



**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF DEBATES**

**Thursday 25 March 2021**

**REVISED EDITION**



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

**JUSTICE MISCELLANEOUS (COMMISSIONS OF  
INQUIRY) BILL 2021 (No. 6)**

**Third Reading**

**Bill read the third time.**

**WORKPLACES (PROTECTION FROM PROTESTERS)  
AMENDMENT BILL 2019 (No. 54)**

**Second Reading**

**Continued from 24 March 2021 (page 56).**

[11.05 a.m.]

**Ms RATTRAY** (McIntyre) - Mr President, I mentioned when I moved the adjournment last night that I might well think of something else to add. I do have a very brief offering. I will not take up too much time of the House and the members.

Just as I concluded my contribution I received an email from Danny Carney. I do not know if Danny Carney is a Tasmanian citizen, but I assume he is and I want to thank him for contacting me. I replied to Mr Carney earlier today. He asked whether I have any evidence to back up my statement about protesters coming into Tasmania - that they are paid to come to our state and perhaps use funds they are provided with to protest in and around the state for various things. I have provided Mr Carney with some names I was able to source overnight. I was going to talk about those, but I have decided that might not be terribly advantageous, because I do not want to be in conflict with anyone. It is not what I am about and it is not my nature. I want to work proactively with people. I made an offer yesterday to meet with anyone who wants to understand my position and, I believe, particularly the position of the majority of people I represent. I will not go down that path.

During my contribution I urged members to vote the bill into the Committee stage and as a House work together to achieve what I believe is in-principle support for the same outcome we are all looking for - that people can legally protest and not impede workplaces. I do not believe it is fair and just that some protesters can impede, harass, humiliate, put pressure on people and do all those things we heard about and spoke of yesterday.

Again, if we support this bill into the Committee stage and allow the House to do what I believe it does best - deliver robust, fair and workable legislation for all - it will be a very good outcome for all Tasmanians.

I support the bill into the Committee stage.

[11.08 a.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Mr President, I am quite thankful to other members who have spoken. It has been really interesting to listen to contributions; I have noted that so far, no non-Government members of any stripe have been able to stand up and give unqualified support to this bill. I thank members for the points they have already raised. I will try not to go over those things too repetitively, but pick out matters I felt were important to reiterate and add to the total of the debate.

Quite frankly, I am disgusted to have to participate in this rank exercise of cynical self-serving political theatre from the Government. I am appalled the Government has chosen to play-act at policymaking and legislation on a topic that has such serious consequences for the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanian workers and the success of Tasmanian businesses. In reality, the Government is clearly indulging in an exercise in petty political pointscore for electoral advantage at the blatant expense of hardworking, vulnerable Tasmanian workers whose interests they falsely claim to be serving.

This matter could have been advanced and settled had the Government chosen to put well-conceived, well-drafted, fit-for-purpose and constitutionally sound legislation in place seven years ago.

The Government clearly put ideological virtue signalling and cheap political pointscore ahead of the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanians. Instead, we have seen seven years of uncertainty, of Tasmanian workers and businesses left in the lurch with no additional protections or legal support for their safety or wellbeing - seven years in which the Tasmanian Government has wasted the time and good work of public servants, and wasted considerable public money defending a law in the High Court of Australia that was so bad it was described by one of the Justices as Pythonesque.

We have heard from industry bodies and representatives who spoke passionately about the devastating impact that some types of protest action have had on Tasmanian workers and businesses, and I feel for those Tasmanians. Hearing emotional stories from people personally impacted by threatening and violent protest actions is heartbreaking. These people have clearly been traumatised by their experiences, and they just want those kinds of protests to stop. They are not necessarily looking for more effective responses as they say it is often too late - by the time the police arrive, the damage has already been done and the trauma has been caused. They want a greater deterrent effect for it not to happen in the first place.

I particularly feel for them because this Government has not in good faith put their interests ahead of its own political ends. There are industry bodies that genuinely want the best for their members and workers. They have been rolled out as cheerleaders by the Government for this piece of legislation, that on all indications will not achieve the specific outcomes those core Tasmanian people wish to see. They want to see an end to extreme protest actions, but this legislation remains so questionable it may well face the same fate as its predecessor and be struck down - leaving them in the lurch once again.

Most of us will sympathise with people and businesses experiencing trauma from protest action in their workplaces, and businesses whose lawful business activities are being disrupted. We recognise our laws should protect the rights of people undertaking lawful business

activities. At the same time, most of us will also express support for the important principle of the right, in a healthy democracy, for people to engage in protest activity.

We also recognise the need to protect and ensure this right in our laws. We recognise that our complex task is to balance a suite of rights in an appropriate manner. This bill does not do that. It is broad; it lacks clarity and sufficient balancing provisions. We have to remember this bill is not simply about one form of protest or one protest organisation - as much as the Government might like to highlight one kind for its own political purposes. Extreme protests involving violence and threats are causing harm that needs to be addressed.

That does not excuse the Government for putting forward a bill that goes much further than that particular form of protest action, and has much broader implications for other nonviolent protest actions - which are the vast majority of protest actions. This bill has implications for all of us here - our families, our workmates, our community members. It is important to remember that we cannot conveniently divide people into two camps: workers on the one side and protesters on the other. It is politically convenient to divide people into us and them, to pitch people against each other, but I suggest many of us here have engaged in various forms of protest, and may well engage in such activities in the future.

Protest is a normal and healthy part of a liberal democracy. It is essential. It is the only way we have seen progress in a range of important issues that affect our lives. Without protest action occurring in the past, I literally would not be standing in this place today. Protest is a valid mechanism by which people who do not hold power or do not have ready access to participation in decision-making can make their voice heard. Protesters are people - citizens - who care passionately about an issue on which they want to see positive change. They are unable to access or influence the decision-making on that issue through formal structures so they engage in action to be seen and heard and to express their view on what needs to change.

In many cases protest is a last resort for citizens who care passionately about an issue and have not successfully been able to access, participate and be heard through the formal decision-making processes such as parliament or the political system. The vast majority of people who engage in protest action are regular citizens who care passionately about a better outcome for their community. They protest because they feel an urgent sense of civic duty to take action to see that better outcome realised. Even the tiny cohort of protesters who engage in extreme protest activity, and who may be characterised by some as 'ratbags' who are just trying to be disruptive - even those protesters are motivated by an urgent sense that the wellbeing of our community, our state, our planet requires change to be made. When citizens feel the need to protest, it points to other avenues for civil discourse being broken or too limited. An escalation of an extreme form of protest points to a serious break in other avenues for civil discourse and influence.

Mr President, some have noted an increase in extreme protest action here in recent years. I put it to you that protest does not happen in a vacuum. It occurs within and is a product of the social and political environment. Any escalation in protest action can be linked to what is occurring in the social and political environment around it.

Some members have spoken about the previous efforts of discussion and negotiation that went into the Tasmanian Forest Agreement. That process and that agreement made a change to the social and political environment that resulted, at the time, in a de-escalation of protest action. Members have talked about their disappointment and frustration that efforts around the

TFA are being lost, and about the resultant escalation of protest action and the very real and negative impact some of the extreme forms of that protest action are having on our state.

I remind members that this Liberal Government took the disruptive and damaging action of ripping up the TFA. This parliament as a whole supported that action and passed legislation to facilitate the end of the TFA. Members in this Chamber voted to support the legislation that brought about its end -

**Mr Valentine** - Some did.

**Ms WEBB** - Indeed. Actions and decisions have consequences. Votes in this place have consequences. Discarding the efforts on all sides that went into the TFA overtly changed the social and political environment on issues related to forestry in this state and provoked an escalation of protest activity.

Let me be very clear: in saying this I am not endorsing any particular instance of protest action, especially violent or threatening protest action. I am merely highlighting that protest does not happen in a vacuum, therefore if you want to look at effective ways to address extreme protest action, we have seen clear evidence in this state that bringing people together to discuss and negotiate, bringing all voices into the decision-making process, is effective. We are also seeing evidence in this state that threatening a crackdown on extreme protests by discarding discussion and negotiation efforts and empowering our legal system to broadly squash protest action is not effective. It creates an escalation, not a de-escalation.

This parliament has the power to affect the social and political environment. It has done so in recent years to both positive and negative effect through its legislative function. We are faced with that opportunity again here today. Evidence tells us that passing this bill will have an ultimately negative effect in exacerbating extreme protest action - the exact opposite outcome that stakeholders in our community who need us to act have pleaded with us to deliver.

It brings us back to the issue of balance. The balance that must be found between the value of dissent and protest, against the value of public order and safety and undertaking lawful business. Our job is to ensure the Government is doing its job to balance these two roles - protecting business and protecting civil rights. There are legitimate concerns that this bill does not achieve this aim. The Government has made election commitments and says this bill is to deal with workplace invasion-style protests. That was the election commitment, but the bill goes far beyond that scope.

The Government has not simply toughened fines and jail terms for current trespass and property crimes; it has created new offences. The Government says this law should protect people undertaking lawful activity; but it has elevated this above the even more fundamental principles of civil liberties and a healthy liberal democracy. It has the balance wrong. This bill ignores laws already in place that provide such protections, which may have been strengthened and extended to serve the intention here.

We have had sufficient concerns raised. All members have spoken of those, which gives us pause on the lack of balance in this bill. We have heard legal experts, including the Law Society of Tasmania, express significant reservations about the broad nature of this bill and the likelihood of it capturing benign protesting behaviour. We have heard from many expert

stakeholders that the laws we currently have are adequate to respond and could possibly be strengthened in their current form to give effect to the purported intent of this bill.

We have heard about the potential impact on the police force, due to the lack of clarity in the bill, and the weight of discretion that puts on them. It has been put to us that the amendments in this bill only compound the confused nature of the original act.

We heard that workers and businesses affected by more extreme protest actions - sometimes involving threats and violence - want those protests to stop. They recognise that by the time there is a response from the police under current laws or indeed, under this proposed law, the damage is already done. They are looking for a deterrent effect. That is the impact they are looking for from legislative efforts here. Will this bill stop extreme protest action from occurring? Will it provide that deterrent effect? Will the new offences created here substantially deter people who undertake those kinds of protest actions beyond the deterrent that is already there in existing laws.

Evidence tells us, Mr President, that they will not; it tells us that this bill will not deliver the outcome sought by those Tasmanians who have made entreaties to us for the protests to be prevented. Evidence suggests this kind of bill in particular will have the opposite effect - of exacerbating extreme protest activity. It will throw fuel on the fire, although it may have an impact on other non-extreme forms of protest or have a deterrent impact in those places.

While it is unlikely to deter or prevent extreme protest activity, there is every indication this bill will have a chilling effect on more benign, nonviolent protest action and all political expressions due to the fear and uncertainty in which it leaves us and our community. This likely impact is not the outcome sought. This likely impact was not in a commitment taken to an election by the Government. This is a fundamentally anti-democratic impact that erodes the civil rights of our community.

In the absence of guaranteeing the agreed outcomes that were sought, this erosion of civil rights and the strength of our democracy is an unacceptable outcome. It is not an appropriate balancing of these rights.

A question has to be asked: why has the Government not brought a fresh bill with considered provisions addressing these fundamental issues? In response to the High Court decision, this Government introduced an amending bill - amendments to an act that was deemed invalid by the High Court. Despite these proposed substantial amendments, the breadth of the operation of the amended provisions continues neither to be appropriate nor adapted to the legitimate objective. 'Compatible' is not compatible also with our constitutionally prescribed system of representative responsible government.

Given that the bill imposes criminal sanctions and modifies a range of common law freedoms, including freedom of speech and association of movement, clarity and accessibility should have been central to its drafting. Yet the bill remains unbalanced and unclear, and continues to focus on the rights of business without any commensurate concern for civil and political rights. The bill should clarify that citizens have the right to associate, criticise government and business, and express their political views. It does not do that. It is a fundamental rule of law principle that the public should be able to understand what rights and duties they have and which of those rights and duties are to be altered or to be taken away by any given law.

The lack of clarity in this bill goes against this principle. A number of issues with the proposed amendments in this bill have been discussed by this parliament and legal experts who have spoken to us many times already. I do not want to go over too much ground that has been covered by other members; I am just going to mention a couple of particular issues about details in the bill.

The first one is the amendments we are discussing in this bill were made in response to a High Court finding that the previous law was invalid. What is happening in these amendments is a move away from reference to protesters, a key issue in the finding of the High Court that it could not be targeted at protesters in an explicate way as the previous bill was.

These amendments then are removing the word 'protesters' and removing specific reference to protest from the bill. This is an overly simplistic drafting decision because it does not actually remedy the issues of discrimination identified in the High Court decision as it does little to remedy the practical operation of this bill, which will still be focused at protesters and protesting activity.

The purpose of the bill remains on a prohibition of protest activity that affects business operations. Removal of the explicate reference of protesters has not remedied the operational discrimination there. I believe there are still problematic aspects in regard to that.

Second, I would like to talk about the choice not taken with this opportunity to amend the provisions to provide more defined and clarified definitions and a scope of this bill that balanced rights appropriately. The lack of clarity on when an individual might be in breach of the provisions of this bill is likely to serve only as a deterrent and a chilling effect on potential future communication on government and political issues and protest activities of a benign nature.

We look at some of the elements of the bill that do that - the lack of clarity, the defining of impeding a business activity, broadly defined in clause 3, to prevent, hinder or obstruct. The definition does not offer clarity of the necessary materiality or physicality of the threshold of that. You need to intend to threaten or intend to impede, both of which are difficult to prove. No time or place is attached to the threat or its effect on the business activities. It is not clear that actual damage needs to occur to the business activities or what the level of damage should be. We have to infer that the lack of clarity will have an impact on people's choices and activities and an impact on the discretion needed to be brought by police.

Not having a clear threshold on what damage or disruption needs to occur to activate this scares people from exercising their political voice. That is the chilling effect I mentioned. It puts police in a difficult position to know what the threshold is to apply the law. We also see provisions extending to public spaces and thoroughfares. The inclusion of the new provision in this way means that in effect anywhere in the public domain and some private spaces, like easements, are thoroughfares for the purposes of the amendments.

Rather than determining a clear definition around particular forestry or business sites, the Government has instead decided to cover all its bases by including all public spaces. Beyond this it has removed any time or location linkage between the offending activity and the business activity in question. This lowers the necessary obstruction away from business to public spaces and is problematic. There is a new offence, a new provision of threatening in this bill that



proscribes threatening to commit an offence against clause 6 in relation to business premises and business vehicles if the person intends by so doing, by threatening, to impede the carrying out of that business activity on the business premises or in the vehicle.

The threatening offence is an overly broad offence. It is speculative and entirely uncertain in scope. We have heard this from numerous experts. Confusingly, the offence apparently requires two separate intents in relation to the same crime: the intent to impede by threatening; and the threat to do the act itself, which must also possess an intent to impede the business. Or at least if that is to be clarified, clearly enough experts are finding the lack of clarity in that part of the bill confusing.

This provision around threatening is not appropriate and adapted to a purpose in this bill. It is overbearing and it is beyond the purposes of the bill. It seeks to charge people with offences without any damage needing to have occurred. Rather the offence requires merely an intention to impede by threatening to commit an offence under section 6 of the original act.

As with other provisions, the offence lacks temporal or geographic elements. It may be committed at any place, apparently including online and at any time. Furthermore, the provision around threatening has not been included under the bill's given exemptions in proposed new section 6. Unlike new section 6, it would appear to be possible for a person to be charged with a new section 7 threatening offence where the conduct - which they are threatening to undertake - forms part of a lawful activity that has been exempted in new section 6, but is not exempted here.

Given the clear potential to impact on the freedom of political expression, the level of ambiguity within the provision, particularly in relation to its scope and application, raises problems that could well lead to difficulties with the bill down the track were we to pass it. Proposed new section 7 is a problematic provision and I think it needs to be rethought entirely.

That is just a brief mention of some particularities in the bill that I think are problematic. Other members have covered some of the other areas in more detail and I do not want to be too repetitious with those. Basically, the concerns I have raised - and the ones we have heard from others in this place - relate to the form, breadth and clarity of this bill. They have not been adequately answered and addressed by the Government in what has been presented to us.

I mention also that the second reading speech referenced - as did a lot of material the Government put out publicly on this matter - that the Government wants us to understand this legislation is simply aligning us with other states and the Commonwealth in some manner. It is doing nothing of the sort.

The three pieces of legislation from other jurisdictions cited in the second reading speech are all much more discrete and/or balanced than what we see in this bill. The Commonwealth act that is talked about is about incitement to commit a crime. It is not about expanding the scope of crime or making it more severe. It explicitly includes a balancing provision for freedom of political communication, unlike this bill.

The Queensland law mentioned is very specific. It relates to dangerous devices used in protest and it is about police powers to remove them. That is a very targeted and specific response to particular kinds of dangerous activities. Very appropriate. The reason that is targeted and specific - and unlike the bill we are presented with, it does not capture and bleed

into other legitimate benign process spaces - is that Queensland has a charter of rights. Queensland has to balance and measure its proposed legislation against its charter of rights. They are guided by that charter in getting the balance right. That is why we see appropriate targeting, effective lawmaking there and why we do not see it here.

It is a great tragedy that Tasmania does not yet have a human rights act in this state that would provide us with similar guidance in our legislative efforts. A human rights act in this state would be a very positive contribution where we would have an agreed and respected set of rights that would assist any government of the day in developing policy and legislation that would appropriately balance and protect rights for Tasmanians.

The New South Wales bill, the third bill mentioned in the second reading speech, is quite specifically about interference with agricultural land. Again, it is targeted to a particular problem. I believe it relates to leaving the gate open in some respect, and it explicitly did not try to replicate the trespass offence found elsewhere in the New South Wales laws.

Overall, to try to paint this bill as being a straightforward way of bringing us into alignment with some national approach on this issue is simply misleading. No other jurisdiction has taken this road and risked this breadth and lack of clarity that we see in this bill. No other jurisdiction has done that. I encourage the Government to take a much closer look at other jurisdictions and see how they have gone about solving particular problems with targeted and balanced legislation. Let us go down that path.

In conclusion, for seven years the Government has acted in bad faith in the development and progress of this bill - the first bill, and now this bill. Twice in the past seven years we have seen it ignoring expert advice, neglecting to engage meaningfully with all affected stakeholders, curtailing appropriate parliamentary debate, wasting time and public money, and entirely failing to achieve the outcomes the bill purports to seek.

The Government has used this bill as a political tool, part of its ideological weaponry to be deployed to wedge opponents and score cheap electoral points. Through all that, the Government has let Tasmanians down - it has let Tasmanian workers down, and it has let Tasmanian businesses down. It has left Tasmanian workers and businesses less protected and less safe.

On top of that it has actively fostered a political environment that increases tensions on contested issues. It has discarded and destroyed past efforts at negotiated peaceful resolutions on those issues. There are more targeted means of achieving the desired end of protecting workers, but rather the choice made has been to pursue this piece of legislation which is broad, and lacks clarity and risks our civil rights. Further, with the absence of human rights protections in this state, and with no explicit balancing provisions in the bill, it carries a high risk of chilling benign political protest by creating confusion and uncertainty among the Tasmanian public.

The amendments in this bill should not be passed. The invalid act which they seek to amend should be abandoned and a fresh approach taken that is targeted, clear and more effectively balances all our rights.

This Government loves to crow about the many things it will not apologise for. Let me put on the record some of my own when it comes to this bill. I will not apologise for wanting

strong democracy that balances fundamental rights. I will not apologise for listening to expert advice. I will not apologise for expecting sound and proportionate legislation to be presented for consideration in this place. I will not apologise for expecting a government to legislate to genuinely deliver safer outcomes for Tasmanian workers rather than play-act for political advantage.

Finally, I certainly will not apologise for being disgusted by the Government's self-serving political theatre at the expense of vulnerable Tasmanians. I cannot support this bill.

[11.39 a.m.]

**Mr DEAN** (Windermere) - Mr President, what an interesting bill and interesting position we have. I thank the Leader for the briefings we have had from all sides in relation to this matter. With some of the information and evidence, and some of the things said today, it is going to be pretty tough for our departmental people now present in this place to hear some of the comments being made because it is attacking their capacities and abilities in many respects.

**Ms Webb** - If that relates to my comments on the bill, I am in no way attacking the public servants who worked on it. They act under direction from the government of the day. I put that on the record. Government policy decisions direct the efforts of public servants. I am not attacking the work of public servants.

**Mr DEAN** - If the cap fits, wear it.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - We will not quarrel.

**Ms Webb** - Mr President, I take exception to that. I am clarifying an assertion that the member has made. He appears to imply I am attacking public servants, which certainly was not the case.

**Mr DEAN** - I am not making any assertions.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - Point of clarification - we will not promote quarrels between members. There is a standing order on that.

**Mr DEAN** - I am simply making the statement, Mr President, that some of the comments must be difficult for department officers.

I was intrigued when the member for Derwent chose to speak on the second reading from the President's Chair. Normally, albeit not frequently, the President speaks on clause 1 of any bill once it is under consideration of a Committee of the Whole Council. I am left wondering what was going on. I was quite perplexed. I doubt there are many instances to be found in the annals of the Legislative Council where the President has spoken on the second reading of a bill; bearing in mind that in the event of a tied vote, it is the casting vote of the President that determines passage to the Committee stage. If the President has spoken in support of or against the bill under consideration, he would surely be walking a difficult path to change his mind when exercising his casting vote as to whether the bill should move to the Committee stage.

Custom and practice developed over centuries in the Westminster system is worthy of respectful consideration. What we saw yesterday is, I suggest, unprecedented. Certainly, unprecedented in my time. I have not seen it happen in the 18 years I have been here.

**Mr Valentine** - I thought he was only making a statement. He was not talking to the second reading -

**Mr DEAN** - I can only speculate as to why that occurred and that could be fraught, of course, but so could the decision to step outside the customs and practices of this place. Was the member for Derwent sitting in his place as the President, taking the opportunity to respond to political commentary about himself in the other place? I might add that -

**Mr WILLIE** - Point of order, Mr President. I think the member is reflecting on the Chair and I am not sure whether that is allowed under the Standing Orders.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - I will seek some advice. The advice I have is that is technically not a point of order. I can, as President, make a statement. It has not been common practice, but I am allowed to do so. I sought that advice prior to making the statement, because I did not believe I would have an opportunity to defend myself against false allegations made in the other place. I remind the member that this is a debate about the bill and that is what the member should keep his comments to.

**Mr DEAN** - Thank you, Mr President, and I will certainly do so. I might add, that even if that were the case, your comments were measured and temperate as we have come to expect from you as the member for Derwent. I am simply making that clear. As I said, I had not seen that happen before. The reason I raise it here today is to seek an explanation about how and why it occurred, as it was new to me.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - It is certainly your right to do that as a member of this place.

**Mr DEAN** - Thank you for that. Much has been said here about wedge politics being at play with this bill. That has been raised by a number of people. Government versus Opposition is a contest of ideas, even ideology. That is politics, and usually the Legislative Council does not concern itself with the argy-bargy between the parties - rather, it considers the merits of legislation. In this case, is protection of the right of workers to go about their employment unimpeded by improper or illegal protest required? Is the principle of the bill sound? It could equally be said of the Labor Party that it is engaging in wedge politics and is ignoring the protection of workers and workplaces, when its members claim they have all the answers and the Government should sit down with them to chart the way forward.

I understand the Liberal Party took this matter to the last election, saying they would bring this legislation back and that they would bring in an amendment bill, or another bill, to counter the issues that came out of the High Court decision. As I understand it, they made no bones about the fact they would be doing that, and this legislation is as a consequence.

We are in the midst of a building boom in this state yet native hardwood studs in particular are almost impossible to procure. All the people who are building want to get obtain some hardwood timber; but it is not easy to source. That is the reason I am milling my own, because it is so difficult to obtain. Because of this, we have concrete slabs sitting around with

nowhere to go, waiting for the timber that is required to build these homes. You might ask, what is the reason for that? It is because the TFA agreement was reached, I think in 2013 -

**Mr Valentine** - Yes, March 2013.

**Mr DEAN** - That agreement was driven by the Labor-Greens government. In addition, successive federal governments - in order to secure inner city Green votes - forced many small sawmills to shut down. In addition, many of the resources that sawmillers required were locked up. Now, we have the Bob Brown Foundation working hard - and illegally - to close down the remaining sawmills in the state. We also have agriculture and horticulture. There are numerous examples of ecoterrorist groups terrorising and invading farms and, in some cases, closing them down. If you want information about that, look at what has happened in Gippsland and some other areas, for example.

Here we are in Australia, and in Tasmania, having our private enterprise, small businesses and food-producing industries being illegally trespassed upon by urban eco-warriors. Is that fair? Should we, as parliamentarians, sit back and allow this to continue to happen? Why should these people not have fair protection to go about their legal business?

As legislators we often forget that a great majority of members have never endured the vagaries and the uncertainties of employing people and taking commercial risks. We sit here, secure in our jobs - if our workforce were invaded, we would not have any concerns because we would still be paid. We live off the public purse. Our business will not be closed down nor will it be at risk of being closed down. We are happy. We are satisfied. It is not going to worry us. I might ask some of those people to put themselves in the position of other businesses.

Bullying and harassment are things we should never condone - we refer to that in this place every other day, but here we have a situation whereby some continually seek the high moral ground on these issues, but when they get the chance by way of legislation to support those who are obviously being maligned and bullied, they go missing.

