



**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**REPORT OF DEBATES**

**Wednesday 23 September 2020**

**REVISED EDITION**



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The Speaker, **Ms Hickey**, took the Chair at 10 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **COVID-19 - Effect on Tasmanian Jobs**

#### **Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.02 a.m.]

Jobs figures released yesterday paint a sobering picture of the reality facing thousands of Tasmanians. The latest ABS data shows Tasmanian jobs were down by 4.3 per cent, or more than 11 000 jobs since March. Job losses are higher in Tasmania than anywhere except Victoria and the ACT. ANZ economists have warned against cutting government stimulus too early and say the outlook for household spending is particularly uncertain. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry has today called on the Government to act, and I quote Michael Bailey who said -

Now it is time to outline a clear plan for dealing with the economic crisis that COVID has created.

You seem to have your head in the sand when it comes to the impact COVID-19 continues to have on jobs and the economy. You failed to front ABS data figures yesterday that were very sobering and instead sent out your hapless Finance minister, Michael Ferguson, to spin the numbers. It is clear that once JobKeeper is cut by the Liberal Government there will be significant pain felt by workers, families and by businesses across this state. Why will you not stand up for Tasmanian jobs and join with us and fight your Liberal colleagues for greater support for workers?

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. We haven't got off to a good start today.

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I do not thank her for her continuing negativity which continues unrelentingly in the way she approached this particular issue. Let me again mention some of the matters that I touched on yesterday relating to the Tasmanian economy. Tasmanians are cautiously optimistic at the moment. It is unfortunate that you are not.

As I outlined yesterday, when you look at the underlying economic indicators, new home finance is up by 13 per cent; dwelling approvals up by 50 per cent; first-home-buyer finance up by 15 per cent - Tasmanians getting their first homes. Online job vacancies coming back, up 11.5 per cent. We are seeing real growth in those key indicators underpinning our economy. As I mentioned yesterday, if you look at retail sales, which are a good litmus test for our broader economy, they are up by 18 per cent year-on-year and back at record levels. These facts all

seem to be ignored by the Leader of the Opposition. As I said yesterday, since the peak when we lost nearly 20 000 jobs back in May as a result of the difficult measures that we had to put in place, we have seen employment growth of nearly 16 000 people coming back into the workforce.

We have the lowest unemployment rate in the country when you look at the fact that as of August there are now 6600 more Tasmanians employed in the workforce compared to 12 months ago. Jobs are coming back, nearly 16 000 jobs have come back, and that means more than 80 per cent of those jobs that were lost are coming back because Tasmanians are optimistic. The vast majority of those jobs were women coming back into the workforce. All of this is ignored by the Opposition.

To support the economic rebuild we have released an economic and social recovery package of more than \$1 billion - the single largest package in the country compared to our GSP. This is on top of, relating to the rebuild, a \$3.1 billion construction package that will underpin 15 000 jobs over the next two years. That is what this side of the House is doing as opposed to that side of the House which continues to whinge and carp.

The transition package by the Commonwealth Government is not doing away with JobKeeper, as you would have them understand. They have put in place a transitional pathway. As turnover in businesses increase and as businesses become more able to employ of their own accord there is a sensible withdrawing of the underpinning. As our economy comes back, the supports step out. That is what most people would expect to occur. Yet that side of the House -

**Mr O'Byrne** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Mr O'Byrne, warning number one.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - continues to be negative, they continue to harp and whinge. As I have said in this place on many occasions, whingeing is not a platform and complaining is not a policy. The cautious optimism that we are seeing in our economy is what we will continue to support. We are supporting that through the programs that we have introduced. We are seeing our construction sector come back. We are seeing our retail sector come back. Importantly, our export sector has remained strong as well.

### **COVID-19 - Quarantine Restrictions for Fly-in Fly-out Workers**

**Ms WHITE** question to **PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.09 a.m.]

Yesterday, Labor asked you to explain the reason why Tasmanian FIFO workers were still subject to quarantine when you had announced they could come home at the same time you announced seasonal workers could come into the state without quarantining. Tasmanian FIFO workers and their families felt heartbroken at the discovery that they will need to be working a 14-day roster to meet your rules when many rosters are shorter than that. Within hours of this matter being brought to your attention the rules were changed from 14 days to seven days. PESRAC recommendations, which you have accepted, clearly call on your Government to explain the basis of your decisions.

Are you making decisions relating to our state's border controls based on Public Health advice or advice from the State Controller? Can you explain how that advice changed within a matter of a couple of hours? Can you explain why it only seemed to have changed when you were asked questions about it? What role did you play in the decision?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I must admit that I am bemused by the fact that she asks it. She brings an issue to the parliament and asks, 'Would you please have a look at this and see if you can fix it?'. In response to that question I indicated that when it was explained to me last week that the issue of an 8:6 split was what was raised, and the fact that we would need fly-in fly-out workers to have a significant period of time outside of the state, I thought that sounded reasonable. I was not aware of the fact that the State Controller had written to people on the basis of 14 days being the minimum period of time.

**Ms White** - So it is the State Controller's fault?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Quite reasonably, as a result of the question being put to me in parliament, we raised it with the Deputy State Controller, Mr Tilyard, to say that is different from what we thought it was going to be. He engaged with Public Health, and between Public Health and the Deputy State Controller, they arrived at a one-week period. That is the end of it.

**Ms White** - The community deserves to understand how decisions are made about borders.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - As I said yesterday, I was surprised that it was 14 days because that was not my understanding when it was explained to me last week.

Madam Speaker, it beggars belief. They raise an issue, a matter of concern, we raise it with the State Control Centre, they have a look at it and the matter is sorted out appropriately between them and Public Health -

**Ms White** - Who makes decisions here?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - and for the constituents who have been affected, the matter has been sorted. That is the end of the matter as far as I am concerned. It has been dealt with appropriately.

**Ms O'BYRNE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, going to relevance. The issue that has been raised - and obviously we are pleased that this matter has been resolved - is that the State Controller either made that decision on Public Health advice or he did not. What we want to understand is what the health advice says. Tasmanians deserve to understand that.

**Madam SPEAKER** - That is not a point of order. I thought I heard that it was health. Would you like to clarify that, Premier?

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Madam Speaker, I have clarified that.

**Ms White** - But why did it change in a matter of days?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - The Public Health advice and the position arrived at last week was that fly-in fly-out workers working away from home for extended periods of time will be able to come back into the state without having to quarantine. The Deputy State Controller interpreted that to be 14 days and in discussion with Public Health, seven days was arrived at.

**Ms White** - What Public Health advice were they relying on to make that decision?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - My understanding, quite clearly, is that Public Health is quite comfortable that an extended period of time is seven days. The matter has been dealt with; it has been fixed. I thank the Opposition for raising it, but I cannot understand why after raising it and asking for the matter to be fixed, they want to play politics with it. I will leave it there. It beggars belief that the Opposition would look to play politics with a matter that they asked to be fixed and then, between the State Control Centre and Public Health, the matter is sorted.

### **Parks Reserve Activity Assessments - Tasmanian Audit Office Report**

**Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for ENVIRONMENT and PARKS, Mr JAENSCH**

[10.13 a.m.]

Yesterday's Tasmanian Audit Office report evaluated 22 Parks reserve activity assessments and found that of these, only two had complete documentation. This would be inexcusable in any other statutory assessment process that had appeal rights. The Audit Office report also found that consultation on the RAAs is developer driven and the process is not suitable to deal with the quantity and complexity of projects generated by the expressions of interest process. Given the inadequacies with the process, the lack of appeal rights and the ability of RAAs to make objectively false assertions that cannot be challenged, will you concede that Parks RAA process is not fit for purpose?

Despite commitments from your predecessor that the process is under review, we have seen no discussion paper or terms of reference or consultation happen, and no details on what the revised system may look like. Given the current process is confirmed by the Auditor-General as not fit for purpose, will you suspend all assessments and begin consultation on a new statutory process for assessment of proposals for developments in public protected lands?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens for her question and her interest in this matter of our beautiful parks that protect our important natural and cultural heritage, and the

opportunity for Tasmania to be a leader in the world in protecting and presenting those parks in a sensitive and appropriate way that assists us to look after those values while also sharing it with other people and educating them.

The Auditor-General's report referred to in the Leader of the Greens' question found that the EOI process was, in all material aspects, implemented and administered effectively and in a manner consistent with the Government's policy objectives. In other key findings, there is no evidence to support allegations of undue secrecy of the process. The publication of information was timely and appropriately handled. The process and guiding principles are fundamentally sound and well supported by reference to authoritative guidance on ecotourism.

Staff were knowledgeable and diligent in relation to relevant issues. Ministerial authority was respected and appropriate communication channels used. The EOI process has been successful in contributing to the objectives of economic growth that were the purposes of its instigation by the Government.

To the Greens' tragic disappointment, the Auditor-General's report says this process is doing the job it was meant to do. The process is sound and fair and has an additional layer of assessment, checking and approval of projects before they even get to the gate of being assessed as activities in our parks and reserves systems -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 45. Could you ask the minister to address his mind to the question? We confined the question to the Reserve Activity Assessment process, which the Auditor-General found is not fit for purpose.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Thank you. As you know, that is not a point of order, but I do ask the minister to try to address the question.

**Mr JAENSCH** - Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a fairly ironic question, really, from the Leader of the Greens, because we know that the Greens hate process. They will take a protest over a process any day of the week.

The EOI process that the Auditor-General has reviewed and given a clean bill of health, a roadworthy certificate, adds a layer over and above the Reserve Activity Assessment that is the same that operated under Labor and the Greens when they were approving tourism ventures in our parks and reserves, including in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, without any front-end assessment of any kind. It was a random process where people came up with unsolicited bids and talked to whoever in government to say, 'Can I come and build this?'.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. Could the minister please address his mind to the question of Reserve Activity Assessments and the fact that the Auditor-General found that only two of 22 they were presented with had complete documentation?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Thank you very much. That is not a point of order, but minister, could you address the question?

**Mr JAENSCH** - Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I say, the Reserve Activity Assessments Ms O'Connor refers to is the same Reserve Activity Assessment process as applied when Labor and the Greens were in power, when leases and licences were granted to tourism operators to work in our Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and other

national parks and reserves; businesses which have continued to set the high bar for Tasmania's reputation as a place that could do this well.

What we have done is added an additional front end to that. You will see if you read the report the very large number of projects that entered that process but did not proceed for a range of reasons, because we have a front end which has been able to triage them out and say, 'There are certain things we do not want to have in our parks and reserves. These are the ones that are attractive. We believe they can do the job and they should be allowed to go through to be assessed now as activities in our reserves. Previously there was not that gate ahead of them. The Greens hate due process, evidence and independent review. They hated it in the Major Projects debate.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. Can the minister confirm he is answering on the basis of Luke Martin's media release? That is in front of him and he has been reading from it.

**Madam SPEAKER** - I do not think that is a point of order. Minister, please resume, but I warn you your five minutes has passed.

**Mr JAENSCH** - As I say, Madam Speaker, the Greens hate due process, they hate evidence, and they hate independent reviews. They hated it in the major projects debate. They hate it in the EOI process and the RAAs. This sounds like Dr Seuss.

This is because these processes call out the Greens' hypocrisy and crazy venomous conspiracies and focus back on the facts. The Greens cannot handle the facts, including that we can have our unique, natural values and visit them too. Tasmanians can do this better than anybody else in the world. I call on the Greens to abandon their baseless, slanderous, venomous campaign against the EOI process, cease their personal attacks on individual proponents and public officials involved in the process and back this Government's belief that Tasmania can be a leader in sensitive, sustainable world-class nature-based tourism, like they used to be.

### **Make Yourself at Home - Travel Voucher Initiative**

**Mr ELLIS question to MINISTER for TOURISM, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.21 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the Government is supporting Tasmanian businesses and Tasmanian jobs through the successful Make Yourself at Home travel voucher initiative?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Braddon for his question and his interest in what has been a very successful program. The initial release of the Make Yourself at Home travel voucher was an outstanding success. The popularity of the scheme was a clear indication of Tasmanians' interest in exploring our beautiful state and supporting our local businesses. For the tourism and hospitality sector, the \$7.5 million scheme was a welcome stimulus. Expectations are it will help to generate around \$20 million in economic activity.



As of 14 September, there were close to 21 000 vouchers released with around 55 000 Tasmanian travellers set to benefit from this initiative. To date, about 800 vouchers have already been lodged for redemption. We expect the period over coming weeks with the school holidays to be very busy.

Early feedback from businesses has been very positive. Stillwater in the north reports that restaurant and accommodation activity has been very strong. This has been underpinned by the interest generated by the vouchers, both people turning up with a voucher but also people visiting because they have realised that it is important to support our tourism businesses. Ashdowns at Dover recorded a 63 per cent increase in their September bookings. Hotel Bruny has said that accommodation bookings are much higher than for the same time last year.

A number of attractions are reporting that about 80 per cent of visitors are requesting a receipt for their entry tickets, a strong indication that they are being booked as a result of the voucher scheme. The West Coast Wilderness Railway has reported it will be operating at full capacity until mid-October, with additional services being scheduled. The RACT has reported more than a 10 per cent increase in bookings for Strahan and Cradle Mountain. Additionally, Pennicott Wilderness Journeys has taken a fantastic initiative, got on the front foot and offered its own vouchers. Others have matched that. The RACT has released its own voucher scheme and is promoting matching or complementary vouchers similar to what we have done. The industry is getting behind it.

While our travel voucher initiative was specifically designed to support our accommodation and tourism experience sectors there is a much broader benefit. By getting out and about and using the vouchers, Tasmanians are supporting other areas of our economy - our small businesses in the regions, the cafes, the pubs, retail outlets, petrol stations and local services. There is also the important social and community aspect; the ability for us all to connect once again with each other.

People travel from all over the globe in ordinary times to discover what make us special here in Tasmania. In these extraordinary times it is Tasmanians who are exploring their own backyard and Tasmanians are turning up. They are supporting one another when it matters most because that is what Tasmanians do. The model that was designed to distribute the vouchers was one that is contemporary and is used to book concert and event tickets. The interest, I must say, surprised us all. They were gone in 38 minutes. That was extraordinary. Unfortunately, there will always be people who miss out. It is not possible to guarantee that everyone will receive vouchers.

As we move to the next stage of this, it will again be on a first-in best-dressed approach. With the vouchers going out the door so quickly we have looked at what we can do to provide some assistance.

I am very pleased to announce the Government will provide a further \$5 million to support a second release of the Make Yourself at Home travel voucher initiative. This release will take place on 30 September, with tranche 2 vouchers available for redemption for accommodation experiences from that date until the end of November. Learning from the first release, the online registration option remains the primary way to register. However, people who do not have adequate online access will be able to register by a voucher hotline telephone number. Registration will open at 7 p.m. on 30 September, next Wednesday evening, and people will be able to register outside of standard working hours.

The vouchers can be claimed by logging onto the Make Yourself at Home website but there will also be support for those without digital access. They will be able to register by contacting the call centre on 1800 344 077 between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. on that Wednesday evening. The number will be on the Make Yourself at Home webpage. Print ads will also run next week. A week's notice will help people to get organised to identify the best option.

I know that I will disappoint many people. I know that because we had such demand for the last voucher scheme. I am certain that there will be incredible demand for this again. I encourage Tasmanians to get online, or get on the phone next Wednesday evening, get their voucher and get out and support our local Tasmanian businesses. Try some of our fantastic experiences and attractions and stay in some of the best accommodation anywhere in the world. I encourage Tasmanians to get online, get on the phone next Wednesday evening, get a voucher and get out and enjoy Tasmania.

### **NBN Fibre to the Home - Upgrades**

**Ms OGILVIE question to MINISTER for SCIENCE and TECHNOLOGY, Mr FERGUSON**

[10.28 a.m.]

The *Mercury* newspaper reported that \$4.5 billion will be invested in an upgrade of NBN's fibre to the home nationwide. The Tasmanian build had already finished but now there is an opportunity to renew our leadership in communications access. In Clark, Sandy Bay from Manning Avenue to Taroona, a large patch from South Hobart up to Fern Tree and a swathe of New Town through to Moonah from Augusta Road and Hopkins Street are fibre to the node. People will now be able to choose an upgrade to fibre to the home. We have seen through the COVID-19 crisis how essential good communications is to enable people to work from home.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our telecommunications sector in particular for the work they did to keep us all online during the crisis. Now we have a chance to get on the front foot and land more jobs in Clark.

Minister, will you ensure that Moonah, Sandy Bay, Lenah Valley, New Town, Taroona, South Hobart and Fern Tree get the benefit of the upgrade funding and that local jobs are secured for this renewal project?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Clark for her question. We were greatly excited by the announcement by the federal Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, Paul Fletcher, this morning, which we received advice about last evening. We are very pleased about this exciting investment that will benefit Australians right around our country, but particularly in regional parts of this country.

I welcome the announcement which we anticipate will allow even more Tasmanians to be able to access high-speed broadband services via the National Broadband Network, including and with a focus on those that are in the fibre to the node footprint areas. I will come to the areas Ms Ogilvie described in a moment. As she has correctly said, our NBN rollout is materially completed ahead of other states. We have a much higher proportion of our NBN

customer base being served by fibre to the premises. This next phase will build additional capacity and higher internet speeds on offer for both residential homes and businesses who will take advantage of it.

We have been very well served by the initial NBN rollout, with the highest proportion of fibre to the premises in the country. I intend and hope that that will be maintained with this announcement. It has to be said that other states will be looking to try to catch up with Tasmania and they will have to be trying very hard to do that.

As we have always done, we will continue to work cooperatively and constructively with our federal colleagues to ensure that our state is well served by these network enhancements, particularly as we enter our crucial period of economic recovery from the pandemic, which is already well and truly under way with the strongest rebound around the country and the strongest business confidence for this Government of any of the states in Australia. I know that upsets the shadow treasurer a lot, who mutters in the corner as he undermines his leader.

**Ms White** - Ha! You can talk - you're the one who actually challenged and lost.

**Mr FERGUSON** - That is a fake laugh, Madam Speaker. Just letting you know.

**Ms O'Connor** - You're pretty good at spotting that because you're a bit of a specialist.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I know your leadership is secure, Ms O'Connor, but I am not so sure about the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, this year this close engagement has resulted in 46 -

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, come on.

**Mr FERGUSON** - It does not take much to wind them up, Madam Speaker. I apologise for that. I will not do it again. I apologise. It has upset them.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Yes, you are inciting.

**Ms OGILVIE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. As I am ageing I am finding it a little hard to hear the response to this very important question which goes to jobs in my electorate. People want to hear the answer and I cannot hear it.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Yes, I do not think that is a point of order, but it is a good comment, so I hope your colleagues heard it.

**Mr FERGUSON** - The O'Byrnes are coming in again.

**Ms O'Byrne** - I beg your pardon? Once again, not answering the member's question; you just want to have a go at us? Why do you not answer her question? You are such a bully.

**Ms OGILVIE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. I only get one question in this place and I am very interested in the answer; it is an important issue. All of these suburbs are in my electorate and people are hanging on this answer and are watching this.

**Madam SPEAKER** - It is not a point of order and the minister needs to proceed.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to tell the House about something marvellous that has occurred as a result of our engagement with the NBN, the Education Department and the Tasmanian Government. Forty-six Tasmanian public-school locations are upgrading from residential speed internet services to high-speed gigabit Enterprise Ethernet. This is unlocking more opportunities for Tasmanian students, as well as a further 29 Catholic schools and offices around Tasmania connecting to the same service. That has been delivered by proud Tasmanian business TasmaNet and we are very pleased to see that. With the build-out occurring to those public and Catholic schools, the opportunity exists for neighbouring residences and businesses also to piggyback off that and reduce their investment needs.

I applaud the question around jobs, something that this Government is determined and committed to delivering. We will be advocating that as many Tasmanians and businesses will be engaged in that build-out as it evolves and as we give advantage to it.

The member mentioned in her question a small number of communities in her electorate, including Sandy Bay, South Hobart, New Town and Fern Tree. It is terrific that one MP has identified some areas that are currently served by fibre to the node which, by the way, in many cases services those communities adequately for what they need. For those who want faster speeds, we want to help them get that, particularly for those businesses that want to have a higher bandwidth and greater capacity, particularly on the upload side.

A few places Ms Ogilvie did not mention would be Devonport - I want to put in a pitch for Devonport -

**Mr Rockliff** - Yes.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I hear some agreement from the Deputy Premier. I want to see some upgrade pathway for Burnie, the city of my birth, and where I know there is a lot of demand. I am thinking of Ulverstone. George Town and Scottsdale are already taken care of but there will be towns and communities in the north and the north-east as well as down the east coast and even potentially the west coast where this Government has helped to achieve fibre to the node in communities.

I will conclude where I started and that is that we will be working very closely with the federal government. They have been very good to Tasmania and excellent to work with. This announcement will create jobs in our state. This announcement will add to the already highest in the country business confidence that the Gutwein Liberal Government has secured, with the highest support of any state or territory for this Government's policies. If we can help both residential customers and business customers seize their opportunities to get better productivity and business opportunities to land that contract and get that job through better internet connectivity, we will be there. Ms Ogilvie, I will be very pleased to work with you on this as we go forward.

## **Hydro Tasmania and TasNetworks - Leadership**

### **Mr O'BYRNE question to MINISTER for ENERGY, Mr BARNETT**

[10.36 a.m.]

In your own words, renewable energy is Tasmania's greatest opportunity, not only for the next decade but for decades to come. You have talked a big game on Marinus Link and pumped hydro, yet you have taken your hands off the wheel while chasing photo opportunities. Hydro Tasmania and TasNetworks are dealing with the biggest infrastructure project in the state since the creation of the Hydro in the form of Marinus Link and the pumped hydro projects that rely on that link, projects worth billions of dollars in investment and associated economic benefits to the state. Yet the CEOs of both organisations have walked away on your watch, announcing their resignations within six months of each other. Such disruption at the top level of leadership is destabilising at best but it can be fatal to keep projects at worst.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Minister, is this a vote of no-confidence in you and your handling of this crucial portfolio?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, it is not often the case in this place that you get to the lectern and are not sure where to start, but this is one of those occasions where I want to say thank you, thank you, thank you to my shadow for his question. How kind of the shadow minister for energy to talk about leadership and the head of an organisation. What about the Opposition? What about the Labor Party?

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Mr O'Byrne. All of you.

**Mr BARNETT** - I am just looking at this -

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please; a little more respect on both sides of the House.

**Mr BARNETT** - Madam Speaker, we are coming up to the anniversary where the shadow minister for energy on behalf of the Labor Opposition wrote an opinion piece where he said, 'I will do the hard work to deliver the vision and the plan for the Labor Party'. That was on day one and then the op-ed two days later was amended. It was tweaked slightly to say, 'I will do the hard yards to work with my colleagues to deliver the vision and the plan'.

It is two and a half years and we are still waiting for the plan from the Opposition. Where is the Leader of the Opposition? Oh, here we go.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 45, relevance. The question is about the fact that on this minister's watch he has lost two of the key CEOs of

the two GBEs that are supposed to deliver a major economic project for this state. The Tasmanian people deserve better than this rubbish.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Yes, I accept that, but it is not a point of order. It is nice to see you all getting along. Thank you.

**Mr BARNETT** - Madam Speaker, we are talking about leadership, and taking the organisation forward. We are coming up to the anniversary. On 14 October last year, an opinion piece appeared in the *Mercury*, and two days later it was tweaked on behalf of the Labor Party. When are we going to see the plan and the vision from the Labor Opposition?

**Ms White** - You should pay less attention to opinion pieces and more attention to where your CEOs have gone.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr BARNETT** - Here we have the Leader of the Opposition whipping in, interjecting, trying to insert herself into the leadership on behalf of the organisation. I make it clear that I am so thankful and appreciative on behalf of the Government for the service of Steve Davy as CEO of Hydro Tasmania. I put that on the record. We had a 'thank you' event. You, in fact, were there and I expressed my thanks. The Leader of the Opposition was there with many other key stakeholders. It was a 'Team Tasmania' event. All the key stakeholders were there and I put on the table my thanks to Steve Davy.

On the same evening I said congratulations and well done to Ange Evangelista who is the new CEO of Hydro Tasmania. We are pleased and proud of the efforts to take our plans for Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation to deliver thousands of jobs, billions of investment, downward pressure on electricity prices and improved energy security. Likewise, with Lance Balcombe. I put on the record my thanks for his service. We are pleased and proud of those GBEs on behalf of the Government, delivering our plans for the future.

Where are your plans and where are your policies? You are bereft. The only thing, and I quote from David O'Byrne from last week, it is an anniversary, a one-week anniversary. What did he say in this parliament? You said, 'We think it is a bit of cherry-picking so we are not going to argue with that'. Then you say, 'We do not want to be seen as relentless and negative'.

This is the Opposition. He does not want to be seen as relentless and negative. The carping, the negativity and the criticism from the other side. Knock, knock, knock. You have great strengths, David O'Byrne, both in being relentless and negative ...

### **Swift Parrot Habitat - East Coast**

**Dr WOODRUFF question to MINISTER for ENVIRONMENT and PARKS, Mr JAENSCH**

[10.42 a.m.]

You are responsible for ensuring the state protects all species and especially critically endangered ones. Department of State Growth contractors have blocked the nesting hollows needed by critically endangered swift parrots in six large old blue gums south of St Helens.

They are acting in anticipation of a road widening, but do not yet have development approval. A department email confirms the protocol of covering tree hollows before construction because it reduces the risk of breeding disturbance during later stages of the project.

To be clear, the disturbance this project would involve is the destruction of critical and increasingly rare habitat. Every tree-hollow matters. Under your dystopian administration, blocking the hollows that critically endangered birds need to breed and survive, is considered a conservation measure.

Do you accept that blocking hollows to prevent nesting, instead of actively killing the birds when their nesting trees are logged for development, is nonetheless an effective death of the critically endangered swift parrot by a thousand cuts? Have you sought advice about whether the removal of necessary habitat, such as these nesting hollows, is a crime under the Threatened Species Protection Act, and if it is not, will you step in, save this habitat and remove this legislative loophole?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank Dr Woodruff for her question.

**Ms O'Connor** - Is that from the Tourism Industry Council; the brief you have in front of you?

**Mr JAENSCH** - It is comedy hour. The Department of State Growth has, I am advised, undertaken some initial tree treatment works in preparation for the proposed upgrades to the Tasman Highway between Basin Creek and St Helens. I understand that initial ecological assessment of the site identified the presence of potential breeding habitat for swift parrots within the project area. To minimise the risk of possible breeding disturbance, tree hollows have been covered in a small number of trees, based on specialist advice from ecological consultants.

I am advised that covering tree hollows is a common pre-construction practice that presents considerable conservation benefits as it reduces the risk of breeding disturbance during later stage to the process. The department has taken this proactive approach to minimise the risk of disturbance during breeding. Only a limited number of trees identified for removal during construction have been treated in this way. The trees and hollows were inspected and assessed by an ecologist before the hollows were covered. I am advised that no -

**Dr Woodruff** - Come on, stop using euphemisms.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr JAENSCH** - I am advised that no fauna was present in any of the hollows and that many of the hollows were considered potentially unsuitable for nesting based on their size.

**Dr Woodruff** - Rubbish, that is not what we understand.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr JAENSCH** - A Development Application for proposed upgrades is currently with Break O Day Council. However -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. My question was relating to the Threatened Species Act -

**Madam SPEAKER** - Which point of order?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Standing Order 45, relevance. The minister has not addressed the question. There appears to be a legislative loophole that is preventing him from acting to protect the threatened species. We want to know whether he is going to assess it and fix it.

**Madam SPEAKER** - That is not a point of order but I have allowed it on *Hansard*, so there you go. Minister, if you could address that.

**Mr JAENSCH** - The DA is currently with the Break O'Day Council. To ensure there is no impact on the parrots during the breeding season the department has been proactive in this case.

**Dr Woodruff** - It has not been approved. Why are they doing this when it has not been approved?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Dr Woodruff.

**Mr JAENSCH** - The department is committed to carefully managing any environmental impact of delivering infrastructure improvements and has conducted these activities in accordance with all relevant planning schemes and all relevant legislation.

Madam Speaker, I need to make the point for anyone who is listening to this: this is not about preventing swift parrots breeding. It is about getting in before the breeding season, closing off some possible breeding sites that they may have started to build their nests in, and diverting them to other ones, so they can breed away from areas that are going to be disturbed.

This is our Government following good process yet again and taking proactive action to ensure that these threatened birds can find themselves a safe breeding place this season.

### **Aurora Energy Financial Relief for Customers**

**Mr O'BYRNE question to MINISTER for ENERGY, Mr BARNETT**

[10.47 a.m.]

You will be well aware that thousands of Tasmanians are experiencing 'bill shock' as they receive their winter energy bill. Kathy Flynn is a retired grandmother caring for her three grandchildren. She received a bill significantly higher than the same period last year with no change in her energy use patterns. Kathy has done all the right things. She pays instalments, she switches off appliances, and she signed up to the Yes Program. When her current bill arrived, she rang Aurora for help, but they told her there is no relief available. Yet on Monday morning, the day after we publicised Kathy's plight, she got an unprompted call from Aurora saying they had reviewed her case and would make a substantial credit on her bill, as a goodwill



gesture. This is not the first time someone has been offered financial relief after we have drawn attention to their situation.

