer, Freidenvall and Palmieri. Research identifies an important aspect of these dedicated parliamentary committees, including forging ongoing relationships between the parliamentary institutions with stakeholders, including NGOs and women's advocacy organisations. In turn this contributes to making the governance in institutions more inclusive, more robust and responsive to community equality machinery. Crucially, the formal parliamentary committee particularly can provide, and this is another quote from the same conference paper:

They provide an alternative reference point to dominant parliamentary norms and provide leverage and legitimacy beyond that of individual parliamentarians.

And further:

... provide additional access for women's civil society organisations to the legislative process.

Further to that, dedicated parliamentary committees are recognised as providing a vital mechanism by which political leaders and legislative decision-makers demonstrate in a transparent and accountable manner their collective responsibility to consciously work to counter institutionalised gender bias and marginalisation.

To work towards a coherent policy and legislative process which actively checks itself, that it is not undermining equality with each changing policy or bill.

It is worth noting that since 2020, when Professor Marian Sawer decried the absence of a dedicated gender equality parliamentary committee and other governance machinery in Australian parliaments, the ACT Parliament has established a Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality. Currently, this committee in the ACT has a Liberal MLA as Chair, a Labor MLA as Deputy Chair, and third and final member being a Greens MLA.

Clearly, the proposed joint sessional committee outlined in this motion is consistent with well-established mechanisms in parliaments elsewhere and a growing trend of them.

However, I believe there is further merit within the specific Tasmanian parliamentary context. It is important to point out the proposed committee, in this motion, does not duplicate similar work or focus of any other committee reference currently underway in either Chamber of this parliament. Nor does it replicate anything similar held previously that I could find. The Tasmanian parliamentary website lists current and former committees and inquiries going back to 1997. It is interesting to note, however, there are committee inquiries listed with a joint or single Chamber on issues where a gender equality lens would have been useful and valid, but it was not a specific focus. For example, I am thinking of the 1997 Joint Select Committee inquiry into superannuation schemes; the 1998 Joint Select Committee inquiry into workers compensation schemes; the 2000 Legislative Council Select Committee inquiry into Industrial Relations; the 2008 Legislative Council Select Committee inquiry into housing affordability; as well as the more recent Assembly 2020 Select Committee Inquiry on Housing Affordability.

That is to mention a few, to demonstrate that the proposed committee would fill a recognised gap in our Tasmanian parliamentary gender equality aware and focused architecture.

On the point of the Tasmanian parliamentary committee architecture, in general, it is worth pausing to note that the proposed joint sessional committee outlined in the motion would contribute significantly to our current committee system in parliament as a whole. The key function of committees, within the Westminster style parliaments, as described on the Australian Parliament's website, is that:

Committees can contribute to better informed policy-making and legislative processes. They help members access a wide range of community and expert views so that through the committee process, the parliament is able to be better informed of community issues and attitudes. Committees provide a public forum for the presentation of the various views of individual citizens and interest groups.

The Australian Parliament website also further states:

In a sense, committees take parliament to the people and allow direct contact between members of the public and Members of the Parliament.

Recognising that for the past years we have had to prioritise our response to COVID-19 pandemic, it is notable, and certainly it has been noticed by others in the broader community to some extent, this parliament's committee architecture has languished or at least has been employed lopsidedly. Since 2020, there appears to have been only two select committee inquiries into matters of public policy undertaken in the other place. This is a matter of public record and observation. Clearly, there are reasons for this and, as flagged, possibly the COVID-19 pandemic prioritisation is a contributing factor.

Why this is relevant to this particular debate is that not only do we need to decide whether there is merit in a new committee, or inquiry proposal, but even if there is support in principle, the next consideration is logistics. Do we have the means to undertake the work and do it justice?

I would argue that for this significant social human rights and economic issue, we must find a way to make it work. It is vital for an equitable and inclusive Tasmania. It is equally vital that this work is shared with the other place. Being a joint committee is crucial, not just for logistical reasons, but also for the recognised broader benefits of the committee process throughout our parliament. These benefits include encouraging multi-party or bipartisan engagement with stakeholders and affected communities, fostering both an educative as well as a networking rapport and trust-building understanding and opportunities.

I now comment briefly on some of the specifics of the motion, to start at the end in the context of the motion's point (3), which is the number of members to serve on the said committee on the part of the Legislative Council be four. I am happy to accept that the proposed number of members from the Council fixes the numbers from the Council recognising that facilitates an equitable representation from the different voices contained in this place. Similarly, that number of Assembly members should also be inclusive of the number and nature of that Chamber's party and Independent composition and it makes sense. This is an important inclusive consideration made by the member for Murchison proposing the joint committee, which needs to be acknowledged. I am hopeful the other place will recognise that and be in support of it.