**Ms Webb** - Point to where this legislation deals with bullying and harassment that is not already dealt with. Point to it.

**Mr DEAN** - I thought you had spoken on the second reading.

I will focus on the right of people to be able to attend work, to be in a safe environment, to do what they are paid for, to receive a salary and provide security for themselves and their family. That is what we seek in this place. That is why we seek to continue our employment here, not only to serve the people and the public, but also to ensure their security so they can support their families and put the food on the table for their kids - and not be the subject of protest action that invades their workplaces and puts them in danger and has mental, emotional and physical impact for them. We heard that yesterday. These protests not only shut businesses down, but they also have lasting impact on people. It is long-lasting. These large businesses employ thousands of Tasmanians. Neville Smith Forest Products and all the other big businesses around this state that are being targeted employ thousands of Tasmanians.

In particular, Ray Mostogl and Peter Skillern yesterday articulated strongly the right of people to work and feel safe and not to be interfered with by illegal protesters. They have no

concern about, and support, protest action - they made that clear, I do too. Skillern - as mentioned by others - was extremely emotional in telling us what he has been through and has witnessed as a result of some of these workplace invasions.

Four parties are involved in any protest action that takes place - the business, the employees, the protesters and the police. The police are the ones called on to sort out these workplace invasions. They are frequently subjected to violence, insult, bodily fluid contact, which happens on a prevalent basis; they suffer public scrutiny and have to satisfy courts they have acted lawfully and fairly - not that the protesters have acted fairly. They are the meat in the sandwich in these protest actions.

The laws police work with need to be practical, so they can be applied with ease and clarity and can give police the authority required to carry out the duties expected of them by those putting the legislation together. Whether it can be done in a way the public and/or an impacted business requires is probably a moot point.

In the briefing yesterday I raised my concern about police attending a protest action and looking at this bill to see how they could respond and what they would need to do in the circumstances. I specifically raised the issue of police rocking up to an incident and having to decide quickly whether they were dealing with a substantial workplace invasion, a not substantial and/or indictable situation, and/or whether it could be summarily dealt with.

As a result of my concern, we saw fit to contact the Police Association. The member for Launceston referred to the association's response yesterday. I will not go into that because there is no need for me to do so.

In the briefing I also raised the issue of whether the police had been involved in putting the bill together, and the legislation we have. I am advised that the police department certainly had involvement, that it raised concerns and those concerns were addressed, and that a number of those were used in putting the bill together. Some of the things police raised, I understand, were about simplifying the bill and these issues so they could work with it.

**Mr Valentine** - Did someone read in the letter?

**Mr DEAN** - The Police Association letter? Yes, they did. I am talking about the department -

**Mr Valentine** - Sorry, you are talking about the department.

**Mr DEAN** - not the Police Association.

I understand the department has not come back to say it cannot work with this bill. I am satisfied that for those who will be responsible for removing protesters to allow people to go back to work, the bill is fairly robust. Apart from the right of the people to continue to work, that was a very important factor for me.

I, like other members, have received many letters, mostly from people opposing the bill now before us. Some of those were roneoed-type letters. I had a letter yesterday - I suspect other members got it as well - along the lines of 'The UN does not support you' or, 'You are a fool.'. Did others get that?

**Ms Armitage** - Yes, we all got that.

**Ms Rattray** - We all got it, except the Liberal members.

**Mr DEAN** - I thought it might have been an attack on me because I work with the United Nations. I thought it might have been a personal thing, but obviously it was not. Other members received it as well. Interestingly, many of those letters referred to peaceful protest action. That is what was in a lot of those letters - I'm not saying all letters, but a lot of those letters. This legislation does not affect or impact a peaceful protest legally in place. It does not stop that. I would not support any legislation that would stop that from happening. That is covered very clearly in, I think, clause 4 of the bill where it identifies those areas it does not impact on. Industrial actions and so on are all covered in that area. It makes that clear.

I took the course of responding to what I thought was a well-written email urging me - obviously all of you - to vote down the bill because peaceful protest is the right of people, and also that person referred to the current activities as occurring. I responded to the one person. That is the only person I have responded to. I am not sure if my staff have responded to others. I responded by asking the author what was peaceful about stopping people working, locking onto machinery, causing danger, causing havoc, causing mayhem, and blocking access and exit roads. I further asked how they would respond to me entering their house, stopping their activities and not allowing them to leave because I did not like the wood they were burning in their fire, or, in fact, where they were sourcing it from. I am still waiting for a reply. That was two or three weeks ago.

The member for Hobart raised again the issue of unintended consequences -

**Mr Valentine** - I always do that.

**Mr DEAN** - You are right. You do and every time you get up to speak, I write it down - 'unintended consequences'.

**Mr Valentine** - I am glad to know you listen.

**Mr DEAN** - As I said during my moving of the T21 bill, we pass no legislation in this place where there could not be unintended consequences. That is fact. Nobody in my view is good enough, knowledgeable enough, knows enough about the law to be able to say there might not be. That is why we have judges. That is why we have the High Court. That is why we have appeal rights.

**Mr Valentine** - That is why we have amendment bills.

**Mr DEAN** - That is why we have amendment bills. That is the process. That is what we live with. That is what it is about.

**Mr Valentine** - That is what we are dealing with now.

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, that is right, absolutely. During the briefing we were given information about another High Court action on another bill we passed not that long ago through this place, but the appeal was not upheld.

**Mr Valentine** - It is just the level of risk.

**Mr DEAN** - Of course it is. You are not ever going to be able to delete risk totally. You can minimise it the level of risk by ensuring you do the work, do the research. I am satisfied that has been the position here, particularly following the High Court decision. While you cannot be 100 per cent sure, no department or no person would produce an amendment bill to come before us without being as close to being 100 per cent satisfied as they could be in all the circumstances.

**Mr Valentine** - One wonders why the Law Society did not think it was too good.

**Mr DEAN** - They raised legitimate concerns. I am not in any way putting those people down. They are far more knowledgeable in that area than I am. While I have reasonable knowledge on criminal law, it is nowhere near the same level as those people. I recognise and accept that, and do not profess to look at it in the same way or to the level they do.

I want to mention a couple of other matters. The member for McIntyre referred to the Artec protest yesterday. It happened in my electorate, at Bell Bay where Bob Brown Foundation protesters rocked up and cut off business, that industry, for almost a day. It was at an absolutely huge cost to the people caught up in it. As the member for McIntyre said, many innocent people and parties - loaded with logs from plantation forests - were caught up in it. I do not know, but I think Bob Brown Foundation would probably support this. Those innocent parties were caught up in this - loss of salary and I am not too sure what happened in the following few days, whether they had the financial capacity to provide for their families as they should have. It is absolutely unacceptable that anybody has the right to stop a person working in a legitimate business in all these circumstances. I find that very difficult.

We all remember the TFA - again, the member for McIntyre made a number of points here. We all remember the roundtable meetings, the agreement where all but the forestry workers came out feeling happy and content. The forestry workers were never happy and content with it. Neither was I. Some of us commented at the time - I was one of them - that it would not last and would not be effective for a long time. However, it worked for a few years, but now all of a sudden we see this happening.

Interestingly, I asked some people who were protesting here - some members may have seen an email between those people and myself; if you didn't, I won't refer to it -

**Mr Valentine** - I walked through the door though when they were protesting.

**Mr DEAN** - I asked them why were they protesting, because we had the agreement in place. It was an agreement we were all happy to sign off on - including environmentalists and the Greens groups. The protesters said they could not be satisfied because some of the trees being harvested were greater than the size referred to in part of that agreement. I had always missed that. They said there was a specific size for a tree, and after that size, they cannot be harvested. That was a comment made to me.

**Ms Rattray** - One of the biggest issues that remains, and I didn't touch on it yesterday, is access to those specialty species that support our fine furniture, boatbuilding and the like. It has been very difficult to access some of those timbers that make Tasmania unique.



**Mr DEAN** - Andrew Denman has sent us a letter about those concerns regarding specialty timber access and the businesses that it supports, and how it makes Tasmania unique from the other states with this woodwork and the things he can do.

**Ms Rattray** - It comes back to that agreement. They are not harvesting in those areas where that special species timber comes from. That is why there is very little out there, because they are not in there harvesting it. I am not on the ground, but that is what I hear.

**Mr DEAN** - True. When these matters first came up in 2012-13, and we were going through all of this, I commented on my concerns about clear-felling. I have really never supported it. My family were in timber for 50 or 60 years as logging contractors and in timber milling. They never thought of clear-felling. It was always select logging.

**Mr Valentine** - I thought you just had a mill of your own; you didn't tell me about your past.

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, I do. With the little I do now, it is select logging. I only select the log where and when I need it. I have never considered clear-felling because I do not agree with it and I do not support it.

That agreement did not fix the problems. We are here again, with the other issues we have been talking about for a couple of days now. I refer to an item on the ABC, posted on Monday 21 January 2019. I imagine at least some members will have seen it. The heading was 'Animal rights group creates online map showing farm locations and contact details'. When you look at that and then look at protest activity and actions, we have a good idea of where it is all going. I am quoting from this document:

A website detailing the location and contact details of Australian farms has caused outrage in the industry with farm groups saying it is an invasion of privacy.

That map was created by an animal rights charity, Aussie Farms. That is some of what caused mayhem around the country and caused most states and territories to start taking stronger action to ensure the protection of these workers and farmers and the right for them to conduct their businesses.

The National Farmers' Federation says the website will encourage trespassing:

... National Farmers' Federation president Fiona Simson said she was very concerned about the information on the map being viewable by the public.

'This is really, a huge breach of privacy to be publishing these people's private addresses, their private family homes in conjunction with their businesses online,' she said.

This is the angst, this is the trauma - it is those sort of postings that cause mental health issues and other health issues in people conducting their good businesses. How would you like your name, your details, your telephone numbers, being provided in a map that is sent out countrywide? I think there might have been some agreement at the end with the people putting out the map withdrawing some of the personal detail. It was too late. It had gone out.

Much of what is happening now with the protest action is gut-wrenching to say the least, and it is creating a huge amount of angst with people legitimately going about their businesses. They are legitimately working and wanting to look after their families in the way that you and I do. As I said, we are protected. That is what they want. That is what they are asking for. They are asking for protection and where do they get their protection? Through us. Through the parliament, by the parliament introducing legislation that will, or most likely will, give them some comfort.

The real question here is: does the Opposition support the principle of this bill? If they do, they should stop politicking and provide workers with an environment where they can lawfully go about their work. They should do it now so that the grandstanding protests by the likes of the Bob Brown Foundation can be properly prosecuted in the courts, with real action being taken. Now is the time to stand up. As I said on Tuesday, there was a time where we could have stood up to make a big difference. Dr Broad, the member for Braddon, was right recently when he referred to that dodgy foundation as a green Ponzi scheme where donations fund paid protesters to raise money for more protests.

Are we serious about bringing such rabid attacks on a range of workplaces to an end? It is not just about forestry - activists like the BBF are already attacking the mining industry and will inevitably attack the aquaculture industry. We had a briefing in relation to the aquaculture industry yesterday as well, and its concerns. We are aware of one protest action against an aquaculture industry, where the protesters got themselves in a lot of difficulty and had to be rescued by the same group they were protesting against. This is the sort of thing that is happening.

Going on from that, we would support this bill at least to the Committee stage and amend the legislation where necessary, because as the member for Hobart has said since the day he got here - 'It is not the role of the Legislative Council to challenge policy but to amend bills, where necessary, to make them better.'

**Mr Valentine** - Where did I say that? I reckon I have learnt a thing or two since.

**Mr DEAN** - You mentioned the word policy; I can go back and pick it up for you in relation to our position in not setting policy.

**Mr Valentine** - Setting policy is different to challenging it.

**Mr DEAN** - No, setting policy.

**Mr Valentine** - We are not the policy-setting House. I agree with that.

**Mr DEAN** - Challenging policy. I will get that; if I have it wrong, I will apologise to you.

**Mr Valentine** - No, you do not have to apologise; I am just interested, fascinated.

**Mr DEAN** - Having said that, I am concerned this matter is not going to go any further, I know that. I can certainly count up to 15 or 14, so we know what is going to happen there and we are going to have these protests continuing until whenever. That is the situation that saddens

me. We know protest actions are being planned as we are talking about this bill. It is extremely upsetting.

If you talked to some of these people who have been involved and caught up in these actions, such as Peter Skillern - he is only one - it is heart-wrenching to hear from them what they have gone through.

Without any doubt we will see, if these actions are not stopped, serious injury and we will see death. That will occur because of the actions being taken by some of these protesters in locking on to machinery and gates.

I spoke to Andrew Walker, CEO of Neville Smith Forest Products, a couple of weeks ago. He talked about the protest action that happened at Southwood - I think it was the day before. He took me through what happened there; and he said that some of the things that occurred were frightening. The angst of people. He was concerned about what might have happened between the two groups. His instructions to his people at the time were that he did not care if no work was done at all that day - at the cost of thousands and thousands of dollars to the company - but they were to keep the protesters from locking on to the gates because they had to keep the gates open. As I understand it, that was successful.

The member for Launceston and I had a meeting with Shawn Britton, where he raised a number of similar-type issues and concerns as to where all this was going. As he said, he has a responsibility to protect his workforce and with what is now happening, he cannot guarantee that.

I want to raise the issue of workplace standards. I had questions - and I have not had answers to them from the Leader at the present time - about the number of reported incidents and actions made to workplace standards over time in relation to the protest actions. There seems, and I need to be careful here, to be some reluctance to take action on these reportable incidents regarding the protests that are occurring, particularly those involving the Bob Brown Foundation. I will be interested in the answers to those questions. I am hoping it will be at least today, but I am not sure where they are at. Does the Leader have them?

**Mrs Hiscutt** - No, I do not think we are able to get them. Can you specify exactly - it is the number of convictions?

**Mr DEAN** - I wanted the number of reportable protest actions for the last three financial years, the number of actions reported against the BBF and what had happened to those reports - what actions had been taken, if any, and if no action had been taken, why not? I will chase it up with my staff to make sure the questions were sent off. If they were not, I will get it to you posthaste.

**Mrs Hiscutt** - We will make every effort but that is another department from this bill.

**Mr DEAN** - I understand that. I am aware of it. Having said that, I urge members - and I know it is a difficult task - to think about this bill and at least support it into the Committee stage.

If Labor says it has the answers, why can we not look at some amendments to the legislation we now have in order to satisfy those issues and concerns? The Committee stage is

the right time to do that. Not to vote it into Committee at this stage would see this bill defeated; we would be back at square one, having to rely on the current legislation, which the police have concerns with. That is what it would do. Protest action is escalating. It is occurring as we speak. I ask the members, of the Labor Party in particular, to look at this and at least let us look at the legislation clause by clause, and discuss it. At the end of that process, the bill can be defeated in the third reading.

It is not a point that if they support it into the Committee stage it will get through, but I am asking that they consider it at least.

I support the bill because I support workers, and I support the right of workers to go about their business in a safe, fair and proper way. That is why I support this bill. If you do not support that, that is a matter you have to answer for.

[12.22 p.m.]

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I seek some advice. I have quite a bit of advice here in answer to some misunderstandings of the bill, but I will seek further advice.

I will make a start but there might be some more information to come for the member for Windermere.

The member for Huon had a few questions. He talks about the impacts on healthcare workers with protesting. Hospitals and residential care services are specifically excluded from the definition of business premises. Further, otherwise lawful trade union activity is also excluded from the operation of the trespass offences, as are marches authorised by a permit under the Police Offences Act, so they are specifically excluded from that.

The member also spoke about catching unlawful union activity. I have just crossed off on that. The new section 6(8) in clause 10 specifically excludes protected industrial action and lawful trade union activity. New section 6(9) - clause 10 - also contains a broad defence for those that can establish that they have a lawful excuse for their behaviour.

The member also mentioned other jurisdictions have instead moved to improve the existing trespass laws. That is exactly what this bill does. The offences introduced by clause 10, new subsections 6(1) and (2) specifically build on trespass. It is specifically named as an element of the offence.

The member for Murchison spoke about it being disingenuous to say we should amend the existing act. The High Court found the purpose of the Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) Act 2014 to be valid.

**Ms Forrest** - I also said that in the speech.

**Mrs HISCUTT** - What the High Court ruled was that the operation of a number of provisions were invalid only as they relate to forestry land. The commentary by the High Court provided a guide as to how the act would be amended to address the issues identified by the High Court.

The member for Murchison also spoke about the power of the prosecutor to determine whether it could be heard summarily or by indictment. Prosecutors routinely make such decisions on a case-by-case basis, including whether to charge with assault under the Police Offences Act or Criminal Code; whether to charge with reckless driving under the Vehicle and Traffic Act or dangerous driving under the Criminal Code; whether to charge with assault with indecent intent under the Police Offences Act, or indecent assault under the Criminal Code; or whether to charge with motor vehicle stealing under the Police Offences Act or stealing under the Criminal Code.

These are choices that the police or the Director of Public Prosecutions make all the time. It is also open for the prosecution to consent or not to certain indictable matters dealt with in the Magistrates Court. These include possession of stolen firearms and aggravated assault under the Firearms Act. Such decisions are guided by guidelines issued by the DPP under the act.

Prosecutors operate independently of the Government, and are well placed to assess the objective seriousness of the facts of an individual case in determining how it should be prosecuted.

The member for Hobart asked how it will not apply to every interference with businesses. As the High Court observed in the Bob Brown case, 'prevent, hinder or obstruct' is limited in scope. 'Prevent, hinder or obstruct' are in the current version of the act and as such the High Court considered their reach in the case of Bob Brown. It is clear from that case that these words should be construed to require substantial, substantive or serious hinderance or obstruction.

The member for Launceston asked how is the term 'trespass' used? 'Trespass' and 'trespassers' are established legal terms with established legal meanings. It has been interpreted by the High Court of Australia and is routinely applied in Tasmania where entry as a trespasser is an element of the crime of burglary. For the purposes of the Police Offences Act, it occurs where a person enters or remains on premises without authority. For the purposes of this bill, trespass occurs when a person enters or remains on premises, or in or on a vehicle without authority. The person must also either know that they have no authority to be on the premises or the vehicle, or be reckless as to whether they have authority to be on the premises or the vehicle. A person is reckless where they believe it is probable that they have no authority, but proceed anyway. There are, in addition, elements relating to impeding business activity.

Does a person become a trespasser as soon as they are told to leave the premises? No. A person who enters land or a vehicle without authority, whose authority is revoked after they are on land or a vehicle, only becomes a trespasser once a reasonable time has elapsed for the person to leave. Is someone always a trespasser if they do not have express permission to be on the premises? No. In some cases, entry will be by express or implied consent. An express licence is often given formally. For example, when a person buys a ticket to go to see a movie. An example of implied consent is a path or driveway that leads to the front door of a house. Usually that will give rise to an implied consent for a member of the public to access the front door to communicate with, or deliver goods to, any person in the house.

The member for Launceston also spoke about capturing people who are handing out pamphlets. As the member stated, this is not intended to happen. The offence of obstruction requires certain things to be proved. Has the person proven to be an obstruction? Has the

person by that obstruction intended to impede the business activity? Handing out pamphlets would not be part of that.

The member for Launceston also spoke about women's protests. I can confirm the bill clearly does not criminalise the right to protest. There are many types of protests the bill does not cover - the March 4 Justice protest and any other protest outside of Parliament House such as was held the other morning; protests in business premises that do not intent to impede seriously and substantially, and do not actually impede business activity; and protests on streets that substantially obstruct the street, unless the obstruction itself is intended to, and does, impede business activity, such as local shops or access to workplaces.

The member for Launceston also asked whether the Government would be monitoring the bill. The Government will, of course, carefully monitor the implementation of this bill. It is noted the offences are indictable charges and are made only under the oversight and guidelines of the Office of Director of Public Prosecutions.

The DPP is independent of government and free from political influence. The statutory guidelines have key elements. You have to have a significant consideration of the public interest, including interest of the victim, the community and the accused. Admissible, substantial and reliable evidence is required. Not all offences must be prosecuted. The seriousness of the conduct is considered.

Apart from prosecuted discretion to charge summarily, any serious charge proceeded in the Supreme Court can also be remitted by a judge to the Magistrates Court if the judge considers a 20 unit fine or one year in jail the appropriate maximum penalties.

The member for McIntyre and member for Windermere have pleaded for this to go into Committee. At the moment the Government's opinion is this bill needs dealing with today, so we will make a decision here today with a vote.

**Ms Rattray** - Going into the Committee stage would be the next process.

**Mrs HISCUTT** - The next speaker was the member for Nelson who talked about reacting or chilling protest. I reassure members that this bill starts with conduct that is already unlawful, such as trespass, and clarifies targeted conduct subject to higher penalty. The bill does not make protest unlawful. Protest on streets, crown land and private land can already be unlawful, yet we know that has not chilled or restrained protest.

For example, the original act applied to trespass where a person only knew the activity was impeding. The amendments require the person to intend to impede activity and very importantly that serious impeditive nature has happened.

The member for Nelson mentioned something about removing 'protester' from the bill being overly simplistic and still targets protests. The Government does not agree with this proposition. The original act specifically targets protesters and protest activity. That meant different people undertaking the same conduct were dealt with differently. The amendments do not simply change language, but alter the focus to get persons who carry out the disruptive behaviour described in this bill.

The member for Nelson also mentioned that obstruct is too broad and applies to all public spaces and has no temporal links, not limited to specific areas. The offence provides specific elements that must be addressed, that are required by the obstruction itself that impacts business activity. Limiting it to specific areas gives rise to not protecting certain businesses and also risks narrowing the application and was an issue the High Court had with the original act.

The member for Nelson also mentioned that 'threatening' is too broad in scope, uncertain in drafting like a double intent. Exceptions in proposed new section 6 do not apply. The Government does not agree with that. The offence provision sets out specific elements that need to be proved beyond reasonable doubt. They are that the threat is actually made, the threat is to commit an offence against section 6 in relation to a business premises or business activity. At the time of making a threat, the person intends by the threat to impede the carrying out of a business premises or in or on the business vehicle.

Further, new section 7, which contains the threaten provisions does link to new section 6. The exceptions in new section 6(8) provide a person's conduct is not trespass if the exception applies. Trespass is an essential element of the offences, so if an exception applies a person cannot be threatening to commit an offence.

There was a bit of talk about the uncertainty of definitions when impeding. As the High Court observed in *Brown*, prevent, hinder or obstruct is limited in scope. Prevent, hinder or obstruct are in the current version of the act and as such the High Court considered their reach in the case of *Brown*. It is clear from the case that these words should be constructed to require substantial, substantive or serious hinderance or obstruction so that it is the meaning of impede as defined in the bill. This is in line with existing interpretations of the terms 'hinder' and 'obstruct' in other cases dealing with criminal offences containing these terms. Hinder - making another's performance of a desired activity substantially more difficult by interference - and obstruct - in the context of a highway requirement for a lessening in a substantial degree the commodious use of the highway.

The High Court further said a consequence of the limits of the meaning of prevent, hinder or obstruct means these words capture only what is otherwise unlawful. The High Court said that, and the Tasmanian Solicitor-General agreed, the 2014 act, sections 6(1) to (3), did not prohibit trivial or transient disruptions, but were confined to substantive preventions, hinderances and obstructions of business activities and access to business premises.

The High Court said there shall be no doubt that the purpose of ensuring protesters did not do these things is a purpose compatible with the system of representation and responsible government.

In regard to the member for Windermere's questions on looking for numbers, we do have the answer to your questions, member for Windermere, but they do not specifically answer what you were looking for.

**Ms Forrest** - It is not answers to the questions then really. A bit of context perhaps.

**Mrs HISCUTT** - The answer will be here at question time, but I do not think your contribution will probably benefit from the answers at this stage, if that makes sense.

**Mr Dean** - Okay, thank you.

**Mrs HISCUTT** - In closing, it is very disappointing to see the Labor members of the Council have not seen their way to support this bill that supports Tasmanian businesses.

This legislation ensures Tasmanians can operate a business and go to work without being impeded, threatened or interfered with by others. Our proposed laws are supported by farmers, foresters, miners, fishers and Tasmanian workers and their families. I urge members to support the bill.

Thank you, Mr President.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - The question is that the bill be now read the second time.

**The Council divided -**

**AYES 6**

Ms Armitage  
Mr Dean  
Mrs Hiscutt  
Ms Howlett  
Ms Palmer  
Ms Rattray (Teller)

**NOES 8**

Ms Forrest (Teller)  
Mr Gaffney  
Ms Lovell  
Dr Seidel  
Ms Siejka  
Mr Valentine  
Ms Webb  
Mr Willie

**Second reading negatived.**

**PREMIER'S ADDRESS**

**Suspension of Standing Order 10(2)(a)**

[12.45 p.m.]

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

That Standing Order 10(2)(a) be suspended to provide to the Premier's Address to be tabled without the requirement of the Address to be read again in the Council.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Incorporation of Premier's Address**

**Mrs HISCUTT** - Mr President, I lay on the Table of the Council a copy of the Premier's Address. I move:

That the Address be incorporated in the *Hansard*.

**Motion agreed to and Address incorporated as follows:**



## **PREMIER'S ADDRESS**

In January last year I was honoured to receive the support of my colleagues to become the state's forty-sixth Premier and shortly after that, around 12 months to the day, coronavirus found its way to the Australian mainland and unfortunately to our shores as well.