Your Government provided an energy supplement in the middle of summer in the lead-up to an election - a decision smacking of politics. We have been calling for you to provide relief for winter power bills at a time when Tasmanians really need it, which is now, but you failed to act. Do we really need to bring individual cases to your attention in order for you to act?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. He is obviously coming back for more when it comes to energy, and when it comes to being the titular leader for the Labor Opposition. I am more than happy to respond to that question, because he has form. You have come in here, you have raised the question, and now you are complaining that we have got a result.

You heard from the Premier earlier today. You raised some questions about FIFO, responded, got a result. With respect to Ms Quinn, you raised and Aurora Energy has responded. Why would they not respond? It is on the public record.

It is very clear. Aurora Energy is saying, 'Please, anyone who is concerned or distressed, let us know'. Why would you not refer them to Aurora Energy?

**Mr O'Byrne** - She did and they knocked her back.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Mr O'Byrne.

**Mr BARNETT** - That is my point. I am making it very clear that Aurora Energy has \$4 million available for those who are disadvantaged or distressed. I urge the Opposition to refer their constituents with a concern to Aurora Energy.

**Ms WHITE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. It goes to Standing Order 45, relevance. The minister is not addressing the question and did not seem to hear the question, which was this person had applied and was knocked back. In his response to this he needs to reflect on why that might have occurred. It seems you have to raise things in this parliament or the media to get outcomes for people. Do we have to keep doing that, or are you going to provide a winter energy supplement?

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. Thank you, that is not a point of order.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Excuse me, no conversations across the Chamber. They are all through me.

**Mr BARNETT** - A clear question for the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow minister for energy is, did you raise it with Aurora Energy?

**Mr O'Byrne** - The Aurora customer did. She was highlighting the fact that she was knocked back.

**Mr BARNETT** - Did you raise it with Aurora Energy? From the answer from the shadow minister for energy, he did not. Clearly, that inquiry to Aurora Energy did not occur.

**Ms O'BYRNE** - Point of clarification: has the minister just said that no-one will get their power bill fixed unless a politician raises it? Is that what he just said in parliament? Is there a new policy? When did that become the rule?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Excuse me, minister, are you finished?

**Mr BARNETT** - No, I am just starting on the answer now. We have had so many interjections from the other side. From the other side's perspective - from the Labor side - if parliament was not sitting this week, you would sit on it. Why would you not refer it to Aurora Energy? You know there is \$4 million available at Aurora Energy for Tasmanians who are disadvantaged and concerned.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. We raised it on Sunday in the media. Part of the question, if you were listening, we pointed out that this person had raised the issue with Aurora, and she was knocked back. We did not sit on it until today. We are asking the minister: do we need to go the media every day for him to act?

**Mr BARNETT** - Madam Speaker, they keep jumping up making interjections as though -

**Ms O'Byrne** - Because we are trying to help you out, you idiot.

**Mr BARNETT** - Why do you not raise it on the adjournment or some other time? I am trying to answer your questions and you are continually interrupting. The Government has a policy to have affordable prices: low cost, reliable, clean electricity. We have \$45 million available in concessions. They are among the most generous in Australia. For the first time in years we have been able to reduce electricity prices. On 1 July, 1.38 per cent down, down, down. Unlike under the Labor-Greens government, where they went up 65 per cent - up, up, up. Clearly, there is a track record -

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr BARNETT** - They keep interrupting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. Minister, I ask you to wind up in 30 seconds. I ask everyone else to be respectful.

**Mr BARNETT** - In nominal terms, our electricity prices have gone up 2.2 per cent. Under Labor they went up 65 per cent. We are delivering.

We have \$4 million available. If people are concerned, please contact Aurora Energy. Go direct to Aurora Energy and they will respond to you.

**Ms O'Byrne** - She did, and she got knocked back. Are you not listening?

**Mr BARNETT** - If the Opposition has concerns, please contact Aurora Energy. If parliament was not sitting, you would sit on it. Shame on you.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, we have Mr Ellis. It would be good to hear his question

### **Business Growth Loan Scheme**

**Mr ELLIS question to MINISTER FOR STATE GROWTH, Mr FERGUSON**

[10.55 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on the response to the Government's Business Growth Loan Scheme, launched recently?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Braddon for his question. This Government acknowledges the enormous toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had and continues to have on our businesses and on thousands of Tasmanians right across the state. We are encouraged by those early signs of optimism and we want to do more. The Government recognises that the private sector is critical to rebuilding and growing our economy and remains committed to assisting Tasmanian businesses throughout this period and beyond.

Last week I announced the establishment of a \$60 million growth loan scheme to assist our businesses to recover, to adapt and to grow and hopefully to seize hold of new opportunities. This new \$60 million loan scheme builds on the success of our previous COVID-19 business support loan scheme. I advise that that scheme assisted over 350 businesses around Tasmania during the height of the pandemic. It came as massive relief, particularly to mum and dad businesses who were really struggling and wondering how they were going to get through with a cash flow crunch.

These loan schemes, together with more than \$80 million in targeted grant programs being run by various agencies including my colleagues' portfolios, represents support for our businesses that is unprecedented in our state. Under the new loan scheme, low-interest loans of between \$20 000 and \$3 million are available to all eligible businesses and will help to support local job creation and business growth at a time when our state needs it most.

Under the new scheme loans of up to \$100 000 may be provided without security and will be subject to a streamlined assessment process meaning money in the pockets of Tasmanian businesses more quickly so that they can get on and make those necessary investments. The low-interest loans will help existing businesses navigate through Coronavirus and focus on recovery efforts. This new loan program is targeted at the retention of Tasmanian jobs as well as entirely new projects, new innovations, and new investments that will generate new jobs and apprenticeships.

This is how you grow the Tasmanian economy. That is what this Government understands. It is clear that the scheme has been very well received. It was only nine days ago.

Since then, when the program opened at midday on 14 September, there have already been nine applications completed. They have been submitted and are being assessed with a further 72 applications under way and in the system as of last night. The scheme will help successful applicants across all business sectors of our economy to strengthen their position, to build resilience and capacity.

I encourage business operators listening to this today to read the scheme guidelines on the State Growth website, speak to their bank and their accountant or financial adviser, to see if these loans are right for their business. The scheme will be administered through the Department of State Growth under the auspices of the Tasmanian Development and Resources Board. Applications opened on 14 September and will remain open for 12 months or until the available funds are allocated.

Our policies are working. We are seeing through the jobs data that the Premier referred to this morning, the new homes data, retail figures and yesterday's ABS statistics that our economy is moving positively in the right direction. As I referred to earlier, the business confidence in this state is real. We are very grateful to be the Government in this country that has the strongest support of our business sector. It was not always that way.

The Government welcomes yesterday's report by the Tasmanian Audit Office, the Auditor-General, into our EOI process. It supports what the Government has been seeking to do. While others will want to misrepresent it, it backs up what we already knew to be a robust and transparent process. The report said that the program is meeting effectively the Government's policy objectives. Our business sector will be very pleased that in the EOI process it was found we have been successful in contributing to the objectives of economic growth that were the purpose of the instigation by the Government.

While I am on that, the combined value of the projects with either a lease or a licence or under negotiation is approximately \$99 million and they have the potential to create more than 260 jobs for Tasmanians when the various developments achieve their full objectives, so why would we not try to support that process so that Tasmanians not only can enjoy our wild areas but also look after them and create jobs. It is the trifecta -

**Madam SPEAKER** - It is five minutes, minister.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I will conclude on this point. That is why it is important to have a plan. The Gutwein Liberal Government's plan is working. We are seeing those positive early signs of confidence, growth and optimism. In contrast, Labor has no plan. They only have a red, glossy brochure with no dollar amounts committed to any of their wish list items and it points to the simple fact that the shadow treasurer said, 'I will do the hard work to have a plan'.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Time, minister.

**Mr FERGUSON** - All that tells you is they do not have a plan.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Before you sit down there is a point of order.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I am glad you called time, Madam Speaker, because the minister has just clocked six minutes on a self-congratulatory, dishonest Dorothy Dixier.

## **Volunteer Fire Brigades**

### **Ms BUTLER question to MINISTER for POLICE, FIRE and EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, Mr SHELTON**

[11.01 a.m.]

For a number of months rumours have been circulating around regional communities that there is a Government plan to close up to 20 volunteer fire brigades around the state. At a recent meeting at the Glengarry volunteer fire brigade you were asked directly by a volunteer whether you as minister and your Government are intending to close brigades. This was your opportunity to rule this out. Is it true you failed to rule this out and in doing so confirmed that closures are not only being considered but are actually being planned? Local volunteer brigades are at the heart and soul of their communities. They are also the first responders to emergencies for many regional communities. As the bushfire risk increases across our landscape and Tasmania's reliance increases on the surge capacity of volunteers, your secret plan needs to be stopped now. Can you provide assurances that there will be no closure or forced amalgamation of volunteer fire brigades across the state?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question and her interest in our rural fire brigades and the fantastic work they do in keeping our communities safe throughout Tasmania. We have just over 220 rural fire brigades around Tasmania. This gives me the opportunity to speak about what the Government is doing to protect our communities around the state.

As has been indicated, there is a rumour. The House already knows that Mike Blake is the independent chair of the steering committee doing a review of the Fire Act. That review is looking at how we sustain our fire and SES component of that going forward. I am not going to speculate on what will be in the Mike Blake review.

I know that when I travel around the state all the rural fire brigades I have been to have been strengthening their numbers. What I said at Glengarry was that it was a fantastic opportunity for me to be there and support those communities that were investing and working for their community in their rural fire brigades. I will always take advice on the most appropriate positions to take on different things and I will listen to that, but only recently there was a small brigade out off the side of Oatlands that only had three members and they decided that their unit would close. It is really simple. I will take advice when Mike Blake comes back. I am not going to tell Mike Blake what he should be telling me so I will listen to his advice.

Around the state at the moment there is a tremendous amount of work going on as far as preparing Tasmania for the fire season. The chief fire officer has come out and said it will be typically a normal fire season and because of the wetter weather it will be a little later than normal but more than likely just the normal fire season.

Every single member of every brigade in Tasmania is very much appreciated and the work they do is fantastic. That is why we are supporting rural fire brigades. I was at Tea Tree the other day when they took possession of their new medium tanker. We are investing in 30 new tankers over the next four years and investing in remote area firefighters. We are investing in a program to re-educate our farmers with our Red Hot Tips program. We are

putting that effort in to protect our communities and every single member in Tasmania's rural fire services is a valuable member to Tasmania.

### **TT-Line - Contract for Replacement Vessels**

**Dr BROAD question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr FERGUSON**

[11.07 a.m.]

On 15 July when you were asked for an update on the MOU between TT-Line and shipbuilder RMC, you were quoted in *The Advocate* as saying that TT-Line was in conversation with RMC and that the Labor Party should not be trying to involve themselves in what are commercial negotiations. It has now been revealed by the TT-Line that just one day after you made these remarks, on 16 July the Premier instructed TT-Line to tear up the contract that was ready to be signed. Is the split between you and the Premier so big that you were kept completely out of the loop on the Premier's decision to scrap the contract on the replacement of the TT-Line vessels, or were you deliberately misleading *The Advocate* and the Tasmanian people?

### **ANSWER**

Let me at him, Madam Speaker.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Minister, in a respectful manner.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Yes, I will be respectful, Madam Speaker. The question is beneath contempt. The Premier and I, and indeed our whole Government, make these decisions in the interests of Tasmanians. We make them together in a united fashion.

There has been so much said about this issue, but the clear feedback I have is that Tasmanians want us to very closely examine all our options around the TT-Line ship replacement program. The Premier and I are in lockstep on this matter. The Premier and I, our Cabinet and our Government are in lockstep with so many interests around the state, including the Australian Manufacturers Workers Union. In fact, TT-Line spoke for itself recently in a hearing and made it clear that it was very positively engaged in the role with the task force. The Tasmanian Maritime Network, represented by Geoff Hawkins, said this is exactly what should happen for the state, and particularly, as we deal with the economic crisis and the recovery, we should be looking for these opportunities.

**Dr BROAD** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 45. I draw the minister's attention to the question which was, did he either not know what was going on, or did he mislead *The Advocate* and the Tasmanian people when he made those comments?

**Madam SPEAKER** - It is not a point of order but I thank you for the brevity.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I will not be casting over Dr Broad's horrible history, Madam Speaker, but I am quite happy to put on the record that the Premier and I as shareholder ministers have been closely engaged on a frequent and regular basis in the lead-up to -

**Ms O'Byrne** - So you did lie?

**Mr FERGUSON** - Madam Speaker, could you deal with that, please, and have it withdrawn?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Ms O'Byrne. That is not very parliamentary.

**Ms O'BYRNE** - Madam Speaker, I am happy to withdraw it but I am also going to ask the minister if he deliberately told *The Advocate* something he knew not to be true?

**Madam SPEAKER** - That is not a point of order. Please proceed, minister.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Madam Speaker, the O'Byrnes are very agitated today. Whatever is going on over there, I want to be allowed to answer the question without that incessant interjection. I make it clear that the Government has been closely engaged with TT-Line -

**Dr Broad** - So you misled *The Advocate*?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Dr Broad.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I will restate the point that I made in relation to Dr Broad, that his continual frustration with TT-Line -

**Ms White** - We can't trust a thing you say.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Madam Speaker, they are clearly not interested in the answer. Everything that sits on the record is truthful and we stand by it.

**Dr Broad** - There are only one of two things it can be: you didn't know what was going on or you misled.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Dr Broad. We are on to a new question.

### **COVID-19 - Support for Events Sector**

**Mr ELLIS question to MINISTER for SMALL BUSINESS, HOSPITALITY and EVENTS, Ms COURTNEY**

[11.11 a.m.]

Can you update the House on the new support package for the events sector during the coronavirus pandemic?

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, the Tasmanian Government recognises the significant contribution events make to the Tasmanian economy every single year. Last year we invested more than \$13 million through the Events Tasmania major partnerships program, the attractions fund, the grants program and other partnerships like the Hawks, the Supercars and Collingwood. Events provide both economic and social benefits. They are a key driver for tourism and visitation

and are critical for the survival of small businesses employing local Tasmanians in regional areas, particularly through the winter months. They are also an important foundation in building community participation through volunteering and skills development.

As a government we are committed to supporting this important sector as it adjusts to a COVID-19 operating environment and we know how important the events sector is. The increased outdoor gathering limit announced by the Premier last week will enable more events to go ahead.

Today I am pleased to announce a new round of funding that will be made available to events organisers through Events Tasmania, the Event Ready grant program. This will provide grants of up to \$5000 which will be made available to new and existing events that are scheduled to occur between now and the end of 2021, with \$200 000 allocated to this scheme. This program will provide important support to help Tasmanian events and implement COVID-19 safety practices, as well as increase their marketing and promotion capability such as online ticketing and digital marketing options within the COVID-19 environment.

Applications for the Event Ready grant program will open today at midday and close on Sunday 15 November 2020 and will be assessed on a competitive basis. More information on the program, and applications, will be made available from noon today on the Events Tasmania website.

The Event Ready grant program responds to the T21 Visitor Economy Action Plan 2020-22 which has been developed in partnership with industry through the Tasmanian Hospitality Association and the Tourism Industry Council and highlights our homegrown festivals and events as a key priority in rebuilding visitation across Tasmania.

I acknowledge the challenges that COVID-19 has prevented to event organisers during the past six months when many activities had to come to a standstill. I thank them for their continued patience and commend them on their resilience as well as their innovation for the events that we have seen possible. I also thank the Events Tasmania team who have worked very hard over the past months to provide guidance to event organisers.

We will continue to work with the events sector to get all Tasmanians back into the lifestyle they want. We will deliver our plan for recovery and get things back on track. We look at the other side which has failed to have any kind of plan for Tasmania's future. We know Mr O'Byrne has a plan for a plan and he will do the hard work, perhaps in the future, because we do not know whether we are going to have an alternative budget from Mr O'Byrne. In the background he is sharpening his knives while the backbench is creating fear in regional communities, yet nobody bothers to come up with a plan at a time when Tasmanians need it. This side of the House will work together, we will deliver our plan and we will rebuild Tasmania's economy.



## **COVID-19 - Emergency Food Relief**

**Ms STANDEN question to MINISTER for HUMAN SERVICES, Mr JAENSCH referred to MINISTER for DISABILITY SERVICES and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, Mr ROCKLIFF**

[11.15 a.m.]

The demand for emergency food relief statewide during COVID-19 has doubled for Foodbank Tasmania and increased by 70 per cent for Loaves and Fishes. In many communities there are people asking for support who have never sought help before. Food relief agencies report that your short-term Government stimulus funding has run out and they are dipping into reserves and relying on donations and volunteer support to continue their operations as best they can. Right now there is no certainty about ongoing funding for frontline services providing food relief and it is not fair to expect them to keep drawing on their goodwill for months until budget funds are unlocked, with little time to plan for the busy Christmas period. The sector expects that demand will only increase because the Liberal Government is cutting JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments, putting more pressure on household budgets. Will you immediately support Tasmanians who have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and provide further additional support to food relief organisations so they can help people put food on the table?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I believe that question should be directed to me and I am happy to answer it.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. We have Mr Rockliff on his feet.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - I will answer that very important question under my responsibility as minister for Community Development. With the ongoing impacts of the pandemic the Tasmanian Government allocated an additional \$800 000 to emergency food relief providers -

**Opposition members** interjecting.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - Madam Speaker, the Opposition should avail themselves of the facts of who is the minister responsible for various portfolios.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. Leader of the Opposition and the front bench, I am urging you to be quiet.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - Last week my colleague, Mr Jaensch, referred to Ms Standen as Alison 'Misunderstanden' because of the housing facts. Today it is Alison 'No Understanden' of who the minister is, unfortunately.

**Ms WHITE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, that is misrepresentation of the member. You are meant to call members by their proper names.

**Ms STANDEN** - Madam Speaker, I ask the minister to withdraw that statement.

**Madam SPEAKER** - I remind all members to use the names that are appropriate and correct. We are in a safe workplace and we do not like disorderly conduct.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - No, Madam Speaker.

We know that our funding has led to significant increases in delivery of produce, hampers and ready-to-eat meals to Tasmanians in need, and appropriately so. I acknowledge the organisations that continue to work hard to get food on the table of Tasmanians in need.

In the month ending 28 August, approximately 3331 hampers, 11 726 ready-to-eat meals and 150 000 kilograms of produce were distributed across Tasmania. In response to this growing need for emergency food relief we have also delivered an open, competitive small grants program for local emergency food relief organisations to access grants of up to \$10 000 to provide hampers or ready-to-eat meals for their communities. Since this program closed at the end of May, 28 organisations have received a total of around \$211 000.

I was pleased to see the PESRAC interim report recognise the Government's important support for our communities, and the need to consider where and how we provide emergency food relief as we recover from COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19, the Tasmanian Government had commenced work to collect data and map the supply and demand of emergency food relief. This will further inform the development of longer-term planning to ensure Tasmania's food security.

I acknowledge Foodbank as one of the many vital emergency food providers in this state, and their important role in assisting Tasmanians in need to have food on the table. I thank them, and the volunteers of the organisation, very much. The Tasmanian Government is one of Foodbank's biggest supporters, which deputy chairman Rob Higgins acknowledged, and they are halfway through their three-year funding agreement. Foodbank is about to receive the next instalment of \$125 000 as part of this agreement, as per the usual process.

I believe Mr Higgins referred to the terrific relationship that Foodbank has with the Tasmanian Government just yesterday, and they are working in close collaboration with Government with respect to understanding their need. We are working with Foodbank and service providers because we understand the very real need there.

Many organisations have provided food relief prior to COVID-19, and we know the impact the pandemic has had on many individuals and families right across Tasmania. The support we have provided, regarding the Premier's considerable investment, across areas of Government responsibility, includes community development, mental health and wellbeing, and health. Mr Ferguson today outlined small business grants and support. Rent relief is another. Right across, we have a big understanding of the need of our Tasmanian community.

**Ms STANDEN** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. The minister is talking a broad range of supports and nobody is arguing that, but the question was about the fact that food relief agencies have reported that their stimulus money has run out. What are they to do? They cannot last until the budget, and the uncertainty through to the Christmas period is crippling. There are people who demand -

**Madam SPEAKER** - It is not a point of order, but I urge the minister to address it.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have been addressing it. I have highlighted the close working relationship we have with food relief organisations. My understanding is that Mr Higgins yesterday referred to the close collaborative working relationship with the Tasmanian Government, and that will continue.

We also recognise within that, the importance of volunteering in Tasmania as well. Of the \$4 million package to support those who are most vulnerable, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, \$130 000 was committed to Volunteering Tasmania to assist in mobilising volunteers across the state. We are working with Volunteering Tasmania to deliver this outcome as well. By the end of August 2020, Volunteering Tasmania had registered approximately 2500 volunteers in the EV group, a 133 percent increase since March.

**Ms STANDEN** - Madam Speaker, point of order, Standing Order 45 - relevance. Either the minister is prepared to answer the question about whether he would provide additional funding support, or he should sit down.

**Madam SPEAKER** - That is not a point of order and I cannot tell the minister what to say.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - Madam Speaker, I have answered that particular question. I have referred to the process for Foodbank. I have mentioned the \$125 000 - the next instalment - as per the usual process.

**Ms White** - They have used it. If your relationship was as good as you say, you would know that.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - The relationship is strong. We are listening to the needs of the community and the community organisations that are on the ground dealing with volunteers and dealing with people in need across Tasmania. We understand as a Tasmanian Government we need to be responsive to the needs of the Tasmanian community, particularly our more vulnerable members and families, and organisations across Tasmania, and we have stepped up. We have stepped up in terms of the economic stimulus that is needed to support our small and medium businesses across Tasmania. We also recognise the social investment that is needed in times of distress as a result of COVID-19 -

**Madam SPEAKER** - Minister, you are at a risk of another point of order as you hurtle towards 10 minutes.

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - and that will continue with those great organisations that provide food relief right across Tasmania.

### **COVID-19 - Support for Veterans and Ex-Service Personnel**

**Mr ELLIS question to MINISTER for VETERANS' AFFAIRS, Mr BARNETT**

[11.26 a.m.]

Can you please provide an update to the House on the support for Tasmania's more than 10 500 veterans and ex-service personnel?

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I am delighted to receive the question from the new member for Braddon. I know of his interest and support for veterans and the veteran community in Tasmania.

**Ms O'Connor** - His fourth for the day, just for the record; his fourth Dorothy Dixier.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Ms O'Connor.

**Mr BARNETT** - I am delighted to say that Tasmania has been at the forefront of serving our country and serving the best interests of our nation for more than 100 years. We have only 2 per cent of the population, but we have amongst the highest enlistment rate of any state or territory. We can be proud of our veterans and their service and their sacrifice. On behalf of all of us in this place, I say thank you for their service and their sacrifice.

We now have 101 Australians who have a Victoria Cross - the highest award for gallantry - and 15 are from Tasmania with the most recent being the renowned Edward 'Teddy' Sheean. It is an extraordinary record and one in which all Tasmanians can be very proud.

We have 10 500 veterans in Tasmania and we say - 'thank you', to them and their families. I know people in this place and nearly all Tasmanians have a connection with a veteran, whether it be family, a friend, neighbour or workmate.

During COVID-19 we implemented a plan and we have acted on that plan. We made available \$500 000 in COVID-19 grants for RSL organisations and ex-service organisations and they have been rolling out, with \$10 000 to keep them going during those difficult times and special \$25 000 grants for those RSL and other organisations providing new services and programs to meet those identified needs because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

We have supported the veterans' community with more than \$418 918 to 52 organisations from Circular Head to Queenstown, from Cygnet through to St Helens, and all in between. It has been a pleasure to visit many of those organisations in recent weeks, including Mates4Mates. The Devonport RSL is preparing care boxes for veterans who have been kept at home. You can make a \$10 donation to the Devonport RSL and they will deliver that care box - a fantastic initiative. Thank you for that initiative. The Longford RSL and Vietnam Veterans are all doing terrific work to support their veterans.

The Teddy Sheean Memorial Grants Program is now open for applications. This is in addition to the plan - \$100 000 for those important organisations to provide support in two parts. There are two separate rounds. This is for minor capital works, equipment purchases, memorial repairs, lighting on memorials, kitchens, four-year upgrades, purchase of rehabilitation exercise equipment, memorabilia, preservation of equipment and supplies. All of that is happening in the Teddy Sheean Grant rounds; that is fantastic.

I am delighted today to advise that we are going to give it a new name in the next round. Rather than the Teddy Sheean Memorial Grant round, it will be the Teddy Sheean VC Memorial Grant round. It is a great initiative. It is a part of our plan and we are delivering on that plan, unlike the Opposition. We are still waiting for their plans.

**Time expired.**

## **ELECTRICITY SAFETY BILL 2020 (No. 38)**

### **First Reading**

Bill presented by **Ms Archer** and read the first time.

### **MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

#### **Cost of Living**

[11.32 a.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the House take note of the following matter: cost of living.

I rise on the important matter of cost of living, particularly how it pertains to the circumstances many Tasmanians are facing today, and that is confronting what has been a tsunami wave across the state of energy bill shock -

**Madam SPEAKER** - Excuse me, Mr O'Byrne, I am sorry about this, but I have just been advised that due to the fact that Ms Ogilvie has to have a start on her motion, this has to be a truncated debate. Because question time ran over you will not get the full 35 minutes. The substantive motion takes precedence over a Matter of Public Importance. If we are to get on to Ms Ogilvie's motion at noon, we have to truncate this debate.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Madam Speaker, not reflecting on the ruling of the Chair, but now I have lost a fair bit of my time in dealing with that procedural matter. It highlights the issue we have in question time with Dorothy Dixers and the length of time some ministers are taking to answer these questions. This is a case writ large of how we need to have discussion on the role of Dorothy Dixers in question time.

I opened with the matter of public importance around the cost of living. One of the biggest bills households face across Tasmania, on a quarterly basis, is their energy bill. At this time of the year, people are receiving their winter bills. We are hearing story after story of Tasmanians receiving significantly larger energy bills, a bill shock way in advance of what they were expecting, but also what they were promised by the Government in terms of trying to keep energy prices low.

While the cent per rate of energy determined by the regulator is low, Tasmanians have some of the highest energy bills in the country. A bill is made up of a number of components and the regulator makes the decision regarding the wholesale price point, which defines the market price point. Many Tasmanians concerned about the price of their bill have contacted us. There is bill shock that has a level of explanation regarding the usage. Tasmanians during COVID-19 were asked to stay at home or asked to work from home or asked to school from home and therefore usage increased.

Tasmanians did the right thing. Now with their bill shock and the energy bills they are receiving, they are being punished financially for doing the right thing and staying at home.

That is manifestly unfair. Tasmanians who did the right thing in response to the COVID-19-related restrictions, should not be financially punished by receiving some of the bills.

We have also received questions from families who have received bills that have had no change in their energy use pattern yet there has been up to a third and sometimes a half increase in their bill from the commensurate time last year. For pensioners, people on single or fixed incomes, a 30, 40 or 50 per cent increase in their energy bills is a massive shock.

The Government in 2018, in the middle of summer, leading up to an election, in a base political move, not only gave a deduction for energy bills of a certain amount, but also sent out cheques to Tasmanians for an energy supplement payment with the Premier's and the Energy minister's signatures on them. If they are to be consistent with the view of wanting to assist Tasmanians through this process, then a winter energy supplement for COVID-19 is a completely reasonable measure to take to support Tasmanians.

We acknowledge that Aurora has announced a program out of the Aurora funds to support people. That is not enough. We have been raising cases publicly with the Tasmanian community, with Aurora and with the Government on the outcomes of some of the bills. It is remarkable that only when these issues are raised publicly is there action taken.

We saw it with Sarah, a young mum living in the northern suburbs who has a child with a disability. She received a bill for slightly under \$2000. She is on a fixed income. It was not until we raised this publicly that she was contacted by Aurora and given a discount on her energy bill.

We have urged Tasmanians to contact Aurora to see if they can access that fund. We had another case on the weekend. Kathy from the northern suburbs received a massive bill with no energy use; massive energy bill shock. She has done all the right things and is on the Yes program. She contacted Aurora and asked them for assistance. They advised her no assistance was available. Aurora also told her that many people are complaining and are off to the Ombudsman and maybe she should do that. After we raised her case publicly, the next morning she received an unsolicited call from Aurora saying it had reviewed her bill, agreed it was a bit high and offered a goodwill payment equivalent to her fortnightly payment. That is so cynical. We cannot bring individual cases.

**Ms Ogilvie** - Good result though.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - No, it is not a great result for her. She received the bill shock. She went to Aurora and asked for help. Aurora said no and she had to go to the media. That is not good enough.

We call on the Government to show heart and show a winter energy supplement is the right thing to do. You did it before an election. How about you do it now when people need it?

**Time expired.**

[11.39 a.m.]

**Ms STANDEN** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I rise to make a contribution on the cost of living. In addition to energy costs, households across the state are experiencing unprecedented

costs of living in relation to housing, household food and household budgeting. In relation to housing costs, there was a crisis in housing affordability leading into COVID-19 and the indications are that although there has been some slight easing, the vacancy rates, particularly in the private rental market, have only eased to as much as 2 per cent to 3 per cent vacancy. In fact, from the period April to July, REIT reported a tightening from 1.4 per cent to 0.7 per cent, the lowest of all capital cities. For several years now charitable organisations, Anglicare chief amongst them, have reported a worsening rental affordability crisis, particularly in our capital city, but the Tenants' Union reports on a quarterly basis on rental affordability and highlights that the north-west coast has experienced a significant decline in rental affordability of around 10 per cent for the year.

