



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Hon. Eric Abetz MP

Tuesday 24 September 2024

MEMBERS

Mr Simon Wood MP (Chair)
Mr Josh Willie MP (Deputy Chair)
Dr Rosalie Woodruff MP
Mrs Rebekah Pentland MP

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Tabatha Badger MP
Mr Mark Shelton MP
Ms Janie Finlay MP
Mr Craig Garland MP
Ms Anita Dow MP
Dr Shane Broad MP

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. ERIC ABETZ MP

Minister for Business, Industry and Resources, Minister for Transport and Leader of the House

Craig Limkin

Secretary, Department of State Growth

Martin Crane

General Manager Road User Services

Cynthia Heydon

Deputy Secretary Transport

Dr Ryan Wilkinson

Acting Director of Inland Fisheries

Deidre Wilson

Deputy Secretary, Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

Alastair Morton

Director of Mines

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Minister for Business, Industry and Resources

The Committee resumed at 2.35 p.m.

CHAIR (Mr Wood) - Good afternoon everyone. Before we commence, I have a letter to read from the Speaker:

Dear Mr Wood,

In accordance with the provisions of the resolution appointing the Estimates Committee under Membership of Committees, paragraph 6, I hereby nominate Ms Anita Dow as a substantive member of the committee in substitute for Mr Josh Willie on Tuesday, 24 September 2024 from 4.00 p.m. for the remainder of the day.

Yours sincerely,
Honourable Michelle O'Byrne MP
Speaker

CHAIR - The time being after 2.30, the examination of the Estimates of the Minister for Business, Industry and Resources will commence. Welcome minister. Would you please introduce the persons at the table for the benefit of Hansard?

Mr ABETZ - Starting with Jenna Cairney, acting Deputy Secretary. Craig Limkin, Secretary. Mark Bowles, acting Deputy Secretary. All have fancy titles but do a great job and I am appreciative of the fact that they are at the table with me.

CHAIR - Welcome. The time scheduled for estimates of the Minister for Business, Industry and Resources is four hours. The resolution of the House provides for a minister to provide additional information to a committee either later that day or in writing as an answer to a question taken on notice. To submit a question on notice, the member must first ask their question of the minister and the minister must indicate they will take it on notice. The member must then put the question in writing and hand it to the committee secretary so it can be included in correspondence to the minister.

I remind everyone that the microphones are sensitive, so please be mindful of Hansard when shuffling papers and the like around the table. Also, it is difficult for Hansard to differentiate when people are talking over each other, so I'd ask members to speak one at a time to assist with this.

Would the minister care to make an opening statement?

Mr ABETZ - Chair, it's good to be back before the committee. The Budget underpins the 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future designed to create jobs, attract investment and continue positioning Tasmania as a global destination for both business and tourism. The government is maintaining its commitment to a business friendly environment, delivering no new or increased taxes in this Budget.

Business and industry are the lifeblood of our society and economy in providing jobs and self-reliant households. The 2024 Budget delivers funding for key projects that will drive

investment and secure employment for thousands of our fellow Tasmanians. This Budget delivers more than \$5 million to supporting CAT's expansion plans with a 50/50 co-contribution to support new training facilities, equipment, production halls, and growth in floor space in Tasmania's first marine recharging facilities.

Furthermore, the Budget provides \$600,000 in funding to deliver the Mount Wellington Strategic Review. The purpose of the review is to develop a long-term vision for the mountain which includes the Wellington precinct.

The Resources portfolio encompasses mining, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries, key pillars of our economy that underpin the prosperity of every Tasmanian family, especially in our regions. This Budget builds upon the government's steadfast commitment to ensuring that Tasmania continues on its strong trajectory of economic growth and job creation. In forestry, we are continuing our strong support for our sustainable forestry sector. Our goal is to ensure the long-term future of the sector, which brings around \$1.2 billion into our economy each year and keeps more than 6600 people in jobs, both through direct employment and through demand generated in regional economies.

The Budget provides around \$70 million across the forward Estimates to support and grow our sustainable forestry sector, providing certainty and stability for Tasmanians, keeping our economy strong and creating jobs, particularly in our regional communities.

Importantly, this Budget continues the critical work of our forestry regulator, the Forest Practices Authority, and the current momentum of Private Forests Tasmania facilitating sustainable forestry on private land and increasing the resilience of our agricultural sector through farm forestry.

In mining, our mining sector remains a powerhouse of the economy, supporting thousands of jobs and generating billions in export earnings. In fact, the mining and minerals processing industries employ 6800 people, generating 64 per cent of the state's export value and producing over \$2.9 billion worth of product. The 2024 Budget allocates \$3 million over the next three years to supercharge the Critical Minerals Strategy. We are also extending the successful Exploration Drilling Grants Initiative (EDGI) by a further four years, committing \$1.5 million to co-invest with industry.

Aquaculture and fisheries - fishing is a way of life recreationally and professionally for many Tasmanians. We want to see profitable and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in Tasmania, sectors that create economic growth and opportunities right across our state. The Budget delivers over \$8.6 million to support our wild-capture aquaculture and recreational fisheries. In addition to initiatives that support research, stock enhancement and protection of our iconic fisheries, we will be developing a wild-capture seafood strategy in partnership with Seafood Industry Tasmania. The strategy and developmental fishery opportunities like this will guide our sustainable seafood sector into the future.

Funding has also been allocated to support the development of the sardine fishery, an exciting prospect for Tasmanian fisheries. When it comes to aquaculture, this state's salmon industry employs over 5000 Tasmanians, with nine in every 10 of those jobs in our regional communities. We are going to continue to back this important sector, a Tasmanian success story that has grown from nothing to become the highest value seafood sector in Australia in only 40 years.

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To best support our agency officials, noticing that the BIR portfolio includes staff from both DSG and NRET, depending on the output, I suggest that we commence with State Growth before moving to NRET, as DSG provides support for mining, forestry, and business and industry, all of which are supported by different parts of the agency. Would the committee be amenable to scrutinising Resources first? Of course, I am in the hands of the committee.

Dr BROAD - That wasn't what we were going to do, but -

Mr ABETZ - I am in the hands of the committee, as I have said.

Ms DOW - I have a few short questions, and then we can move to Resources.

Dr WOODRUFF - We can just ask questions in the order we seek to, can't we?

CHAIR - That's right.

Mr ABETZ - In the general DSG, the marine fisheries is with NRET and so -

Ms DOW - I won't be asking about marine fisheries.

Mr ABETZ - there will be different cohort at the table, that's all.

Ms DOW - Same for us. As minister for industry and business, you will be aware of the importance of the new *Spirit* vessels to business and industry, particularly in north-west Tasmania and for regional economies. Some of those industries include the tourism industry, but there are many others, including horticulture, that rely on the freight task of those new vessels to get their products to market, and are already doing planning around that. Can you guarantee that works at Berth 3 at the Devonport Port will be completed by January 2026 as your government has committed to?

Mr ABETZ - What I can commit to is that for the producers of this state, TT-Line will continue to provide a service to ensure that their product gets to the mainland overnight, as they've been doing for a considerable period of time. In the event the demand increases, TT-Line has already told us that they will be putting on extra sailings. That said, Chair, those sorts of questions should really be either under Transport or, even more correctly, with the government business enterprises scrutiny committees.

Ms DOW - I would have thought that as minister for business and industry that this was in your remit to answer these questions.

Mr ABETZ - The impact of the TT-Line will be undoubtedly beneficial to our economy. There is a number of businesses in Tasmania that will benefit from the local fit out, that will be happening, I assume, later this year on *Spirit IV*.

Ms DOW - You won't confirm that those Berth 3 works will be completed by January 2026, as has been previously committed by your government? It feels like the government's walking away from that date.

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Mr ABETZ - No. I invite you to ask questions of the state-owned corporation at the appropriate scrutiny forum, which will be later this year, so you can get the exact details. The government at the moment, as the Premier has already advised, is getting information and advice from Ben Moloney and Peter Gemmell, two experts, to see how that which has occurred can be put behind us, to ensure that we get this moving as quickly as possible. There are some who always want to look into the past. There are those of us who want to get on with the job and look to the future and that is my mindset.

Ms DOW - Minister, we're very much about looking to the future. We're not looking at the past. The six-week time frame where your government was going to provide an update on this project is with us now. Tasmanians don't want to wait till GBEs to be updated about this. They want to know now. They want your government to be honest about the time frames that you set and whether you'll actually meet them.

Mr ABETZ - What you're really saying is, 'Government, ignore the work that experts are doing, come out with some answer today'.

Ms DOW - No, I'm not. I'm saying be upfront with the community.

Mr ABETZ - That is why I've indicated to you that we are waiting for the advice of Ben Moloney and Peter Gemmell, two experts in the field, to help us charter the way forward. If you want an answer now, it would be like going to the doctor saying, 'I want an answer how to fix me' before a diagnosis is made. We need the diagnosis -

Ms DOW - You might be able to answer this one for me, then. Are you 100 per cent -

Mr ABETZ - We then need a prospective treatment.

CHAIR - I'm giving the call to Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - The State of the Environment report that was released just last week shows how terrible the environment has deteriorated under a decade of Liberal policies. One of the greatest threats to the survival of key endemic Tasmanian species is the removal of habitat through native forest logging. Your election policy was to go into an additional 39,000 hectares of future forest reserves. These are high conservation forests that were protected for their outstanding high conservation values. After the State of the Environment report, which was a failure for Tasmania's environment, are you going to reconsider this plan? If you didn't reconsider it, it would be seen as a science-denying policy position on your government's part.

Mr ABETZ - The premise of your question, with respect, Leader of the Greens, is rejected. We do forestry in a way that is the envy of the world. We do forestry in a sustainable manner. In relation to that which we took to the election, might I remind you, was that we would look at opening up what has been described as the 'wood bank' to see what extra harvesting can take place subject to certain conditions. That is what we are doing and are undertaking in a methodical manner.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm not surprised. I'm saddened on behalf of Tasmanians, but they wouldn't expect any less from you. You didn't even attend to the question, which was about the reality of the State of the Environment report and what it said about the impact of native forest

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logging on the removal of habitat for species. Given that you're not changing your position, can you please tell us, if you're successful in converting 39,000 hectares of high conservation value FPPF forests, is it your intention to convert them to PTBZ land to be managed by Forestry Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - What we are doing is going through some proposed areas to consider their suitability in relation to a number of criteria. Any land that is to be converted, if that were to occur, will be subject to the parliamentary procedures. So you, Dr Woodruff, and every other member of the parliament, will be able to have a say in that.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. Can you answer the question?

CHAIR - Mr Garland.

Dr WOODRUFF - Well, hold on. He's getting information, Chair -

CHAIR - Sorry.

Dr WOODRUFF - and he hasn't answered the question yet, which is, will he be handing them to Forestry Tasmania to manage?

Mr ABETZ - I haven't turned my mind as to whether that would go to Sustainable Timber Tasmania, which is the correct word -

Dr WOODRUFF - Chair, can I table a document? I wasted so much precious scrutiny time having to have this fight with the chair of Forestry Tasmania at GBEs last year. I'm very happy to table the document which shows the ASIC name for that company, which is trading as Sustainable Timber Tasmania, but it is indeed registered as Forestry Tasmania, and also to table the agreement from Michael Ferguson, the shareholder minister, in June last year, which is on the common seal of Forestry Tasmania. So, let's dispense with that charade.

Mr ABETZ - Trading as and having a business name is a very common practice, and that is the common usage. That is how people know it. It goes against every instinct of the Greens to have a trading name which actually tells the truth about the organisation, namely that it is sustainable timbers. You can have your affected laughter but it does not change - and there you go again -

CHAIR - Order.

Dr WOODRUFF - It is actually the truth.

CHAIR - Order, Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - That is what they are, Forestry Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - But it does not change the fact that we do timber harvesting in a most sustainable manner. I have many a time challenged and asked, where do they do forestry better than they do it in Tasmania?

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Dr WOODRUFF - To the question, will you be handing it to Forestry Tasmania to manage?

Mr ABETZ - I will be handing it to Sustainable Timber Tasmania if we get there.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay, so, you don't know that yet? You started the process and you don't know who you're going to give it to?

Mr ABETZ - No, because it's the parliamentary process that will determine whether or not any parcels of land are made available. If the parliament would -

Dr WOODRUFF - So you haven't decided that yet.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - Can I finish one sentence without an interjection?

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm just asking questions along the way.

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff, you can't ask questions along the way. Please let the minister respond to this particular question.

Mr ABETZ - What we have is a process that is clearly outlined by the legislation. The parliament will have its say. If any allotments are put before the parliament, then it will be up to the parliament to determine. If they so determine that the land should be made available for harvesting, then it would be under the auspices of Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

CHAIR - I take this opportunity to remind committee members that you are not able to table documents during proceedings as the purpose of the proceeding is to elicit information from the minister, not to provide it. A member can provide the minister the information, though, by handing it to them. Thank you, Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm very happy to hand that to you, minister, which is about the actual name of Forestry Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, Dr Woodruff.

Mr ABETZ - Trading as Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes, I know, but only for PR purposes.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, the Legislative Council Finfish Inquiry looked at the value of the salmon industry to Tasmania in great detail. Recommendation 40 was to ensure appropriate returns to the Tasmanian community -

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, this is now fishing. This is the difficulty that we're going to get into that I tried to suggest avoiding at the beginning. I am happy to answer the questions, member for Braddon, but this is the Department of State Growth.

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Fishing is with NRET, which is another department. We'll need to bring other officials to the table. I'm happy for that to occur, should that be the wish of the committee, but there will be time wasted by people coming to and from the table. We have a time limit. It's up to the committee to determine how it uses its time.

Dr WOODRUFF - Chair, is it possible to have other departmental members at the table at the same time so that members can ask of either department?

CHAIR - I'm not sure practically there's room to do that.

Dr WOODRUFF - Or at least the secretary.

CHAIR - Mr Garland, would you have a more pointed question to the -

Mr GARLAND - I can let you get through this and when the fisheries people come to the table, I'll come back.

Mr ABETZ - That would be very helpful. Thank you for your forbearance.

Dr BROAD - In other committees, like in Housing yesterday, people were coming and going all the time.

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes, that's right.

Dr BROAD - It's not such a big issue. You just need to call up whoever's going to answer the question.

Dr WOODRUFF - This is going happen when we go back - the other member for the Greens is going come in later to ask questions on mining after I have asked a question on salmon. This is going to happen all afternoon.

CHAIR - Minister, I think the mood of the committee is that we make that available. In this instance could we please get the appropriate people?

Mr GARLAND - The Legislative Council Finfish Inquiry looked at the value of the salmon industry to Tasmania in great detail. Recommendation 40 was to ensure appropriate returns to the Tasmanian community. That recommendation said it should commission an independent review of fee and levy structures for finfish farming, including a number of items.

In your Salmon Industry Plan 2023, priority outcome 3, page 14, the government committed to ensuring an appropriate return to the Tasmanian community from use of our land and marine waters. It was called value capture. In the implementation program for the plan, one of the actions was to consult on an appropriate return from the salmon and aquaculture industry to the Tasmanian community. NRE was to be the lead agency.

Since we are now looking at a huge budget deficit with no money in the Budget for promises like the Northern Heart Centre, my question is, does the government still intend to consult the community on what it considers an appropriate return for the use of the land and water by big salmon? If so, when, and if not, why?

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Before you answer that, minister, for the benefit of Hansard could you please introduce the person at the table?

Ms WILSON - I am Deidre Wilson, Deputy Secretary, Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - The government looked at the Legislative Council's report and was appreciative of the work that was undertaken by it. As I understand it the government provided a detailed formal response in August 2022, before either of us were in this place. We are continuing to deliver in relation to the salmon sector, with the Environmental Protection Agency being an independent environmental regulator for it.

In relation to the value that the people of Tasmania get from the salmon industry, let's start with the very important contribution, and that is literally the thousands of jobs that put food on the tables of many families right around this state. Down the Huon, in the electorate of Franklin, it is considered that about one in four people are employed courtesy of the salmon sector.

I met a little electrical company with 15 people employed and 5 apprentices. That business that operates out of Ranelagh in Tasmania - 90 plus per cent of its work is the electrical work at Tassal and Huon Aquaculture. The spin-offs and benefits to the Tasmanian community are literally huge. Then you've got Mitchell Plastic Welding down at Castle Forbes Bay that employs people. Then you've got nets at Cairns Bay, I think it is - companies that provide the netting for the pens for the fish farm.

The benefits to the Tasmanian community, Mr Garland, are huge. On top of that, there are the fees that are paid and we have the cost recovery which we announced, and which the salmon sector is paying to ensure the regulatory frameworks that are in place aren't a burden to the taxpayer of Tasmania, but is covered by that sector.

From 1 July 2023, cost recovery levy was established to recover the full costs of managing the salmon industry. I'm advised that the levy revenue was \$9.61 million for 2023-24 and we did say, and when you ask about consulting with the Tasmanian community, we believe we did that during the last election by saying no salmon taxes or no new salmon taxes, and the people of Tasmania, rightly or wrongly, backed that in. As a government, we intend to abide by that election promise.

Mrs BESWICK - I understand that royalties that Tasmania collects on resources are a lot lower than in many other states.

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, just so I am clear straight away, this is about mining?