We were faced with the probability of a significant health crisis if action was not taken swiftly to protect our community. That action meant limiting people's movements and closing businesses where people congregated and, sadly, the impact on our economy was severe.

We banned cruise ships, closed our borders and we stayed at home to save lives. There were hundreds of thousands of Tasmanians who did their bit. Fishing, camping and going to the shack were banned. We kept our older Tasmanians safe by limiting visits to aged care homes and hospitals, and all the while our courageous frontline workers and volunteers willingly worked with us to keep our communities safe.

We will not forget the sacrifices that Tasmanians made, the costs borne by individuals, families and communities, nor will we ever forget that, tragically, 13 lives were lost. While this is not over yet, we are in a good place. Tasmania is one of the safest places in this country and we are, without doubt, one of the safest places in the world, a world that is adding nearly 500 000 new cases a day to a total that has now reached more than 120 million cases, with sadly nearly 2.7 million deaths.

Today I acknowledge and thank all Tasmanians for working together to ensure we kept our state safe. Over the past 12 months I have witnessed some incredible examples of self sacrifice, courage and kindness as Tasmanians, regardless of race, religion, politics, background and circumstance, held out their hands to each other and helped each other in the most extraordinary example of common humanity I have ever witnessed.

As a result of those incredible efforts, Tasmania has not only managed on the one hand to conquer a health crisis, but has also turned around our economy, which is once again growing strongly and supporting Tasmanian jobs.

I acknowledge our First Peoples, the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging. Last week I committed to receive and consider proposals for a further land return. I will be clear: this Government is committed to taking significant steps on our path to reconciliation and also, importantly, to taking significant steps to ensure we improve the lives and circumstances of our First Peoples.

Further, with regard to the rallies held yesterday around the country and the hundreds of women who marched and rallied for a more inclusive, safe and fair society here in Tasmania, I see you and I hear you. This Government, this parliament, sees you and it hears you. While action has already been taken, there is more to be done and we will not shirk our responsibilities to ensure that everyone is safe, everyone is respected and everyone is supported.

Next week I will meet with the leaders of the other parties - Ms Ogilvie, the Speaker, the President of the upper House and Ms Webb to work through and shape the independent review of practices and procedures for this workplace, for ministerial parliamentary services and for our electorate officers.

Today, I provide for Tasmanians an update on our economy, the Government's response to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council final report, which I will release in full today, and the steps we will take to grasp the opportunities ahead that will secure Tasmania's future.

The social and economic consequences of COVID-19 were felt far and wide, and for many they continue. Families remain separated by international borders. Schooling was disrupted, businesses were closed and marriage plans were set aside. Some people had to deal with losing their job or having much less income, balancing this with home schooling and decreased community connection.

In April last year retail trade fell, confidence dropped and by May nearly 20 000 jobs had been lost. I did not sugar-coat the severity of the challenge we faced. In May, we were the first jurisdiction to release an economic and fiscal update.

Treasury was forecasting an unemployment rate of around 12.25 per cent by June, which would have meant around 34 000 Tasmanians out of work and an economy that was going backwards.

We were facing the dual threats of a health and economic crisis and we knew we had to act decisively to deal with both. As a government we put in place the largest economic and social support package in the history of our state and the largest out of all the states in terms of the share of our economy, at over \$1 billion.

In June we led the way with our construction blitz, bringing forward \$70 million in public building maintenance and \$24 million to bring forward 222 new social home builds and investments in training centres, schools, roads and irrigation as well as stimulating the construction of thousands of houses through the \$45 000 HomeBuilder package.

In July we released an interim Trade Action Plan to support Tasmanian businesses to reclaim and grow trade in disrupted global marketplaces, and we accepted all the initial recommendations of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council Interim Report.

In the November budget, we continued to address both the health and social challenges as well as addressing the economic challenge.

We invested where it mattered most to help more Tasmanians with the essential services they needed, including a record \$9.8 billion into health over four years and a record \$7.5 billion into education.

As part of our plan to support economic recovery, we announced a landmark \$5 billion infrastructure investment package, including \$300 million into the largest ever program of social and affordable housing in the history of the state. We expect this will support 25 000 jobs over the next four years and provide a pipeline of projects to underpin confidence and demand across Tasmania for years to come.

Our plan is working. Confidence is up. Our economy is growing again; we have the lowest unemployment rate of all the states and job numbers are at pre-pandemic levels. In fact, job vacancy ads in February led the nation, at 52.4 per cent higher than the previous year and more than double the national growth over the year. We have jobs available right now for

skilled people, especially in our construction sector, which now has a full book of work in front of it.

With confidence returning and businesses investing, retail trade - which is one of the best litmus tests you can have for your wider economy - grew 1 per cent in January to be 9.3 per cent higher than this time last year while our merchandise exports were higher in 2020 than the year before, bucking the national trend.

Recent expert commentators reinforced that our economy recovery is in full swing. CommSec has placed Tasmania as the best performing economy in the nation for the fourth quarter in a row. ANZ rates our surging exports and booming housing market. Deloitte notes our gangbuster budget and Sensis finds that our businesses are the most confident in the nation.

The COVID-19 vaccine rollout program is underway, with a plan to have our 14 000 strong priority frontline health, quarantine, aged and disability workers, along with aged and disability care residents, vaccinated by April. All Tasmanians over the age of 18 will be vaccinated, should they choose, by October this year, subject to the supply of the vaccine arriving in Tasmania.

Phase 1B of the vaccination rollout plan commences this week and will see an expanded group of people, including elderly Tasmanians aged over 70 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as healthcare and frontline workers eligible to receive the vaccination. The vaccine is safe. It is effective and it is free. While it is not a silver bullet, it is a key safeguard that will help to further suppress and contain the virus and support our pathway back to a freer and more normal life.

A strong economy strengthens our budget through increased GST receipts and own source investments. As shown in our Revised Estimates Report, compared to the November budget, the net operating balance this year is estimated to improve by \$157.3 million. Net debt is also expected to improve to be around \$150 million lower.

These results show the confidence and resilience of businesses in Tasmania, backed by a government that supports them. Small business is the engine room of our state, which is why we stepped up and delivered a nation-leading Small Business Support Package of \$80 million, providing more than 20 000 grants to more than 14 000 businesses. More than 370 businesses have been supported by our \$110 million low or no interest loans schemes.

We will continue to support our small business sector as we rebuild across all sectors and regions by providing access to specialist financial counselling through a new \$1 million COVID-19 Small Business Financial Counselling Support Program over the next 12 months. This program will help eligible businesses that need advice to support them to recover, transition or apply other strategies to address business impacts due to the pandemic. This program will run in parallel with existing programs, and complement the financial support provided through grant and loan programs that are being delivered by the Department of State Growth.

I will now provide an overview of the final report of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council. On 30 April last year, I announced we would establish PESRAC to provide advice on how best to support Tasmania's short-, medium- and longer term recovery from COVID-19. The council was chaired by well-respected former Treasury secretary,

Don Challen AM, who was supported by a group of extraordinarily talented individuals who represent a good cross-section of our community. I recognise Mr Challen, along with Professor Rufus Black, Dale Elphinstone AO, Tim Gardner, Kym Goodes, Samantha Hogg, Leanne McLean, Paul Ranson and Brett Torossi. Thank you for all your time and effort and invaluable expertise. Within two months, the council provided an interim report containing a package of 64 recommendations aimed at our short and medium-term recovery. We accepted all these recommendations, provided funding where necessary in the Budget and continue to implement them.

I also tasked the council with a second and more critically important task - to look over the horizon to the medium- and longer term opportunities for our state, with a time frame for implementation between two and five years. The council has taken a whole-of-state approach to identify the priority areas and consulted extensively, hearing from Tasmanians through the most comprehensive consultation program undertaken in two decades. Around 3500 people were involved, and the report reflects their voices as much as it does the voice of the council.

Tasmanians clearly articulated a vision for our future based on five key priority areas: namely, jobs and income, health and housing, community connectivity and engagement, environment sustainability, and public sector capability. These priorities are the priorities of Tasmanians, and they align strongly to the priorities and values of my Government.

Today I am making a commitment to the Tasmanian people: this report will not be another report that will sit in someone's desk drawer. If we can close our borders, shut our businesses and support those most disadvantaged in a time of crisis, we can seize this moment to adopt the future-focused recommendations of PESRAC informed by Tasmanians for Tasmanians. Today, we will make the PESRAC Final Report 2021 available to all Tasmanians. Today, I am committing to accept all of the report's 52 recommendations - however challenging they may be.

Time does not allow me to comment on all the recommendations, but I will touch on each of the key priority areas contained in the report and some of the immediate steps we will take in each priority area. The PESRAC consultation identified that one of the most important concerns for Tasmanians was jobs and incomes, and especially skills and training.

When I became Premier, I said my vision was for a Tasmania that, no matter where you live or what your background is, no matter what your circumstances are, opportunities will be there and that if you want to grasp those opportunities, a better life will be within your reach. This Government has a strong and proud record of achievement in this regard.

There are now 22 000 more Tasmanians employed since we came to government in 2014. Our economy is one of the strongest in the country, and we have the lowest unemployment rate of any state in the country but we can still do better. PESRAC has recommended that the Government continues to support major investment to stimulate economic activity, create jobs and attract other investment as well as building confidence and hope.

In line with the PESRAC recommendations, we will take the opportunity to support major investment and realise projects that can make a real difference to our state - projects such as the Macquarie Point development, which has the potential to rival Southbank and other landmark waterfront precincts. While we delivered the remediation works within budget, there is still more to do - and now is the time to accelerate this work and attract investment.

That is why I am today announcing we will provide an additional \$77 million investment in the site for the corporation to continue to advance the site development, including more than \$6 million that will be provided this year. This certainty will get the next development stage to market sooner - over the next three years - providing the foundation for around \$500 million worth of investment to take place so that this fantastic waterfront precinct can come alive for all Tasmanians to enjoy.

In the Budget we have already announced a \$10 million fund to support paused private sector projects that were shovel-ready. Today we are building on that, with the establishment of a \$30 million building construction support loan scheme. The scheme will provide loan finance to support paused commercial-scale building and construction projects that create new or improved building or associated infrastructure. Under the scheme, projects of \$3 million or more will be able to apply for low interest commercial loans through the Office of the Coordinator-General.

A key recommendation of PESRAC is the creation of Jobs Tasmania local networks to strengthen the links to job opportunities, to ensure more Tasmanians have the opportunity to live and work in the place they call home. The local networks will be regional, with local leadership, and they will complement the work of the Australian Government's Jobactive networks. We have already taken steps down this path under our Strategic Growth portfolio. We are delivering job hubs in Sorell and Glenorchy, as well as initiatives to better connect skills and training provision directly with local industry and business, such as the regional growth projects underway in George Town. In line with this recommendation, we will establish Jobs Tasmania local networks that link to our existing hubs. However, there is no time to waste and businesses are telling us they need workers now.

Today we are announcing a two-year, \$20.5 million package to help more Tasmanian workers into jobs. Through this, we will establish a Job Ready fund of \$2 million to help jobseekers gain essential tools they need to get a job, such as White Card licencing, Working with Vulnerable People checks, boots, protective clothing, equipment or a toolbox.

We will expand our Area Connect service to get more people to work, training or education where no easy transport options exist. We will invest \$3.2 million and expand the current transport services from six to 16 local government areas. We will fund a \$400 000 Worker Connect portal, providing Tasmanian businesses and jobseekers with information about local jobs, as well as the programs and the support services available.

We will deliver a regional job show and events program with \$200 000 available to showcase local employment and industry opportunities, in partnership with regional job hubs and community groups. We will expand our successful job matching service, with an additional \$2.4 million to place more jobseekers with local employer vacancies, and we will introduce the Tasmanian employer bonus, incentivising employers to take on a long-term, unemployed jobseeker. In coordination with federal government programs, we will invest \$6.5 million over two years to help employers take on jobseekers who have experience and skills but need a fair go, with a \$6500 incentive to those employers.

Some of the fastest growing industries in Tasmania are the aged care and disability support sectors. We know that the skills pipeline for these sectors was disproportionately affected during COVID-19. We will invest \$3 million to fund an additional 600 training places in Certificate III in Individual Support, which is the crucial qualification staff need to work in

these sectors. The successful Skype initiative will also be extended for a further 12 months, with a \$1 million investment to continue to provide fee-free training for those hardest hit by COVID 19, delivering more new entrants into the job market by upskilling jobseekers or those wanting to retrain in key areas.

To safeguard our disadvantaged youths from the ongoing fallout of COVID-19, we will invest \$850 000 in the youth Navigators' Project for the next 12 months. This will see a youth employment alliance formed between community organisations to deliver triage services specifically tailored to young people, including one on one guided support to enter the job market.

I am also pleased to announce these projects will be managed by a new jobs and participation unit in Skills Tasmania. This unit will also oversee the establishment of the Jobs Tasmania local networks, helping to ensure Tasmanians can access opportunities in their local communities and that they are trained and ready for work.

The initiatives I have just outlined will remove some of the barriers especially in relation to costs and access to training and support. While we have been focused on rebuilding TasTAFE since we came to government, it is time to take the next steps with TasTAFE's evolution. TasTAFE is in a stronger position than when we came to government. However, one of the strongest themes PESRAC heard in its consultation with business is the need for our training provider, TasTAFE, to meet the needs of a generation of young people and an influx of jobseekers who need to quickly upskill - and reskill - to move across sectors as we recover from the structural impacts of COVID-19.

We know our construction sector has a pipeline of work in front of it that cannot be met by our existing workforce. Our plan is to deliver more apprentices and trainees and more Tasmanian tradies, rather than relying on fly in fly out interstaters. Job vacancies - which are increasing across all industry sectors but especially in the trades and construction sector - are at record highs. However, the single largest risk, the greatest challenge that the state faces to rebuilding our state and delivering both public and private projects, whether that be building someone their first house or building a school or a bridge, is the fact that we need more skilled and trained people.

PESRAC points strongly to the critical role of skills in building recovery and TasTAFE takes a central role in this. However, they are of the view that TasTAFE must be given the autonomy and workforce flexibility to continuously align its training offering with our evolving workforce needs. I could not agree more. We have the jobs that need filling. We have Tasmanians who want to work, and need to work. We have worked hard to improve the outcomes from TasTAFE and great steps have been made, but without further change, without further intervention, the single largest risk we face in terms of our recovery is the ability of our major training provider to train enough people quickly.

I do not want our businesses to be employing people from interstate in the coming months and years because our training provider is not empowered to act as nimbly, as quickly and as flexibly as the businesses it seeks to serve. The PESRAC consultation tells us there was overwhelming support for improving and investing in TasTAFE as the public provider and creating the operational flexibility TasTAFE needs to match the needs of business. Across our business and industry sectors that are creating employment pathways and providing jobs for Tasmanians the message was loud and clear: we need a public skills and training provider that

is fit for purpose, industry-specific and offers training specific to the outcomes required - a provider that looks and operates more like the businesses it serves.

PESRAC heard that employment conditions for TasTAFE trainers align more to a school than an industry environment, with restrictive maximum training loads and inflexible time-of-day training arrangements that make it difficult to deliver to industry work patterns or for students' out-of-hours needs. No business or adult learner should reasonably expect training to be unavailable for 11 weeks of the year, or for training to be undertaken during office hours only, or for salaries that do not incentivise new industry skilled trainers, especially in trades areas.

These restrictive practices do not happen across most TAFEs in Australia. Businesses expect TasTAFE to be able to recruit new staff quickly in response to industry demand. That is why we agree with PESRAC's recommendation that TasTAFE must have the autonomy and the workforce flexibility it needs to continuously align its training offering with evolving workforce needs, as well as the financial capacity and flexibility to invest in and manage infrastructure best suited to deliver contemporary training.

PESRAC's recommendations are that the most effective way to achieve the flexibility and the agility required is to make TasTAFE an independent government business which has available to it all the tools and resources that other public trading enterprises have, including a modern and fit-for-purpose industrial relations framework. Under this model of TasTAFE, the public would have a clear view of its charter aligned to government priorities to address industry and business needs as they emerge.

We have a growing economy and there are jobs to be had. We have emerging industries with new jobs on the horizon, and we must act now to make sure Tasmanians have the best access to fit-for-purpose industry-endorsed training. To make sure that learning skills and training is fully integrated, we support PESRAC's recommendations as well in relation to implementing a range of training and education pathways, including school-age work experience, apprenticeships, cadetships and internships.

It is time to take action and build a bolder, better TasTAFE with a smart approach to delivering hands-on training through courses that best equip Tasmanians to gain a job, removing material barriers and enabling greater participation in skills training and the workforce. It is imperative that we do this, otherwise we will deny Tasmanians the opportunity to receive the skills and training they need to achieve a better life and to secure Tasmania's future.

Tasmanians told PESRAC that health was a priority. We need to keep investing in mental health, and securing affordable housing close to work, family and friends remains challenging. There is no denying that COVID-19 has impacted on many people in ways never imagined and PESRAC has identified very clearly the challenge of mental health. While we are rolling out a \$120 million plan for new facilities, additional staff and more support for the community sector, we know there is more to do. Over the next few years we will deliver significant reform arising from the Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program and the reform agenda for the alcohol and other drugs sector in Tasmania.

In last year's Budget we invested \$4 million to commence phase 1 of implementing the Government's response to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) review

report and recommendations. Late last year we also released Tasmania's Mental Health Plan, Rethink 2020, which represents a shared approach to mental health service planning and delivery in Tasmania. However, we understand that as a result of the impact of COVID-19 over the last 12 months, there is more to do.

I am pleased to announce today, in line with the PESRAC recommendations, that we will invest a further \$41.2 million over four years to fully fund phases 1 and 2 of the Government's response to the CAMHS review. The review recommended large-scale changes in the way CAMHS operates, including in its structure, practice and culture to better support our children and adolescents, with particular emphasis on those most vulnerable and in need of support. We have also prioritised mental health and wellbeing in our schools, delivering an extra 80 FTE professional support staff, including school psychologists, social workers, nurses and speech and language pathologists to support children and young people impacted by trauma. We now have support and wellbeing teams established in every school.

Today I am announcing we will further strengthen the supports already in place by upskilling all school health nurses with the latest youth mental health first aid training, with school nurses given the opportunity to begin undertaking specialised training later this year. We will also fund the wellbeing of lead teachers and principals in every government school in Tasmania to undertake online professional learning focused on student mental health and trauma informed approaches.

Furthermore, we understand how alcohol and drug and mental health services provided by government can dovetail better with our longstanding community organisations, which is why we are providing \$150 000 to the Salvation Army for a master plan to redevelop its ageing New Town site to a purpose-built village providing tailored care and support to vulnerable Tasmanians, including alcohol and drug rehabilitation, crisis accommodation, parenting programs, new social affordable housing units, a common community centre and garden and extended family violence support.

Tasmanians deserve a health system they can be proud of. Since coming to government we have grown our Health budget to \$9.8 billion, a 70 per cent increase since the last Labor-Greens budget, with 1500 additional FTE staff, over 800 new nurses, 230 more doctors, 170 more allied health professionals and over 170 more FTE staff at Ambulance Tasmania. Coming to government we inherited significant legacy issues from underspending and underinvestment, but brick by brick and service by service we are building a better health system. Whilst not specific PESRAC recommendations, there are a number of further health measures I want to comment on today that we intend to implement.

We know pressure needs to be relieved on our emergency departments so that those most at risk can get the care that they need when they need it. That is why we will make it even easier for Tasmanians to access medical care close to home by working with the primary health sector, with the \$3 million support and encouragement program for primary health services and local GPs to provide after-hours services for their local communities. This will complement other initiatives, including community rapid response and secondary triage and, subject to consultation with the primary care sector, we intend to have these initiatives in place by the end of June this year.

We will also build on our 50 per cent increase in Ambulance Tasmania staff recruited since 2014, recruiting two new paramedic crews with an additional 12 FTEs each and new



vehicles to support increased access to ambulance services in the Greater Hobart and Greater Launceston areas.

We also know that the oral health waiting list has increased in the last 12 months as a result of COVID-19 due to the inability for practitioners to conduct appointments and the reduced availability of dental students from interstate due to lockdown and border closures. To support more Tasmanians to get the care they need sooner, we will be providing a funding injection of \$5 million in addition to this financial year's \$1 million boost, with extra capacity sources through the existing and very successful private dental sector outsourcing program. This will deliver 20 000 additional dental appointments for public patients across emergency general care and denture clinics. We will work closer with private practices and organisations like the RFTS to ensure that the care can be received where it is needed most.

We have also been considering improvements in access to Tasmania's controlled access scheme for medical cannabis. I can confirm we will allow GPs in Tasmania to prescribe medical cannabis subject to necessary approval from the Therapeutic Goods Association, with the commencement of the new scheme from 1 July this year. We will also remove requirements that medical cannabis is dispensed only from Tasmanian Health Service pharmacies, allowing other pharmacies to dispense throughout the state, and we will continue to review the controlled access scheme to ensure it continues to provide an appropriate specialist-led pathway alongside the new process of GP prescriptions.

Before we leave the Health portfolio, I want to touch on the End-of-Life Choices (Voluntary Assisted Dying) legislation which passed through the lower House with amendments last sitting. It is my view that through a conscience vote by the Liberal Party, we have delivered more robust legislation, offering both choice and protection for Tasmania's most vulnerable. However, I am also committed to ensuring we have better palliative care for Tasmanians. Our funding for palliative care has consistently increased since we came to government, with over \$12 million in state funding per annum for specialist palliative care services as well as the refurbishment and delivery of new palliative care spaces in our hospitals through the \$10.5 million King Island redevelopment and the \$35 million Mersey Community Hospital redevelopment.

However, we know there is more to be done, and in the lead-up to the August budget we will work with peak palliative care and health bodies and the community sector on the best approach for additional and expanded hospice and home services and the expansion of statewide after-hours palliative care support. This will be a substantial investment to ensure Tasmanians continue to have improved levels of care.

PESRAC clearly notes the challenges inherent in our housing market at this time, with Tasmanians saying that access to affordable housing was one of their concerns for the future. This Government has set in place the most comprehensive affordable housing strategy focusing on social and affordable housing that any government has attempted, especially supporting low income Tasmanians. Yet Tasmania is seeing unprecedented demand for housing across all sectors, which is why we support the PESRAC recommendation to develop a broader housing policy framework that looks at the full array of housing market issues across both the public and private sectors, to drive practical actions and deliver more sustainable housing market outcomes across Tasmania for all Tasmanians.

We will commission this work immediately while we continue to take targeted action to boost supply, support home ownership and put downward pressure on rents. As I have said on many occasions, we must build more houses and with regard to the supply, Tasmania is building houses at a rate not seen in nearly a decade.

Home builders delivered with over 2600 applications received and 1763 applications already conditionally approved by the State Revenue Office. In total, in the 12 months to January, there were 3538 new dwellings approved the most approved in a quarter of a century. But we need to build more.

Currently, there is around 5000 hectares of privately-owned vacant residential zoned land across Tasmania which could deliver around 60 000 lots to residential development across the state. However, for various reasons this land is not being developed. That is why we will take immediate action to remove barriers and costs and encourage further land activation. Landowners who wish to activate residential zoned land that is not currently being developed, will benefit from a \$10 million headworks holiday for new residential subdivisions. This includes up to \$5000 per residential lot for power and up to \$5000 per residential lot delivered for water and sewerage infrastructure

Tasmanians are seeking different types of housing, yet current planning settings do not cater well for infill developments in our cities and towns where services and transport are already developed. To address this need, we will finalise an apartment code to establish appropriate permitted and discretionary assessment pathways for medium density residential development to provide certainty, consistency and transparency for developers, councils and the community to get these developments going sooner. The code will make it easier, faster and simpler to build infill, medium density apartments to meet demand near existing transport routes and services. Complementing this, we are also providing a no-permit required pathway for landowners to construct ancillary dwellings on their properties.

Ancillary dwellings are extra living quarters with a floor area of less than 60 square metres which is self-contained but additional to the primary home on a block, such as a granny flat. Ancillary dwellings will allow home owners to accommodate changing family needs and they also add value to the family home.

To help meet demand for rental properties, today I am announcing that the first 250 new ancillary dwellings that are made available for long-term rental for more than two years, will receive a \$10 000 payment. These changes will make it easier, faster and simpler to build and meet demand and put downward pressure on rents in Tasmania.

When it comes to social housing, we have added 1138 more long-term homes and supported accommodation places for applicants on the social housing register since coming to government. Contracted right now in our pipeline, there are 552 new dwellings to be added to social housing and supported accommodation and 103 more places in homeless accommodation, as well as a further 764 social houses currently being contracted.

We will continue building on this ambitious pipeline. The HomeShare scheme opens the door to home ownership for those who have enough income to make the step but need a helping hand. This is a fantastic program that enables the Government to co-invest with purchasers by taking an equity stake in the home of up to \$100 000 or 30 per cent of the home's value, whichever is the lesser.

There are income and asset limits to meet; however, they are very generous. For example, a couple with two children and an income of up to \$133 242 and up to \$100 000 in financial assets, would qualify for the program. We want to help more Tasmanians to understand and access this program so we will ensure that it is widely advertised during the course of this year and funding will be increased by up to another \$10 million meaning at least another 100 households can realise the dream of home ownership through the program.

