

Minister for Primary Industries and Water
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC
Chair
Legislative Council Select Committee
Estimates B
By email: Julie.Thompson@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Ms Armitage

Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2026

I refer to my appearance before the Legislative Council Select Committee on 1 June 2026 and provide responses to the questions taken on notice as follows:

**DIVISION 8 – DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
TASMANIA**

Overview

- Please provide details of any IT or Digitisation projects in progress or in development within your portfolio areas in NRE, including details on whether the project is being delivered on time and on budget.***

I am advised the following IT & Digitisation Projects are in progress or development within the Primary Industries and Water portfolio:

Agriculture and Water

Key Initiatives / Projects	Delivery Status
Water Information Management System (WIMS) Replacement. \$1,274,000.	Proof of concept phase completed. Design & development of new platform underway. The project is being delivered on time and on budget.
Public Land Hunting Portal: \$50,000 Online deer hunting booking and authorisations portal to access approved public reserves.	Currently in testing phase. The project is being delivered on time and on budget.

<p>Take Returns Portal: up to \$70,000 Take Returns Portal – digital permits & hunting returns system.</p>	<p>Currently in development. Scheduled for completion in the 2026-27 financial year. Expected to be delivered on time and on budget.</p>
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Biosecurity Tasmania

Key Initiatives / Projects	Delivery Status
<p>Digital Transformation Program focussed on digitisation of biosecurity processes and traceability. Budget: \$5,420,000</p>	<p>Of the 11 digital projects being delivered across Biosecurity Tasmania in 2025-26, six have been completed. These include the TrapBase Fruit Fly and Codling Moth surveillance enhancements, the Avian Influenza Emergency Management Platform, Cruise Ships Inspection System Phase 2, BeeTAS Phase 2, and the Multiple Cat Permit Application Portal.</p> <p>A further three projects, the Invasive Species Case Management System, Online PIC Application and Renewal Platform, and Equine Registration and Traceability System proof-of-concept, are progressing as planned and are expected to be delivered by 1 July 2026 or remain on schedule.</p> <p>The remaining two projects, the Electronic Notice of Intent to Import (eNOI) and the Primary Produce Food Safety System, have experienced delays associated with contractor procurement, system integration requirements, and the need to prioritise resources across a number of concurrent digital transformation initiatives. These projects remain in development.</p> <p>All completed projects have been delivered within approved budgets.</p> <p>The projects currently in development remain within their approved funding allocations.</p>

Marine Resources

Key Initiatives / Projects	Delivery Status
<p>Development of a Fisheries digital transition roadmap and tools to enable transactional efficiency for wild catch fisheries in partnership with Seafood Industry Tasmania. Budget \$200,000 allocated in the 2026-27 financial year.</p>	<p>Yet to commence.</p>

Output Group 2 – Primary Industries and Water
Output 2.2 – Supervision of Poppy and Hemp Crops

1. Late last year the report from the three-year Epping Forest Industrial Hemp Variety Trials came out – with 80 per cent of Australia’s hemp seed coming from Tasmania. What is the scope to expand on this into international markets?

The Tasmanian Government supported the AgriFutures Australia Industrial Hemp Variety Trials with funding of \$150,000 over three years from 2021-2024.

The Tasmanian trial was supported by the Tasmanian Hemp Association and the results of the trial will assist Tasmanian hemp growers to make decisions about the most suitable varieties for Tasmanian conditions.

Global demand for hemp seed is driven by a range of market factors including supply, cost and quality.

I am advised that the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) understands that companies, such as Midlands Seeds, are looking to develop opportunities for Tasmania’s hemp industry to become a counter-season supplier into northern hemisphere markets.

Output 2.3 – Water Resources Management

1. The NRE Tas Annual Report 2024-25 details programs to support producers to help manage, prepare for and navigate drought and climate change, which have included delivering resilience funding, emergency grants, water infrastructure rebates and mentoring support. Please provide a breakdown of the amount of funding provided for the 2024-25 year as well as that expected to be provided for the 2025-26 year for each of those areas:

- a) **Resilience funding distributed**
- b) **Emergency grants**
- c) **Water infrastructure rebates**
- d) **Mentoring support.**

I am advised of the following in relation to programs to support producers to help manage, prepare for and navigate drought and climate change during the requested timeframe:

Initiative	2024-25	2025-26
Farm Business Resilience Phase 1. Delivered by DairyTas and RM Consulting Group <i>Funding Source State Budget 2021-22 Rural Business Resilience Package</i> <i>* Note: State funds only – joint program with Australian Government</i>	\$600,000*	\$631,000*

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<p>Farm Business Resilience Phase 2.</p> <p>Delivered by Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA)</p> <p><i>Funding Source State Budget 2024-25 Drought Resilience Package in partnership with Rural Business</i></p> <p><i>* Note: State funds only – joint program with Australian Government</i></p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>\$750,000*</p>
<p>King and Flinders Island Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme.</p> <p>A contestable grant payment program targeted to Primary Producers.</p> <p><i>Funding Source 2024-25 State Budget Drought Support - Bass Strait Islands Water Resilience Program</i></p>	<p>\$598,662</p>	<p>\$164,804</p>
<p>Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)</p> <p>Delivered by Rural Business Tasmania</p> <p><i>Funding Source: 2024-25 State Budget Rural Financial Counselling Service.</i></p> <p><i>* Note: State funds only – joint program with Australian Government</i></p>	<p>\$133,000*</p>	<p>\$133,000*</p>
<p>Rural Business Tasmania Advisory Service Support and Farm Mentorship Program</p> <p>Delivered by Rural Business Tasmania.</p> <p><i>Funding Source: 2024-25 State Budget Rural Business Tasmania</i></p>	<p>\$99,000</p>	<p>\$98,000</p>
<p>Emergency Smoke Taint Testing Program</p> <p>Delivered by Wine Tasmania</p>	<p>\$0</p>	<p>\$50,000</p>