Mrs BESWICK - Mining and resources

Mr ABETZ - Obviously resources has forestry, mining and fishing in it when we talk about levies, et cetera. Anyway, we now know it's mining.

Mrs BESWICK - I am quite curious as to what the term of mining includes in terms of things like Cement Australia or quarries and things. Does that make sense, did you hear me?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Mrs BESWICK - In the terms of royalties from our resources that are taken out of our ground, Saul Eslake believes increasing these royalties would help with budget repair. Is there a historic reason as to why they are currently at the low point they are and, in your opinion, would there be a risk to increasing them or have you considered increases to these?

Mr ABETZ - I can let you know that in 2023-24 the Tasmanian mining industry paid \$52.2 million in royalties and over \$2.2 million in fees and rentals. This is in addition to the payroll tax and stamp duty taxes that mining companies also pay.

I'm aware that the Eslake report, that the then JLN encouraged, recommended to increase royalties. The royalty revenue is already, we believe, quite substantial and in the last 25 years it has contributed \$800 million in royalties to the state.

Tasmania operates under a two-tiered system where royalty is paid either as a percentage of net sales and profit, or ad valorem or a specific rate royalty by those who sell the minerals. The ad valorem system operates predominantly on the metallic minerals produced, for example lead, zinc, gold, nickel and tin, whilst the specific rates are applied to the construction and industrial minerals on a per tonne basis.

When you're further away from markets, there is an extra cost of production and getting product to those markets that has to be factored in. So you have to be careful to ensure that, if I can use the expression, you don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

In this case, governments of all persuasions over the years, have tried to the best of their ability to get the best return for the Tasmanian community whilst also ensuring that the mines do not become uncompetitive, where the worst thing that could happen for us, if they were to close down, and as a result jobs lost and then there would be absolutely no royalty stream.

Mr SHELTON - As we are on mining, minister, can you please provide an update on the minerals royalty rebate scheme that was announced as part of the 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future?

Mr ABETZ - I can indeed. The Tasmanian government is committed to ensuring that our mining sector remains a key contributor to the state's economy, which is why we announced the Minerals Royalty Rebate Scheme as part of our 2030 Strong Plan. The scheme will be designed to incentivise the reprocessing of historic tailings and the recommencement of operations at legacy mine sites particularly where environmental benefits can be demonstrated.

This will be a double win if this is taken up and that is why we thought that a 20 per cent rebate on royalties would be a good incentive. One, we extract more mineral wealth, but we also have an environmental clean-up or dividend from those activities. So, it is a good win-win, thinking outside the square and those that were in the portfolio before I joined this place, thought it would be a good idea as part of the 2030 Strong Plan, and I'm delighted that I've been given the opportunity to try to put that into practice.

Ms DOW - Minister, you won't guarantee that works at Berth 3 will be completed by January 2026. Are you still 100 per cent committed to completing the temporary fix at Berth 1?

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Mr ABETZ - These questions should be asked of the appropriate portfolio.

Ms DOW - I would have thought that a fiasco of this extent, that has implications right across Tasmania could be asked across any ministerial area because it should be a whole-of-government focus to get this project up and running.

CHAIR - Ms Dow, please allow the minister to answer your question.

Mr ABETZ - These questions should be either asked at Transport or even more appropriately at the GBE hearings later on this year. We as a government, and I have said this before, the Premier has said it before me during these Estimates as well, we are going to inform ourselves by the experts, Ben Moloney and Peter Gemell, and see what they recommend. As I said before, it would be like having a doctor seeking to suggest a treatment before the diagnosis is even made. What we need is an expert diagnosis that I have confidence Ben Moloney and Peter Gemell will deliver for us, and it will be on that basis that the decisions will be made.

Ms DOW - Will you be withdrawing your ministerial direction around Berth 1?

Mr ABETZ - These are hypothetical questions and that's not on the government's agenda.

Ms DOW - Maybe this is. The HIF proposal at Burnie: I want to draw your attention to the HIF proposal for an e-fuel plant at Hampshire. It's an important project for Burnie and the north-west. What role as Industry minister are you playing in ensuring that this important economic development opportunity for the north-west of Tasmania is not lost?

Mr ABETZ - That is something that is part and parcel of the totality, but can I tell you that SeaRoad gets its LNG via tanker from Westbury?

Ms DOW - That's not the commitment though. The commitment was that there would be infrastructure.

Mr ABETZ - That will enable a local Tasmanian business to be the supplier of fuel if that is the source. Excuse my confusion. I understand this is something that falls in the bailiwick of Mr Duigan.

Ms DOW - As Industry minister, you're not looking at what new prospective industries are prospectively coming to Tasmania. My last question to you is why wouldn't you be across this proposal? It's going to create lots of jobs in a part of Tasmania that's seen a huge reduction in industry over time. It's a great prospective development. Why aren't you across it and why is it Mr Duigan's responsibility when you're the minister for Industry?

Mr ABETZ - That is a hydrogen proposal for which the minister for Energy has direct line responsibility for. As Minister for Industry and Business, do I encourage any potential investment? Of course I do.

Ms DOW - Have you met with HIF?

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Mr ABETZ - At the end of the day, these matters fall into the bailiwick or ministerial responsibility of my colleague, minister Duigan. Should you wish to ask questions about that specific project, avail yourself of the expertise of minister Duigan, who has direct line responsibility.

Ms DOW - I'd encourage you to meet with them and get abreast of a really important project.

Dr WOODRUFF - On the 39,000-hectare conversion of high conservation-value public forests, this was in your 100 day plan, this proud additional destruction of our forests. Can you tell me where the process is up to exactly in the conversion? As you mentioned before, there is a stage process under the *Forestry (Rebuilding the Forestry Industry) Act*. It has about eight steps to it. Can you please tell the committee where the process is up to there, and can you please provide us with a map or details of the areas that are being investigated?

Mr ABETZ - First of all, I'm delighted that some of the areas that are included in this are described, as the member has, as our regrowth Tasmanian forests - that have been harvested, sown and regrown and are now being described as high conservation-value forests. Does that not tell everybody how well we do forestry? That is something I'm very appreciative of, that that is now on the record.

In relation to the 'wood bank' proposal, we made our announcement during the election as to what we were proposing. We are looking through various allotments of potential production to ascertain whether or not they would be suitable to be made available for harvesting. That process will take some time to determine - whether the areas are suitable.

Work has begun. A forestry round table was held on 26 June 2024 to begin discussions on our government's pro-growth settings for forestry jobs, confidence, investment and wood production, including value adding. The round table was attended by representatives of numerous timber and forest contractors, organisations. That was in our update in the 100 plan delivery document.

Dr WOODRUFF - You walked yourself around answering any of that question. The question was, this is a legislative process. Conversion of our future production forests is a legislative process. It has eight steps. What step are you up to, and do you have any areas that you have identified at all at the moment? Let's put this on the record. This was announced during the election campaign. It seemed like it was a bit of a 'brain fart' of the then-minister. It had no support from anyone in the industry at all. I'm trying to understand, is there any appetite for this, or is this something the Liberals just cooked up as a very divisive thing during an election campaign? Where is it up to exactly, other than one conversation as a round table?

Mr ABETZ - All this wonderful rhetoric. One day we're in the pocket of big business and -

Dr WOODRUFF - Every day.

Mr ABETZ - The next day, as you are now saying, we are ignoring big business.

Dr WOODRUFF - No.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - You can't have it both ways.

Dr WOODRUFF - What is going on? Just tell us, please.

Mr ABETZ - I have already told you, we are going through to ascertain if there are any areas that would be suitable for conversion under the legislative process. We said in our 2030 Strong Plan what we would be doing in that regard to ensure that we would not prejudice and may need to be reminded that we wouldn't prejudice our comprehensive and adequate reserves. That we wouldn't be prejudicing Sustainable Timber Tasmania's certification and also the other important criteria that we mentioned such as [inaudible]. Allow me to get out the Strong Plan and I'll try to find exactly what we promised in that regard.

Dr WOODRUFF - Chair, if the minister can answer the question, which wasn't what he's trying to do at the moment.

CHAIR - Order. I cannot direct the minister to answer the question a particular way.

Mr ABETZ - If I can indicate I said the parcels that would be identified would be subject to and I quote:

The state's comprehensive, adequate and representative CAR reserve system is not compromised, that there is no negative impact on Sustainable Timber Tasmania's current and future certification and that they maximise carbon carrying capacity, fire protection and recreational opportunities.

They were the caveats that were placed by my predecessor. All those caveats are being considered in relation to particular parcels. Once those determinations have been made, then it will be for me, as I understand the process, to write to the minister for Crown lands, who will then submit something to the parliament for you, Dr Woodruff and your colleagues to vote on.

Dr WOODRUFF - Get the forest round tables. What did they say? Did the industry say that they wanted this conversion to happen?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not going to divulge that which occurs at a round table. Industry tells us what they believe and confidentiality is very important in those sorts of discussions.

Dr WOODRUFF - They were very outspoken in the election campaign in not wanting it to happen.

Mr ABETZ - That is your rhetoric.

Dr WOODRUFF - No, they were on the public record. Don't change reality.

Mr ABETZ - That is your rhetoric. Yes, there was somebody who spoke out against it. There were others who I understand quietly supported it that were not willing, for fear of public demonisation by certain groups within the committee, like the Bob Brown Foundation, to make public commentary.

Like with most proposals, it shouldn't come as a surprise that when there is a proposal there are those who are for it and there are those who are against it. We took a policy to the

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election and the people, right, wrong or indifferent, we are in government and we intend to deliver on the policy on the basis of the very important caveats that I've just read out of the 2030 Strong Plan.

Mr GARLAND - In your last response, minister, you talked about the perceived benefits of the salmon industry. Have you accounted for the cost to the environment from the industry? Will you provide this full cost benefit analysis if you have it?

Mr ABETZ - We have an Independent Environmental Protection Agency that will determine these matters. I understand the situation; there is an environmental impact. The question is balancing it and is it sustainable and then consider as well the financial benefits for every single one of those individual workers and the wealth that it creates for our state with the export of the product mainly to the mainland of Australia, to our fellow Australians.

I also add that the medical experts, health experts, tell us that we should be - and I believe I was wrong in parliament the other day when I said one feed of fish a week. I started off with saying a day and a week, but in fact it - and you, Ms Finlay -

Ms FINLAY - You have to eat it every day, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, it should be two or three times a week. This is an affordable product to help sustain the health of the community at large.

As you would know, Mr Garland, from your activities, there is a limit to our wild catch. There is a limit to our wild fisheries. Therefore, if we want to provide the fish, the health food that is so important for our community, we've got to farm it. It's a bit like why we found chickens and sheep and cattle, because there aren't enough of them in the wild to feed us. As humanity developed, we started farming them. That is what we are now doing with the fisheries as well. That is a good environmental benefit in putting less stress on our wild fisheries and ensuring that we provide a good health food.

Are there environmental impacts? Yes. Each and every time you and I drive into Parliament House, there's an environmental impact. You've got to balance it out. Hopefully the people of Braddon say that when you drive down here, there might be an environmental impact, but that is more than offset by the good you do in this Parliament. I'd like to think that people are frank and think the same about myself.

To try to say that we can do things in our community without any environmental impact is to not understand the realities of the world. What we need to do is balance and provide sustainability. I think that is what we're doing. That is why with the Storm Bay development, we are looking at ensuring that the nitrogen levels that Storm Bay can absorb are within a limit to ensure sustainability. That is what is so important from this government's point of view.

Will there be environmental impacts here? Virtually everything we do - when we buy a mobile phone, there's an environmental impact in the way that it was made. We cannot escape that. The question is, can we do it in a sustainable manner and in a manner that the stewardship protects the environment as much as possible?

Mrs BESWICK - I recently toured the proposed site for the ambitious Whaleback Ridge Wind Farm. As you know, it stretches a long way, and from my understanding is close to some

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dormant mine sites. Do you have any opposition to the Whaleback Ridge going ahead? In your opinion, are there any mining related reasons that this should not occur?

Mr ABETZ - I have not personally set my mind to that exact issue. I'm not sure whether I've in fact even been briefed on it. That said, I am aware that certain holders of mining leases are a bit twitchy about the installation of these big wind turbines. I would need to take that on notice.

CHAIR - Thank you. Take it on notice.

Mr ABETZ - I've just been provided with some information that tells me that the *Mining (Strategic Prospectivity Zones) Act 1993* demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that the minerals industry has continuing access to Crown land that we know is prospective for minerals. Before alienating any Crown land from within a strategic prospectivity zone for the purposes of mineral industry access, the comparative benefit test is applied, and a final decision is focused on what is in the best interest of Tasmania.

That means that this area can potentially host both mining development and, for example, wind power generation by ensuring that the most suitable location for such activities is identified and implemented through careful, considered planning and assessment. I suppose this goes to the fact that what we as a government try to do, rather than make it a binary proposition, that it's either mining or wind farming, can you facilitate so both can coexist? I think that is what that which I read out to you indicates. Thank you for bringing that matter to my attention.

Mr SHELTON - The Greens' dislike for our sustainable forest industry is clear, and they've always had that position. Can you advise the committee of the benefits of the native forest and the facts that the Greens conveniently ignore? Coming from the regional area of Bracknell and the Liffey, which have always been forestry areas - and there have always been jobs in the forestry area from my electorate and right round Lyons. It was devastated after the Labor-Greens government moved on the forest industry. There are some substantial benefits for employment in regional areas. Can you explain to the committee the benefits of that?

Mr ABETZ - The forest sector provides employment to many regional areas right around Tasmania. It also provides a product that is genuinely renewable and, if you don't use wood, the question is beckoned, what would you use instead? If you don't have a wooden floor in your house, chances are you've got a concrete floor. How much CO₂ was emitted in making that concrete? If you don't have wooden uprights or framing in your house, chances are you use steel or aluminium, and the question then is how much embedded energy is in that and then you have to ask, where does the CO₂ go?

The good news with wood products is that they are a carbon sink and it holds the carbon in and so forestry, to be sustainable, which we do in Tasmania, for every tree that is harvested, a new one, usually more than just the one, is planted, and as a result you've got this cycle of renewable production. If we don't do forestry in Tasmania, as the people of Victoria and Western Australia are now finding out, having banned native forest harvesting, they're starting to get their hardwood from South America.

I just ask rhetorically, Mr Shelton, whether we actually believe they do forestry better in South America than we do it in Tasmania. Even if it were equivalent, you would then have to

ask how much bunker fuel is belched out through the chimney of the ships as it's brought to Australia? How on earth, if you're thinking globally, is that a good thing for the environment? So be it that it's a renewable resource, it's a carbon sink. It provides local employment, local wealth, keeps exports out of the country. There are a whole lot of positives for our timber sector and we in Tasmania should be exceptionally pleased with the way that we do forestry, keeping in mind that over 50 per cent of our land mass is locked away in national parks, World Heritage Areas, et cetera. With all these things, it's about getting the balance right. That is what the Tasmanian community has voted for on a regular basis, that they do want the balance and as a government we are providing that balance.

Dr BROAD - During the election campaign on 8 March, Premier Jeremy Rockliff said to people from the forest industry, making the following promise: to provide STT's existing customers long-term supply contracts for plantation sawlogs on commercial terms until the end of 2040. Are you committed to this?

Mr ABETZ - Believe it or not, if the Premier makes a promise, every one of his ministers is going to be committed to it so that's not a difficult question to answer for me, but what I can say to you is that I am in close discussions with Sustainable Timber Tasmania to ensure that there is that certainty of supply that our downstream processors are seeking. That is something that I would encourage you to ask at the government business enterprise scrutiny committees, where the STT will be able to tell you in more detail where they're at.

Dr BROAD - But, minister, it's a policy decision as well, so you should be across it. Also, Premier Rockliff promised to extend long-term native sawlog supply contracts with STT's existing customers until 2040. Are you committed to this?

Mr ABETZ - I am committed to all the Premier's promises.

Dr BROAD - When will those two contracts for plantation sawlogs and for extending native sawlog supply be in place?

Mr ABETZ - That is being worked through as we speak. I'm not going to give you a date.

Dr BROAD - An idea perhaps? At the end of year or a decade from now?

Mr ABETZ - Chances are, not a decade from now. We can narrow it down from there.

Dr BROAD - Narrow it down as best you can.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for that opportunity to clarify it for you, but I'm not going to be committed to a particular timeline. Suffice it to say that I'm sure you and I would be in heated agreement that the quicker these things can be resolved between STT and those who seek to buy the product, the better because it provides certainty, it provides investment certainty, it provides employment certainty. It's within everybody's interest that these matters be resolved as soon as possible, but I leave that to STT.

Dr WOODRUFF - On the question that you've asked many times who does forestry better than Tasmania, I think one obvious answer to that is any one of the more than 1500 jurisdictions in 83 countries that have managed to achieve Forest Stewardship Certification (FSC). Tasmania has not done that. In fact, Forestry Tasmania has twice tried and failed to get

FSC. The reason for that has been their continued logging of swift parrot habitat. You can laugh, but that was the evidence that was provided from the certifiers at the last attempt of Forestry Tasmania.