Furthermore, given the strong growth in housing prices we will provide further support to Tasmanians to buy their first home or pensioners to downsize by increasing the conveyance duty concession threshold from \$400 000 to \$500 000 to reflect current market conditions, providing relief of 50 per cent on duty, effective immediately.

We recognise that the private rental market remains challenging for many. During COVID-19 this Government has provided significant support for tenants and landlords including \$2.3 million to support tenants and \$1 million to support landlords, helping to keep people in homes and helping them to insulate landlords from financial liability.

We are currently waiving land tax for commercial land impacted by COVID-19 and to incentivise the availability of long-term rentals, providing land tax exemptions of three years for newly-built housing and one year for former short stay accommodation.

While as a share of total state revenue, land tax in Tasmania - along with Western Australia - is the lowest of all of the states, there remains a need to contemporise our land tax thresholds. That is why we will reset the land tax thresholds to reflect today's strong property market. We will double the land value on which land tax becomes payable from \$25 000 to \$50 000 and we will increase the maximum land value threshold by \$50 000 from \$350 000 to \$400 000. These changes will save around 70 000 Tasmanians up to \$613 in their land tax bill. It will also mean an additional 4100 landowners will now pay no land tax in the year ahead putting downward pressure on the need for rental increases to be passed on.

In addition, we understand that the impacts of COVID-19 along with rising property values have created challenges. Currently, there are already a number of mechanisms to assist landlords to meet their land tax liabilities but these need contemporising as well. We will halve the premium rate of interest charged on unpaid tax from 8 per cent to 4 per cent and we will also allow for land tax over \$500 to be paid by three instalments over the year. We will introduce legislation for the land tax and conveyance duty measures before June this year.

The impacts of COVID-19 meant for many weeks we spent time isolating and apart at a time when we longed to be together. The PESRAC report focuses on the importance of place-based recovery strategy centred on improving and enhancing community outcomes as well as the importance of digital inclusion and access.

The Tasmanian Government supports this recommendation to proactively seek out and fund additional initiatives and increased community connection, primary prevention and early intervention in areas such as family and community violence and models that support new and innovative strategies to engage volunteers and support leadership development.

To ensure that our supports are ongoing, yesterday I wrote to our specialist family and sexual violence service providers extending their funding at the increased level of COVID-19

funding until the 30 June 2022 so that they can maintain their operational capacity to meet demand and continue to support our communities.

The most recent Australian Digital Inclusion Index Report shows that off the back of the Tasmanian Government's Digital Ready for Daily Life Program our state has made progress with digital inclusion in our community, even factoring in the challenges presented by COVID-19. The PESRAC report highlights the need to continue making improvements with digital inclusion and infrastructure. We support the recommendation by PESRAC of a review into coverage gaps, future investment priorities and pursuing enhanced collaboration between the federal government, telecommunication carriers and other local providers so that more Tasmanians can participate in an increasingly digital society. The findings of this review, which will be conducted in coming months, will be used to inform the development of the August budget, where additional funding will be made available for digital infrastructure projects to close the digital divide and strengthen connectivity and access.

Many regions have events that help celebrate and define their identity and that enhance and bring their community together. Tasmania's events landscape has been hit hard through COVID-19 and while we have invested \$4 million under our Events Attraction Fund to strengthen the regional events calendar, we know that as we recover further support is needed. In line with the PESRAC recommendation to support community-based events, \$1.5 million will be made available in the Regional Events Recovery Fund to support organisers to undertake activities that contribute to the sustainability of these rich events in regional areas.

In addition, we will provide support to our creative and cultural sector through a \$1.5 million investment to aid the ongoing recovery efforts of this important industry. This package includes additional funding for arts organisations along with assistance for performing art production companies and venues to stage live events and performances in a 2021 COVID-safe environment.

As Tasmania continues to cement itself as a premium destination for creative screen productions - many of which are filmed on location in regional Tasmania - we will provide \$3 million to attract and support the production of filming in Tasmania of works that showcase our state and build on our successful Tasmania brand.

This Government recognises how critical a good education system is to strengthening and connecting communities. We have been steadfast in our commitment to build a better education system to give our young people the best start to life. Since 2014, 56 high schools have now been extended to years 11 and 12 in all regions of Tasmania and there are 35 new education infrastructure projects currently in planning, design or construction around Tasmania, including two new schools, four major school redevelopments, six new child and family learning centres and five new kindergartens. We have boosted staff with 269 more FTE teachers and 250 FTE teacher assistants.

Tasmania's school expenditure per student is now above the national average and our schools have a teacher/student ratio better than the national rate.

We are also aware of the need to decrease pressure on popular schools in some areas, such as Tarooma High School, which is why we have taken the steps for Ogilvie and New Town to go co-educational in 2022. While the full master planning process will get under way to assess the medium- and long-term capital spend required, we will provide \$1.6 million

immediately for essential projects, including co-educational toilet facilities and refurbished general learning areas. These works will be completed before the 2022 school year.

There is always more that can be done and it is often the little things that can make the most difference. Last year, a 14-year-old student wrote to the Government asking for free sanitary items for girls in our schools, explaining that many students struggled to buy these products and sometimes even missed school because of that. We need to remove barriers to learning so I am pleased to say we will make sanitary items freely available in all government schools from term 3 of this year.

We have proven we can keep Tasmanians safe during the pandemic and a major continuing priority for our Government is to keep Tasmanians safe in our communities with a stronger law and order program. We are on track to deliver 258 more police officers. Since we came to government we have recruited 200 more correctional officers since 2016. While we must ensure the safety of our correctional staff as well as prisoners and detainees at our custodial facilities, we accept we must minimise as far as possible personal searches in these facilities. That is why we are strengthening the Youth Justice Act to support this. Today, I can announce we will invest \$1.3 million in body scanning technology in the Hobart and Launceston reception prisons, Risdon Prison and the Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

We also want to work hard to stop the revolving door of prison as our reoffending rate remains too high. That is why we are actively working on a plan to reduce the rate of reoffending through an increased focus on rehabilitation and reintegration. The Minister for Corrections will lead this body of work as a priority. We will also extend Project Vigilance, Tasmania's electronic monitoring of family violence perpetrators, following recent successful trials where an evaluation demonstrated increased safety of victim survivors with an overall 82 per cent reduction in high-risk incidents. An additional \$2.4 million will be provided to allow for up to 100 devices to be fitted whilst also providing police supervision and monitoring.

During COVID-19 we implemented a range of support measures to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families, including support for informal kinship carers who play a vital role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children who cannot live with their parents. Part of our response was to conduct a review of supports currently placed to understand where support can be enhanced. Today we are releasing the summary of the review report and are providing \$500 000 to immediately commence implementation of recommendations. I am pleased to say we are installing an informal kinship carer support liaison officer in the north-west and opening up access to more concessions, training opportunities and an information portal, as well as respite and increased brokerage funds for families who need that support.

We will also invest \$500 000 to begin the work needed for a new Tasmanian-based therapeutic residential care program for Tasmanian young people with exceptional needs as an alternative to the Many Colours 1 Direction program in the Northern Territory.

Underpinning all of the consultation that PESRAC undertook was a need for our recovery to be sustainable, to not compromise our competitive strengths and the importance of our environment to our wellbeing.

One of the greatest strengths right now is renewable energy. We are a global leader and one of only a handful of jurisdictions in the world to achieve 100 per cent self-sufficiency in

clean, reliable and affordable renewable energy. This has been a key Liberal Government commitment. We have reached it through our nation-leading energy policies to attract investment in jobs, particularly in our regions, but we need to do more to seize our state's immense potential, which is why we have a bold plan to double our renewable generation to 200 per cent of our current needs by 2040. We will deliver this by progressing the Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation projects and our \$50 million Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Industry Development Funding Program to inject billions into our economy and create jobs.

The transition to net zero emissions is a global economic transition and represents an economic, environmental and social opportunity for this state. Thanks to our unique landscapes, renewable energy and our climate action to date, we are well placed to grasp this opportunity. We have already achieved our net zero target by 2050 four years in a row and our target climate change plan and act are currently under independent review. We are also developing our next climate action plan to guide our actions over the next five-years which will be informed by the modelling we are undertaking to understand both the economic and the environmental implications of more ambitious goals. However, it is my firm belief that we hold a unique opportunity to raise our ambition. Later this year, I look forward to introducing to this House a new climate change bill with bolder targets, along with the release of a new comprehensive climate action plan.

We already have a target to have the lowest rate of litter in the country by 2023. We will continue to support up to \$30 million of investment in waste management recycling facilities statewide and we will introduce legislation for our container refund scheme this year.

PESRAC has recommended that we develop a sustainability strategy for Tasmania with ambitious goals and actions. The Department of Premier and Cabinet will lead this work in concert with other agencies and will consult widely on this strategy later this year. In the meantime, one concrete action that we can take right now is to set a goal to phase out the use of single-use plastics, as a number of local governments, including the Launceston and Hobart city councils, have already done. The Government, as a first step, will consult with local government on the best way to implement and phase in the removal of single-use plastics from government and council facilities and events held on publicly owned land across the state by 2023.

In terms of our environment, one industry leading in this area is tourism. The industry, through the T21 Industry Recovery Action Plan released last year, identified a goal for Tasmania to become a carbon-neutral destination. Today I can announce that the industry has set a target to achieve this goal by 2025. To assist businesses to start the journey to carbon-neutral, \$1.5 million will be provided to support carbon audits and formulate a pathway for them to achieve a standard of operation that will be globally recognised. This is a massive opportunity with more travellers than ever before proactively selecting climate-positive destinations.

In addition, as this industry has been hardest hit by travel bans and restrictions, we will provide \$8 million in innovation and development grants to continue to enhance Tasmania's world-class experience reputation, and a further \$500 000 to extend the Business Planning Support Program. Additionally, we will also provide \$4 million in direct financial support to tourism and hospitality businesses identified as critical to regional visitor attraction which remain in acute financial stress as a result of the restrictions on travel due to the COVID-19 response. This will include grants of up to \$100 000 per business with a go-live date of 4 April.

There is no doubt travel agents, which have been hard hit through COVID-19, will be instrumental in helping to drive demand. We will also provide \$1 million in grant funds to support Tasmanian travel agents with a program to be rolled out through Business Tasmania, again from 4 April. The funding that remains unspent of around \$5 million from the successful travel voucher scheme we ran last year, which underpinned nearly \$30 million in additional spending, will be used as I said it would - to support the industry it will be rolled in to support these new grant programs.

In addition, along with further funding from Austrade's Recovery for Regional Tourism initiative, Tourism Tasmania will invest \$3.5 million to deliver our most aggressive winter season campaign ever. Complementing the Australian Government's \$1.2 billion tourism recovery package announced last week delivering discounted flights to the regional areas, we anticipate Tasmania to be red-hot this winter. This activity, coupled with initiatives like the free vehicles program through the Bass Strait passenger equalisation scheme will make a winter holiday in Tasmania more accessible and compelling than ever before and will contribute to the rebuilding of our very professional and resilient tourism industry.

We have a long-term plan to secure Tasmania's future for all Tasmanians and to ensure they receive the services they need, but to continue this efficiently and effectively we need the right governance and processes in place. This is identified by PESRAC in its report and we are moving ahead with the review of the Tasmanian State Service to ensure we have a contemporary framework to enable the continuous improvement necessary to provide services to the Tasmanian community which are fit for purpose in this rapidly changing world.

Dr Ian Watt AC is leading the review of our State Service, with a final report due at the end of May. I thank Dr Watt for his work to date and also the public sector unions for their engagement through this process. While I am certain there will be differing views on the final report when it is available, I want to provide an assurance to the public service that I see this as an opportunity to ensure we have the best framework in place supported by the best system so we can service Tasmanians effectively as we recover and rebuild from COVID 19. I also want to especially thank our public servants for their outstanding work over the past 12 months as they have supported the Tasmanian community through this most challenging period. This Government will not forget your efforts and hard work.

PESRAC has also recommended that local government reform should be considered. They have recommended that the two Houses of parliament work together to set terms of reference for a reform process that will run over an 18-month period. However, they are of the view that local government reform should not be used as a political football and that unless there is agreement in this place as well as the Legislative Council that reform is needed and that a process should be established, there is no point in considering it further. I accept that advice. I have no interest in expending energy on a political bunfight that ultimately does not lead to improvements in the sector and only leads to a divided parliament and divided communities.

The position of the Government on this recommendation is that across this Chamber we will establish a cross-party working group as well as the Independent member for Clark, Ms Ogilvie, to discuss and decide on whether we wish to move collectively forward on this matter. I will write to the leaders and Ms Ogilvie in coming days to arrange our first discussion.

I thank PESRAC for their considered and comprehensive work and assure the 3500 Tasmanians who were consulted throughout this process that they have been heard and we will take action.

Tasmania is in a great place. We have emerged from the pandemic with a strong economy and business confidence leading the nation; yet when we talk about our greatest assets, it is not our infrastructure, our resources or our environment, it is our people. Our people have shown great strength, resilience, courage and also, importantly, great compassion and kindness. This year the Government is firmly focused on delivering our plan to rebuild our state to ensure we learn from our shared experience, and, importantly, that we secure our best future.

There is work to be done. With the PESRAC recommendations strengthening our resolve, this Government will continue to provide the decisive leadership needed to keep building a strong economy, to deliver the essential services Tasmanians need, to create jobs, and to put in place the very best skills and training pathways so more Tasmanians can benefit today and well into the future. When I first became Premier, I said I would lead a government of conviction and compassion, a government that ensures that opportunity is there for our people. I said that no matter where you live, no matter your circumstance or your background, this Government will help you grasp the opportunities this great state provides.

My resolve is firm, my commitment strong. This Government will deliver the plan I have outlined today to secure the future of every Tasmanian.

## **MOTION**

### **Note - Premier's Address**

[12.47 p.m.]

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

That the Premier's Address be noted.

All of the Premier's Address speeches are important, and this one particularly so. It is especially important, because unlike any others in recent memory, it sets the framework for recovery from the ongoing impacts of an unprecedented global crisis in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic. When COVID-19 hit us over a year ago, the uncertainty and worry in our community was palpable. What would the impact be on our small island state? What does the future hold for our families and friends? How will our businesses survive? Will we be able to access continuing essential services?

Many of us were not in a good place at all. If ever there was a need for a strong, decisive leadership from the Government, it was then. That is what happened. The Premier, Mr Gutwein, and the Government stepped up and introduced significant economic and social support packages, as well as key infrastructure investments which provided Tasmanians with the security and confidence to continue. The signs are looking pretty good. You could not deny that Tasmania is well positioned after COVID-19. I will just go through some of the reasons why I say that.



Tasmania's economic levels have returned to pre-COVID-19 levels, with some 261 200 Tasmanians now employed. We had the highest percentage monthly growth in the country during February this year, of 1.5 per cent - more than double the national growth rate. Job vacancies grew by 13.3 per cent; again, it was the highest in the country. The unemployment rate fell to 5.7 per cent in February - the second-lowest of the states - and our youth unemployment rate is also one of the lowest around. Back in May last year, Treasury was forecasting an unemployment rate of over 12 per cent for youth unemployment. I will have a bit more to say on youth measures later.

Business confidence is surprisingly resilient, and business investment grew by 8.2 per cent in the December quarter. Businesses are hiring and investing in Tasmania. In fact, a new brewery is setting up in Penguin, and we are all very excited, waiting for the official opening. Our state's economy is the second-fastest growing in Australia, up 3.3 per cent in the December quarter. CommSec has Tasmania as the best-performing economy in the nation for the fourth quarter in a row. Retail trade is 9.3 per cent higher than this time last year and merchandise exports were also higher in 2020 than in the previous year. It has been particularly gratifying to see Tasmanians spending money in local businesses and holidaying within our state. These positive results are really encouraging - we seem to be doing okay, but now is most definitely not the time to relax or fall into some false sense of comfort or security. Clearly the Premier is adamant we will not do so.

The strength and leadership he has shown over the past year is continuing and is essential because what the Government does over the coming year will largely determine the success of our long-term recovery from COVID-19. In conjunction with the state of the state address, the Premier released the final report of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) and all 52 recommendations have been accepted in full.

The PESRAC report identified future focused opportunities across five key priority areas - namely, jobs and income, health and housing, community connectivity and engagement, environment and sustainability and public sector capability. In his speech, the Premier gave a commitment that the PESRAC report will not just be another report that will sit in somebody's desk drawer, and that he intends to seize his moment to adopt its future focus recommendations. I welcome that.

In his address, the Premier has outlined a clear plan with new policies and new initiatives to create jobs and keep our economy growing to support our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. He is to be commended for the truly sterling job he has done and will continue to do for all Tasmanians.

I want to make a brief comment on a few of the initiatives announced particularly close to my heart. The opening of the Medical Cannabis Controlled Access Scheme in our state in 2017 was a welcome and significant step, but improvements to the operation of the scheme can, should and have been made. The Premier and the Minister for Health have announced changes will be made to increasing access to unregistered medicinal cannabis products in Tasmania, including authorising Tasmanian GPs to prescribe medicinal cannabis products and allowing pharmacies across the state to be able to dispense these products.

Tasmania will also adopt the national streamlined online application pathway and the 48-hour authorisation time frame, subject to approval from the Therapeutic Goods Administration. These changes are consistent with other state and territory jurisdiction models'

changes in recent years. I personally welcome the announcement that the controlled access scheme will be reviewed and the Department of Health will shortly undertake targeted consultation with key stakeholders regarding the changes. The commencement of the new scheme is from the 1 July this year.

I also thank the member for Windermere for his motion on that subject and the discussion that went with that, to which the whole Council agreed. I note to the member for Windermere that I was very strong in presenting my views to the Minister for Health and was pleased with the end result, as I hope you are, too.

Youth education and support - arguably nothing is more important than supporting and investing in the health, education and wellbeing of our youth. Somebody once said that educating and supporting our youth is the best way to invest in a prosperous future, and I strongly agree. I welcome the announcement of a number of initiatives aimed at increasing support available for young Tasmanians as the Premier said in his speech:

... one of the strongest themes PESRAC heard in its consultation with business is the need for our training provider TasTAFE to meet the needs of a generation of young people and an influx of jobseekers who need to quickly upskill and reskill to move across sectors as we recover from the structural impacts of COVID-19.

The next steps of TasTAFE's evolution announced in the state of the state will ensure our training provider is empowered to act as quickly and flexibly as the businesses it seeks to serve. It will ensure our youth are provided with the necessary and relevant skill sets they need to secure a job. The Government's plan to ensure we have the skilled workforce needed to deliver new growth as we recover from COVID-19 also saw the recent announcement of up to 200 apprentices and trainees in small to medium businesses through the new Mentoring for Success Program. Under this \$1.5 million program, up to \$6000 will be available per apprentice or trainee in a small business for wraparound mentoring and support services.

To safeguard our disadvantaged youth from the ongoing fallout of COVID-19, the Government will invest \$850 000 in the Youth Navigators project for the next 12 months. This involves a youth employment alliance formed between community organisations, to deliver triage services especially tailored to young people. This includes one-on-one guided support to enter the job market. It was also announced that, in line with PESRAC recommendations, the Government will invest an additional \$41.2 million over four years to fully fund phases 1 and 2 of the Government's response to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) review.

Additional funding announcements included the implementation of a second service to be established for children in out-of-home care; a second service to be established for the youth early intervention service; the capacity of perinatal and infant mental health services to be increased and enhanced; establishment of a statewide youth forensic mental health service; and the establishment of eating disorders day treatment programs.

Dealing with mental health issues in our schools requires a holistic, multi-pronged approach. I was pleased to see the announcement of further strengthening of supports already in place, by upskilling our school health nurses with the latest youth mental first aid training. Training will commence later this year.

The Premier's Address outlines the framework for our continued recovery from the effects of COVID-19 in the short, medium and long term. It points out that we are in a good position at present - certainly compared to other parts of the world - because of the willingness of Tasmanians to work together to confront a crisis. It also points out that much work still needs to be done.

I note the Premier's state of the state speech.

[12.58 p.m.]

**Mr GAFFNEY** (Mersey) - Mr President, I rise to offer my thoughts and reflections on the Premier's Address, which has been delivered following a year of unprecedented challenges to our community and economy on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

I congratulate the Premier, the Government and those in the public service for taking such a proactive approach in the face of an invisible foe, at a time when so little was understood about how the spread of the virus could be managed and stopped. I also acknowledge the wider Tasmanian community, which has gone above and beyond in doing the right thing by following the advice of the Government, epidemiologists and our health professionals as the impact of the virus evolved, often leaving families and businesses in extremely challenging circumstances.

The north-west outbreak and subsequent hotspot was an incredibly difficult period. It had a huge impact on the region, especially with many members of the Mersey electorate who were directly impacted by loved ones with COVID-19 and the necessary restrictions of the quarantine and wider lockdown processes. We still have a lingering memory of those times and we have no desire to revisit them.

I also pay tribute to the essential workers in health and retail who maintained essential services with stoicism, courage and great fortitude, when the majority of us were able to stay at home in relative safety at a time when so much was unknown. Managing the COVID-19 threats - both tangible and intangible - to the wellbeing of our proud island state has rightly been at the forefront of our thinking, especially as we look to the rollout of the vaccination process and the future of our community.

I note with interest the report of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council - PESRAC. I acknowledge the Premier's commitment to accepting all of its 52 recommendations. Within those recommendations there are many points of interest that point to future opportunities and complement ongoing initiatives.

It is with this context that I frame the following comments and observations. Like many of us in this place, I speak from a position of experience. As a former Latrobe councillor for 20 years and mayor for 12 years, I have been party to significant growth and development and the associated strategic implications - especially as Latrobe is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Tasmania and has been for many years - together with the initiation of the Devonport Living City project and the ongoing business and community developments in my Mersey electorate.

The COVID-19 crisis has left the future of many businesses and jobs in doubt, and many are still navigating their way forward.

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

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Welcome River - Dairy Farm Effluent**

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

With regard to concerns raised related to reports of substantial effluent discharge into waterways from north-west dairy farms, including some media coverage:

- (1) What monitoring has been done in the Welcome River for dairy effluent?
- (2) Who undertakes this monitoring?
  - (a) How and where is the monitoring recorded and reported?
  - (b) How is the monitoring resourced?
- (3) Have there been any concerns regarding water quality and impacts of dairy farm effluent raised as a result of the testing?
  - (a) If so:
    - (i) what are the concerns;
    - (ii) what action has been taken to address the concerns; and
    - (iii) what follow-up monitoring has been undertaken?

## **ANSWER**

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

(1) and (2)

Given recent reporting of effluent issues in the north-west, the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), with the support of the Environment Protection Authority Tasmania, will be undertaking specific water quality monitoring of the Welcome River relating to effluent discharges.

While there has been no dedicated environmental monitoring program in the past solely for the Welcome River, DPIPWE has done a range of water monitoring over the past two decades across Tasmania. Rivers are a vital part of the Tasmanian landscape and sustaining their health or their condition allows the benefits they provide to the community to be maintained. River health is a broad concept that relates to the conditions of riverine ecosystems, and includes water quality and quality of habitat within rivers and the composition of communities of aquatic plants and animals. Since 1994, the Tasmanian government has conducted

monitoring of river conditions across Tasmania under the River Health Monitoring Program (RHMP).

The RHMP employs rapid sampling methods to assess river health, including Australian River Assessment Systems protocols, which focus on waterbug, microinvertebrate communities and habitat quality. Monitoring occurs every second year in spring and autumn. A recent review of the program is available on DPIPWE website - I will not go through the website; for anybody who is interested, it is [dpipwe.tas.gov.au](http://dpipwe.tas.gov.au), follow the links to a document title 'Review of the Tasmanian River Health Monitoring program'.

DPIPWE also has stream-gauging stations on the Duck, the Welcome and the Montague rivers as well as Edith Creek. This data is publicly available on the DPIPWE Water Information Tasmania web portal.

- (3) Historic water quality testing in the far north-west has not indicated there are significant nitrogen loadings of river systems. You can refer to the water quality section of the EPA website.

The Tasmanian Government is keen to ensure the growth of its vital dairy industry does not come at the expense of the environment, particularly our precious water resources. We recently took another step towards that goal by announcing a new \$100 000 round of the highly successful Cows Out of Creeks program.

It will provide \$5000 grants to 20 dairy farmers across Tasmania to construct infrastructure and install off-stream watering systems aiming to prevent accessing waterways.

This funding commitment follows the success of the past seven rounds of the Clean Rivers and Cows Out of Creeks programs. Dairy farmers are also under strict legislative requirements to effectively manage effluent from their operations and to report any failures of those systems to the local council and the Tasmanian Dairy Industry Authority.

### **Check in Tas App - Access Issues**

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

[2.36 p.m.]

Leader, in regard to the Check in Tas app being made mandatory as of 1 May 2021. The media release from the minister, Ms Courtney, on 18 March 2021 stated that the free Check in Tas app will be the only system used for collecting contact tracing information in Tasmania. I have three questions. I apologise for the length of the first one, but it is important to have this much information.

- (1) For those in our community who do not have a smart phone - and there are many - or access to the internet or who are unable to use this technology, why in the media

release is there a lack of information relayed to those people on how they go about entering premises and events et cetera?

The Coronavirus Tasmania website states that if you do not have a smart phone or are unable to use one, others in your group can check in for you on their device or staff at the premises will be able to record your contact information on their device or with pen and paper.

