



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Guy Barnett MP

Monday 17 November 2025

MEMBERS

Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC (Chair)

Hon Luke Edmunds MLC

Hon Mike Gaffney MLC

Hon Casey Hiscutt MLC

Hon Meg Webb MLC

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

PUBLIC

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. GUY BARNETT MP

Deputy Premier, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation,
Minister for Small Business, Trade and Consumer Affairs.

Ministerial Staff

Jim Dunham

Chief of Staff

Eliza Jones

Senior Adviser

Kristers Niklavs Bosveld

Adviser

Department of Justice

Kristy Bourne

Secretary

Pauline van Adrichem

Deputy Secretary, Justice and Reform

Jennifer Lee

A/Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Governance and Major Projects

Ross Smith

Deputy Secretary

Colin Shepherd

Deputy Secretary, Corrective Services

Gavin Wailes

Director, Finance

Bruce Paterson

Director, Strategic Legislation and Policy

Penelope Ikedife

Registrar, Supreme Court

Jane Cook

Administrator of Courts

Andrew Smith

Chief Information Officer

PUBLIC

Ann Owen

Registrar, Births Deaths and Marriages

Ross Thomas

A/Principal Registrar, TASCAT

Krissten Wylie

Director, Tasmania Legal Aid

Pia Saturno

A/Anti-Discrimination Commissioner

Andrew Hawkey

Tasmanian Electoral Commissioner

Louise Coe

Independent regulator

Chelsea Trubody-Jager

Director, Crown Law

Narelle Pamplin

Director of Prisons

Christopher Carney

Director, Community Corrections

Amber Smith

A/Director, Strategic Infrastructure Projects

Wayne Johnson

Director, Monetary Penalties Enforcement Service

Angela Mc Crossen

Executive Director, Justice Support Services

Jeremy Harbottle

Public Guardian

Statutory Authorities**Daryl Coates**

Director of Public Prosecutions

Ellen McKenzie

CEO, Integrity Commission

Grant Davies

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PUBLIC

The Committee met at 9.02 am.

CHAIR - Welcome, everyone, to the first day of budget Estimates. Thank you, Attorney-General, for being here with your team. I'll introduce the members of Committee Estimates B at the table. We have the Honourable Luke Edmunds, the member for Pembroke; the Honourable Mike Gaffney, member for Mersey; myself, Rosemary Armitage, the member for Launceston; the Honourable Casey Hiscutt, member for Montgomery; and the Honourable Meg Webb, member for Nelson. We also have secretary support from James and Julie, and we have Gaye from Hansard. This is our team at the table, Attorney-General, and we invite you to introduce your team.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much. Sitting on my left is Kristy Bourne, the secretary of my department, and Pauline van Adrichem, who's the deputy secretary of my department.

CHAIR - Thank you. If you do wish to take some questions on notice, the committee will consolidate outstanding responses to the questions and provide them to you by written response. If you could provide a brief opening statement, and the committee will then have some short questions around the overview. We'll then proceed to questions on the output lines, starting with the Supreme Court. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the opportunity. Thank you, Chair, and to members of the committee for the opportunity to be here for budget Estimates for another - I was going to say 'another year' - for the second time this year.

CHAIR - We didn't quite make it before.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. But, look, it's good to be here. Certainly, the budget continues our strong plans of investing in our justice system, ensuring an efficient and accessible justice system that supports improving community safety and also offender rehabilitation. As Attorney-General, Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitations portfolios, they form a critical part of the role of government in delivering access to justice and protecting and ensuring community safety as a priority. All of us want Tasmania to be the safest place to live and to work for ourselves, our family, and for members of the community. Unfortunately, there are comparatively a small number of people who, for various reasons, put other people's safety and well-being at risk or harm others, so it's a core part of our justice systems to respond to those cases, hold those perpetrators to account, hopefully rehabilitate those responsible so that they don't commit further offences or endanger others in the future.

It's important to note that many of the decisions within the justice system are made independently by the courts, and I want to acknowledge upfront all those in our justice system, all the staff across my department of Justice, but particularly those on the frontline who are tasked with dealing on a daily basis with offenders who, in many cases, exhibit dangerous, violent or other forms of unacceptable behaviour. To highlight our Correctional Services officers and the staff in the prison system who do such a good job, and I thank them for their service. They deal professionally with those offenders on a daily basis and, in doing so, help to keep the community safe. Having said that as an opening remark, Chair, I pass back to you and members of the committee.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do members have any questions on the overview?

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - I might clarify something on the overview, if I might.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Attorney-General, I'm not sure where any funding for Closing the Gap plan 2025-28 exists within the DoJ appropriation. There are key targets that DoJ is the lead agency for, so I'm just wanting to clarify if there's a line item that I should bring those questions to or whether it's something to deal with here in overview.

Mr BARNETT - Well, let's just check on that. I'll just check with my secretary. We do absolutely have responses to Closing the Gap, but we'll just check the best place for those questions. Yes. In terms of Closing the Gap, most of those questions probably relate to the Corrections portfolio.

Ms WEBB - Okay.

Mr BARNETT - But more than happy to deal with -

Ms WEBB - Which line item would that be?

Mr BARNETT - There's no particular line item, I'm advised.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Shall I ask them now?

Mr BARNETT - You can ask them now or in the Corrections, whichever you prefer.

Ms WEBB - May I? Thank you. Yes. I'll go now, if that's okay with you, Chair.

CHAIR - That's fine.

Mr BARNETT - Sure.

Ms WEBB - Actually, as a positive suggestion, it might be good to have Closing the Gap nicely highlighted in some specific way in future budgets so that we can see how that's tracking. My questions relate to the DoJ elements of the Closing the Gap plan. Are there specific funding allocations within the Department of Justice budget dedicated to delivering the key actions that it's responsible for against those necessary targets and outcomes that we're trying to achieve?

Mr BARNETT - To start off, Closing the Gap is very important to our government, and of course it covers many parts of government in terms of the corrections and of course the justice system. That's part of the overall answer, and certainly, as the government, we're highly invested in supporting a contemporary, consistent and accountable judicial system. In 2023, our government released the Changing lives, creating futures strategic plan, which continues our strong focus on rehabilitation and reintegration. The issue of overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody is an extremely complex problem right around Australia.

That requires comprehensive and collaborative approach across government. Before I pass to my secretary to address more specifics of the question, we also work across all levels, not just in government but across the community and the federal government to address that overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our custodial settings.

PUBLIC

You've asked some particular parts of that. I might just refer to the secretary to see if she can add to the answer.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Just for clarity, that question was about specific funding allocations within the DoJ budget specific to delivering the actions.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. As the deputy has alluded to, the Department of Justice plays a key role in the overarching justice policy partnership and Closing the Gap initiative led at a Commonwealth level. At a state level, we work with the Peak organisation, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, and other Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and other relevant agencies to progress our initiatives under Closing the Gap.

In terms of specific funding initiatives, noting that the state services recently released the plan for Closing the Gap between 2025 and 2028. It's a strategic priority under our corrections strategic plan. The government has previously funded the Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service to pilot a bail support program trial in the north of the state, providing support to Tasmanian Aboriginals who are bailed or seeking an application for bail.

The government has also invested over \$500,000 until 30 September 2026 in providing Aboriginal cultural well-being supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody, which is provided by virtue of engaging TALS in the employment of two Aboriginal well-being officers to provide those services in the custodial setting. There's a great deal of in-kind contribution that the Department of Justice provides as a representative on the justice policy partnership at a national level. It's also a priority of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General in progressing that reform.

Ms WEBB - How's this?

Mr BARNETT - Can I just add one other thing to that, if I could.

Ms WEBB - Sorry. Yes. I do have a further question to build on that answer.

Mr BARNETT - I was just going to say the National Legal Assistance Program is relevant. I mentioned the federal government before. The legal assistance sector does do an excellent job. We could add to that answer, if you'd like, in terms of the assistance provided through legal assistance partnership with the federal government.

Ms WEBB - Excuse me moving slightly further away. It's just so I can get near a working microphone, apparently. Can I ask about - just following up on that answer, thank you - then in the plan that the secretary mentioned, the 2025-2028 Closing the Gap plan, there are some actions that have due dates in 2025-2026, others that are further forward in the forward estimates. The ones in 2025-2026, can I ask about progress on them. So target 10, action number 48, page 30 of the plan, 'Review evaluation of and consider re-establishing the bail support program'. You mentioned the trial, but I'm wondering where we're up to with that particular action. Is it underway, and what's the timeframe for the review of that program to be undertaken? Is it going to be involving consultation, and will it be completed within the target timeframe?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Perhaps I'll pass it to the secretary.

PUBLIC

Ms BOURNE - Thank you, deputy. Through you. That body of work is under evaluation, and in the meantime, as the deputy referred to, the allocation to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service under the National Access to Justice Partnership puts them in a good position to continue the work that they're doing. But we're very conscious that that particular funding or piloted program, the evaluation, needs to continue so that we can provide them with definitive advice around the future funding specifically for that service.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Attorney-General. So it's targeted for this year being completed in the plan, is that a likely time frame or what's the time frame then that we should expect?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. I'd have to take advice on that from the secretary or the deputy secretary.

Ms WEBB - The evaluation part of it.

Ms van ADRICHEM - The evaluation would be this year, 2025-26, would be considered.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Correct.

Ms van ADRICHEM - Any fund may, through you. The National Access to Justice Partnership, the full allocation onto that has been provided to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service and it does present a significant increase in Commonwealth funding of \$10.318 million over five years for the ATSILS stream, and there's been an uplift in the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service stream as well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I check on the other action that's due for this year, 2025-26, action 49, page 31 of the plan, which is, 'Fund the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service through the National Access to Justice Partnership, the Australian Government and state and territory multilateral agreement for legal services.' Is that on track to be in place by the end of the 2025-26 period?

Ms van ADRICHEM - Through you, minister.

Mr BARNETT -Go ahead.

Ms van ADRICHEM - Yes, that's in place.

Ms WEBB - Great. Thank you.

Ms van ADRICHEM - So that's an additional \$5.48 million over five years.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for clarifying, Sheriff.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks, Chair.

DIVISION 6

Department of Justice

Output group 1.1

Supreme Court Services

CHAIR - Now, our first item, Attorney-General, is Supreme Court Services, and I have the lead question on this. So looking at the 2024-25 annual report, I note the new Chief Justice mentions obviously increasing caseloads and emerging backlogs that I think has been ongoing for some time, but he says, obviously, that it's never acceptable, but innovative approaches coupled with new levels of resourcing proffer the way forward. Can you advise, what are the innovative approaches that are being undertaken to try to reduce the caseload and the backlogs?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for that. In terms of the court backlog, it's an ongoing effort to make a difference. We've already made some significant reforms with the appointment of the Associate Judge to the Supreme Court, which includes the criminal as well as the civil matters and, of course, the allocation of additional TasPol employees over the past few months to assist with the timeliness of disclosure. The Chief Justice, who I'm very pleased, is progressing very positively off court with his colleagues but also across the justice system, and he's certainly working hard on the backlog.

We've also supported the Supreme and Magistrates Courts to review their case management and listing procedures with the aim of reducing decision and finalisation times to ensure the efficient use of court resources. I've also expressed publicly and privately my support for the transfer of the criminal listings from the Director of Public Prosecutions to the Supreme Court to enhance case management and criminal matters, and, as you know, I established the justice forum, I think it was last year, early last year, and that's progressing very positively.

The Chief Justice, Chief Magistrate, DPP, Solicitor-General and all the key legal stakeholders in Tasmania meet during the year on key topics. In the last year we had many meetings, we've addressed the topic of business improvement in our courts and there is a clear focus on that. Part of this budget before us, there's funding for acting judges and that's been extended to 30 June 2027. You might have seen that in the budget and, of course, that's very important to support, but there's a lot more I could say about business improvement in our courts. But that's a short summary, if that assists the committee.

CHAIR - No, that's fine, and I just have one last question before other members might have questions. So how many people are currently held without bail in our gaol, from the Supreme Court?

Mr BARNETT - Okay. So on remand without bail?

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - That's a fair question and we'd need to dig into the details there. So I'll just see if we've got-

CHAIR - Happy to take it on notice, and also, if you could advise the longest time that someone actually has been held without bail and without being found guilty, obviously.

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - Sure. Yes, of course. So let's just see if we can assist the honourable member.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms van ADRICHEM - There's some detail around some of these numbers, so I might just read them out in order. So at 6 November 2025, there were 352 held on orders from either both the Supreme Court and Magistrates Court, 30 held on Supreme Court and Magistrates Court remand orders, 253 held only on Magistrates Court remand orders and 69 held on only Supreme Court remand orders. There were 99 remandees being held on remand who were not concurrently serving a sentence of imprisonment and whose current episode of remand included one or more orders from the Supreme Court.

The median or middle length of time on remand for the 99 remandees was 108 days and the longest days on remand among these remandees is 1377 days, and that particular accused remanded for the longest period was charged with one count of murder and sentencing submissions have been adjourned until December 2025.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do other members have any questions?

Mr BARNETT - No.

CHAIR - I just have one last question for you then, if there are no other questions. I noticed that previously there had been reported unacceptable delays on the part of Tasmania Police in disclosure of documents and that was in-

Mr BARNETT - Sorry, in the?

CHAIR - In the previous annual report.

Mr BARNETT - Right.

CHAIR - Has that actually changed. There were unacceptable delays on the part of Tasmania Police in relation to the disclosure of documents and recordings to defence counsel, which created delays, obviously. Is that still a problem or has that been resolved?

Mr BARNETT - Is that in the Supreme Court annual report?

CHAIR - Supreme Court. Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, we will just have to check that one.

CHAIR - I'm happy for you to take it on notice. My understanding was it was quite a delay with issues coming to court because of information that wasn't received and it was in the previous annual report but as it hadn't been asked.