You've mentioned our certification and not compromising certifications that Forestry Tasmania has now or would seek to achieve into the future regarding the 39,000 hectares of additional high-conservation value forests you're trying to go into. Can you tell me whether you've had conversations with Forestry Tasmania about the impact? I see from their website that despite having failed twice, they are still working towards FSC certification and they are clear that, in their words, it will give them access to key markets and it will add stakeholder confidence that they're managing forests appropriately. Do you recognise the threat to Forestry Tasmania getting FSC if you went into these additional 39,000 hectares? What has that company told you?

Mr ABETZ - First of all, the countries to which you refer that have gained FSC certification, there have been questions in the past as to how FSC certification has been achieved. I would invite you to ask the question, out of all those countries you mentioned, how many of them have 50 per cent plus of their land mass in reserves and World Heritage areas?

Dr WOODRUFF - Are you changing the goalposts?

Mr ABETZ - No. They're the goalposts that I would encourage you to consider. A certification, if it can be obtained, is clearly something that is on the mind of Sustainable Timber Tasmania. If that wasn't on our mind - let's be clear, I recall it was on page 55 of the Strong Plan on the potential parcels et cetera - that, 'There is no negative impact on Sustainable Timber Tasmania's current and future certification'. That's about as clear as it gets. That is part of the consideration that is in the melting pot.

Dr WOODRUFF - On 29 February, when it was announced via media release that your government was going to do this if it was re-elected, it said that the parcels of land 'have already been selected'. Not, 'We're in conversations and having roundtables talking about which ones we might go into'. They have already been selected. Was that media release incorrect? Or are you being dishonest with the committee in saying that you haven't decided on the areas of land that will be selected, and if you have, then can you tell us which ones they are?

Mr ABETZ - No area has been selected. There were potential areas that are being considered, subject to the caveats that I outlined before. I can read them out to you again, which indicates that the community, inadequate reserves, certification, cultural aspect, all those things are being considered and they will be looked at one by one.

Dr WOODRUFF - It said that you had already done that. You're not being honest now.

Mr ABETZ - I don't reflect on your honesty and integrity -

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm reflecting on your government's in that press release.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - as you are so willing to do to everybody else, and I would just encourage you to watch your language in that regard.

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Dr WOODRUFF - I can't help it if we're the ones who are being honest with Tasmanians.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - You can have a civil disagreement without labelling each other as honest or dishonest.

Dr WOODRUFF - This is not a joke.

CHAIR - Order. Mr Garland has the call.

Dr WOODRUFF - This is about public land. Either you've got it or you haven't got it, and you shouldn't change it and be dishonest with Tasmanians.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, you've acknowledged there are environmental impacts from salmon farms. Can you detail what these environmental impacts are? What cost recovery is the government currently undertaking for remediation of those environmental impacts from salmon farms?

Mr ABETZ - The environmental impacts would be the use of plastic for the pens, the fossil fuels used in the barges and boats that service them, getting the fish to market undoubtedly engages in fossil fuels, then you have the fish waste, as the fish are growing, they leave waste behind that then gets diluted in the water and that is why you have to manage that in a sustainable manner. There are a whole host of environmental matters that come into play.

Can I say, my existence and your existence has huge environmental impacts as well. Let's not try to package the salmon sector as somehow being unique in having environmental impacts, be it beef cattle farming, indeed, even when you go out catching calamari, there will undoubtedly be environmental impacts. I don't know if you use lead sinkers or not, or is that passé nowadays? You use something else? I thought as much. But you might use a line or something that isn't made from flax or hemp, that's some sort of nylon or plastic. You may or may not use fossil fuels, I assume you don't row out to the fishing ground.

There are those impacts and the question then is: is it worthwhile? I've got to say, in the endeavours you engage in, you provide a fantastic fresh fish product which is commanding at the moment a good high price in the community because of its value, but there are environmental impacts with a wild fishery, as there is with the aquaculture sector. I would encourage you to see it in a balance that, yes, there are environmental impacts in nearly everything we do. The question is: how sustainable is it? Is the stewardship such that you don't do permanent damage to the environment? That is what I think we need to consider, and as a government, we are agreed that the salmon industry can coexist with the wilder fisheries and whilst maintaining our oceans in a very good state.

Mr GARLAND - More of a comment. I'm not putting the equivalent of a million people's sewage into my fishing environment, which is basically what's happening every year in Macquarie Harbour; the equivalent of a million people's untreated sewage going into that waterway or consider it a major environmental impact. If we're not looking at the damage that is doing and not taking steps to address that, I'd say we're not doing our job properly.

Mr ABETZ - If that were the case, I would agree with you. But in Macquarie Harbour the best of advice was taken as to the potential stock levels. With the benefit of time, that has been reduced and that is what you want - it is adaptive policymaking, so that as more evidence comes to the table, you can either increase stocking or decrease stocking and that is what has happened.

Just today, IMAS has given another report indicating that the Maugean skate in Macquarie Harbour is now at numbers of 2014 levels and that there is a substantial population of junior skates as well. That suggests that they are breeding, which suggests to me that you can have coexistence with salmon farming in Macquarie Harbour and the Maugean skate. Getting that balance is, of course, within everybody's interest and that is what we are seeking to do with the benefit of the science. That is what IMAS is advising us.

Mr SHELTON - Obviously the Greens have their opinion, but can you outline to the committee how forestry is playing a part in the solution to climate change? Particularly, as you have mentioned, where trees and forestry suppress carbon? Certainly, they employ people. I live in a regional area and it's always been part of the economics of regional communities. If you wouldn't mind minister?

Dr WOODRUFF - Demonising climate scientists, cherry picking research. You start every question off talking about the Greens don't you? You're really quite obsessed with us, Mr Shelton.

Mr SHELTON - You just can't sit back and listen to an answer.

Dr WOODRUFF - You did start off talking about us.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - In answer to the Member for Lyons, Mr Shelton, I can say the Tasmanian Government has made a legislative commitment to transition to net zero emissions or lower by 2030 because we recognise the need to contribute to global efforts. Forestry is one of Tasmania's natural advantages in combating excessive levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

Our sustainable forestry sector is part of the solution. Tasmania's Productive Forest Estate provides the opportunity to sequester carbon in long lived timber products and provide society with low emission construction materials that I was mentioning before. Might I just add as an aside, there have been campaigns in recent times, and we as a government are seeking to assist in that regard to get rid of the one-use plastics that are often associated with takeaway food, plastic straws, et cetera. What are we reverting back to? Paper produced product. Guess what paper is made from? Dare I mention the word 'wood chips'? If you want to rid our rivers and oceans of the plastics that are going into them and choking them, and you want something that is biodegradable, you would go for something like a paper-based product. That is our timber sector, where we use the best possible wood, or the most of the wood, for the best high quality, high value saw, log veneer, et cetera. Then that which is not able to be used in that way, we convert to wood chips and that's made into paper, which is a lot better a product than a lot of the plastics that we are now trying to get rid of from our community.

It is pretty clear that an old growth forest is a carbon sink, and that a brand-new forest or regrowth forest, when it's in the growing phase, that is when it sucks in a lot more carbon. That is why that renewed and recycled forest production is so good for the environment, not only in sequestering carbon, but avoiding all the other products that are made from plastic, from steel, from concrete, which we all know adds to the pollution in the environment. I quote the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land which was released in August 2019:

Sustainable forest management can prevent deforestation, maintain and enhance carbon sinks and can contribute towards greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. Sustainable forest management generates socioeconomic benefits and provides fibre, timber -

Dr WOODRUFF - Point of order, Chair. There's a time limit to the minister's answers and the minister has been over his time limit on this Dorothy Dixier, this anti-science Dorothy Dixier. I think we've heard enough.

CHAIR - Thank you, Dr Woodruff. I do allow a little bit of flexibility to all members with their questions and their answers. Can the minister please -

Dr WOODRUFF - Time limits on minister's answers to Dorothy Dixers, particularly - this is really pretty outrageous.

CHAIR - The minister will continue. Order. Thank you, Dr Woodruff.

Mr ABETZ - Can we please have on record that the IPCC Report is anti-science?

Dr WOODRUFF - Cherry-picked by - yeah, you go right ahead.

CHAIR - Order.

Dr WOODRUFF - You go right ahead with that one. I was an author of one of those reports.

Mr ABETZ - Because:

Sustainable forest management generates socioeconomic benefits and provides fibre, timber and biomass to meet society's growing needs. Sustainable forest management can maintain or enhance forest carbon stocks and can maintain forest carbon sinks, including by transferring carbon to wood products.

And that from the IPCC is labelled anti-science. Let that be on the record.

Dr WOODRUFF - Go on, for the record.

Dr BROAD - Speaking of Wood, during the election campaign, Jeremy Rockliff in that letter also committed to rewriting STT's ministerial charter to ensure that Tasmanian wood supports Tasmanian jobs. Has this occurred?

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Mr ABETZ - The ministerial charter has been rewritten, it will be made available very soon and just bear with me as to - I'll be able to give you the exact answer, but it is - can I use the term 'imminent'?

Yeah, the final revised ministerial charter will soon be tabled in parliament. I think I've seen the final version of it, but it's a creature of Treasury, isn't it, the ministerial charter? I can let you know I've signed off on it but it's gone into - am I allowed to say this in the absence of the Treasurer? - into the bowels of the Treasury, but I'm sure it will re-emerge in due course and be tabled very shortly.

Dr BROAD - You've also committed to halting STT's expression of interest process for plantation saw logs, has that actually been halted?

Mr ABETZ - Has that been halted? Yes, it has.

Dr BROAD - Is the government or STT considering - sorry, just a bit of background in -

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, just bear with me, Dr Broad. Yeah, so that has been halted. Yes. I was just checking to make sure that I was absolutely correct on that.

Dr BROAD - In 2017, STT sold part of the plantation estate to Reliance Forest Fibre for \$60.7 million. Given the Treasurer didn't rule out asset sales, is the government or STT considering selling further plantation timber resources, especially the plantation sawlog resource?

Mr ABETZ - It's not on my agenda, so I don't think any work's been done on that.

Dr BROAD - But would you rule it out?

Mr ABETZ - These games of ruling things in and ruling things out is one of those things that oppositions love to do. And I was there quite a few times -

Dr BROAD - Well, throw us a bone then.

Mr ABETZ - I'm not going to rule anything in or out, but that's not on the agenda.

Dr WOODRUFF - During the election campaign, one of the other of the Liberals election promises to existing Forestry Tasmania customers was that there would be 158,000 cubic metres of saw logs coming to them from Future Potential Production Forest (FPPF) land, the new land that you're intending on going into. How did you arrive at such a precise figure if you haven't actually found the land that you are seeking to convert?

Mr ABETZ - That was the estimate made at the time.

Dr WOODRUFF - Based on what?

Mr ABETZ - I wasn't part of the policy-making. I can try to obtain an answer for you as to how that was calculated at the time.

Dr WOODRUFF - Shall I take that on notice?

In the budget papers, it says that there's a fairly unbelievable - it doesn't say that; our words - but there is a fairly unbelievable 90 per cent of timber that your government claims is processed here in Tasmania. The footnotes clarify that this is the proportion -

Mr ABETZ - Which page?

Dr WOODRUFF - I don't have the page number in front of me. This is the proportion of the total volume of timber that undergoes 'some form of processing within the state'. Can you clarify what the different forms of processing are?

Mr ABETZ - To be able to provide an answer, I would really prefer a page number.

Dr WOODRUFF - I think one of your staff might be able to find that. It's a footnote. There can't be that many in the forestry section.

Mr ABETZ - We don't do your homework for you. You need to come prepared for these Estimates.

Dr WOODRUFF - Excuse me, Chair, that's pretty rude. You've got the whole of the Department in front of you, and you've got your secretary there.

Mr ABETZ - That is rude, but calling somebody dishonest isn't? Really?

Dr WOODRUFF - If you aren't able to answer the question, a very simple question about what forms of processing happen in Tasmania, I am shocked that you're the minister and I'll move on. Would processing, for example, include trimming logs down before they're placed on the back of a logging track? Is that what the Liberals call processing of timber in this state? Can you confirm it? Would that be the case?

Mr ABETZ - The processing of the timber, thinking out loud now, would be making veneer paper, making saw logs, framing timber, timber link, pallet-making is another. I'm sure there are other areas.

Dr WOODRUFF - Can the secretary confirm whether trimming logs down before they're placed on the back of a logging truck would be defined as processing by the government? Would that fit under the 90 per cent of timber that's processed in Tasmania? To the secretary, or you can take that on notice if you can't answer it.

CHAIR - Order. It's for the minister to direct to the secretary.

Dr WOODRUFF - Your terminology. Could I take those questions on notice please?

Mr ABETZ - What's the terminology that's ours?

Dr WOODRUFF - The terminology is your words in your budget paper that says, '90 per cent of timber is processed here in Tasmania', and that that is the proportion of the total volume of timber in Tasmania that undergoes 'some form of processing'. I want to know what 'some form of processing' is considered by your government, and separately, whether the

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trimming of logs down before they're placed on the back of a logging truck is regarded as a 'form of processing'.

Mr ABETZ - Until we can find the page number that you're referring to, it would be helpful if you could have provided that. We don't have that immediately in front of us, so we'll take that on notice. What I would encourage all members to do. If you want to quote something -

Dr WOODRUFF - Page 343. See, my staff have done it. You've had your whole office and you're not able to do it, but there you go.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - Don't reflect on departmental officials like that, that's very unbecoming.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm just reflecting on the efficiency of the Greens staff.

CHAIR - Order.

Dr WOODRUFF - Volume 2, number 1.

Mr ABETZ - Budget paper number 2?

Dr WOODRUFF - Volume 2, number 1. Page 343, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Page 343 is screen industry development, arts industry development.

Dr WOODRUFF - Maybe you need to go to another paper.

CHAIR - Order.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm trying to help him out. I mean, honestly, the whole staff here.

Mr ABETZ - It's in a footnote, is it?

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes, that is correct, No. 1, Volume 2. Timber processing.

Mr ABETZ - Mr Bowles is assisting us and he'll tell us it's an ABS.

Mr BOWLES - The definition of wood processing is it's an Australian Bureau of Statistics definition, so it involves any transformation to the product. As to specific examples, without referring back to the ABS's guidelines, I couldn't answer that, but it is the ABS definition.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you, Mr Bowles. You don't know whether it would involve -

CHAIR - Mr Garland has the call.

Mr GARLAND - There's a sardine fishery in the pipeline. They've been building up in numbers in our waters for quite some time now and that's probably mainly due to the pollution

that's gone out of the Bass Strait waters. There's a lot of concern within the recreational fishing community that these sardines, pilchards and what have you out there could possibly be used by the salmon industry as part of their fish mill operations. We have a multitude of small licences in this state. We have 150-odd licences that are not being actively used at the moment.

Will there be a strong focus on utilising the small scale fishes of this state and giving us access to those fish and not allowing them to be trolled up in an industrial way and to be used for fish meal. Blue bait at the moment is \$6 a packet. That's for a 500gm packet. Even packaging up those bait fish and selling them for bait, you're going to get \$12 per kg, which I believe you would not get if you were using industrial fishing methods in a large scale. They are difficult to handle because of their nature in larger volumes. They are omega-3 rich. There are restaurants that would be looking to use those fish, but more importantly, they're the building blocks for the ocean - and right now what we have going on in the north-west with the bluefin tuna - in my lifetime, I've seen three tuna come through that area until recent years and now we have them there for three to four to five or six months. The return from the recreational fishing community in just targeting and going after tuna would far outweigh any return from any industrial use of those species. They'd be better off left in the water than they would be for going to fish meal. I'm just wondering where you are with that, minister? I know there's been talk about this fishery and I'd like to see where you are.

Mr ABETZ - There's been a lot of talk about this potential fishery. A lot of studies have been undertaken in relation to it. IMAS is still undertaking some final studies in relation to the total biomass, but it seems to be in high proportions, which would suggest that you could get a viable sustainable fishery by taking a relatively small percentage of it to ensure that it's able to be a sustainable fishery. Those that would invest in it and, look, we are now talking hypotheticals, was we have to find out what IMAS tells us and if it is going to be at a certain level that lends itself to commercial fishing - then investment decisions have to be made. I suspect if I were a fisherman I would want the highest possible return from my fishing endeavours. As much as I'm sure you won't be selling your calamari as fish meal because there might be a higher price elsewhere, I would imagine those that fish the sardines' sector, if we get to that stage, and that's always an important caveat - that step by step with this that there's an exciting proposition for a new fishery to be developed, new jobs and a bit of a value add. I'm not going to rule anything in or out at this stage. If we can provide job opportunities and investment opportunities for the benefit of the Tasmanian community, that is what the community expects us to do, on the basis that it's sustainable and does not prejudice other fisheries to the extent that you may have suggested in your question.

Mr GARLAND - There are 100 000 recos in the state - recreational fishers.

Mr ABETZ - It is like with every organisation, there are a lot of recreational fishers. In Tasmania, it's part and parcel of our way of life, and that is why, getting into other areas of my portfolio, MAST is assisting, the government is assisting in providing fish cleaning facilities, boat ramps, jetties et cetera to enable people to enjoy something which we as an island state have a stack of, and that is lots of water and lots of fishing opportunities.

There are also a lot of recreational fishers that say that it is appropriate to have professional fishers such as Mr Garland out there on the water catching calamari, and I dare say there will be recreational fishers as well who say that it's appropriate to have people catching sardines at a level that is sustainable and that doesn't impact unduly on their

recreational activities. With all these things, it's balance, and that is what we as a government seek to achieve.