- (2) Does the Government intend to make this option clear to all?
- (3) Why is the Check in Tas app contact system used only in certain businesses and not all - for example, this system is not used at Kmart or Woolworths.

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for McIntyre for her question. I have quite a lengthy answer here.

- (1) The Director of Public Health has issued a new direction that mandates from 1 May 2021 the free Check in Tas app will be the only system used for collecting contact tracing information in Tasmania.

**Ms Rattray** - That is what I said.

**Mrs HISCUTT** - Yes.

The direction requires that a person must use the Check in Tas app to provide the information required. The direction applies to each person over the age of 16 who enters and remains on the relevant location for longer than 15 minutes.

These changes have been made to strengthen our rapid response contact tracing capability, which will help keep local businesses open and ensure ongoing community safety.

Members of the public can download the app to their mobile phones or devices for free from Google Play or from the Apple app store. If people do not have a smart phone or are unable to use one, others in a group can check in for the entire group on their device or staff at the premises will be able to check people in manually.

The Tasmanian Government is also strongly encouraging businesses and organisations to assist people when they check in by offering an electronic device onsite. A new functionality has been added to the Check in Tas app to allow this to happen.

Where none of these options are possible - for example, where no internet is available or the app is not accessible - the venue operator will be able to record contact information with pen and paper.

By 1 May 2021 businesses must clearly display the Check in TAS QR code sent to them after being registered at all entrances of the premises or event, and refuse

entry to those persons who refuse to provide the information required by the direction.

- (2) To support and assist businesses, consumers and patrons in meeting the requirements by 1 May, the Public Health Unit, supported by the departments of Health, State Growth and Communities, is providing tools and advice to educate and promote the use of the app; it has commenced a fully integrated media campaign. To ensure the message is widely communicated in the community, the broad and comprehensive campaign includes a series of print media advertisements, which commenced on Saturday, 21 March; it will also include advertising on buses, social media, radio and television.

This complements the direct stakeholder engagement the departments of Health, State Growth and Communities are undertaking, including with industry groups, businesses and organisations to which the direction applies. For assistance registering with Check in Tas or difficulties with venue QR codes, people may contact the Public Health Hotline on 1800 671 738 or email [checkin.tas@health.tas.gov.au](mailto:checkin.tas@health.tas.gov.au). People are also encouraged to visit the Government's dedicated Check in Tas app website, [www.checkin.tas.gov.au](http://www.checkin.tas.gov.au), for more information.

- (3) The organisations and businesses required to comply with the Public Health direction to use Check in Tas to collect contact information about everyone who spends time at their premises from the 1 May 2021 are:
- Restaurants, cafes and other retail food business and outlets where food is sold for consumption at these premises
  - Premises where alcohol is sold for consumption at those premises, including pubs, registered and licenced clubs and hotels other than such part of those premises lawfully operated to provide alcohol for consumption at a location other than the premises.
  - A gathering if a direction under section 16 of the act requires an event COVID-19 safety plan in a form approved by the Director of Public Health to be developed and implemented in respect of the gathering.
  - Places of worship, religious gatherings, religious premises and other similar premises, including premises used to perform a wedding or a funeral.
  - Cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos, gaming or other gambling venues, dance venues, nightclubs, strip clubs, brothels and other similar premises.
  - Galleries, museums, national institutions, historic sites and other similar premises.
  - Tourist premises, venues and sites where consideration is paid to enter such a premises, venue and site.

- Tourism activities and services that are provided for consideration.
- Concert venues, theatres, arenas, auditoriums, stadiums and other similar premises.
- Amusement parks, arcades, play centres and other similar premises regardless of whether the premises are an indoor space or an outdoor space other than skate parks and playgrounds.
- Auction houses, real estate auctions and houses open for inspection including display homes.
- Hairdressing and hair salons, beauty treatment premises, including body modification, tattoos, piercing, waxing and nail services.
- Spas and massage parlours and other similar premises, swimming pools and gymnasiums, health clubs, fitness centres, wellness centres, including yoga and barre premises and other similar premises or venues whether they are indoor outdoor.
- Venues used for sport or fitness, saunas, bathhouses and other similar premises or venues, whether indoor or outdoor.
- Premises used for personal training and other prearranged sporting activities.
- Zoos, wildlife centres, animal parks, petting zoos, aquariums, marine parks or similar premises.

General retail is not captured under the Public Health direction in relation to contact tracing as these premises are not considered to have the same level of risk that the businesses organisations and events listed in the directions, where patrons spend time on the premises for more than 15 minutes.

However, the Director of Public Health will continue to monitor the situation closely and has the ability to extend the requirements to use the Check in Tas app to other sectors, industries, premises and businesses in Tasmania if required.

### **Racing - North-West Coast - Venues**

#### **Ms RATTRAY to MINISTER for RACING, Ms HOWLETT**

I am interested in where the negotiations or discussions are around the transfer of racing on the north-west coast. There is to be some relocation but I have not heard anything for a little while. I am interested to see what negotiations have taken place, and where those changing venues are, particularly for the two codes that may be homeless.



## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for McIntyre for her question. Last week we announced an engineering agreement for the north-west coast, which was in the paper last week.

Tasracing has established a project committee as well. I do not have the details of the individuals on that. I know there are three from each code: three greyhound, three harness, Tasracing representatives and the engineering representatives as well. At the moment we are still looking at purchasing the land required for both tracks. We are certainly working on it.

### **Racing - North-West Coast Venues**

**Ms RATTRAY to MINISTER for RACING, Ms HOWLETT**

Is it not the Devonport City Council wanting to reclaim the current venue? What is the time frame left on that?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for McIntyre for her supplementary question. The venue has been sold to a developer, Mr Want. We have established our steering committee and our engineers are ready for the design. As soon as we can source some land - have established and found suitable land - the process will start.

### **Racing - North-West Coast Venues**

**Ms RATTRAY to MINISTER for RACING, Ms HOWLETT**

What is the time frame for the developer who wants to take possession of the land? Is this all going to marry up?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for McIntyre for her supplementary question. I expect, as with every project at the moment, there will be some slight delay, but we have the opportunity to talk to the developer and I am sure he has experienced delays as well. We all know how hard it is to get a builder or any development done at the moment, so his could well be pushed back as well. We may be able to come to some agreement with him, that if he is not ready to go, we can stay on that site until the new track is up and going.

**Ms Ratray** - Supplementary to the supplementary, you will not meet the expected time frames?

**Ms HOWLETT** - We will do our absolute best to meet the expected time frames.

## **WorkSafe Tasmania - Mandatory Request to Bob Brown Foundation**

**Mr DEAN to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,  
Mrs HISCUTT**

[2.49 p.m.]

Will the Leader please advise:

- (1) On my advice, on 4 March 2020 WorkSafe Tasmania issued a mandatory request to the Bob Brown Foundation (BBF) for documentation and information relative to the foundation. Was the information as required made available?
- (2) If not, what response was received from the BBF and what action has WorkSafe Tasmania taken, if any?
- (3) How many notifiable incident reports were made to WorkSafe Tasmania in 2019, 2020, and 2021 to date?
- (4) Has any business foundation had multiple notifiable incidents reported against them during the same financial years? If so, against whom, and the number?
- (5) What action, if anything, has been taken against any person or group or registered business?
- (6) If no action has been taken, why not and for what reasons?
- (7) Have any other concerns of multiple notifiable incident reports involving WorkSafe issues been brought to the attention of WorkSafe Tasmania or the CEO of WorkSafe Tasmania?
- (8) If so, what concerns, complaints have been made in those same financial years to date?
- (9) Against whom are these concerns and complaints made, and what action was taken as a result?
- (10) When is the election going to be called?

### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Windermere for his questions. I will work through these answers and see whether they answer all of the member's questions but I am not so sure on that.

There is an answer here to question (2) not so much so for question (1). I think the answers will be here as we work through. As the independent Work Health and Safety Regulator is continuing to engage with the Bob Brown Foundation in relation to an ongoing investigation, it would be inappropriate to comment further on that particular matter.

- (3) Further to that, how many notifiable incidences. I am advised the number of such incidences reported in the requested time frames are as follows: 2019, 347; 2020, 505; and 2021 to date, 107

Some businesses across Tasmania have multiple incident occurrences. This may be due to a number of factors such as they have high numbers of employees or they operate in a high-risk industry.

Not all notifiable incidents are necessarily due to the actions or inactions of the person conducting the business or undertaking which is briefed down to a clear person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU). Therefore, it would be inappropriate to name individual businesses as the context of each incident notification is not provided and matters may still be under investigation by the Work Health and Safety Regulator.

Previously, Worksafe Tasmania did not record details of notifications received and investigations completed in a purpose-built database, but instead captured this information in two different systems with limited reporting capability.

However, a new custom-built information management and reporting system called Inspect It has been able to capture and report on this data from 23 March 2020.

I am advised from 23 March 2020 to date, 252 notifiable incidences relate to multiple incidences for a PCBU, which was the person conducting the business or undertaking. There were 78 PCBUs involved in these 252 notifiable incidences.

- (4) and (5)

WorkSafe Tasmania applies the National Compliance and Enforcement Policy issued by SafeWork Australia when determining the action to take in response to a notifiable incident.

In determining which complaints or reports of incidents, injury or disease to investigate and then deciding the level of resources to be deployed, the regulators take account of the following factors:

- the severity and scale of potential or actual harm
- the seriousness of any potential breach of the law
- the duty holder's compliance history, including such matters as prior convictions and notices issues
- whether the duty holder was licensed or authorised to undertake certain types of work
- strategic important priorities, and
- the practicality of achieving results and the wider relevance of the event including matters of significant community concern.

The following circumstances or allegations are priority areas for investigations:

- work-related fatalities and serious injuries or where there is risk of such outcomes
- noncompliance with inspectors' notices or directions
- offences against inspectors
- offences against health and safety representatives
- matters relating to entry permit holders
- discrimination against workers on the basis of their work health and safety activities, and
- failure to notify incidents.

All notifiable incidents are triaged to determine the appropriate level of response. This ranges from critical incident responses like fatalities or serious injury; site visits in response to notification; and dealing with the incidents by phone or it being determined that there is no action required. To put further context around this, attendance at a site is dependent on many factors some of them are:

- Lack of clear information at the time of reporting.
- Remoteness of location versus the minor nature of injury.
- Likelihood of gaining any useful additional insights or evidence by a visit.
- Time elapsed since the incident as a result of later reporting or lack of clarity in information.
- Number of staff available for deployment at the time of the incident when triaged using the National Compliance and Enforcement Policy.

- (6) WorkSafe Tasmania administrator legislation covers three policy areas - work health and safety; workers compensation schemes, including for asbestos-related diseases; and workplace relations. Issues or concerns may be received in relation to any of these areas.
- (7) As advised in response to question three previously WorkSafe Tasmania did not record details of notifications received and investigations completed in a purpose-built database, but instead captured this information in two different systems with limited reporting capabilities. I am advised that from 21 March 2020 to date, 994 matters have been advised to WorkSafe Tasmania in relation to work health and safety, workers compensation or long service leave.

- (8) It would be inappropriate to name individual businesses as the context of each concern or complaint is not provided and matters may still be under investigation by the independent regulator.

I apologise to the member because I do not have answers to (9) and (10).

## **MOTION**

### **Note - Premier's Address**

#### **Resumed from above.**

[2.57 p.m.]

**Mr GAFFNEY** (Mersey) - Mr President, from a national perspective, the scaling down of the federal JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments may yet lead to a new local issue that will need to be addressed.

However, the Government's move to support development has led to an extraordinary situation, where a thriving construction industry and national confidence in housing fuelled by low interest rates have seen booming house prices and surging rents across Tasmania. Add to this the mainland exodus to our island state that has seen challenging times for many of my constituents who are struggling to find housing they can afford in a tight rental and sales market. I can only hope the Government's housing support initiatives together with its headworks holiday will encourage more developers to release blocks for developments to meet the demand for housing and return the market back to some sense of normality.

The other issue developing with our construction boom is a shortage of skilled trades professionals. One of the Government's proposed solutions is the evolution of the TasTAFE into a government business enterprise. I understand the Government's interest in expanding the scope of TasTAFE central training service that so many employers and student have come to know and trust. My concern is this step - one that I hope will achieve what the Premier expects - will not be a step blindly into the unknown. The strength of TasTAFE comes from its committed staff who have a direct interest in supporting their students to be the best they can be.

If the proposed restructure leads to a higher course fees and a period of instability as these changes establish themselves, are we going to see students laden with debt and dissatisfied industry clients? Especially if TasTAFE is to become a fully commercial enterprise that has to compete with private training providers who will naturally attempt to cherry-pick the most lucrative parts of skills training for their own benefit.

In addition to this, how will this new TasTAFE structure partner with the Education department seeing growing enrolments in school- and college-based vocational education and training courses. I have to reference Don College in my own electorate which has a hugely popular range of VET courses that are oversubscribed with facilities that do not allow the pent-up student demand to be fully met - a huge opportunity for expansion that the new TasTAFE may see as a future competitor to its activities. I hope the Government can find a way to support our schools and colleges through this.

While I am on the subject of education, I am sure all members fully appreciate the value of education in developing the future life chances of the young people in our constituencies. For those coming from less advantaged backgrounds, a high-quality education is a route that offers better employment and greater chances for successful lives and satisfying careers. For these young people, often there is only one shot at this, and it has to be right.

I welcome the Government's focus on helping more students to successfully complete year 12. The Don College has been supporting this for many years with inspired leadership, active industry partnerships, and a keen understanding and analysis of where its students go on to, be it further education, employment or apprenticeships.

The COVID-19 pandemic has redefined the delivery of education and brought new challenges to bear for both staff and students in all our schools and colleges. With the challenges brought to student wellbeing in such a turbulent time, it is deeply gratifying to see the Government commit additional funding to fully support phases 1 and 2 of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services review.

The extra 80 full-time equivalent (FTE) professional staff for our schools to support children and young people impacted by trauma builds on its previous funding commitments in this area. This will be welcomed by TANA - the Trauma Awareness Network Australia - a north-west-based organisation whose essential work I fully support and which I have spoken about many times.

I also welcome the Minister for Education and Training's recent announcement that the Government has set a target that by 2030 at the latest, all grade 7 students will be above the national minimum standard for reading skills. As we all know, reading is the key that unlocks learning and is an essential life skill. I await with interest the development and impact of the various initiatives that will support this, but I am concerned that it was only three or four years ago that the Government said we would be the healthiest state by 2025, and yet we have slipped further down the scale, and it is another 10-year period.

I know that many of the schools in my electorate are actively working in this area, one of which is the Latrobe High School, with Brent Armistead as its truly inspiring principal and his superb staff team, who have developed a range of literacy support programs for students who need additional input. The school has been so successful that even with its recent additional developments, it is now close to 600 enrolments. It is almost at full capacity and is at the point of having to turn students away.

It is schools and staff teams like these that inspire our students and families to accomplish great things, and they need their due acknowledgement. It was only a few years ago that the school received a \$12 million to \$13 million redevelopment and already it is bursting at the seams, and the local primary schools are also full.

Establishment of reading skills in early childhood starts in families and it is Tasmanian's groundbreaking Launch into Learning (LiL) and Learning in Families Together (LiFT) that helped families understand and develop these learning skills and networks that can help their children thrive in the school environment.

Added to this are our child and family centres where family members can go with their birth- to five-year-old children for a range of social support and learning activities. The positive outcomes of these are so pronounced that they are attracting national attention. While we can

commend the Government's support for six new centres, I am sure we can all recommend additional support for these uniquely Tasmanian initiatives. They are achieving exception outcomes in a grassroots front-end delivery model.

I also have to ask: how can we enhance and build on the strengths of these initiatives across all governments in Tasmania that underpin better education outcomes for those with most to gain from a high-quality education in our public system? Maybe there a greater focus on the tail-end transition into employment was of greater interest to industry and business. Notwithstanding this observation, the creation of the Jobs Tasmania local networks to facilitate the transition to better employment prospects and the Youth Navigators project offer hope for our next generation. I hope within this that thought has been given to how these initiatives will integrate with our schools and colleges.

Like many in this place I have a lifelong interest in sport, and the communities that support our clubs and sporting groups. While soccer - or football - is flourishing with the highest participation rates of any sport in Tasmania, it has come as a huge shock to the community to see that the senior teams of the East Devonport Football Club, the Swans, are entering recess and have withdrawn from the NWFL senior competition for the 2021 season due to a lack of players. This perhaps speaks to the challenges all voluntary organisations face, with increasing demands and pressures in people's lives impacting on their availability to give back to the activities and organisations they love.

There is a well-understood anecdotal observation of funding ratios, that a dollar given to support a voluntary body achieves as much as \$10 spent in a commercial setting. We, as legislators, need to be fully aware of this. In spite of its challenges, the Swans are maintaining their junior teams, together with the superb work and events that actively support mental health and wellbeing in the community.

Without our volunteers, so much of what we hold dear in Tasmania would not exist. Many of these, like the Swans, have a long history that is woven into the fabric of our society. I recently attended the fiftieth anniversary dinner of the Lions Club of Latrobe, a wonderful group of volunteers who give so much back to their community. Their goodwill, enthusiasm and ability to deliver huge events and significant fundraising for the local community's enjoyment and benefit never cease to amaze me.

Over 50 years, they have raised \$480 000 for our local community. While for some people that might not seem a lot, the president who spoke on that night said that in 1971 he purchased his brand new house in Launceston for \$12 000, so times have changed.

This leads me to consider our entertainment and arts communities, a sector that has probably had the greatest impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen many events, functions and performances cancelled in a way which saw them as the first to be shut down, and maybe the last to re-establish themselves due to the necessary social distancing requirements.

I hope the rollout of vaccines will speed the return to full capacity for our performance venues. We have uniquely Tasmanian success stories. With the advent of COVID-19, the Latrobe Federal Band had to cease its practising and public events. However, it came up with the novel solution of recording individual parts at home and then amalgamating them into a full band to be shared as a complete video on social media.

The band has now made a welcome return to live performance as an essential part of our local community and its established culture. This is indicative of what many community arts groups have achieved, despite the challenges of the pandemic.

On a lighter note, Latrobe Council's declaration of two 'ministry of silly walk' zones in Latrobe and Shearwater during the pandemic has brought a bit of fun to my community and to the council's social media. The sign has even been retweeted by John Cleese himself. I have yet to indulge - but you never know.

**Mr Valentine** - Will you do a silly walk?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - No. Another new and unique offering has come in the form of Art Screen Events, the brainchild of Katrine Elliott. Many will know Katrine as a champion of bringing international theatre and opera performances to what was the CMAX Cinema in Devonport, an initiative she pioneered in Tasmania well over 10 years ago.

Hopefully, in a post COVID-19 world, Katrine can start her new enterprise screening a variety of recorded live performances, exhibitions and specialist performances in a number of venues. This Friday she will be simultaneously screening a live performance of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra concert in Hobart at the Leven Theatre in Ulverstone. It will include an on-stage performance from the local group, the Al Dente chamber music trio, before the screening of the TSO performance begins. This is a great example of using COVID-19 and those initiatives to further the arts.

Within the Premier's declared support for the arts, I have to ask how innovative arts business and events like Katrine's can be supported by the Government, as they offer rich experiences that are normally unavailable to welcoming audiences in regional areas.

In this place we enjoy a certain sense of theatre, and there is nothing like a live performance to get a truly aesthetic experience. In my electorate of Mersey, we are incredibly lucky to have the Devonport Choral Society which this year is putting on a production of *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story*. The recent opening up of theatre capacity regulations is a welcome development that we all can appreciate as we return to normality.

Tickets have just gone on sale and the show is directed by the honourable Sid Sidebottom, a doyen of musical theatre, with his usual aplomb, and with an incredibly talented cast.

In support for the arts, I hope that there is scope to fully support community productions, innovate new events and the methods of delivery, and not just see funding directed to long-established entities with sound resources. The arts are a living, breathing part of our community and need to be encouraged to evolve as such, especially in rural Tasmania.

Mr President, one thing that has caught my attention and that of many in my electorate and the wider north-west region is the new Northern Forage Drive Journey signage. Whilst we appreciate any initiative that gives visitors a better and more enjoyable experience, it is almost as if the north and north-west of Tasmania have been turned into a strange blancmange of homogeneity when each region has a unique identity that we all celebrate. I actually thought they had put the signs in the wrong place as I was driving through Leith and saw we are now part of the north. Maybe it is just an old-fashioned view from Hobart that everything north of Oatlands may as well be the same. I could perhaps go on to suggest that the productivity of



our north-west and northern regions, which do so much to support the Tasmania economy in so many diverse ways, seems to have been forgotten here.

Furthermore, what picture does the Northern Forage Drive Journey paint? For an urban-based person, it might suggest fossicking on the roadsides and paddocks for something to eat, whereas for us from a more agricultural background, it suggests a trail of silage or hay fed out to the hungry livestock in winter.

**Ms Rattray** - I was thinking they were thinking roadkill.

**Mrs Hiscutt** - I need to point out there is an answer to that question; it was incorporated into *Hansard* yesterday for anybody listening who would like to know how they came about.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Hardly an evocative image, especially since south of this we have the warm and engagingly described Heartlands of Tasmania. Either way, to use an old fashioned expression, it is disappointing and we could do better.

Additionally, as we all recognise, our tourism and hospitality industries have been hard hit and again the reduction in JobKeeper will come at a time when many enterprises are only just beginning to see a way forward.

The travel voucher scheme was a noble attempt to support our industry, but it is gratifying to see that the unclaimed funds from this are being fed back into new initiatives. The Government support for reduced fares on the *Spirits* has been another welcome addition to the flow of tourists into Tasmania, together with some certainty now about the future replacements for what is an iconic symbol of Tasmania tourism which is based in my Mersey electorate.

We have also seen increasing demand for accommodation, and hotel occupancy rates are on the rise together with increasingly busy cafes and restaurants. Perhaps we have to be mindful that the actions and sacrifices Tasmanians have made in controlling COVID-19 have allowed us to resume a sense of normality that is the envy of many nations around the world which are still suffering through the pandemic crisis.

I close by thanking the Premier for his leadership in what has been an extortionary time for Tasmania. I also thank some of the ministers who have supported him ably through that journey - Ms Courtney, Mr Jaensch and Mr Rockliff. We have collectively faced exceptional challenges and there is still much to do. The Premier has had to make some hard choices that some of us had to take on trust, but we do know he is a deeply compassionate family man who has the best interests of Tasmania at heart.

I am sure we will be keeping a keen eye on how these initiatives will play out together with any adjustments that may need to be made. In closing, many of us perhaps have had conversations with people from other states, even other countries, and generally those people speak highly of the way Tasmania has approached the COVID-19 pandemic from its leadership, but also from the community. I think that plays well for our state and the future.

With that, I note the Premier's Address.

[3.13 p.m.]

**Ms ARMITAGE** (Launceston) - Mr President, what can I say about the last 12 months that would meaningfully encapsulate the experience of our state and Tasmanians who have endured through some of the most challenging circumstances in almost a century? Many, many people have suffered in the past 12 months mentally, emotionally and financially. Thirteen people died, scores more lost their employment and their businesses, and myriad opportunities came with having a good attitude and hard work in atypical circumstances.

We cannot take away the pain many Tasmanians have endured, but the best we can do is hear it and try to understand it so the future can be a bit better and brighter. The swift establishment of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council, endowed with nine members of high community standing and broad areas of expertise, set us on the right start. In releasing its final report last week, there were five areas of focus on the medium- and long-term future that would not only ease Tasmania out of the mire in which the COVID-19 pandemic has set it, but also make the most of our state's inherent assets for generations to come. These are jobs and income, community connectivity and engagement, health and housing, environment and sustainability, and public sector capability.

The Premier in his address last week structured his response largely around these areas, announcing a number of policy initiatives and funding to back them up. It is heartening to see the expert work done by PESRAC being taken seriously. Understanding what the final report and its recommendations mean, particularly for my electorate of Launceston, has been a priority for me.

Undoubtedly, ameliorating the adverse effects of the pandemic on our businesses capacity to operate should be a priority for the Government's response to it. Producing conditions conducive for an effectively functioning economy will have an effect on people's health and wellbeing and their sense of belonging, and will keep our state growing and prosperous.

With forced closures, social distancing, limits on weddings and funerals, shopping, eating out and tourism, we came to a halt virtually overnight. Conditions such as this have not been seen for generations, and I struggle to think of an event that has had a similar impact in recent memory.

Keeping people afloat through federal initiatives like JobKeeper and JobSeeker was necessary, and the right course of action. The real challenge was always going to be how to best move out of it into the so-called 'new normal'. Things are looking up. For the fourth quarter in a row, CommSec's State of the States report - quite separate from the Premier's Address last week - has placed Tasmania as the best-performing economy in the nation. Tasmania leads in four of the eight indicators: relative population growth; retail spending; equipment investment; and dwelling starts.

These indicators show a diverse but linked range of economic factors, which feed into Tasmania's current strengths. Home building is strong because, among many other reasons, population growth is also strong. This is a double-edged sword, especially when other segments of the community get left behind, which I will speak about in just a moment. Retail spending in Tasmania was 23 per cent above decade-average levels in the September quarter. Success in suppressing the virus boosted confidence while government cash handouts and wage subsidies supported incomes.