Mr BARNETT - Let's see. I think the secretary might be able to assist the honourable -

CHAIR - Otherwise I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - I think the secretary might be able to assist.

Ms BOURNE - Thank you, deputy, through you. It's an issue that continues to impact the timeliness of matters through both the Supreme and Magistrates Court. That said, through the Deputies Justice Forum, but also obviously ongoing discussions that we have with the Commissioner of Police, it's an issue that we're continuing to work through, noting the impact of available resources to enable the disclosure of documents in a timely manner and the acceptance of this as being an issue that is one of the many factors that play into how quickly a matter moves through the court during the development of our Criminal and General Act, and some proposed changes to the timeliness of disclosure that are reliant on some system changes that we're obviously progressing as part of the Astria program. So it is an issue, it's one of many and it's something that we talk very openly with our colleagues at Tasmania Police about.

CHAIR - Thank you. So if we move on to the Magisterial Court Services and the Honourable Meg Webb, has some questions.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. I've got a few to run through here so I'll try to be prompt about it. Attorney-General, I see that in the key deliverables table in the budget papers, p112, the Magistrates Court (including coronial and civil divisions) increasing demand and case complexity item has \$800,000 allocated for both the 2025-26 year and the 2026-27, but then nothing after that. So why is it that that drops away? Are you expecting the increasing demand and case complexity to subside after the two years? How will the program deliver a decrease in demand and complexity in the next two years? What does that look like?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks for the question. Obviously, we first of all say that we address these matters on an ongoing basis and going forward, you know, in future budget years, this is an interim budget, as you know, and then the May budget next year will no doubt have a more considered approach. But in terms of the Magistrates Court budget and performance, I want to thank the chief magistrate and the magistrates and the members of the court for their excellent work and delivering a better justice system. It's certainly the highest volume court in Tasmania. It had over 32,000 matters, more than 191,000 individual listings in the 2024-25 year. Criminal, civil, youth justice, child protection, family violence and coronial. I'll just see if we've got more specific details to assist the Honourable Member.

Ms WEBB - Mostly my question was focused on that additional funding being provided across a two-year period, and did you expect the complexity and the demand in cases to decrease after that time?

Mr BARNETT - I think the point I made at my opening remarks that it's been supplemented in the 2025-26 budget with a further funding of \$800,000 per year for two years to address the continued growth and demand for services and complexity of cases, and going forward in terms of future years after that, we'll consider that in the context of future budgets, and, of course, the need at the time. We have a strategic improvement project that we raise with the Justice Forum, the chief magistrate's part of that. So we address these, and we'll attend to them in future budgets as well.

Ms WEBB - Certainly makes the forward Estimates look pretty rosy, doesn't it, when you drop things off in the forward years because of this interim budget and the need to apparently wait till May to think about those years.

PUBLIC

I also note in conjunction with the extra funding dropping away, just in the line item in the table 7.2, the revenue from appropriation table, in the budget papers for this line item, we've got an uplift in 2025-2026, 2026-2027, but then it does drop away going forward. So as well as the additional money not being present in those out years, is there also an actual fundamental core funding drop in the out years in this budget, or does it stay consistent?

Mr BARNETT - Again, I'll pass to the secretary in one moment, but we've got ongoing operational funding of \$500,000 additional per annum to the Magistrates Court for additional resources as it continues to experience growth in both demand for services and complexity of cases resulting in delays in cases being heard and an increased backlog. We've talked about the \$800,000 per year over two years.

The government's also funded strategic improvement projects in recent years which will benefit from the operations of the Magistrates Court in the longer term, including providing funding of \$1.4 million over two years for improvements to audiovisual equipment in the courts and \$7 million per year for the Justice Connect Astria systems report that the secretary referred to a few moments ago. So both those initiatives will improve access to justice for the Tasmanian community. I'll see if the secretary can add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thank you. Through you, Mr Wailes, who the committee knows well, is just seeing if there's any further clarity we can share with the committee. But as you just noted, I think relevant to the reduction in funding over the forward Estimates includes the cessation of some of the funding previously provided for those strategic improvement projects, including funding provided for, or allocated to, both courts for Astria development rather than include Astria development costs as capital. We recorded those against outputs. That's why - or contributes to some of the drop-off over the forward Estimates.

Ms WEBB - It's interesting, Attorney-General, on that, if I may, because normally we'd expect to see a footnote in the budget papers to explain variation across the forward Estimates of programs, for example, concluding or beginning. I'm interested as to why, having provided that detail here, that that wasn't actually put into the budget papers.

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question. Of course, there was not much time to prepare this interim budget. I note that. Of course, we had the election that was forced upon us, but I think the Treasurer and Treasury did the best they could under the circumstances with the limited time. I can't explain that, but I am able to put on the record today, as I have done, those funding initiatives to improve Magistrates Court efficiency, and the secretary, I think, has confirmed that, but we're happy to add to that or assist the honourable members in any way.

Ms WEBB - I'll move on to another question if there's -

Ms BOURNE - Through you, deputy, just to note for the member's benefit, but I do appreciate that having an understanding of the internal workings of the funding allocations, it makes sense, but objectively, it probably could have been clarified further on page 121 of the budget paper. It notes variation in expenses for Supreme Court and Magistrates Court in separate paragraphs, including reflecting a variation in the funding profile for the development costs of the Astria system, but it's not particularly clear in terms of what way it makes the allocation move.

Ms WEBB - Yes, I appreciate that. Thank you.

I would like to ask about staffing and recruitment because we'd seen in the court's 2024-25 annual report, page 11, saying that the court's experienced ongoing challenges in recruitment of staff for new and existing positions across all registries, primarily due to delays in the departmental recruitment processes, the comparatively low banding levels of the positions and the nature of the work.

I also understand that following the completion of the Cornell-McGleenan staffing structure in September 2023, the Magistrates Court is working closely with DoJ to implement all recommendations, including reviewing staffing, bandings, roles, responsibilities and internal processes. Given that and the challenges identified, what changes have been made to ensure that necessary staff across the Magistrates Court can be recruited in a more timely manner?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I think I can update the committee and then pass to the secretary. As a Magistrates Court, there's some 89.4 FTE staff statewide supporting 17 magistrates who are based in four permanent registries: Hobart, Launceston, Burnie, and Devonport. As I indicated earlier, it's the busiest court in Tasmania, some 37 615 lodgements in 2024-25, 205,298 listings, an increase of 11.5 per cent from 2023-24, an overall increase of 19.7 percent from 2019-2020. So the court sits 365 days a year, and I'd like to emphasise that, relies on volunteer bench justices to run night courts and weekend courts, and I pass on my sincere thanks to those volunteers for what they do. I will pass to the secretary to add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks. Through you, as the member alludes to, for many years, the Magistrates Court has absolutely experienced difficulty in recruitment training and retention, and I think back in 2021-22, there was a turnover rate of 25 per cent, which was high with respect to the agency's general turnover rate. In 2022-23, that rate was 15 per cent. Sorry. I beg your pardon. In 2022-23, that was 28 per cent reduced to 15 per cent in 2023-24, and reduced further to 10 percent in 2024-25, which means that its turnover rate is lower than the agency's average, and I think that is a testament to the work of the chief magistrate and her executive led by the administrator, supported by the work that Mr Cornell-McGleenan prepared which gives us a really good blueprint for what the court's establishment, supporting the statutory decision-making functions, ideally needs to look like.

That hasn't been looked at in a very long time, and as the deputy has talked through today, the workload of the court continues to grow, but it also continues to change in terms of the nature, complexity and the times at which matters need to be held. So the court's accepted all recommendations, and the department's executive has considered that report, and through the deputy secretary, the executive with assistance from human resources continues to work through the best way to provide change in a way that is cognisant of budget, but also best practice to support the court to do what they need to do. That's probably it. Thanks, deputy.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

The Witness Intermediary Scheme, that's detailed in the key deliverables, doesn't have any funding allocated in that table on page 112 until 2028-29. I'm just wondering about that, whether the scheme is in place and operating, and are there specific funds allocated to it across this year and the next two years before we get to the one in 2028-29 that's in the table? I'm also wondering, I believe that that scheme was a pilot and was going to be reviewed, and that review

was done by Professor Penny Cooper in 2024. Have the 12 recommendations of that report been accepted and implemented?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. The government's very pleased and proud of this initiative.

Ms WEBB -Yes, it's a good one. I think it's quite -

Mr BARNETT - Yes. It is a good one, and it's obviously a pilot, and there's been a final review of the scheme. It does use intermediaries, support communication with the vulnerable witnesses in our criminal justice system, and the witness intermediaries are professionals. They do an excellent job with expertise communication from professions such as speech pathology, psychology, occupational therapy, social work. They provide recommendations to Tasmanian police, Tasmanian courts about reasonable adjustments that can be made to support the communication of children and adults with additional needs so it ensures vulnerable witnesses can give their best evidence. That's the objective.

The introduction of the scheme reflects the government's commitment to providing equal access to justice for vulnerable Tasmanians. From commencement, I can advise the committee that to 30 June 2025 the scheme has received 1776 requests for intermediary assistance, and this, of course, the commission of inquiry, had quite a bit of evidence presented to it and provided recommendations around it. I might ask for the deputy secretary or the secretary to add to that answer.

CHAIR - Yes, because the question was about the funding profile across the forward Estimates.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

CHAIR - Then there also the 12 recommendations from the review.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. Deputy secretary, perhaps, or the secretary, to answer that specific question regarding the funding profile.

Ms BOURNE - Sure. Through you, deputy. Before we get to the funding, I would note that, as you've indicated, the government has accepted Professor Cooper's recommendations in principle. The work that the agency's done in reconciling those against some similar recommendations made by the commission of inquiry has occurred as well and continues to occur so that we make sure we can get the benefit of both of those to improve the operation of the scheme. I'll just bring up the funding for the witness intermediary.

Ms van ADRICHEM - My understanding is you're still working through those recommendations,

Ms BOURNE - And my understanding is that the scheme continues to be funded from the existing allocations of the agency based on past appropriation or additional appropriation provided by government. We're working through what potential further funding is required to give effect to the expansion, is my understanding, unless Mr Wailes tells me otherwise.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - I'm just particularly interested in the allocation that's there in 2028-29 then. So what's coming in to play at that point?

Mr BARNETT - Could we, through you, Chair, welcome to the table Gavin Wailes, deputy secretary.

Mr WAILES - Thank you, deputy, through you. The \$1.1 million in out year 4 is reflective of the budget decision made last year, only running for four years and the funding for the Witness Intermediary Scheme has now been made permanent.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - I should just add to that, the court dogs, it's wonderful what they can do. I've met a number of the dogs, and the recipients of their interest and care, and the feedback is very, very positive. So that's an excellent initiative of our government and justice system with the court dogs and the excellent work that they do. I want to do a little shout out to our court dogs.

Ms WEBB - I've got more, but I'm mindful of time.

CHAIR - All right. Thank you. Any other members' questions on magistrates? No. Thank you.

Output Group 1.3 Births, Deaths and Marriages

CHAIR - So we move on to Births, Deaths and Marriages. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. It might be just an understanding of the budget question, but it explains in the major variations that the increase is in relation to the Collins Street relocation project. I'm just wondering if you could give an update on that and should this be considered a capital expenditure line item instead of coming from the operational, as I understand, the budget line?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for your question, Mr Hiscutt. Welcome to the committee, and thank you for your interest in the justice system and in this case birth, deaths and marriages. I'll just check with my secretary or the team at the table to assist the honourable member in answering that question, but also note it plays a very important role in our justice system, and there's no cost for the registration of a birth, death or a marriage, just to note that. There's the cost of a standard certificate of \$59.21, I'm advised, in terms of record searches.

The issue of certificates and other BDM services are prescribed as fee units. Applicants suffering significant financial hardship can also apply for a fee waiver, and expenses include a high proportion of fixed costs such as salary, system support and maintenance, national certificate paper and postage, which are subject to regular increases. But I'll pass to the secretary to add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, and through you. In terms of the general context of the move, before, if you're content, deputy, I'll ask Mr Wailes to talk about the particular aspect around the source of the funding. The relocation to 199 Collins is part of the agency's strategic

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long-term accommodation plan and the need to consolidate a number of existing lease arrangements that we have to reduce the number of small leases and tenancies into larger four plates so that we can accommodate more of our staff as particular outputs grow.

Through Mr Wailes' team we have continued to strategically review our leased and owned properties, and a significant outcome is leases for property at 199 Collins Street, as you allude to, following the decision to relinquish our leases at Rosny Park and some space in Victoria Street, and outputs from these locations will gradually relocate there ready for the entire premises to be occupied from mid-2026. In terms of the question that you raise, I'll hand to Mr Wailes who can outline why it doesn't appear as capital expenditure.

Mr WAILES - Thank you, deputy, through you. Because this is self-funded, so there isn't a specific government appropriation for this funding, because it's not reflected in the revenue by appropriation table. In the next table, the expenditure by output, it doesn't show either, because it's capital expenditure, and so it doesn't show up particularly clearly in the budget papers themselves. It's actually included within the cash flow statement, which is on page 142 of the budget papers, and included within the payment for acquisition of non-financial assets line, which is slightly different from the capital improvements table, which is on page 131, which also includes some recurrent maintenance funding.

So the numbers, you've got some additions to that, which are included in the cash flow table and some subtractions from the capital improvements table as well. So they don't quite match up perfectly due to those, effectively, ons and offs.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

Mr WAILES - But all the expenditure is included across a couple of years in the budget papers.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I appreciate the answer. One more question, if I may.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - I understand that celebrants used to communicate freely with the registrar. As you may be aware, my mother was a celebrant, and appreciated that communication quite heavily to fix issues as they arose quickly. I just wanted to say if this is still permitted and still the case for that communication to occur directly.