In relation to point (1) and the three subsections, which I will not read in their entirety, to say very briefly these points are self-explanatory and I support the proposed reference provisions they outline.

I do wish to reiterate the point the member for Murchison made that the use of the term 'gender' is important crucially because it is inclusive also of all genders and non-binary. We know women and girls are over-represented at the wrong end of key statistics and indicators. However, we also know that men and boys are over-represented in statistics and key indicators such as mental health challenges and suicide as previously mentioned, and the LGBTQI+ and gender-diverse Tasmanians also contend with the landscape's invisible and visible barriers. Hence it is important to recognise that proposed terms of reference provide the capacity to examine any gender-related equity matters or issues of concern.

In relation to point (2) of the motion, this seems fine in principle, but I do have a query or a point of clarification from the member which I am sure will be readily answered. I agree

with the proposed two sitting days described in point (2) of the motion. Yet in cases where a Chamber of both are on a lengthy break such as summer or winter breaks for example, does the reference as it currently stands allow for the capacity of the Chambers' presiding officers to accept and make public notice of the committee's own motion and as per current provisions accept and make public committee or statutory officer reports during non-sitting periods?

This is really because even though I find myself having been here for three years, I am still not entirely familiar with the ins and outs of some of our formalities here and the second question is really for my education.

Mr Valentine - You are not on your own.

Ms WEBB - In regard to the formation of the proposed committee and the motion, what is the thinking behind establishing this as a joint sessional committee, rather than a joint standing committee? Is there a particular reason why it is considered to be that one form is more appropriate than the other? I am sure there is a very straightforward procedural explanation and I beg the indulgence of the member for Murchison to provide it to me.

In summary, to return to the fundamental questions, when asked to consider the establishment of such a piece of parliamentary infrastructure, is there an identified need, and is there an appropriate mechanism by which to address that need, if it has been identified? For me, the answer to both those questions is a clear yes, the challenge of gender inequality and other forms of inequality, their entrenchment and prevalence across social norms, institutions, including public policy and legislation is broadly recognised and acknowledged globally, nationally and at our state jurisdictional level.

Specifically, it is a recognised gap of need within Tasmania, our social and government structures. I firmly support this motion and thank the member for Murchison for bringing it and I hope others in this place will do likewise.

[3.49 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre) - I have a brief offering on this motion and acknowledge the work that the member for Murchison would have put into this motion as she does with anything that she presents to this House.

A couple of questions also that the member for Nelson has certainly covered, but I am interested how the number of members to serve on the said committee, 'on the part of the Legislative Council be four', does that mean that it could be a different four each reference or will it be the same four for the duration of the establishment of the committee? Is there a substitute arrangement if somebody is very keen to be part of a committee inquiry for a particular bill and they are not initially part of that committee? I am interested in the mechanics of that. I know we have substitute arrangements for other committees of parliament, but certainly not for our joint committees and that may well be the reason why this is a sessional committee. I would appreciate a response from the member who has proposed this motion and the establishment of this committee.

My second issue is: obviously, resources are always scarce. From time to time, it can be difficult to get committee work completed because of resources in the parliament. That is not only because of members in the other place. I have sat on a couple of joint House committees, and select committee inquiries where it has been difficult to get members from the other House

available to meet at various times. With all due respect, the Legislative Council members have always been very good, I believe, in making their time available when they commit to being part of a joint House committee. We have a small parliament, and while that may well change in the future, it will not be immediate. Again, interested in how that works.

Certainly, I do not have any opposition to this; I have some questions on the mechanics of how this might work. That is certainly front and centre of my mind because there is no point, in my view, of having the committee if we cannot make it work. It is not a productive way to go about our business. I acknowledge that any work that is done now, inside or outside the parliament, has a gender lens put across it.

I read with interest an email that came through at only 2.50 p.m. from Women's Health Tasmania. They are talking about the Budget and the changes in the federal government. It says:

Meanwhile, back in Tassie, the State Government handed down its State Budget. It was good to see the investment in the specialist family and sexual violence support services.

It goes on to say:

There were disappointments, though. We were part of a coalition that put in a budget request for the money to support family and sexual violence services to have a collective voice. We want to see coordinated improvements in this system. Tasmania is the only state not to have an organisation to provide a voice for sexual and family violence services. We won't give up looking for funding for this and given it's the missing the piece in this system, we remain very hopeful.