To this end the results in Launceston have been a bit of a mixed bag. The virus has directly caused the closure of some retailers, including some major names in and around the Brisbane Street Mall and CBD. Others are popping up on the peripheries, including both 'big box' retailers and local specialty retailers and hospitality venues.

The jobs being created by the construction blitz in the north of the state are already underway, and this is no doubt responsible for the multiplier effect across other industries and services, which are also being generated. Roads programs, proposed developments and major works like the University Northern Transformation Program and the recent approval of a \$208 million redevelopment of UTAS Stadium will set us up very well for the years to come.

We also need to be mindful - in the exuberance that cash-splashing developments create - of ensuring that the people who live locally still have their say, and that the character of our regions is not overridden by big developers who spend and send good portions of their revenues overseas. There is little point initiating big-spending projects if the longer term profits are not invested back into the communities in which they are situated.

I, and many others, want to see the Government proactively engaging with Tasmania-based businesses to deliver on these projects - not the easy course of action such as the hiring of mainland or overseas-based firms, such as we often see, for example, with TasWater.

I will speak briefly to the issue of housing and save my observations on the issues of health for later on. In rekindling our economy, targeting areas such as housing, which is unquestionably an area in need of significant improvement, channelling \$300 million into a program to create social and affordable housing is an excellent start. Housing issues are being felt right across the state and people are desperate for any place to live.

Rentals are being way oversubscribed with applicants who, in an effort to secure a successful application, offer to pay over what is listed and price other applicants out of the market. Dwellings for sale are being snapped up at a breakneck pace. Currently the average time for a dwelling to be on the market, I am told, is nine days.

According to CoreLogic's recent Home Value Index, dwelling values in regional Tasmania increased by 11.9 per cent in the year to 31 December 2020. The median value now sits at \$344 897. I read in *The Examiner* last week that for houses in regional Tasmania alone, values have gone up by some 12 per cent, which brings their median value up to \$349 521. Units have gone up by 10.5 per cent, to a median value of \$271 076.

Real Estate Institute of Australia data shows that housing affordability in the state further declined in the December quarter, with the amount of income required to meet home loan repayments increasing by 2.2 per cent, up to 31.1 per cent. Forget anyone who works in insecure working conditions, is unemployed or underemployed, or in a single income household. It is difficult even for those with multiple secure incomes to secure and reasonably pay off a home loan if they can manage to get one.

The property market is extremely volatile and it is a matter of when rather than if the market will bust. Action taken now will go a long way to cushioning the effects of that bust down the track. Of course the ultimate aim in these circumstances is to ensure we look after those in our community who are struggling to find a safe, reasonable and affordable place to

live so this investment by the Government into constructing housing is a welcome development.

With the federal government programs of JobSeeker and JobKeeper being phased out, we are clearly at a very important moment in time, and it is imperative that we set ourselves up for success. Ensuring that our small and medium enterprises, as well as our community groups, receive meaningful and ongoing support in the medium- to long-term future will be the key to our state's success, bringing us into conditions that will help us thrive.

I note that the Government is providing access to specialist financial counselling through a new \$1 million COVID-19 small business financial counselling support program over the next 12 months. While this will help businesses with advice to support them to recover, transition and apply other strategies to address COVID-19-related impacts, I hope to see further support for our community groups that have done it just as tough - many without the support many of our businesses have received.

As the COVID-19 pandemic reached its height with people working from home, maintaining social distancing, and keeping our students at home, disconnection and isolation for many people in our communities was a daily reality. It was encouraging to see many of our community groups adopt online forms of connection. Rotary clubs held their meetings via Zoom, not-for-profit organisations engaged their clients and members online, and our educators from primary to tertiary taught in new and innovative ways.

Some aspects of connection cannot be replaced. In my electorate, try as we might, we could not secure a workable solution for the dancing groups of some of my elderly constituents in the Prospect area. Organisations like New Horizons could not run their usual suite of activities with their members, and participation of some of the playgroups in the greater Launceston area evaporated.

It is these organisations and those who support them that I would like to see further financially supported. To this end I am extremely glad to see a good start with support to our kinship carers. According to Kin Raising Kids, approximately 80 per cent of kinship carers in Tasmania are informal, making qualifications for formal payments, subsidies and gaining access to support services much harder. The commitment by the Government to provide \$500 000 to commence the implementation of recommendations from a review of current support measures in place is only the start of a long road but it is a start nevertheless.

Addressing digital literacies is another welcome announcement from the Premier's Address. I note that substantial policies will be developed in the lead-up to the forthcoming state Budget but I can see that the Government is taking it into account, and I echo the sentiments that emphasise the importance of including those who struggle to connect with newer technologies. No-one should be left behind for this reason and every effort should be made to ensure that anyone who needs help can access it.

Every week, community groups approach me in my office for assistance with grant applications, letters of support and advice. I imagine the experience of other members of this place and our federal counterparts is similar. It is evident that our community groups need support and assistance, particularly after the year we have just had.

The focus of the Government has been keeping businesses and employees supported. This was the correct approach, but we should not neglect our community groups and organisations that fulfil important functions which otherwise fall to the public sector to look after. The announcement of the Regional Events Recovery Grant Fund to the tune of \$1.5 million, with an additional \$1.5 million investment to aid ongoing recovery efforts for the community-based events sector is absolutely a welcome development to kickstart Tasmanian events.

I do not, however, want this to be at the expense of community-based organisations and not-for-profits which have endured the last 12 months, and continue to struggle, without support. While I and everyone else understands there are not bottomless buckets of money to hand out through grant programs to our community groups and organisations, I emphasise it is in everyone's interest to ensure a diverse range of grants programs is on offer to community groups for both broad and specific purposes. We should be supporting the organisations that support us. If too many of these organisations wind up, it will fall right back to government to fill the gaps their absence creates.

Leveraging our unique state-based environmental assets will play a critical part in Tasmania's longer term prosperity, with a suite of energy infrastructure projects in the pipeline. The Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation projects and the \$50 million Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Industry Development Funding program staying true to the clean green Tasmania imagery will ensure our state remains an attractive place to visit, live and invest in for generations to come.

However, what supports these big ticket items are the efforts being made at the local level where the work really gets done. To this end, a number of initiatives are in place, also in the north of the state, which I am very proud to see progressing. The launch of the ASPIRE platform by the Northern Tasmania Development Corporation in July 2020 is an excellent example. This has enabled northern Tasmanian businesses to be able to divert tons of waste products from landfill via a website described as 'Tinder for waste'.

ASPIRE works on circular economy principles and connects producers of waste with those who can re-use, repair, remake and recycle the products. George Town, the City of Launceston, Meander Valley, Break of Day, Flinders Islands, West Tamar and Northern Midlands have signed on.

The much anticipated container deposit scheme is slated to be brought to parliament very soon. It is imperative we get this scheme right and support our producers, community groups and the environment in the process with a scheme that is fit for purpose for Tasmania and will most efficiently achieve the desired outcome of the scheme.

I am yet to be fully convinced of the merits of the split responsibility scheme the Government has announced. I want to have a better idea of what contingencies are in place to ensure the issues experienced in other jurisdictions - like funding vending equipment to accept containers, and missed opportunities to engage community groups and not-for-profits in having a stake in the scheme. I continue to engage stakeholders in this matter and I look forward to seeing what solutions and responses the Government has on the apparent shortfalls of the scheme.

The past 12 months have been above all a health crisis, in which 13 Tasmanians were killed by the deadly virus that swept the globe. The quick response by governments, both state and federal, in combination with the mobilisation of our health workforce and the speedy implementation of new health protocols - especially in the north-west - stand as a paragon of best practice. We should be immensely proud of how we all responded quickly and overwhelmingly positively to the instructions given to us by the Health director, who has done an incredible job over the last year.

However, it takes nothing like a crisis to emphasise the issues that already exist. Supporting our health sector, health professionals, facilities and associated staff is more important than ever. The PESRAC final report takes stock of the overall preparedness for a pandemic event. It generally notes that experience demonstrates governments are geared towards the public sector reacting and responding to significant unplanned events. It further notes one of the reasons for this is that institutional settings are generally geared towards dealing with immediately observable problems and issues. It is essentially a question of priorities. It is difficult for any government to justify allocating time and resources to preparing for something that does not seem very likely, when there are more pressing and obviously problems occurring in the here and now.

Political memory is both long and short, and priorities are forever changing. Significant events get very quickly overlooked in favour of what's current and topical. This is simply the nature of our fast-paced political, social and economic environment. The PESRAC report rightly observes that the community has a role to play in setting the expectation of its political leaders that the state's long-term strategic interests need to be properly considered, and a more structured and deliberate approach taken to strategic risk and management. More than that - we, as leaders, need to listen. We need to think beyond our own election cycles and that of the government of the day, and we need to consider what kind of place our state will look like five, 10 or 20 years down the track.

**Mr Valentine** - Hear, hear.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - What legacy are we leaving for our children and their children? As they say, society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they will never sit. This is the mentality we need to adopt when looking at how our Government best responds to the needs of the people it serves. I look forward to the review of the Tasmanian State Service, led by Dr Ian Watt, due at the end of May.

On to health: Tasmania had a significant case-to-fatality COVID-19 ratio, according to the Johns Hopkins Dashboard. This is likely due to the vulnerability of the north-west coast population to the virus.

I, like everyone else, was floored by the accusations made about historical sexual abuse, allegedly perpetrated by a paediatric nurse at the Launceston General Hospital. I was pleased to see the commission of inquiry established.

However, while staff continue to do an amazing job, and work above and beyond for their patients and the community, I despair at the developments over time at the Launceston General Hospital. The LGH was once a hospital in high demand for registrars and trainee doctors, and certainly a centre of excellence in our state. We have fewer and fewer specialists in our regional areas, and they are not being replaced as some of the more senior specialists

retire. Waitlists are ever-growing and do not move in the right direction. Bed block and ambulance ramping, especially on the weekends when fewer hospital services are available, are factors contributing to dwindling public confidence that if one gets sick or injured they will be well looked after.

We need to look into the efficacy of existing health policies and examine whether the best procedures are in place to ensure that our hospitals are running smoothly and efficiently. We need to be supporting them, their staff and their patients. We need to look at improving the conditions in our health system, to encourage and incentivise a great number of talented health professionals and specialists to relocate to our state's regions. This is not a problem that will be solved by having money thrown at it. Only with careful examination of the existing issues being reported at our hospitals, and consideration of adequate responses, can we hope to start finding and implementing solutions.

Key to Tasmania's long-term outlook and prosperity will be our education system. The PESRAC final report notes one of the core structural issues raised during its consultation phase was the ability of the training system, TasTAFE in particular, to provide more responsive and industry-relevant training. This is the key skill-related challenge that needs to be tackled as the longer term COVID-19 response.

I understand that gearing up TasTAFE to handle a task of this magnitude is difficult to conceptualise, let alone carry out. Resourcing is clearly a significant factor in ensuring this can be implemented correctly. Beyond what has been suggested by PESRAC to improve TasTAFE's central role in vocational education and training, which is central to Tasmania's current and future economic and workforce needs, I believe a closer look into the issue is warranted. It is important to get it right.

If we do not figure out and implement a solution in a timely manner, Tasmania will continue to suffer skill shortages. Publicly funded stimulus may drive economic activity, but may also simply increase demand for interstate and international workers while many Tasmanians remain unemployed because they do not have the right skills.

I know the Premier has acknowledged PESRAC's recommendation to make TasTAFE an independent government business, which would be a major reform. Ensuring that all the options have been considered, including the role that registered training organisations have to play, will be an important step in ensuring its legitimacy and integrity.

More granular detail on how student to employee pathways will be integrated will also be welcome. I would like more detail on how internships, traineeships, work experience placements, cadetships and the like will be secured, meaningful and beneficial both to students and employers. I note that when reporting on the Premier's Address, the ABC spoke to Simon Bailey of the Australian Education Union (AEU), which advised it had not been consulted on the plan to convert TasTAFE into an independent government business. Some clarity on the Government's next steps would be very much appreciated.

On to the arts -I am very pleased to see that the Princess Theatre in Launceston can now move to 75 per cent capacity, which equates to 708 patrons, with mandatory mask-wearing once the number hits 373. Obviously our arts are very important, particularly in times of COVID-19, and hopefully we will have some of the larger shows returning to the Princess Theatre.

In conclusion, in less than favourable times what keeps us going is the hope of a better future. I therefore place a lot of trust into our young people. I believe that trust is very well placed. We have much about which to be optimistic. Like everyone else in this place, I am buoyed by the selection of the incredible Grace Tame as Australian of the Year - the first Tasmanian to be selected in its 61-year history.

The action brought about by the work of Layla Seen, the Exeter High School student whose letter has resulted in the Government committing to provide free sanitary products to public schools from term 3, is yet another achievement by our young people, and we should be incredibly proud of them.

A person who was born in the year 2000 will be turning 21 this year. In their lives so far, they lived through one of the most devastating terrorist attacks in global history; protracted armed conflict in the Middle East - in which Australia's interest was not insignificant - the biggest global financial crisis since the Great Depression; significant increases in fees for tertiary education, with a job market where supply outstrips demand; and witnessed violently suppressed uprisings in the form of the Arab Spring, Myanmar, Hong Kong and others. They will also have witnessed the terrors perpetrated by armed extremists in Norway, the United States, France and New Zealand, and the most significant pandemic event in a century, with over 2 500 000 people dead.

It would be understandable if our young people simply threw their hands in the air and refused to engage - but they are doing the exact opposite. I believe that young people are now more engaged in their communities and with politics than ever before.

Just a couple of weeks ago on the lawns at the front of this building, we saw a peaceful assembly for the rights of women and girls. Many of the participants were young people. This is a watershed moment not just for Tasmanians, but for all Australians - and particularly women. It may be trite, but enough is enough. Now is the time to look at the harm that has been perpetrated in insidious and hidden ways to women and children and begin to make meaningful strides towards healing and doing better.

Beyond that we can feel the impetus for positive change and hear the demand for good leadership. It is the responsibility of those in power to lead by example and make the changes necessary to improve conditions - working and personal - that will make Australia a better place to be. I am truly inspired by Grace and Layla and Brittany Higgins, and people like them, and I commit to doing my part as a member of parliament and lawmaker.

The Premier's Address is good, and we have all pulled together in the most extraordinary of ways in the past 12 months. There is much about which we can be optimistic, but our jobs are by no means done. There is plenty left to do, and I believe that Tasmanians are up to the task.

I note the Premier's Address.

[3.38 p.m.]

**Mr WILLIE** (Elwick) - Madam Deputy President, I like you - very fair.

The previous speaker said the Premier's Address is good, but I have a different perspective. There is no doubt a lot has happened in the past 12 months. Our generation has



been thrust into uncharted territory by a worldwide pandemic. We have seen the community at its most vulnerable, but we have also seen its people at their most generous. We supported each other without hesitation or delay. We accepted our duty to work together as citizens, as neighbours and as fellow human beings. The parliament even put aside its political differences. We worked together, mostly, to make sure problems were being addressed and making sure government messages to socially distance and follow the rules were being adhered to.

It all made a huge difference. I remember being on the phone to the Premier's office trying to resolve problems in my electorate. I also called the minister at times. I remember a conversation about child care before he went to a national meeting. There was a lot of collaboration happening at that time because we were facing a crisis. I am proud of working with my colleagues during that time, in Opposition, to help give the Government confidence to make tough decisions like closing the borders. As we reflect, that was the right call at the time and we were in front of the Government saying we would take the politics out of that decision.

The pandemic has demonstrated that systems can change overnight and so can the priorities of government. Who would have thought this time 12 months ago, that a conservative federal government would be paying for wage subsidies, an increased social safety net, free child care, and effectively nationalised private hospitals. This rapid change shows that there is a huge opportunity to address structural inequalities post-COVID-19. On many measures, Tasmania performs worse than the rest of the country. In employment, in Tasmania we have wages \$12 000 below the national average, a gap which has grown \$1000 since the Liberal Government came to office.

In regional Tasmania we have some of the worst unemployment in the country. In health, we have the worst ambulance response times in the country. We are all too familiar with the ramping that occurs outside our hospitals. We have the longest surgery waiting times, and it keeps getting worse. Just this week Wendy Gebel spoke to the ABC:

Wendy Gebel is confined to her armchair, barely able to move due to debilitating hip pain.

'For the last three years I can hardly do anything because the pain is so bad, it's bone on bone,' she said.

'I don't go anywhere, I've got no quality of life, these four walls are about it. Even if I cough it's like a really sharp pain that goes right through me.'

This article also says that the AMA says that there has been a 30 per cent increase in Tasmania's hip and knee replacement waiting lists in the past two years:

Ms Gebel said she was speaking out in the hope of helping others.

'I think the government should wake up to themselves and realise what is going on down there.

'They've spent all this money on re-vamping it [the RHH] and making it all look pretty, and they've got no beds.'

It is not just patients who are telling me these stories. The vice-president of the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Scott Fletcher - he is a Burnie orthopedic surgeon, I believe - said:

So waiting lists have gone up significantly, in fact, where they are at the moment is the highest I've seen them. And I've been around quite a few years.

We can talk statistics, but there is a human face to this. The Premier will try to paint a rosy picture of recovery, but I do not think all things were well before the pandemic. Along with waiting lists, we also have some of the worst general health of all states. In education, we have attainment rates that have declined for three years in a row to 58 per cent. That is the same rate as it was in 2008, and it is 14 points below the national average. Our retention rate has dipped to 73.9 per cent in 2020 and that compares to the national rate of 82.1 per cent. There are lots of measures in education, and they are not looking rosy.

In the last Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) test, which is internationally renowned, Tasmanian students scored the lowest reading and mathematical literacy and the second-lowest science literacy in the country. In the last NAPLAN tests, in reading we were the worst-performing state across all four age groups, and 11 per cent of our year 9s did not meet the national minimum standard. In writing, we were the second-worst performing state across all four age groups, and one in five year 9s did not meet the national minimum standard. This is nearly at the end of their schooling - and they do not have functional literacy. In spelling, we were the worst-performing state across all four age groups and 13 per cent of year 9s did not meet the national minimum standard. In grammar, we were the worst-performing state across all four age groups and 15 per cent of year 9s did not meet the national minimum standard. In numeracy, we were third-ranked in year 3, not too bad; second-worst by year 5; worst by year 7; and second-worst in year 9 with five per cent of year 9s not meeting the national minimum standard.

I could go on to other important areas like housing, corrections or child safety, but I will move to my point: where are the plans to seriously address these issues?

The Liberal Government was returned to power on a sea of big promises and confidence - the confidence of the Tasmanian people of a second term to make change. I conceded we have faced a worldwide pandemic and that took significant state resources, but where are the reforms or the promises being delivered?

During the 2018 election, we heard promises to build a new Tamar Bridge with stage 1 construction in this term, new *Spirits* by 2021, a fifth Southern Outlet lane, a Hobart Airport roundabout, which is delayed again, and the infamous underground bus mall.

In health, we had promises for 250 new beds at the Royal, and 'That will happen in this term', said the Premier at the time. New Burnie and Glenorchy - my patch - ambulance superstations by 2021 have not been delivered. I heard previous speakers talk about making the state the healthiest by 2025. There is a big question mark on that.

In education, by the way, these were promises made:

- By 2020, we would be at or above the national standard in every single NAPLAN measure in reading, writing, maths or science.

NAPLAN did not happen last year because of the pandemic, but I can most certainly promise it will not be achieved this year.

- Seventy-five per cent of all students will attain a Certificate of Education by 2022.

As I said previously, attainment rates have now been in decline for the past three years.

The member for Mersey talked about the literacy commitment made by the Education minister and I welcome that too. It is a significant change in practice, but I query why it was not mentioned in the Premier's state of the state address. Arguably, education is the biggest lever we can pull as a state, as a state government, to improve the lives of Tasmanians across a whole range of areas.

No mention of this policy announcement was made in his speech, which I found very odd. We are talking about his commitment that all year 7 - young people - will be at the expected reading standard - that is, above the national minimum - by no later than 2030. He talked about this at a press conference. It is a significant change in practice because on the mainland you will hear about the reading laws and we are talking about whole language and phonics.

Somewhere in between there is a term called 'balanced literacy'. The significant change in practice with this is that lots of people in my generation - probably the member for Rumney and others - went through school under a whole language approach, as did most of the teachers who are entering the workforce.

**Ms Rattray** - I went through school. Does that count?

**Mr WILLIE** - There were different approaches to literacy when you were in school. We are kind of going back to the approach you had in a way.

**Ms Rattray** - It served some of us quite well, Mr President.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - Indeed, nothing wrong with the schooling at Scottsdale.

**Mr WILLIE** - We are talking about a significant change to go to phonics-based instruction from prep to year 2, and there will be a year 1 phonics check made available to schools. It is unclear whether that is mandatory -

**Mr Valentine** - Is that part of Jolly Phonics?

**Mr WILLIE** - There is a whole range of programs, member for Hobart.

**Mr Valentine** - I hear it.

**Mr WILLIE** - I bet. I guess, to your point, some of this is happening in schools already. There are teachers doing this now, using the Progressive Achievement Tests. The minister was talking about the PAT in the other place today. There will be a significant workforce challenge there. A lot of teachers went through school with whole language, and universities often teach whole language or balanced literacy. I thought it was odd to announce a policy such as this

with very little detail around the resources. At the time I welcomed it; I thought it was a good announcement. However, I was also critical of the fact the minister had made bold, ambitious education targets before and not met them. If you are going to be serious about something like this, it has to be with resources, otherwise you are going to end up with no change. I queried that, because I thought it should have been in the Premier's Address. It is a very serious policy and I will certainly be holding the Government to account for it.

I return to the human face of something like this, or the failings in the education system. A grandmother come to see me not long ago; I taught her grandson for about 10 weeks in primary school - grade 6. She was incredibly frustrated that he was now in the college system and he cannot read or write. In my defence, she said I had built his confidence in the time I taught him, but she was so frustrated with the school system that she came to see me again, to see if I could help him.

His college said to her, and him, that he did not have the learning capability to undertake further study at college. What a disgrace. It is a legal requirement for kids to engage with school work or training until they are 18. That grandmother feels completely let down by the system. Her grandson had identified learning development issues - dyslexia and ADHD - that she did not find out about until he was in the end of high school. It is extraordinary. The grandmother is incredibly frustrated. She feels that the school system has let her grandson down. That is the human face of this. We can talk about literacy rates, we can talk about attainment rates, but what is the future for that young man going to be like? I am saying that too many kids are falling through the cracks.

Turning to housing - there was a promise of 3400 new social housing dwellings by 2023. The Government has only delivered about a third. The minister likes to take credit for the housing debt waiver, but most members in this place know a federal senator helped negotiate that.

**Ms Rattray** - You don't think all of my lobbying helped?

**Mr WILLIE** - It may have been a collective effort, but one particular senator was in a position of power to cut a deal at a particular time.

**Ms Rattray** - We are very grateful to her.

**Mr WILLIE** - It does not stop the minister trying to take credit for it. When that announcement was made, they said they would build 80 homes per year. I think five might have been built last year. There was a promise at the last election to reduce the waiting list. It has actually increased by 65 per cent since 2014. What is the human face of housing? Members in this place may recently have seen a constituent of mine, Megan Doyle, on ABC news. I was there to help her tell her story. She was in transitional housing - government housing. She had very difficult circumstances in her life. She fled family violence. She was kicked out of transitional housing with her kids and now she is sleeping in the lounge room at her parents' home. That is her life.

**Mr Valentine** - What was the reason?

**Mr WILLIE** - They could not find a permanent house for her. That is appalling. She has primary school age children; the youngest son has just started kindergarten. It is no home environment for kids to be at school and learning. That is the human face of these statistics.

The Premier's Address, in my view, shows we have a state Government that probably gets a tick on the handling of COVID -19, but it has not used its position of power for lasting change. I consider that is why the Premier incorporated all 52 PESRAC recommendations in his speech. I respect PESRAC. There are some very intelligent people in the membership and there are some good recommendations - but they are not elected members. I believe outsourcing policy is a fraught space for a government to be in. Two recommendations that raised my eyebrows - and Mr President, you knew this at the time, because I was furiously texting, saying 'Why are they doing this to TasTAFE?' - were the recommendations around TasTAFE and local government. The decision to turn TasTAFE into a business, driven by profit, demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding about the role of public education. TasTAFE serves the Tasmanian community, not just business.

We have heard the Premier repeatedly saying it is there to serve business. It is there to serve the Tasmanian community. It has many roles that would be considered a public good. Teaching literacy and numeracy, often as remedial; English as a second language; and employment preparation skills. How will things like this work in a cost recovery model? There are serious questions regarding the courses, the quality and the cost-shifting. We know the Government currently heavily subsidises TasTAFE courses; a business may not.

Regional delivery and job cuts -

**Mr Valentine** - Is it definitely a cost recovery model?

**Mr WILLIE** - It is a government business enterprise, and they have a charter they have to operate under.

**Mr Valentine** - I appreciate that.

**Mr WILLIE** - And job cuts under this proposed change. We will have the debate in this Chamber because the Premier is committed to introducing legislation this year; but you can look at some of the other states where they have done this, and there have been cuts to courses.

**Mr Valentine** - I realise that. I am noting some of that.

**Mr WILLIE** - I know this has been mentioned, but I spoke to Brian Wightman at the time. There was no consultation with the workforce, merely a phone call - that he initiated - informing him of the change. That is no way to treat a workforce. The Premier is committed to tabling this bill by the end of the year, and I look forward to that debate. I am a great defender of public education and always will be.