Mr BARNETT - Well, let's just check on that. Thank you for the question. It's a good one, and the role of celebrants is very important all across Tasmania, and appreciate the work of our celebrants to achieve those objectives to care for our community in that way and provide that service. I'll just see if the secretary can add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. The amazing Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Anne Owen, advises me that that communication still continues.

Mr BARNETT - Beautiful. Thank you very much.

CHAIR - Thank you. Any other questions, members? No.

Output group 1.4

Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

CHAIR - If we could move on. Turning to Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Mr Gaffney has the lead question.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. Mr Wailes outlined something there that Meg alluded to earlier, that those little footnotes we used to get were so helpful. For us to chase that around over a weekend from page to page to page to cash flow to whatever is quite difficult. I know it's a short term - it's been an interim or a budget short time. Hopefully in the May one we will have those footnotes coming back to us, because it really does help. Yes. My question now, I've got two major questions.

I'll ask one at a time, because there's not a big preamble, but I would like you to ask a question relating to potential fiscal changes on the tribunal over the projected budget and forward estimates. The Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Additional Jurisdictions) Act 2025 came into effect on 1 July.

I note that this legislation conferred many new review jurisdictions to TASCAT for review and made changes to its power and structure. My question to you is what is the anticipated fiscal impact these changes will have in the short and long term for TASCAT spending and efficacy and how will those changes and impacts be measured, evaluated, and reported back?

Mr BARNETT - That's a very good question. I think it highlights the importance of TASCAT. I just want to say right upfront, my sincere thanks to Malcolm Shyvens - the president - and all the members of TASCAT, and all those that work within TASCAT. In my view, this is one of the best justice reforms in the last decade, the establishment of TASCAT. This is making it faster, easier and cheaper for Tasmanians and Tasmanian businesses and families to access justice. It's an outstanding initiative, and I'm very, very proud of it.

In terms of the additional jurisdictions, the reforms that you've noted, in terms of that legislation, that was 2024, and now being implemented in 2025. We've got three new streams. It moves to existing streams, into a new structure. The new streams are the administrative stream, the occupational and disciplinary stream, and the community, children and families stream. Health practitioners stream will be moved into the occupational and disciplinary stream, I'm advised. The forestry practices stream will be moved into the resources and planning stream.

Both of those streams will still preserve all their existing legal settings and requirements. The bill amalgamates the property agents tribunal into the tribunal and forms part of the occupational and disciplinary scheme. The bill transfers a large number of review rights from the Administrative Appeals Division of the Magistrates Court to the tribunal. The bill transfers appeal rights of the Police Review Board to the Supreme Court to the tribunal.

The bill also implements one of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, by giving the tribunal jurisdiction over appeals in relation to the registration to work with vulnerable people decisions, and this is in accord with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry. But there's a lot more to be said. That's a big-picture response, in terms of the

funding support. I will pass to the secretary, because I know it's an interim budget, but that funding can be summarised I think by the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, so additional funding, as the member would be aware, has been provided prior to this interim budget as well, as part of the Commission of Inquiry response, which rises to \$720,000 a year in 2026-27, to resource TASCAT as it's conferred with these new jurisdictions. As part of this budget, this funding has now been provided on a permanent basis. In addition, the budget has delivered just over half a million dollars to enable the tribunal to continue to enhance its case management system, particularly in the protective jurisdictions, is critical, given the number of matters, and to remove reliance on other systems and increase functionality.

Your question around, how do we best determine what future resources are required, is something that - we're very reliant on the support of our strategic legislation and policy team working with - obviously at arm's length - the tribunal, to give a best endeavours approach, in terms of what we understand the demand for a particular service, if it's an existing service, or that's transferring from another jurisdiction like the Magistrates Court, or with regard to appeals around registration to work with vulnerable people decisions, to make sure that we use evidence to understand how many appeals of the registrar's decision TASCAT may receive.

It's not an exact science, and we're very conscious that, moving forward, the agency needs to continue to work with the president and registrar, to ensure that if any of those estimates around future funding to support those requirements fall short, that we can inform government of those. But I'm fairly comfortable, in terms of the means by which we've put those cases to government for additional funding. But it's certainly not something that we stop considering, particularly as those new jurisdictions really find their feet. Of course, there may be increases in demand for services, by nature of the functionality and effectiveness of TASCAT.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. Through you, Attorney-General, how do you evaluate the movements there, or the effectiveness of what you're doing? I suppose, is there a short-term, long-term, medium-term, long-term plan, and how is that done, so that, in 12 months' time, you can come back and say, 'Well, this worked, this didn't, so we need to do this'? I'm just interested how this government manages.

Mr BARNETT - If I just kick it off. I appreciate the question definitely for the secretary through me, but just to say, I do have regular meetings with the president, get their feedback. It's obviously getting their thoughts and views on where they are now, and the pressures and challenges that might be coming going forward. But then, likewise, they meet with the Department of Justice and the secretary, and I'll ask the secretary to respond more specifically.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, probably not too much to add. I feel like I'm verballing the deputy secretary here, who has a very close working relationship with the registrar, and obviously communicates with the president fairly frequently. I also understand that the tribunal itself has a very comprehensive set of key performance indicators and metrics that provide really robust information about demand for services, timeliness, and all those sorts of things that the president, supported by registrar, keep a very close eye on, and advises the deputy secretary and/or myself if it was felt that something was potentially getting out of hand, in terms of demand.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. My second question, Attorney-General, is that the explanation of the variation states that the increase in expenses for TASCAT reflects the additional funding for the 2025-26 key deliverable, the TASCAT access to justice program. It does not mention the key deliverable, TASCAT expansion of services for new jurisdictions. So my question is, is this increase in funding projected to adequately offset any anticipated burden on TASCAT that will come from conferral of 64 acts from the Administrative Appeals Division of the Magistrates Court to TASCAT?

My further question there, will you be taking steps to ensure that TASCAT remains functional and efficient, despite an expansion of responsibilities, especially given the recent commitments to reducing the publicly employed workforce? So we're actually saying, 'Here's more work for you to do. This is our funding, and there is potentially some minimisation or decrease in staffing'.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thank you for the question, and it's a very fair and understandable question. But I would say straight up, *res ipsa loquitur*, that the facts speak for themselves. We are working already, very positively and constructively, with TASCAT. We are responding to their calls and questions and requests, and responding. Their appropriation of funding is eight and a half million, including overheads, in 2025-26; includes additional funding by the government for the 2024-25 budget, as part of the response to the Commission of Inquiry, \$380,000 rising to \$720,000; and then 2026-27, to resource TASCAT as it's conferred with new jurisdictions, as recommended by the Commission of Inquiry.

I think the secretary indicated earlier, in terms of how we're responding to other needs, which you've indicated in your first question, in terms of those additional jurisdictions, the extra half a million dollars we've got in the budget for the digital transformation priority expenditure program, in finance general, to deliver enhancements to the TASCAT case management system. So there's a lot of work going on. We're addressing it at every single angle.

My point is that we're responding, we're doing the job. We're responding to TASCAT. I'm so pleased and proud of the TASCAT reform and the establishment of it, making it easier and faster and cheaper for Tasmanians to access justice. I will pass to the secretary to add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Not much to add, other than to reiterate your point about the additional \$505,000 towards the enhancement of the case management service, which is referred to as the access to justice program in our budget chapter, is in finance general, so it won't appear in our allocation in the table. The other question around, or aspect around ongoing monitoring of delivery of service is what we'll continue to do. The tribunal is already doing that, with regard to the sharp increase in the number of matters coming before the mental health stream, for example, where it's looking at how internally it changes its methods for hearings and the like to adapt to that increase in demand whilst we work out whether there are any broader changes, whether they be personnel or funding which are required to support that in the longer term.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you. My final question on this one is because TASCAT's review increased, what it was supposed to do, what impact did that have on other departments around the place where some of their responsibilities have now gone to TASCAT? So other

initiatives that may have closed down or whatever, what happened to the staff out of those? Can you give us a rundown on whether that's how it worked?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. Of course, you've seen efficiencies across government as a result of the establishment of TASCAT, and you're right. In terms of full-time equivalent positions, there's 48.35, I'm advised, as at 30 June 2025. That includes 10 full-time members and 38.35 FTE staff positions. There are, I'm advised, 50 persons occupying those positions as at 30 June 2025. In terms of the efficiencies across government, I'll pass to the Secretary and/or the Deputy Secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. I obviously can't speak for other government agencies. I'm not aware of the transfer of any FTEs to TASCAT, albeit some additional jurisdictions have come with additional funding from government or the particular area from which the service is transferring from, and without wanting to hazard a guess, I suspect that some of the existing staff dedicated to that particular jurisdiction would be re-allocated to other work, but I couldn't speak for other agencies in terms of how that has impacted their organisation.

Ms van ADRICHEM - If I may add, obviously, the original amalgamation brought existing tribunals together and the staff that worked within those small tribunals, but that's obviously a number of years ago now.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. You've got no further questions? We'll move to Tasmanian Legal Aid. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. I'm really interested to try to unpick this line item a little bit to understand what's coming and what's going. Looking back, to start with, from the budget papers in 2024-25, so last financial year, there was specific allocation of funding for Tasmanian Legal Aid for commission inquiry response, a dedicated resource to provide legal services and advice to people impacted by child sex abuse, and that had a particular allocation across the forward estimates in last year's budget. So that would have been into the 2025-26, 2026-27, 2027-28. First of all, my question is, is that funding still in this line item as detailed in last year's budget paper?

Mr BARNETT - Let's just check on that. I think the answer's yes, but let me just double check. So the answer's yes. Yes, is the answer.

Ms WEBB - Right, and other than a duty lawyer at AYDC, what else does that fund, then? So last year's budget paper indicated that in the 2025-26 year, this financial year that we're in, \$388 000 would be there, 2026-27 would be \$324 000, 2027-28 would be \$324 000. So are those still the amounts of money, and other than a duty lawyer at AYDC, what else is that funding for?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to the secretary. Thank you for the question.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. So the current state budget allocates fixed funding of \$2.8 million, which includes funding for the AYDC duty lawyer program, the extension of acting judges funding for which Legal Aid receives two years of funding to support acting judges in the Supreme Court and other additional funding to go towards general

service demand increases, and, obviously, the budget allocates \$8.6 million in permanent funding to TLA.

Ms WEBB - I'm just going to unpick that a bit more because the money I was speaking about then was money allocated in the last financial year under Commission of Inquiry responses. The \$2 million that's specified in the key deliverables for this financial year and next, does that include that same money, or is \$2 million additional to the money that had been previously allocated?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. If Gavin Wailes, our finance director, could assist the committee.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Mr WAILES - Thank you, deputy, through you. The funding that was provided for the Commission of Inquiry response, it had the AYDC lawyer that you mentioned. It also has the TasVOCAL program in it for four years in addition to some policy work as well for two years. The additional \$2 million for two years provided in this year's budget is for general demand and response to increased demand.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, and through you, Attorney-General, that's additional, then, \$2 million to the Commission of Inquiry response money. I see nods. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Sorry. I just want to jump in there. The government has increased the funding, to \$4 million, 2 million per year for two years, because of increased demand for Tas Legal Aid, and that's a very important initiative, and we're proud of it

Ms WEBB - Excellent. Then, of course, there's nothing in the forward estimates. So is the expectation that the May budget may then be continuing that? I presume we're not expecting the increased demand to fall away after two years.

Mr BARNETT - Well, there has been an increase in demand. We're responding to that increase in demand. We'll consider further matters in advance of the May budget and then the future budgets as well, of course, but we have responded in this interim budget, and I'm pleased with this initiative and its backing in Legal Aid. They absolutely provide core and specific purposes for access to justice for vulnerable and other Tasmanians.

Ms WEBB - Does it set them up to just meet current demand that's there already demonstrated, or will they be able to actually, as demand potentially continues to increase, meet that?

Mr BARNETT - There's been an increase in demand in a range of areas, like criminal matters, obviously family violence matters, which is more, you know, obviously federal than state, but there's a range of areas where there has been demand, and there's an expectation that that will be the case next year and the next couple of years. That's why we've responded to those requests based on feedback from the department and, of course, stakeholders and feedback I've had in the community.

Ms WEBB - When I look at the table 7.2, page 117, the revenue from appropriation table for this line item, and bearing in mind that \$2 million in 2025-26 and then another \$2 million in 2026-27, that's one of your key deliverables that we've been discussing. I don't see an uplift

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of \$2 million from the 2024-25 amount specified. So 2024-25, it was just a bit over \$10 million. It's going up to \$11.35 million, for example, in 2025-26, 2026-27. That's not an uplift of \$2 million. Was something else cut, or did something else come to an end?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. I think the secretary or deputy secretary could assist the honourable member.

Ms van ADRICHEM - Through you, deputy. So on 30 June 2025, the previous allocations for the serious cases fund, complex criminal trials of \$750 000 and the 2021 election commitment, children and young people legal representation in the north and north-west expired. At the end of our last financial year, TLA also received an additional one-off funding amount of \$1.4 million to respond to the increases in demand in last financial year. It means that the \$2 million allocation in this financial year represents a continuation of the serious cases. So the funding that was ending on 30 June and an overall increase of \$1.2 million to respond to demand.

Ms WEBB - Okay. So sort of a bit of a switch in, switch out. We've brought some funding to an end, and then we've put a further top up in. So the top up isn't actually 2 million; it's \$1.2 million.

Ms van ADRICHEM - It's \$1.2 million, but I suppose in addition to that, there have been a number of solicitors guarantee fund grant allocations as well.

Ms WEBB - Are those solicitors guarantee fund allocations then towards core funding of core operations of Tasmania Legal Aid?

Mr BARNETT - The solicitors guarantee fund is more focused on short-term needs in the justice area and the application made by Tas Legal Aid was supported in full. So we're pleased and proud of that decision to back in their needs which apply for the short term.