Housing rental stress is an issue that is truly statewide, not just in our capital city where there is ample evidence of the tight market, but across the state. With 40 000 households in the private rental market and 8000 households, so let us say 20 000 people in rental stress across the state before COVID-19, the issue is our low average incomes that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 and the higher rental costs that have been holding up despite this COVID-19 pandemic crisis. It puts those people, particularly in the private rental market, in a terrible pincer movement of loss of income, hours, wages and jobs on the one hand, and household expenses, particularly around rental affordability, holding up.

There is some movement around rental relief and a possibility of some loosening of the rental market over time. Let us not forget that the majority of people in the private rental market are locked into 12-month leases, so that means for those people there has been no change and no relief in rental costs over this period. It is the private rental market that is doing the heavy lifting in relation to the rental market overall, with those least able to afford private rental markets putting downward pressure on the social housing sector.

It is a terrible situation with the average medium rent exceeding 30 per cent, which is the agreed acceptable upper limit that defines housing stress when that percentage of income expended on rental or mortgage costs exceeds 30 per cent. Much more needs to be done in that space and the Government should be looking at whatever it can to ease the housing crisis that is set to get tighter as time goes on.

I do not understand why the minister is sitting on the short-stay accommodation report, the third data report that was expected for the June quarter and is well overdue by now. It covers the acute period of the pandemic crisis and should give us an accurate picture of the number of households that, with the goodwill of the Government to step in and regulate that short-stay market, could well mean that some hundreds of properties are converted back to the long-term private rental market, particularly where the rental market is tight. It is not a forever thing. Regulation can be nuanced, and those are the sorts of things that the Government ought to be looking at.

As raised in question time today, interim funding needs to be considered now for those food relief agencies that have contracts through to the middle of next year. There was \$790 000 announced by the Minister for Human Services - so forgive my mistake in directing my question to him because it was in his media release - for a range of organisations, more or less the salt-and-pepper approach. I am not criticising that for one minute; it was good to see a range of organisations putting their shoulders to the wheel in the food relief effort. A number of organisations, such as the Wellspring Anglican Church I visited a couple of weeks ago, for a time have been stepping in and providing assistance to up to 500 international students

without any assistance at all to begin with. The Foodbank has now pitched in to that effort and I know that the church is also looking at rental support and so on. Food security is a basic human right and without adequate safe, nutritious food we cannot expect people to engage in education, engage in the workforce and engage in civil society generally.

There was a 20 per cent increase roughly in demand for food security agencies over the previous year leading up to the COVID-19 crisis. At that time 40 per cent more food was required to meet demand. These agencies are bending over backwards but the funding that was provided in the short-term stimulus over the last six months has been well expended because those agencies, small to large, have experienced unprecedented demand. The Risdon Vale Neighbourhood Centre I visited the other night has had an increase in demand and they are servicing maybe 50 meals a day. The Clarendon Vale Neighbourhood Centre has, at their peak, provided 350 meals, not per day but once a week. The logistic effort for that one hot meal spread across their community takes up the entire week. There needs to be additional funding right now but also long-term funding security and coordination between those services.

[11.46 a.m.]

**Mr BARNETT** (Lyons - Minister for Energy) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to make a contribution on the cost of living, one of the most important priorities of our Government and it has been for some time. The policies we are putting in place ensure that we have downward pressure on the cost of living, not just for residential customers but for business customers.

The shadow minister for energy is very sensitive today because he is talking about leadership for and on behalf of organisations. There is clearly something happening on the other side. I am not sure what it is but clearly the shadow minister for energy and the Leader for the Opposition are in a fight for the leadership. That is what is going on. I do not know exactly but if you want to keep interjecting I will respond. We know you are in the fight of your life for the leadership, David O'Byrne, and that is what you are on about.

With respect to Ms Standen's contribution, the credibility of it has been called into question because two days running she has asked a question of the wrong minister. She is the member for 'Oops, sorry, wrong minister', so in terms of credibility she has a little bit of work to do.

I will read a quote from Mr O'Byrne from last Wednesday, where he said, 'People are starting to look more hopeful towards the future and instead of cherry-picking we need to have a holistic approach to the challenge of COVID-19 recovery'. Well, wouldn't that be good? Rather than coming in here pretending you have a 'gotcha' moment, which you did this last week and are doing it again this week, the fact is you are just playing political games. You are not interested in people and their circumstances.

Thanks to Aurora Energy, we have in place support for those Tasmanians who need it and they are providing that support. It is a \$5 million package and there is some \$4 million still available. If you have any concerns or needs contact Aurora Energy on 1300 132 003. We want to support you. It is a very targeted approach. Rather than the one-size-fits-all approach from David O'Byrne as per his suggestion, we are trying to respond to the needs of those going through the coronavirus pandemic and responding accordingly.



You have heard from the Premier. We are delivering in spades in Tasmania, more than any other state in terms of proportion of gross state product. We are providing \$1 billion of support for Tasmanians in terms of -

**Mr O'Byrne** interjecting.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order. I ask the member for Franklin to be a bit quieter in his comments. The minister was quiet during your own contribution.

**Mr O'Byrne** - Sorry, but when the minister is on his feet and misleading the House -

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** - That is enough, thank you. I will let the minister proceed.

**Mr BARNETT** - As I have indicated, a billion dollars is what the support has delivered in terms of economic and social recovery. Our priority is to keep people safe and then to rebuild our economy with more jobs. You have seen the wonderful result of the Sensis data yesterday saying Tasmanians are more confident, particularly in the small business sector, and they are pleased and proud of our Government with the policies we have in place to support small business.

Regarding electricity prices - because the shadow minister for energy has been criticising and carping and being negative, at all times relentlessly negative, and that is one of his great strengths of course, being relentlessly negative - we have delivered. He was part of a government that delivered a 65 per cent increase in electricity prices over seven years and since we have been in government we have delivered a 2.2 per cent in nominal terms. What is that in real terms? For residential customers it is a 12 per cent reduction; for small business customers it is a 19 per cent reduction in real terms.

In the six and a half years under our Government we are delivering and that is terrific. Why do you not say, 'Well done, you have delivered a 1.38 per cent reduction from 1 July'. We are delivering on that. On top of that, the concessions for those doing it tough across Tasmania are among the most generous in Australia - \$45 million per year, and on top of that you have the \$5 million COVID-19 Fund thanks to Aurora Energy. On top of that you have the \$1 million provided for the Energy Saver and Subsidy NILS Scheme. Overall, there is more than \$58 million in assistance to help Tasmanian customers manage their power bills.

We are backing small business to the hilt. For 34 000 small businesses we have provided a quarterly waiver - \$27 million - that is a fantastic boost to help them during those tough times to get through the coronavirus pandemic so they can keep employing their employees. They are the backbone of our economy, particularly in rural and regional areas. We are so pleased and proud of them. We responded to those customers who talked to us. We got their feedback in the embedded networks, whether it is at a shopping centre or a large office block, and those customers by application can get a \$1000 grant to help them with their electricity bills. We are on the case. We are getting on to it and are continuing to deliver as we have.

I recommend people to contact Aurora Energy to discuss the needs that they have, and I make that point very clearly.

[11.53 a.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to remind the minister for Energy and Resources that any increases in power prices that came about prior to the Liberals taking government were in fact set by the Economic Regulator and they were the consequence, as the history tells us, of a widespread 'gold-plating' of the transmission network system. That is why power prices went up.

This minister's record on power prices which he speaks of, often falsely, will be cold comfort to those people who this past winter have had significant spikes in their power bills. Even our little place at Nubeena - three months, one bedroom, a \$1000 power bill - that is out of this world. The minister needs to be more frank and a bit less self-congratulatory about what is really happening out there because the evidence that has come to us this past winter is that power prices are increasing.

If you are really serious about making sure you are bringing down the cost of living for everyday Tasmanians, but particularly people on low-to-medium incomes, then what you need to do is invest in energy efficiency for low-to-medium income households. That is the best way to bring down power bills for the long term. You can take \$500 a year off people's power bill simply by making their house more thermally-efficient, changing the light bulbs, sealing the draughts, and making sure that the hot water system is insulated. Those are simple measures that Government can take to bring down power prices, which we did under the Labor/Greens government with a massive roll-out of energy efficiency to 9500 low-income households, small businesses and community groups. If you are serious about cost of living and taking the pressure of low income households, Government should intervene and enable this energy-efficiency roll-out.

There is no question that the cost of living is on the rise and it has become a key concern in the lives of Tasmanians. We have COVID-19, where thousands of people were put out of work, and you have long-term wages stagnation in this country over the last 15 years or so, while the cost of living, the price of basic goods, continues to go up. Only yesterday when I read into *Hansard* some of Shelter's budget submission, it was clear that we are the least-affordable capital city in the country for rents, even less affordable than Melbourne, yet our average income, medium income, is about \$63 000 to \$64 000 a year.

This Government has under-invested in social and affordable housing which jacks-up the cost of living to people who are in the private rental market. Life is becoming increasingly unaffordable and, yes, we need to have systems in place to support families that are on the bread line. We need FoodBank, Second Bite: our food organisations that are there to support families who are doing it really tough. We also need to think a little bit long-term because those emergency food relief services are not the only answer to deal with food security.

There are food deserts in Tasmania where families cannot get fresh fruit and vegetables. We have some of the most productive farms and finest produce anywhere in the country, and yet our kids in rural and regional Tasmania, in urban fringes, are going without fresh fruit and vegetables. We can do better. It is about the choices we make as a community and it is about the choices government makes. For too long governments have been thinking in the short-term. If you are serious about food security you need to work with farmers, you need to look at your supply chains; you need to make sure that you are providing fresh fruit and vegetables and quality produce throughout Tasmania and into communities.

We should be encouraging people to learn how to grow their own produce. We saw a lot of that happen during the lockdown months. You could go into Bunnings looking for fruit and vegetable seedlings and they had all been sold out, which was fantastic because households were taking their food security into their own hands.

We do need to make cost of living a priority because when people are polled about their key concerns, cost of living is right up there. People feel that pain in their back pocket and parents feel it when they send their kids off to school in a uniform that is from the year before last and shoes that are half a size too small.

In closing I will just say this: if either of the two parties in this place apart from the Greens are serious about cost of living and taking the pressure off low-income Tasmanians they will not support the legislation that will embed poker machines in communities until 2048 because that rips money out of families' pockets, takes food away from children and entrenches poverty and disadvantage in our community.

[11.59 a.m.]

**Mr STREET** (Franklin) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I know I do not have much time remaining. In the brief time I have I will make a very quick reflection on the debate that has gone on. Ms Standen made a comment across the Chamber to the Minister for Energy, 'Don't you care about people?'. I thought you were better than that to ask a ridiculous question like that. We are all here because we care about people. To ask a question like that is ridiculous.

**Ms Standen** - And you are better than this.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr STREET** - Mr O'Byrne stood up here and said that he has spoken to people who have received power bills for this winter where their energy use had not changed from the previous winter but they have received a 50 per cent spike in their bill. He knows as well as I do that the reason that happened is because of the estimating process that went on when meters could not be read. The increase he is talking about on this bill would have been reflected in the previous quarter's bill because the difference in unit price between last winter and this winter is negligible, so people have used more power and that is why there has been a spike in bills, which is why there is a relief fund available.

Do not stand up here and say that their energy use has not changed but there has been a 50 per cent spike in their bill without at least putting on the record that you know why that has occurred.

**Time expired.**

**Matter noted.**

## **MOTION**

### **A Fair Social and Economic Recovery**

[12.01 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark - Motion) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I move -

That the House agrees that Tasmanians deserve a fair social and economic recovery.

I am hugely optimistic for our great state of Tasmania. We have been through a very difficult year and we have learned a lot along the way. We have had to adjust and create new ways and new norms and take into account the context of things as they have happened on the way through.

It feels like quite a long time since I have had one of these sessions because we have had parliament in a difficult state for some time and we have come back into a more normal set of standing orders. From recollection, I have not had private members' time since around this time last year so my approach will be to give a wrap-up of the 12 months. It is actually nigh on my anniversary of being re-elected into this place so that is the tack I will take.

I have purposefully chosen a very broad topic for this motion which I hope everybody can agree with because it seems to be a sensible proposition and a no-brainer that Tasmanians deserve a fair social and economic recovery. The question is how we construct that and what are the right elements that would go into making sure we are able to deliver that, not just in the short term but over the long term for our children as well.

I also acknowledge, being an animal lover, the great work that is happening today on the whale stranding rescue. That is something on all of our minds and we are watching that very carefully on the media as it unfolds.

It has been 12 months on, and taking a step back from the front line on this, what a view it is looking back over that time since I was re-elected. It has been fairly tumultuous and was fairly tumultuous at the time. It has been and is an honour to be back in the House of Assembly and I am very content and happy to be able to contribute to all of these debates from a new perspective.

I have the great benefit of being able to speak quite strongly as an Independent on behalf of my electorate and that gets lost with the larger parties where there is internal competition around electorates and what people are able to speak on and in particular questions in question time.

Putting to one side the issue of question time, which we will need to have some discussion about and how that is tracking, I have put a lot of thought into my one question that I have per question time and I am grateful to have that question. The Liberal Party gave up one of their questions to enable that to occur and I am pleased that I get to raise issues of importance.

During the last 12 months I have obviously had an opportunity, like all of us, to witness the strength of the Tasmanian people and the Tasmanian economy. I have also had an eye on the weaknesses that have been exposed. I was here for the great changing of the Leader of the Liberal Party in government, which was interesting and exciting in itself. Who would have thought that the all-encompassing global pandemic that nobody expected would arrive here?

I have seen the stoicism of our business community, in particular, and their moves to take the steps necessary to keep not just our communities safe, but to look after their employees. People might recall I was a very loud voice very early on for those small businesses, particularly the restaurant sector, many of whom had migrant workers working there who are

not entitled to other support. I raised my voice loudly and strongly on behalf of our multicultural communities and was very pleased that the Government responded and unlike other states and territories, made good moves to put some assistance into place.

Our businesses have really shown a lot of flexibility and it has not been easy for them. They are all local people with the same challenges we all have: mortgages, families, kids at school, kids not at school, working from home. All of those things were and are happening at the same time as trying to keep their businesses alive and afloat and to accommodate, reinvigorate and reenergise the rules around which they operate. Their commitment to their employees, which has been ongoing, continues to be ongoing. We have seen great examples of the strength of community during this phase as well - local community, Tasmanian community, regional communities - and how we have all tried to look after each other.

During all of this I have tried to be very focused on achieving positive outcomes for my community of Clark. Being an Independent, it is an interesting position to be in, because I am not really the Opposition, so I try to take a propositional approach to propose new ways of doing things, good ideas, suggestions, better things we can do and other ways we can do things.

I try not to get involved in personal and individual attacks on people. It was a lesson explained to me through my family line, which as you know, goes right back in politics and the law. The reason you do not attack individuals is because it shows the poverty of your own argument. If you do that it shows that you are unable to make your case and win the argument based on policy and ideas. Apart from that, it gives your opponent a free kick. It gives them something to work with. Why would you do that?

I try not to do that. I have a lot of sympathy for Ms Butler. She raised that the other day, but frankly, Labor has done a few things recently I have not been that impressed with myself. These issues, are a lesson for all of us in this place. That is my approach. Others will do things differently. We are all individuals.

I come into this place refreshed, renewed, reinvigorated and reinvented, and I am really keen on landing the new economy for Tasmania - jobs, jobs, jobs - and part of the reason is that I have the most amazing electorate in Tasmania. It is, in a sense, an electorate of two halves, two council areas, and different strengths and weaknesses in both. I would like to see more sharing across the Creek Road boundary happen, both economically and socially.

I am sure many in this place will no doubt be tired of hearing me constantly banging on about jobs. I am a mother of three kids who will be graduating from school and looking for those jobs. When I graduated from university here in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we were in the middle of the recession. It was a terribly hard time. As a young law graduate I recall making 200 job applications around the nation, eventually securing one, but it was very difficult. We have an entire cohort of young people who have to leave the state. Many went to Western Australia, the great mining state, where there were jobs. Many did not come back. Some could. I managed to come back after what was a fabulous international career with my wonderful Irish husband.

The impact of this pandemic has given us an opportunity, while we are in the eye of the storm, to reflect on how we do things. It has made me more passionate to secure wins for the people of Clark on the issues that matter.

From the devastation that is still happening globally - we are in a safe bubble here - there will be new opportunities: how we can innovate, how we can work smarter, how we can be more connected and look after each other better, and how we can invigorate and ramp up and amp up sectors that we are very good at, for example, hydroelectricity. It is essential not only that we get the economic side right, but that we get the social side right as well. We will talk about that.

During the lockdown we saw gaps in our important social support system. When the streets were empty, it was a very different, a very eerie feeling but you could see the people who needed help more clearly. On my one walk a day, I saw people living rough and in tents. We were able to help them. I even had to pull back on the wig and gown and assist some homeless people who were in serious legal trouble who could not get back to their places of residence in Queensland. We had the borders down by that stage - very difficult times. Every MP in this place just rolled their sleeves up and did what had to be done to help people.

It was a real example of a full-court press by a leadership cohort in a crisis. We have tried to find analogies about what kind of crisis it was or is. We lean towards war-time analogies, but it is actually a unique crisis. It is something that has not happened in this way ever before. It is a combination of a recessionary flavour together with a health impact that has not occurred in this manner before. We can draw lessons from the Spanish Flu from a long time ago. We can draw lessons from how to manage our economy in some Keynesian way, such as with the Great Depression. Blending those two things has been really challenging. We have these parallel crises and parallel challenges that we are trying to manage.

There are some very strong and wonderful migrant communities in Tasmania, many of whom were severely impacted during the COVID-19 lockdown.

I give my office a huge amount of credit. My office comprises me and two people. We work incredibly hard. We really focused first and foremost on constituency work, communicating with our people, and policy work second. In relation to how we prioritised that work, we think of what is best for Tasmania, what is best for the electorate, and then what our personal views may be. We found that model works pretty well. I support as broad and as strong consultation processes on everything we can do. This means I am on the phone pretty much 24/7. I see that as part of the role and keeping those communications up is really essential.

My office, fabulous people, work tirelessly. They immediately went into work-from-home mode. We set up and we just kept going. They worked tirelessly to support our migrant people: friends, neighbours and community; everyone who had been left behind because there were not citizens or permanent residents, who had lost their jobs through no fault of their own. I was getting great phone calls from employers and restaurateurs, say, 'My employees, I really care about them, I am worried about them. Please do more'. The Government responded. I was grateful for that. It was a welcome decision when the Premier committed additional funding support for these people, the second time around, who were running out of resources again and who had lost their jobs and had been severely impacted by the shutting down, particularly, of our hospitality industry.

I jumped in the car and visited many families to deliver food for those people who had reached a crisis point. That was tough stuff but I was happy to do it. What else do you do in a crisis? You turn up and try to help.

It is positive for our community that we can look to each other when things get tough. I am proud as a member of parliament to support the residents of Clark, no matter where they come from or what circumstances face them. We certainly had some difficult moments with interstate people who had to come to care for dying relatives and to see them through that process with parents. I like to think that if a crisis unfolds we would all be good in a crisis. Until you are tested, you do not know.

I have spent a lot of time, and my office is now expert at, helping stranded overseas Tasmanians. It is a very difficult issue. I have been robust in my views on doing more. The Government stepped up with a help line, thank goodness, because trying to run it through my office was difficult. I am certain all the other offices in this place would be having these sorts of calls as well. Every person who is stranded overseas, is stranded within their own particular context in their own circumstances. At the beginning of the pandemic, particularly when the fear was still there, we were more inclined to say, 'Stay where you are, you have travelled, you need to stay there. We will sort it out when you come back'.

Now we need to shift to designing a new normal level of travel arrangements. People need to travel. We need freedom of movement and to have our airlines engaged in that conversation. I would like to see the international capacity of our airport re-established as it was when I was growing up here. We can do all of this really well. That would help the university with its international students. It is struggling on that front. We can reinvent this stuff and how we do it.

The university students are telling me that they feel things are a little unfair at the moment because they are paying full fees - this goes to the federal government's HECS payments - but they are all online. The online classes got very large. They are missing that human interaction. I am worried about their wellbeing and mental health. Young people are not made to be alone. It is not in the DNA. We are social creatures. Getting them back together would be a good thing.

Wellbeing is more important than ever. As we have moved out of the worst of the crisis, we have a chance to catch our breath. Maybe we are in the eye of the storm, but we are in an incredible position where we are COVID-19 free. It is an unusual thing to be happening globally. If you look at some of the island nations, and I like to think of Tasmania as an independent island nation but obviously we are still part of Australia, they have been able to do a better job at containing the contagion. At some point, we are going to have to move out. The question is, how do we move out of our current stasis? People want to travel.

I am hearing that people are getting tired. They want a break and get out of the house. They have spent a lot of time at home with families. We are made to mingle as human beings. It is important for our social health and wellbeing that we are able to get out and about and see each other, mingle, go to events, enjoy a band, go to the pub, have a dance and all of those things that are so wonderful about living here in Tasmania. Let us face it - this is something I am interested in the minister's perspective on - I feel that we have all been through a very traumatic event.

When research is done, as it undoubtedly will on this phase of life, we will see that some people have been impacted more severely, some have been impacted and do not really understand how they have been impacted, and some are just feeling a bit flat. To be honest, I have had some awful situations that have not ended well and I have been reflecting on that

from last week. It is time to prioritise wellbeing. I have raised some suggestions around wellbeing with the Government and I stand by my call. We need to get people out and about doing things that they can do.

Because it is a public health pandemic we talk a lot about the rules and around what you cannot do or what you have to comply with. I would like to see a new conversation that is innovative, energised and excited around what we can do. Getting the kids back to their formals and dancing again was fantastic and the joy that swept over - there were something like 10 000 people on social media enjoying that, because these rites of passage of young people in communities are really important.

Everybody remembers their end-of-year formal or social gathering. Mine was at Hobart College back in the 1980s. At that time I thought I was going to be a fashion designer so I made my own dress. I cannot quite recall what it looked like now but I am sure it was fabulous, but that is something I will always remember. Our children deserve that too, so prioritising wellbeing is really important.

I know not everyone can travel. The travel vouchers have been very popular - who doesn't like free stuff? Let us give more of that out. It is a great idea. I have been very supportive of that and proposed those models we have seen coming out of Scandinavian countries as well, but people like me with kids are flat-chat raising them and doing schooling and driving the car around. I call myself 'Uber mummy' because they just call me up, I Uber over and pick them up and drop them off, even this morning before coming into parliament. In our busy lives sometimes it is just too difficult to get away.

I would really like to see something for the mums and the women who have done double-duty with working from home and schooling from home. It has not been easy for anybody and I reflect on my experience. I have three kids going to different schools and in different age groups. That means three different rooms, three different sets of computers, the cost of all of that and getting on top of the educational needs of each of them. I found it really hard and I know my other mummy friends found it hard too. That is why I went pretty strongly on getting the kids back to school and that has normalised things not just for the children but also for the parents and our workforce. There was resistance to that because that was a fear thing, but I will continue to keep pushing the boundaries a little bit ahead of the curve to keep the acid on with these things.

Wellbeing, therefore, is different for everyone. That is what makes it complex and hard to deliver. For some people it could be about accessing counselling services, for others it might be about going to a fitness class that they otherwise could not afford; mindfulness or yoga. I love to go to beauty therapy because it gives me some time out, as well as massage and meditation. All those things are great, but it could be as simple as being able to play netball. It could be about finally getting your teeth fixed. It is about how you feel and how you feel about yourself. It could be about getting a job. That is incredibly important to wellbeing if that is what you are looking for.

I believe we have a chance now to get people engaged with the arts again. I would love to see a reinvigoration of Adult Education. I learnt to do cake decorating at Adult Education and for my sins I am now the person who does all the wedding cakes and Christmas cakes for our family, which take a long time to do.



We know people are ready now. They are champing at the bit to be active in our businesses. They want to get out there and what a great way to support them by getting people moving and out there again.

In education, I was so happy to get the kids dancing again - the whole footloose movement, free the kids, get them moving again - fantastic. We know it has been a really disruptive year and very difficult. With online learning everybody has done their best, but it has not suited everyone and kids want to see their friends. They want to get back to footy, netball, soccer, rowing, back to a pattern of behaviour. For students who are finishing their last year, it has been a very challenging year. The dancing was a good win. I was really glad to see we could deliver that.

Education is very important to me. It has always been important in our family. We have always been great supporters of education, public education in particular, and as a member of parliament and also as a mum, nobody will be surprised to learn that the success of Ogilvie High School is incredibly close to my heart. My great-uncle and grandfather, who were Attorney-General and Premier of the state in the Depression era, were very keen on public education. They were the children of convicts themselves and had gone from being the kids of convicts, through access to education, to rise to the roles of Attorney-General and Premier of Tasmania. It is all about access to education. It is the secret ingredient.

At one point during this trajectory for them, they were able to establish the area schools and get the farm kids some proper access to education. Ogilvie High School, which was co-ed to begin with, was then renamed the A G Ogilvie High School and the intention was that it would be the leading light of public education for women's education in Tasmania. It achieved that goal for many years. Things have eroded somewhat but I am supporting the new principal that school and am lobbying and pushing incredibly hard for the performing arts centre and gymnasium project. It is a specialist area and something that that school has always done beautifully and well - their dance program, their choirs, their music, the arts side. They have a long history of excellence in the arts and a capital works project that supports that would be very good. I thank the minister for listening to me endlessly on that project.

Looking forward, like everybody in this place, I have been thinking long and hard about what a fair social and economic recovery looks like for the people of my electorate. Yes, I have been a squeaky wheel. I am lobbying hard to secure projects to deliver jobs and outcomes and I make no apology for that. That is what I am paid to do and I will continue to lobby to secure commitments that will benefit my electorate and community, but it is an approach I also apply to a legislative agenda and I have my own legislative agenda that I have been running and rolling out in both incarnations of me in this House.

I take the approach that it is important to negotiate outcomes, to listen to the community, and to act on improvements to legislation where it can be made. I have made a point, and I hope it has been noted, of supporting good amendments when legislation has come forward in this House, no matter from where, and to nonetheless ensure that bills continue to progress through this place. I have found - and this has been a great joy - that my experiences as barrister and solicitor knocking on 25 years now, nationally and internationally, continues to help a lot. It is just me. I do every bill. I read every bill. I do all of the analysis. I work with my team. They keep me sane. I do read every word of every bill. Some I will speak on, where I think I can make a valuable contribution. Others I think are just sensible and we put them through.

I have made a serious commitment. I wrote to my electorate and ensured them, and assured them that with all legislation I supported in this place, I would do my utmost to make sure it was well consulted and the best possible legislation it could be.

I have drafted plastic free waters bill, the Tasmanian Constitution Act Aboriginal recognition change, which actually got through, bills on online bullying, and advanced care directives; we are now seeing the iteration of that come through. I thank the Attorney General for her work on that. It is a good act to be tabling.

I will be revisiting those. I wrote those when I was part of a party. Times have changed. I will be updating and amending those and looking at retabling them in new formats.

During this term, I have developed some bills. The one I am really passionate about and I almost did this as the private members' time - I think COVID-19 has overtaken most things at the moment - is modern slavery and supply chains. We do have a moment in time right now to look at our supply chains, as a state, and as a Government, to make sure we have eradicated all taint of modern slavery from those supply chains. We have the advanced care directives the Attorney General has delivered, which is fantastic.

I have my own suggestion on electoral reform. I know it is uncomfortable but I do not agree with Labor's proposal, particularly how they have constructed their caps. I have written to them on this. I am yet to hear a response on that.

I have provided a copy of my proposal to visit section 196 of the Electoral Act, particularly around telephone banking and social media use.

There is a huge diversity of opinion around Section 196, about whether we even need it. It is ostensibly there to cover the prohibition on running tickets. We are either all in, or we are all out.

Either, we are going to have phone banking and social media distribution of information about candidates' names captured by that section in the same way as advertising and traditional media does, or we are not.

We need to have that conversation. I have written to the Attorney General and the Government on that. I am yet to see the Liberal's proposals on their electoral reform. I look forward to that. I am certainly not, unlike some, suggesting that things be kept secret. I do suggest that we have a broad-ranging discussion that includes all of the elements that all of us are proposing.

I have written a climate change bill. I note, of course, that the Greens have tabled their own bill. Mine is different in scope. I have held that back, because I do want to have that conversation. There are a lot of similarities with what the Greens have proposed, but mine is more limited in scope. I want to be careful about how we have that conversation.

I am pushing hard on APS jobs and Macquarie Point because when we turn Macquarie Point into our science, space, technology, Antarctic and Southern Ocean research hub, it will be a marvellous thing for our town. There is such an exciting opportunity there. Let us shift some APS jobs down here. Let us make that happen.

The federal Liberal Government has a minister for regionalisation of those jobs and redistribution. I have been in conversation with him and also some senators to make it happen.

I am a strong supporter of UTAS. There are challenges at the Tasmanian campus, and the new model of how it delivers tertiary experience. If I had my way, every arts degree would be HECS free. I was fortunate enough to go through my first degree at Melbourne University, Ormond College, in classics, history, archaeology, without a HECS impost. It meant that I could enjoy this small 'I' liberal education that was filled with arts, history, novels, philosophy, politics, science and history of Australia in a way that I am not sure happens much anymore. Increasing the fees on those sorts of subjects is a retrograde step. We need to educate our nation. We need to understand ourselves as Australians and Tasmanians.