The other recommendation I mention briefly is the Premier's commitment to local government reform. This issue seems to go in cycles, doesn't it? The report states that the parliament should own local government reform, own the process, by setting the terms of reference for the process, setting a time frame of about 18 months for completion, committing to implementing the recommendations without material modification. What a utopian statement that is.

The process should be undertaken by an expert panel and supported by an appropriately resourced secretariat. Here is this outsourcing policy again. I find it a very strange proposition. The recommendations are almost asking the parliament to lead the government. Governments are elected to bring their agenda to parliament.

I also consider it is wishful thinking to expect members of parliament to agree to implementing a proposal without material modification - words used in the report - when we do not know what the proposal is, until the process is completed. That is not a suggestion that this will be debated over party lines. I think all members of parliament would have a keen interest in representing their communities. I will also watch that one with interest.

Mr President, that is it from me. I will be carefully monitoring a few of the issues I raised at the end, because I believe they are the biggest concerns in the Premier's Address. Clearly, we have a lot of work to do post-COVID-19, and I would like to see some of those big structural reforms happen. To date we have not seen many at all from this Government.

[4.00 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Mr President, I rise to respond to and note the Premier's Address. The COVID-19 pandemic dominates and frames the delivery of the Premier's annual address and the response of many of us within this parliament. A year ago on 17 February 2020, Tasmania issued the first coronavirus-driven Public Health emergency declaration. A year ago on 19 March 2020, Tasmania issued the first coronavirus-driven state emergency declaration, which remains in place over a year later. To echo the Premier's acknowledgement in his address, we cannot forget the sacrifices made during that time, and those which continue to be made by many Tasmanians, their families and communities.

Further, we must acknowledge the 13 Tasmanian lives tragically lost due to COVID-19 over this period. A health crisis widely described as unprecedented spiralled into also becoming an equally unprecedented social and economic crisis. Obviously, there is no blueprint for how to best contend with an unprecedented crisis, let alone one on a global scale, and one which continues to exist over a year later.

Tasmania is not alone in that our state emergency infrastructure is geared for short, sharp emergencies more in line with natural disasters. Even terrorist attacks are factored in as having a finite active duration with the emphasis being on recovery. Another commonality shared by all the possible emergency scenarios for which our emergency response infrastructure and plans focused is the assumption that there is a normal to which we can return.

We all know that this pandemic has upturned permanently any sense of returning to a pre-COVID normality. It is not going to happen and that is our collective challenge as a community and here as an elected representative microcosm of that community to carve out an equitable, inclusive and liveable post-pandemic normal. We will only be successful in achieving this new goal by recognising that the status quo is neither practical nor even desirable within our brave new post-pandemic world and learning from what we have been exposed to. We need to identify and act upon the strength and weaknesses this shared pandemic experience has exposed.

As members of this place will recall, I proposed last year - and the majority of this Chamber supported - a joint House committee to be established not only to provide appropriate oversight during a time where public health considerations required protracted shutdown of

parliament, but also a mechanism by which to capture the community's experiences and develop a real time knowledge repository for what does and does not work when confronted with an unprecedented crisis, such as a pandemic.

We knew then the pandemic, however long it lasted, would expose structural, social fragilities, fault lines, as well as unexpected strengths. The health of our community emerging from the crisis in the immediate through to the long term would depend on how coherently and comprehensively we identified and acted upon these fragilities and fault lines and how well we harnessed those strengths. I proposed a parliamentary mechanism to provide transparency, accountability, and community ownership of that process.

Instead, the Premier established his Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council consisting of his captain's pick of community leaders to develop an interim and longer five-year recovery plan. The Premier's Address, therefore, unsurprisingly reflects the final report of PESRAC; similarly, my response to the Premier's Address will also examine elements of the PESRAC contribution.

We know the PESRAC interim report's 64 recommendations were accepted in full by Government upon its release last year. Now we are told the Government is committed to accepting all 52 recommendations contained in the final report. This immediate response from the Premier set some alarm bells ringing for me, Mr President. Why be alarmed when such an agreement by government would appear to be a positive move?

As already stated, PESRAC was set an extraordinary challenge: how to revitalise, reinvigorate and restructure a Tasmania emerging from an unprecedented challenge? Submission after submission made to the PESRAC process recognised that 'there is no going back to the way things were.'. This was more than adapting to a 'new normal'. There were myriad calls to use this period to reset, reimagine and redefine Tasmania's opportunities, who we are as a community and where we are going as a community. Hence the community could be forgiven for expecting that PESRAC would present new, novel, far-reaching and challenging initiatives that would take some time to digest and be considered by government.

The very fact that there could be a swift acceptance of 52 of the final report's recommendations causes a degree of concern that the PESRAC recommendations were perhaps not as challenging as the circumstances that prompted PESRAC's formation in the first place, and that instead the report presents more of the same, that it perpetuates a status quo. This seems inconceivable, given the task, and the involvement, of the highly dedicated and skilled participants at all levels of that process, but it does appear that the majority of the report's focus is on shoring up the status quo.

A perceived advantage of an accountable and transparent COVID-19 parliamentary committee process was the capacity to help reassure the community that any push to run ideological agendas under the cover of COVID-19 would be identified and placed within a context of other goals and criteria. If there were gaps in focus and emphasis, there would be mechanisms to exercise accountability on a parliamentary committee. The public would be able to follow the discussions through public hearings, as well as access submissions in real time, for example.

If issues and matters were put forward but left unaddressed or received an overly weighted hearing from the committee, this could have been seen and followed. Instead, as a

point of contrast, the 79 PESRAC submissions to phase 2 - which includes a preparation of a final report - only became available sometime between noon and 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday 23 March, some seven days after both the Premier's Address and the release of the PESRAC final report on 16 March.

This leads me to one of the key disappointing and worrying aspects of the Premier's Address given it was so closely based upon the PESRAC final report. The report's - and hence the Premier's Address as well to some degree - almost default position that the status quo could and should be maintained has resulted in key considerations and serious aspects being left unaddressed or at least inadequately addressed.

I do not have time to go into all those omitted considerations in detail; instead I will characterise them as the glossing-over of the very real and apparent social structural fragilities and fault lines that the pandemic had exposed within the Tasmanian community and economy, particularly those fault lines impacting on women, girls and other vulnerable cohorts such as migrant and new Tasmanian communities, young people, Tasmanians living with disabilities, and older Tasmanians, just to mention a few.

Our cultural challenges regarding gender and treatment of women and girls at the state and national levels are dominating current political and public discourse, and not before time, quite frankly. Hence it will not surprise anyone if I now focus on the pandemic's impact upon Tasmania's women and girls, and the plan put forward by both PESRAC and the Premier's Address to help strengthen that exposed fault line.

This inequitable gender fault line was clearly identified even prior to the PESRAC interim report nationally and internationally. Report after report highlighted that the pandemic had impacted women's access to employment, to education, to services and to child care. Statistic after statistic highlighted the increasing demand for family violence and sexual assault services, showing an escalation of violence against women. Warnings were issued over the federal government's move to allow early access to superannuation funds and the impact that would have on women who collectively have less superannuation to dip into than their male counterparts, now and into the future.

Deloitte released modelling last year indicating that women and young people have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. In Tasmania women make up 60 per cent of the tourism and hospitality workforce, according to the Tourism Industry Council's submission to PESRAC, as well as being highly represented across the arts, events and retail sectors. Evidence also continues to mount that women disproportionately suffer in the labour market, with diminishing opportunities to obtain secure, decent jobs because women are more likely to be in casual roles, filling 54 per cent of all casual positions nationally.

Nationally women accounted for 62 per cent of all new casual jobs created in the period from May to November 2020. Recent industrial relations changes federally will only continue to make women more vulnerable to casualisation, yet the main suggestion to assist in filling this gender fault line from the PESRAC interim report, with its predominant focus on building our way out of the pandemic, was to suggest support programs to assist women to transition to the construction industry.

Many Tasmanians at the time raised their eyebrows at this rather limited and borderline dismissive addressing of the pandemic's impacts on women, but were told to wait for the final



report with its more detailed and long-term two- to five-year plan. Wait we did, anxiously perhaps for some, as nationally recent job quality data tells a bleak story for women's employment prospects. The fault line of women's work environment sees them returning to paid work on inferior terms compared to men - fewer hours, less pay and less security.

Nationally, casual jobs accounted for 64 per cent of the total growth in women's employment from May to November last year. However, more than half of all the growth in women's employment in the six-month period was in both low hours and insecure work with 52 per cent of the total growth of employees in part-time casual jobs. Further, traditional full-time permanent jobs with what were once considered normal entitlements, such as paid sick leave, holidays and superannuation, represented only 10 per cent of the Australian female employment growth from May through to November.

If you wish to know what the prospects are for Tasmanian women and girls, what the rate is of traditional full-time permanent jobs with paid sick leave, holidays and superannuation available for Tasmanian women and girls, do not expect the PESRAC final report nor the Premier's Address to inform you of this. In fact, the PESRAC chair stated on the ABC Radio's *Mornings* program on 18 March, following the release of the final report, that challenges facing women and the other vulnerable cohorts I mentioned, including young people, 'are dealt with closely in the interim report.'. Gobsmacking.

Unfortunately, it is not surprising, given this dismissive attitude that women have to fit in with the male norm, that they are dealt with in the interim report by those superficial gestures. That they have to fit in with the male norm with male expectations, and be permitted into male spaces, such as the construction sector, traditionally on male terms is consistent with the prevalent cultural attitudes that are only now becoming recognised as being so extremely entrenched.

The absence of any dedicated plan to make more resilient this particular fault line, impacting on over half the Tasmanian population, is not surprising, sadly, but we deserve better. I acknowledge the Premier's commitment to Tasmanian women and girls made in the opening of his address and I quote:

We know there is more to be done and we will not shirk our responsibilities to ensure that everyone is safe, everyone is respected, and everyone is supported.

I acknowledge that I believe the Premier is genuine about trying to do the right thing to address gender inequities. But due to the lack of a fully developed and integrated plan by which to do so, the Premier is left with a piecemeal and ad hoc crisis-driven mode by which to act.

For example, his address includes the very welcome and positive measure to provide free sanitary products in our schools to help address period poverty experienced by many Tasmanian girls and young women. This is not because of PESRAC, despite New South Wales introducing similar initiatives before the PESRAC final report was released, but due to the initiative of a young Tasmanian girl, whom I thank for that. It is wonderful leadership to come from our community, but it is not part of a greater plan and or a planned policy response from the avenues to which we were looking for that plan.

I also place on the record my appreciation for the Premier's swift and genuine acknowledgment and implementation of my proposal to actively have an independent review conducted of the Tasmanian parliamentary, ministerial and political office workplaces in light of the recent national events. I am pleased to see that that suggestion was picked up immediately and that we are progressing it.

However, this Government places much emphasis on getting women into boards and into leadership roles, which is laudable, absolutely, but I have to say to some extent it misses the point. Women first want and need safety. Women first want and need respect. Therefore, in the absence of a meaningful or targeted resilience-building plan to address in-built entrenched structural gender-based disadvantage and inequality, either from PESRAC or from the Government, the Government will seriously need to consider my call I think to guide them. That is the call for a gender impact assessment statement to be incorporated within state budgets from now on, as well as to be incorporated into the Cabinet assessment process for any bills or policy being forwarded for consideration, just as economic impacts are incorporated and considered.

A gender impact assessment and statement in both these spheres would be a demonstration that the Premier is serious about delivering for Tasmanian women and girls. Clearly, the state cannot on its own counter damaging changes to superannuation or the erosion of industrial protections occurring within the federal jurisdiction, but it does have a responsibility in developing appropriate migratory measures as well as to ensure its own initiatives, such as the predominant reliance on shovel-ready, 'build our way back into the black' strategies. They do not continue to marginalise, to disempower and to endanger Tasmanian women and girls. This is clearly where we do not want to return to the status quo of pre-COVID. We also have to be brutally clear that during COVID the fault line of gender was exacerbated.

I need to move on despite there being much more I could say on that subject. Some may say that it was not the role of PESRAC, nor the Premier's Address to provide a detailed plan such that I am calling for when it comes to redressing gender equity. However, there were some surprisingly detailed structural plans in both the PESRAC report and the Premier's Address. I would like to focus on a couple of those now to demonstrate that disparity in prioritisation. The disparity in detail.

TasTAFE is clearly an important and significant component of our education, skill development and training sector. I do not think anyone here would dispute that we need it functioning to deliver world-class education and training services. I also note that the Premier's Address asserts:

One of the strongest themes PESRAC heard in its consultation with business is the need for our training provider TasTAFE to meet the needs of a generation of young people and an influx of jobseekers who need to quickly upskill and reskill to move across sectors as we recover from the structural impacts of COVID-19.

We absolutely need to support the upskilling, reskilling and initial training of Tasmanians across all sectors and demographics. I do not think anyone needs to prosecute the case for that. What I am concerned about is the lack of a convincing case being prosecuted here, that, first, TasTAFE currently is not or is unable to deliver on those expectations; and, second, that

corporatising this entity into a government business enterprise is the appropriate solution to whatever the perceived problem is regarding TasTAFE and its current capacity to deliver for Tasmanians seeking skill development and employers seeking skilled Tasmanians.

Put simply, I am not convinced of the nature or extent of the perceived TasTAFE problem. Nor am I convinced the GBE proposal is the best solution. Unfortunately, this proposal does have the hallmark of a pre-COVID ideological agenda being implemented by stealth under the cover of COVID. Why do I say that? Well, I look at how the GBE proposal is framed. Despite the Government boasting that Tasmania's economy is far outperforming other jurisdictions and I quote from the Premier's Address:

We have the lowest unemployment rate of all the states and job numbers are at pre-pandemic levels.

Further, he says:

CommSec has Tasmania placed as the best performing economy in the nation for the fourth quarter in a row.

Additional examples of business confidence and government support are also provided in the address, despite all that positivity, however, suddenly under the heading of 'Skills and Training' we discover there is a massive deficiency problem with TasTAFE. Such a problem, apparently, that it is one of the 'strongest themes PESRAC heard in its consultation with business.' This makes me wonder what PESRAC heard from TasTAFE students or staff, or how a generation of young people feels when, apparently, the business sector is anxious TasTAFE is not meeting their needs. They may share or have a different view to that held by the business sector, but neither the PESRAC report nor the Premier's Address provides any insight into the perspectives held by these other involved stakeholder groups.

If this survey conducted through the PESRAC process about TasTAFE had been done in a different way, perhaps it might have been decried as push polling. I note that although TasTAFE appears on the consultation list provided on the PESRAC website and was involved in the cross-sector workshops, it does not appear that TasTAFE made a written submission during either phase 1 or 2.

I had a quick look at some of the stakeholders who did make submissions, such as the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Tasmanian Small Business Council, which both made submissions to phase 1, neither of which mentioned TasTAFE. The TCCI did discuss the need for industry-led training services as opposed to training provider-led, and also called for a skills and workforce development fund among other things. Interestingly, the Tourism Industry Council Tasmania, while emphasising the importance of hospitality and tourism training, and also identified the current success of, and need for, ongoing further support of both industry-led tourism and hospitality training organisations and the collaboration between the University of Tasmania and the tourism and hospitality industry, it makes no mention of TasTAFE, good or bad.

I do not intend to go through each and every submission by PESRAC in this address, but just for the sake of completion, it is worth reviewing the nine cross-sector workshops and the three regional roundtables also conducted by PESRAC, of which the summarised output and outcomes are available on the PESRAC website. Doing that review, you will find the regional

workshop summary of outcomes report makes two mentions of TasTAFE. One was a call for more certainty and regularity for TasTAFE delivering training courses in the regions, and the other was to suggest moving the regional trade training centres from the Department of Education to Skills Tasmania or TasTAFE.

Of the nine cross-sector workshop outcome reports there were a handful of mentions of TasTAFE across workshops 2, 3, 5 and 7. The comments range from TasTAFE being under-utilised, in workshop 2; that it as well as UTAS needed more flexibility such as including provision for weekend courses, in workshop 5; to its role within the board of context of VET service supply, workshop 7; and the need for modernisation and different delivery models, workshop 3.

To sum up on this point, it is not surprising, given the economic aspect of the pandemic crisis, for there to be focus across a range of PESRAC participants on an immediate and long-term skill development and retention. However, if there were extensive and persuasive evidence of broadscale community and stakeholder dissatisfaction with TasTAFE to fulfil its role, it would be a fair assumption that it would appear more extensively than we see in the PESRAC submissions and output reports rather than the scant few oblique mentions that TasTAFE garnered across nine cross-sector workshops and three regional roundtables.

We heard that apparently discontent with TasTAFE was raised by virtually all who participated in the PESRAC. However, the materials provided by PESRAC do not appear to support that contention. It is difficult to reconcile TasTAFE as underperforming when its students won the following in the 2020 Australian Training Awards - apprentice of the year, and vocational student of the year. TasTAFE was also one of three registered training organisations nationally shortlisted as a finalist in the large training provider of the year category.

Despite the effort made by the Premier's Address to present the proposal to transform TAFE into a GBE as a solution, it remains unclear to me at least what is the exact nature of the problem. Undoubtedly there is always room for improvement, but unless we are clear on the exact nature of any problem or identified areas for change, how are we meant to evaluate whether the proposed solution is a good fit? Potentially, an appropriate way to test exactly whether TasTAFE is fit for purpose, given current challenges and opportunities, and also to test whether the proposed solution addresses any identified problem is to establish a joint House select committee to examine the issue. This parliament will be required to debate and sign off on any move to transition TasTAFE into a GBE. A joint House committee would provide an appropriate and transparent mechanism by which to inform ourselves that the solution fits the problem as well as whose voices are being included in a discussion.

I mentioned earlier my concern of the potential for an ideological agenda to be prosecuted under the cover of COVID-19. Another area where I hold grave concerns that we are seeing it occur is in the PESRAC report for local council amalgamations. This is a matter in which we all need to engage as per the Premier's Address that:

unless there is agreement in this place as well as the Legislative Council that reform is needed and that a process should be established, there is no point considering it further.

At this stage I hold serious reservations regarding this PESRAC recommendation. Again, despite being told that it was an issue raised by virtually all spoken to by PESRAC, their publicly available documents do not reflect that purported concern. The Regional Workshop Summary of Outcomes Report makes 10 references to local government. One includes local government reform without detailing what that reform could look like or address while the other mentions are within the context of the role of local government to be the conduit between their respective communities and the state government.

Another output report included one call to reduce council numbers - that was workshop 4 - and another workshop, 8, recognises that there is more opportunities to get smarter at sharing resources across councils, businesses and industry to help improve services or reduce costs. This report also warned that local government cuts in particular will have a direct impact on communities. Once again, it is unclear how or why our local government tier has been identified as problematic in this manner or why it warrants the proposed and contentious so-called solution of amalgamations.

We know amalgamations has been a long-held objective in certain sectors while also being strongly resisted by others, including communities invested in their local municipalities. At this stage, given my strong reservations regarding exactly how problematic the number of local councils is or how amalgamations will assist in strengthening a robust and resilient Tasmania moving forward assisting in addressing the serious fault line exacerbated by the pandemic, at this stage I would be indicating to the Premier that as a member of this place this proposal does not yet have my agreement.

Mr President, it is also worth noting that the issue of local council amalgamations also predates the arrival of COVID-19 and the ensuing pandemic. By the PESRAC chair's own priority criteria as expressed on the local ABC Radio's *Mornings* program on 18 March, it should not be considered a COVID-19 recovery issue, just as, apparently, the challenges and opportunities posed by the state's ageing population should not be considered a COVID-19 recovery issue on the grounds that it existed pre-pandemic, according to the PESRAC chair.

I will talk about Tasmania's ageing demographic. I place on the record how bewildered and concerned I am over the lack of focus upon Tasmania's ageing demographic, a particular factor that distinguishes this state from our federal counterparts. I welcome the acknowledgement in the Premier's Address that the aged care and disability support sectors are amongst the fastest growing industries in the state, with COVID-19 disproportionately affecting the skills pipeline for these sectors and the additional funding of \$3 million to assist funding an additional 600 places.

However, as pointed out by eminent workforce demographer, Dr Lisa Denny, much more needs to be done to address the challenges of an ageing population. As Dr Denny states in her submission to PESRAC:

Future economic and social policy development for Tasmania will need to be positioned in the context of a population with low or no population growth and ageing rapidly.

I do not have time in this context to go into Dr Denny's submission in detail. I note she discusses the need for Tasmania to consider investing in the white economy - which is described as encompassing 'a new collective for economic growth based on the increasing

demand for age-focused needs; an eco-system of products and services for older people' - to address structural challenges. She also discusses the synergies between the opportunities to incentivise research and development as Tasmania recovers from the unprecedented global scenario of COVID-19 and provides for the ongoing unprecedented global scenario of population ageing.

Significantly, Dr Denny raises substantial and interesting points of consideration regarding the Government's current emphasis on shovel-ready projects, in addressing the need for both urban and regional regeneration and revitalisation of public spaces and towns. She discusses the unfortunate correlation between ageing regional populations and the deterioration of the built environments surrounding them. She draws attention to the potential for such revitalisation programs at an appropriate scale, boosting both liveability in the region as well as improved service provision which in turn improves social cohesion.

Yet surprisingly, neither PESRAC's final report nor the Premier's Address integrates addressing our ageing population into our COVID-19 recovery plan. Apparently, again according to PESRAC's chair as per his ABC radio interview earlier this month our ageing population is not a COVID-19 recovery issue as it pre-existed the pandemic.

Yes, it did and it will continue to exist during and post the pandemic. This sector of our community is recognised as being one of the most vulnerable cohorts to pandemics of this nature and will become increasingly so if targeted services are not there to support them.

I do not understand how or why we distinguish between sectors of our community which are or are not part of the COVID-19 recovery. We are told that we are all in this together but apparently not if you are part of the aged population or a service and care provider to this portion of the Tasmanian community, just as you are not perhaps if you are a woman or a young person or some of those other cohort groups who also were told they pre-dated this experience and therefore are not part of the recovery.

This distinction also feels further arbitrary when we pause and realise it could apply to any aspect identified for prioritisation within the COVID-19 recovery plan. Challenges for the construction sector. Skill development needs. Challenges meeting perceived skill demand and supply in the tourism and hospitality sectors. All these things existed pre-pandemic for example and yet they are considered and prioritised within the COVID-19 recovery plan put forward.

I stated earlier local government amalgamations have been dangled or threatened depending on your perspective ever since Ray Groom's contentious MP's pay rise of the early 1990's. Definitely pre-pandemic but apparently it still qualifies to feature as part of our COVID-19 recovery under the PESRAC report and the Premier's Address.

I now wish to move on to how we evaluate the delivery of PESRAC's proposals adopted by the Government and expressed in the Premier's Address. I raised concerns over the lack of tangible benchmarks and delivery measurement mechanisms during last year's budget Estimates scrutiny committees in relation to the interim PESRAC report, particularly in light of the manner in which they were presented in the 2020-21 state Budget with no indication of time lines and milestones of status.

These concerns still stand in light of both the final report and the Premier's Address. In comparison, I looked at the 1999 Jim Bacon initiative, Tasmania Together. That process had a whole level of bureaucracy, including legislation for the progress board et cetera which there is probably very good reason not to duplicate with the PESRAC process.

However, there was an acknowledgement that to develop and maintain community confidence in a process, there needed to be clear transparent accountability and evaluation mechanisms, so people could see for themselves what how and where the Tasmania Together process and its initiatives and proposals were being delivered. In fact, they were being delivered in a manner people expected therefore the Tasmania Together process saw initiatives and policy priorities released with associated indicated benchmarks.

Also, as part of that the process laid out regular inbuilt reviews such as a five-yearly reviews and there were also benchmark status summary reports delivered to assist people to see how things were playing out.

I am suggesting that in stark contrast we currently have no credible or meaningful pandemic recovery benchmarks nor any objective mechanism by which to identify or evaluate the delivery of the recommendations from either the interim or the final PESRAC reports that are apparently underpinning our way forward from here.

I wonder whether the Premier could give some thought to how best to deliver community confidence through better accountability, better benchmarking or at least record keeping in a public fashion around progress and achievement of the things that are detailed in both the interim and the final PESRAC reports.

There are some other things missing from the Premier's Address when we think of it being about the state of our state and where to from here.

There were other significant silences contained in the address relating to fundamentally critical public policy.

First, I speak about political donation reform. The silence regarding the long-promised and overdue state-based political donation reform was deafening in the address. The proposed legislative time frame for this essential democratic reform should have been outlined at the earliest possibility at the commencement of parliament this year, which was in fact the Premier's annual address, but it was not there.

No more will the excuse wash that the pandemic takes priority over such fundamental reforms to strengthen the health of our democracy, particularly not when we see the legislation the Government has chosen to prioritise in their stead, such as the workplace anti-protester and the major projects bills we dealt with last year during the pandemic.

Concerns are growing over the Government's perceived tardiness in delivering on this promise, given we know they have the report and they have had it for many months now, and particularly given the recent shift in government status to that of minority, and the growing whispers of an early election. The situation the Government finds itself in, without a majority, is one largely of its own making. It will be unconscionable for the Tasmanian community to be penalised for the Government's predicament.