Ms WEBB - Yes, but what I'm trying to dig into there is, my understanding often we're spending money out of the solicitors guarantee fund onto not short-term projects that are nice extra icing on the cake, but into core operations of some of our community legal supports. Would that be the case with Tasmania Legal Aid and the support they get through that fund? What's it specifically for?

Mr BARNETT - We can perhaps go into the demands. As I say, it specifically meets the requests of Tas Legal Aid. They are the demands in the here and now, but in terms of the detail around that request, I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms van ADRICHEM - Thank you, deputy. So Tasmania Legal Aid was granted \$2.5 million for criminal law duty lawyer services in the Magistrates Court and in the mental health stream of TASCAT. This was announced, I think, in May, commencing on 1 July of this year until 30 June 2027. A full-time legal practitioner in Launceston - sorry, a youth justice lawyer in the Magistrates Court's youth justice division - for one year at \$167,000.

Ms WEBB - Thanks, Attorney-General. That sounds like core operational activities of Tasmania Legal Aid. They've had to go to this list of guarantee funds to beg for funding, basically, because clearly they didn't have sufficient funding. Is that how you interpret that request?

Mr BARNETT - No.

Ms WEBB - How do you interpret that request?

Mr BARNETT - No. I don't interpret the request as you've interpreted it. I do see it as very important funding. I see it as additional to the core funding to support the work of Tas Legal Aid in those areas of the criminal listings and the duty role of the duty lawyer. The duty lawyers, again, I do a little shoutout for them. They do a wonderful job, and I've met many of them and, yes, really admire their work.

Ms WEBB - We don't fund them as core, obviously. We fund them through nice-to-haves.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. They provide important work, but the demand goes up, and it varies from time to time. The deputy secretary can add to that. In terms of the mental health lawyer division of TASCAT, again, that need is one that's here and now. It was specifically requested by Tas Legal Aid for the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund for that year or for that period of time. I'll see if the deputy secretary can add to that.

Ms van ADRICHEM - Just by way of background, in 2020 until 2023, there was an insufficient amount of interest available in the solicitors' trust, so SGF grant rounds couldn't be undertaken at that point in time. The government then committed - and I'd have to double-check the numbers, but from memory, it was \$2.2 million per year - to continue some of the activities that have previously been funded out of the trust like duty lawyer services. When there is surplus available, grants can obviously be made out of it, but if it's not available, then it doesn't provide that ongoing source.

Ms WEBB - No. I understand, and that's why it concerns me. The trust is excellent to have, and it absolutely should be there, available for projects or extra things above and beyond potentially core operations of some of our key legal supports like Tasmania Legal Aid. The thing that worries me is, if we're funding what looks like core operations out of that sort of fund instead of in core funding to the agency through the department, that looks problematic to me, because presumably they have to go back, cap in hand, again and again to get that topped up rather than be funded for - any of the things that are being funded out of the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund right now, do we expect them not to be required in one year's time, two years' time once this bucket of funding drops out?

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question. We'd need to wait and see next year on the demand and the needs and the applications. Obviously, there are many applications. That's assessed accordingly.

Ms WEBB - No. My suggestion is they shouldn't have to go back to the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund to ask for a top-up, because if the demand continues, it's clearly something that's part of their core operations.

Mr BARNETT - It depends.

CHAIR - Thank you, member. I think the Attorney-General -

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Ms WEBB - I'm asking about whether you would then be looking to fund that out of operations.

Mr BARNETT - It depends on the circumstances.

CHAIR - I think the Attorney-General has answered the question.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Do you have any further questions?

Ms WEBB - I'm just looking at my notes on that. Would it be fair to say that delays in the Magistrates Courts would be actually putting a greater financial impost on Tas Legal Aid, for example, and be driving that increased demand, because delays mean lawyers are having to go back more times than they might have to for mentions and for matters in court, and then they get delayed further and delayed further. Are we seeing Tas Legal Aid suffering the result of a Magistrates Court that isn't functioning properly?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I think of some observations which are readily made. In short, it's a way-too-complex problem to summarise that it's going to deliver one quick fix or one big, massive problem for Tas Legal Aid just because Magistrates Court's not functioning as efficiently as perhaps it can or should. We all want to do better. That's why I have focused directly with the justice forum. I meet regularly with them. Tas Legal Aid is represented there by Kristen Wylie, of course.

The director for Tasmania provides excellent input together with other members of the justice forum. We all are trying to work together, team Tasmania, to deliver better access to justice in Tasmania. The chief magistrate is consistently looking at how she can improve the efficiencies in the court, and I thank her for her work and her leadership with her other magistrates and acknowledge that work. But it is a key focus of government to address the efficiencies across our court system, Magistrates and the Supreme Court, and note the pressures on Tas Legal Aid and other parts of our justice system as we progress to improvement.

Ms WEBB - Because inefficiencies in one place is costing us more in another, isn't it, essentially? It's a fairly important nexus to break.

Mr BARNETT - It is an important nexus. It's an important initiative of government. That's why it's a key feature at the justice forum and for government. I have these discussions with Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice of the Magistrates Court. They know it's a topic regularly on any agenda with myself and my office and likewise with the department, and I meet with the department to discuss these matters pretty much every other week or every week just about. It's a very important priority of government, and we're looking for improvement. We're getting improvements, and we want that to continue.

CHAIR - Thank you. You right?

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Just a question: how many people actually applied for Legal Aid in the last financial year, and how many received it? I'm happy to take it on notice.

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Mr BARNETT - Thank you. Let's just see again. To thank Legal Aid, Kristen Wylie and the team. I want to thank the board of Legal Aid and their good work. Let me just check if we can assist the honourable member.

CHAIR - I am interested in how many actually applied but how many weren't able to receive Legal Aid as well.

Mr BARNETT - All right. I'm just looking. We have got some figures here, but I think I'll pass to the secretary or deputy secretary to assist the honourable member, noting that we have delivered \$2 million extra per year for two years in this budget and the next one, and we've also extended that additional funding to Legal Aid of \$380,000 per year for two years to support the extension of the acting judges. We've mentioned the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund, but I might pass to the deputy secretary.

CHAIR - It's just the numbers.

Ms van ADRICHEM - Yes. Through you. 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, there were 5,451 grants of Legal Aid, 25,512 extensions of those grants. The number of grants deprived of practitioners was 37,000, inhouse grants was 1751, and the total value of grants deprived of practitioners was \$9,042,318.

Output group 1.6 **Legal assistance**

CHAIR - Thank you. If there are no other questions from members, I'll ask a question on the next line item, which is legal assistance. Attorney-General, if I could just ask you with regard to the community legal centres, which obviously provide free legal services to the public, obviously their focus is on providing legal services to the socially and financially disadvantages, who in many cases are unable to access other legal services.

I notice, since 2012, the Tasmanian government has provided \$50,000 per annum funding to community legal centres Tasmania to employ a part-time policy officer. The funding runs out on 31 December 2025. Can the government give a commitment that the policy officer position will continue to be paid, freeing up time and resources so that the community legal centres can focus on providing frontline service? I'm hoping that comes in your area here.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thanks very much for the question. It is very important, the legal system sector.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - I thank members of not just Legal Aid but the community legal centres that you've made reference to, likewise the Women's Legal Service, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, Family Violence Prevention Legal Service - all really appreciated. In terms of the National Access to Justice Partnership, I've made mention of that before.

CHAIR - You have. So the policy officer position?

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Mr BARNETT - Yes. So let me just check. My understanding is that they have made an application for the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund. I'm not privy to the decision of the panel, but I'm aware that they have made an application.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - I've got one on this line to ask, if I may.

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. In terms of the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund, where is that reported on and are we able to get a full breakdown, for example, of current allocations and their duration, so we can actually see what's tracking and when it will end and what's included?

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Is that reported publicly?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it is. It's reported publicly when the-

Ms WEBB - Point me to it.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, we can, through my secretary or deputy secretary. The announcements made, there's an announcement in terms of the amount, in terms of the project and the objective of the project and the time frames around that, and that's on the public -

Ms WEBB - So other than announcements-

Mr BARNETT - That'll be on the Department of Justice website for earlier this year, I assume. I'll just check with the deputy secretary.

Ms van ADRICHEM - That's correct, but probably not to the specificity that the honourable member is asking, but it is something that we can, subject through you, provide, a breakdown of current grants and then time frames for expenditure.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I would like that. Just to clarify, as well as providing that to us as it is currently, is there no way that it's reported on in a regular annual way with that sort of granularity, so we can see where the fund is being allocated? I mean, beyond making announcements about allocations at the time that that occurs?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Just to be clear, my understanding, it is on the Department of Justice website

Ms WEBB - Is it?

Mr BARNETT - But we're more than happy to review the specificity of the details on that website and update it and ensure that - we've already got the total amount, I assume, and the topic, I assume, but let's check and see what more information can be provided on the

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Department of Justice website, noting that this is handled independently and then through the Department of Justice to the Attorney-General for approval and review and approval.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That would be good to have more granularity there, for sure. One of the things I'm interested in, for example, is the funding of the Tenants' Union Launceston office. It seems to be reliant upon grants from the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund, and that's due to expire - my understanding is in June 2026. If that office is reliant on the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund for core funding, what's going to happen in 2026? Are there plans to migrate long-term recurrent funding needs, such as that legal service, into more of a core funding model of some sort rather than out of the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. My understanding, in the previous round, the Tenants' Union of Tassie representation for a full-time legal practitioner in Launceston - my understanding is \$150 739 was committed in the previous round and that's effective to 30 June 2026.

Ms van ADRICHEM - Yes, that's correct.

Ms WEBB - 2026, which is what I was referencing in my question.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms WEBB - The question pointed to the fact that, given that that's very much core funding for the fundamental functions of the Tenants' Union in Launceston, after the expiry of that Solicitors' Guarantee Fund, will they have to keep applying for ongoing recurrent buckets out of the fund or will they be funded in a more core way, in some way?

Mr BARNETT - Okay, thank you for the question. As you might be aware, and as noted earlier, it wasn't possible to have an SGF fund round last year, and that's why, as an Attorney-General, I sought and requested, and it was agreed to have two rounds this year. So one in the first half of this year and we're going through the second round now to assist not just the community legal services, but various other important applicants. We're hoping to have that announced before Christmas, is my understanding, so within the next four or five weeks, which I'm looking forward to, and then we'll review the opportunities for next year, depending on the feedback. But that would be my expectation, to have a further round next year.

Ms WEBB - So my question is directed more towards the expectation that a core function of a tenancy union lawyer in the north of the state - presumably we would all accept that the north of the state would need tenancy support through the Tenants' Union just as much as the south of the state would. The Tenants' Union lawyer that's funded there, it's not necessarily appropriate for that to be dependent upon ongoing short-term top-ups from the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund. Is it something that you're considering funding in a more core way through a more ongoing bucket of money into that space?

Mr BARNETT - We're currently sitting here having delivered an interim budget. The May budget is obviously next year. There will be a lot more work to do as we consider what's best for Tasmania in a - obviously a tight fiscal environment.

CHAIR - So there'll be more information in next year's budget, hopefully.

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Mr BARNETT - Well, when there's more to say, then I will say it, but before that, I can't make any commitments.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask a follow-on question, still on the topic of the Tenants' Union, actually, and it might be something you can answer here because this is probably where the result of the funding comes, but it also may be more located more appropriately in your CBOS line item, which we come to later, so by all means, let me know.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms WEBB - But the department's annual report for 2024-25 notes that in the 2024-25 year, interest accrued on the bonds that we take in from tenants across the state. 48,478 bonds, in fact, across the state. The interest was \$3.1 million, which was an increase of \$552 000 over the previous year. So we're collecting more money from bonds and then we get the benefit of interest accrued.

Despite the increase, Tenants' Union, which has received some funding out of that interest money - in fact, they receive less than a quarter of that money - goes to the Tenants' Union to provide support to tenants. I'm just wondering about that proportion and about the fact that the Tenants' Union has to go to the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund, cap in hand, it looks like, on an annual basis, rather than actually have more of the bond interest be put towards it.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thank you for the question. If you're happy to hold that for CBOS this afternoon, we'll be well and truly able to answer you at the time, if possible. CBOS and the bonds.

Ms WEBB - Okay. So you'd rather answer it from the location of the money end rather than the result of the support provided.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms WEBB - All right. I'll hold it over.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. So you're fine? Okay. No further questions on that line item? If we could move on to the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. Mr Edmunds.

Output group 1.7

Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you, Chair. You're good to go. Okay. The office has received the highest complaint and inquiry numbers this year. What extra funding or resource will the government provide so the Commissioner can manage this workload?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question, through you, Chair. I appreciate, obviously, preserving freedoms for our democracy and freedom of thought, worship, speech and association is all important. I appreciate the work of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. In terms of the funding support, we've got the 2025-26 funding for the office, which is obviously in the interim budget, it's consistent with the funding provided in 2024-25.

There were complaints received, 261 complaints compared to 242 for the same period of the previous year. That was the highest number of complaints ever received, an increase of just 8.8 per cent from 2023-24 and 37 per cent from 2022-23.

Disability discrimination continues as the highest attribute of discrimination and prohibited conduct alleged in complaints, followed by the attributes of race and gender. Complaints of discrimination and prohibited conduct from the LGBTIQ+ community have increased by 43 per cent for the same period in 2023-24. In relation to inciting hatred, racism is the highest attribute complained about, followed by disability. One hundred and thirty-two of the 261 complaints received alleged victimisation. The provision of facilities, goods and services and employment remain the main areas of activities for complaints received. There's more that could be said in terms of the funding. I'll just check with the secretary or the deputy secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. As you've alluded to, the appropriation for the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, formerly known as Equal Opportunity Tasmania, has remained relatively consistent in past budgets, as has the staffing establishment. No anticipated increase in funding over the forward estimates other than the minor variations reflecting indexation and the like that appear in the budget paper.