We have a hidden gem in Tasmania. I call it the fifth pillar of our economy because it spreads across and touches everything; that is our science, technology and engineering sector, our ICT sector. We can turbocharge that and grow a more vibrant and strong industry. We can create roles here through that sector that reach across the planet. I reflect on my time in Silicon Valley around that.

I would love to see the *Spirits of Tasmania*, the majority of that work, built here. Marinus Link is a massive opportunity as well. Shades of the old Hydro there. I continue to lobby very hard regarding Tasmanian joint ownership through a special purpose vehicle of the Marinus Link. I do not want us to be held captive by the dreaded mainlanders. We need to make sure they understand who has the keys to this engine room. It is us.

The GRN project, Government Radio Network, is massively exciting and not before time. I recall working on that project when I was general manager with Telstra in contracts and commercial. It took a long time to come to fruition but it is fantastic that it is now up and running. The more money we can put into these jobs for our local technicians, for our local people who get around in their trucks and get that fibre and haul that fibre through the trenches, the better off we will be. GRN has another important element which is radio towers. That will help, hopefully, fill in some of the spots around Tasmania where emergency services have struggled. The bushfires time was a difficult time.

I spoke about NBN this morning so I will be short on that, but \$4.5 billion is a good swag of money. Let us see if we can land a fair proportion in Tasmania.

I mentioned that I have tried to prioritise jobs and economic recovery, not only handing out money but looking at how we are going to build things and raise ourselves up. Social recovery: let us push the boundaries and get us back to the pub. I want to see the night clubs open and would love to go for a dance. When can we do that? Let us keep pushing the boundaries a little bit.

The Glenorchy jobs hub is going to be fantastic. We managed to deliver funding for palliative care. I was excited about that. We need to see more of that happening.

Davey Street will finally get that upgrade. I am grateful to the minister for Infrastructure for that. It is fundamentally unsafe and dangerous driving up there.

There is still more work to be done. I look forward to working, as I always do, with any member in this House who wants to be collaborative, positive and deliver results for Tasmania.

[12.38 p.m.]

**Mr ROCKLIFF** (Braddon - Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute to Ms Ogilvie's motion which covered a range of areas across various areas of responsibility and had some insight into the member's family history among other matters.

If I look at the context of COVID-19 and the importance of both economic and social recovery support for our entire community, then it is an important motion. We all agree with the motion and support you in that. In many respects, the Government is doing all it can across all of those areas of responsibility which I touched on in question time today.

It is important that we support and bring the entire community along with us as we get through COVID-19 and the pandemic and the leadership of our Premier has been extraordinary, particularly in the earlier times when it was so important that the entire community gelled together and did the right thing, obeyed the rules and kept our community safe. Touch wood, so far so good, but there will always be challenges. COVID-19 will be with us for some time so we need to work through health aspects of that and ensure that we keep our community safe but also recognise the importance of a recovery. That is where we have very key investments in areas supporting economic recovery and growth but also the social infrastructure as well and the social investments that we need to make to ensure that no Tasmanian as much as possible is left behind as a result of the circumstances the globe has faced over the course of the last six months or more.

Keeping Tasmanians safe and secure has always been our number-one priority. However, we need to be very mindful of what have been significant economic and social impacts. If we go back to March the Premier announced at the time what still is an unprecedented social and economic support package almost totalling \$1 billion, \$985 million which comprised of measures to support our health sector, our businesses, our jobs, households, individuals and our community. As part of our plan to rebuild a stronger Tasmania the Premier established his Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council, or PESRAC as we often speak about it now. The council's role is to provide advice to the Government on strategies, initiatives that support the short, medium and longer-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We received the interim report and accepted all 64 recommendations.

We know the impacts of the pandemic will be felt in our Tasmanian community and nationally and internationally for a long time and it is important that we continue to balance the health and safety of Tasmanians by having in place appropriate restrictions to maintain social and physical distancing, while also taking steps to reboot our economy, grow our business confidence, create opportunity for investment and generate jobs.

There is a range of areas across my portfolio responsibilities that I could touch on here and will, but the member mentioned the importance of education and we would all agree that it is such an important investment to make. It will be critical when it comes to our recovery as well. I want to take the opportunity to thank the Department of Education, and when I say the Department of Education I mean the leadership right across the department but also particularly on the ground - our principals, our teachers, our support staff, our cleaners and our teacher assistants - for the work they did and the difficult circumstances they endured.

Effectively they were delivering a public education system across multiple sites, but when you consider the sites of the schools - because we did not close school sites and I believe

that was very important so people could still access education if they were unable to be supported with a good education at home - and all the thousands of households right across Tasmania that engaged in education during that time: there were challenges there.

The member mentioned gaps and through these things we find gaps. There is no rulebook for this, there are no guidelines, so we are very mindful of the gaps in terms of information technology support and the Department of Education supported our students with the help of Telstra and others to support that uptake, which was a great collaboration.

I thank also the Department of Communities because the Department of Communities and the Department of Education worked so well and collaboratively to support particularly our more vulnerable students and students in need in ensuring as much as possible we could reach them in terms of their education and needs, and that is ongoing. That is very important but it was a very big challenge and we do not want to go back there again, as other states have. I also thank the University of Tasmania and their School Recommendation Program. There was a large uptake of that; I think around 1600 or 1700 students partook in that School Recommendation Program which worked extremely well. I also want to thank the other sectors of education. There was great collaboration between the non-government sectors of education, independent and Catholic and our government system as well, which is so important.

As Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing I was also very well aware that Tasmanians during this time were seeking help for their mental health possibly for the very first time and the support was needed. There was a very valuable investment of some \$4 million into the mental health and wellbeing sector and I will take the comments of the member on board in terms of wellbeing and it will very much play an important role as we move forward. In terms of our students' wellbeing, their voice is so important when it comes to our young people's voices. Our Commissioner for Children is doing a fantastic job in listening to the student voice as well and I will be joining Ms O'Connor and Mr Willie in Launceston on Friday for a forum, and it will be wonderful to listen to the students.

The Department of Education has done a recent survey across years 4 to 12 called Listening to the Student Voice. That survey is about wellbeing. We surveyed around 14 000 students back in March and it will be interesting to gauge the wellbeing of our young people pre-COVID and post-COVID and see what the difference is there. There was an additional \$4 million to support individuals experiencing mental health and alcohol and drug difficulties as a result of the challenges associated with COVID-19. This investment included the new Lifeline service - Lifeline Tasmania on 1800 98 44 34 - and that commenced on 1 May. This hotline is for Tasmanians who may feel stressed or anxious about the future, and it is common to do so, people finding isolation a challenge or simply needing a friendly and understanding voice to talk things over with advice, information, comfort and reassurance.

There are agreements in place with Rural Alive and Well and the Migrant Resource Centre to provide additional non-clinical services statewide, focusing on migrant Tasmanians or people in rural and remote areas who require additional support. The Mental Health Council of Tasmania along with the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Council also administered a \$450 000 technology grants program which is providing financial support to the community sector organisations that changed their service delivery as a result of COVID-19 and we are supporting the Mental Health Council of Tasmania and the ATDC to monitor and collect information on COVID-19-related impacts in the community for a recently established sector network to further inform recovery and planning.

Because I have already detailed it this morning, I will not go into the details of the emergency food relief providers who we provided an additional \$800 000. The organisations there have been communicating well with the Department of Communities. He was very collaborative and we have always got our ear to the ground so we can be responsive to need of the food relief providers. Part of that was assisting smaller organisations that wanted to fill a gap in their local community and grants were up to \$10 000 were provided. That investment was around \$211 000. We are working with the community and we will continue to do so.

I am very mindful of the time and I want to provide members the opportunity to say a few words but there are lot of areas within my responsibilities in the social context which I am acutely aware of, responsible for, and acting on, but we cannot ignore the investment in infrastructure. The \$3.1 billion of infrastructure investment is providing jobs right across Tasmania, much-needed infrastructure that will make Tasmania more productive in the short, medium and long term. That is an investment in our future but also an investment in jobs.

Having a job, I am sure you agree, Ms Ogilvie, is very important, and making a contribution whether we are having a job or volunteering. Making that contribution is so important to an individual's self-worth. This is what we want for all Tasmanians whether they are volunteering or making a contribution through employment, to make that contribution to Tasmania in their social and their economic recovery.

[12.51 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I could not agree more with the Deputy Premier's observations of the value of having a job. It reminded me of a statement from one of my favorite living human beings, the Dalai Lama, who says 'be useful and be happy'. That is, wake up each day with a sense of purpose and you can out into the world and do good things and that brings its own rewards, whether it is paid employment or unpaid employment.

We will be supporting the member for Clark's notice of motion that the House agrees that Tasmanians deserve a fair social and economic recovery. It does raise the question: what does 'fairness' look like, as we chart our way through the pandemic while accelerating climate impacts are barrelling at us at a rate of knots? We have twin crises here: a pandemic and climate. The people who are most affected by that are young people.

There is a mental health crisis amongst young people, there is great fear about the future, and COVID-19 has brought it to a point, but young people are engaged and aware. They know the system is not fair and they know that they have been shafted by the economic system in place now, which has been the key contributor to the enormous social and economic disruption and distress that has been caused by the pandemic.

We have stagnating wages in this country and increased casualisation of the workforce and insecure work. We have a government that attacks universities. They will not provide them with the critical JobKeeper lifeline, so some of our finest academic institutions are now shedding hundreds of staff. You have a Morrison Government that is trying to stop Australians from learning how to critically think by getting an Arts or Humanities degree.

On every single front, the system is unfair on young people. They cannot dream of owning their own home. Many of them lost work as a result of the pandemic and lockdown. They are terrified that they are running out of time. I talked about a young man named

Jack O'Hare, from the Forestry Watch group of scientists. We went into the Denison Valley a couple of weeks ago. Jack is very bright. I asked, 'What are you going to do with your life? You have to do something with that brain because brains that are not put to work start consuming themselves'. He said, 'I do not have time. I could go to university but things are such now that I do not feel I have time to spend years getting a degree. I want to be out here saving the forests and to doing what I can for a safe climate'.

We cannot talk about fairness without focusing on young people. The difference in their experience of life and their future from what most of us in this place, privileged as we are, experience could not be more stark, profound and a challenge to us all.

The level of poverty in this country and inequality brings shame on us all as Australians and we know that. From 25 September when there starts to be cuts to the coronavirus supplement for JobSeeker, single-parent payments will be cut by around \$300 per fortnight.

This is a government in Canberra that treats people as disposable, and people who are not in the workforce, as a burden. It is punitive in its approach to people who are dealing with the profound consequences of intergenerational inequality and widening social inequality caused by an economic system that is set up by the rich and for the rich. What does fairness look like? It looks like full employment. It looks like government making sure that the engine-room of an economy is built to serve people and a planet, not the profits of billionaires.

If there is one thing COVID-19 has taught us, it is that the money is there if it is needed. It is a political choice that is being made by successive governments. You could have full employment, could put a roof over everyone's head, could be sure that every child in Tasmania is safe and loved and well-nourished, attending quality public schools that are well-funded. You could have a health system that did not leave people to die in waiting rooms, an aged care system that respected and allowed to flourish those we have entrusted to its well-funded care, but right across the country, you see unfairness embedded in our social and economic structures.

As a nation, we need to rethink the whole thing. Young people need to know that governments and parliaments have got their back. In Tasmania we do things differently because we are a small and highly-connected island. We have a minister in this place who cares about young people in his portfolio, but still there is unfairness embedded in the system here, deeply embedded, and we have to have a rethink.

Part of that rethink should be a Green New Deal where we tackle the twin crises of the social and economic destruction that has been caused by the pandemic and the environmental destruction that is happening as a result of rising greenhouse gas emissions and accelerating climate impacts. You need an economic model that works for people and the planet, not the profits of billionaires.

It sounds, I am sure, to the neo-Liberals in this place, and the right wingers from Labor, like heresy to talk about remaking the whole economic system, but unless we do, we are knackered. Unless we have a total rethink of the system, young people will not have the hope for the future that we need and want them to have and we should dedicate every single day of our political life to making sure they do have.

[12.59 p.m.]

**Ms DOW** (Braddon) - Madam Deputy Speaker, we will be supporting Ms Ogilvie's motion today. Had I had the time, I would have said that I would be pleased to speak again to the House about our COVID-19 recovery package, our plans for the economic and social recovery of Tasmania, our particular focus on regional Tasmania and the need for targeted support and working locally with communities on place-based solutions to the challenges we face economically and socially across those communities.

Our COVID-19 recovery package was our submission to PESRAC. I note that the Deputy Premier alluded to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council in his contribution. We would like to see the government implement all of the recommendations from PESRAC -

**Time expired.**

**Motion agreed to.**

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

## **MOTION**

### **Bushfire Preparation**

[2.30 p.m.]

**Mr TUCKER** (Lyons - Motion) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the House:

- (1) Acknowledges the ongoing importance of preparing for bushfires in Tasmania and the leadership the Tasmanian Liberal Government has shown by taking strong action each year since 2014.
- (2) Notes that bushfire preparation is a shared responsibility between land owners and occupiers, asset managers and different levels of Government.
- (3) Further acknowledges the significant additional financial contributions from the Australian Government and the State Fire Commission enabling additional aerial resources to be added for the 2020-21 summer bushfire season.
- (4) Commends the cooperative approach to planning and preparation of all levels of government, and recognises the key role local government plays in responding to emergencies and during recovery.



- (5) Further notes Tasmania is a national leader in bushfire policy and preparation through our fuel reduction program which gives communities and our firefighters a better chance to combat fires.
- (6) Further commends the Tasmania Fire Service and other firefighting agencies and landowners for a highly successful autumn and winter burning program, and notes the spring burning campaign is already underway.
- (7) Further notes the Government is developing legislation to make it even easier for landowners to manage risks on their land.
- (8) Further notes the Government is also investing in the Red Hot Tips program to support landowners, and is investing in additional burn crews to get more fuel reduction burning done.
- (9) Thanks all volunteers and career staff in our fire agencies who are making Tasmania safer by year on year increasing our readiness to deal with future fire seasons.

The motion today is on bushfire preparedness. To keep Tasmanians safe the Government is doing more and we will be better prepared before next summer. I call out the assertions to the contrary. This is simply a grab for relevance and an exercise in political scaremongering and for self-promotion.

It is about time we dealt in facts. The facts are that this year we have increased our capabilities. We have bolstered our nation-leading fuel reduction program. We have invested in more resourcing. We are working with private landholders to actively manage their bushfire risks. We will introduce legislation to make it easier to reduce fuel loads.

The Government strongly advocated for a statewide fuel reduction program in Tasmania. This was initiated after the 2014 election. The National Council for Fire and Emergency Services said there was no viable alternative to broadscale fuel reduction and resultant risk reduction for communities. While fuel reduction burning is not going to prevent every catastrophe, it is a fact that reducing fuel loads in Tasmania is one of the most critical tools in the fire fighting kit.

The aim of the Government's fuel reduction program is to strategically reduce bushfire risk in areas of greatest risk to provide the most protection to Tasmanian communities. Therefore, areas of both private and public land are included in what has been acknowledged as a nation-leading tenure-blind approach. The program has a multi-agency approach with the delivery facilitated through program partners: Tasmania Fire Service; Parks and Wildlife Service; and Sustainable Timber Tasmania. The program has now entered its sixth year of operation with 775 strategic bushfire risk reduction activities completed statewide encompassing over 116 882 hectares, of which 17 786 hectares was conducted on private land.

Relative risk is the lowest it has been in 15 years and on track to meet fuel reduction program 2022-23 target. At a local scale many Tasmanian communities have significantly reduced bushfire risk as a result of our program. Strategic fuel reduction burns around the

greater Hobart area including Lenah Valley and Mount Stuart resulted in a 25 per cent to 50 per cent and 50 per cent to 75 per cent bushfire risk reduction.

During the 2018-19 summer bushfires fuel reduction burns previously undertaken were critical in protecting the town of Zeehan while preventing the spread of the Western Hills fire, reducing the spread of the Castle Cary fire north of Avoca, and south-west fires of Moores Valley, Dolphin Ridge and Spero River. The spring 2020 burn season has commenced, with two burns undertaken to date as part of the Government's nation-leading fuel reduction program.

The autumn 2020 burn season was very successful with a total of 146 strategic fuel reduction burns across over 27 000 hectares of Tasmania completed. All burns undertaken have strategic value against fuel reduction program objectives of bushfire risk reduction to communities, critical infrastructure, assets and significant natural values. While fuel reduction is not a silver bullet, it is an extremely important element of fire management.

The Government is strongly committed to fuel reduction and will continue to improve and innovate the program for our future firemen. This year the Government bolstered the program by an additional two new burn crews consisting of 12 additional crew. Applications for these positions have closed, with 346 applications received. It is expected that employment will commence in October. The employment of 12 additional crew into the bushfire risk unit provides an opportunity to undertake even more activities in mechanical and fuel reduction bushfire risk mitigation. Works programs are currently being developed to facilitate and capture additional mechanical bushfire risk mitigation activities.

I move now to aerial firefighting, which is a critical tool in the bushfire management toolbox. This year, Tasmania will have access to 11 aircraft that will be prepositioned in strategic locations across the state, consisting of seven helicopters and four fixed-wing bombers and swooping aircraft. This increases Tasmania's prepositioned aircraft by an additional four aircraft for the 2020-21 bushfire seasons, representing a more than 50 per cent increase in our state aerial firefighting capability. The Tasmania Fire Service has also increased its capability in the early detection of fires by adding an aerial intelligence gathering helicopter to its aerial firefighting capability. This helicopter will gather data and intelligence to support operations.

This increase in our prepositioned aircraft complements our local arrangements of nearly 30 call-when-needed aircraft across Tasmania. Tasmania also has a new combined air desk to improve the coordination of our aerial firefighting capability. The state air desk is currently staffed by one person. However, this this will increase to two personnel once the additional 11 contracted aircraft arrive.

I confirm that the additional funding has also been provided from the National Aerial Firefighting Centre to set up large air tanker bases in both the south and the north. This work is currently progressing to plan. The Tasmania Fire Service will have access to large aerial tankers from around Australia during the bushfire season, and engage them through NAF when required. The planned aerial support should ensure Tasmania is well prepared for any bushfire threat that may occur during the upcoming fire season.

We have also launched the revised Red Hot Tips program, which will see Tasmanian landholders better able to manage bushfire risk on their property. The coordinator and three regional facilitators are employed and will be visiting landholders to provide practical advice

on identifying bushfire risk, bushfire behaviour, fire management planning, burn plans, legal requirements for burns, mitigation strategies and ecological guidelines. Landholders are already registered for the program across the state and registration sessions have been held.

Last week the Premier announced the release of the draft bushfire mitigation measures bill for public consultation. The bushfire mitigation measures bill will introduce a new legislative framework for bushfire mitigation in Tasmania. The bill aims to proactively manage and mitigate risk to better protect human life, property and natural and cultural heritage values from the devastating impacts of bushfires.

It will create a streamlined, one-stop-shop approval process for bushfire mitigation activities, such as the creation of fuel breaks. The bill will provide exemptions from multiple approval requirements in a number of Tasmanian acts whereby bushfire mitigation activities are carried out in accordance with an endorsed bushfire mitigation plan.

The Government recognises that stakeholders will have a range of views about the new framework and is committed to listening to the community and working with key stakeholders to finalise the framework.

The Government is boosting volunteer capabilities. The first cohort of 30 volunteers that were selected through a recent expression of interest process are now training to enhance the state's specialist remote-area firefighting capability. The training will be completed during the spring months, with the volunteers adding to the existing personnel in the Tasmania Fire Service, Parks and Wildlife Service, and Sustainable Timber Tasmania, before the summer season.

Remote-area firefighters access difficult terrain by helicopter or on foot, and use special lightweight pumps or hand tools to protect our iconic natural assets, or to fight bushfires before they spread to affect our cities, towns, and critical infrastructure. Creating a team of volunteer remote-area firefighters delivers on our election commitment made in 2018. The opportunity was open to our existing volunteers who have been eagerly awaiting this opportunity and we are excited to provide it to them. As the program evolves, an opportunity will open up to non-members who are interested in joining the capability.

In recognising that Tasmania's unique landscapes have been shaped through Aboriginal land management and cultural burning practices undertaken for tens of thousands of years, the Government has committed to working with Aboriginal people with a view to supporting cultural burning practices in Tasmania.

Staff from the Parks and Wildlife Service are working with Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania to progress the development of a cultural burning policy for Tasmania. Input by and shared understanding with Aboriginal people will be integral to the success of the policy. As a first step over the next few months, the Government will undertake extensive engagement and consultation with Tasmanian Aborigines. These discussions will inform and guide how the policy will be further developed and implemented. The Parks and Wildlife Service is in the process of appointing an Aboriginal project officer to support the development and implementation of the policy and the grants program. In addition, two fixed-term Aboriginal fire ranger positions will be appointed.

This year's bushfire season is predicted to be 'normal'. Normal means that we can expect three or four major fires over summer anywhere across the state. For the first time in five years, the eastern half of the state is wet. Additional spring rains will increase soil moisture levels and the moisture in the heavy fuels. Our forests are also very wet so we can expect a delayed start to the fire season on the East Coast and in the south-east. Over summer, our strategy will again be a rapid rate of response in an initial attack to keep any fires small and contain them. On days of high fire danger, the following arrangements will be in place: hot day response; prepositioning aircraft and strike teams; and standing up of regional operational centres.

Multi-agency briefings, fire brigade district briefings and exercise of emergency arrangements are underway across the state and encompasses local brigades, regional emergency management, state emergency management, firefighting partners, and state and local government.

The Tasmania Fire Service has more than 330 career firefighters and over 5000 volunteer firefighters stationed strategically through the state, and 228 fire brigades at the ready. I note that this is the highest number of career firefighters we have ever had. The Government was already significantly boosting volunteer capabilities prior to the onset of COVID-19 and this will help reduce the reliance on interstate requests for resources.

At a national level the Commissioners and the Chief Officers Strategic Committee and Emergency Management Australia is planning for the processes around interstate resource deployments for this fire season, factoring in COVID-19 and border restrictions. The Tasmania Fire Service is working on Tasmania's COVIDSafe planning for operations in the event that interstate assistance is required during this bushfire season.

We know that the COVID-19 situation is evolving constantly and can change drastically in just a short time as we have seen in Victoria. This is why we are working on a set of arrangements that are scalable and agile, and can be activated for a range of different scenarios should interstate assistance be required during the summer bushfire season. These arrangements will incorporate the full suite of measures within the TFS COVID-19 Safe Support Plan to minimise COVID-19 risks whilst facilitating prompt and effective interstate support, should it be required, to protect Tasmania from significant fires. Broadly, these arrangements will facilitate essential worker status or exemptions to border control measures that may be required to ensure the safety of Tasmanians.

Any request for interstate support should give precedence to accessing resources from hot-spot free jurisdictions. Management of these resources will be guided by the approved plan. This means that interstate firefighters and other resources such as pilots may be required to comply with a testing regime; be issued with PPE; use the fireground tracking system; occupy separate accommodation and travel; isolate during interstate transit; and work as a separate team with embedded local knowledge on the firegrounds where practical.

The undertaking of the Government is that we will take on board the lessons of past fire seasons and never stop in our goal of ensuring Tasmania is prepared for the future challenges. That is why we have worked hard to ensure that all recommendations arising from the 2013 Tasmanian Bushfire Inquiry, the 2016 Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) Review and the 2018 AFAC Review have been completed.

The TFS also undertook an internal review of the 2019-20 bushfire season to enable a critical reflection across a range of areas, including preparedness, response and demobilisation. The internal review did not identify any new recommendations for implementation but rather broad actions to be undertaken regarding pre-season preparations.

Outcomes from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, the CSIRO Report on Climate and Disaster Resilience, and the South Australian, Victorian and New South Wales governments' reviews will be examined for relevance in the Tasmanian context as there are always more lessons to be learnt.

Bushfire preparation is everyone's responsibility. It is critical that we continue to work with and educate the community on what they can do to manage bushfire risk. There are a few simple things people can do to manage bushfire risk -

- prepare a bushfire survival plan. If you already have one, now is a good time to review it. The plan should include a list of nearby safer places in case you need to leave quickly.
- understand your bushfire risk. People living in areas close to bushland need to be familiar with their surrounding area and be aware of local bushfire risks.
- start to prepare your property. Create a defensible space by modifying vegetation, removing flammable materials, look at your personal capacity, maintenance activities, and make sure there is an adequate water supply.

I also encourage members of the community to connect with the Tasmanian Fire Service Community Fire Safety Programs and understand plans for their local area. I will outline these now. Community bushfire protection plans enhance the safety of Tasmanians by providing community members with local emergency planning advice and information, including the location of shelters of last resort called 'nearby safer places'. To date, 126 bushfire protection plans and response plans covering Tasmania's highest-risk communities have been developed and 18 mitigation plans for at-risk communities and specific assets have also been developed. These are available on the Tasmania Fire Service website.

The Tasmania Fire Service Bushfire Ready Neighbourhood program focuses on building a shared responsibility approach to bushfire preparedness through recognising that individual communities and the Tasmania Fire Service all play a part. The program's aim is to build resilience and capacity in bushfire prevention and preparedness in Tasmanian communities most at risk to bushfire for a sustainable community development approach.

The Bushfire Ready Neighbourhood program has been operating for six years. In round three of the program, July 2018 to June 2020, Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods delivered approximately 200 community activities attended by almost 9000 community members in bushfire-prone areas. As part of round four of the program Tasmania Fire Service is trialling a new online engagement platform to help communities to be involved and learn how to be bushfire ready. Independent research has found that households and communities that have already undertaken the program are significantly more prepared for the bushfire season.

Bushfire Ready Schools is a TFS bushfire safety initiative. Its objective is to promote community resilience in bushfire and supporting education centres in bushfire-prone areas to

manage their bushfire risks. As of May 2019, all Department of Education schools in Tasmania have been visited by the TFS, assessed for their bushfire vulnerability, had emergency plans developed and provided with tailored advice on strategies to mitigate bushfire risk. Private schools are now opting to participate in the program. By the end of 2020 all fire management area committees across the state will prepare a new bushfire risk management plan. These bushfire risk mitigation plans identify and assess community bushfire risks and prioritise strategic works in response to those risks, including areas for strategic fuel reduction burning.

The Fire Management Area Committees provide a vital link between local volunteer brigades, local government, land managers both private and public, and other key stakeholders responsible for land management or critical infrastructure to ensure the whole community is working together to manage bushfire risk.

Tasmania has an established a cooperative model of bushfire management. The state is unique, with the inter-agency bushfire arrangements in its sixteenth edition. The Inter-Agency Bushfire Management Protocol is the operating agreement between the three organisations most closely involved with the management of bushfires in Tasmania, the TFS, Parks and Wildlife Service and Sustainable Timber Tasmania. The protocol underpins the cooperative spirit which is to ensure that the management and suppression of fires in Tasmania is safe, efficient and cost-effective. These arrangements have contributed to the close working relationship of all landowners and managers in Tasmania during bushfire management planning and response.

Madam Speaker, to finish, I thank all volunteers and career staff in our fire agencies who are making Tasmania safer year by year, increasing our readiness to deal with future fire seasons.

[2.54 p.m.]

**Ms BUTLER** (Lyons) - Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing on this very important issue in our private members' business today. I also pay tribute to the 5000 volunteer firefighters across Tasmania working out of 262 volunteer brigades, I believe, but my number is contrary to the one that the member provided in his speech, and also to the 330 career firefighters as well.

I place on the record our sincere awe and respect for the members of the Tasmania Fire Service in total, the career firefighters and volunteers, and also to the Parks and Wildlife firefighters, the Sustainable Timber firefighters, as well as the farmers and community members and people who also volunteer for the State Emergency Service, a nationally branded and recognised organisation.

I have a personal story about being in a particularly difficult house fire when I was quite young, and the Tasmania Fire Service firefighters saved half our house. They did a tremendous job. I have a small scar on my arm from trying to put a fire out with a nylon dressing gown. It is not something that I would recommend to anybody, but you panic in those moments. Having the firefighters put out that fire saved half our home, so we were very fortunate. I will always have a special place in my heart for firefighting and when the chips are down, they are who you rely on. They are who our community relies on, especially in bushfire season.

We are heading now into another bushfire season. I can honestly say that the minister and the Government are doing nothing to calm the rumours of forced amalgamations and

closures by stealth. The minister was not surprised at all by the questions I asked this morning. Those questions have been circulating in the community for quite some time, and we thought it prudent to ask him that question especially after he was asked the same question at a meeting in Glengarry.

Let us be honest about this. We would like to know if there is already a plan in place. I also do not really swallow the fact that this is all down to Mike Blake's recommendations. Minister, you have started this uncertainty and it was the Government that provided the answer to question 26 of the issues paper in the Fire Service Act Review June 2018, over two years ago. Mike Blake can only answer questions he is asked and he can only provide recommendations and look into things he is asked to look into.

Question 26 states: Are the provisions relating to the establishment and composition of brigades still appropriate? By my reading, that is a request for the composition of our brigades to be looked into. That was over two years ago. We would really like -

**Mr SHELTON** - Madam Speaker, as a point of clarification, Ms Butler started off this morning talking about rumours. I have qualified my point of view in the sense that there will be no forced closures of any of our rural fire brigades.