<p><i>Funding Source: 2021-22 State Budget Wine Tasmania</i></p>		
<p>Rural Relief Fund</p> <p>Administered by Rural Business Tasmania. Part of the 2024 Drought Response</p> <p><i>Funding source: Department of State Growth</i></p>	<p>\$890,000***</p>	
<p>Drought Response Coordinator</p> <p>Delivered by Tas Farmers</p> <p>\$171,000 initiative. \$118,000 allocation of funding to support Community Drought and Preparedness Coordinator</p> <p><i>Funding Source: NRE Tas with additional \$53,000 from TAS Farm Innovation Hub</i></p>	<p>\$118,000</p>	
<p>Drought Advisory Support Program</p> <p>Delivered by Rural Business Tasmania</p> <p><i>Funding Source: 2024-25 State Budget Drought Support Rural Business Tasmania (through Department of State Growth)</i></p>	<p>\$78,750</p>	<p>\$96,250</p>
<p>Drought Support Counselling Outreach Program</p> <p>Delivered by Rural Alive and Well</p> <p><i>Funding Source: 2024-25 State Budget: Drought Support – Rural Alive and well – administered by Dept Health.</i></p>	<p>\$200,000</p>	
<p>Drought Resilience Coordinators Program</p> <p>Delivered by Tas Farmers</p>	<p>\$ 150,000</p>	

<p>\$250,000 initiative.</p> <p><i>Funding source: 2024-25 Drought Support \$150,000 allocation of funding to support Community Drought and Preparedness Coordinator with additional \$100,000 from TAS Farm Innovation Hub</i></p>		
<p>Primary Producers Seasonal Conditions Scheme Extension</p> <p>Primary Producer recovery grants to support drought response on King and Flinders Islands and mainland Tasmania</p> <p><i>Funding source: 2024-25 State Budget Primary Producers Seasonal Conditions Scheme Extension (delivered through Department of State Growth)</i></p>	<p>\$3,300,000**</p>	
<p>Natural Disaster Primary Producer Recovery Grant Program</p> <p>Primary Producer Emergency Response Grant</p> <p>Support for the Tasmanian Flood and Severe Weather Event – August/September 2024</p> <p><i>Funding Source: National Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)</i></p>	<p>\$940,846.45***</p>	<p>\$557,855.3</p>

** Actual amount expended for Grants over the whole grant program from March 2024 until it closed in August 2024 through Department of State Growth = \$4,087,500

*** Indicates the costs incurred by the State – with Tasmania to be reimbursed consistent with DRFA cost sharing agreements

- 2. Please provide detail on all scientific assessments, reviews, studies that will be undertaken to inform the decision-making on the GSEIS proposed project to extract nearly 40,000ML/yr of water from the River Derwent System at Meadowbank Dam, including who will be responsible for conducting and funding each assessment/review/ study, and the timeline within which they will be conducted and completed.**

The Greater South East Irrigation Scheme (GSEIS) will integrate three existing schemes in the south east, and improve reliability of water supply for current and new

irrigators. It will also transition farmers off drinking water in two of the three existing schemes which are currently reliant on TasWater supply.

The proposed \$301.2 million Scheme is to be jointly funded by the Australian Government (\$150.6 million), the Tasmanian Government (\$75.3 million) and local irrigators (\$75.3 million).

Tasmanian Irrigation has an in-principle agreement to purchase water from Hydro Tasmania from Lake Meadowbank to supply water for the Scheme that will be delivered via underground pipes to irrigators in the south east when commissioned.

The annual volume for GSEIS irrigation at full capacity is approximately 1.3 per cent of the historic average total annual inflows to Meadowbank Dam. The maximum volume of water the GSEIS will use is 1.1 per cent of the total Meadowbank Dam outflow during the winter irrigation season and 1.6 per cent in the summer irrigation season.

Hydro Tasmania has confirmed that the GSEIS, once commissioned, will not affect its ability to meet its existing downstream summer and winter flow commitments in the Derwent River.

Tasmanian Irrigation has sought offers from specialist environmental firms to prepare the documentation for assessment of the project under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC). It is expected the project will undergo EPBC assessment in late 2026 or in early 2027.

In addition to assessment under Commonwealth and State environmental legislation, the GSEIS will be subject to planning approvals under the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*, as well as requirements relating to biodiversity, cultural heritage and land management. This includes controls such as threatened species permitting, reserve management processes where applicable, and strict biosecurity and weed hygiene measures during construction and operation.

Once the GSEIS is commissioned, further environmental protection is achieved through Farm Water Access Plans, which guide the sustainable application of irrigation water on farming properties. These are property specific management plans that must be in place before an irrigator can receive water from Tasmanian Irrigation.

I am advised that Tasmanian Irrigation expects there will be a full public consultation process as part of the EPBC assessment, and Tasmanian Irrigation will continue to engage appropriately with all project stakeholders.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G Pearce', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

Hon Gavin Pearce MP
Minister for Primary Industries and Water