Mr GARLAND - Might I add that Australia is a very old continent. We rank somewhere in the 50s as far as productive fisheries. We've gone through so many cycles of boom and bust, and I would ask you, minister, absolutely exercise extreme caution with anything in that space with those sardine fisheries.

Mr ABETZ - That I think is a very valid point, and that is why discussions about this fishery have gone for about a decade or more, which is, if I might say, a very cautious approach. I might be wrong on this, but, unlike the Orange Roughy fishery that people jumped on and then virtually destroyed, we will be taking a more cautious approach.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, I'm particularly interested in the on-island processing program that's been mentioned for the forestry sector and what it means to Tasmanian jobs in regional communities. As I mentioned before, forestry has always been part of where I live and you have the Kelly Gang sawmillers up at Mole Creek, you've got Travellers Rest sawmill not far away from home on the way to Launceston, you've got Coppers Inn, Longford, who treat hydro poles out of the native forest sector. It's absolutely important. Can you explain the importance of the on-island processing program and what it means?

Mr ABETZ - I would have thought every Tasmanian would want our timber production as much as possible to be processed on island, and unfortunately there have been campaigns in the past to ensure that that hasn't been able to happen as we may have wanted and, as a result, opportunities have been denied us.

This government does want to see on-island processing and we had made available in 2021 \$10 million over five years to the on-island processing program, with a further \$5 million committed in this last election campaign. The program is designed to help grow the forest industry with more on-island processing and value adding and will drive industry investments in the sector providing new opportunities, investment and increased value of our local timber processing industry and a lot more jobs in our regional areas. Currently, seven projects are receiving almost \$6 million in funding under the first round of the program, which will lead to a direct investment of \$23 million from industry and create at least 30 new direct and indirect positions.

The program is not just throwing money, it's going to be a co-investment where the businesses have to have skin in the game as well, but it encourages them and helps their viability in ensuring that our Tasmanian processes remain viable and they're able to grow their range of products and we see change. The projects include, for example, new product lines to convert low-grade and short-length timber into higher value timber products and general improvements in timber recovery.

Further details of the seven successful projects under round 1 can be found on the website of the Department of State Growth. We have now got a second round and it's due to be launched this financial year. We'll see another \$9 million made available for co-investment. A great program which hopefully will underpin even further our sustainable timber sector and the jobs that it provides, especially in our regional communities.

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Ms FINLAY - Minister, the underpinning of almost every answer today around fisheries has been around science and the importance of science to inform the decision making. We've talked about whether it be recreational fishers, small-scale fishers or large-scale fishers. The one thing that seems to bring everybody together is the science. The Sustainable Marine Research Collaboration Agreement (SMRCA) funding - government - you outsource your research and monitoring to IMAS. As I understand it, in any other environment where there's a commercial exchange, you outsource about \$4 million worth of work to IMAS to undertake that, but until recently have only been paying them \$2.6 million for the pleasure.

I acknowledge that in the election there was a \$500,000 addition to that, but that's still a shortfall with no indexation. In my conversations with IMAS, for years, because it's been underfunded, they have been leaning out as much as they can. They've pulled all the rabbits out of the hat and now a consequence of that shortfall of funding is that projects will be limited. Some things might not be delivered. Science might not be as complete as it could be to support our fisheries, which is really important.

I acknowledge that already at the table today, you, as a new minister, have made some changes to some of the positions of the previous government and I'm wondering whether this is an area that you will reflect on how important this science is and increase the funding because it underpins everything.

Mr ABETZ - I hear what you say in relation to that. This area, I think, you can never spend enough. That seems to be the situation, that we as the government are committed and we've had the long-standing partnership and the government has announced its commitment to increase funding of the SMRCA by \$2 million over four years, taking the total commitment of core funding to over \$28 million over 10 years.

All I would say in the total context of the current Budget, is there are criticisms from certain quarters that the deficit is too great. I understand that line of argument, but then we have to be careful that, on the other hand, we don't ask for more funding in other areas which would see even a higher deficit unless you're willing to, say, cut public transport by so much so you can put it into SMRCA.

That is the balance that we as a government have had to try to come to. As Fisheries minister, would I like to see a lot more being put into SMRCA? Yes, but then you've got a Health minister and other ministers all competing for funds.

Ms FINLAY - Within your own departmental allocation of funds, minister, the foundation piece to all fisheries, whether it be recreational, commercial, or whether it be aquaculture, wild fisheries, is science. We have seen the depletion of species and the additional costs associated with recovering those species - recalling sand flathead - by not putting the investment at the right place, you're causing yourself to spend more money elsewhere. It has been years of underfunding for this research. In the private sector, if you sought work from another entity, and you needed \$4 million worth of work and you said that you were going to pay them \$2.8 million, you wouldn't get the work.

By outsourcing this funding to IMAS and undercutting them, we are seeing depletions in the fisheries. It doesn't mean that you need to have more in your overall budget allocation, but it means you need to be investing the money at the right place. Are you saying that on taking

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up this ministry, reviewing your responsibilities, and understanding the pressure on the fisheries that there is no consideration for further funding to SMRCA?

Mr ABETZ - There is always consideration given, not only to SMRCA. There's funding for the Blue Economy CRC. There is funding provided to various organisations to try to do the very best we can, given limited resources, but I understand.

Ms WILSON - I would like to add that whilst the core grant is \$2.65 million, with the additional 500, we're anticipating in 2024 there'll be around \$650,000 for costs-recovered salmon-related research. We also put in project specific funding in response to research priorities that emerged during the year. This can come from our special purpose council, from our administered payment.

Last year, I don't have a breakdown of what it was, but we contributed an extra \$963,000 into SMRCA.

Ms FINLAY - Is that leveraged funds or direct funds?

Ms WILSON - That was from us. UTAS contributed \$1.4 million, and that led to leverage - which is the external funds that were leveraged in - of around \$9 million from 1 January to 30 November 2023. We get a good return on investment and the agency -

Ms FINLAY - That's the point. You get a good return on investment.

Ms WILSON - The agency invests for additional research as required. As noted, we have some additional funds going in in 2024 from SAM.

Ms FINLAY - Can I ask specifically, as an example, the depletion of the sand flathead fishery was a direct result of government not taking advice from science. As I understand it, there are concerns that because of this shortfall of ongoing funding, there could be implications, for instance, for the monitoring and the recovery of sand flathead. Can you give an indication from the initial investments in the recovery of sand flathead of what ongoing investments are made and what current responses are being provided in terms of any efforts in the sand flathead fishery?

Mr ABETZ - The government has contributed \$250,000 to initiate the Flathead for the Future program to rebuild the fishery through a coordinated range of actions by NRET, IMAS and TARFish. These include actions to fill knowledge gaps, develop the rebuilding process and encourage responsible fishing attitudes and behaviours. Rebuilding actions are described and coordinated through the Sand Flathead Rebuilding Plan, which is currently in draft form. Changes to recreational and commercial fishing rules implemented on 1 November 2023 are the first action to directly reduce fishing mortality. A review of the effectiveness of these changes will take place next year.

Improved stock modelling for the sand flathead fishery is being developed by IMAS through a government-supported Fisheries Research and Development Corporation project, which supports the identification of appropriate rebuilding targets and provides accurate advice on the management settings required to achieve them. The government committed \$1 million over two years in the 2023-24 Budget to undertake sand flathead research and management needs and provide targeted fisher stewardship programs in partnership with TARFish.

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In our 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmanian fisheries, the government committed a further \$1.2 million to support sand flathead stock as well as enhancement studies, including the feasibility of enhancing natural stocks of sand flathead. We are taking it seriously. We are doing our best and are always open for further consideration and adapting policy settings to ensure that we rebuild the population.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, I have a couple of questions about the expansion of the smalt hatchery at Whale Point in the Huon. Huon Aquaculture is proposing to intensify their production there from 500 tonnes to 786 tonnes standing biomass at any one time, and they're proposing to increase a maximum standing biomass of 1446 tonnes by adding an extra 660 tonnes of capacity.

Can you please tell me whether the government will be subsidising this expansion and, if so, to what extent, and what the timeline you understand there will be for the expansion of that finfish industry in the Huon?

Mr ABETZ - As far as I'm concerned, no request has been made to government for any support in that area. These proposals have to go through the normal development applications to the local Huon council, et cetera, so it'll be step by step. That said, you can be assured that we are encouraged that there is a growing demand for Tasmanian-grown salmon that has led to this announcement of further investment in the sector. This is based on the confidence that they have in being able to provide this quality seafood in circumstances where demand is there. They're willing to make the investment, and it's a private investment.

Dr WOODRUFF - On the impacts of the salmon industry on native animals and wildlife in Tasmania, can you please tell me how many native birds have been shot by the salmon industry since the beginning of this calendar year? What weapon or implement is used by the industry to shoot native birds?

Can you also tell me whether there have been any conversations between the government and salmon companies about changing their farming practices to prevent further bird shootings and to notify boaters about shooting operations as they occur? This happened recently, for example, at the Coningham lease where 50 cormorants were shot but there was no notice to mariners about that.

Mr ABETZ - Could I invite you to ask that question of Minister Howlett in the appropriate Estimates hearings? That's not within my purview as minister.

Dr WOODRUFF - It is a question about the impacts on the industry.

CHAIR - Mr Garland?

Dr WOODRUFF - Can I ask another question that the minister can answer, since the minister has told me he can't answer that?

CHAIR - I'm sorry, Dr Woodruff. That was your turn.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, in the 2030 Strong Plan, the Premier asserted that the salmon industry employs exactly 5000 Tasmanians when highlighting its economic contribution.

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Where did this figure come from? Noting the importance of employment as a justification to keep this industry in business when it has devastating effects on our marine environment, does the government have any data on the number of people directly employed on the fish farms in Macquarie Harbour?

Mr ABETZ - I would disagree with your description of the sector as having devastating impacts, but setting that aside, the figures undoubtedly arise from - I understand it's 395 at Macquarie Harbour - direct and indirect jobs.

Mr GARLAND - Where does that figure come from?

Mr ABETZ - Well, undoubtedly from the companies that employ people there - from the salmon sector, from the three growers that are in Macquarie Harbour.

Mr GARLAND - The ABS figures show forestry, farming and aquaculture in that region as being around 81.

Mr ABETZ - That is interesting that the ABS would suggest that, because I addressed a group of workers at Macquarie Harbour in the shed and I would anticipate that the workers that were there numbered more than 81, and that was just in the shed at the time. I didn't account for those that were on another shift, were on the water or were otherwise gainfully employed.

Mr GARLAND - They might've been mates of the workers there.

Mr ABETZ - It might've been mates, but I think that stretches credulity a little bit too far. When I mixed and mingled with them, they all had a very good and easy account as to what they were doing there, whether they were a mechanic, a fish feeder or a diver. They all immediately told me what their involvement was there at the site. Nobody stumbled and said, 'Oh, I'm here because a mate asked me to come here to make up the numbers'. They all had a very good explanation and rationale as to what their employment was at Macquarie Harbour.

I have no reason to doubt that the body of men and women that I had the privilege of addressing, and then talking to individually, were there on the basis that they were there on their lunch break and were gainfully employed.

Mr GARLAND - The 5000 figure, does that come from industry as well?

Mr ABETZ - I would assume so, but I can take that on notice to get the full details.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, on the environmental issue of pests in our sea, can you update the committee on what the government is doing to combat the destructive *Centrostephanus* long-spined sea urchin. It's certainly a problem on the eastern side of Lyons, on the east coast. It's attacking the kelp forest, and the crayfish industry is also affected.

Mr ABETZ - The *Centrostephanus* long-spined sea urchin is a genuine pest that needs to be controlled. There are divers that collect them and, in the past, we have provided some support. We have made \$1 million available to the AIRF for the program of trying to limit the numbers of and get rid of the *Centrostephanus*. We provided \$2 million over two years in 2023 and became a party to the National *Centrostephanus* Task Force established to work in partnership to develop a regional control initiative.

The funding this government has provided has directly supported the commercial dive industry to remove around 3000 tonnes to date, with the ambitious but achievable goal of removing a further 500 tonnes per year. That tells us how much they are reproducing, growing, et cetera. I was at a facility down the Huon just recently that is seeking to process them and provide some sort of commercial value for this pest, which enables us to get rid of them on a more financially sustainable basis.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, the review of the *Living Marine Resources Management Act*, has been critical, like science, in underpinning all the fisheries. It has been underway for some time now and is obviously a large and lengthy process, but I wonder whether you've put your mind to the time frames for that review and the tasks to be completed. Could you please provide an update of your commitments to the timing of delivering that essential piece of work?

Mr ABETZ - That is a matter that the member for Clark, Kristie Johnston, first raised with me during question time. As a new minister, I then turned my mind to that, and I was advised by the department that it was 'a work in progress'. I have been considering the best way forward with that, as has the department. I look forward to some departmental advice in due course, but I can't put a time line on that body of work at this stage because it will be a major piece of work.

As I understand it, the legislation hasn't been renewed for about two decades. No, more. 1995, so three decades. It's well and truly time for an overview of it and to make it more 21st century, if I can use that term.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you, minister. It is important that that work happens as quickly as possible because, as you mentioned in a response to Mr Garland before, our wild fisheries in particular are under pressure. They're continuing to be reduced in terms of the contribution they make, and without the fully invested science, they're also under pressure from a lack of information.

I'm interested in conversations that you might have with the department and your approach to fisheries as a whole. There has been concern in some sectors of our wild fishers in Tasmania around the balance between investment and local jobs, and the scale of fisheries. You mentioned in your introduction how fishing is a way of life and it leads to both the brand and the experience of Tasmania in both tourism and in investment. As minister, will you take the approach where you prioritise local jobs, particularly in regional Tasmania, for the benefits of fishery - you mentioned something similar in your response about sardines - or will your approach as minister be around efficiency?

Mr ABETZ - As minister, I'll take everything into account and come to a balanced decision. In relatively recent times - I reckon it was about four to six weeks ago - I availed myself of talking to, as it happened, mainly rock lobster fishermen at both Dover and then at the Margate wharf and jetty, and I indicated to those people that I think most Tasmanians have a soft spot for the fishing families that are now third or fourth generation rock lobster fishermen. I think they were mainly fishermen, not women, that I spoke with, if not solely. For some of them it is quite difficult to think that the next generation won't be able to take over the rock lobster fishing boat or whatever fishery they're in.

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I have said many a time in question time, if not here then up in the other place, that in general terms, big business and big unions are big and ugly enough to look after themselves. I would seek to dedicate myself to look after small businesses and individual workers. That's my mindset, if you like.

Ms FINLAY - That's great to hear, minister. I look forward to holding you -

Mr ABETZ - But I do understand that in some areas, you need the big investments, let's say in the aquaculture sector. I don't seek to demonise big business or indeed foreign investment, because we need that as well, but at the end of the day, there's a huge soft spot in my heart for small businesses and the men and women who mortgage their house for the log truck jinker or for the rock lobster fishing boat.

That's my predisposition, but that said, everything's got to be put into the melting pot.

Ms FINLAY - Having responded in that way, which I find positive -

Mr ABETZ - Glad to have your approval.

Ms FINLAY - It has for some time been a massive concern to those people you would have met at Dover and Margate that there are people who are losing their homes and boats, and losing their entire generational investments, because of the pressure put on by some less-than-reasonable behaviours by some quarters of industry.

Tasmanian Labor absolutely supports investment and foreign investment in our fisheries and in aquaculture, and we 100 per cent see that as an important part of the Tasmanian economy. However, when there is a balance in behaviour in terms of an interplay between the levels in the sector, then that's not okay. I'm sure if they were open with you, you will have had some heartbreaking conversations with some of those people.

Mr ABETZ - There was one very heartbreaking one at Dover.

Dr WOODRUFF - Chair, can we move to the question before the answer from the minister?

Ms FINLAY - We've spoken around rock lobster a little bit in that, but take your mind to abalone. There are some concerns in the governance and the management, and I said the interplay between behaviours, whether it be between divers, processors or quota holders. Have you had any feedback from divers in terms of some of the contracts they're being asked to enter into from some of the larger operators around which are holding that quota, where they are being asked in some ways to enter into contracts that are not balanced, that could be seen as anti-competitive, as predatory or as having conflicts of interest?

Where this exists in our fishery in Tasmania, it is something that as minister you need to turn your mind to. Is that something that's been brought to your attention or something that would concern you if that's the case?

Mr ABETZ - These matters have been brought to my attention and it is something that would concern most Tasmanians at the end of the day.

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Dr WOODRUFF - Predatory behaviour of foreign corporations? Absolutely.

CHAIR - Order.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'm glad Labor is finally speaking about it.

Ms FINLAY - I didn't use the word -

Dr WOODRUFF - Predatory? You did.

Ms FINLAY - But not of corporations, I didn't. It could be -

Dr WOODRUFF - But then you said foreign companies instead.

Mr ABETZ - That's amazing. When Ms Finlay and I were having a pleasant -

Dr WOODRUFF - Such a cosy little Tassie chat.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - interchange, Dr Woodruff interrupts.