**Ms BUTLER** - I thank the minister for clarifying his very impromptu media release. You have been asked that question twice: once at Glengarry, and you did not answer it then but you did not rule it out. You were asked by me this morning and you also did not rule it out.

**Mr Shelton** - It's ruled out now.

**Ms BUTLER** - You do not talk about forced amalgamations. You do not talk about closure by stealth. You do not talk about starving our volunteer fire brigades.

**Mr Shelton** - What you're prepared to do is spread rumours out there. That is all you're prepared to do.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, through the Chair.

**Ms BUTLER** - Thank you very much. I will continue, Madam Speaker. Instead, what you have done, minister, is completely confuse the situation and create more unease. It is political unease for you, with all due respect.

We know last week there was an amalgamation between Penguin and Heybridge volunteer fire brigades. These people want to know who is next. They want to know what the plan is.

I have a quote from the Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigade Association submission to the fire service review. This talks about how important volunteer firefighters are to our community. Mr Tucker did not talk about one of the key ways to fight fires in Tasmania, and that is through our volunteers. It is wonderful to talk about aerial and doing burning but there was little acknowledgement about what you can do to support volunteer firefighters in Tasmania. That is one of our most important issues. The submission says -

Given the dedication and skill (which include existing 'civilian' skills from a wide variety of areas) the volunteers bring to the agency the legislation should not prevent a volunteer from doing anything which a career member does in the context of emergency response. Furthermore, it is submitted that with the limited population growth in rural and remote areas it is important that volunteer fire brigades be enabled to bring up numbers in regional and populated areas in order to provide prolonged volunteer surge capacity into those more rural areas in the event of a major incident. To this end, the TVFBA would consider some form of provision enabling unpaid leave for volunteers from their employers for response to emergencies may be an option.

That gives you an idea of where the Volunteer Fire Brigade Association is at. They are talking about being enabled and what you can do to boost them and recruit more volunteers, what you can do to make it easier for them to travel. Instead, you have been asked twice and you could not rule out closing them down.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Ms BUTLER** - It is all over the place. They are asking to be enabled and for more support. They are telling you what they would like you to do for them. Instead, you are not even prepared to rule out forced amalgamations or stealth closures. You are not prepared to do that.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Ms BUTLER** - I go on to quote -

The TVFBA also believe that the association should be recognised in the legislation in terms of being the representative body which advocates on behalf of -

**Government members** interjecting.

**Ms BUTLER** - Excuse me, Madam Speaker.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Yes, I know. They are very rude. I am sorry and I am very disappointed in them.

**Ms BUTLER** - They get a bit touchy when you are exposing them. This morning must have been quite embarrassing to have that about-face so quickly. Obviously there was some political pressure.

**Government members** interjecting.



**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Mr Ellis you are learning some very bad habits. I may have to separate you three.

**Ms BUTLER** -

The TVFBA also believe that the association should be recognised in the legislation in terms of being the representative body which advocates on behalf of and promotes volunteer engagement and welfare for our volunteers.

Welfare for our volunteers. This is what they want. They want you to work with them and assist them to promote volunteer engagement; not create and propagate rumours about closures of volunteer fire brigades. You have done nothing to stop it or to quell it.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Ms BUTLER** -

Provision in the legislation recognising a continuation of the commitment to recognise the association will enshrine a dedicated commitment to volunteers. It should be legislated that every decision which impacts volunteers should be a decision which is reached in consultation with the association.

We will be moving an amendment later that will provide that clarification to the volunteer organisations that you do not intend to close their brigades even if it is by stealth, which is one option or whether it is by forced amalgamation. I will hand that out in a moment.

I refer to the Lachlan Fire Brigade. They say they are protecting the tail end of Hobart. If a fire comes through Lachlan and it then goes over the hill to Glenorchy, from Glenorchy it can then reach Hobart. Hobart is the most fire-prone city in Australia. You know that, so it is important that you appreciate you have to bolster the volunteer fire brigades, not fill them with fear.

After question time Mark Shelton announced on social media that he had no plans to close volunteer fire brigades. Why did you not rule that out in parliament when you had the chance? It is little wonder volunteer fire brigades are confused and worried about their future when the minister could not even answer a direct question. I asked you to rule it out and you could not on the spot. You fumbled it.

**Mr Tucker** - We all come from rural areas, Ms Butler.

**Ms BUTLER** - I also asked whether the Government would be recommending certain brigades close and has not ruled out forced amalgamations. You get so loud when you are on the back foot do you not, Mr Tucker?

**Mr Tucker** - Maybe you should venture out into the rural areas.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Mr Tucker.

**Ms BUTLER** - This could be closure by stealth and you have not ruled it out.

**Mr SHELTON** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. The member has again commented that we have not ruled it out. We have. I ask the member to refrain from telling less truths.

**Madam SPEAKER** - According to my colleague that is not a point of order. It is a point of clarification. Thank you.

**Ms BUTLER** - Before I move my amendment I will read out another quote from the Tasmania Fire Service submission to the Fire Service Act review of 11 October 2018. The submission talks about volunteers and community organisations -

A well equipped, skilled and sustainable volunteer workforce is critical for long-term cost-effective delivery of emergency services.

It suggests that the TFES could provide support for and commitment to volunteerism by -

- defining the functions of the TFES to include supporting and equipping volunteers to deliver frontline operational management and support services;
- creating any necessary head of power to enable the establishment of a volunteer code of conduct and/or the service standards;
- continuing to provide good faith protections for volunteers; and
- ensuring that there are no legislative barriers that would preclude the expansion of volunteer roles to include both response and non-response roles.

It is also suggested that the Fire Service Act could provide for arrangements that enabled the TFES to engage the assistance of other volunteer organisations outside of the TFS and SES. This gives you a scope and a concept of where the volunteer associations think they are heading. They do not want to be closed or amalgamated. You need to listen to these people. It is important that you do that and put the record straight. You botched the answer when you were asked by a volunteer in Glengarry, you botched the answer today in parliament, and you walked out of parliament. Obviously you got a tap on the shoulder saying you have to quickly fix that.

**Mr Tucker** - Farm managers: they volunteer for brigade captain.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Mr Tucker. Could you bite your fingers? Thank you.

**Ms BUTLER** - Madam Speaker, I have an amendment to Notice of Motion 361. I move - That a new clause be added -

- (10) Commits that there will be no closure of Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigades by stealth or forced amalgamation.

This would provide Tasmanian volunteer fire fighters and the brigades they belong to assurances that their brigade is not on the chopping block. They cannot be starved out of

resources, they cannot be given poor equipment, and they cannot be not part of volunteer drives. They have to be supported. That is really important. I will read it again, Mr Tucker -

Commits that there will be no closure of Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigades by stealth or forced amalgamation.

Can you look each volunteer firefighter in Tasmania in the eye and say 'we are not going to close your fire brigade'? I do not know why my minister could not answer the question when he was asked at Glengarry, and could not answer it again when he was asked in parliament, but then changed his mind half an hour later when obviously someone tapped him on the shoulder. That is what we would ask.

We are going to ask today that this be added to Motion 361: commits that there will be no closure of Tasmanian volunteer fire brigades by stealth or forced amalgamation.

[3.10 p.m.]

**Dr WOODRUFF** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on the important matter that Mr Tucker has raised, the importance of preparing for bushfires in Tasmania. The Greens have a long and proud record of scrutinising the Government on its preparations for bushfires. We know very well the dangers of the increasing heating of the planet and the changes it is having on our weather systems; and the dangers of those changes to the communities around Tasmania.

As a state we are predominantly living in rural and regional areas and even people who are living in the cities, particularly Hobart, are thoroughly exposed to the risk of bushfires. None of us in this state really live in a place where we can be confident that we will not be physically affected by the possibility of bushfires in certain seasons.

I want to take a point of difference with Mr Tucker on his opening remarks where he talked about 'normal'. A 'normal' bushfire season, he says, is what is being predicted for this year in Tasmania. It is correct that the bushfire outlook for Australia did not identify from the weather systems over the next three months that there would be an extreme risk of bushfires in Tasmania. Mr Tucker, 'normal' does not mean the historical record of bushfires that we have experienced in Tasmania. That is not what normal means because we are not in that 'normal'. There is no normal when it comes to bushfires.

You would understand that if you had been able to attend the University of Tasmania's audiovisual link-in last year with one of the most senior fire chiefs in California. He, very clearly, outlined what 'normal' looks like in California in their bushfire seasons. I am speaking as somebody who listened to that last year, and now we have all seen the experience the Californians are having again this year. It is the fourth serious lot of bushfires they have had to deal with as a state in four years.

We are seeing completely new bushfire weather events happening in pyrocumulus clouds and enormous hurricane-like storms that are occurring. We saw new events that had not been recorded in eastern Australia last year, and there were records of apparently completely new bushfire phenomenon from California just this year. We can be quite sure that 'normal' will include much more extreme and severe experiences in any common year with increasing risk of years where we have catastrophic bushfires.

The fact that we are not suggested to have catastrophic bushfires in Tasmania this year, by no means does that suggest we should do anything other than treat this very seriously as a risk to communities, to wilderness, and other natural areas as the warm weather approaches.

I acknowledge the people in Tasmania who do the principal work of keeping us safe during a bushfire event and who do the hard work in between bushfire events, preparing for the next one, maintaining the trucks, the burning of areas for fuel reduction, and maintaining the records and data connections with the other organisations who are all collectively involved in keeping us safe and protecting our wilderness areas and settlements from bushfires.

The volunteer firefighters - more than 1000 in Tasmania, their hundreds of bushfire brigades in regional areas, and over 300 crew who are paid firefighters who are there all the time, caring for us and being on alert - these are the people who are there on the front line and I thank them and I thank their families for the time that they have to endure without them by their side in the bushfire events. I had conversations with people in Geeveston after the bushfires in 2019-20, many of whom had not seen people in their family who had been fighting fires, some of them for two months, people who slept for a month or more on the floor in a very simple set up in the local fire station, just grabbing the sleep they could in between fighting the fires.

The minister made a concerning response to the question from Ms Butler this morning in question time. He could not confirm that 20 volunteer fire brigades around Tasmania were not going to be closed. The department, as I understand it, hurriedly prepared a response to the media queries which happened after that, and said - 'No, it's not true'. The minister did not know what he needed to say. What he needed to say is that the brigades will not be closed.

I have been very concerned to hear a lack of clarity in the minister's communication on the matter of the closing of bushfire brigades. What people in the community need now more than ever is clear communication. They need to know and have confidence in the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management that he is all over the detail of his department and that he is doing everything that is needed to prepare us for the upcoming season. The comments that the minister made around the closing of fire stations is concerning. I am still not clear that the minister is really being straight with Tasmanians about what is going on.

There is a review that Mr Mike Blake is chairing. That review as I understand is due to report back to the state Government next month. It is a review which is substantial. It is the review of the Fire Services Act which will centralise the Tasmania Fire Service and the State Emergency Service so that they come under the umbrella of a new Fire and Emergency Services Tasmania body. It will involve a change to resourcing, a change to funding, and a change to the structure. All those things come with impacts on people who are volunteers and on paid fire crews. All those changes are the last thing that you would hope to see brought into play on the cusp of a fire season. We are on the cusp of a fire season so it is really concerning that we are seeing the minister potentially overseeing a major restructure of the Fire Service and the emergency services and change the financing and resourcing of those two bodies at such a time. It is terrible timing.

Let us put this in context. It was only last week that we heard Parks will be sending vehicles during fire season to fight fires in wilderness areas with less than a full tank of water. We know from information supplied from the leaked material from Parks that the vehicles would be over-capacity if they were carrying a full tanker of water. How useless to send a

crew into a fire with anything other than a full complement of water on board. That is concerning.

It is also concerning that the risk-ready app the Government quietly launched last summer, which is meant to give home owners in bushfire-prone areas the level of risk to their property from bushfires, is missing data for a large number of local council areas in Tasmania. That means it is still the case that if a home owner in 14 municipalities in Tasmania goes in to use the risk-ready app, it will falsely give them information that their property is not at risk. Minister, this has been pointed out to your department for well over two months. Why is this not being fixed? This is a massive issue for 14 municipalities in Tasmania where people are being misled about the risk to their property. It was taken down for three months so it could be fixed and when it was put back online it has still 14 municipalities with no information in it. That is appalling and does not give people confidence.

When the minister points the finger and says there is rumour-mongering going on, maybe he should point it back to himself and correct the misinformation his department is providing to Tasmanians about their level of risk from bushfires. That might give people a bit more confidence about the other things he is saying.

We would also like to know what he is going to do about the tankers, the Parks vehicles that are going to be sent into remote areas with half a tank of water. What are you going to do about that, minister?

We would also like to know whether the remote area firefighters have been fully trained. I saw the good news in the paper the other day that another remote area team has been recruited to do that training work. That is really good news, but last November this minister was responsible for having 80 remote area team volunteers stood down because they had not received the training they needed to ensure they would be safe when they were helicoptered into bushfire areas in remote wilderness, nor had they received the training they needed to be taken in by a vehicle.

Those are the sorts of specialist skills we need in people who are going to take up this very dangerous work on our behalf. Maybe the minister can tell us how many remote area team staff are available for this season, whether it is the full complement or whether there are still people who are not ready yet.

It is all very well for Mr Tucker to rattle off a list of things the Government is doing. They are welcome but they are a minimum list of things that need to be done. This is not new information that the Greens or Labor are pointing out and trying to find holes in. This is the same stuff we have been pointing out year after year. We need a minister who will stand up and say, like the 33 fire chiefs from the National Bushfire Leaders Group, that climate change is real, climate change is happening, and climate change is affecting the fire season. It is changing its intensity and severity.

**Mr Shelton** - That is why we're doing the work we are.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - You can say that is why you are doing it, but Tasmanians want to hear the words. They have a minister sitting in one of the most important portfolios. They want to know that you understand the world is heating, that the risk of bushfires is completely different from what it has been historically, and that you recognise we have to take urgent measures not only to prepare for bushfires but to tackle the underlying causes driving them.

That is what people want to hear from the minister responsible for Fire and Emergency Services.

They are the words that the Emergency Leaders for Climate Action made clear when they got together after the terrible bushfires that happened last summer on the east coast of Australia. They prepared a National Bushfire and Climate Summit report and I commend that report to the minister if he has not seen it.

**Mr Shelton** - I have read it.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - That is great.

**Mr Shelton** - It qualifies a lot of what we are doing with fuel reduction. It actually states there that we need to do more fuel reduction.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Through the Chair.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - That is very good news, Madam Speaker, and I am really pleased. There are a number of things here which are federal issues and quite a few that are state responsibilities. I also hope that the minister took account of recommendation 10 and not just read it, which says that there have to be integrated and long-term approaches to landscape management, including phasing out native logging and protecting biodiversity and carbon sinks. A very important point, minister. I hope you took that point on board and did not just hand-pick the things you thought would suit you and the policy approaches of your Government.

I hope you also took account of the recommendation to establish local government area climate change and bushfire expert centres so communities could be involved not only in bushfire fighting in terms of volunteer firefighting brigades but in a climate change emergency response centre that bushfires would be part of that. It needs to be part of a bigger climate change response. An emergency response for climate change requires not just a focus on bushfires but on all the other extreme weather events that happen such as landslides, terrific winds and so on.

In closing, I signal that the Greens support the amendments Ms Butler has proposed. We would like clarity, together with other people in the volunteer firefighting community, and a surety that there will be no stealthy or forced closures of volunteer fire brigades.

**Mr SHELTON** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. The member asked for clarity and I have already clarified that there will be no forced closures for volunteer fire stations. It is only a political amendment.

**Madam SPEAKER** - It is not a point of order.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It is not a debate. Minister, you can make your point with your vote. There are no problems, so everyone can settle down. We are all in furious agreement. We will all agree to this amendment that there will be no stealthy and forced amalgamations. That is the end of the story.

It is clear that the community wants clear communication. If the COVID-19 pandemic has done nothing, it has shown us, as a community, that it is not just enough for premiers and

ministers to stand up and give press conferences and put things in media releases. That is not communication. Communication is multi-faceted. It is about reassuring the community. Providing evidence and overall being transparent -

**Mr Shelton** - You are scaremongering.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please, minister.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - and being clear about what the Government is doing, and providing the evidence from the 14 municipalities for the RiskReady app.

**Madam SPEAKER** - The time for debate has expired.

**Question** - That the amendment be agreed to - put.

**The House divided** -

**AYES 10**

Dr Broad  
Ms Butler  
Ms Dow  
Ms Haddad (Teller)  
Mr O'Byrne  
Ms O'Byrne  
Ms O'Connor  
Ms Standen  
Ms White  
Dr Woodruff

**NOES 12**

Ms Archer  
Ms Courtney  
Mr Ellis (Teller)  
Mr Ferguson  
Mr Gutwein  
Mr Jaensch  
Ms Ogilvie  
Mrs Petrusma  
Mr Rockliff  
Mr Shelton  
Mr Street  
Mr Tucker

**PAIR**

Ms Houston

Mr Barnett

**Amendment negatived.**

**Motion agreed to.**

**MOTION**

**Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council -  
Recommendation for a Future COVID-19 Management Strategy - Motion Negatived**

[3.37 p.m.]

**Ms WHITE** (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition - Motion) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the House:

- (1) Notes the Government accepted all recommendations of the July 2020 Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) report on 18 August 2020.
- (2) Further notes recommendation 2 states, 'The State Government should explain to the community its future COVID-19 management strategy including how any future outbreaks will be handled'.
- (3) Acknowledges PESRAC identified this recommendation for immediate action.
- (4) Calls on the Government to detail in full its response to recommendation 2 and table the management strategy by 24 September 2020.

This is an important motion to bring before the House today. There are a number of community members and business leaders who are very interested to know what the Government's response to this recommendation from PESRAC is. There is still much uncertainty in the community and they are looking for the Government to provide detailed explanations for how they will support the community as we continue to live with the virus, and what their management strategy looks like should there be any future outbreaks in Tasmania.

We have seen significant change to the world this year. COVID-19 has brought with it huge disruption to everybody's way of life. I want to reflect on some of that to provide context for why it is really important now that the Government responds to this report and provides the level of detail that this report has requested of them.

In Australia, the health emergency that struck us in late January has now led to the fact that we have had 26 942 cases and we have had 854 deaths across the country. In Tasmania, sadly, 13 people lost their life, primarily related to the outbreak that occurred on the north-west coast. Across the country, 24 213 have recovered. There are still 100 hospitalised and we hope that they are all able to recover. It highlights the fact that even in Australia, when we thought that we had started to get on top of this, a case emerged again and we have seen the devastation that caused for Victoria.

That is why it is critical that the Government lay out what its management strategy is in Tasmania should there be further cases or a further outbreak. We do not want to see happen here what we have seen happen in Victoria. This is why PESRAC has emphasised the need for the Government to be transparent and explain its decision-making so that people can have confidence that the Government is able to manage the way through.

Across the world - and I refer to some data from the World Health Organization - they report global cases now sitting at 31 174 627 with 222 256 cases just in the last 24 hours. Sadly, across the globe we have seen 962 613 people lose their life to this virus. It has been devastating. The health impacts across our community have been immense.

I referred earlier to what we have seen in Australia, but the impacts to our health system have been much broader than what we have seen from the virus. We have had cancellations of



elective surgery procedures that have meant Tasmanians have had to endure longer waits in pain before they access the health care they desperately need. We saw two hospitals close in north-west Tasmania because of the outbreak there. That placed huge pressure on other hospitals across the state that had to meet that need and adjust their operations to be able to support Tasmanians. We have seen huge social disruption we are still living with, with the requirement for people to have physical distancing from one another, families who have been separated with border closures, our schools that were not able to provide face-to-face learning with many children learning at home under the supervision of their parents, activities disrupted like sports events, and activities in the arts and cultural sector continue to be disrupted.

The economic disruption is equally bad. We have seen some very worrying trends starting to emerge in our economy, with job losses persisting, with 20 000 jobs lost at the peak of the virus here in Tasmania. Worryingly, across the country and even in Tasmania, we are still seeing a fragility of the economy. With the removal of JobKeeper on Monday and the fact that 15 000 Tasmanian businesses rely on that, there is no doubt that will place further pressure on businesses, on workers and on confidence across the broader economy. The disruption this virus had caused for all of us - economic, social and health - has been enormous.

The Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council has played a very important role. I would like to reflect on the membership of that council that was brought together by the Government. They include Don Challen, who acts as the chair; Tim Gardner; Leanne McLean; Professor Rufus Black; Kym Goodes; Paul Ransom; Dale Elphinstone; Samantha Hogg; and Brett Torossi. They were brought together by the Premier on 30 April. They say in their report -

... the Premier set up his Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council to provide him with advice on how best to support Tasmania's short, medium and longer-term recovery from COVID-19. As a first step, he asked us to quickly bring him any actions for immediate implementation that we see as important in that journey to recovery. Those recommendations are listed in chapter 6.

One of those recommendations is recommendation 2, 'that the state Government should explain to the community its future COVID-19 management strategy, including how any future outbreak will be handled'. They have listed this as an immediate priority for the Government to take forward and outline to the community of Tasmania.

This report was handed to the Government in July and on 18 August the Government said they accepted all those recommendations. It is now 23 September and the Government still has not clearly explained what its management strategy is and how they will manage any future outbreaks.

I will go to the heart of some of the details within the report to provide some explanation for why this is important. As a part of the consultation work PESRAC did, they identified that one of the critical things the Government needed to do was to build confidence. This is a key part of why this recommendation has been marked for immediate action. I will quote from the report:

Tasmanians need to be confident that while governments had to work very quickly to put good plans in place to respond to COVID-19's initial strike,

we are now much better prepared and able to co-exist with the virus until a vaccine or rapid treatments are found.

The much longer era that is before us of living with COVID-19 also requires strong messaging and open communications. In making decisions about removing restrictions, and potentially imposing them again when an outbreak does eventuate in Tasmania, the Government will be making decisions to manage the health risks.

The community needs to understand the Government's strategy for managing COVID-19 into the future - is it a continuation of suppression or another approach more accepting of a limited number of outbreaks? Is the intention to 'stamp' quickly on any outbreak or manage it within a containment area? Without an understanding of the strategy, there may not be strong community support for the measures the Government takes to manage outbreaks and that likely means lower levels of compliance with restrictions than is needed.

These are some of the reasons they gave for why they made recommendation 2 in particular and why they have identified it for immediate action by the Government. I will continue to read because this is very important work they have put together and it also highlights why it is unfathomable that the Government has not yet taken action to implement this recommendation. I continue:

Similarly, the community needs to understand - in advance of any occurring - what the Government intends to do in the event of an outbreak. Following a pre-announced process and strategy will engender community confidence and promote acceptance of the measures needed to deal with the outbreak. In the initial crisis, events were moving very quickly and the community was accepting of surprises as new measures were imposed, sometimes daily. For future outbreaks, that level of acceptance cannot be assumed unless the Government's intentions are carefully explained - in advance.

An important part of rebuilding community confidence and the willingness of business to again move onto a positive footing is giving the community an insight into how those decisions are being made.

One well-established crisis-management method to help people plan is to have a limited number of scenarios that provide people with an understanding of how things might play out. A number of organisations around the state have already created and used these and they have proved very helpful in planning responses to what is a changing situation.

The report clearly articulates why it is critical that that Government not only accepts this recommendation, as they said they have done, but they implement it immediately. I was reflecting on that word immediately and to help the Government I consulted with the Oxford Dictionary that sits here in the parliament on the definition of 'immediately', because it is critical the Government does this. 'Immediately' means without any delay; instantly.

The Government received this report in July. They accepted all recommendations on 18 August. It is 23 September. Nothing has happened. The problem is if the Government has

a plan, nobody knows about it. One of the critical things that has been identified by PESRAC is that the Government needs to tell people in advance and they also need to do scenario planning so people can understand that if something happens they can be prepared for what to expect next.

No-one wants to go back to what we all experienced earlier this year where we were in a crisis mode and making daily decisions, all done with the intention of saving lives. People were willing to do what it took at the time but nobody wants to return to that. If we can have a plan that is clearly communicated by the Government to help people understand what to expect, that will ensure that compliance is better, as PESRAC has identified in the work they have done, but also make sure that all agencies, the community and business can all respond and together we can get through this, which has been one of the defining features of what we have done so far.

One of the other concerns we have is that the Government has taken this time to do what is necessary to prepare our health system, our disability sector, our aged care sector workplaces, but they have not used this time wisely enough. This is a critical part of making sure the Government not only explains its management strategy about how any future outbreaks will be handled, but that we have necessary capacity within the system to respond to handle those outbreaks and its preparedness work has been done.

We have raised some concerns about the lack of preparedness across our health settings. I would like to talk specifically about our hospitals. That is an area that has been highlighted, as recently as last week, by doctors who are working at the Launceston General Hospital. They wrote to their superiors to outline some of the concerns they have. As part of that they identified concerns about the hospital's preparedness should there be another COVID-19 case in Tasmania. I will quote from the letter that was sent to Mr Daniels, the chief executive of the North/North-West Tasmania Health Service. They refer to their concerns about COVID-19 and the lack of preparedness right now in our hospitals and I quote -

Our waiting room, once suitable, is no longer. Patients at risk of significant readily contagious respiratory disease are forced to sit with patients with no respiratory disease at all. Our patients in the waiting room are often immunocompromised, are often being treated for severe diseases such as cancer, or other terminal illnesses. This is not good enough. Tasmania has been isolated and protected since closing the borders and getting control of the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be a tragedy if the disease took a foothold in our community again due to a lack of appropriate waiting spaces for patients with respiratory illness.

Public health advice worldwide since the start of the pandemic has been consistent and solid about the need to socially distance in order to save lives. Our community are unable to do this in our ED. They are unable to do this in our waiting room, they are unable to do this when ramped, they are unable to do this in treatment areas. Patients have chosen to wait outside in the middle of winter rather than put themselves or others at risk. We do not have the workspace to socially distance. We want to behave in the best interests of public health, we want to set an example

for our community. We are unable to socially distance, we are unable to protect each other at work, we are unable to protect our community.

This was written just last week by registrars in the Emergency Department at the Launceston General Hospital. They are speaking about what is happening right now in our hospital settings at a time when the Government keeps telling us we have to be patient because we need to ensure we have systems in place so that we are prepared to open the borders again. We are not yet there because our health professionals do not feel safe. Our health professionals tell us that they are unable to protect our community.

This Government has had since the start of this year. In January, Australia had its first case of COVID-19. In March we started to see the significant impacts here in Tasmania. It is September and even today if somebody walks into one of our hospitals with respiratory symptoms, they are sitting next to somebody else who might be immunocompromised. How can that be the case? How is that possible?

We have the Minister for Health in here saying that she has an escalation plan in place for our hospitals. It is the COVID-19 escalation plan. Surely, level 1 of that plan would be that if you present with respiratory symptoms to any of our hospitals you are triaged in a way that means you are not sitting next to somebody who is immunocompromised. We are not even getting that right according to these registrars at the Launceston General Hospital.

This concerns us greatly because it is clear the Government has not explained what its future private management strategy is, because the plan is not in place. Either that or you have one and you are not telling people about it. That is in contravention of what PESRAC has asked you to do too.

We are also very worried about what is happening in the disability sector. We heard on many occasions throughout the peak of COVID-19 in Tasmania that the disability sector felt forgotten about. They did not have access to PPE in the same way other sectors of our community did at that time. They are very worried for their staff. They are worried for the clients they care for, many of them who are vulnerable and would be at great risk if COVID-19 was in any of those settings.

It is our understanding that the National Stockpile Initiative has not responded to disability providers as a priority, and that access to COVID-19 testing has not been made a priority for the sector. Yesterday, the minister said that preparedness and response planning is being developed. Being developed. It is September, and the Government is starting to ease the restrictions on our borders. They are letting seasonal workers come into the state. Yet, we still do not have a plan that is finished and implemented for the disability sector. That was confirmed yesterday by the minister. The lack of preparedness puts at risk the health of some of the most vulnerable people in our community; people with disability and people who care for them.

The Government clearly has more work to do. This is why we are very worried about not only their lack of action in responding to the PESRAC recommendations - particularly those that are marked immediate - but also very worried about the blasé attitude and the head-in-the-sand type of approach from the Government, particularly the Premier, when we have raised these concerns. In fact, last week he criticised us and those doctors, claiming that

we had written that letter. We did not write that letter. That letter was written by those registrars who are understandably very worried.

The Premier also needs to recognise the impact that COVID-19 continues to have on the economy, because all these things are intertwined. This motion calls on the Government to detail in full its response to recommendation 2 of the PESRAC report, and to table that management strategy by tomorrow. We are not sitting next week and we believe this is a very important piece of information that the community needs to have, as does PESRAC.

I remind the Government, and the Premier, who is the responsible minister for convening this advisory council to provide him with advice, without strong communication and without an understanding of the strategy, there may not be strong community support for the measures the government takes to manage outbreaks. Nobody wants that. We want the community to have confidence in the Government's ability to do its job, particularly when it comes to dealing with the pandemic. That is why we have always said we would give the Government our full support for any of the tough decisions they had to make to save lives. We have done that because we want the Government to have the confidence of the community. If they are not providing open and honest communication about what their plan is, what the management strategy is, if there is another outbreak, it makes it very difficult.

On Friday, the Government launched an advertising campaign talking about some of the work they are doing to keep the community safe. I presume that is in response to recommendation 1, which was that:

The State Government should continue to deliver clear and consistent messaging to shift the community's mindset from 'stay home, save lives', to the importance of all Tasmanians working towards recovery.