Similarly to the relationship we have with other independent statutory officers, it's an ongoing discussion that we have currently with the Acting Anti-Discrimination Commissioner about the needs of that office and other work that is happening around triaging matters and complaints and the like, noting the number of the complaints that they've received and noted in the annual report is the highest number of complaints they've ever received.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. Yes. Obviously from the annual report, there's the quote from the acting commissioner that says, 'For the past year, we have operated with resourcing deficiencies in the administrative complaint and education teams.' I've heard the answer about the resourcing remaining flat, but will there be any work done by the government to address these shortfalls as the demand on this service increases?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. Without seeking to speak for the acting commissioner, my understanding is that those deficiencies relate to existing positions that for various reasons have been vacant from time to time, not necessarily about positions that would ideally be required to assist the workload.

Mr EDMUNDS - They're positions that aren't filled rather than don't exist?

Ms BOURNE - That's my understanding.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Thank you. I appreciate your comments before, deputy premier, regarding complaints regarding disability, sexuality and race. Outside of some specific resourcing questions from just before, what sort of work is being done or should be done across government to tackle this challenge?

Mr BARNETT - Certainly across government, more of a question for the premier and DPAC, but I think we can safely say that there's a lot of work that goes across government in

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terms of culture, education, training and development or members of our public service across the government. The secretary might want to add to that, but they do have an important role to play in terms of our ongoing training and education.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. There certainly is a concerted effort across government led by DPAC, as the deputy's noted, around for state servants at the very least, which obviously is a huge cohort of the Tasmanian workforce, to make sure that our diversity, equity, inclusion policies for both staff and the Tasmanians that we provide services to reflect the need to operate in a way that's respectful to all people. I also think one of the fundamental roles for the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner is the training and education that they continue to provide and the community engagement, which is a core function of their office, but it's a work in progress.

Again, without wanting to speak for the acting commissioner, I think there are always evolving ways, depending on how information is disseminated and how people who feel the need to talk about parts of the community in a way that is discriminatory is best tackled. The office is really best placed to make sure that that community engagement and training meets that demand, and they obviously provide that across all local governments, state and private institutions and the like, but it's an ongoing challenge.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. One last one to tie this up a bit: with the comments that it's more about backfilling these positions rather than the positions not existing, do we have an expectation about when those roles will all be filled, or is it more a case of workers' comp, or is it vacancies?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, Attorney-General. Without speaking on individual circumstances, my information is that as of around 1 October, there's one vacant position which is in the establishment, which is in its final stages of recruitment, and noting that the office has an establishment of 10 staff equating to 9.7 FTE. I can certainly appreciate how any vacancy for any period would impact other staff in that office, but I'm certainly not aware, unless the deputy secretary has any further detail in terms of establishment.

Ms van ADRICHEM - No, nothing further to add. That's correct, Kristy.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Just to wrap my head around this, the comments are about resourcing deficiencies are about potentially one position not being filled, or are they about 10 not being enough?

Ms van ADRICHEM - Through you. The Acting Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, her substantive position is within the commission. As she's acting, we have now backfilled her position with the acting arrangements, but that took a little bit of time to fill that position. Then there's a separate position that's currently vacant, and recruitment's near finalisation as well.

Mr EDMUNDS - That position, yes. All right. I look forward to the next annual report where it's all hunky-dory, then.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Thank you. I'd like to follow up on that a bit, if I might. I would find it surprising if an independent statutory role, such as the acting commissioner, in an annual

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report made comments about a lack of resourcing and actually didn't clarify clearly that they were talking about vacant rather than insufficient resourcing. Does the Office for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner put in a budget bid to the department?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, deputy. Yes. As part of the normal budget process, we engage, the relevant deputy and myself, with our outputs to work out what, if anything, they wish to put forward for us to consider as part of our broader budget submission.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. In terms of the budget bid that was put forward from the office for this budget, was it funded fully to the extent that was requested or identified as necessary by the office?

Mr BARNETT - The secretary can respond to that. Obviously, those conversations are had between the various independent agencies and the department. I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Through you, deputy. My understanding when we prepared the budget submissions for the draft budget earlier in the year, there wasn't a specific request from the office. That's not to say that there weren't discussions about workforce capacity and capability, but from memory there was no specific request for the agency to put forward a request for additional funding. Obviously, we will continue those discussions now as we head into the next process.

Most discussions that I have with the acting commissioner and I've had with the previous commissioner are around training and education resources and the need to meet increasing demand and balance, as members would be aware, the fee for service component that at least one of those positions have, but from my memory no specific budget submission request.

Ms WEBB - It's not a standard practice to have a budget bid put in from these statutory offices, for example, as a matter of course? It's just discussions that are had, is it?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, deputy. There's certainly a formal process. Discussions are normally initiated once we get the advice from treasury around time frames for budget submissions. Without speaking for Ms van Adrichem, she would ordinarily have a discussion with the acting commissioner in relation to, 'The process is coming up. Do we need to start working on a particular submission that can be considered for your office?'

Ordinarily, there is a process at the executive level to consider all the requests from output so that we can make sure that we rationalise and collate those in a themed way so that the deputy, through the budget committee, can consider those aligned priorities of the agency. There's certainly nothing stopping in the output from talking with the relevant executive member about a budget submission, and we follow a very similar process with our independent statutory partners, noting their independence. If they wish to make a submission to government for further funding, we will incorporate that into our agency submission. We're obviously getting ready to make those again in January.

Ms WEBB - It's going to be interesting to see, because we certainly have a theme that's been ongoing for a number of years of those independent statutory agencies identifying underfunding, attorney, in an ongoing way and the need for more funding from your government. It will be interesting. Committee B of the upper House quite likely will scrutinise annual reports of the independent entities that come into this space. Be fascinating to see, if

we have them sitting in front of us, whether they identify that the funding in this budget is what they regard as sufficient for undertaking their statutory roles. Do you regard the funding in this budget as sufficient for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to undertake the statutory role that she has?

Mr BARNETT - First of all, I thank the commissioner and her office for the work that they do. I don't want to add too much more to the response of the secretary, which I concur with. Those deliberations and discussions are ongoing in terms of the budget. I note again that this is an interim budget. I note that the May Budget, obviously, there's a lot more work to do. I also note that it's a tight fiscal environment. Everybody's aware of that across government. You know, in terms of the training and education results, the last 12 months, the commission has actually done an incredible job.

Ms WEBB - I'm not criticising the commission, Attorney-General. I'm criticising the funding.

Mr BARNETT - So it's increased the number of sessions, the number of people. There's a significant amount of work that has already been done, and I look forward to their further work.

CHAIR - Thank you. Final question from Mr Edmunds on this line.

Mr EDMUNDS - To the point about the fiscal circumstances, is the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner's office subject to vacancy control measures?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. The offices obviously connect directly with the department and meets and talks to the secretary. You're aware of the government's position with respect to non-essential workers, but I'll just see if the secretary had any more to add.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, in terms of the normal vacancy management process that the agency undertakes and has been for some time, as the employees are state servants, they follow that normal process in terms of the requests being made, going through the system, the discussion with the deputy secretary. We review each and every position as it comes through at the moment in terms of essential v non-essential, and as I think we discussed in this place last year, the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, as all outputs of the agency are subject to reductions over the forward estimates to enable the agency to comply with its bid, as it was then known.

Ms WEBB - One very quick question, if I may.

CHAIR - It needs to be very quick.

Ms WEBB - It's just in relation to the comment in the annual report from the acting commissioner that we're falling behind our interstate counterparts with our act, and it's due for comprehensive review. Is that on your radar, Attorney-General, in terms of conducting a comprehensive review of our *Anti-Discrimination Act*, and if so, what's the timeline on that?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question, and, of course, we take the views of the commissioner or acting commissioner very seriously, but the government has a range of priorities across government, and it's not currently at the forefront of our minds.

Output Group 1.8
Elections and Referendums

Ms WEBB - I'm looking at the administration of state elections and referendums line item here. Of course, it appears in a few different places here in the budget papers, but a line item in the revenue from appropriation, but we've also got the reserved by law allocations into this space. I'm wondering if we can have a breakdown of what is covered under each of those areas so that we can fully understand that appropriation table amount compared to the reserve by law amounts. The reserve by law sort of puts out fairly clearly what it is covering, but the allocation in table 7.2.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. We can assist the committee through you, Chair, to that question. I want to put on the record thanks again to the Tasmanian Electoral Commission. We've had three Legislative Council elections, one House of Assembly recount, 15 local government councillor recounts, four rounds of local government by-elections, and associated non-voter processes.

I also want to highlight very quickly the alternative voting procedures legislation allowing people with disabilities and print disability in particular in the 2025 Legislative Council elections and going forward. That's an excellent reform, and I thank Jo Palmer and myself and others in my department for progressing that and recognise those with a vision impairment who've had access to our democracy in this last 12 months, which is an excellent initiative.

Specifically to your question in terms of appropriation funding totals \$891,000, including overheads, reserved by law funding, which you specifically asked about for 2025-26 totals \$6.5 million, and that includes as follows: \$750,000 for the *Electoral Disclosures and Funding Act 2022*; \$5000 for the expenses of Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania elections; \$5.7 million for expenses of parliamentary elections and referendums; \$5000 for expenses under the *Legislative Council Electoral Boundaries Act 1995*, and for your interest and that of the committee, as at 30 June 2025, the TEC staffing profile had increased to 28, equating to 27.7 full-time equivalents.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. As I said, I can see those quite clearly in the reserve by law revenue table. I'm wondering about the table line item in 7.2, the revenue from appropriation. What is that covering specifically so we can understand the allocation?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. We'll check with our finance director, Gavin Wailes, to see if the secretary or Mr Wailes can assist the committee.

Mr WAILES - Thank you, deputy. The TEC obviously has their specific functions which they perform which we've just gone through with the reserve by law. There's also the local government elections, which occurs on a fee-for-service, or a cost recovery basis, sorry. The figure that you're referring to in the revenue from appropriation, as the deputy mentioned, has some overheads in it, but it really covers all those costs that fall in between the specifics. They're just some of the office administration costs, some of their general financial management costs that they have and really just those general administrative costs.

Ms WEBB - Where would something like the education programs, for example, that the Electoral Commission does to help voters understand their role better and things like that?

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Does that come under specific funding for each election as it plays out, or is that in the revenue from appropriation?

Mr WAILES - Through you, deputy, so it depends specifically on what election it was for. If it was for a Legislative Council election or a House of Assembly election, then that activity would be within the bounds of the elections act, and so it would be covered through the reserved by law funding.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'm interested in the *Electoral Disclosure and Funding Act* funding in the reserved by law section, the \$750,000 starting from this year, obviously, because this is when we're beginning that scheme, and going across the forward Estimates. What is that funding directed towards in terms of actually giving effect to our new act in that space?

CHAIR - We welcome Mr Andrew Hawkey to the table.

Mr BARNETT - Perhaps through you, Chair and the honourable member, commissioners here, I welcome Andrew Hawkey, the Commissioner of the TEC, and maybe the commissioner could assist in answering that question.

Mr HAWKEY - Through you, deputy, that funding goes through the staffing structure, which we've established in relation to funding and disclosure and compliance and also contributes towards the establishment of an online portal, which is in development at the moment, which will better facilitate the documentation being provided by all political participants in the system.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that detail. I'm also interested in the reserved by law amount that's to do with parliamentary elections and referendums and particularly - now, let me find the bit that I'm looking for - in that line item, the jump that's in the 2027-28 financial year and what that is associated with. Maybe it's over here in the notes, and I haven't quite picked it up. My apologies if that's the case.

Mr BARNETT - That's all right. Let's just check if the secretary and/or the commissioner could assist the committee.

Mr HAWKEY - Through you, minister, I think that's in relation to some planning and preparation for the next state election primarily, but there is a range of different events that will take place in the coming years that will draw on those figures.

Ms WEBB - I'm interested if there's any more detail available. In the notes it does say that it's to ensure the reliability of elections, increase access to voting and for the next anticipated state election. What does ensuring the reliability of elections and increasing access refer to there?

Mr HAWKEY - Part of that funding covers some of our staffing and so we are expanding in things such as our accessibility, which some of those things took place at the recent state election and recent council election. It's also involved some broader engagement. There'll probably be some IT uplifting.

For example, with the local government, for the last four elections we've had a data entry process for the Hare-Clark counts and we're working with the Victorian Electoral Commission

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at the moment to be able to have a data entry process for House of Assembly elections, which we believe will create a quicker, easier process and also make a more efficient and cheaper recount process for replacing. So that's just a part of the modernisation we're undertaking, and that's specifically adapting the system so it can have multi column versions for a House of Assembly ballot paper.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney had a follow-up.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, just a follow-up. I'm interested when you mentioned that you're looking at a portal for that. Whereabouts is that funding coming from and what's that to do?

Mr HAWKEY - That's a part of the \$700 000 for the funding disclosure reserved by law item. This is the basically Victorian IT system. They've provided us a free essential version of theirs and a large proportion of that money is about adapting the Victorian system to meet the Tasmanian requirements for funding disclosure. So, for example, the Tasmanian system, which is primarily designed for the New South Wales legislation, includes registers, registers of candidates, parties and other things. The Victorian system doesn't have that. As well as modifying it for the Tasmanian environment and our back-end systems, it also requires other elements such as the creation of registers.

So it'll again, hopefully in the medium and longer term, streamline that process for people to participate and provide the requirements through returns, donation disclosures and claims going forwards in the future.

Mr GAFFNEY - And you think that would be more efficient than the service you already have?

Mr HAWKEY - Yes, it will be. It'll streamline that. It'll certainly make it easier for the political participants. They've been the ones that are calling for it as much as anyone. For example, where the major parties already run those systems that apply with those in Victoria, it'll allow more streamlined processes from our - and it just makes it less - it's a more streamlined process, less labour intensive, and as you're aware and as we found this election, that when the busiest period for funding disclosure is the same time as elections, especially with our seven-day disclosure periods. Enabling those things as digital transactions should be a simpler process for making sure that's on time and manageable.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. My last question: did you have to take a case to the government for funding for the portal, or how does that work?