It goes on to say:

We were also disappointed in the promised first Gender Budget Impact Statement. When is a duck not a duck? When it's nothing like a duck. That was not a Gender Budget Impact Statement. Why do we care? Because a Gender Budget Impact Statement looks at Government income and expenditure to understand how these impact on different genders; it's the first step towards building equity into the budget process.

And it goes on to say:

For example, poor funding for childcare impacts hugely on women, less so on men.

Albeit the men in the house certainly have an eye on their budget. I am not sure, but often the women are left to arrange child care.

Ms Forrest - I was watching one of the ABC 7.30 reports. They were talking about what mattered most to people. They were interviewing a man, who was a father. He looked like he was a tradie from the way he was dressed. That was a judgment I made, based on the way he was dressed. But he said the most important thing to him was child care.

Ms RATTRAY - Without child care, as we well know, it is very difficult to hold down a job when you have small children and some of the flexibility around being able to stay home with your child if they are unwell or for some reason they are not eligible for school or they are not at school. I have been there.

Mr PRESIDENT - Child care continues for a long time. It is just not the little ones.

Ms RATTRAY - It can do. The email goes on to say the Government said it was going to do a gender budget impact statement but just released a brochure of initiatives that loosely relate to people's gender. It goes on:

Perhaps the Government needs more time to create a framework for Gender Budget Impact Statements but this is not explained in the Budget papers. The Government needs to engage with the community about what it is hoping these statements will eventually look like and how it is going to build towards delivering them.

The email is from Jo Flanagan, CEO of Women's Health Tasmania.

So, there is certainly that focus. I see no reason why that same focus would not be part of the work of this parliament. But as I said, if we are going to have a committee established, particularly a joint sessional gender and equality committee, it needs to be able to operate and time frames are quite tight. That would be my assessment.

Ms Forrest - Only for the bills referred to it.

Ms RATTRAY - Yes, I know it is only for the bills that are referred but sometimes the availability of people and the like can cause issues. I am interested in the member's response. I feel sure that she has already addressed her mind to parts of those aspects. As I said, the member for Nelson has already flagged them as well.

It is general support from me, Mr President.

[3.57 p.m.]

Ms PALMER (Rosevears - Minister for Women) - I begin my contribution with genuine thanks to the member for Murchison for bringing this on. As a number of other members have said, it is a passion of yours. You are committed to this and you are known for that. I thank you for the work that you have done in bringing this important motion forward.

Yes, as the Minister for Women and yes, as the member for Rosevears, but also as a Tasmanian, I believe gender equality is a really important discussion that must be had. It needs to be discussions that are had in our homes, in our schools, in our businesses and most definitely here in this place. I welcome this motion on how we can ensure gender equality in the work of the Tasmanian Government.

The Rockliff Liberal Government is committed to ensuring that all women and girls in Tasmania feel safe and have the opportunity to fully participate in our economic, social, political and community life. The world is changing rapidly and particularly so over the last two years so we must ensure that the way we operate as a government reflects and supports contemporary standards and expectations.

Over the past 12 months we have been consulting widely in the development of the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-2027 and we have clearly heard that the community wants to see the Government leading by example to achieve systemic cultural change. We agree it is an exciting and critical challenge.

The draft strategy proposes some key initiatives that reflect contemporary practice and we are looking to introduce a gender impact assessment process to be integrated into the work of the Tasmanian Government. This will include resources, tools and training to build the capability of all agencies to assess the gender impact in the development of policies and programs. We plan to make these resources publicly available so other organisations can use them as well. We are also looking to develop an evaluation framework that will help to measure the gender impact of our work.

In the 2022-23 Tasmanian Budget, we committed \$800 000 over four years to implement the Tasmanian Women's Strategy and progress these important pieces of work. We delivered a gender budget statement, as part of the Tasmanian Government's Budget this year. It was an important first step and we intend to build on this for next year using the processes I have outlined.

It is timely and very important that we consider this amended motion today.

I strongly believe that a joint sessional committee on gender and equality will complement the work that we are doing within the Tasmanian Government and it aligns with our aim to provide government-led cultural change. A parliamentary committee shifts the responsibility for change from women to the institution of parliament as a whole. It shows that we are serious about our commitment to systemic and sustainable cultural change and gender equalities. The reality is there are structural barriers to genuine equality. There is a gendered aspect to poverty and disadvantage. The Rockliff Liberal Government believes we can improve the way we work to address these barriers and work towards gender equality in Tasmania.