Ms FINLAY - This is to do with the housing and livelihoods of Tasmanians, Dr Woodruff. Could you please allow the minister to respond?

Dr WOODRUFF - We're very concerned.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms FINLAY - Well, then this is important.

Mr ABETZ - Could you please ask the question again?

Ms FINLAY - That behaviour and the interplay between certain sectors, where you have a single-handed fisher in rock lobster or a diver in the abalone industry earning a living to support their family and being put under pressure in a way that is not seen to be appropriate - you have mentioned that it's been brought to your attention. As minister, how would you seek to ensure that fisheries in Tasmania are managed in an appropriate way?

Mr ABETZ - Regrettably, government cannot fix every issue. I have heard from divers that what they are being paid per kilogram or whatever is not what they're used to or what they think they are entitled to. It is one of those great difficulties when it's your way of life, it's not easy just to change jobs because that's what you've done for a considerable period of time.

Ms FINLAY - Many of these fisheries sustain our regional towns and communities.

Mr ABETZ - They do indeed. Sometimes it is like small farms. When a bigger company comes along and buys -

Dr WOODRUFF - A shark comes along and the minnows get eaten up -

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CHAIR - Order.

Dr WOODRUFF - and there is nothing the government can do.

CHAIR - Order.

Dr ABETZ - Your rudeness knows no bounds.

Dr WOODRUFF - Honestly. What's happening here?

Mr ABETZ - It has allowed some people to retire and get out of the sector with some dignity, with debts paid off and the capacity to then buy a house or restructure themselves financially. That is the great dilemma in this debate and these considerations, and so government seeking to insert itself when there are questions of viability, it becomes very difficult.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms FINLAY - My question was around behaviour as much as it was around viability.

Ms FINLAY - As much as it was about viability.

Dr WOODRUFF - Chair, I think I've got the next question, it's been three for Labor, at least.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms FINLAY - It was about behaviour within the sectors.

CHAIR - Could we just sum up, very briefly, and then we will go to a break.

Mr ABETZ - In my ideal world, everybody would get on very well with each other and be fair and reasonable to each other. As we know, that unfortunately does not occur at all times. Government cannot insert itself into all these situations. Can I say to you, Ms Finlay, if you think there is a way government can reasonably be involved to make the show fairer, let's have a cup of coffee and discuss it, because I would be interested to ensure fairness and reasonableness within the sector.

CHAIR - Thank you. We will now break for five minutes.

The Committee suspended from 4.36 p.m. to 4.44 p.m.

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff has the call.

Dr WOODRUFF - I've got some questions about the \$600,000 your department allocated to a strategic review of kunanyi/Mt Wellington in the Budget. I'd like a breakdown of how the \$600,000 is planned to be spent and whether you are aware that the Wellington Park Management Trust had made a submission for \$300,000 to the Treasury Structured Infrastructure Investment Review process for a business case? Were you aware of that when

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you announced your own strategic review? Now we have a \$300,000 review for a business case from the Mt Wellington Management Trust and you are undertaking a \$600,000 strategic review.

Mr ABETZ - As I understand it, the \$600,000 was an allocation for the department that's been tasked with undertaking the review.

Mr LIMKIN - The \$600,000 is tasked to the department to undertake the review. The elements that the department are doing in that is working with the Mt Wellington/kunanyi trust, who actually already take up what they've done. For example, they've done a large amount of work in community consultation already.

We've met with the trust. I've met with the trust personally, and we've looked at how to use the work that they've already done on the reserve and management plans to enhance our review going forward. Then what we're doing is looking at the areas of value management, user experience and administration and doing targeted consultation in relation to that, including targeted consultation with the councils and NRE staff to make sure that we consult with workers as well as the community on this.

From that, the government has committed that, in its next 100-day plan, we will release a discussion paper and commence that consultation in October 2024. The intention is to do that.

Dr WOODRUFF - Can you confirm that, as I understand it, there are three reviews of kunanyi/Mt Wellington that are running concurrently at a significant cost to the state? There's the increased allocation to the Wellington Park Management Trust for the management review, there's \$300,000 funding for the business case and \$600,000 for the strategic review. Is that right?

Mr LIMKIN - All I can talk about is the \$600,000 that has been allocated to the department. I know that the trust has been allocated some funds. They are currently considering whether they are going to continue with their review, pause their review or continue to work with the department so that we are using the appropriate resources and not duplicating effort.

Those conversations are ongoing. I have met with the trust once. I intend to continue to meet with the trust regularly so that, if they do choose to continue to do their requirements under the act of the management reviews, that we are not duplicating effort, to make sure that we do use taxpayers' resources in the most efficient and effective way.

Dr WOODRUFF - Did you advise the Wellington Park Management Trust to stop working on their management plan while you conducted the strategic review?

Mr LIMKIN - We have had conversations with the trust about the pros and cons and I did provide them with an email that indicated it was a choice for them.

Dr WOODRUFF - What does that mean?

Mr LIMKIN - Ultimately, I cannot instruct the trust. What I can do is suggest ways forward. I put options on the table to the trust. I understand the trust has made a decision to continue their review. That was the last discussion that I had, but we are ensuring that we do not duplicate effort to ensure the best value for the community. I also want to say that we don't

want to have community engagement fatigue where we're asking the same questions multiple times. My latest information was the trust was continuing with their elements but we were working together to ensure that we didn't duplicate effort.

Dr WOODRUFF - A final question. Which stakeholders are you consulting with that you just mentioned then? Who are those stakeholders that you have spoken to?

Mr LIMKIN - We have engaged with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, we have engaged with peak government agencies such as Tourism Tasmania, Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania. We've also talked to councils and other peak bodies as well.

Mr GARLAND - In budget paper 1, page 74, for this financial year, is an allocation of half a million dollars for the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre, which amongst a range of projects, is proposing a 15,000 Atlantic salmon and 15,000 kingfish aquaculture research trial in Commonwealth waters 12 km offshore from the north-west coast in Bass Strait. The Blue Economy CRC partners include Tassal, Huon, Petuna, New Zealand King Salmon and a whole range of universities.

To do the research trial, I've been informed by Angela Williamson, former senior manager for responsible business at Tassal and now Blue Economy CRC director of blue policy and planning, that the trial would be partly implemented and managed by Tassal and Skretting.

Between July 2019 and June 2020, Blue Economy CRC paid Tassal \$1 million. Annual reports since then don't highlight which organisations or companies received payment from the Blue Economy CRC. Minister, do you know how much money Blue Economy CRC is paying Tasmanian salmon farm operators services and, if so, how much?

Mr ABETZ - Cooperative research centres are, as I understand it, a federal creature, albeit they partner with industry, states and other organisations, and the management of the Blue CRC, you would really need to ask them how they are managing their funds.

The management of the Blue CRC is not one which I am necessarily able to provide any insight into.

Mr GARLAND - Well, if we don't know, why are we giving them funds, minister?

Mr ABETZ - We're giving them funds because it's a research activity in Commonwealth waters and it's a sensible step to test the economic, environmental and operational feasibility of offshore aquaculture in Commonwealth waters. If that were to be a possibility, then there are substantial potential benefits to Tasmania for Tasmanian jobs and wealth creation.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, I'd like to ask a question around the rock lobster now. To give you a bit of background, around about 14-15 years ago - how old is my daughter? it's about that - she was a student down here at university and came back from Townsville to do her degree in marine biology, and a part of that degree, in the later end of it, she was actually working for IMAS part-time and doing some research into rock lobster translocation.

Ever since that day, I've always been interested in it because it's part of the east coast historic fishery and where it goes. And, so, along those lines, how is the rock lobster

translocation program going? It is substantial benefit to one of our main industries, our fishing industries, on the east coast.

Mr ABETZ - I won't have to tell you that the translocation program is underpinned by science, given the family involvement in it. The government believes it's been highly effective and it's been reliant on the active involvement of the Tasmanian rock lobster industry over the years to catch and relocate rock lobster. I can't believe these figures, but I'm told over 800,000 to the south and west coasts and over 300,000 to the east coast. Are those figures correct?

Ms WILSON - I believe so.

Mr ABETZ - That is a huge number. Since 2019-20, the program has focused on translocation to the east coast. There are no known sustainability risks and the program is beneficial for all east coast fishers. The movement of lobsters from slow growing deep-water areas in the south-west to faster-growth inshore east coast areas has resulted in measurable productivity and biomass gains for the fishery. Recreational catchers and commercial catch rates have increased and commercial catch rates are at a 40-year high.

On the back of this program's success, the Tasmanian government has increased and extended funding in this Budget, with a total additional commitment of 600,000 over the next four years to support the continued rebuild of this important shared fishery. Your family member has made a valuable contribution to this program. Please thank her.

Ms FINLAY - Thanks, minister. I appreciate that in your previous answer to do with the review of the *Living Marine Resources Management Act* that there is some consideration for the time frame of that work. It is critical. Equally, the time frame of developing the harvest strategies is critical.

It did shock me and it continues to concern me that the time frame for delivering the harvest strategies is outlined to be 10 years. In speaking to a number of people that have formally sat on the FACs (Fishery Advisory Committees) and other people in industry, if we are going to manage to the best of our abilities the fisheries that we have, particularly in our wild fisheries, I would hope that you will turn your mind to the fact that we as reasonably as possible can fast track those harvest strategies. Can you indicate what consideration you have made and what discussions you've had with the department around the harvest strategies in order that they are delivered in a more timely manner for Tasmanians?

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for that question and, yes, I have turned my mind to it and I'm just looking to find where.

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister, and thank you for the question. We are progressing the abalone harvest strategy and the rock lobster harvest strategy. We've focused on those two because they are high-value fisheries, and we already have an abalone harvest strategy, so it is a review of an existing strategy.

The rock lobster strategy is well progressed. We have a working group established and we have just appointed an independent chair, Max Kitchell. In terms of the progression of the harvest strategies, the agency does see them as a priority and is working towards having harvest strategies in place.

It is also sensible to ensure that we are doing this in an orderly fashion in relation to our highest value fisheries. We also have to take into account we're dealing with our constituents and they need to be able to invest their time in ensuring the path strategies are the best product that we can produce. We are progressing those harvest strategies and we'll continue to do so.

Ms FINLAY - Is there some clarification on the target that you're working towards for rock lobster and abalone in terms of a time to complete those two harvest strategies?

Ms WILSON - We plan to deliver and we do allow for the fact when I put this forward, minister, that we have to take into account that sometimes extensions of time happen because of consultation. We plan to deliver the rock lobster harvest strategy by November 2025. I may have to come back to you on abalone because I have to quickly look it up. Once I've got that date, I don't have it in my head.

Ms FINLAY - In responding to that, I appreciate that and it's nice to know that those two are more advanced. You talked about engagement with constituents, the community and fishers. In a recent rapid review of the FACs, the FACs have been, in my language, disbanded. I think there's an interim process at the moment. Having spoken to previous members and chairs of FACs and other people that have got an interest in that, there's a concern that you, as minister, are without the best available advice directly from collections of people working with the fisheries. What's your current commitment to how you will structure your advisory from fishers? Will you reimplement FACs? Are you looking at a different structure? I know in the rapid review, not only did they recommend a more timely response to the harvest strategies, but they recognised the importance of those advisory structures.

Mr ABETZ - In a former manifestation when I was a federal minister for fisheries, amongst other things, I found the equivalent to the FACs very helpful. With no disrespect to our scientists who give very valuable input, no disrespect to our departmental officials who give very good input, I think there's always something to be learned and gleaned from those who are actually on the water doing the fishing, who make observations and understand things that they have practically lived with, for some, for decades on end, often intergenerationally. Getting that input as well is very helpful. That is why I've had preliminary discussions with the department as to how we deal with this. There's a certain gentleman with whom we both sat the other evening who made a very valuable contribution whilst I was federal minister. There are other people as well who I'm sure could and would make valuable contributions. The gentleman of whom I speak is engaged in South Australia as the chair of one of their FACs over there.

Ms FINLAY - On that matter, the rapid review that was conducted in the FACs, neither the members of the FACs nor the chair of the FACs were ever garnished with any feedback from that review, nor provided with the document. There was some concern expressed about that. Would you commit to having that conversation with those people who had invested a lot of time, effort and expertise into those FACs in terms of them understanding where you're at with the process?

Mr ABETZ - I'm always happy to talk to people in any sector. Should you be in contact with the individuals, feel free to let them know to make contact.

Ms FINLAY - I'm interested, that through RTI, I was able to get a copy of the rapid review heavily redacted. The pieces of information that were redacted over the many pages

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were in fact the feedback provided. Will you commit to being able to provide an unredacted copy of that rapid review?

Mr ABETZ - I don't do the RTIs, that's a matter for departments and departmental officials.

Ms FINLAY - I'm asking if you are on top of that process now.

Mr ABETZ - I don't know what the rationale was for the redactions, so I'm not going to say at the table that I'll provide you with an unredacted report. There might be very good reasons for it. I'll defer to the deputy secretary.

Ms WILSON - I might go back to the question about the abalone. The target is for the first half of next year, hopefully the first quarter but I'm giving myself a little bit of room.

Ms FINLAY - So abalone, the rock lobster next year?

Ms WILSON - Rock lobster towards the end. It takes around two years to develop a harvest strategy. You can see the rolling program progressing. I met with both chairs of Fishery Advisory Committees relating to that review.

Ms FINLAY - Recently?

Ms WILSON - I'd have to look at the date. What I would say is that at that meeting, it was a general overview of the process. As the minister has indicated, the RTI office has made an independent decision, which is appropriate. The document itself was produced as an internal document for NRE Tasmania so that we could inform advice to the minister. It was a rapid review, with people given advice that it was a rapid review, with the view that they could provide open feedback. I was extremely pleased that the options have been put on the table because that is actually the most important part of the document. It is the fact that's what will inform the debate and the advice, and has informed the debate and advice, around the future of the fisheries advisory committees.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, I want to dig into any communications, if there have been any, between you and the Minister for Tourism. It's in relation to a \$15 million major commitment to upgrades of three key reserves across the state, including the Dial Range, which is an icon of the north-west. It is supposed to be about enhancing the visitor experience.

This is a much-loved community area that is highly used for walking and trail bike riding. Forestry Tasmania has scheduled that two coupes in that area will be slated for logging - 45 hectares this year. That's at the same time as the tourism announcement of enhancing the visitor experience and investing in new trails in the Dial Range.

That's expected to boost visitor numbers and the local economy. The amount of harvest log volume to come out of those coupes is very tiny - 200 cubic metres of category-one saw logs. This is chump change for Forestry Tasmania but would make a huge swathe into what is a highly loved and visited area that is slated for tourism investment.

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I'm wondering whether the Tourism minister has been in contact with you about this area. What has your response been? Has there been any correspondence at all between your departments about this issue?

Mr ABETZ - To the best of my recollection, the Minister for Tourism has not corresponded with me in relation to this matter. My staff don't recall that either, but I'm more than happy to check the record to see if something has slipped through that I didn't notice. In relation to the Dial Range, I can say that that's an operational matter for Sustainable Timber Tasmania. They've commenced planning and they've notified neighbouring landowners and registered stakeholders as part of the process.

No forest operations, including roading and harvesting, can occur until a Forest Practices Plan has been approved. Importantly, the plan will also outline how the forest will be regenerated and managed following harvesting activity, as sustainable native forestry operations across Tasmania provide the timber and wood products required to build our homes and help support a plastic-free future. They also support many jobs in our regional areas.

Can I also say - and I'm not across all the detail with the Dial Range - that forestry and other activities can coexist. It doesn't have to be black and white. There can be a coexistence, and managing our forests for the benefit of tourism, bike trails and wood products is all part and parcel of what we as a government want to see.

Dr WOODRUFF - I know that's your government's position, but it is directly at odds in this instance in a quite peculiar way, because the coupes that have been chosen, DLO11A and DLO11C, are right in the middle of the Dial Range. They're highly visible from the walking and riding trails that are there. A couple of months ago, or less than that, over 120 people turned up on a Sunday to meet as a community for the first time. They were shocked at this proposal to go right into the middle of this very loved and highly accessed area, one that's just been slated for a boost with financial investment.

Will you have a conversation with the Minister for Tourism, will you understand and learn about the values of the area, and will you consider talking to Forestry Tasmania about reordering their priorities in relation to these two particular coupes?

Mr ABETZ - Sustainable Timber Tasmania is who I might talk to about this, but at the end of the day they are a government business enterprise and they will be making their determinations in relation to the guidelines under which they have to operate, namely forest practices plans, et cetera. I would encourage anybody who's concerned about this to reach out directly to Sustainable Timber Tasmania and have the dialogue to see what can be done to ensure that there can be a coexistence of matters tourism and matters forestry.

Dr WOODRUFF - Ash Bulgarelli will definitely be doing that. He's already been in touch on behalf of the community.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, in relation to Tasmanian aquaculture, what was the total number of individual workers directly employed on finfish marine farms and land-based freshwater hatcheries between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2024? Also, what was the total number of seasonal workers directly employed with either a working visa or a seasonal worker scheme on finfish marine farms and land-based freshwater hatcheries between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2024?

Mr ABETZ - Any self-respecting minister would have that sort of detail in his back pocket. Unfortunately, I don't, Mr Garland. I'm not sure that we necessarily have oversight in relation to the number of workers that are on visas in the various fish farms. I will try to do my best to see what departmental records have to offer in relation to that.