That is welcome news, but an advertising campaign is very different from explaining your management strategy, and explaining how you are going to deal with another outbreak of COVID-19; explaining what happens if one of those seasonal workers comes in and they have COVID-19; explaining what happens if one of those essential workers that you grant an exemption for quarantine comes into the state and they have COVID-19. What do you do? Tasmanians want to understand what the management strategy is. PESRAC made it the very first recommendation in their report for immediate action.

This motion is pretty simple. It is calling on the Government to detail in full its response to that recommendation and to table the management strategy by tomorrow in this parliament, so that, in the interests of the community, we can understand what the plan is, and we can support the Government in delivering on that plan. Nobody wants to see this virus take hold in Tasmania again. We have all lived the social, economic and personal disruption that it has caused. Nobody wants to go through that again.

With the Government now starting to loosen some of the restrictions on our borders, they need to provide better communication to the Tasmanian community. We are not just talking about a couple of press releases. That is not communication. It is actually detailing your management strategy. You owe it to PESRAC, which you have convened to do this work on your behalf, to fulfil your commitment to them.

They have done this work in good faith. They have identified some of these matters for immediate attention to inform the next stage of their work. As a first step, he asked us to quickly bring to him any actions for immediate implementation that we see as important in the journey to recovery. They need you to do this before they can do the next part of their work. That is what they say in this report.

The Government's action on some of these recommendations, particularly this one, is the reason that the business community is raising questions and asking you to explain your decision-making. It is the reason why families are asking why there is discrepancy and inconsistency in advice depending on whether somebody is a seasonal worker, or a FIFO worker, or whether they are a relative who wants to see their grandchild for the first time in South Australia and come home again.

The inconsistent application of Public Health advice is confusing people. Without a government properly explaining their plan, properly detailing what their management strategy is, if there is another case, helping Tasmanians to be prepared, treating people like grown-ups and making sure they have the information they need to make decisions about their lives, then the community frustration and confusion will only grow.

The Government has an opportunity to address this right now. I hope the Premier is going to be able to do that. I thank him for being in the Chamber to participate in this motion. This is a critical recommendation from PESRAC. We want to be able to support him to make sure the community understands what the plan is. By tabling the management strategy in this place tomorrow, we can all do that much better because we will have information available to us that currently is not there.

[4.02 p.m.]

**Mr GUTWEIN** (Bass - Premier) - Madam Deputy Speaker, it is another stunt motion from the Leader of the Opposition. It beggars belief how you have played politics with this pandemic for the past six to eight weeks, ever since you stepped into the space of saying one thing in supporting the Government then allowing shadow spokesmen and women to go out and say different things.

**Mr O'Byrne** - Absolute rubbish.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - It beggars belief. The shadow treasurer interjects. On one hand on a Friday I can have a conversation with the Leader of the Opposition regarding the difficult decisions regarding racing only to have on Wednesday of the next week the shadow treasurer completely undermining the Government's strategy. That is a statement of fact.

**Mr O'Byrne** - Rubbish.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - It is not rubbish. You know that happened.

**Mr O'Byrne** - That is absolutely not true.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - On one hand we had the Leader of the Opposition suggesting that they would back the Government, understanding how difficult some of these decisions were and then allow the shadow treasurer out to undermine the Government's position.

**Ms White** - That it not true.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Everybody in this Chamber understands that is true.

**Ms White** - We asked questions in parliament and we have raised it in the media. I have raised it with you.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order, the Leader of the Opposition has already made a contribution. The Premier was silent during that.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - That is exactly what happened. We will not be supporting this motion. There is a plan in place. I will speak in a moment about the steps we have taken. We will not jump to the tune of an Opposition that is only interested in playing politics.

You look at the calls that were made for parliament to return, for there to be more committees running regarding scrutiny. How many questions did you ask me last week concerning the pandemic and our response? You are a fraud. It is no wonder this bloke over here is chasing you down. How do we know that? We know what he is saying to people in the community.

**Mr O'Byrne** - That is rubbish.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Not, it is not rubbish. We know what he is saying. This is a contribution that is explaining to Tasmanians exactly what is going on on that side of the House. The way you have conducted yourselves through this is appalling. When you consider the calls for parliament to be returned, for scrutiny to occur, what have they done? Last week how many questions were asked of me? In a question time of 21 opportunities last week you can count on less than one hand those that went anywhere near COVID-19. You can count on one hand the number of questions I received last week after the Opposition was claiming day after day that we should bring parliament back, that there needs to be further scrutiny. The way you have conducted yourselves is outrageous. This is a stunt motion.

I will deal with some of the issues from the PESRAC report to begin with. The council is doing a very good job. They are an exceptionally gifted group of people. I met with them a week ago. I am pleased that individuals of such quality and such commitment to Tasmania are prepared to freely give up their time to do that job. I will have more to say in coming days on the next phase of PESRAC's program.

Regarding PESRAC's 64 recommendations, six of them have already been completed. A further 28 are being progressed, and the remaining 30 will be dealt with in the coming budget process and over the six months.

Regarding recommendation 2 -

The State Government should explain to the community its future COVID-19 management strategy including how any future outbreaks will be handled.

The State Control Centre has been tasked to deliver the public awareness campaign following the PESRAC recommendation. The first stage of this multimedia communication campaign was announced last Friday with advertisements already commencing. The Keep on

Top of COVID campaign will explain the shared responsibility between the community and Government and how the actions we take now will reduce the risk of COVID-19 but also prepare us should an outbreak occur.

The campaign reiterates the COVID-safe behaviours the community needs to continue to embrace. All of us in this place, at every opportunity, should speak to our community about this. It is important that all Tasmanians continue to take personal responsibility and that we continue to be cogent in our hygiene habits, ensure that we test if we have symptoms, stay home if sick and, importantly, follow the restrictions that are clearly laid out and understood by Tasmanians. This is important now and if there were to be an outbreak in the future.

The businesses of Tasmania have embraced COVID-safe plans, ensuring that they provide safe workplaces for their staff and customers. The efforts that businesses have gone to is sensational. They have done everything they possibly can. They have pivoted where they have needed to, but have gone with the program and they are keeping Tasmanians safe.

The campaign will demonstrate the important link between community and Government working in partnership to reduce the risk of COVID-19, but also the importance of these actions in responding to an outbreak.

One of the key planks of the plan that we have outlined has to be testing. Our testing levels have broadly remained with the one per 1000 testing target that was set, about 500 per day. It is important that we keep it up.

In Western Australia their level of testing has dropped as the community has become more comfortable and, to be frank, I expect that will occur here to some degree as well. It is important that we message regularly to people that if you are unwell, if you have any symptoms at all, please get tested. The more testing we do the better we understand where the virus is. Importantly, testing will be conducted in line with Public Health advice, not yours, Ms Butler.

Every time we hear from the other side about test this, test that, they are saying to Public Health, 'We do not trust your expert view on this'. That is what they say every time they raise these issues. I have full confidence in Dr Mark Veitch. He has worked very hard and been very diligent and at a time when you need to have a cautious Public Health director, we have had exactly the right person in that job, and together with Dr Scott McKeown, they have been excellent. Dr Scott, as he is fondly known, has been brilliant through this as well.

The Government's actions are focused on measures to reduce risk such as border restrictions, health screening, contact tracing and the extensive planning and preparation being undertaken for future cases or outbreaks.

**Ms Butler** interjecting.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Your shadow minister did not even know who her alternate minister was, which I think demonstrates -

**Ms White** interjecting.



**Mr GUTWEIN** - In two days she missed the target on both occasions. That demonstrates they simply have not asked any questions on it; either that or they are just lazy.

The campaign will continue to evolve to make it reflective of the current situation in Tasmania and show people what is required of them, as well as what the Government is continuing to do. In line with the PESRAC report, we have tasked the State Control Centre with rolling out this public information campaign and it began last Friday. I made it perfectly clear last week that last Friday's launch was the start of the public information campaign as recommended by PESRAC, yet here we are today with a stunt motion from the Labor Party.

Regarding the PESRAC report, a key recommendation for the public information campaign is that it was important for rebuilding community confidence to have that campaign in place. It is not the Government doing the polling; Sensis and National Australia Bank are. We are the most confident jurisdiction in the country, and in terms of the Government policies, when asked at the height of the pandemic in recent weeks, businesses are saying they are more confident in the Tasmanian Government's policies than any other state in the country.

In terms of planning, I want to remind Labor - and I know they wander in and out of this 'We're in a pandemic, we're not in a pandemic, we should be playing politics, we shouldn't be playing politics' - we have been in a state of emergency since 19 March with a comprehensive, integrated whole-of-government response to COVID-19. They know this because they have been briefed by the State Controller, by Public Health and other Health officials. They know we are working to a comprehensive plan. They understand that, but again it is about politics.

To support the integrated whole-of-government response to COVID-19 there have been numerous plans put in place by authorities to manage the response, including the State Special Emergency Management Plan, the COVID-19 Rapid Response Strategy, outbreak preparedness and outbreak management plans for specific sectors, including residential aged care, hospitals and primary healthcare, correctional settings, remote Aboriginal communities, residential disability sector, residential education sector and residential community settings. The Tasmanian Government already has in place a strong response and management plan for COVID-19 as part of its plan to recover and rebuild a stronger Tasmania.

Underpinning the implementation of that strategy is the Tasmanian Government's Plan to Rebuild a Stronger Tasmania, which is a publicly available document and outlines four safeguards to help better protect Tasmanians from the risk of coronavirus, the four safeguards we have had in place and have been working hard to educate the community about increased testing. We want Tasmanians to get tested. I have said that in every forum I have spoken in and we have advertised, we have run campaigns, we have communicated widely through a vast array of multimedia channels. Testing is important, as is ensuring that Tasmanians have good personal hygiene. One of the most important things, and it is something that has brought Victoria undone, is that people were going to work when they were sick. For Tasmanians the message could not be clearer - do not turn up for work if you are sick.

This Government, as part of its plan, has provided additional levels of support so that if you do not have any sick pay, if you are a casual worker or a temporary visa holder, the Government will pay you to sit at home and wait until you get your test result. Then we will support you in concert with the federal government if you need to self-isolate for a period of 14 days. They are the levels of support that are offered under our plan to ensure that along with the increased testing we have a community that is safe and well informed. Regarding the

testing numbers, which has been relatively constant, Tasmanians have accepted the role they have to play in this. Greatly enhanced tracing capability is also important. What is important in the COVID-19 safety plans we have put into place is people identifying themselves when they go into a business or a gym, that there is contact tracing from the junior football or the senior football as people come through the gate, or the netball. All of those tasks and actions will help us with our enhanced tracing capability.

Regarding rapid response, we demonstrated once - and it was unfortunate that we had to in terms of the north-west - that we could step up and respond. We have provided additional resources through our COVID-19 provision in the Budget to ensure that Public Health has the necessary resources so we can respond rapidly. The COVID-19 safety plans were the final part of the four-point plan, and businesses have bought into that in a big way. I could not thank them more for doing that. Anywhere you go in this city, anywhere you go in Launceston, you walk into a business and there is hand sanitiser there and crosses on the floor. They are on top of it.

I was in Grand Central Station coming down Wellington Street on Sunday afternoon and I walked in and there were crosses on the floor and they had actually gridmarked their floor into two square metres and I said to the young lady behind the counter, 'That is fantastic, that is brilliant'. There was hand sanitiser by the register and hand sanitiser as you walked in. I thought for a business that is so well done and it is great to see businesses being prepared to play their part as part of our plan to ensure that customers are safe but importantly that we keep all of Tasmania safe.

Our rapid response capabilities are comprehensive, integrated and whole-of-government in its management response to COVID-19 and supports the broader State Special Emergency Management Plan. The strategy provides advice and support to a range of stakeholders to ensure that all settings and in particular settings with high risk of serious consequences are appropriately prepared to reduce the likelihood of an outbreak and to respond quickly and effectively to cases and signs of an outbreak. The rapid response capability strategy includes having a well-resourced core team, highly-skilled, multi-disciplinary staff able to rapidly and effectively manage cases and contacts and rapidly identify and control outbreaks.

The strategy builds and maintains a highly-skilled multi-agency support workforce that can be deployed for preparation and planning, and response and recovery actions, and it draws on the authority of the Director of Public Health to take the actions necessary to manage cases and contacts, and control outbreaks and thereby prevent community transmissions or large outbreaks of COVID-19 in Tasmania.

It is underpinned by four key action areas - active monitoring and surveillance; planning and preparedness; compliance; and outbreak response. The planning that has gone into this has been extensive. The State Control Centre is under Darren Hine and I have to say he has stepped up and gone above and beyond. His work ethic is second to none. I could not be prouder of the work that he has done and to be frank he has the right personality to manage the difficult challenges that we face through a pandemic like this. He has been balanced. He has demonstrated real leadership.

Regarding the program that is being rolled out, the strategy that started on Friday will run for the next six weeks. It will provide information through multiple channels to Tasmanians so that they understand what the actions are of the Government in terms of outbreak

management, health preparedness, and aged care preparedness. It will help Tasmanians to understand very clearly what their role and responsibilities are in this. As individuals, all of us have a responsibility. All of us need to ensure we do those little things that are a part of the plan, ensuring that we maintain good personal hygiene, that we cover our coughs and sneezes, that we wash our hands regularly, that we socially distance and, importantly, ensure that we follow the rules when we are in a COVID-safe business or at a public event with a COVID-safe plan. All of those things are going to ensure we keep Tasmania safe.

Under Darren Hine's leadership the plan will be rolled out by the Public Information Unit. It astounds me that in taking that first step on Friday, we are here today debating whether we are going to inform Tasmanians about the plan. The plan has started to be rolled out through the information campaign.

I am keen to ensure that as we work our way through this, Tasmanians can receive the information they need, in understanding their role and understanding the Government's response, that they have the information that is necessary. I am buoyed by the fact that there are independent checks being done on community confidence, not by the Government - not like the Labor Premier of Queensland who, I understand, has spent somewhere between \$500 000 and \$1 million on polling her own community to test things - but independent research houses like Sensis or NAB. Tasmanians are cautiously confident but it is important that we continue to communicate and communicate clearly. The Public Information Unit's campaign will do that.

Regarding the further Government response and the response to PESRAC more broadly, the Leader of the Opposition quite disgracefully wanted to play politics with PESRAC. It needs to be placed on the record that PESRAC was tasked with providing some initial recommendations and then they were to provide an interim report in September which would have informed the coming budget.

Based on feedback and their own thinking within the group, they provided a more comprehensive report as a starting point, with 64 recommendations, not a handful, of immediate initiatives. It is comprehensive and it has provided a body of work that the Government will draw from as we work through this budget process and more than likely, the next budget process, because of the breadth and depth of what they are recommending, and the quality of their recommendations.

The Leader of the Opposition, knowing that full well, chose to again play politics with what their role was and what was the initial intent of their report. I put on the record for this House, the recommendation that is the subject of this motion, has been actioned. The start of that campaign to inform Tasmanians began on Friday. The campaign will, over the next six weeks, inform Tasmanians not only of what their role is, but what the Government is doing, how we will manage outbreaks, the preparedness regarding health, rapid response, and for aged care.

We will be voting down this motion. It is a stunt motion. I urge other members of this place to vote down this motion.

I will come back to where I started. After starting a process and having good engagement from the two leaders, the Greens have maintained their position on this. They have backed Public Health through this, they have asked questions where they needed to be asked, but they

have not played politics. I thank the Greens for that. The cycle is changing and we will get somewhat closer to our old ways in this place over time, but on the pandemic, the Greens have been consistent and I thank you for that.

With an issue as important as this, there have been numerous opportunities where politics could have been played. Labor, very early in the piece, decided that they would play politics within a pandemic. I come back to how appalled I was that I could have a conversation with the Leader of the Opposition on a Friday only to have the shadow treasurer out there on a Wednesday undermining the Government -

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order. There is too much chatter in here. Members can make their contributions later, thank you.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - It was appalling and the politics have continued. After complaining and calling for more scrutiny, for me to be in this place last week with 21 questions from Labor and less than a handful of them directed at me regarding the pandemic, was an abrogation of the Opposition's duty.

It demonstrates the wafer-thinness of this Opposition that we have in this parliament at the moment. To beat the drum for months that 'we want more scrutiny' but then to come into this place and ask me, out of 21 questions fewer than five questions. I do not think the Leader of the Opposition on one, possibly two days, even asked me the first two questions. After making such a fuss about wanting to be able to question me about the pandemic, it is an abrogation of their duty. The point that it clearly makes is the one I have put to this place - the Opposition is more interested in politics. I am asking you to hold me to account and you will not ask me any questions. You are demanding that we have other inquiries because that was the politics you want to play. I hope Tasmanians understand just how wafer thin, how shallow you lot are.

We will not be supporting the motion. It is a stunt motion. The public information unit began its campaign on Friday. It will continue to roll out key messaging to the Tasmanian community following the important points PESRAC made in its report to us. We will communicate through a range of media channels to ensure that we reach as many Tasmanians as possible. I say to the Opposition again, stop playing stunts. This is far too important an issue for stunts.

[4.32 p.m.]

**Dr WOODRUFF** (Franklin) - Madam Deputy Speaker, no-one on the planet could have looked into a crystal ball and understood where those early cases being reported from Wuhan in China last year were going to lead us. Every country in the world has been unutterably altered. Australia and our little state of Tasmania has also felt the changes that have come to societies around the world and to communities as we have attempted to deal with this very infectious and sometimes lethal virus.

The Greens were on the front foot early in the pandemic, recognising the risk to Australia from cruise ships that were disembarking passengers with coronavirus infection. Already in March hundreds of people had disembarked in Sydney and Western Australia, including from the *Diamond Princess*. Eventually some of those people made their way to Tasmania and

infections were transmitted as the result of those people coming into Tasmania. Tasmanians coming back to Tasmania, whether it was known to them or not, were infected.

We understood the risk. The Greens were on the front foot calling for a ban on cruise ships in the waters of Tasmania. We supported the Premier's response to that; I think it was the next day. Since then there has been a steady process of looking at this pandemic on a day-by-day process, understanding what is happening in countries around the world. We are looking at the scientific evidence of the transmission of the virus and the epidemiology of how it moves through communities depending on people's age, availability of health services, and availability of preventive equipment and practices.

All of these things we have learnt from. It has been a journey that has brought Tasmania to a graver place than we were earlier in the year. Hundreds of businesses have closed in Tasmania. There are still thousands of Tasmanians without a job and with the prospect of JobKeeper and JobSeeker ending in the current levels within days, there are tens of thousands of Tasmanians who are deeply concerned about their prospects. We have a level of insecurity and anxiety in Tasmania that we have not experienced in living memory.

I thank the Premier for his comments earlier about the role the Greens have taken in this pandemic. We have been critical of the lack of scrutiny available to members of parliament through the normal functioning of parliament. We did not support the fact that there were no other opportunities for scrutiny that the Government could have taken up through a COVID-19 committee or through continuing parliament's sitting. When we rose for winter we thought that was premature. We have continued to call for more scrutiny. Nonetheless, as a party, Ms O'Connor and I have continued to support the importance of listening to our public health experts in setting the advice for the Government to respond to and to establish the restrictions that are needed to keep people safe, and to keep institutions functioning in a safe fashion. We have continued to say throughout this process that the model the Government has adopted in responding to the coronavirus pandemic is one they should adopt everywhere.

Our governments have lost the ability or the desire to listen to expertise outside their own government officers on almost all issues. This pandemic has been an exception for the Liberals in Tasmania. Not all governments in Australia or around the world have put the advice of public health experts at the forefront of their decision making in responding to the pandemic. We are fortunate in this country that that is what most governments have done. It shows that when we work together, by putting the people with expertise and scientific evidence first, we can make decisions that are in the best interests of the majority of people, rather than a few people. What we do not understand is why the Government and the Premier refuse to listen to climate health experts.

When we heard that the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council was going to be established, Ms O'Connor and I could see the importance of looking at the things Tasmania needs to be able to respond to in the short- and the mid-term in quickly re-establishing jobs and economic activity within Tasmania, and making decisions that will be in the best interests of the majority of Tasmanians, not the few.

We wrote to Mr Don Challen, the chair of the committee, in June and proffered our thoughts on the frame that we hoped the PESRAC would take when looking at the decision-making about an economic recovery.

Our interim submission presented three potential areas where we believed immediate measures could be made to stimulate the economy and these were through a housing-led recovery, the development of green skills and an industry around green skills, measures to rewild and restore our island's degraded landscape and the diversification of investment into renewable energy. Those measures can deliver sustained employment and social benefit at the same time as well as strengthening Tasmania's brand to make sure our state remains competitive in increasingly uncertain global markets.

The economic recovery from the pandemic has to shift a focus for our economy onto a more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable path. We cannot go back to normal and the report makes the point that we cannot go back to normal because normal was not working.

We proposed to the council that their threshold consideration should be what will deliver the maximum public benefit and we urged the council members to avoid recommending allocating public funds in a large part to private entities that were simply looking for bailouts, but that the money should be directed to public expenditure for sustaining the economy for the public good. The obvious co-benefit for public good is the benefit to society as well as to the natural environment because it is the natural environment that sustains us.

We propose a housing-led recovery ought to have a minimum of \$600 million which would buy 2000 new houses and three new facilities for young people and an opportunity for first home buyers to buy their own property, which would be an extraordinary opportunity for many people who have no prospect at the moment of being able to afford a house with the prices that exist in Tasmania.

We were disappointed at the interim report released in July. The PESRAC report mentions many things and has 64 recommendations, but in the 66-page report there is not a single word for climate. In a climate crisis staring into our children's future in such a short amount of time, to talk seriously about a large investment in economic recovery in Tasmania without looking through the climate lens is not only a missed opportunity, it shows a frightening lack of judgment and understanding about the reality we are facing. For a whole report to not have the word 'climate' in there in any fashion is deeply concerning.

The other word which is utterly missing from this report is 'environment', unless it is in the context of the economic environment, where it is mentioned in that capacity seven times. That has nothing to do with the natural world and the systems we depend upon for food production, for storing carbon, for biodiversity that provides intrinsic beauty and spiritual wellbeing for every person who lives in Tasmania, and also to people on the rest of the planet for whom we are custodians of the glorious places we have under our care such as the Wilderness World Heritage Area and the marine areas around the state.

We are extremely concerned at these missing elements for the framing of this work. However, and we are disappointed to see, it includes recommendations for the Government to facilitate private sector major projects and the removal of barriers. It is troubling in that context. We have seen the Liberal and Labor parties both kowtow to the building industry and big developers by throwing community interests under the bus with nary a concern for the rights of the community to be able to have a meaningful say, to be able to appeal major projects, often controversial projects, in their area. The Labor and Liberal parties have both capitulated together to the demands of big corporations that want what is already an easy glide path for

them through the planning system to be made even easier. That is an utter disgrace. It is despicable that the regulations that ought to be in place to safeguard the health and safety of the environment and the people of Tasmania have been eaten away a bit more by the major projects legislation.

It is very concerning that there is no account in the PESRAC of the role we will be playing throughout this economic recovery in relation to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change special report on global warming of 1.5 degrees. That found that in order to mitigate the worst impacts of climate emergency we have to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. That means we have to make substantial changes in every sector of the economy, every part of the state we manage - the land, the energy, the industries, the buildings, the transport and the cities. In all of these different sectors we have to be limiting our emissions so that the total for the planet remains at 1.5 degrees Celsius. Despite the warnings of the IPCC and despite our submission, the PESRAC interim report does not make any attempt to argue for any substantial adaptation to the way we are doing business in Tasmania.

The principal message that comes out of the PESRAC report is to escalate development and that is a single-minded focus of thinking about what our economy is and what it can be and it lacks vision. It is very disappointing to see a collection of what should have been some great minds in Tasmania coming up with a report which has such little vision in such an important area.

At the moment the Environment Protection Authority has been eroded to such an extraordinary level that its capacity to protect the environment is throttled. It is functionally all about facilitating development and productivity of business. It has lost the public's trust. I could not count the number of times I have had conversations with people in the community especially over the last two years, where they said, 'I thought the EPA was going to come in and look at this development fairly. I thought the EPA was going to come in and call to order the fact that Huon Aquaculture, for example, was wanting to put fish farms in areas where they never should be', fish farms just down near the Peninsula, the Storm Bay expansion. People expected the EPA to be able to do an independent job. It is not a problem with the EPA; it is a problem with the Liberal Government that sets the rules under which the EPA must work. The EPA's job and the job of the director and the board is constrained by having to be in accord with Liberal Government policies and sit within the directive of the minister which requires the EPA to put the productivity of businesses first.

The Labor Party makes a good point in their comments regarding recommendation No. 2 in the PESRAC report that the state Government should explain to the community its future COVID-19 management strategy, including how outbreaks would be handled.

I sent letters to the Minister for Health and we have made public comment that we think it is important for the Premier to change the form of communication on the restrictions in place to provide more variety. Premier, you have done a great job of delivering media conferences, but people need to hear communication in different ways as things unfold. We are really concerned with the health hotline. We are concerned with the comments that we hear back from that; the advice that people are getting. We are hearing that the application form people have to use for Tasmanians to come into Tasmania is robotic. It is cold. It is bureaucratic. It does not make sense. It is producing irrational responses to people. It is asking repeatedly for information to be provided when it has previously been provided, or when it has never been asked for in the first place. People's applications are being rejected purely on the basis that

information that has never been asked for was not provided. We are consistently hearing this message.

For each of the constituents we have advocated for, their stories are heartbreaking because they are Tasmanians who want to return to live in Tasmania. We expect to have many hoops for people who are coming to the state as seasonal workers. We expect to have many hoops for people who are coming to stay as essential workers. It is a very different matter when people who want to come back to Tasmania are having their applications rejected on a website, are not able to talk to a human on the end of the phone, and the Government refuses to make available a member of the Health department. The Health minister's office has refused to make itself available for constituents to speak to it. The minister for Mental Health's office refused to take on an extremely serious and concerning issue for a mother whose daughter was in mental health distress and had been hospitalised in Melbourne. It refused to take that phone call from that woman. It is terrible.

People are getting an application response instead of a human voice. It is not good enough. I challenge you, Premier, to put more effort into having humans on the end of the phone. Tasmanians do not want to get a cold hard app response that said, 'application rejected, try again' when they have tried four or five times and they have not been given the information the first time. I put you on notice that I will be in contact with your office and the State Controller about another matter that came to me this morning. I thought that we might have got to the end of this but no-one is listening to the fact that people should not be dealt with by a computer when it is a matter of life or death. That includes having a child in hospital for a psychiatric illness and needing to get them back to Tasmania only to be rejected again.

It is not good enough that listening to health experts, which has been undertaken in this pandemic, does not extend to listening to the health experts who know that climate change is such a critical issue for us to attend to. You have listened to the Director of Public Health on the COVID-19 pandemic. Premier, listen to the doctors who are calling for action on climate change and have a conversation with the PESRAC committee about the fact that they failed to put any climate change thinking into this economic recovery report.

How can you possibly be the Minister for Climate Change and put your signature on an economic recovery plan that has nothing to do with climate change and the challenge of the lifetime of all the children in this state? I cannot believe it. I hope you think again before you do.

[4.56 p.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the motion. In doing so, I will indicate a level of disappointment with the Premier's contribution and some of the political points he tried to score. It seems every time someone disagrees with the Premier, he accuses them of playing politics. That could not be further from the truth regarding the role we have tried to play over the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have supported many of your decisions even though, at times, like with other members of the community, and with business and community groups, you were not clear on the reasons for your decisions. So many times we supported you, but that does not mean you get a blank cheque. That does not mean that we abrogate our responsibility as Opposition to raise issues on behalf of stakeholders. That is incorrect. You have verbalised us on that. That does not mean you get a blank cheque to make any decision in the absence of any critique or questions that are raised by not only us as an Opposition, but by other members of this House and other community groups.



This motion is trying to help you do your job. It is trying to help the Government do its job. If people do not understand the reasons or thought processes behind certain decisions, they question every decision that is made. It was loud and clear by the chair of PESRAC, Don Challen's evidence to the Public Accounts Committee. He offered at that committee to write out some form of advice or a document which would indicate what we do in the circumstances that we may or may not face. We saw that in the Public Accounts Committee evidence last week, where the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania, and Visit North all said that they welcomed the Government's hard work and acknowledged it had done some amazing things, but they are now at a phase of the process where they need to understand what decisions the Government will make in a COVID-19 world.

It was clear from that evidence, that moving the dates forward and back, announcing bubbles and then moving them back and backflipping on the bubbles, as he would accuse us of when supporting positions, means that people then do not understand why you are doing it. Moving the dates is not a plan; it is not a strategy. It is a tactic you apply once you establish the strategy and the tactic.

It is clear that people are asking for an insight into the range of advice you receive from Public Health. When you make a decision and people question you, and you say it is Public Health advice and that is all you say, that undermines confidence if people do not understand it. If they think it is inconsistent, it undermines confidence in all the work all Tasmanians have done to get us to this point.

There is no vaccine and we are not going to eradicate this disease. We know we will have to live with it in some form at a community level and an economic level. The advice you rely on can be applied differently in different circumstances given the context. It was clear from the evidence from Visit North in terms of the events that they were wanting to schedule and business decisions that are being made that they had good interaction with you, Premier, and good interaction with departments, but had very little line of sight into Public Health and the reasons why they make their decisions. They are of the view that if they could have a conversation with Public Health around circumstances and situations about how they manage the risk, better decisions would be made, and that goes to the heart of the PESRAC recommendations. It is calling on the Government at this stage of the response to open up, to explain, to talk through how a government will respond in a certain set of circumstances. It does no more than that. It is very clear and the evidence was very clear.