Again, I thank the member for Murchison for bringing on this motion today and for highlighting the need for this discussion to be had in this place. The Government supports the amended motion.

[4.02 p.m.]

Mr VALENTINE (Hobart) - Mr President, I rise to support this. I do not want it be unusual that no fellow got up to speak. I am sure that there are others who will. It is a very important motion that we have before us. I too thank the member for Murchison for bringing it forward.

It is important that the legislation that we pass here is cognisant of the need for equality in the community, whether that be male, female, other gender types, if I can put it that way without being offensive to anyone. It is important that the laws that we bring into play in the state do not discriminate simply because of who a particular individual might be in terms of their gender. I see this as being very positive.

I wonder about the mechanics and how bills might pass through this committee. I have seen bills come into this place in very quick time, and I think to myself, you know, would it be more often than not that this committee did not get to review them because of the urgency of the bills. We know that bills have to sit here and mature for two days. One presumes that it

would have been through the committee - this committee - before it actually gets to this place. I do not know whether you can enlighten me as to how you see that process working, member for Murchison. It really would mean that the bill gets good scrutiny before it arrives to us, and that they are not brought on in a rush, and that the committee does not get to examine it.

I am heartened by the fact that the member for Rosevears and Minister for Women, Ms Palmer, is getting behind this. It is very important that that happens. It is important that it is apolitical. If it is not apolitical it is really not going to work properly. I congratulate you for supporting it. I look forward to how this might progress.

So I simply support it.

[4.05 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - I thank all the members for their contributions and particularly for the support of this motion. I thank the Minister for Women for her kind comments about the work I have done in this space. This is a continuation, for me, of some of the recognition of the need to actually progress some of these things in a way that is very inclusive and involves the whole parliament. This is a matter for the whole parliament and that is why - and I will come to the questions asked by members about why a joint House committee and why a sessional committee, and also to when a bill perhaps is not a bill being referred to the committee when that would happen.

It is important that a joint House committee has the capacity to look right across all portfolio areas. We know that there are gender and equality impacts across all areas, whether it be infrastructure, justice, housing or health. That is why our government administration committees are not really the appropriate place to do something like this as an existing standing committee or as a sessional committee, so it is there available to do the work, should a reference be considered by that committee.

Before I go on to answering those questions, I note the member for Nelson's comment that we often do not see our own privilege and there is a really good opinion piece in the *Mercury* today talking about that.

Ms Rattray - It was the member for Pembroke.

Ms FORREST - I am sorry. It was you who mentioned that, member for Pembroke, my apologies. My pen was not working well so sometimes I cannot read what I have written. It is really important that we are able to try to put our prejudices aside even if we do not recognise they are there. All of us in this place have certainly been born with a level of privilege well above many of the people we represent.

The member for McIntyre asked, as far as the two-day tabling of a report, that is exactly the same as what our GAA and GAB committees do. They can make a decision on their own motion to inquire into a matter and within the next two sitting days they table a report. It does not prevent the committee from getting out there and getting about its business, promoting or publicising the inquiry that is on foot. It is a formality to inform the parliament. It does not mean that the committee cannot get on with the work, it cannot publicise or publish the terms of reference or whatever it is; it is the process to make sure the parliament is informed and there is a complete process for that.

Why I moved for a sessional committee rather than a standing committee: it is along the lines of the reasons that all our standing committees are statutory committees. They all have acts that support them. Ideally, this may one day be a standing committee where we have a piece of legislation that guides it. It is not essential to do that, but that is the reason it was a sessional committee. This means it will need to be re-established at the beginning of each new parliament, but that is what we do with our GAA and GAB committees. We re-establish them. It means that it is on foot for the life of that parliament and then hopefully each new parliament will agree to re-establish it. Hopefully, it does give it at least three years or thereabouts to establish the purpose and the benefit of such a committee, so it will have every reason to be re-established in a future parliament.

The membership of the committee would be four members from here and four members, I assume, from the other place - that is a matter for them to determine - but they would be the members of the committee. As it is a joint committee, I would have to clarify, but I believe there would be the four committee members. The sessional orders that guide our GAA and GAB committees are particular to those committees. As I understand it, and I did talk to the Clerks about this area, they would be governed by the section about joint committees in our Standing Orders, which do not provide for substitute membership. If there was a real need to facilitate that, you could look at additional sessional orders to govern this committee. At this stage the intention is that it is guided by the Standing Orders that refer to joint house committees, if that makes sense.

Mr Gaffney - I have a question on who will be on the committee? Is there a gender lens put over who will be on the committee? It is important.