Mr HAWKEY - Again, the *Electoral Disclosure and Funding Act*, provides a reserve by law function in relation to funding of requirements.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Thank you very much.

CHAIR - Mr Hiscutt had a question.

Mr HISCUTT - I'm not sure if it was going to be asked or not, but just in relation to the reserve by law expenses under the *Legislative Council Electoral Boundaries Act*, I note that there is a redistribution expected - 2027, I think. There's no uptick to account for that.

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Mr HAWKEY - Yes, unfortunately that was a miscommunication with me and the department. We haven't yet looked at our allocation that will be required in the following - in the forward Estimates. Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - In the May Budget. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Yes, I wanted to come back to the questions I was asking about that uptick there in 2027-28, which you were explaining to me around the expenses for parliamentary elections and referendums. It's a very significant uptick - it's more than double - and you ran through a few things. Is it possible to get a breakdown of how that will be allocated across those different areas that you talked about?

Mr HAWKEY - I think part of it is to say that we don't have fixed elections for House of Assembly, as we all know. I think it's as much in preparation that the likelihood that there may, you know, that there's funding there in case it's a little bit of an earlier election, but also, we are looking to do it to other things to uplift over the coming - as we head closer towards that timeframe.

Ms WEBB - Is it possible to get the anticipated breakdown of that uptick for that year?

CHAIR - We can take it on notice.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr HAWKEY - Again, all of this is through you, minister and Attorney-General, we wouldn't have a full breakdown of that as things stand at the moment, because again, part of the expansion of the electoral act is we're going through a new strategic plan and we're working through those work plans as we're going forwards.

Ms WEBB - Would it be fair to say then, that that amount allocated for that year may be a bit of a moving feast as we move further towards it and that we might find ourselves discussing a different amount next year, for example?

Mr HAWKEY - True, minister. Yes, I would think that's the case.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Then one final question, because the Attorney-General mentioned the increase in staff and I noticed in the annual report it mentions having conducted an organisational review, moving to a new staffing structure: 'There will be an expansion from 16 to 34 permanent staff'. That's on page 48, and I think the Attorney-General mentioned 28 as a figure perhaps currently. Are we still increasing up to 34 and is that 34 FTEs - full FTEs? That's a significant expansion. Is there a new organisational chart which can be provided to show that staffing structure?

Mr HAWKEY - Through you, minister. Yes, there is a new organisational chart. The expansion came after an independent review undertaken in 2023, which looked at vulnerabilities and single point dependencies and, as we speak today, all recruitment has been finalised and our last individual will join us in December.

The expansion has created a tri-directorate structure, which has allowed for us one directorate for compliance and funding disclosure, one in relation to elections, engagements and operations, and a third in corporate and IT and other business areas. So that is expanding, and yes, we can provide updated organisations.

Mr BARNETT - So perhaps on notice we can provide a committee with the corporate structure.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Appreciate that. Where would I see that uptick in staffing? Because staffing typically for most agencies is a fairly large proportion of the funding allocated. So I would have expected to see a jump in funding through one of these line items here to show that uptick in staffing. Where do I look to see that? Is it here in the reserve by law area or back in the line item?

Mr HAWKEY - Through you, deputy. It's fundamentally through reserve by law. The Electoral Act provides reserve by law funding for the conduct or preparation of electoral administration, and so aspects such as the training team, the operational team, predominantly come from either the reserve by law function across different items, or also our trust through local government for when we undertake local government events as well.

And the uptick occurred earlier. As I said, the review took place in 2023, and so with the 2024 state election and 2025 state election, the funding was already provided. So the uptick has already sort of occurred across those funding arrangements from previous years.

Ms WEBB - Right. Thank you

CHAIR - There are no further questions. We can move to Mr Edmunds and Tasmanian Industrial Commission.

Output group 1.9 Tasmanian Industrial Commission.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you, Chair. According to the DoJ annual report, the number of applications to the TIC has remained similar to last year at around 200 a year. This year, there was an increase in reviews of actions, however, with 72 applications made, the most received in any reporting year to date. What can you share with the committee about the reasons behind why this increase has been seen?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I should note that, with respect, through the Chair, industrial relations matters are more a matter for the Head of the State Service and the Premier. I would note, however, that there were 76 applications lodged to the *State Service Act* for a review of an action within the reporting period. Forty applications were finalised and closed within three months, with two finalised and closed within six months.

Of the remaining 34, some proceeded to arbitration; some took time for the parties to reach agreement; and conciliation is ongoing for some. One hundred and fifteen applications were finalised within three months. But I will pass to the secretary, perhaps, to add to that answer as best she can, noting that it's primarily a matter for the head of the State Service.

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Ms BOURNE - Thank you, deputy. Through you, nothing in particular to add, noting the deputy's comments around sitting within the purview of the head of State Service and the State Service management office. The agency obviously worked through that framework, and I think the framework exists so that staff can make those applications should they wish to.

CHAIR - We can ask for those tomorrow, Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Output Group 1.10 Office of the Independent Regulator

CHAIR - Okay. If we go now to the Office of the Independent Regulator, Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. I'm interested, following up on questions just a little while ago, actually, about budget submissions from independent statutory entities like this. Does the independent regulator provide a budget submission of any kind, or is that similarly dealt with through conversations with the department?

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, a similar process applies. I have a very strong relationship with the independent regulator in terms of the establishment of the office, around how it's made up and the staff in it, but particularly in relation to identified areas of additional resourcing, and working with them around the best way to get that particular request off the ground, and the appropriate mechanism, working within their funding envelope.

The agency provides, through a service level agreement, obviously a range of corporate services to that office. But in terms of budget submissions, it's very much open, given the current establishment and the relationship with the agency ahead of the formation of the new Commission for Children and Young People, the relationship where the justice staff works very well, noting and respecting the independence of the independent regulator. But a budget submission would, as all of them would be, from similar offices, well-received and as part of a discussion for addition to our upcoming budget submission. If that was felt as required by the independent regulator, we would facilitate that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I note in the annual report for the Office of the Independent Regulator, on page 31 and 32, it is indicated that the office is prompted to use its statutory powers for public interest monitoring and initiating two own motion investigations, both, it's noted, earlier than anticipated, in terms of using those powers.

My questions around that are: what information is available to confirm that the regulator had sufficient resources in place to undertake those actions, given that they were at an earlier stage than anticipated? Is there any indication that the independent regulator will be called on to use those powers more often than anticipated, and therefore, that may have resource implications, if we've seen it already crop up sooner than expected?

Mr BARNETT - Before I pass to the secretary, I want to put on record my sincere thanks to the Office of the Independent Regulator and the Regulator herself, Louise Coe, the work that she does, obviously reporting and ensuring compliance with Child Safe Framework, pursuant to the Commission of Inquiry recommendations, of course in terms of protocols and working

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with the Integrity Commission, obviously Tasmania Police, the ombudsman, custodial inspector, registration for working with vulnerable people. There's a lot of work that is undertaken, and I appreciate their leadership, and that of the independent regulator.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, I'm not aware of any concerns about the office's ability to undertake those critical functions, but I'd certainly hope that the regulator would speak with me if they felt that their current establishment was limiting their ability to do that now or moving into the future, noting the ongoing work that's happening, obviously, around the establishment of the new commission. The Office of the Independent Regulator has permanent funding assigned to it, and a permanent establishment to support ongoing operations as they stand now.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Another comment from the annual report caught my eye, which related to an indication that small in scope organisations, they note, are being challenged by the reportable conduct scheme and what it means for them, and having to comply with it. I'm wondering what assessment the government has made of the impact of the reportable conduct scheme on small in scope organisations, and especially what support they may need to comply with the law and be able to interact with the regulator as required.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. The first thing to say is that it's obviously only recently been established, 1 January last year, and so up and firing pretty quickly. I'd say, compared to other jurisdictions, we, Tasmania, is going positively and well. There's a lot of work to do. There's been a lot of consultation, collaboration with various community groups and organisations across the state, so the independent regulator has been very busy. I'll just check; the secretary might wish to add to that answer, to more specifically respond to the question of the honourable member.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Again, without speaking for the independent regulator, I know, from discussions that we have and the material available, including in the annual report, there would seem to be a constant, routine seeking of stakeholder feedback about the fantastic resources that the office has stood up and made available, to enable organisations to comply with the framework.

The office is very responsive to those needs and that feedback. I understand that the engagement model they have, with their dedicated resources, means that their online guidance on the scheme is able to be expanded, has very practical resources and compliance resources, and noting that there is a statutory review mechanism of the CISOF Act built into the legislation, which you would think would also pick up the broader potential points of feedback around the scheme generally. But I think it's about tailoring that information to a range of agencies and organisations that need to comply, and from what I see and hear, the office is doing that exceptionally well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I agree. I think the office - it's been fantastic to have it established, and the work that it's doing is incredibly important, and everyone is learning.

CHAIR - Do you have any further questions?

Ms WEBB - No. I'm agreeing with the Attorney-General on the value of this office and the importance of it.

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for your observations, and I think that's shared around the community and the legal stakeholders that I talked to, and I do a little heads-up with the establishment of the Commission for Children and Young People, all being well, through the parliament, and without reflecting on any debates. But I highlight the importance of that, and the important role of the independent regulator going forward within the Commission.

CHAIR - Thank you. So being 11 o'clock - and we did mention that, for ease -

Mr BARNETT - I'm flexible, totally flexible.

CHAIR - You're happy to go on to 11.15?

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms WEBB - This one will probably be relatively short.

CHAIR - It would be good to do the next two, if we could.

Mr BARNETT - No worries. Yes, for sure.

Output Group 1.11

Office of the Implementation Monitor

CHAIR - Okay, then. Fine. Ms Webb, Office of the Implementation Monitor.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Another excellent office to have been established, and important work to be done. Minister, this is one that had been previously funded through DPAC, and then, on 1 July this year, has been switched across to the Department of Justice.

I'm trying to sort of track, in terms of the funding that had previously been allocated during the establishment under DPAC, and then across into this budget, it looks to me like, across the forward Estimates, we're looking at less funding for the Office of the Implementation Monitor, about \$300,000 a year less. Is that the fact, that that is the case, and if so, why would that be?

Mr BARNETT - Let's just respond to that query. I'd like to confirm again on the record my sincere thanks to the implementation monitor for the excellent work that Robert Benjamin undertakes. I thank him for the consultation with myself, my office, and the department and so many others. That was an excellent initiative out of the commission of inquiry inquiry, and this delves into that legislation. That appointment was made on 3 December 2024 so it's been a lightning response by the implementation monitor and of course his office.

You'll see the funding there, appropriation of \$1.125 million in the 2025-26 interim budget, and reserve by law funding of \$359,000, for the implementation of the monitor's salary and allowances. My advice is, as at 22 September, the Office of the Implementation Monitor consists of seven full-time employees, including the implementation monitor, and these staff provide a range of skills, knowledge and expertise in policy law, evaluation, monitoring, communications, admin and the like, with respect to fulfilling their statutory obligations under the legislation.

PUBLIC

The monitor's obviously an independent statutory role established under the act, and funding for the position is reserved by law. That act is the *Child Safety Reform Implementation Monitor Act*, which I put through last year. It's a very, very fast establishment and not yet one year in the role.

Ms WEBB - I think you might have just answered my question, Attorney-General. Since it's been switched to you, the funding for the actual monitor's role has been put into the reserved by law column, and though that \$300,000-odd discrepancy is explained by that, that it's now spread across those two locations in this budget paper under DoJ.

Mr BARNETT - That would be my understanding.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - I'll double-check that with the secretary. The answer is yes.

Ms WEBB - Because under the DPAC one, that amount was included in the one-line item.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms WEBB - We got there together, didn't we? Thank you. I do just have another question on this area. The scope of the role for the implementation monitor is being essentially expanded as we look ahead due to the inclusion of the Woolcott review recommendations into his remit for ongoing monitoring and some recommendations potentially from the RTI Review.

The implementation monitor, who appeared before the commission of inquiry implementation committee just recently to talk about his annual report, stated that he'd been assured by your government that additional resources would be provided if required to undertake that expanded remit. Can you confirm that you have provided him with that assurance and that's your intention to provide resources required if identified?

Mr BARNETT - Obviously, I can speak to the interim budget, and I also acknowledge the May budget coming up and the importance of that. I can't make any decisions about the May budget sitting here today, but I can acknowledge the important role of the implementation monitor. My thanks for that service, my ongoing engagement with the implementation monitor, that and my department and my secretary. I might pass to the secretary as she can add to the answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. Nothing to add other than the ongoing discussions around the needs of the office. Mr Benjamin effectively has a relationship with the Department of Justice through the service level arrangements to ensure that his office has what it needs to function from corporate services, but also the engagement with Department of Premier and Cabinet through the Keeping Children Safe reform team, and those discussions around resources and needs are something that happen, and we would continue to feed advice to Government, as I'm sure Mr Benjamin would himself as well, regards to what may be required moving forward as the reporting framework and other mechanisms are firmly embedded.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Output group 1.15

Commissioner for Children and Young People

CHAIR - Next, we have the Commission for Children and Young People. So if I could ask, what specific priorities have been set out for the first 12 months?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Of course, the bill went through the House of Assembly on 24 September, for which I'm incredibly grateful. It's a key structural reform coming out of the commission of inquiry, and as a government we're determined to implement that recommendation. Of course, it's now upstairs, and I thank the members upstairs for their considered views on this legislation.