**Time expired.**

**The House divided -**

**AYES 10**

Dr Broad  
Ms Butler  
Ms Dow  
Ms Haddad (Teller)  
Mr O'Byrne  
Ms O'Byrne  
Ms O'Connor

**NOES 12**

Mr Barnett  
Ms Courtney  
Mr Ellis  
Mr Ferguson  
Mr Gutwein  
Mr Jaensch  
Ms Ogilvie

Ms Standen  
Ms White  
Dr Woodruff

Mrs Petrusma  
Mr Rockliff  
Mr Shelton  
Mr Street (Teller)  
Mr Tucker

**PAIRS**

Ms Houston

Ms Archer

**Motion negatived.**

**MOTION**

**COVID-19 - Impact on Unemployment and Underemployment**

[5.06 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens - Motion) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the House -

- (1) Acknowledges the economic shockwaves from COVID-19 will continue for years.
- (2) Notes that unemployment and underemployment were already significant, ongoing issues prior to the pandemic.
- (3) Recognises intergenerational inequality has resulted in poor economic, health, and educational outcomes for thousands of Tasmanians.
- (4) Accepts the majority of unemployed and underemployed people are in unfortunate circumstances through no fault of their own.
- (5) Understands access to a reliable and liveable income is essential to meet basic needs like food, housing, healthcare, transport, bills, and education.
- (6) Further recognises that providing more work opportunities benefits individuals, society and the economy as a whole.
- (7) Further accepts that dealing with the colliding challenges of the climate emergency, long-term disadvantage and the impact of coronavirus will require ambitious Government action.
- (8) Further notes in the decades following the Second World War, the Australian Government was committed to a policy of full employment.

- (9) Further notes that since the full employment policy was abandoned, the private sector has never employed all willing labour participants, even in economic booms.
- (10) Calls on the Gutwein Government to investigate how a Jobs Guarantee program could be adopted in lutruwita/Tasmania to strengthen our COVID-19 recovery and support economic transition to tackle the climate emergency.

The last time Australia had genuinely full employment was in 1975. That was also when our income inequality was the lowest in our modern history. We are in a very different place today. Obviously the coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating impact on employment in Australia and in Tasmania and there are the profound social flow-on consequences as a result of that.

In the last Australian Bureau of Statistics data we checked, there were 35 000 Tasmanians received JobSeeker as of 24 August, an increase of 61 per cent from December last year. The federal government estimates there will be thousands more on JobSeeker by December this year. There are 63 000 Tasmanians on JobKeeper as of June this year and, as we know, the JobSeeker coronavirus supplement will be cut from Friday and JobKeeper will be cut from Monday.

The impacts of the pandemic on Australians and Tasmanians is devastating and it will have generational impacts. The power of having employment, of having a job and the dignity of work, cannot be overstated. What the pandemic has taught us is that we need a new deal in Australia, we need a green new deal for a more productive, happier and healthier country.

For our young people, we need to give them genuine hope for the future and we need to commit to them that we recognise there is no going back to normal, because normal was not working. It was not working for them, it was not working for the economy, it was not working for our society and it most certainly was not working for nature.

We know that unemployment and underemployment were already significant issues before the pandemic hit. We need to look at the fact that a huge, untapped human potential exists in our society and it is a failure of economists and governments that we have not tapped into that human potential and recognised the enormous capacity it has to lift the nation's productivity as well as tackle those entrenched cycles of socioeconomic disadvantage in Australia.

Dr Steven Hail from the School of Economics at the University of Adelaide estimates that under-utilisation, which is both unemployment and underemployment, is currently at about 20 per cent in Tasmania. We know that number would be much higher and there would be many more people who would be under-utilised without JobKeeper. Prior to the pandemic, the under-utilisation rate in Tasmania was about 16 per cent to 17 per cent.

There is an excellent paper on a job guarantee that has been prepared by Dr Steven Hail and he notes that we have had in this nation full employment. We have had low-income inequality, but since then generations of policy-makers and opinion-formers have taken it for granted that unemployment and underemployment are inevitable characteristics of a modern economy. As Dr Hail points out, consequently, generations of the unemployed,

underemployed and insecurely employed have faced severe financial hardship and distress. Unemployment has also been shown in dozens of studies by economists, psychologists and other social scientists to have a wide variety of non-financial costs for the individuals concerned, their families and the broader community.

The experience of unemployment has a permanent impact on the wellbeing of most people and a prolonged period of unemployment makes it more difficult to get back to work and is particularly damaging to the future employment prospects of younger workers. It is young Australians and young Tasmanians who have been kicked hardest in the guts by this pandemic but they were being kicked before, because the entire system was set up in a way that worked against them. They are also acutely aware that they are dealing with a system that is designed to fail them and accelerating climate impacts make them deeply fearful for their future.

We have to recognise that intergenerational inequality has resulted in poor economic health and educational outcomes for thousands of Tasmanians and it has trapped people in cycles of intergenerational poverty. As elected representatives of communities, every day we come into contact with people who are being mistreated or neglected or smashed by the system. We come into contact with people who are the product of generations of disadvantage, of not being given a fair go. At the heart of a job's guarantee is fairness and respect for human dignity and the value of work to an individual's wellbeing as well as to a society's wellbeing.

Of course, intergenerational disadvantage is all linked with health outcomes and it impacts on public services in health and housing. It leads to low educational attainment, and creates mental health issues, addiction and poor life choices. When you are on the end of that cycle of intergenerational disadvantage you will make poor life choices because you think you are not valued by the society that you are part of.

We need economic justice in this country. We need a country that is not run by the likes of Gina Rinehart. We need a country that works for people, for place, for nature, and is underpinned by the principle of the fair go which for so long has been part of a cultural identity but which in modern Australia is no longer a reality. It is no longer a reality for young people, for single parents, for the long-term unemployed. There is no fair go for those Australians.

We need to accept that the majority of unemployed and underemployed are in unfortunate circumstances through no fault of their own. The evidence tells us that the private sector has never employed enough people, even though they should be able to, but you have billionaire corporations that are pocketing profits and tax cuts and not reinvesting that money into people, into human capital, into lifting the nation's productivity, happiness and health.

We have had wage stagnation in this country for the past 25 to 30 years, so the system by design keeps wages low as prices go up. A third of all workers prior to COVID-19 had to live with their wages not growing at all. We need to understand and accept, instead of paying lip-service to this, access to a reliable and liveable income is essential to meet all the basic needs like food, housing, healthcare, transport costs and other bills as well as accessing education and training. What we know in Tasmania today, and it is not that different around the country, is that according to the last of Australian Bureau of Statistics survey there are around 1500 Tasmanians who are without a home.

Elective surgery waiting lists are ballooning, meaning those who cannot afford private health insurance are suffering more and more compared to those who can. Because of changes at the federal level to the GP arrangements under the Abbott government, accessing bulk billing doctors is now impossible for too many Tasmanians.

As we have heard today, there is pressure on our emergency food support services because more and more Tasmanians are being pushed to the breadline and going to organisations like Foodbank, to the Neighbourhood Houses, and accessing food that way.

We know that petrol prices are going up, electricity prices are going up and inflation for essential items has been going up much faster than luxury items and this disproportionately impacts on the poor.

We need to recognise that providing more work opportunities benefits individuals, societies and economies as a whole. It takes the pressure off people to search for every cent and there is plenty of research to show that if you are so poor that you do not know where your next loaf of bread is going to come from, your system floods with cortisol which is a stress hormone. That leads people to make poor choices too. It is enormously stressful to be poor.

To get your latest electricity bill before the kids have come home from school and to wonder how on a single parent's pension you are going to pay for it, the stress affects you as the single parent, and as soon as the kids walk in the door the stress hits them too. In some families the stress is so great that when the power bill comes in mum will crack open a bottle of wine. These are the hard truths of intergenerational poverty and a system that is shafting too many Australians and too many Tasmanians.

We need to accept and embrace the fact that dealing with the colliding challenges of a climate emergency, long term disadvantage and the impacts of coronavirus will require ambitious government action. It will require heart from government as well as a strategic eye on the future of this country and its incredible creative human capital.

We can tackle the climate crisis and recover from the pandemic through a reset of our economic and social system. We need a jobs guarantee in this country. We need to make sure that every Australian who wants to work can work, instead of casting people off onto the welfare system and making them go through humiliating mutual obligation meetings when there are no jobs available. We can do better than that.

We can invest in repairing our landscape, in better preparing for bushfires. We can make sure that those 10 000 jobs that we need in the aged and disability sector are filled. That leads to greater dignity of work for those people who are going into those sectors but it also tackles the need to provide a caring and compassionate and responsive society as people age, or if they are living with a disability.

In the decades following the Second World War the Australian Government was committed to a policy of full employment and the experience of the Depression and World War II made it clear that no-one was safe from the risk of unemployment or under-employment. Outdated distinctions between the deserving and the undeserving - or as former treasurer Joe Hockey called them, the 'lifters and the leaners' - were abandoned in favour of a comprehensive commitment that no-one should be left out of shared prosperity which has been made possible by progress. Full employment became a bipartisan policy goal throughout the decades

following the war. The Department of Post-War Reconstruction set the full-employment policy, establishing the Commonwealth Employment Service to match workers with jobs, and also overhauling the social benefits system and creating the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

What do we have now? We have a privatised job-search sector that is not working for the unemployed and it is particularly not working for the long-term unemployed or people living with a disability.

The aim was to ensure that the standard of living for Australian people improved from what it had been pre-World War II. It was also an aim to avoid the poor conditions in which many World War I veterans lived after returning home.

We need to recognise that since the full employment policy was abandoned, the private sector has never employed all willing labour participants, even in economic booms. The national unemployment rate has averaged more than 6 per cent since full employment policies were abandoned. In the 30 years before that, unemployment only went above 2 per cent once.

A jobs guarantee helps to smooth out the expansion and contraction in the private sector and what we have learned through this pandemic is that when the chips are really down the private sector will not come to our rescue. It has been governments and even neoliberal governments like the Morrison Government that have had to insert policy to make those necessary changes to keep people from becoming homeless, from having nervous breakdowns and ending up in our health system.

We have had JobKeeper, which has helped people enormously, but the benefits in many ways went to business. We have had a lift to JobSeeker, but the cruelty of telling Australians it is only temporary is unfathomable. The rate of NewStart or JobSeeker has not been lifted in real terms for a quarter of a century. That is a punitive approach to providing economic support to people. It does not deliver economic justice. It leaves people on the scrapheap and tells them their country does not care enough about them to provide a liveable wage and the dignity of not being in poverty and having some work.

The problem we have is that we entered a period of neoliberalism where human beings became units of productive measure or not, and people were placed in the too-hard basket and you had an entire economic system that accepted large numbers of unemployed people in order to keep inflation down. It is no longer acceptable.

The work that is available and the whole employment space is changing, but the ones who are still missing out are young people and the long-term unemployed. We have to provide a better deal for them and tapping into that human potential when we have a climate emergency barreling at us is not only desirable, it is absolutely necessary.

The Centre of Full Employment and Equity and the Cape York Institute have produced a paper arguing for a job guarantee. I will read some of this excellent paper -

The introduction of JobSeeker and JobKeeper in response to COVID-19 presents the Commonwealth Government with the unique opportunity to transition unemployed Australians from welfare into real jobs by establishing a Job Guarantee.

This scheme would see JobSeeker and JobKeeper recipients transition to permanent jobs at the minimum wage from January 2021, committing the Government to one of the biggest productivity reforms ever undertaken in Australia: to replace income support with entry level wages for work.

Some background -

Although COVID-19 provides us with an opportunity to replace welfare with work, the need for this reform long predated the pandemic.

The paper points out that -

Monetary and fiscal policy has been geared to keeping inflation low and to achieving fiscal surpluses, respectively. There is a belief that if inflation is kept in check, then markets will deliver the necessary and sufficient conditions for the return to full employment but the evidence does not support this supposition. Instead there has been a persistent shortage of work, a problem now exacerbated and highlighted by the current crisis.

The authors go on to say that in May 2020, so two months after the pandemic hit and most of the country was in some form of lockdown or another -

... there were more than seven unemployed for every job vacancy, and the problem of a lack of jobs intensifies if we include the 480 000 odd who have dropped out of the labour force since March due to lack of work and the 1.8 million who are underemployed and desire, on average, an additional 15 hours of work per week.

What are the arguments for a job guarantee in simple terms? The benefits of a job guarantee include introducing a more effective control on wage inflation than current monetary policies by creating a pool of on-demand labour that the private sector can access in periods of growth; providing an important source of counter-cyclical spending in periods of contraction; disrupting the current pattern of entrenched disadvantage experienced by the long-term unemployed and ensuring the pool of long-term unemployment does not grow via passive welfare; increasing economic growth and productivity by maximising the use of our labour resources; providing workers with the experiential training necessary for participation in the private sector; and reducing the size of the welfare state by removing income passivity, labour under-utilisation and burgeoning cuts.

I note that the Cape York Institute and the Centre of Full Employment and Equity wrote to the Premier of Tasmania, Mr Gutwein, on 3 August this year with the briefing paper attached which they have presented to the Prime Minister arguing for a job guarantee. This letter simply encapsulates a job guarantee in this manner. It says -

This scheme would be federally funded but locally administered through Councils. The Councils would place workers in local jobs provided by State and Commonwealth Governments, local Councils and non-government organisations. These jobs would deliver what are broadly understood to be public goods in areas such as community transport, education, environmental services, public works and community infrastructure. The implementation

model is based on the detailed findings of a joint report between the University of Newcastle and Jobs Australia entitled 'Creating effective local labour markets: a new framework for regional employment policy'.

The authors go on to say -

This proposal will also allow the Commonwealth Government to reform the much-maligned welfare system. For the past forty years this system has done little to ameliorate disadvantage and social dislocation. In most places the welfare system has engendered passivity, exacerbated the breakdown of social norms and entrenched intergenerational dependency. Left unchanged, this system will exacerbate the scarring experienced by a new class of Australians rendered unemployed by COVID-19 and put additional burdens on state services such as housing, child protection, health, education and criminal justice.

The authors sought a meeting with the Premier, who I understand is very busy, but in his response - and to his credit he did respond - the Premier talks about PESRAC and encourages the authors to make a submission to PESRAC but does not commit to a meeting. We will certainly be making another submission to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council arguing for a jobs guarantee.

We acknowledge that a full jobs guarantee is not something the Tasmanian Government on its own could afford. It is estimated that it would cost the Commonwealth around \$1 billion a year to have a full jobs guarantee but you have the offsets in the welfare system. There is no reason why Tasmania could not make a start on this.

I am certain that Australia will have a jobs guarantee one day. The imperative for this policy is unarguable and it is urgent. The private sector and the billionaires such as Gina Rinehart have failed us and they have failed our young people. We have such enormous challenges confronting this country even today. We need to make sure that every Australian who can do so roll up their sleeves and do some work to give something back to their country, to tackle the climate crisis, to restore our landscapes and look after people.

We need to make sure every Australian who is willing to work - and it would be a voluntary scheme - is able to do so and that they receive at least the minimum wage for doing so and some money goes into their superannuation, because that is another huge social and economic cost of the system that has been engineered for the billionaires and not for poor Australians. So many Australians have a zero balance in their superannuation and that entrenches the most terrible disadvantage. It consigns people to poverty in old age. As a wealthy country, surely we can do better than that?

What we have learnt through this pandemic is that the way governments spend money is about choices. It is not actually about how much money is really there; it is about the choices governments make. Suddenly we realised in March/April this year that the federal government could in fact lift JobSeeker and provide a living wage for people who had been made unemployed as a result of the pandemic. This is about political choices and there has been a series of political choices made by governments of both colours going back almost half a century that have led to a nation with deepening and scarring social inequality.



We must demand better for our fellow Australians. We need to be able to look young people in the face and say, 'We know you're stressed. We know you're frightened. We know you're worried about work and secure housing. We're going to change the system for you because you deserve it. We are not going to just tell you you are our future. We're going to come good on that and invest in your future by investing in you'. That is what a jobs guarantee is about - it is about investing in people.

We cannot tolerate any longer a system that accepts poverty and disadvantage as the norm. The pandemic has shown us that governments have choices and we need to demand of our governments that they make better choices that work for public good. In this period in Australia's history we need to harness every bit of human capital that we can. We need to invest in people. We need to provide the dignity of work and a living wage to make sure there is something there in their superannuation account for old age.

We also need to be investing properly in aged care because the other thing the pandemic has exposed is how appallingly we treat our old people. What has happened in New South Wales and Victoria is criminal negligence. Again, it is a choice that a government made to prioritise the profits of the corporate aged care sector over decent pay for aged care workers and dignity for people in private or not-for-profit aged care facilities. There are broken hearts all through this country because state and Commonwealth governments made a choice about how to treat old people in a pandemic.

As a nation and as a decent, compassionate society we need to embrace a jobs guarantee. We are going to have to because we need to fix up this country's degraded landscapes and start properly investing in people's wellbeing. We also need to let young people know we believe in them and we are going to change the system so it works for them. It is the very least we can do as legislators and parliamentarians.

I urge the Premier to go back to that letter written by the Centre for Full Employment and Equity and properly read that paper. Stop thinking like a neoliberal and start thinking about people who deserve the dignity of work. Start thinking about how we can reshape our country so it is kinder, fairer, happier, healthier and more productive so we can reshape our country and tackle the COVID recovery and climate change.

Our choices are narrowing so we have to do things differently. Australia needs a jobs guarantee. Tasmania can make a good start on that and we strongly urge the Premier to be part of this important nation-changing reform. Madam Speaker, I commend the motion to the House.

[5.36 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Minister for State Growth) - Madam Speaker, I will be mindful of the time. I thank Ms O'Connor for her effort in articulating a voice for that motion. I have to agree with much of what she said, I have to say, particularly from a perspective of wanting to see people enabled with the greatest form of social welfare, which is a job. I agree with that and the Government shares that view. We do not share a view about the jobs guarantee per se and I will speak to that later on in my contribution.

In short, this Government has an absolute central dedication to employment and to jobs. We also acknowledge the enormous toll that COVID-19 has had and continues to have on our businesses and on thousands of Tasmanians across the state. We recognise, as I said this

morning in question time, that it is the private sector that is critical to rebuilding and growing our economy. We remain committed to assisting Tasmanian businesses as the actual vehicle for real employment in our state. That does not overlook the role of the public sector in terms of its employment. However, if you want to look at where the jobs in this country and this state are, it is not in the government sector but in the private sector. That is a fact. Check the facts. Most employees are employed outside of government.

While there may well be institutions like aged care, health care, disability care, regardless of whether it is a government provider or a non-government provider, many of those are underpinned by government funding, activity-based funding, for example, or client packages. I am all for that and the Government is all for that.

We are not going to be having an ideological debate today about different economic models; that is not my intention. We will be continuing to implement our plan for our economic recovery after what has been an absolute walloping of our state and our country and the world as a result of COVID-19. I am pleased to indicate that through our strong management, the Government has already invested record amounts into essential services. Not only are they essential but they have been more or less guaranteed throughout the period of the pandemic with strong commitments being given to retaining the employment of people who work as state servants for the Tasmanian Government. We have been investing more into Health, Education and safety. Since 2016 we have employed more than 2000 in the public service and the majority of that is in Health.

The Premier has categorically ruled out job cuts in the public sector as recently as the last parliamentary sitting. We cannot lose sight in this House of the fact that only through having a strong economy, including through outside the public sector, can we have the opportunity to invest more into essential public services for Tasmanians. We are doing everything we can to rebuild our economy.

We are very pleased that we can be cautiously optimistic that the Government's plan for economic recovery is working. Our plan to rebuild Tasmania will generate \$3.1 billion in construction activity around the state and will support and underpin 15 000 jobs. This is generating confidence and the evidence for that is now very clear. It is beyond doubt, not from some opposite, but the results are in from the NAB Business Survey, the CommSec Report, the Sensis Business Index which was released last week, and retail and jobs data coming out only yesterday, they are presenting a consistent picture that despite the challenges we have been going through as a state in 2020, our state is rebounding more strongly.

The confidence that is in the business sector is vital for the very people that Ms O'Connor, you have been advocating for in your very good speech. You have been advocating for people who need a job and without business confidence you cannot actually provide the lifeline that you are hoping that we could provide. That is the link between the real economy and the real aspirations of people who are looking for a job.

I am very attracted to any language about giving people full employment. I am personally there with you on that.

**Ms O'Connor** - No one talks about that anymore.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I hear you on that but again, the jobs guarantee is a complete rewrite of our economy which I will come to if time permits.

**Ms O'Connor** - Yes.

**Mr FERGUSON** - You acknowledge that? A complete rewrite of the economy.

**Ms O'Connor** - Absolutely, because it is not working. It is shafting people.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I am happy for you to put that on record. Tasmanians are now returning to work and a jolly good thing too. Last week's ABS labour force data showed that in August another 2300 jobs were regained since the height of the pandemic's impacts in May when nearly 20 000 were lost.

Thankfully, with strong income-support policies from the Morrison Government, we have recovered 15 800 of those jobs. I celebrated that and everybody here will agree that is good because people were going through hardship. On that weekend in late March when the Prime Minister announced the JobKeeper program, many of us were wondering how our precious, little state will get through this. It was clear was that businesses needed to close, social distancing needed to be enforced, and the borders need to be managed. What was unclear was how these businesses were going to survive. How these businesses would retain their employees and how they would reopen. The language of the day, in case members have forgotten, was about hibernation. It is all very well to say that to a business with no financial lifeline. That is what many of us were trying to work out. How were we going to support this?

From the Tasmanian perspective, we would not have the strong positive outlook we are getting now - although I should be more moderate because the Premier's language is more moderate - that cautious optimism that we now have, those early signs of confidence - it would not have been possible for us to say any of those things without that income support program from the federal government, which I have to remind members is on the credit card. Our kids will be paying back that money -

**Ms O'Connor** - The credit card is already maxxed out for those kids.

**Mr FERGUSON** - It is important I make that point. In government, we do not spend government money. We spend other people's money. We spend taxpayer's money.

The employment position by mid-March of this year, before the pandemic had hit, was that 23 700 jobs had been created under this government, the Hodgman government/the Gutwein Government with the highest annual job growth of any state. The number of unemployed Tasmanians had been consistently falling from around that 20 000 figure in 2013.

Tasmanian state final demand grew 0.8 of 1 per cent in the March quarter and Tasmania was one of only two states to see a growth while national GDP declined. Private new capital investment grew 20.2 per cent in that March quarter in real seasonally-adjusted terms - the highest growth rate in the country.

I have mentioned retail trade. The Premier talked about building approvals this morning. Even today, the August figures of approvals are higher than at August 2019, early signs of strong recovery.

**Ms O'Connor** - What is your answer to the long-term unemployed then?

**Mr FERGUSON** - If time permits, we can discuss that, but I suspect it will not, but this is a further prompting of the need for a strong economy. There is more to do and nobody, least of all me on behalf of the Government, would be suggesting that somehow everything is under control. We are a long way from where we want to be; we want everybody to have that opportunity of a job, and we do not want to see anybody forcibly unemployed, unemployed because they have no job that they can reasonably attain.

We do not propose to agree with a complete rewrite of the economy as the Greens Party is proposing -

**Ms O'Connor** - A significant rewrite of the economy and the welfare system, yes.

**Mr FERGUSON** - You did acknowledge that earlier. The loan scheme, which I did discuss this morning, is going to be a terrific enabler and we support that. We support the EOI in our parks. As I said this morning, I am backed up by the Auditor-General who said it is an effectively-run program and it is meeting Government policy objectives -

**Ms O'Connor** - No, you are not backed up by the Auditor-General.

**Mr FERGUSON** - If all of the EOIs that are currently being under lease, under licence, or being assessed - and I am sure not all will be - but if they were all captured -

**Ms O'Connor** - The parks would be like Disneyland. We will not let you do that. They are not your parks.

**Mr FERGUSON** - and implemented, that would equate to \$99 million of economic development. That is jobs, Ms O'Connor, and you are putting on the record that you oppose that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, the minister is being misleading there. He says the EOI process is about jobs. The Auditor-General made it clear that 53 jobs have been created through that process in the past six years. It is not a jobs generator.

**Mr FERGUSON** - That is 53 jobs that were not there before. If you want full employment -

**Ms O'Connor** - It is not a jobs generator.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr FERGUSON** - As I was saying, that would represent \$99 million in development and more than 260 jobs - and thank you for letting me know about the 53 jobs in the report. I must say I did not have that -

**Ms O'Connor** - So you have not read the report you have been quoting.

**Mr FERGUSON** - If you would just let me speak, I did not have that number in my mind, no, but that is 53 jobs that were not there before. I am pleased about that, thank you. If

you believe in full employment or, to put it another way, if you believe in maximum opportunities people would get a job, then you should welcome those 53 jobs.

Regarding the actual motion, I will get back to that, and conclude. I want to allow the other members to speak.

We do not support this motion for the reasons I have already outlined. We do not want to support a complete economic restructure along the lines of the Greens Party mantra. The jobs guarantee that the Greens Party talk about includes opposing key measures that provide for employment. The Greens, when they were in power, worked with the Labor Party to destroy jobs. That is what happened.

I am not an ideologue on the jobs guarantee because I had to really do a bit of research into this motion in preparing for today. I looked for something that was objective, so I walked past Wikipedia and a range of other websites and settled instead on the Australian Parliament's Parliamentary Library paper which was authored by Don Arthur. I commend members to have a look at that. There are arguments for and against. I will not try to misrepresent anybody, but it is there for people to have a look at. In short, it relies on -

The most recent radical idea to enter the mainstream in the US is the jobs guarantee. Rather than offering unemployed and under-employed workers job-finding programs or training opportunities, under the jobs guarantee, the government would offer them actual jobs.

It is self-evident that there is a difficulty with that for the member to promote that the Tasmanian Government would be in a position to do that.

I applaud the intentions behind the motion. I understand Ms O'Connor wants to see everybody who wants a job to be able to have one. I agree with that and the Government agrees with that. That is why we will continue to stimulate the economy in the way that we responsibly have been. That is why we continue to work with the Commonwealth, which is responsible for income support and our partnership in training.

On this particular motion, Madam Speaker, with all respect to the mover, we are not able to support that for the reasons given.

[5.49 p.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, we will be supporting the motion. The motion is very clear. It talks about an investigation around how a jobs guarantee program could be adopted in this state and how it could be managed in a way that supports people in their time of need and gives them a level of dignity that they deserve.

During this pandemic the scab has been ripped off the labour market in Australia and we are seeing how workers are being treated in Australia in many workplaces and how thin their lives are.

Twenty years ago, the predominant form of employment would have been permanent full-time. People would have had access to sick leave, annual leave, long service leave, redundancy payments - a whole range of secure forms of entitlement. This meant that if there was an issue, or if there was a moment in their career where they had to rely on those

entitlements to put food on the table for themselves and their family and keep a roof over their head and have a life of dignity, they had those entitlements in place. What we have seen over the past 20 years is a move away from that; a move away from secure employment that delivers people dignity and respect, and being able to make better decisions and more decisions in their life. It is a move away from entering a workplace that has some level of security in which they could make decisions to improve their and their family's lives.

The pandemic and the impact it has had has allowed the level of casualisation, the level of contracts, the level of precarious employment to run to such an extent that we are seeing massive waves of inequality and appalling outcomes for, not only Tasmanians, but Australians across the country. People are being forced into circumstances to make the toughest of decisions. The Government is not investigating this idea and looking at how it can support those Tasmanians who find themselves outside of the workforce because it believes having a strong, diverse and robust private sector is crucially important. It is one of the key factors in enabling people to have a better life and a dignified life.

The Labor tradition is not to have winners and losers in that and say, if you do not get access to the workforce, you do not get access to secure jobs, you do not get access to decent pay, well, arguably that is your fault and we are going to leave you behind.

**Mr Ellis** - You picked losers with the forest industry.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - That is absolute rubbish. Do you understand how markets work? Do you understand how terms of trade work, the Australian dollar at that time?

We believe the Labor way is to build a robust, diverse and strong private sector but ensuring that people are not left behind, having a system which enables people to have some form of income, who have some form of ability to make decisions to better their own life and their family's life and to live a life with dignity.

The pandemic has ripped the scab off what is pretty thin economic security for Australian workers. The Government says, 'We are cautiously optimistic. We have done stimulus. There are some stats coming through which we think are okay', but then ignores the impact JobKeeper and JobSeeker have had on our economy, the conditions around rental properties, and the conditions placed on insolvency for businesses. It is extraordinarily thin.

The Government is saying, 'Oh, well, we have done what we have done. Let us put the cue on the rack and we will just hope it will be okay'. The impact of that will be massive inequality, massive disadvantage, businesses falling over. The JobKeeper payment is keeping the private sector alive in Tasmania. In the past fortnight 850 jobs were lost in the tourism and hospitality sector. That is why Labor has been calling for an extension of JobKeeper for those impacted industries. The vouchers were beneficial.

**Mr Ferguson** - It has been extended. It was going to finish in September.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - But it is not enough. You sit back and say, 'Oh, well, we have done what we have done and the private sector will deliver'. The private sector needs the Government to ensure that it can survive. That is why these measures are crucial for the private sector to maintain its economic presence in Tasmania and to maintain economic prosperity and

opportunity for Tasmanian workers. The consequences of not investigating new ideas such as this, well it is not new -

**Ms Ogilvie** - It is a very old idea.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - It is very old, but an idea arguably whose time has come in lifting people out of poverty. How do we lift people out of disadvantage? How do we give people more of a stake in the community that we all enjoy and love?