The community was promised electoral donation reform multiple times over the term of this Government from, I think, two months after the last election, and that promise must be delivered before the next general election is held. I think I speak for many when I say that the community has put this Government on notice. It will be a blatant untenable and unforgivable breach of public trust should Tasmanians go to the polls again without knowing who has given money to whom. There is no excuse for the Tasmanian voter ever to be placed in that position again.

Another notable absence in the Premier's Address and the description of 'where to from here' was any update on the Government's Future Gaming Market reform plan. Again a plan that has apparently been delayed due to the pandemic, despite the process commencing well before the pandemic hit. Clearly it would potentially benefit some stakeholders, such as Federal Hotels, should the status quo continue. A lazy political party could even recycle the promised reforms as the forthcoming election promise, hoping it may again nullify any alternative political party election commitments.

Should the Government intend to pursue its Future Gaming Markets reforms this term, I take this opportunity to remind the Government that the Premier provided me with an undertaking during budget Estimates hearings last November that not only will there be a publicly released exposure draft bill, they will also endeavour that the community will have a minimum of five weeks public consultation time in which to make submissions on that exposure draft bill. Then, presuming those submissions are treated with due consideration and any modifications are made to the bill before it is formally tabled in parliament, the time frame for this gaming markets reform is not one which can be rushed through at a last minute before going to a rushed election.

Should we be in a position where an early election is called and will be held prior to political donation reform and prior to Future Gaming Market reform, I call on the Government here and now, and all other political parties, to make public commitments not to accept any pre-election donations from any poker machine industry entities or any entities directly associated and financial beneficiaries of the poker machine industry. I call on the Government right now to make that commitment to the Tasmanian people. We deserve to go to the next election with a clear understanding that it is not being funded, bought or influenced by that same industry.

The other detail missing from the Premier's Address was any update on how long we can expect the state of emergency declaration to remain in force. The state of emergency was extended on 13 February this year for a further 12 weeks. By my count that would make its expiry date 8 May. Does the Premier expect to be able to lift the declaration and restore and restore our civil liberties thus far suspended due to the goodwill and cooperation of the community? What are the criteria by which this decision will be evaluated in light of the decreasing numbers of COVID-19 active cases around the nation? I understand that does not necessarily correlate to a decreasing threat, but it would be timely to receive an update from the Premier as to how that decision will be approached and upon what Public Health-driven criteria it will be based.

I would like to finish on a positive note by acknowledging that there are many positive announcements in the Premier's Address, and important commitments for investment. These have been well canvassed by others in the other place and this place, and I will highlight just a few that I was particularly pleased to see.



The Premier's commitment to develop a sustainability strategy for Tasmania is welcome. I also acknowledge the PESRAC final report's recommendations that we adopt the United Nations' sustainable development goals. These were developed by the UN to provide a blueprint for developing a better and more sustainable future for all. They seek to provide a measurable and deliverable mechanism to address challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice and they can be addressed locally as well as globally.

I also acknowledge the further resourcing of adequate, affordable social housing, which is very welcome. Although it is positive, this commitment remains far short of what will be required to substantially address that housing and homelessness challenge we face in this state. We are still in a holding pattern on this issue. All the investments, while good, are desperately trying to hold us in place so that we do not lose further ground, rather than taking us forward towards a solution.

Much bigger and bolder action will be required in the area of housing and homelessness to see our state truly thrive. I commend to the Government the target proposed by Shelter Tasmania of increasing social housing in the state to 10 per cent of all dwellings in 10 years. To achieve this target would require an additional 10 000 homes delivered at the rate of 1000 per year.

It was positive to see the commitment in the Premier's Address to investment of a further \$41.2 million over four years to fully fund phases 1 and 2 of the Government's response to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service review. I dearly hope to see the outcomes of this investment deliver on the intent to better support children and adolescents, particularly those most vulnerable in our community.

Investments such as these, if fully delivered and successful in achieving their intent, have a capacity to make a tangible difference to the life outcomes for Tasmanian children and to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. I note that this review and investment was already in train prior to COVID-19 and although mentioned in the PESRAC report, it was not a new or different direction emerging from PESRAC consultation processes. However, it is well overdue and a straightforward improvement that was required to better address the pre-COVID-19 challenges we faced in that area.

Last, but of prime significance, I welcome the Premier's commitment to receive and consider proposals for further Tasmanian Aboriginal land returns. I look forward to further details of that process, which I hope are forthcoming sooner rather than later.

To conclude, Mr President, bold is used frequently to frame the undertakings detailed in the Premier's Address. However, despite the cluster of positive new initiatives contained within the Premier's Address, there was the potential for it to be much bolder and braver than it actually is. This address strikes a familiar tone in the lead-up to an election year. That should give us pause to stop and think after the year we have survived and the prediction of ongoing and future destabilisation and vulnerabilities in the wake of the pandemic, how could the plan forward appear familiar?

I understand the need to be reassuring for a traumatised community, but the reassurance we most desperately need to receive is that all the lessons from this unprecedented experience have been identified. All the necessary lessons have been learned. We have collated, stored

and activated our unique experiences - to inform how to look after the vulnerable better, how to close gaping fault lines, how to invest in whole-of-community resilience building now and into the future. Further, that we have collated, stored and used our unique experiences to inform our emergency infrastructure for future crises, whether it is the next wave of this particular COVID-19 virus or a different, unrelated cataclysm that sees us perhaps plunge again into partial or entire lockdown.

If that happens, or perhaps when that happens, we will not be able to hide behind 'unprecedented' again. The community will rightfully have expectations that while we may be plunged into say, a lockdown, we should not necessarily be plunged into the same degree of chaos or disconnect of unprotected vulnerable cohorts, for example. We should not have to learn those lessons again.

Despite there being some positive components contained in both the PESRAC reports and the Premier's Address, I have to say that currently I am not confident we have either a rigorous post-COVID-19 plan for resilience and recovery, or that we have a comprehensive and accessible resource to inform any future shock of a similar scale as this past year.

I am concerned that the tough and truly bold challenges and opportunities presented by this pandemic to reset and re-imagine a resilient Tasmania have become muffled by an opaque process, during which ideological agendas could be, and have been, promulgated - an opaque process that muffles once more the voices traditionally marginalised, whilst also obscuring from sight by whom and whereby proposals which have been picked up and adopted - even those I support - have originated. Just as Tasmanians should know who has donated what to whom when they go to the ballot box, so too should they be able to see who and what may have influenced this critical decision-making process on which we are relying as we move forward into an unsettling post-pandemic future.

I will finish my contribution with my heartfelt thanks to the Tasmanian community for the shared efforts and successes of this past year under the shadow of COVID-19.

I look forward to our continued community efforts in our recovery and rebuilding efforts and I hope to see truly innovative and bold developments, if not led and driven by this Government, then emerging and growing from the resilient and committed Tasmanian citizens and communities.

I note the address.

[4.45 p.m.]

**Ms PALMER** (Rosevears) - Mr President, it is almost impossible to believe after such a turbulent and indeed frightening 12 months our state is standing here - our beautiful island state standing so strong. We are the envy of the country, indeed the envy of the world.

Earlier this year my family held an eightieth birthday celebration for my mother, Diane. We were connected with her brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and cousins from all around the world, and one of them was my cousin who lives in London. We are of a similar age. She lives with her family. She has two children. For over a year she has worked from home and has supported her children through homeschooling. As a parent and as a working parent, I looked into her face on that screen and I just wondered what her actual day-to-day reality

looked like. A year she had been living this way and at the moment not necessarily an end in sight to the way that she is living.

I wondered what my life, indeed all our lives, might have been like had hard decisions not been made, if decisive action had not been taken in those early weeks. While my cousin and millions of others around the world are just slowly venturing through their COVID-19 journey, we are being encouraged to holiday in our own state, to eat in our local restaurants. We are back in our gyms. Well, not me personally - more of a book-and-a-cup-of-tea girl - but there are many back in gyms. We are back with our colleagues here in this place. My children run freely in the schoolyard and indeed yesterday my 12-year-old son was here in the parliament with his classmates on a school trip, albeit only in the foyer.

I have always loved my state and I have often used the lines in numerous speeches I have given, or at events I have hosted, that we live in paradise - 'Where else in the world would you want to be?'. But now those words have quite a different meaning. A much deeper meaning. As our Premier has said time and time again, Tasmania is one of the safest places in the country and we are without doubt one of the safest places in the world. We are now emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis with optimism, with a strong economy and business confidence leading the nation and a clear focus on securing Tasmania's future.

As a result of the incredible efforts of all Tasmanians, our state is turning things around and we can once again feel so optimistic about our future. Tasmanians have shown again they will always rise to the challenge and help each other get back on our feet.

I have seen this again and again in my work over many years as a community ambassador. Over these past 12 months my local communities have taken this kind of support to the next level. Optimism in the face of a crisis is one that I believe characterises Tasmanians. Together we have good reasons to be optimistic as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. We are in a good place. We now have a strong platform ready to harness the opportunities of the future.

The Government has worked hard to support jobs, to regain our confidence and to rebuild our economy and our communities. I believe the Government's clear plan to secure Tasmania's future is working, but we know there is more to do. There is always more than we can do. That is why the Premier has accepted all 52 recommendations of his Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council to help support Tasmania's short-, medium- and longer term recovery to secure our state's future.

We need Tasmania to be humming again with a strong economy and businesses hiring, so we can ensure we can keep delivering the essential services Tasmanians need. There is good evidence the Government's clear plan is working. Tasmanian employment is back up to pre-pandemic levels. Jobs were up by 1.5 per cent in February, the largest monthly growth rate in the country. Unemployment is down. We now have the second lowest unemployment rate of all states, at 5.7 per cent. The participation rate is back up to pre-pandemic levels - that is a good indicator that confidence is returning to the job market. Job vacancies are up. They grew 52 per cent over the year. This was the highest growth in the nation. In fact, I have businesses in my electorate calling my office saying they have jobs they cannot fill. They are actually advertising through the media calling for people to please apply for these positions.

It is a strong record on jobs - 26 400 jobs have been created since our Liberal Government came to office in March 2014. Businesses are confident and confident businesses invest and they hire. Business investment in the December quarter was up. It grew 8.2 per cent in the quarter and is now 7.4 per cent higher than the year before. Our businesses are confident and confidence leads to economic growth, increased investment and jobs.

In the December quarter 2020, the Australian Bureau of Statistics data showed the Tasmanian economy was stronger and bigger than before the pandemic. Private investors are confident in the way the Government has handled this COVID-19 crisis and they have invested. Private investment is up. It grew 10.2 per cent over the previous year, bucking the national trend that saw nearly all other states and territories decline over the same period. Private new capital expenditure for the December 2020 quarter is also up, growing 17.2 per cent, the highest growth of any state and over five times higher than the national growth of just 3 per cent.

Building approvals are up. Boy, are they up. In January, they were 40.3 per cent higher than in January last year. The number of construction loans in January nearly tripled the number 12 months earlier than the pandemic. It was higher than national growth over the same period. A strong sign of confidence in the building and construction sector.

Building approvals are up. In January retail trade was up. In the year to January, our merchandise exports were higher than the previous year bucking again the national trend. As I said, we have good reason to be optimistic. The statistics and the data back that up.

In my electorate of Rosevears, you can see the confidence people have in our state as new businesses just continue to pop up. Bakeries, cafes, florists, small businesses - and you do not see this happening unless there is a sense of real confidence. I know I cannot wait to see the flow-on effect for the fast-growing community of Legana when we see the new \$24 million primary school open its doors in 2024. We have just seen the announcement that Tasmanian architectural firm, Cumulus Studio, has been appointed to the project, which will cater for up to 350 students from kinder through to grade 6.

I was delighted to be involved in the extensive community engagement, which has already taken place along with many others. I cannot wait to see the concept plans, which will be available to our community again for feedback. It is an exciting time for many young families who live in Legana and those who are moving to Legana, who call Legana home. This school will bring a real sense of community and a sense of belonging. There are going to be a lot of excited little faces when the doors open and some pretty happy parents too, I imagine.

How exciting to see more schools have extended to years 11 and 12, including Exeter High School. This means that schools right across the Launceston region are providing year 9 to 12 options, so our students have a clear pathway to continuing their education and attaining their TCE. This Government recognises how critical a good education system is to strengthening and connecting communities. We have been steadfast in our commitment to build a better education system to give our young people the best start in life.

It takes me a little longer at the moment to get from one end of my electorate to the other, not quite as long as it does for other members to get from one end of their electorate to the other. However, for me it is a welcome wait on the side of the road as I get to watch the progress of the roadworks currently underway on the West Tamar Highway. These projects will improve safety and travel time reliability.

I have to say the patience shown by motorists has been extraordinary. I thank them very much for that because, as we know, the patience shown by motorists will equate to keeping those who are working on these projects safe. It is always a good reminder the safety of these workers remains in our hands, as we reduce speed while travelling through roadworks.

This Government is focused on the safety of thousands that travel the West Tamar Highway daily. We also committed to a 10 kilometre section of the highway between Margaret Street in Launceston - which is just around the corner from my home - and Legana Park Drive. The cycling improvements include improved services, increased space on road shoulders, line marking adjustments, warning signs, head start boxes at some signal-controlled intersections and shoulder widening. Congratulations to all the cyclists who lobbied for many years to see this happen on their highway.

In my inaugural speech in this place I shared some of the heartache I found behind the front doors of those living on the streets of my electorate. It is no surprise Tasmanians told PESRAC that health is a priority and we must keep investing in mental health. Over the next few years, we will deliver significant reform arising from the Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program and the reform agenda for the alcohol and other drugs sector in Tasmania.

In last year's budget we invested \$4 million to commence phase 1 of implementing the Government's response to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services review report and recommendations. Last year we also released Tasmania's strengthened mental health plan, Rethink 2020, which represents a shared approach to mental health service planning and delivery in Tasmania. We have also prioritised mental health and wellbeing in our schools, delivering an extra 80 full-time professional support staff, including school psychologists, social workers, nurses, speech and language pathologists, to support children and young people impacted by trauma and we now have support and wellbeing teams established in every school. I welcome this.

I have been an ambassador for many years for Inside Out 4 Kids, a program run through the Launceston City Mission solely for the purpose of reaching out to children under the age of 12 who have experienced trauma at all ends of the scale.

When the pandemic struck, we faced the most serious health and economic crisis in generations as Tasmania's leader, Peter Gutwein, took clear, decisive action and unprecedented steps to protect and safeguard our community. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis Peter Gutwein and his ministers demonstrated unerringly strong leadership to help Tasmanians manage the many challenges that arose through this once-in-a-lifetime crisis. We need that kind of clear, decisive leadership to continue so we can deliver our plan to secure Tasmania's future. It is the clearest message yet I have received from so many of my constituents in the electorate of Rosevears.

My confidence and excitement for what lies ahead for my electorate and state fills me with great pride and anticipation. I know we can achieve more together and we now have a strong platform ready to harness the many opportunities of the future. I believe as a proud member of Peter Gutwein's Liberal team that our clear plan to secure Tasmania's future is working.

[4.59 p.m.]

**Ms LOVELL** (Rumney) - Mr President, I rise to deliver my response to the Premier's state of the state address and start by acknowledging that we are on Aboriginal land and that sovereignty was never ceded. I recognise and respect the Tasmanian Aboriginal community and their ongoing custodianship of this land and I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

I begin by acknowledging the Tasmanian community and the extraordinary year we have all experienced. I am very proud of our state and communities, and how Tasmanians responded to the pandemic. Tasmanians did what was asked of them. We stayed home to stay safe, we got tested when we were unwell. Parents kept their children home and supported them through learning at home. Teachers worked extremely hard to set up those systems almost overnight and to support their students and their parents - probably their parents more than their students a lot of the time, if my experience is anything to go by.

Home offices were set up. Members of households scheduled their Zoom meetings and classes around each other. We exercised at home and in our local streets instead of in gyms. Supermarket workers wore masks and adjusted to standing behind perspex barriers and dealt with outbursts as emotions got the better of some of us at various times. Cleaners worked harder than ever, changing practices, working longer hours and keeping us all safe.

Our healthcare workers held our struggling health system together and braced themselves for the worst-case scenario. They updated their training, they were fit-tested for masks, they isolated themselves from their family and friends. They stood on the front line of this invisible battlefield, ready to protect us all. In the north-west, they were called to respond and dealt with an outbreak. They quarantined, they were repeatedly tested, and they dealt with misdirected displays of fear and anger from members of the very communities they were protecting. They heard some of the highest profile people in the country criticise them falsely and then they went straight back to work. We are so lucky we have such courageous and dedicated people working in our health system and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

Sadly, 13 Tasmanians lost their lives; I am sure we all remember waiting each evening with feelings of dread for those updates and the deep sadness we felt with each of those announcements.

In my own electorate I saw some inspiring examples of resilience. I saw neighbourhood centres adapt almost overnight to be able to continue to support members of their communities when they could no longer welcome them into the centre. Community groups moved to online meetings to maintain contact during an otherwise isolating time. Tangible support being offered through food hampers and meal deliveries and through it all a recognition that many people were having to reach out for support in ways they never had before and those people being met with compassion and with dignity.

I could not be any prouder of my community and I am so privileged to be their representative in this place.

I now turn my attention to the Premier's Address. The Premier spoke about working with party leaders and some independent members of the parliament to conduct a review into the workplace culture here in Parliament House and in our electorate offices. I welcome this review. It could not be more timely. I acknowledge the member for Nelson for prompting this action by raising this matter with the Premier and other party leaders and members.

In light of the allegations of numerous horrific incidents in our federal parliament and in parliaments around the country, it is absolutely imperative we take this step to ensure we are providing a safe workplace here not only for members of parliament, but, more importantly, for the many members of staff who support us. Everyone has the right to be safe at work, so I am very pleased this review will be taking place.

However, it is important we recognise our privilege and while we are fortunate to have the influence, resources and the mechanisms to conduct this kind of review in our own workplace, thousands of Tasmanian women and men do not.

Workplace harassment, sexual assault, bullying and intimidation is unfortunately common in many workplaces. It is important this review be expanded beyond our workplace and across the entire public sector, and I encourage the Premier to consider that.

The Premier delivered his address just one day after women rallied at parliaments around the country in sheer fury at the events we have seen come to light recently with the bravery of women like Brittany Higgins and others, as well as continued revelations of despicable, misogynistic, intimidating behaviour in particularly our federal Parliament House. It feels like almost every day there is another example, another report, and I continue, as I am sure many women, not to be surprised by these revelations, but to still be shocked.

Shocked every time that there are people among us who see this to be an appropriate way to behave. Shocked that there are still workplace cultures - indeed in the highest offices - in this country that enable this type of behaviour. Shocked, furious, frustrated, devastated, but not surprised. Never surprised.

The Premier addressed these rallies in his state of the state address; one of the first things he said to women who rallied here in Tasmania was 'I see you, I hear you. This Government, this parliament, sees you and hears you.'. It is one thing to be seen and to be heard. I was at that rally, and it would have taken an enormous effort to avoid seeing and hearing the thousands who gathered outside Parliament House. It is one thing to be seen and to be heard, but another altogether to be believed. I believe women, and I want to hear the Premier tell the women of Tasmania that not only does he see and hear them, but he also believes them. I would love to hear every member of this parliament say that, because this is a moment in time: women have had enough - but nothing will change if women are not believed.

We have said it many times before - the social and economic consequences of COVID-19 have been felt far and wide across our state and are still being felt by many. At the height of the pandemic almost 20 000 Tasmanians lost their jobs. Job recovery across the state has been very uneven across regions and industries, and many Tasmanians are still feeling deep financial stress.

Our health system was in crisis long before the pandemic and we are still there now. The most recent available data from the Department of Health, from the September 2020 quarter, shows that 11 791 Tasmanians are waiting for necessary surgery. The average wait times are well over the clinically recommended times. Category 3 patients who have been determined to require their surgery within 365 days - a whole year, that is plenty of time - are waiting on average an additional 192 days. Category 2 patients, who should be treated within 90 days are waiting on average 218 longer than they should be. That is more than seven months. Category 1 patients, who should be treated within 30 days are waiting on average 99 days over

the clinically recommended time. They should be having their surgery within 30 days. They are waiting more than four times that long. It is not good enough. It is not getting any better, and it cannot be blamed on the pandemic because this was the situation long before any of us had even heard of COVID-19.

Tasmanians are still struggling to see a GP, to access allied health services, to receive mental health treatment and support. Ambulances are still ramped almost every day at both the Royal Hobart Hospital and the Launceston General Hospital. K Block has opened but the hospital in Hobart is still locked in bed block most of the time, meaning patients cannot be admitted from the Emergency Department with the result being a backlog there.

The health system is in crisis and this Government and this minister have no plan or vision for the kind of health system Tasmanians want, need and deserve. We need a vision for the future, for the long term, and we are just not seeing it. Our healthcare workers cannot possibly work any harder. Right across the system there is not a single part of our health system that is not under strain. Thank God we have dedicated healthcare workers who are willing to hold this broken system together. It is not sustainable and it cannot continue.

One of the most important consideration in terms of the state's recovery from COVID-19 is in skills and training, but to be honest I am not a fan of that word 'recovery' because it gives a sense of going back to the way things were and I think we can do much better than that. Perhaps it is better to say the state's plan for the future is in skills and training. We know our current skills and training system is not working as it should. Labor has been calling for increased investment in TasTAFE for years but those calls have fallen on deaf ears. Instead, what we have now seen is the Premier declaring war on TasTAFE with plans to establish it as an independent government business.

It was this line that stuck with me the most - that TasTAFE needs to look and operate more like the businesses it serves. There was a mention of flexibility, agility, being nimble. Lots of focus on meeting the needs of business and industry, but not a lot of consideration of students or of staff. TasTAFE is not a business and it should never be. Public education is a public service. TasTAFE is a public asset and we should be investing in that public asset, ensuring that students are supported and that staff are adequately resourced to meet not only the needs of business and industry but of their students. There is no doubt that TasTAFE needs rebuilding after years of underfunding from this Government, but that is what we should be doing. Labor would rebuild TasTAFE as a high-quality public education institution, not rip it apart.

It is even more shocking that the Premier did not even think to consult with the union for TasTAFE workers on this massive change. The Australian Education Union and the CPSU were both shocked to hear of this plan. The AEU called it a 'misguided attack on TasTAFE by the Tasmanian Liberal Party', and 'a slap in the face to teachers and regional communities.'.

The AEU went on to say:

Wasting money on a war with teachers and communities that depend on TAFE will delay economic recovery and result in diminished training and education.

...



The Government should be investing more, not less, in education, but the proposed model would shift the full cost of education onto students and employers.

The Government has shown complete ignorance towards students and the needs of industry while also showing little research and due diligence in the announcement.

It is no real surprise, as I said yesterday in this place, that this Government is no friend of unions and no friend of workers. I urge the Government to reconsider this misguided attack and instead take Labor's approach and commit to rebuilding TasTAFE to be the public skills and training institution that our industries need, our educators want and our students are crying out for.

Housing is another area that I want to address. How quickly we move on from a Premier who last year made the comment that no-one should be homeless in the middle of a pandemic. A commendable ideal, Mr President, and one I wholeheartedly agree with. How quickly we move on because here we are with a plan for recovery and yet, again, we have people with no safe place to call their home.

I should not say 'yet again' because while the sentiment may have been there, the necessary action was not. We never got to the stage where no-one was homeless in the middle of a pandemic. Every day we hear stories of Tasmanians who have no safe home, or we see them with one brave woman, Crystal, recently bringing her situation to the attention of all of us, by pitching her tent on Parliament lawns. Crystal had nowhere else to go and, in fact, as far as I know she still does not. This is not new. Not that long ago we had a number of people camping on the parliamentary lawns in the same circumstances. You do not have to go far from parliament to find people in similar circumstances. That is not even to mention those people who are out of sight, who are living in garages, on couches, in tents and backyards. It is simply not okay.

The housing situation in Tasmania is dire. When you have people posting photos of their children on Gumtree in an attempt to illustrate their desperate circumstances in searching for shelter, in whose world is that acceptable? Not mine. There are record high waiting lists for social housing. This Government is failing to deliver adequate social housing. Not just failing - not even coming close.

Various announcements and commitments were made during the Premier's Address, but what we have failed to see yet from the Premier is a plan to fund those commitments. We are yet to see how the Premier and Treasurer intends to pay for all those promises. Where will the money come from? There are still commitments made at the last state election that we are waiting to see accounted for in the Budget.

I will be waiting to see exactly how the Premier intends to actually deliver these many commitments. I know many Tasmanians share my scepticism. It is one thing to make promises and another entirely to deliver.

In conclusion, this has been a year like no other, but this is our opportunity to change the course of our state. Many, many Tasmanians were being left behind before COVID-19. Let us not leave them further behind as we move forward out of the grip of the pandemic.

I note the Premier's Address and move -

That the debate stands adjourned.

**Debate adjourned.**

**ALCOHOL AND DRUG DEPENDENCY REPEAL BILL 2019 (No. 40)**

**JUSTICE AND RELATED LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS  
AMENDMENTS) BILL 2020 (No. 36)**

**First Reading**

**Bills received from the House of Assembly and read the first time.**

**ADJOURNMENT**

[5.16 p.m.]

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

That the Council at its rising adjourns until 9 a.m. Friday 26 March 2021.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The Council adjourned at 5.16 p.m.**