I think I mentioned the recruitment processes, and they have a very important role to play in terms of the next 12 months and beyond. The roles, functions and responsibilities are set out in the legislation. The new commission, obviously, will have separate commissioners in terms of the first 12 months. I will pass to the secretary to add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. Noting the passage, or the status, more appropriately, of the legislation, in anticipation of the commencement of the legislation, we have commenced preliminary work to establish the commission so that the incoming CCYP can be appointed or the process can commence to appoint them following the passage of the bill. We have a project director that's leading that work, and Ms van Adrichem is sponsoring that project.

There's a steering committee that has been developed, established rather, as well, with key stakeholders that you would anticipate to lead that work, particularly as we transition to the new establishment and bring together the two existing organisations and work to establish the additional functions.

Obviously, it will be a matter for the incoming commissioner about their priorities for the first year. The provisions in the current version of the draft bill set out its statutory functions that parliament will confirm as being effectively the overarching priority framework functions for that role. We anticipate whoever that incoming commissioner is will obviously have a strong view about what it would like that body to achieve in its first 12 months of operation.

CHAIR - How many staff will support the commission? Do you have a number at this stage? Or an anticipated number?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, no, we don't have an anticipated number at this point in time. We are obviously looking at the existing Office of the Independent Regulator and the existing Commission for Children and Young People, and then there's obviously an additional amount of funding for the new commission as well.

From a project perspective, we're staging it through three stages. One is assessing current state, stage 2 would be the interim arrangement, and stage 3 would be the final iteration of the Commission for Children and Young People.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do we have any further questions? No. If there are no further questions, thank you very much, and at 11.08, if we could take a 15 minute - or 17-minute break, and return at 11.25. If you could stop the broadcast, please. Thank you.

The Committee suspended from 11.08 a.m. to 11.26 a.m.

Output group 2.1

Crown Law

CHAIR - If we could now start off with Mr Gaffney asking questions on Crown Law.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, Chair. Thank you, deputy. This talks about the increase is for legal support services to build Tasmania's future public infrastructure. Within the Crown Law section, how does that work, save for Burnie court infrastructure or the new facility in Pontville? Do you contract that work out, or is that subsumed within the organisation? How does that work?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for that question. It's a good question, of course. Crown Law covers the Offices of Solicitor-General, State Litigator, Crown Solicitor. I thank them all for their work and their offices providing cost-effective legal services, playing a central role in the management of legal risk for government. You've made mention of infrastructure. I will pass to the secretary shortly in terms of processes, in terms of briefing out, all that work being undertaken within the Office of Crown Law in terms of infrastructure.

You also made mention of the Burnie courts. I do want to just do a shoutout with respect to the good progress with respect to the Burnie courts and i am very pleased obviously with the progress of that, providing quicker access to justice for the north-west court with respect to our Supreme Court and Magistrates Court. I'm sure we can talk more about that at a later time. I will pass to the secretary in terms of processes accordingly with respect to infrastructure and go from there.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. As the deputy's alluded to, obviously the Office of the Crown Solicitor provides legal support across a range of commercial transactions across government activities. The Crown Solicitor has a very established process around the determination about what matters are undertaken by inhouse counsel, effectively, and what matters may be briefed out.

Often, without speaking for the Crown Solicitor and his staff, that work is undertaken on a case-by-case basis, and matters may be briefed out rather depending on potential lack of subject matter expertise within the office, the volume of the work or the size of the potential project that may last for some time that may be more sensible to brief out.

I think we talked at this committee before about the cost ramifications for briefing out work. It's often more efficient to do it inhouse, but for some matters it is more appropriate to brief out. The decision about whether to brief out a piece of work ordinarily is undertaken in consultation with the lead agency that provides the instructions to the Office of the Crown Solicitor.

PUBLIC

Mr GAFFNEY - I'm interested, then, does the Crown Solicitor negotiate with you about the works that are coming up and what that will impact on their budget line and what they need? Through you, deputy.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks. Through you, deputy. Absolutely, noting the independence of the Crown Solicitor as a prescribed officer, I meet with them on a fortnightly basis or thereabouts and also through the Director of Crown Law, who provides the strong administrative and strategic support to all of our Crown principals, about the various needs of the particular offices. Certainly, in light of the number of major transactions that are occurring across government, we often talk about how they're best managing that demand, and sometimes measures they need to put in place around file management and staff management to make sure that they can meet that demand and also manage staff and their well-being as well.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. Bear with me here. Say, for example, Pontville and say that was going to be managed in house. Say, for example, that was managed inhouse. Then there would be a budget allocation for that that would be tabled, and they would say, 'Yes, it's taken three staff, three months doing this project, and we're going to put that out at that much.' Alternatively, they could say, 'No, our staff are overstretched at the moment. This needs some specific industry input, so we'll contract that work out, and this is what it's going to cost us.' They would report that back to budget allocation through you guys?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, Attorney-General. It's probably more the latter scenario you've outlined. The Crown Solicitor, through the Director of Crown Law, each year as we approach budget submission time will formulate a request to government about what additional resources they may need. The Crown Solicitor doesn't come to me in terms of individual allocation matters. That's absolutely a matter for him and within his purview, but he does keep me abreast of pressures on the office and particular matters. Certainly, that budget allocation process is coordinated through the Director of Crown Law that feeds into the department's budget bid process similar to what I was outlining earlier on in the day.

Mr GAFFNEY - That's prioritising the government's needs with the Crown's ability and capacity. Would it be possible, then, since 2020 over the last five or six years, to get budget allocations for Crown Law services or for public infrastructure projects? I'm thinking how much money, say, for the ports, what's been allocated for the stadium, what's been allocated for Pontville so that we can see a breakdown of that funding, because I think that's important. I'll put that on notice, if that's all right.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. We need to take that on notice. More than happy to do so.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. No. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Sure. Thank you, Chair. It was recently reported in the media, and it's in the Solicitor-General's annual report for 24-25, concerns that the Solicitor-General raised over the apparent growing practice of government agencies seeking legal advice elsewhere, potentially inhouse rather than via Crown Law. That's on page 5 and 6 of the annual report. I do note that there's also mention in the Anti-Discrimination Office annual report about matters to do with seeking legal advice from the Solicitor-General and that holding up complaints being

dealt with, for example. There's some interesting discussions around the seeking of advice by departments from the Solicitor-General.

I'm just wondering, particularly in light of the Commission of Inquiry concerns, about the perceptions of potential conflicts of interest where the state utilises Crown Law against victim survivors or whistleblowers or other witnesses. Does the government intend to respond to the concerns that have been raised by the Solicitor-General in the annual report regarding the use of alternative legal advice, inhouse or otherwise?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. I will pass to the secretary to outline the various procedures and protocols that apply and of course note on the public record Mr Woolcott's review, the first part of which has been released publicly by the premier, and of course an indication that's very clear and on the public record that the second part will be released in the not-too-distant future. I draw that to your attention. Through you, Chair. Thanks, secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. Not seeking to speak for the Solicitor-General, but having read her annual report, the concerns that she raises I think is a separate issue, albeit I can see the correlation to concerns that've been previously raised around being able to make sure that Crown Law is able to brief out as required to prevent any potential conflicts of interests, which happens very regularly in line with the relevant TIs across all of the three main Crown principal areas.

The distinction in relation to the matters raised by the Solicitor-General go to concerns about the nature of these types of positions that purport to give legal advice to their respective head of agency or other members of the executive, particularly when workloads are high and things move very fast, is understandable, but the importance of the role of the second law officer to offer a consistent approach and a single view to the application of the law to the Crown remains a fundamental underpinning that I think needs to be managed.

Certainly, this issue is one that heads of agency talk about. I am sure we'll have further discussions following the tabling of the Solicitor-General's report because there is a role for legal officers, absolutely, but it's about making sure that we are clear when advice needs to be sought from the Solicitor-General, given the binding nature of it, and on particular matters that ensure that there's consistency across government in the application of that law.

Ms WEBB - So at the moment, is there a documented protocol for that?

Ms BOURNE -Through the deputy in terms of the seeking of external legal advice?

Ms WEBB - Yes, or just the distinction between when an in-house - some legal advice provided within a department by a legal officer of some kind is appropriate and when it must go to the Solicitor-General, is that described in a protocol of some sort?

Ms BOURNE -So there are guidelines for the seeking of legal advice. They are high level in terms of the intended audience for those, and I think it's traditionally been well understood when you seek Solicitor-General advice. My observation is what may have changed over time is the nature and statements of duties of legal officers in agencies where there's a bit more of a blurring of a line.

PUBLIC

I think it's probably a good time for further discussions to happen to ensure that there's clarity around those roles so that we maintain, you know, the sanctity, so to speak, of the SG, but also note the important role that legal officers play in agencies to manage really critical day-to-day and complex work on behalf of the agency.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I've got another question, too, around model litigant guidelines, which the Solicitor-General's annual report also reiterates, quite rightly, the expectation that all government agencies abide by the model litigant guidelines which are currently available there on the solicitor general's website.

My question is in relation to how those model litigant guidelines are promoted throughout Crown Law and the broader government agencies, what training is provided in relation to them, and is there any auditing undertaken of complaint-based interactions between the state and the public or non-government entities to test whether the model litigant guidelines are being applied appropriately.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question, and I will pass to the secretary in a moment, but in terms of, obviously, across Crown Law, the Office of the Solicitor-General, but also the Office of State Litigator, it was very much at the forefront of their work, and the Office of the State Litigator, in terms of implementing those guidelines in terms of trauma-informed approach and the like, which is very important, flowing from the Commission of Inquiry. They are important in terms of how they are communicated across government. I will ask the secretary to respond.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, in terms of the communication aspect, so they are, as you've noted, available on the website, something that each of the Crown principal areas articulate through engagement with their staff and also instructing agencies when there are discussions, as you would appreciate, between instructors and counsel about a particular path to take, and my experience as head of agency has been there's a constant referring back to best practice as a model litigant.

Crown will also provide, effectively, lunchbox sessions for continuing legal education, not just for practitioners, but also for state servants, and I am fairly confident to say that model litigant guidelines have been the subject of those sessions in the past, and it's something that's certainly front of mind in terms of the need to make sure that not just those practising legal practitioners, but people who provide instructions for them to undertake work are aware of those guidelines.

Ms WEBB - In terms of the auditing of complaints, for example? You know, is there a record keeping of complaints made potentially by either members of the public or non-government entities relating to an assertion that Model Litigant Guidelines haven't been followed? Do we collect data or information about whether those sorts of complaints are made?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, deputy, not a specific system or SharePoint that captures those types of complaints, and without speaking for the Crown principals, they would certainly receive from time to time assertions that model litigant guidelines haven't been complied with.

How they capture that for future reference, I can't speak to, but it's certainly something that we continue to talk about to ensure that particular practice or decision or approach that's the subject of a complaint doesn't happen again, and that's through that continuing legal

education with their respective officers, but no, I'm not aware of a particular audit mechanism aside from the individual processes that each Crown principal's office, and obviously with the support of the Director of Crown Law, have in place.

Ms WEBB - I find that a little bit concerning, Attorney-General, just because it is really important that we are following Model Litigant Guidelines in this space, as reiterated in the annual report by the Solicitor General. It's particularly sensitive given what's come up through the Commission of Inquiry.

I don't understand how we can answer for ourselves how well are we doing this, do we need to be doing better, if we're not actually collecting and reporting on and in some way auditing complaints that may be coming in about it. Is that something you can commit to looking at further in terms of us being able to have confidence in the degree to which we are doing what we say we must do in terms of these guidelines?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thanks very much for the question, and certainly it's important to government, and that's why the Model Litigant Guidelines are in place. They are important. It's an expectation I have of my department and the Department of Justice and, of course, their work through the Crown Law Officer, Solicitor-General, State Litigator's Office and the like. I hear and meet with them regularly, and, of course, they are always able to share with me their concerns or views.

Of course, other members of the public and the community, business community, all the like, likewise, from time to time share their views directly with me, but likewise, the secretary meets with and has regular meetings of course with those relevant, and I should note, as the secretary, I'm sure, will confirm, regular meetings with the Secretary's Board, so other secretaries across government, in terms of what challenges and opportunities present. I might just pass to the secretary to add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, that's right, Secretaries Board because all from time to time to different extents instruct Crown Law across all principals' offices to perform work on our behalf would certainly be a forum where concerns would be raised, but I am happy to consider discussions with the Crown principals about - and the Director of Crown Law about whether there is a more, I guess, concerted way that we can pull together those complaints, for lack of a better word, particularly for, you know, educational purposes, for staff, as part of that ongoing and continuous legal education.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that undertaking. I think it's important for us to be able to know what we're acquiring is being complied with here. We can't answer that unless we collect information and data about it.

Output Group 2.2

Legislation Development and Review

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you, Chair, and deputy, I believe this will fall here so tell me if I'm incorrect. I'll just let you get your notes. Is the department up to date with the review schedule, and are there any pieces of legislation that are past their due date?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. I would like to do a shout out, obviously, to my deputy secretary on my right, but also Bruce Paterson, who I think many in

the room know and meet with from time to time in terms of briefings and explanations of various legislation.

You would have noticed our massive workload this year and the implementation of that, including since the election in terms of the justice legislation, which I've had the privilege of leading as the Chief Law Officer through the Parliament. I want to thank my team for the work that they've provided and the support that they give me. In terms of the detail, I'll pass to either the secretary or the deputy secretary to answer.

Ms BOURNE -Thanks, deputy. I'm just seeking further advice as to whether there's anything more specific we can share. The team led by Mr Paterson, our strategic legislation and policy team, as well as progressing law reform, obviously, is responsible for making sure that the agency's regulations and other statutory review timeframes are met and when they are due. I understand from Mr Paterson that we do have a list of statutory reviews and their due dates, and I understand that none are outstanding or late at this point in time.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you very much. I just noticed as part of this output it is the Council of Attorneys-General. I wanted to ask whether there was anything coming from that that you could share with us at all?

Mr BARNETT - I'd be more than happy because we had a meeting on Friday. That's the SCAG, so Standing Council of Attorneys-General. It was in Brisbane. I was online, in light of parliamentary responsibilities in Hobart. The secretary was there. We have an ongoing commitment to delivering better access to justice and improved justice system.