The member who just resumed his seat talked about our beautiful state. It is a beautiful state. We are all enormously proud of it, but not all of us can conduct ourselves in the state to the same extent as we have with the level of privilege that we have. We are extraordinarily lucky in what this state has provided us. Our privilege has delivered that to us. The obligation that we have as politicians is to find ways to lift people out of poverty; to give them dignity.

This motion does not call for it. It calls for an investigation of how it might work in Tasmania. The level of under-employment - what is it, one hour a week and you are employed. That is your definition: A casual worker who works two or three shifts a week who desperately wants more - that is it, they are employed. Cue in the rack. They deserve better.

You look at the parables of the Depression in the 1930s where there was not a welfare state, where there was not a safety net; the hungry mile; the stories of depravity and hunger and people starving. That is not the society we aspire to. That is not the kind of community that we as politicians should accept.

During that early time in COVID I spent most Tuesday nights helping out at the Clarendon Vale Neighbourhood House putting together up to 350 dinners for people in the Clarence Plains community and having conversations with people in that community about some of the decisions and choices they have to make. You hear stories of people who have not been able to get access to either a permanent job or a full-time job, or a job that delivers for them and their family. They are receiving the extra JobSeeker payments and the decisions they have been able to make for themselves and their family have been extraordinarily empowering and it makes a massive difference.

You have to get this balance right, but having a strong, robust private sector and relying on the private sector to provide opportunities for Tasmanians should not mean we abrogate our responsibility for lifting people out of poverty with government initiatives which connect people to the workforce. I worked for two years in the Beacon Foundation, understanding the dignity of work and what it provides people if they are able to engage in the workforce, if they are able to fulfil the work obligation. It makes an extraordinary difference in their lives.

While it may not be the academic version of a jobs guarantee in Tasmania, what this motion calls for is for the Government to investigate it. In terms of jobs lost we are the second worst state in the country behind Victoria. We welcome every job that comes back but let us not be Pollyanna about the circumstances we find ourselves in. Let us not think we have done enough. Narrowcast stimulus packages, vouchers, all go some way to support people through this moment in time. Given the seismic impact COVID has had on people, it is not going to be enough. Ideas such as this deserve respect, they deserve to be investigated and discussed and debated in a mature way which enables those people who are missing out in our community

and those people who are being left behind in our community, a pathway forward; a ladder out of the circumstances in which they find themselves in.

I know it is only a minute to go so I will allow any other speakers to speak.

[6.00 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I have done some investigation about this issue and have been in contact with the Cape York Institute who I know are keen on developing a national program and are thinking about pilots and all sorts of things that we could do.

I come at this from very much a social democrat perspective, which basically means I know that there are people who want to work. I know we have many people who are on JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments who would like to be active and doing things and I see the benefit of that. I also really see the benefit of being able to deploy this additional capacity that we have in our community and the resources to do things like working in the agriculture and aquaculture sectors, working on climate change initiatives, biodiversity programs, bushfire, forestry, those sorts of things -

**Time expired.**

**The House divided -**

**AYES 11**

Dr Broad  
Ms Butler  
Ms Dow  
Ms Haddad (Teller)  
Mr O'Byrne  
Ms O'Byrne  
Ms O'Connor  
Ms Ogilvie  
Ms Standen  
Ms White  
Dr Woodruff

**NOES 11**

Ms Archer  
Mr Barnett  
Ms Courtney  
Mr Ellis (Teller)  
Mr Ferguson  
Mr Jaensch  
Mrs Petrusma  
Mr Rockliff  
Mr Shelton  
Mr Street  
Mr Tucker

**PAIR**

Ms Houston

Mr Gutwein

**Madam SPEAKER** - The result of the division is 11 Ayes and 11 Noes. I therefore have to use a casting vote in accordance with Standing Order 167. I usually give a reason for my ruling. I do not have a problem with this motion, particularly as it is only asking the Government to investigate a jobs guarantee program. I believe it is beholden on everyone in this parliament to find as many ways as possible to get people back into work, therefore I find in favour of the Ayes.

**Motion agreed to.**



## ADJOURNMENT

### University Course Fee Changes - Impact on Students

[6.06 p.m.]

**Ms O'BYRNE** (Bass) - Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to discuss an issue that is causing a lot of concern for prospective students at university. It goes to the significant changes that are being currently considered by the Senate. As members would know, the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill seeks to decrease the funding for Commonwealth-supported places from 58 per cent to 52 per cent. That would see a 113 per cent hike to fees for some of the humanities course and a drop in the cost of courses for some including sciences, engineering and nursing.

We have had significant debate in the community around this and the University of Tasmania has, in its submission to the committee inquiry, you would have to say somewhat grudgingly provided support for that. They have done that on the basis that what comes along with this is an increase in the cap for students, which the university desperately requires because it has significant funding issues.

This debate has been held very much around funding and we know that in 2017 the University of Tasmania lost \$78 million. The University of Tasmania has had some significant economic problems and it has also had the impact of COVID-19 and the loss of international students. A rise in the cap, looking at it in absolute isolation, would seem like a good thing. The problem you have with that is there is also a disproportionately harsher impact on some students versus other students.

The university has said this is something they will support. I have had briefings from them and I appreciate the opportunity they have had to put their case to me. They have been very upfront about that, but I still think they are making that decision because it is the best deal they could get in the circumstances they are in. They are desperately in need of funding and the Government has given them an opportunity to get some additional funding to their core numbers because of the increase in the cap.

What it is not taking into consideration is the impact on students. The university says that they do not think it will have an impact on students, and I quote from their submission -

Our experience and evidence from elsewhere suggests that school leavers are largely insensitive to price due to Australia's help system for fee deferral. That appears to holding true at present for us. Data from our recent virtual Open Day and the take-up of our Schools Recommendation Program for year 12 supports this, showing no evidence that student choices for 2021 are being influenced by the imminent changes to course costs. We are seeing strong interest for 2021 from both Tasmania and the mainland for those courses which will have increased student contributions, particularly Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws.

I will come back to that in a moment because that concerns me. This is not the view that is held by other experts in this place. Professor Baltzly from the University of Tasmania who made a submission in his private capacity stated that the share of student contributions would rise under the changes, jumping from 42 per cent to 48 per cent which would add to -

... an already vast level of inter-generational injustice between older and younger Australians.

Mark Warburton, a former federal bureaucratic in education and very well respected, also gave evidence to the committee. He said that the student load at UTAS meant that he thought it could lose close to 80 per cent of student place funding compared to the national average. So there is some debate as to what kind of value we will get.

I want to talk about the view that it does not have an impact. I cannot tell you how annoyed I get at people who have money, and people who have always had money, telling people who do not have money what will and will not impact them in the decision-making that they make. I am totally over it, because unless you are one of those families for whom the decision to make a university choice has never been on the table, then you do not understand.

I am a first generation university student. It is a few years now but the economic circumstances that my family were in when we were looking at those opportunities is no different from the economic circumstances of a number of families. I have spoken to families who do not say to their children, 'you cannot go to university'. They simply do not talk about it as an option because it is huge.

In the university's submission, they said that they thought it was okay because Australia's help system for fee deferral made a difference. When you have no money, the idea of incurring a HECS debt is terrifying because a debt is a debt. The less money you have, the more likely you are to try to avoid going into debt in any circumstance, so it does change the way that people think.

I applaud the university for the offer that they made to year 12 students to get early enrolment. I watched heaps of year 12 students and saw the difference that it made to their sense of wellbeing and their mental health knowing that they had that safety net. Yes, it was a fundamentally valuable thing to do. It does not reflect the impacts that these changes will have, because the fee increases are not real yet and for those students who have had the worst year, none of us can imagine what year 12 must be like under COVID-19. They have reached out for this lifeline that the university has offered. That does not mean their families are not sitting at home wondering, 'how the hell are we going to make this work?'

If you increase the debt, then that is a significant impact because it is not only about the HECS fee that impacts your right to go to university. You have to find somewhere to live if you have to move. You have to be able to afford to be there. You are going to be looking for a job in a market where, quite frankly, there are not going to be jobs for these students. I have spoken to heaps of students who were working who have lost their jobs during COVID-19 or lost the hours that would sustain it.

I accept the university has to do what the university has to do to try to make itself viable. I appreciate the difficult position it is in, but do not for a moment presume to tell families on low income what will or not impact their decision-making when they look at their children's futures.

I do not know what the members sitting opposite feel about this, but I grew up in a low-income family and it does matter. It is really hard. I have spoken to young people who are in year 12 this year who are not sure what mum and dad will be able to do. They are so

excited that they have got that offer but many of them have no idea how they are going to pay for it.

Anything that we do that says to people, 'We are going to make it more expensive for you to get the best future', then shame on all of us.

### **Ruth Bader Ginsburg - Tribute**

[6.14 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to pay tribute to the mighty and notorious Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Like a number of, particularly female, members of this House, when I heard that Ruth Bader Ginsburg had died on 18 September, it hurt my heart and I have been thinking about it ever since. I thought the best thing I could do would be to pay tribute to that remarkable woman in this place.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was born in Brooklyn, New York, during the Great Depression, in 1933. She died on 18 September at the age of 87 and to her last breath, she fought for justice.

In Jewish tradition, those who die on the cusp of the High Holy Days are the most righteous, the ones God is most reluctant to take from this earth. Ruth Bader Ginsburg died on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year and as we know, RBG, as she was known, was most, most righteous.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States by Bill Clinton, the then president, in 1993 at the age of 60. At the time there was some commentary that she was too old to be appointed to the Supreme Court. As we know, she sat on that court for 27 years - a voice of gender equality, of justice, of fairness, a progressive who was notorious in many ways for saying - 'I dissent'. When she was asked about her tendency towards dissent later in her career, she said - 'It's my view that dissenting opinions are important opinions because in time they will become the law'.

We honour this extraordinary woman and brilliant legal mind. She was a lifetime advocate for the rights of women and between 1973 and 1976 had already argued six women's rights cases to the court she would one day sit at, and won five of them, prior to being nominated to the Supreme Court in 1993.

At just over 5 feet tall in the old metric, Bader Ginsburg defied anyone who might suggest being female and small makes you any less important or any less dangerous in the right way. She was determined that women not only be seen as equals in the eyes of the law but to be included in all levels of decision-making across different professions.

In a position that had forever in the United States been dominated by men, Ruth Bader Ginsburg embraced her femininity as a strength, wearing different styles of collar over her court robes and some fabulous jewellery as a way of expressing her personal opinions about a court ruling or an event in Congress.

Here is a great quote she gave at an appearance at Georgetown University in 2015 -

When I'm sometimes asked when will there be enough [women on the Supreme Court] and I say, 'When there are nine,' people are shocked. But there'd been nine men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that.

Ginsburg's presence on the Supreme Court reinforced the importance of diverse perspectives in judicial decision making and particularly the perspectives of women. She was a fierce champion for gender equality. She will always be remembered for her advocacy, for women's rights, abortion rights - once quoted as saying -

The basic thing is that the government has no business making that choice for a woman.

Hear, hear. We do not want to live in a country that resembles *The Handmaid's Tale*.

She never shied away from taking progressive stances, no matter how controversial the subject might be and she said -

Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.

While Ruth Bader Ginsburg is remembered as an outstanding jurist, her legacy transcends the legal profession. As a female Jewish lawyer, she paved the way for women across all professions to be treated more fairly and not just in the United States, Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legacy wrapped around the world. I am certain that all over the world people are grieving the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. They are remembering her legacy and we will truly miss her. As it was said in a recent article following her death -

As we celebrate her life and the magnitude of what she accomplished for us, we also feel the enormity of the work still before us.

As she told her granddaughter on her deathbed, her greatest dying wish was that -

The Supreme Court vacancy caused by her death would not be filled until a new president was sworn in.

That is certainly a wish I am sure is shared by thoughtful, compassionate people in the United States who would have to live with the legacy of a conservative judge replacing Ruth Bader Ginsburg, for many generations.

I am so grateful as a woman, as a law maker, for Ruth Bader Ginsburg's life's work. I am grateful for her pioneering example, for the inspiration she gave to women and girls the world over, for her courage, for her tenacity and for her heart. Vale one of the great women of the last century and this century, Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

### **National Dogs in Politics Day**

[6.20 p.m.]

**Mr ROCKLIFF** (Braddon - Minister for Education and Training) - Madam Speaker, I endorse the comments of the previous speaker. Having spent time over the weekend to read up on the legacy of RBG, as they referred to her, I endorse those comments.

Madam Speaker, we have a guest which is appropriate for the topic I am going to raise tonight. In fact last night Ms Ogilvie raised the issue of Dogs in Politics Day. I also rise tonight to acknowledge the great work of dogs and their valuable contribution to the lives of people and acknowledge the presence of our good friend within the Chamber as well, which no doubt Ms Standen will speak about.

Few may know the names of Buddy Morrison, Toto Albanese, Max Brandt, Jo Jo Turnbull, Reuben Gillard or even Sunny Obama, but these are people's best friends and have probably been through just as much of the good and bad of politics as their well-known political guardians.

While many in the Chamber may have received canine tags at one time or another, today is actually National Dogs in Politics Day. The day is recognised in many other countries but it is growing here in Australia and it is important to recognise what our four-legged canine friends do for us.

I was not able to bring my dog Molly into the Chamber today, our family's much loved cavoodle, but our office got behind the day and Frankie, GV, Angus and Charlie have all made the effort to come to work today. I know the Attorney-General, Ms Archer's office, has also welcomed Minnie to work. We share the same floor, Ms Archer and I, so level 10 has certainly enjoyed the opportunity of Dogs in Politics Day.

More broadly with my Education hat on, dogs in schools have proven benefits for students, with research showing a broad range of positive impacts, including reduced anxiety, increased confidence and self-esteem and increased responsibility and respect for others. There are currently many schools around Tasmania that have school dogs. Harper at East Tamar Primary School, for example, is busy all day supporting students through a range of specific programs, even helping them with their reading, I understand. I have had the good fortune to meet many dogs, including Clover the groodle at Cambridge Primary School, and I have witnessed firsthand the remarkable effects that they have on their students.

With my Mental Health hat on today it is widely acknowledged that people with pets are less likely to suffer from depression and studies demonstrate that consumers of mental health services often show changes in behaviour after interacting with dogs and possibly experiencing mutual affection for the very first time.

For many years now some dogs known as assistance, service, emotional support or therapy dogs undergo special training to be able to assist people with mental, physical or intellectual challenges. In mental health settings these dogs are known as psychiatric assistance dogs or PADs, and having a psychiatric assistance dog helps an individual connect with others by enabling social outings and ensuring regular exercise, both of which are protective factors when combatting depression and isolation.

Thank you to all the dogs that provide unconditional comfort and assistance to us humans and the wonderful work also of our police dogs, our biosecurity dogs and our guide dogs. They certainly are more than our best friends.

**Rosny Hill Friends Network -  
Hunter Developments Application for Rosny Hill Reserve**

[6.24 p.m.]

**Dr WOODRUFF** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to speak on behalf of the Rosny Hill Friends Network who are currently appealing the Hunter Developments application to build an enormous private hotel right in the middle of the Rosny Hill nature recreation area, beautiful place that it is.

Only through a successful community fundraising campaign can they afford the proponent's repeated adjournments and their fight against this development will continue. The Nature Conservation Act is clear that Rosny Hill Reserve is for public recreation and education consistent with conserving the natural and cultural values of the area of land. It is not a private hotel.

It is those natural values I want to speak about today and in particular *Thelymitra bracteata*, or the leafy sun orchid, which makes Rosny Hill its own special home. It is called the leafy sun orchid because it only flowers during hot weather and particularly likes sunny hilltops like Rosny Hill. That orchid reproduces from seed in association with mycorrhizal fungi and it has a very complex symbiotic relationship. It is a lovely blue orchid classed as endangered under Threatened Species Act. DPIPWE's 2010 Tasmania Threatened Species Listing Statement records Rosny Hill as the only known population in the state. It had approximately 60 mature plants in 2010 but six years later in 2016, a survey revised that number down to just 30 individual plants. It is a glorious orchid and is desperately endangered and Rosny Hill is its special place.

Threats to that orchid that were identified to DPIPWE include land-clearing, inappropriate disturbance, weeds and climate change. DPIPWE recommended that the leafy sun orchid must be considered in any proposals to further develop that site. The Clarence City mayor and Hunter Developments will tell you that building a giant hotel on top of the leafy sun orchid's patch is not a problem and that the additional pedestrian traffic and movements of people can be managed, but that does not pass the pub test.

It turns out that the Threatened Species Unit in DPIPWE is still advocating for the leafy sun orchid, and good on them, despite the continued cuts to their resources. We have a right to information disclosure that was sent to me of a series of emails on 10 October last year that make it very clear what the Threatened Species Unit's senior conservation management officer thinks about how inappropriate this development really is.

The senior conservation officer is extremely critical of the greenwashing of the proponents reports and is worried about the orchid's future should the hotel go ahead. The RTI reveals, for example, claims by Hunter Developments that the proposal will 'replenish threatened vegetation' were dismissed by the officer as being unjustified. The officer said he was 'doubtful that the leafy sun orchid can be adequately conserved in the long term under this proposal'. He also said that because the proposal would attract more people and cars to the site, he expects 'more trampling and physical disturbance to native vegetation within the vicinity of car parks and other infrastructure'. The officer also said in the RTI that after reading Hunter Developments' landscape design plans and planning report he had -

... serious concerns about the ability of the proposal to appropriately protect and manage the natural values within the nature recreation area, particularly the leafy sun orchid *Thelymitra bracteata*.

The proponent's claims that the orchids could be translocated to another area and therefore, in their words, are protected, were also met with scepticism by the Threatened Species Unit management officer, who questioned that as being implausible. Indeed, it would be an Australian first because of the complex mycorrhizal associations between the fungi and other plants which means that that orchid has never been successfully relocated in its history.

Another email from the senior conservation officer was about whether the officer had read the most recent Hunter Developments assessment of the impact on the orchid that was done by North Baker Ecosystem Services and asked whether the information was up-to-date. The conservation management officer said -

Yes, in light of that, my comments remain. The information about the management of the orchid is pretty scant! Certainly, no improvements in their security'. Has Mr Jaensch seen the reports from his department? Or is this another case of a Liberal minister shutting down experts in the department in the pursuit of the development agenda? Is he keeping himself clear of the expert advice that has been made available in his department because he must ask them on behalf of the community what the experts say? They will tell them that the hotel development should never have been allowed to go ahead because the orchid relies on the sunny Rosny Hill to survive, not to mention the huge lists of other community concerns around that development.

Consent should never have been given for that development application to be lodged, to build a private hotel on Crown land in a nature recreation area with one of the most beautiful views in Hobart. The minister has to refuse to give authority for this proposal to go ahead. He should have done his job in the first place and not let the proposal go as far as it has. He now has a whole community fund-raising in its own time and with its own resources to take this fight through the Resource Management Planning and Appeal Tribunal.

It is a disgrace that the minister has continued to sit on the fence and not clarified whether or not that giant hotel would protect the orchid. It is impossible to do so. We want the minister to come out on behalf of the community, put them out of the pain and effort they are going to and call it for what it is, a proposal that should never have existed.

### **North West Regional Hospital - Hydrotherapy Pool**

[6.32 p.m.]

**Ms DOW** (Braddon) - Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to speak about the North West Regional Hospital hydrotherapy pool which has been closed now indefinitely for a significant period of time. A number of community members who regularly use this valuable service have raised their concerns about whether it will open again. My understanding is that it was closed in response to COVID-19 but I also understand that a number of community pools are open again.

On 23 July I wrote to the Minister for Health on this issue following representations from a number of my constituents. I have not received a response. I would appreciate, as would those constituents who have raised their concerns with me, the minister providing a response on when the facility will be open again.

I have even had people suggest to me that it is being used as a storage facility. That is concerning as it is a valuable community asset which is used by people from across the coast. It is also used in the provision of physiotherapy services and pre-operative physiotherapy, which gives people a better health status and better mobility prior to reconstructive surgery such as hip replacements and knee replacements. It is a highly valued service. I and the community would appreciate a response from the minister on when it will be made available to community members to use again.

### **Guide Dogs Tasmania**

[6.33 p.m.]

**Ms STANDEN** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I introduce Grady, who is a very special guest to the Chamber today. Sit, Grady, drop.

Today is Dogs in Politics Day, a tradition that started in the United States in 1952 when Richard Nixon's speech to the largest television audience of the time apparently changed the course of a presidential election. For the past six months now, my family has had the very good fortune to be boarding a guide dog in training. He started with us as a two-and-a-half-year-old and now a three-year-old black labrador named, Grady. We were approached to help out in March with Grady's trainer away and the resources of Guide Dogs Tasmania incredibly stretched. We were quick to accept the call up to volunteer as boarders.

Initially, my partner was doing the lion's share of the caring, walking him and being with him at work, feeding him, grooming him, but he has brought joy to all of us, especially after we lost our own dear old lab, Daisy, about a year ago. The change in dynamic is terrific, although I might have to ask our labrador, Buddy, whether he agrees. Buddy is a withdrawn Guide Dog and he is eight years old. Buddy and Grady usually get along like a house on fire but every now and then the exuberant three-year old is a bit much.

Over the months we began to step up Grady's training and for the past few months he has been going to Guide Dogs to step up his formal training. It became clear that Grady's training in harness was not going well. He lacked the motivation to become a guide dog and complete his training but his trainer identified that his wonderfully affectionate and endlessly patient temperament makes him perfect to be redirected to become a therapy dog, to work with children with disability.

Here is a picture of Grady dressed up in a shirt and socks so he can become accustomed to being dressed like this so children can practise their fine motor skills and life skills.

When he is not in work-mode he is an affectionate goofball, bounding around just like any other three-year old lab. When he is in work mode he is so calm and confident.

My partner has told me of the positive change in mood when Grady is in her office. Her workplace has been dealing with a COVID-19 response and it has been stressful at times, but



her colleagues are grateful to have him around just being there. I can similarly attest to Grady's magic, whether in parliament on a couple of occasions, in my office, at our son's soccer matches or generally out and about in the community.

My partner also talked about the woman she has walked past every day on the way to work for two years who has never once cracked a smile until one day soon after Grady came to board with us. When Grady was walking along with her, the woman even said, 'Good morning' for the first time.

My family talk about the kids at our son's school who are so happy to see Grady in the playground in the afternoon and how the older kids confidently tell the younger ones to let the dog concentrate because he is wearing his working coat and you cannot pat a working guide dog.

We have been connected with Guide Dogs Tasmania for more than a decade, but due to a range of circumstances this is the first time we have boarded in quite a while. I recently assisted Guide Dogs Tasmania to overcome an impasse that had emerged in April to bring two new pups into the state from South Australia where they are specially trained and bred, accompanied by their handlers.

Last weekend, two handlers were granted exemptions as essential workers to fly to Adelaide to collect the pups, generously volunteering their time and covering their costs. I really want to thank the State Controller's Office and his staff for assisting in overcoming that hurdle.

Having Grady in our home reminds me of the fantastic work of Guide Dogs Tasmania, not only the dogs serving blind and vision-impaired Tasmanians as guide dogs, or other members of our community as assistance and therapy dogs, but the work that goes into training them.

I commend Kim Ryan, program manager, Guide Dog Services, for her amazing expertise as a guide dog trainer in this state. I commend all the dedicated, highly experienced and professional staff and the devoted volunteer force who genuinely love and care for these beautiful dogs and try to give them the best chance of succeeding.

Next month, we are crossing our fingers that he will graduate along with his class recruits. The plan is that he will be working with an occupational therapist to engage children in their sessions, helping hundreds not just one person. A pretty special job for Grady lies ahead.

Despite losing our Daisy last year, I am not deeply sad although I am a tiny bit sad at the thought of giving Grady back in the coming weeks. I know he will bring companionship, mobility and independence to someone else who needs him much more than we do. We are so thrilled and grateful to have been a small part of his big journey.

I encourage anyone who has a love of dogs and the capacity to help to get in touch with Guide Dogs Tasmania and find out about volunteer puppy raising or boarding. Each guide dog costs \$60 000 to raise, train and place with a human who needs them. It takes a whole lot of people to do it. It is so worthwhile and people smile at you when you are doing it.

Remembering that guide dogs can go anywhere, even if this is the first time a guide dog has entered this House I am sure it will not be the last time.

Nonetheless, thank you, Madam Speaker and Clerk of the House for allowing me to bring Grady into this place to help us all celebrate the work of Guide Dogs Tasmania and Dogs in Politics Day.

**Guide Dogs Tasmania  
Ruth Bader Ginsburg - Tribute  
Richie Porte - Podium Finish in the Tour de France**

[6.40 p.m.]

**Mr STREET** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I am the least dog person I know, but I have to say I have run into Ms Standen outside the Chamber with Grady on a couple of occasions and the temptation to pat Grady is almost something that cannot be denied. I noticed Ms O'Connor walk over to meet Grady as well and the first thing she wanted to do was reach out and pat her.

I thank Guide Dogs Tasmania and any other organisation that works with assistance animals for the service they provide to the community and also say I admire Ms Standen and her family greatly for taking Grady in and providing a home for her. I imagine that whilst you might not be sad right at the minute at the thought of giving Grady back, when it happens it is going to be a difficult day, so I admire you greatly for doing that.

I did not know that Ms O'Connor, the Leader of the Greens, was going to pay tribute to Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the adjournment. I would also like to say that I greatly admired Ruth Bader Ginsburg. You do not have to agree with everything somebody says or thinks to admire them. She proved that herself with her relationship with Justice Scalia on the Supreme Court, who could not be further from her way of thinking with regard to the political spectrum. They both admired one another and their intellect. That country needs people of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's intellect right now at all ends of the political spectrum.

Like so many did last night on the adjournment, I also want to pay tribute to Richie Porte. We are probably guilty in Australia of talking up our sportspeople too much and whilst Richie's third place in the Tour de France was terrific and something I have enjoyed over the last three weeks - I am starting to enjoy my sleep a bit more since it finished as well - what strikes me about Richie is the way he has conducted himself across his entire career.

Professional cycling is a very strange sport if you know anything about it, in that it takes a team performance to win the Tour de France but at the end of it, only one individual stands up on the podium. It says everything about Richie that after the end of this current season he is going back to not being a team leader but what they refer to as a 'super domestique', somebody who does all the hard work for a team leader. He said he is doing that basically because he does not like the pressure or the profile that comes with being the tour leader. He just loves cycling.

There is a young rider who is going to be very fortunate next year to be leading a team with Richie doing everything he can to help them achieve their goals. I pay tribute to Richie not just because he finished third in the Tour de France but because at all times anybody who

followed Richie's career knows he has conducted himself with absolute integrity and is somebody we should all as Tasmanians be incredibly proud to have had on the global stage representing us.

My sincere hope is that when our borders eventually open and Richie gets a break in his schedule to come home to Tasmania, as a population and as a parliament we are able to do something to recognise the role Richie has played in putting Tasmania on the map globally for the last decade.

### **John Mitchell - Tribute**

[6.44 p.m.]

**Mr SHELTON** (Lyons - Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management) - Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to pay tribute and talk about a person I presented an award to last Friday evening. The award was the Northern Tasmanian Broadcasters Pty Ltd, 7AD and CFM award for Volunteer Emergency Services. It was won by a remarkable person called John Mitchell, a member of the Kentish State Emergency Service.

John has been a member of the Kentish SES for 31 years. He is a cabinet-maker by trade, then he got into panel beating and he has the RACT truck there. He is now retired and for people's interest, he is putting together and working on a hot rod that is there at the moment.

His volunteering with the Kentish SES has come about by the natural volunteering ethos that many country people have, but John's other trade was that he started up a panel beating shop and had the RACT vehicle and supplied the SES for vehicle recovery all the old wrecks he gathered up around the place. The SES would practise on these for their road crash rescue, cutting up these old vehicles and so on. John donated them and his time and effort in getting them. We all know that the SES is called out in the most horrific of circumstances. You only call the SES when you have floods or a wicked night that has put a tree through your roof or whatever. They never go out in good conditions. They always have to deal with those horrific conditions.

John and the Kentish SES basically cover from Cradle Mountain down to Latrobe and around the Sheffield area. They have done a fantastic job over the years. I was talking to John and he said he has loved every minute of it, the camaraderie that comes from the group and the work and effort that goes into the group in order to look after their community.

As we know, the funding for the SES has been talked about in recent times. Council supplied them with a vehicle, a new truck, but it had no back on it and so forth. His panel-beating expertise assisted in the group putting together and basically establishing the whole back of the SES vehicle that they use for their road crash rescues, flooding and everything else they do.

John has put in 31 years of volunteering in the Sheffield and Kentish area - a fantastic job and well done. These things would not happen without the sponsorship of the radio stations there. Sylvia Sayers, the general manager of Northern Tasmania Broadcasting was there and I thank them very much for what they do in supporting our local volunteer groups. Without that, we would not have the recognition. Most of the people who were there were members of Ambulance Tasmania because the Kentish SES is co-located with the ambulance in that area.

We had a number of people around us and they were basically all volunteers. They are fantastic people of the Sheffield community who are there to assist their community. All I can say is congratulations to everybody involved, and well done to John Mitchell.

**The House adjourned at 6.48 p.m.**