I suspect that will be part of the information that is held by the various fish farms and not something which we would have oversight. I don't know if you were to go to a federal senator or member to ascertain whether the federal Department of Immigration has any figures as to visas granted to people working in the finfish and aquaculture sector. That might be another avenue for you. I'm not sure that I can add any more to that. There is information on the departmental website about employees, but it does not drill down into whether or not they are visa holders.

If I may, Chair, just briefly, I was just reminded that certain people signed off on the coupes that Dr Woodruff has just mentioned, and there was agreement to logging this coupe under the Tasmanian Forest Agreement some time ago. That's an interesting observation, and I thank the person who just fed that information to me.

Dr WOODRUFF - The world has moved on, minister. There is a biodiversity crisis and a climate emergency.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, can you explain the recently launched Private Forest Tasmania Knowledge Hub and Stems for CO2 program, and what the government is doing to back farm forestry in Tasmania? As you find your information, minister, the other day I was at Austral Bricks at Longford, which gave me a look through their process. They actually used native wood chips to fire their furnace, and they produce local bricks that are carbon neutral. They are one of the only places in Australia to do so, and they produce them here in Tasmania. Mainland bricks are fired by gas in their burners. Austral Bricks take all the sawdust from the local mills in the area and puts it through their burner; they also put native sawdust in their bricks and when it fires it comes up with those black specks through the bricks, so they're very proud.

Mr ABETZ - Is that how they do it? There you go.

Mr SHELTON - At Longford. They're carbon neutral in producing their bricks. They were pleased to promote that to me, and I thought I'd just pass that on to you while I had the opportunity.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you very much for that. If I've got the right place, I think they've got that up in lights, literally, that they produce carbon neutral.

Mr SHELTON - They've been advertising it of late.

Mr ABETZ - With one of those mobile - often we see them on the side of the road telling you there's a detour ahead or something. They were promoting the fact that they had carbon neutral bricks and pavers for sale, et cetera. That is all part and parcel of the ongoing growth,

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research and development that is taking place with our renewable forest sector, which is delivering so much.

When people don't want any forestry to occur, who would have thought you'd be denying Austral Bricks the opportunity to do what they're doing. This is another example of where the knowledge hub can be of real assistance in ensuring we get the most value out of every little bit of the tree that we harvest. That's a very good and fine example of it.

Ms FINLAY - I'm interested in your earlier responses to Mr Garland that you have put a line through the returns to community element of the Salmon Plan in terms of no new taxes. I'm interested in exploring the full cost recovery within the Budget. Can you let me know, in the 2022-23 year, what was the full cost of the department's actions? What was the figure then?

In the 2023-24 year, as I remember, it was about \$9.6 million that you collected through the full cost recovery. However, this year it's something like \$11 million. I am keen to know what the numbers of people working in those areas were in 2022-23 and 2023-24, and the numbers proposed in 2024-25? They seem like significant jumps when you're just seeking to recover the costs that you previously allocated.

Mr ABETZ - That's a departmental matter and I defer.

Ms WILSON - We've produced information on our website around our cost recovery.

Ms FINLAY - Is that on the department's website or the salmon portal?

Ms WILSON - No, on the department's website. If you go looking for it, we have a document that explains the services as at August 2023. It has FTE information. They are estimates; our out years were estimates. We collected \$9.6 million in levies.

Ms FINLAY - For my benefit, as I don't have that in front of me, what was the number of FTEs in 2023-24?

Ms WILSON - EPA, 16.5; IFS, 1.7; Business Services, 10.3; Environment, 9.9; Marine Resources, 17.6; Research was 0. That made up 56.5.

Ms FINLAY - So 56.5 overall?

Ms WILSON - Yes.

Ms FINLAY - Do you have the details for the 2022-23 year in front of you, comparing what you used to have, and then you want to fully -

Ms WILSON - Yes, I see. We haven't released the 2022-23 figures because we commenced full cost recovery in 2023-24.

Ms FINLAY - Sorry, for clarification, what I'm seeking to understand is, there was a time where government used to do work and it would cost money. There were allocations in the Budget and it would come to a certain number. You'd have a certain number of people and a certain number of allocations. Then you went to full cost recovery and there was a new number, and now there's another new number. I'm trying to understand the increase in the

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full-time equivalents and also in the allocations, because then my follow-up question is going to be, what has changed in the work in order that the number of full-time equivalents and the allocation or the receiving is different?

Ms WILSON - I'm not sure that I quite understand the question, but what I can tell you is that this government has increased, for example, the staffing in the EPA, and that was a Budget announcement. We've introduced a new biosecurity standard, which has required some additional activity. As I say, the information is available on our website as to how we've derived these figures.

Ms FINLAY - But there's no information for what the base that you're working from is - so the 2022-23 year isn't included in the information.

Ms WILSON - The information on the levy that we received is available. We were already collecting a levy from industry, and there was a difference between the existing levy and the new levy.

Ms FINLAY - Do you have the number of full-time equivalents in the 2022-23 year that used to operate to service the salmon industry? What I'm trying to understand is, you would have serviced the salmon industry, whether it be in research, information exchange, whatever. Then you chose to fully recover those costs, and that was the \$9.6 million after a full year of cost recovery. Now it's \$11 million. I'm trying to understand, in this year, the figure in the 2024-25 year is \$11 million -

Ms WILSON - The net cost that we have on our figures here in 2024-25, less public good, was predicted to be \$9.6 million, but I'll just make sure I've got that right through my staff.

Ms FINLAY - So you're expecting that you will recover the same amount of cost this year as you did last year?

Ms WILSON - The levy will need to be determined, but that was what we anticipated and put forward as the likely anticipated amount for 2024-25.

Ms FINLAY - Outside of the additional people in biosecurity and the additional people in EPA, are there any other additional full-time equivalents expected to be in the department's service in the salmon industry this year?

Mr ABETZ - Can we take that on notice?

Ms WILSON - Minister, I need the question repeated, to be frank.

Ms FINLAY - In the 2024-25 years, so the year that we're about to enter, or that we're actually thick in, is it estimated that there will be an increase in any full-time equivalents outside what you've already identified, which is biosecurity and the EPA?

Ms WILSON - We have an anticipated FTE in the documentation that we've already released. We will be finalising our 2024-25 FTE allocation, but as has been indicated, the amount that is predicted for 2024-25 is \$9.6 million. When you talk about the \$11 million, that may take into account our lease amounts. We have -

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Ms FINLAY - Okay. I can clarify that. I'll go and have a look at the link.

Dr WOODRUFF - I've been very indulgent with that series of questions, really, Chair.

Ms FINLAY - I've been given everything except for the estimated number of FTEs for 2024-25. Have you got that in front of you?

Ms WILSON - It is estimated at 54.8, but I do not have the actual to hand.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you.

Dr WOODRUFF - I have a question on behalf of the community around Lorinna. There're some plantations growing in the upper reaches of the Lorinna area that are leased to Reliance Forest Fibre, and they are detrimentally depleting the water supply south of Olivers Creek. The trees planted originally were of the wrong species for that location. Adjacent to that coupe is an area that's intentionally being protected to preserve the water catchment and supply. It appears that the designation of the coupe now leased to Reliance Forest Fibre for plantations was simply a mapping error, or so the community believe. Will you work with Reliance Forest Fibre, who have said, I understand, that they'd accept a buyback of the leased area to secure that land and add it to the protected part of the water catchment, for reliability for livestock and domestic supply? Farmers have mentioned the impacts of the depletion on that water supply available for them.

Mr ABETZ - A sad experience has taught me not to fully rely on assertions made by Green MPs. There are a lot of assertions that, by Dr Woodruff's own admissions, she believes that the community understands that certain things were mapped in error, that the wrong species of tree was planted, that it has certain detrimental effects -

Dr WOODRUFF - Chair, I find that imputation offensive. I'm speaking on behalf of the community. I'm not there, I'm not standing here giving me these words. This is from an email from the community. I'm reporting it to you, as I understand, because these were the words that people told me. So we should have the respect to treat this as a serious question from the Lorinna community members. I don't need you chiming in, Mr Shelton.

CHAIR - Order. Dr Woodruff, please allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr ABETZ - All I've said is that from a sad experience, I've been burnt from time to time by taking at face value assertions made by the Greens.

Dr WOODRUFF - Let's talk about managed investment schemes and the failure of that. You were the architect of that Ponzi scheme that's been so damaging for northern Tasmanian communities. So, honestly, just treat it with respect.

CHAIR - Order, Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - Give us an answer for the community.

CHAIR - Please, cease interjecting and allow the minister to answer the question how he sees fit.

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Mr ABETZ - The person that demands respect shows none. It is really unbelievable.

Dr WOODRUFF - Start by modelling it.

Mr ABETZ - Allow me to repeat that there are lots of assertions in the question.

Dr WOODRUFF - Do you want to challenge them? Go ahead.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - At law school, I learnt a maxim that the person that wants to assert something needs to prove it. It's not for the other person to prove the negative. If Dr Woodruff has certain assertions, then let the evidence be put forward and then we can consider it. But this is, as I understand it, private property, and that is up to the owner of that property to determine what they might want to do with it, within the bounds of the law. If they're willing to sell it to somebody, be it to the Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC) or somebody else, then that is what the open market allows. At this stage, I can't see any need for my involvement in this matter.

Dr WOODRUFF - On the question, will you answer it, please? Will you consider speaking to Alliance Forest Fibre, who've indicated that they are interested in having the lease secured by the government and handed back. Will you have that conversation with them?

Mr ABETZ - They have not approached me about this matter, and if that is what their view is, I will await their approach and consider it on that basis. I'm not going to reach out to them on the basis of the matters that have been raised today.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay. This is my first question and I was incredibly indulgent for all that long series of questions from Labor. Chair, that was one question. That was an attack on me that I had to defend myself about.

CHAIR - Just because you don't like the answer, doesn't mean it wasn't answered.
Dr Woodruff -

Dr WOODRUFF - Honestly, that was one question about the Lorinna community and I didn't even get an answer. The second question.

CHAIR - There's time to ask the question again, should you wish.

Dr WOODRUFF - No, I have a right on behalf of the Greens to have two questions. That is the rotation.

CHAIR - You have had two questions.

Dr WOODRUFF - No, I didn't Chair. That is really unreasonable.

CHAIR - Don't argue with me, please Dr Woodruff, or raise your voice to me. Mr Shelton has the call.

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Mr SHELTON - Can the government provide an update on its successful Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative (EDGI) and the outcomes of the Auditor-General's desktop review into the program?

Mr ABETZ - The EDGI program has been very successful. It's unfortunate that it has been attacked. The Auditor-General had the program referred to it and has now confirmed that there will be no audit of this highly successful initiative. It's one of those things that elements in our community do breathlessly tell the media that they're referring to the Auditor-General and then, when the Auditor-General declines to engage with it, you don't get the press release saying we were misguided in trying to make these wild claims.

The simple fact is that the EDGI program has consistently delivered results for Tasmania with significant mineral discoveries, like the high-grade tin at north Scamander. The program has been instrumental in growing our state's mining sector and contributing to the vital royalties that we get, which ultimately fund the essential services such as health, education and housing. Rather than suffering the constant attacks on our mining sector and our productive sectors, we as a government sidestep those attacks and continue to work with the productive sectors that provide jobs and wealth for our community.

Just the mining royalties alone, in rough terms, \$52 million last year - that funds a lot of nurses, police and teachers. If you close down that sector, there will be very real problems. As is the want with mines, usually they are exhausted and therefore you have to look for more prospects. That is what the EDGI program is all about, to assist and co-invest with mineral explorers to see if there are any other minerals that might be of benefit to our community, and from which we can generate jobs and wealth and, of course, royalties.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you for the details provided in the previous answer. Fifty-five people to manage a sector, it seems like a lot of people. I'm sure it's a reasonable number, and I know that it's been done in conjunction with the industry. I'm interested to know, where we enter into these agreements with sectors, no matter who they are, if there's a way of testing or checking that the value is returned to both - that one is underpaid or over-utilised and also that there's an audit of the impact of that effort, I suppose. How is that process undertaken in terms of auditing the effort of the team? Could you detail a breakdown of the tasks of the team that deliver, in that full-time equivalent number?

Ms WILSON - When the salmon industry cost recovery model was first delivered, it was based on a model which was well tested and had been in place for some time. It is from the Department of Treasury and Finance's Costing Fees and Charges Guidelines for Use by Agencies. It goes through a model around describing the outputs, the methodology, the approach to use, and the cost must be verifiable. When we did the cost recovery, Wise Lord & Ferguson did a piece of work to test against that guideline so that it had rigour. I'm just going to check with my team. I believe it may be on our website, but I'll just have to check.

Ms FINLAY - While you're checking, I'm interested in the model being established and then implemented. I'm interested in ongoing review or auditing of it, whether it continues to keep in line with the expectations of how that model was initially set up. Sometimes, with no intention, there can be creep or a lack of efficiency or not keeping up with the costs. How is that reviewed?

Mr ABETZ - That is departmental management and I defer -

Ms WILSON - We will do a report on the previous financial year, which will indicate at an appropriate level the functions that have been delivered through the cost recovery. There are models for this. If you have the opportunity to look at the DAC website and others, there's a model for how you report. It's not about every, single part of an FTE's workload. If you look at our model, there are people who work and part of their activities relates to salmon, and we will be reporting. There's also the salmon industry working group set up. That is chaired by an independent chair, and we will report appropriately against our cost recovery model.

Ms FINLAY - The salmon industry has been one of our big success stories and full of innovation, but we need to be on top of emerging opportunities as well. In seaweed, there's a good opportunity in Tasmania. Previously, there's been a commitment to doing a plan around emerging industries like seaweed. What is the current position in investing in seaweed development in Tasmania? I understand there was a seaweed investment plan. What is the status of that?

Mr ABETZ - New and emerging marine industries like seaweed aquaculture present significant potential for the state. We are leading national efforts to develop this new industry with research supporting business development such as Sea Forest Limited, which is established land and marine-based seaweed operations on our East Coast. The Tasmanian government has invested \$4 million to support a large-scale trial of *Asparagopsis* seaweed feed supplements in beef and dairy cattle through the low emissions livestock grant program. The trial is a collaboration between TasFarmers, Sea Forest, the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, Fonterra, Annandale Dairy Farm and Tasmanian feedlot AEON.

The government's investment in emerging marine industries helps to support research and development and enables the development of policy and regulatory frameworks. The Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) has various projects that focus on that unpronounceable seaweed and offshore kelp aquaculture. The government's cash and in-kind investment in the Blue Economy CRC supports these activities aligned to the emerging industries.

Ms FINLAY - My interest, minister, is with the seaweed industry plan. Over a year ago it was suggested there'll be one developed. It is an important and critical part of our future mix in terms of our marine resources. What's the status of the development of that plan?

Ms WILSON - The seaweed industry development plan is in draft, and I'll get an estimate for you at the appropriate time frame we're thinking that will be done.

Ms FINLAY - Oh sorry. What is that time frame?

Ms WILSON - I'm seeking that.

Ms FINLAY - Oh, you'll come back to us? Right.

Ms BADGER - Venture Minerals, now trading as Critica Limited, their lease 3M/ 2012 at Livingstone, on the Stanley River, that expired on 1 June 2022 and the lease is now listed on MRT's website as pending renewal. What's the issue that's preventing the renewal of this lease at the moment? Is that in relation to compliance per chance?

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Mr ABETZ - Just bear with me. You're right.

Ms BADGER - Sorry to make you come up here.

Mr ABETZ - I'll have the Director of Mines to come to the table to assist.

Mr MORTON - Alastair Morton, Director of Mines. Can you just repeat the last bit of that question?

Ms BADGER - So it's in relation to Venture Minerals, or now Critica Ltd, their lease 3M/ 2012, which is on their Livingstone site on the Stanley River. So, that's expired on 1 June 2022. It's just listed on MRT's website as pending renewal. So, what is preventing the renewal of that lease? Is that in relation to compliance?

Mr MORTON - No. Thanks for the question. Yes, it is pending renewal. The expiration date was the 1 June 2022. Consistent with a section of the *Mineral Resources Development Act*, a lease continues to be enforced if an application for renewal is made but not granted before it ceases to be enforced. So, effectively, whilst it's pending the lease is current. We've been assessing it. It's taken us some time. We've sought some additional information from Venture. We've recently requested final information from them so we can form our position and move forward.

Ms BADGER - Great. So, my second question on that is they have announced their intention to sell that mining lease, which although expired, from what you're saying, under that section of the act, they still have rights to. So, that's perfectly fine and there are no implications for a company marketing rights to Tasmanian land which otherwise, if not leased, is reserve land in the Meredith Ranges Regional Reserve. So, they don't own the land. There's an expired lease and they're able to sell it.

CHAIR - Can the question please be directed through the minister?

Mr MORTON - The key point is it's not an expired lease. It's an active lease that's pending renewal. It's a current lease. And we're working through finalising our position in regards to what happens to that lease and our recommendation, MRT's recommendation. But we'll do that soon. But the key point is it is an active and current lease.