Ms FORREST - I can talk about that if you like. I will talk about it. It is not just a gender lens, it is an equality lens. I will come back to that; I will go through the other questions first.

On the availability of members in the other place, I know from time to time there have been challenges getting lower House members onto joint committees. From my experience, having been on the Subordinate Legislation Committee for a very long time, and Public Accounts, though probably not quite as long, we have not had any trouble in recent years getting the lower House members to attend. They are enjoying the work of a committee.

Mr Willie - They seem to send a different one every month.

Ms FORREST - Yes, that is the revolving door of membership, but they do turn up. In reality, we know that things can get busy and there is a lot of demand on us, particularly the lower House members and the backbenchers there. The government likes backbenchers particularly because they have to fill a lot of committee positions. That is one of the arguments that was being considered in increasing the size.

Ms Rattray - They might have to start sitting on Mondays.

Ms FORREST - Well, they might.

Mr Gaffney - There were probably more select committees. When the other committees were here during that week, it was the select committees that had trouble getting members.

Ms FORREST - Back in the day when we did have those joint committees on community development - before many of you were here - and the ERD committees, we did have trouble then. It is not such an issue. If the members who are appointed to this committee are committed to the cause, they will turn up as much as they possibly can. You only need a quorum, which would be five members, to progress the business. If it were critical legislation that has been referred to the committee, you would get on and do it. I guarantee the government members, if there were government members on it, would turn up because they would be told to. They would make it happen. If the committee could not meet for lack of a quorum, I know where I would be going first - if we wanted to get this bill through, for example.

As to when a bill might be referred, there are many ways this could occur. It would be my expectation that a bill would be referred before it would be dealt with in the House of Assembly. You will have four House of Assembly members sitting on that committee. If you were to send it up here and then refer it, you would almost be asking them to review the work they had done in the other place. However, there may be a circumstance where the government of the day - as well as the Opposition and Independent members and Greens members - say they have read the principle and think these things need to be looked at. They are happy to agree to the bill and let it go through to the upper House, but they want these things looked at before it is dealt with there. I do not think that will be the usual process; I think it would be dealt with before they deal with it, but there may be circumstances where that is the case. I do not think it is in particular one way, but that would be my expectation, to enable the lower House members to fully participate in the debate on the bill.

I believe I have covered most of those questions. I will come back to the member for Mersey's question by interjection. I note the minister's comment that there is a gendered impact of poverty and disadvantage. When you add intersectionality into that of other aspects of disadvantage like cultural background, disability, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, that adds to it. The intersectionality of disadvantage and inequality is very real. This would be an opportunity to have a look at those matters.

In my view, we should have mixed genders in the membership of the committee. We have slightly over 50 per cent female members and slightly under 50 per cent male members in our parliament. I would think that such a committee should reflect that - it should be a half and half. I also think we should try as much as we possibly can to get any other form of diversity on the committee. That is not as easy because a lot of us look pretty much the same around here. Diversity of backgrounds and diversity of views is as important as gender diversity in such a committee. These are the sorts of things we should contemplate in considering the membership of the committee. That is a matter for the other House to decide entirely, as it is a matter for this House to decide for ours. Does that answer your question, member for Mersey?

Mr Gaffney - Yes.

Ms FORREST - I do not think there were any other questions asked. I thank members for their support. This is an important committee that will add to the value of our committee work. As the member for Nelson said, it fills a gap that is not currently there. It is not world-leading, but in the absence of the ACT, it is nation-leading. I look forward to it progressing and I hope I will be on it. Thank you, members.

Motion as amended agreed to and message transmitted to the House of Assembly.

ADJOURNMENT

[4.16 p.m.]

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

That the Council at its rising adjourn until 9 a.m. on Friday 17 June.

Motion agreed to.

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

That the Council do now adjourn.

Greyhound Racing - Clarification - Member for Hobart

[4.16 p.m.]

Mr VALENTINE (Hobart) - I want to clarify something I said earlier today in one of my offerings. Is it possible to do that on adjournment?

Mr PRESIDENT - Yes, you can.

Mr VALENTINE - Nobody has questioned it, but I did talk about the amount of greyhound racing that occurs across the world and mentioned that it was 10 nations or less. Seven nations have commercial greyhound racing and there are 21 nations that have non-commercial greyhound racing. I wanted to clarify that if anyone was listening to my offering on the Budget.

Ms Forrest - I am sure lots of people were.

Mr PRESIDENT - I did wonder.

Mr VALENTINE - Who knows? Thank you.

Motion agreed to.

The Council adjourned at 4.16 p.m.