Mr ABETZ - Thanks, Chair. Before Mr Shelton asks the question. can I quickly come back to Miss Finlay? The Seaweed Industry Development Plan is anticipated to be available in the first half of next year for consultation and the Wise, Lord & Ferguson document relating to salmon cost recovery is on the NRET website. Sorry, Mr Shelton.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, can you explain how Tasmania's framework for sustainable forest management provides for the protection and management of the endangered swift parrot?

Mr ABETZ - Thank you very much for that question. Tasmania has a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) reserve system within which half of all Tasmania's forests are protected, including more than a million hectares of old growth forests. This reserve system protects many recognised as important swift parrot breeding, foraging and post-breeding season habitat.

Forest practices in Tasmania are regulated through our forest practices system, and that provides protections that ensure the environmental, social and economic values of our forests are appropriately managed for all Tasmanians.

The Forest Practices Code, issued under the *Forest Practices Act*, requires the management of threatened species, including the swift parrot, to be in accordance with procedures agreed between the independent Forest Practices Authority and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania as the primary regulator of a threatened species and at a forestry coupe level. Forestry operations must comply with a range of specific measures for conservation of the swift parrot, including protection of identified nesting habitat and retention of specific areas of breeding and foraging habitat and the requirement for pre-harvest surveys.

Management prescriptions are incorporated into forest practices plans and they must be certified prior to any on-ground operations commencing, and that is legally enforceable on both public and private land.

To ensure compliance, the Forest Practices Authority proactively audits the forest practices plans and, in instances of non-compliance, the authority can issue a range of penalties under the act. So, as many people are aware, the nature of swift parrots and their recovery is complex due to their life cycle, migration and specific habitat protection, and recovery of the species, therefore, requires coordinated action across multiple sectors on both public and private land on the mainland and here in Tasmania.

The government remains committed to supporting the long-term swift parrot recovery through inter-agency, inter-governmental and cross-sectoral collaboration and has committed \$1 million to support the recovery of the species. This funding is implementing a range of conservation activities to assist with a long-term protection of the species.

The forest practices system is informed by science and practical implementation and is subject to continual improvement as new information emerges. A review of swift parrot habitat management under the forest practices system is currently underway. So, lots of work is being undertaken to assist with the support of the swift parrot.

Ms FINLAY - Circling back to some comments that Mr Young made at the very beginning of this session about the sardine fishery. There's a lot of exchange around sardine fishery. I had a particular question on that as well. It has been something that I think for probably for more than a decade has been considered in Tasmania, and I appreciate your comments about seeking to ensure you get the highest and best use of the resource.

I would love to make sure that we land it and process it in Tasmania and we don't lose the opportunity - by taking our time - to South Australia or somewhere else. There has been concerns expressed from people interested in the fishery of that risk. I don't think in any of the exchanges this morning there was actually a time line provided for a decision on the sardine fishery. Wondering if you can enlighten the committee when you expect that there will be a decision around how to manage the sardine fishery?

Mr ABETZ - Would you mind, sorry, repeating the question?

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Ms FINLAY - It's a fishery in Commonwealth waters. We obviously want to land the opportunity in Tasmania so we get the value out of the processing and the fishery here. It has been in consideration for some time - 10 years suggested, maybe more - and there are concerns that by not making a decision as quickly as possible we could lose the fishery to somewhere like South Australia, who have been more aggressive and could actually soak up that fishery.

My question is: what is the time frame for a decision on the management of the fishery in Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - Well, we first of all and, as I said before, it's a step-by-step process. IMAS has to provide us with a last bit of information to tell us about the extent of the biomass and then what is a reasonable take from that biomass to retain sustainability, and the amount of that catch will undoubtedly determine the extent of interest, commercial interest, in this particular fishery.

You can be assured that I will do absolutely everything I can to ensure that the fish that are caught are landed in Tasmania, processed and dealt with in Tasmania. It is in Commonwealth waters. I'm not sure if we've got an agreement with the Commonwealth that we manage that on behalf of the Commonwealth.

Ms WILSON - An offshore constitutional agreement, part of the Bass Strait.

Mr ABETZ - Right. There is an offshore constitutional agreement. I remember getting my head around all that in a previous life, and I am just not sure as to the exact detail of north-west waters.

Ms FINLAY - This being my first question, it's still the same question, but the question is: for many other things asked today, you do have target time frames for delivering outcomes. Yes, IMAS has to do the work; yes, you have to review it; yes, we have to make sure it is sustainable. What is the targeted timeframe for delivering a decision on the sardine fishery?

Mr ABETZ - From my point of view, yesterday, but we do have to get things in place and I think the department is under no illusion as to my interest in seeing this new fishery being made available should the science stack up for the benefit of Tasmanian jobs and wealth creation.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. To my second question, then. There has been some long-term consideration and shifts in the consideration of the management of the calamari fishery. I was wondering if you could share with the committee your current thinking about management of calamari fishery.

Mr ABETZ - Where is Mr Garland when you need him?

Ms FINLAY - Well, you know, it's probably good that he is not here if he had a conflict of interest.

Mr ABETZ - Mr Garland and I have had discussions, as, might I add, have other calamari fishers from around the state. What I have done thus far is to - and I will get the dates right - close the fishery from the 1 September to the end of October. There are arguments that it should be extended to August-September rather than September-October, et cetera. There are

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a lot of competing views on that, and it won't surprise you that many fishers have differing views. I'm putting all that together, and I'm also looking at whether we have a statutory review - is that the term?

Ms WILSON - Yes. Review of the management plan.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. It is called a statutory review, and that then requires under the legislation for there to be consultation, et cetera, before a plan is determined.

Ms FINLAY - On licensing or on the season opening or closing?

Mr ABETZ - On all matters, as I understand it. The season I can do by signature, and I have done that -

Ms FINLAY - But you are reopening consideration of the licensing framework?

Mr ABETZ - Licensing? Would that be -

Ms FINLAY - I would love to know what you are thinking is, minister, because it has been a moveable feast. Obviously, there is deep interest in -

Mr ABETZ - It has been, and the price of calamari is relatively good, Mr Garland tells me. It's a good fishery. We want to keep it sustainable and I am exercising -

Ms FINLAY - I am more interested in the access; there have been ongoing concerns about people either meeting or not meeting the requirements for when the investment decision notice was made and, as I understand it, there has been some change in thinking around that. I was wanting to get an understanding of your current thinking on how you are progressing with consideration of licensing access.

Mr ABETZ - What I can tell you is that a lot of thinking is going on as we speak, but no firm decisions have been made. The one firm decision I have made is the closure of the fishery from 1 September to the end of October to help protect the biomass in the breeding season. Calamari are amazing creatures; they only last for one year, I understand, so they breed and die. The pressure on the fishery is there, especially given the prices, and we want to keep it sustainable.

What is the best way forward? I think for nearly every fisher in the sector, there is a slightly different or nuanced approach, so I am trying to get all of that together with the department, and we will come to -

Ms FINLAY - Thank you, minister.

Ms BADGER - Minister, the contentious coalmine lease for the east coast - that is lease 4M/2012 -

Mr ABETZ - Is that the Cornwall one?

Ms BADGER - Yes, I believe so. Minister, that has been -

PUBLIC

Mr SHELTON - Is that where Bob Brown was going to put his power station?

Ms BADGER - I wasn't even born when this proposal happened. I'm not sure, to be honest. I am living in 2024. That has been listed for 14 months as pending renewal. I was just wondering, minister, if you could enlighten us on what's stalling the decision on this matter and when we might expect one.

Mr ABETZ - As I understand it, the lease number you're talking about is for HardRock Coal Mining Pty Ltd.

Ms BADGER - I am.

Mr ABETZ - Which has now called itself Hydrogen Ready Carbon Mining Pty Ltd, is investigating the potential for coal resources for mining lease ML4M/2012 and exploration licence EL16/2010, south of Fingal. The nature of the coal seams in this area means that mining would be from an underground operation. It's currently pending renewal. It has been helpfully suggested that any further questions should be referred to this man here. If you've got further questions, I will defer to the Director of Mines.

Mr MORTON - Regarding that mining lease application, yes, the company applied for a renewal last year in accordance with the requirements of the act. The reason it has taken this length of time is that MRT has been seeking further information from the company. MRT has written to the company seeking any final information they wish to provide so we can finalise our position and move forward.

Ms BADGER - Thank you, so no set timeframe at the moment?

Mr MORTON - Shortly.

Ms BADGER - Shortly?

Mr MORTON - Yes.

Ms BADGER - Sure. Back to you, minister. The proponent of that coal mine wants to use the coal for hydrogen, as you said. The company has previously stated that it has been receiving support from the Rockliff government to find a site for the hydrogen plant component of the project. Can you please explain if the government has been providing any kind of advice or assistance to the company? I believe it also operates under Paladin Hydrogen.

Mr ABETZ - That, I think, would be in the ministerial area of Mr Duigan as the Minister for Energy and Renewables. With hydrogen production, I don't have any ministerial oversight in this area.

Mr SHELTON - Many constituents in my electorate love to drop a line in and catch a feed of fish. Our compatriot, the Attorney-General, often talks about these fishing exploits and it would be lovely to have more time to do some fishing. No doubt you're in the same boat, minister. What's the government doing to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Tasmanian recreational fishing sector?

Mr ABETZ - Would it be fair to say that until I got this gig, I wasn't all that acquainted with the anglers in the state. I can tell you that they are a bunch of wonderful people and I was at a wonderful dinner in New Norfolk the other night, where the local anglers association had their prizegiving. It was a most enjoyable evening and you got to see a wonderful cross-section of our community, all absolutely passionate about trout fishing and angling. It made me realise that Mr Barnett was not one on his own but there are many other people in the Tasmanian community who share his passion.

In recognition of that passion and interest in the Tasmanian community, as a government we have committed to supporting and growing freshwater angling participation in our state. We've, in effect, provided \$75,000 to waive junior inland angling fees for a further three years; there's \$150,000 made available for a tagged trout promotion over three years; a further \$220,000 to Anglers Alliance Tasmania over three years to support junior fishing education programs and management of webcams so that anglers can check the weather conditions for free before heading to the lakes for a fishing trip.

These recent commitments build on previous ongoing commitments of \$1 million over four years for improved facilities and improved access to support inland fishing. It is part and parcel of the culture of our state, and it also provides some important tourism dollars to our state where people from around the world come to fish for our trout. It's a wonderful community activity where everybody, irrespective of their socioeconomic situation, can participate.

We also get relatively high-wealth individuals from other parts of Australia and, indeed, other parts of the world partaking in that fishery. It is very important, and whilst I have stewardship of Inland Fisheries, I will be doing my very best to make sure that it's not only maintained but grows.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, we may as well keep with the theme on Inland Fisheries, which is globally recognised and significantly important. Up until recently it had its funding frozen and it was finding it difficult to maintain that quality across a whole range of areas. First, is Inland Fisheries subject to the efficiency in the same way -

Mr ABETZ - Yes, it is. Could I invite the acting director to the table, please?

CHAIR - Would the acting director please state his name?

Dr WILKINSON - Dr Ryan Wilkinson, Acting Director of Inland Fisheries.

Ms FINLAY - I'm just wondering if you can outline the efficiencies plan for Inland Fisheries.

Dr WILKINSON - At this point in time, we've been insulated from the efficiency savings or the commitment there. My role as the Director for Inland Fisheries is to ensure that we have fiscal responsibility and continue to manage our budget efficiently, and as you've alluded to, we've had some challenges in the past in terms of our budget.

My commitment is to continue to ensure that we're delivering our obligations under the *Inland Fisheries Act*, focusing on our commitments to support and maintain the recreational fishery and do important work in terms of pest fish management and native fish conservation. I will make my best endeavours to ensure that we can do that work and meet those obligations

under our existing budget. We're always looking for ways of being as efficient as possible in terms of how we deliver our service.

Ms FINLAY - I understand that you've had to be in recent years. Can I ask a question around Inland Fisheries, but particular to my electorate of Bass? Recently, I've had a large number of people express concern to me around the eels that end up in the Tamar River along the banks of Royal Park and down near the Tailrace Centre that come through the hydro dam. I am just wondering what plan is in place to reduce the number of eels that go through the power station each year? It's confronting, I think, for the community to see that and not good for the eels.

Dr WILKINSON - My understanding of that situation is that Hydro Tasmania invested a significant amount of money - I don't have the exact figure - back in 2020 to build a bypass for the eels. Since that time -

Ms FINLAY - It's not working.

Dr WILKINSON - Whether it's working or not, I'm not 100 per cent sure. I think they've got video evidence to suggest that some eels are coming down. Obviously, a lot of them still go through the turbine.

That matter was referred to the Inland Fisheries Service in March of this year by a private citizen. Under the *Inland Fisheries Act*, the hydro-electric corporation is actually immune - so there's various provisions in the act in terms of fish barriers and passage of fish through those barriers. That doesn't apply to the hydro-electric corporation. I know Biosecurity Tasmania have also looked into that situation as well. It doesn't fit neatly under their legislation, and I believe the EPA and also the water management branch have looked at it as well. But I don't think there's a practical solution to that at this point in time.

One thing that we do as a service is annual monitoring of the yield populations in a couple of locations, but in particular the Tailrace in Riverside. We monitor the returning elvers that come back into that system. We will commence that work in October. That will run through to January. We do a fishing effort over - when you drive past you may see our nets in the system there. We actually take those elvers above the dam, and restock accordingly. That solves the issue of passage backup in the system. The issue of the yields coming down into the turbine is a bit more of a challenging problem.

Ms FINLAY - I wasn't going to raise it. I attempted to come to an understanding on this last year. Since you've raised the elvers, there is some relocation of those up into the dam. Is there also a commercial arrangement where there's funds earned by the sale of the elvers?

Dr WILKINSON - There has been, historically.

Ms FINLAY - It's not continuing?

Dr WILKINSON - It hasn't continued for a while. We did have an inquiry this year to enter into commercial arrangement for the elvers. I think it was an export arrangement. We're not entering into that arrangement this year. That's a resourcing question. It has happened in the past. It hasn't happened recently.

PUBLIC

Ms BADGER - In January this year, the former minister approved the renewal of Venture Minerals mine lease at Riley Creek. That's 5M2012. That had been pending renewal for two years. Within days of that lease being renewed, Venture had put that mine lease on the market. Was the Department aware of the company's intention to sell at the time that they renewed the lease?

Mr ABETZ - In the brief I have specifically, there is nothing to tell me that we were advised of the intention. We were only advised of the intention to sell after the election.

Ms BADGER - At the time of that lease renewal, Venture was in financial freefall. They were lurching from capital-raising to capital-raising with only a few months of operating cash that was available, and no clear source of income. How did Venture meet the requirements under the *Mineral Resources Development Act* (MRDA) for applicants to demonstrate their financial capacity to carry out their mining plan?

Mr MORTON - The renewal was approved in January. The decision around the sale was made in in July. At the time, we stepped through our normal process in looking at the requirements of the act. I haven't got the details in front of me. It met the requirements of the act, so we provided a recommendation that it should be approved.

Ms BADGER - Is it normal process for a company that has no ability to demonstrate they have a source of income to undertake that mining program to be renewed? I'm happy to take the details on notice, but I hope that's not normal process.

Mr MORTON - I don't have the specifics in front of me, but they met the requirements of the act when we did the test.

Mr SHELTON - We're talking fishing. There's river fishing. Our property is on the Liffey, and I've had great times with the grandchildren down on the Liffey River. Not too many big fish; they do the fishing. The Central Highlands is where the bulk of the brown trout fishing happens. That's predominantly in Lyons with Ms Badger's electorate and mine. It's a beautiful spot up on the Central Highlands.

Ms BADGER - It is.

Mr SHELTON - It is sort of out of this world, when you get in beside a lake and you look around and there's just nothing else, only the wilderness around you and the water in front of you and that sort of thing. It's a marvellous place to be. Our initiative to encourage new anglers to take up trout fishing must be good for the soul. It also must be good for mental health. There's some positives there. I would like to hear more that initiative, please.

Mr ABETZ - Getting young people involved in an outdoor activity must be of benefit in a whole range of areas, and you've touched on them. Getting young people off these devices and holding something else, namely a fishing line and casting for fish, breathing the fresh, cool air and experiencing the wonderful opportunities that Tasmania has to offer is very important generally for people's mental health. It is also important for the bonding between kids and their parents, where it was a family adventure or venture to go out and go fishing, and that's what impressed me at the dinner I was at in New Norfolk.

It really was something to behold in terms of societal family harmony, mentoring, et cetera. The only time that there were squabbles was who caught the biggest fish, the most fish and all that sort of stuff, but it was all very good humoured. That is why we have said that with junior fishers there is a waiver on the licensing fee for them. That has an estimated cost to the budget of about \$75,000, and we think that is a very good investment in the young people who might be interested.

If I recall correctly, at the dinner I was told that the number of junior anglers has increased. For junior anglers aged 18 to 21 there is a half-price fee. What impressed me at the dinner - which you were at as well, acting director - was that Inland Fisheries made a couple of those available for an auction or a raffle prize. The people that won them grabbed them and said, 'We are going to give these to a couple of young people that we know'.

We are trying to do everything we can to encourage people into this wonderful outdoor activity, which includes putting wonderful food on our tables.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, I was grateful for the response from Inland Fisheries in terms of being insulated from efficiencies. I wonder if you can outline the efficiency dividend budget plan for the marine division, and in doing so, whether you could table that, please? I acknowledge that in the past when you've been asked for a complete department that wasn't okay, but just for the Marine Division. I would have thought that was appropriate.

Mr ABETZ - I don't know whether that is able to be dissected.

Ms WILSON - Minister, I think I'd start generally with the fact that the agency has established a budget sustainability project. It's really important that savings are achievable and will not compromise the department's capability or impact on the government's priorities and core services for the Tasmanian community. Importantly, we have a principle that they also not impact the safety and wellbeing of staff, nor will they compromise organisational capability. We are looking to do things like identify duplicate workflows, learning processes and how programs are administered. Our initial focus is on savings from discretionary expenditure on supplies, consumables, travel, consultants, advertising, accommodation and fleet usage. The savings target for 2024-25 for Business, Industry and Resources is \$50,000.

Ms FINLAY - That's across your allocation, not across the agency? You opened up by talking about the agency.

Mr ABETZ - That's marine.

Ms WILSON - Yes, for 2024-25.

Ms FINLAY - Do you have that there and able to be tabled?

Mr ABETZ - We'll take it on notice and we'll see. As I understand the ruling from the Chair - sorry, it's the other way round.

Ms FINLAY - If the Chair has previously ruled that you could table that, I would love to see and consider that.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - We can, but there may be other elements on the page, so allow us to take that on notice to see if anything needs to be taken off that page to give you the information that you seek.

Dr BROAD - I want to talk about the Avebury mine for a second. Concerns have been raised by some shareholders in the collapsed Mallee Resources about the apparent predatory behaviour of offtake partner and major lender Hartree. Does the minister have any concerns? There was backing sought from the minister to discuss with the federal government the potential for Hartree to take over the mine.

Mr ABETZ - Overall, that's a corporate or a commercial matter for the owners of the mine to deal with, but the government understands that the Australian Government's Foreign Investment Review Board has approved Hartree to take full ownership of the Avebury mine and that the company is working through the change of ownership.

Dr BROAD - You don't have any concerns about Hartree's ownership?

Mr ABETZ - Whether I have or don't have concerns is immaterial to the decision that was made by the federal government's Foreign Investment Review Board.

Dr BROAD - No, but as mines minister you have responsibility for the licences and the leases, et cetera. You don't have any concerns?

Mr ABETZ - The licences and leases are provided under the statutory framework, and if they meet those conditions, and the federal government's Foreign Investment Review Board has approved Hartree, I can have all sorts of concerns, but at the end of the day, if they abide by the statutory requirements, I don't think there's anything that either the Director of Mines or I can do.

Ms BADGER - Minister, I heard your comments earlier that one of the concerns with the Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative (EDGI) scheme is the lack of transparency that is publicly available in terms of who is being awarded the grants and how much for. It's pretty standard practice for similar grant schemes that are regularly rolled out and have been continuing - this one's been going on since 2018 - to have these details periodically updated on a website. Will you implement such a website for the EDGI scheme?

Mr ABETZ - The actual amount of money made available is publicly announced, then the program guidelines are publicly announced. The department makes an assessment of the applications and then the successful applicants are also publicly announced.

Ms BADGER - Where are they publicly announced, sorry, minister?

Mr ABETZ - In a press release that I did. It's on the MRT website.

Ms BADGER - Every time those grants are awarded from the minister, there's a press release announcing who is awarded the money and how much for?

Mr ABETZ - I think it's the third tranche now that we've just opened up, and the first two lots have been -

PUBLIC

Mr MORTON - EDGI provides grants of up to 50 per cent for direct drilling capped at \$70,000 if they're using helicopters. EDGI's been around, as was noted earlier, since 2018. It's really focused around greenfields. As outlined in the publicly available EDGI guidelines, which are up on our website - we administer the program. Applications are competitive and are assessed by a committee comprising of two staff from MRT, an industry representative and an academic. After a round, they'll sit down and form a view and provide recommendations.

The major feature of the initiative is that we administer it from within existing resources. This ensures that the amount of money available to applicants is maximised. There are requirements we have in terms of the grant conditions.

Ms BADGER - They're very tight conditions and we understand that. Sometimes the company that's awarded a grant puts out a media release, so we know that they've received it. We understand it's a joint grant system, so they're only awarded the money when the work's being done in a specific way, hence the low acquittal rate. Not all of that information is public. The information that we have has been received through multiple RTIs. We are asking for a more public and transparent way moving forward so that any Tasmanian can see exactly who was awarded which grant and for how much.

Mr MORTON - The successful applicants for each round and the final technical reports that the companies provide for each completed grant are made publicly available on MRT's website. We make as much information of publicly available as we can.

Mr ABETZ - That is why there was some consternation on this side of the table with the press release and the referral to the Auditor-General, because there is, as you've just heard from the director, transparency in this area and in this program.

Ms BADGER - We will definitely go and crosscheck everything that is on the website to what came back in the RTI, because there were comments from the office about the lack of such a website, which is standard practice for other grants. I appreciate what you're saying, we'll crosscheck it and no doubt come back to you.

My second question is about the new leaseholder of the Riley mine site, which is Gold Valley. They have quite a chequered financial history. They operate under similar names but with the same CEO and board they've had multiple insolvencies, voluntary windups, et cetera. ASIC has deregistered Gold Valley Iron. How is it that the minister of the department found Gold Valley to be a fit and proper company to hold a mine lease in Tasmania, and, as we've established from a previous question, what is the fit and proper person test?

Mr ABETZ - As I understand it, the sale was a commercial transaction, being a sale of the company and its assets. Therefore, the transfer of the mining lease was not required.

Ms BADGER - Weren't you required as the minister to sign off on the transfer of that lease as one of the assets through the sale?

Mr ABETZ - No.

Mr SHELTON - I appreciate the Greens' interest in mining today. I would have thought the Greens would be supportive of mining that will support a renewable energy future. As we know, renewables and the mining that goes along with solar panels is all part of the renewable

energy future. My question, minister, is can the government provide an update on the Critical Minerals Strategy, and what this important strategy will deliver for the industry?

Mr ABETZ - We are all the beneficiaries of mining activities. Any one of us that's got an iPad, laptop, or mobile phone in front of us, we are the beneficiaries of the mining sector. We rely very heavily on the sector. We need to be encouraging of it because it helps maintain and indeed improve our lifestyle. Constant negativity from certain quarters about our mining sector is quite short-sighted. In relation to critical minerals, which are so important for research, innovation, et cetera, we as a government are determined to update the critical minerals strategy. As part of that we've made \$3 million available to supercharge our efforts in this space. These funds will support a range of initiatives including exploration, grants, investment attraction, and collaboration with industry to accelerate critical mineral projects.

I can advise that the strategy will focus on four key objectives: increasing exploration, supporting the development of critical mineral projects, enhancing on-island processing capacity, and growing Tasmania's trade and investment footprint in critical minerals. Critical minerals, including rare earth elements, tin and tungsten are essential for everything from electric vehicles to renewable energy technologies. We as the government are very supportive of that for the innovations that we as a community expect.

In the geopolitical circumstances in which we find ourselves, it is vitally important that the Western world have a supply of some of these critical minerals. Tasmania may potentially have a role to play. That is where elements such as tungsten can become very important. That is why we as a government are seeking to promote the critical minerals sector. Hopefully there will be developments for Tasmania, creating jobs, creating wealth, and also hoping to secure innovation and developments that will improve our lifestyles.

Dr BROAD - I want to talk about Copper Mines of Tasmania in Queenstown. The new owner, Sibanye-Stillwater, identified, as part of their due diligence, some conflict in a couple of acts that were put in place. That would be in the copper mines of Tasmania act 1999 and the Mt Lyell acid drainage remediation act of 2003. These may actually impact their operations and prevent them from managing acid mine drainage in an appropriate manner.

From what I remember, the Mt Lyell acid drainage remediation act was put in place to try and facilitate treatment capture of copper from a \$10 million project or something that never went ahead. Is the government going to consider amending these acts or is there another solution that's been identified?

Mr ABETZ - The government has committed to ensuring that the specific legislative framework relevant to Mt Lyell Mine is reviewed and amended to ensure it remains relevant to contemporary operations. Work is commenced on this undertaking with an introduction in parliament of proposed amendments expected once negotiations are finalised. The current environmental liability transfers with the sale of CMT, and the Crown, retains the obligations for the historic environmental issues of the site as per the *Copper Mines of Tasmania Pty. Ltd. (Agreement) Act 1999*.

Dr BROAD - In the past there was also funding promised, I think \$25 million, if someone were to restart Copper Mines of Tasmania, to get it out of current care and maintenance. Is that funding still available?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, it is.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, back to fisheries. I'm interested in rates of compliance in our fisheries over the last 12 months, whether it be in our recreational or commercial fishing, with the implementation of some new regulations. Sometimes clients being compliant is confusing when there are borders and landing areas, particularly in different seasons when there are different requirements. Can you outline the number of breaches of fishing regulation laws in Tasmania and if there are any patterns or trends emerging that indicate any organised activity?

Mr ABETZ - We'll be with you shortly.

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. Between 5 April 2023 and 10 July 2024, fisheries officers in NRET detected 67 cases involving potential contraventions of commercial fisheries laws that warranted further enquiries. Of those, 13 cases were referred to Tasmania Police for further investigation and inquiries are continuing in relation to four matters. Fisheries officers in the Department served 11 infringements and 36 caution notices in relation to these matters. The remaining matters are being dealt with via other departmental processes, which include ministry sanctions and penalties. There are currently three matters in the initial assessment phase. That's relating to our commercial fisheries.

Ms FINLAY - What about recreationally?

Ms WILSON - I'm not sure that I have any information on that, through you, minister.

Ms FINLAY - From time to time there's concern expressed around some members of the community taking more than the allowable take around shorelines and some areas that are easier to access. There has been concern in the past about some trends emerging around it perhaps being a little bit organised. Is there any comment on that, or current consideration of how best to address that? Given that you've got commercial compliance, I would have thought there would be some recreational compliance numbers as well.

Ms WILSON - We take a compliance approach around education, informing and taking actions at appropriate times. As I said, I don't have information relating to recreational fisheries. As for the issue around patterns of behaviour, we simply monitor that and, if we thought there was some sort of commercial element emerging, we could advise Tasmania Police.

Ms FINLAY - Do we not track the numbers or?

CHAIR - Ms Badger has the call.

Ms BADGER - I am only new to parliament, I wasn't around in the '80s unfortunately, but I note some hostilities around Bob Brown's coalmine and the sentiment around it - we absolutely need new minerals moving forward.

Dr BROAD - Coal power station.

Ms BADGER - Yes, sorry. Same, same, involving coal.

Ms FINLAY - Not quite.

PUBLIC

Ms BADGER - We have new minerals. Will you rule out providing any more leases to anyone doing any kind of coal exploration in the state? Be that potential for a power station or mining of any sort.

Mr ABETZ - I doubt that there would be any request for a coalmine or for a power station. As I understand it, we do need coal for the making of cement at Railton. The question is, do we make our cement here in Tasmania, or do we import the clinker and other stuff from Thailand and elsewhere and belch out bunker fuel through the funnels of the ships as they bring it to Australia? This is always the balancing act. If you don't want a wooden floor in your house, you might want one made of concrete. If you want that, you might need cement. Then the question is, where do you get your cement from?

I'm not willing to rule anything in or out, other than I can't see anybody seeking a coalmine for the purposes of a coal-fired power station given that we have such a wonderful history of hydroelectricity generation in this state and the suggestion that a coal-fired power station would be a good idea, has long been rejected.

Ms BADGER - Absolutely. We should probably stop bringing it up now. Minister, what's the average time that we're seeing leases on the site say for the last decade that are pending approval? That, as we understand, are still valid, but that are listed as pending approval and are going through that process?

Mr ABETZ - Is that after exploration and seeking a lease or what sort of?

Ms BADGER - The ones that are listed on MRT's site as pending approval.

Mr ABETZ - Right.

Mr MORTON - There's always a number of tenements that will be pending renewal at any time. It's important to note that companies can continue to operate, as I was saying before, under the act, while the assessment of the renewal is undertaken, they can continue to operate. On average, we take around three to six months for pending renewals. What we always do is prioritise new applications and transfers because the pending renewals, they can continue to operate. But three to six months is on average and we're always looking at what we can do to improve those times.

Mr SHELTON - It's pleasing to see such positivity around the mining industry and we know how critical it is to the economy of Tasmania. I'd also like to express that, as far as jobs go in regional communities, it's absolutely critical.

We regularly hear from some quarters about increasing the royalties that miners pay. Can the government provide an update on the current state of the mining sector and outline the key benefits it delivers to Tasmania? I heard you earlier today saying we don't want to kill the goose with the golden egg, so can you provide the committee with an update on the significant contribution that mining makes to Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - Apart from the jobs and the support it provides local regional communities, the mining sector provides a substantial stream of royalties for the benefit of Tasmanians. As a result, the mining sector remains one of the key drivers for our economic and social success in employment, investment, and state revenue.

The mining sector is thriving with major players such as MMG's Rosebery mine, the Renison tin mine, and Grange Resources' Savage River iron-ore mine continuing to provide long-term economic stability for the west coast and other regions. Mining is a cornerstone of the Tasmanian economy and, as I mentioned in previous answers, it provided \$52 million in royalties. These royalties fund critical public services, including health, education, and infrastructure, benefiting all Tasmanians.

The sector supports over 5000 direct jobs, many of which are on the west coast. Importantly, the mining sector also generates thousands of additional indirect jobs through supply chains and associated industries. In the 12 months to May 2024, mining and minerals processing industries employed 6800 people, generated 65 per cent of the state's export value and produced over \$2.9 billion worth of product. The state is a significant global player in the production of minerals such as zinc, copper, tin, and tungsten, with these commodities exported to markets across the world. Mineral exploration in Tasmania remains high with \$38.8 million in expenditure in 2023.

In summary, Tasmania's mining sector is integral to our economic future, contributing substantial revenue, jobs, and export value, while continuing to attract significant private sector investments that strengthen our entire state. That is why we, as a government, have written to Tanya Plibersek, the Minister for the Environment, saying that the tailing dam proposed for the west coast is vitally important for the longevity of the mining sector and for the jobs, and the wealth of the royalty stream. We hope a sensible decision will be made and that this important wealth generator and job creator is not prejudiced and indeed closed down by environmentalism generated from those areas of Australia that are most unsustainable. That is, the inner-city suburbs that see so much asphalt and concrete everywhere and hardly any trees. They benefit from the mining sector, but then seek to salve their conscience by voting for those candidates who seek to close down the very sector that they rely on.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, reflecting back on the fisheries question before. With the change in the rules and the significant changes for recreational fisheries, I would have thought we would track any contraventions to the rules. Do we not carry any stats for that? You were able to provide the commercial stats but not the recreational fishing stats. I mean overtake, undersized, boat limits - there are all sorts of changes to the rules. You talk about education, awareness, communication, but knowing how well the Tasmanian fishes are doing, I would have thought would be a good thing.

Ms WILSON - I'm sure we have them.

Mr ABETZ - The marine police do monitor the recreational fishery and they have indicated in the recent department -

Ms FINLAY - Do they not monitor the commercial fishery?

Mr ABETZ - Both. Sorry, I thought you were asking about the recreational fishery.

Ms FINLAY - I am. We have the commercial stats. We don't have the recreational stats. I'm not sure why that would be.

Mr ABETZ - Tasmania Police, undoubtedly, would be able to provide that.

PUBLIC

Ms FINLAY - You just provided the commercial stats.

Mr ABETZ - I'm assuming that is where we've got the information from, so we'll ask. I'll take that on notice if you like and see if we can get some information.

Ms FINLAY - I'm happy that you take that on notice. Maybe my final question for the night.

Mr ABETZ - That's a promise. I won't continue answering.

Ms FINLAY - TasWater play a significant role in the impact of some of our fishes both recreational and commercial. There are some sectors of our fishery that are impacted more greatly by TasWater spills, and the operation of their assets. What role you will take as minister to actively advocate on behalf of our fisheries to ensure TasWater's management of their assets has limited impact on our commercial fisheries, aquaculture, and others?

Mr ABETZ - And especially our shellfish.

Ms FINLAY - Yes, without correlating those two things in the public place.

Mr ABETZ - Be assured that as a minister with responsibility in this area, I will do everything I possibly can to ensure that TasWater, and indeed any other government business enterprise, lives up to its responsibility to be part of team Tasmania and not only be concerned about its own discrete area of operation, but fully understand their responsibility to the wider community, and that includes the oyster and mussel growing sectors.

As you may have heard me say the other night, one of the things that endears me to the oyster industry is, not only what they assert oysters do, not that I've ever known that to be the case, but, more importantly, they are largely family run small businesses. For them to try to fight the spillage from TasWater becomes very difficult, so anything I can do to champion the cause you can be assured I will seek to do.

You said that was the final question.

Ms FINLAY - One more question, Chair?

CHAIR - My apologies. The time for estimates of the Minister for Business, Industry and Resources has expired. The Committee will convene tomorrow morning at 9.00 a.m.

Mr ABETZ - Before you stop the recording, I thank all the officials that have assisted me during these hearings.

CHAIR - Thank you very much everyone.

The committee adjourned at 6.44 p.m.