I'll just give you a heads-up. Obviously, the children's checks, registration for working with vulnerable people - we obviously passed that legislation in recent days, which I was able to provide an update on our progress at the standing council.

We have a range of topics, obviously Closing the Gap, justice reinvestment, the National Access to Justice Partnership has been important, which we've raised at the previous meeting. The responding to the abuse of older Australians was on the agenda on Friday, so we certainly spoke to that and our support for that. And cyber incident coordination, again, is front and centre. And I'm just thinking of the other main topics, but the secretary might want to add to that.

Yes, it's an ongoing work. It's a very good Standing Council of Attorneys-General. We work collaboratively; we work well together. Michelle Rowland, this is her second meeting she had, the federal Attorney-General. I think She did it very well. She's leading those meetings positively and constructively, in my view, and I look forward to ongoing good working relationships because there's a lot of crossover between the state and federal justice priorities. And obviously crime, law and order, particularly in various jurisdictions, is red-hot. Youth crime, obviously you would be aware of. As a state, I think we're holding our head high. There's always more work to do.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Yes, I've got some follow-ups. Thank you for that. Actually, I'll start with where you landed there, just mentioning youth crime, Attorney-General. So we know in some aspects of your government - through TasPol - we're pursuing sort of tough-on-crime-type approaches and some fairly stern language around things targeting youth offenders in particular, driving more children into the court system through some of those initiatives, and yet we've got also your government's very clear stated commitment to the Commission of Inquiry recommendations, which are very clear about the direction to take with raising the age of criminal responsibility and the age of detention.

So can you just confirm for us today that we're not going to be following some of those regressive steps in other states, like Victoria, when it comes to youth crime, and that we still have a very firm commitment from you and your government to introduce, as recommended from the Commission of Inquiry, raising the age of criminal responsibility and youth detention?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. As you know, we've committed to all 191 recommendations of the commission of inquiry. As a government, we're now implementing the various recommendations. As you know, it's been in a staged approach - three stages through to 2024, 2026, 2029 from memory - and we're progressing.

As you know, we've got a massive legislative load, which my department and across government we are implementing. There are so many key parts of that. I've mentioned the Commission for Children and Young People key infrastructure set-up that will deliver improvements for children and young people, and of course that relates to youth crime as well.

We have a top priority of keeping our community safe and yet also providing rehabilitation from our offenders in our facilities - prison facilities. So I'm not sure I can add anything further but to reiterate that we continue to act in accordance with the Commission of Inquiry recommendations.

CHAIR - Thank you, Attorney-General.

Ms WEBB - Now, can I ask a question about the RTI Review recently done, the Getting Back on Track independent review of Tasmania's RTI information framework by Professor Tim McCormack and Adjunct Professor Rick Snell, released in September. That review has recommendations relating to relatively comprehensive legislative review and reforms, amongst its 43 recommendations. I'm wondering, are you able to provide an indication of when you might expect the government's formal response to the important review, and will it occur before parliament rises at the end of this year?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks very much for the question. Again, I thank Professor Tim McCormack and Associate Professor Rick Snell, both of whom I went through law school with many decades ago, and very accomplished and incredibly talented young - youngish - men doing that job.

Yes, that report has been delivered, and the Premier - obviously on behalf of the government and responsible primarily for the right to information process across government - and of course the Head of the State Service will be providing that advice to the Premier. I'm sure the Premier - well, I know the Premier will be responding in due course in a considered way to that report.

PUBLIC

It's very important; it's quite comprehensive as you've outlined. Lots of recommendations. The Premier has indicated a very considered response to that, and likewise has thanked - as have I - both Professor McCormack and Rick Snell for their work.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. It was a question for the Premier tomorrow then, perhaps, rather than for you. And the funding for that review came out of DPAC rather than Department of Justice?

Mr BARNETT - That's my understanding. I'll just clarify that. It didn't come from Justice. So we can clarify that tomorrow, but I'm very sure it would have come out of DPAC.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I have another question around the TLRI review of privacy laws in Tasmania that came out last year - in May last year. That report came out and found that Tasmania does not have a comprehensive privacy regulation system in that sense, and recommended a review of legislation that requires the retention of personal information. It was 63 recommendations, actually, but the review of legislation by the government and then something to replace the patchwork system we've got at the moment was recommended.

My question is: will the government consider undertaking that recommended review of Tasmanian laws - any that touch onto that space of retaining personal information - and then, if not, what are the government's legislative priorities for strengthening privacy laws and rights in the absence of a comprehensive review?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question, and firstly, thank you to the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute for their work. Caught up with the director just a few weeks ago and really appreciate their good work in a whole range of areas. As a government, we continue to fund the TLRI for their good work, both more generally and then specifically on relevant topics. More recently, the Coroner's Act review.

In terms of the privacy report and recommendations that you refer to, we take that seriously. That's been considered very carefully by my department. It's obviously complex, but it also overlaps with the SCAG, and we've just had the question from the honourable member for Montgomery with respect to the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General, and we're looking at - it came up on Friday - facial recognition software and the laws and regulations that apply to facial recognition, and as it relates to privacy.

That was discussed and there's more work to be done by SCAG and some working groups around the country that are under the auspices of SCAG. So that is likewise being reviewed, and we'll have more to say once that review is undertaken. I'll just check with the secretary if there's anything further to add.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you, just to note that we have recently asked other agencies across the service to nominate for a working group to continue to work through the TLRI's report and other projects that are happening at a national level. There is a lot of interaction between different reviews and reports, including the commission of inquiry recommendations as well, to further inform advice that we'll provide to the deputy in due course.

Ms WEBB - That's good to hear. Can I ask that - I'm not sure if this is going to be a quick question. It's just in relation to legislation we've just recently passed, the Expungement of Historical Offences Act in the redress scheme.

And I just wanted to touch on something that came up in that debate, about whether the department has any intention to consider proactively identifying and finding current whereabouts of potential eligible participants in that scheme now that it's been passed through the Parliament, knowing that there's very few of them and they're likely quite elderly, and time is of the essence.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thank you for the question. I also thank the Parliament for passing that legislation and setting up that redress scheme. In terms of the communications in and around that, obviously we take it seriously in terms of the implementation of that legislation. That's why we brought it into the Parliament. I know there was a committee chaired by Ruth Forrest with respect to it as well, for which I thank them for their work.

In terms of the specifics of the communication, I will pass to the secretary, noting your point that obviously many of those potentially able elderly, and noting the redress arrangements are in place and to date there have been very few that have accessed that scheme.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. At the moment, following the passage of that legislation, we're developing a communication plan. Obviously, the development of that will include engaging with the LGBTQIA+ community on how best to promote it, including through our website.

In terms of direct contacting people who may be eligible to apply, I suspect that's probably something that will come up in the development of this plan and inform further discussions we have with government, noting that balance between respecting individuals' privacy in the event that they may have made a deliberate decision not to apply but working through that ahead of the royal assent of the bill later this month.

Output group 3.1

Prison services

CHAIR - Okay. Thank you. Mr Edmunds, if we could go to prison services.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you, Chair. Minister, could you give me the number of inmates currently within correctional facilities in Tasmania by men and women?

Mr BARNETT - Right. We're onto Corrections now, through you, Chair. Is that right?

CHAIR - Yes, that is. Prison services, and then we'll have community corrections services last.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. 3.1.

CHAIR - 3.1. Yes.

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Mr BARNETT - Yes. All right. I'll just check. Bear with us in terms of the prison numbers. I can assist the honourable member. Again, I wanted to say upfront thank you to our correctional service officers and the staff in our correctional facilities. They do an excellent job. They are on the frontline. They are supporting all of us in our justice system, and we are very highly invested as a government supporting contemporary, consistent and accountable judicial system and the Tasmanian prison service plays a critical role in that.

In 2023, we released the Changing Lives, Creating Futures strategic plan, which continues our strong focus on rehabilitation and reintegration. In terms of the numbers, let's see if my secretary or deputy secretary can assist. I've got average numbers. Did you want to go to the averages?

Mr EDMUNDS - The current ones, if that's okay, of sentenced and on remand of men and women, please.

Mr BARNETT - All right. Let's see. We're trying to get updated numbers as of today because we get weekly reports.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - You may as well get the latest report.

Mr EDMUNDS - Sounds good.

Mr BARNETT - Can I welcome to the table Colin Shepherd, responsible for our corrective services and rehabilitation. Interested in the numbers, the most recent you've got, Mr Shepherd.

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy. As of yesterday, we had 851 prisoners. That was made up of 323 in the remand population and 514 in the sentence population. I can give you a further breakdown, if you'd-

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Men and women, if that's possible.

Mr SHEPHERD - Yes, sure.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

Mr SHEPHERD - Females is 71, and males is 779, and one is not stated.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Breakdown between remand and sentence?

Mr SHEPHERD - Yes, sorry.

Mr EDMUNDS - That's fine.

Mr SHEPHERD - The sentenced is 514, and remand was 323.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, but by gender.

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CHAIR - Gender.

Mr SHEPHERD - By gender.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. It's okay. Take your time.

Mr SHEPHERD - Sentenced females is 30, and remand is 20, and unknown is two. I'm just trying to reconcile that against our-

Ms WEBB - I think you might have to check those numbers.

CHAIR - This doesn't quite come to 851.

Mr SHEPHERD - No. Can I give it you as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal? Then that will give me the totals, if that makes sense.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay.

Mr SHEPHERD - For non-Indigenous, for males, there are nine that are unknown at the moment, and there are 356 sentenced males, and there are 196 remandees. Then for non-Indigenous females, there are two that are not stated, there are 30 that are sentenced, and there are 20 on remand. Then for Indigenous males, three are not stated. 120 are sentenced. 95 are on remanded. For Indigenous females, there are 19. Seven are sentenced, and 12 are on remand.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

CHAIR - I don't think those numbers add up.

Mr SHEPHERD - They don't add up always, because as I've said, some of them are unknown or not stated in terms of what their current status is, whether they've been sentenced or remand, because we're still waiting.

CHAIR - Okay. Thank you.

Mr EDMUNDS - How many people are on remand at Risdon rather than at Southern Remand?

Mr SHEPHERD - Thank you for the question.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

Mr SHEPHERD - The numbers in SRC as of yesterday were 150, and our total remand population was 323. I think that means 173 who are not in the Southern Remand Centre.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

Mr SHEPHERD - Some of those were probably in the Launceston Reception Prison rather than in Risdon itself.

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Mr EDMUNDS - Thanks very much. Do you know the real net operating expenditure per inmate per day for year 2023-24 and, if possible, year 2024-25?

Mr BARNETT - I think the secretary's got the specific details on that - through you, Chair - if we could pass to the secretary.

CHAIR - Yes, certainly.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. In 2023-24, the real net operating cost per prisoner per day was \$472.27, a decrease on the previous year's figure of \$507.38, which was adjusted for inflation.

Mr EDMUNDS - Sorry, it was a decrease from that figure or a decrease of that figure?

Ms BOURNE - The 2023-24 operating costs was a decrease on the 2022-23 per prisoner per day cost, a reduction from \$507-

Mr EDMUNDS - From. Yes, yes. Great.

Ms BOURNE - Yes, sorry.

Mr EDMUNDS - No, that's all right. I think we might have mistaken the *Hansard*, because last year we got that \$472 for 2022-23, but that was the 2023-24 figure. Is that -

Ms BOURNE - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Thanks. Do we have the 2024-25 figure? We've got a few head shakes. Yes.

Ms BOURNE - Through you, deputy, still being finalised.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. When's that number sort of - next year.

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy, in January next year.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, great. Thank you. Another one, what is the current number of open workers' compensation claims, and what is the percentage of the TPS workforce?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Certainly, in terms of workers' comp as a department and as a government, it's very important to manage the risks to the health and safety of its people in preventing work-related injury and illness of its employees. It supports employees who sustain a work-related injury or illness to recover at work, return to work in a safe, sustainable way. So that's obviously a preliminary response. In terms of the detail of your question, I'll pass to the deputy secretary or the secretary. Deputy Secretary Colin Shepherd.

Mr SHEPHERD - At the moment, there are 110 workers' comp claims that relate from this year for the Tasmanian Prison Service.

Ms WEBB - This year 2025-26, or this year 2024-25?

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Mr SHEPHERD - 2024-25.

Mr EDMUNDS - Do you want to know if that's a decrease?

Mr SHEPHERD - Thanks. Through you, deputy. I mean, there is a decrease in these figures. So that's a 25 per cent reduction from last year's figures.

Mr EDMUNDS - Does the figure you have for last year - is that 122?

Mr SHEPHERD - I've got 124.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay.

Mr SHEPHERD - Can I just correct that? Sorry. I think it's an 11 per cent decrease. Sorry.

Mr EDMUNDS - It's all good. That's what I was checking, that I had the right-ish numbers here. Yes, thank you.

CHAIR - Can I just ask through you, deputy, the number of staff, the correctional officers employed for the - I guess, the 2024-25 year? If you don't - probably don't have the 2025-26 year.

Mr BARNETT - We can assist the honourable member with staff numbers at the prison service.

CHAIR - Yes, and vacancies as well, if you could, any vacancies that exist.

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy. I can tell you that as of 31 October this year, we've got a total of 469.3 FTEs who are correctional officers and a headcount of 471. I'm not sure in terms of vacancies that I've got that information at the moment.

CHAIR - No. The other question I would have before I go to other members is, can you tell me the cost of overtime for the 2024-25 and, if you can, for the 2025-26 years, please?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. Let's just see if the deputy can dig up those numbers.

CHAIR - Or the hours of overtime, if you don't have the cost.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. We'll just check. I think the secretary might have that to hand.

Ms BOURNE - Thank you. Thank you, deputy. Through the numbers I have to hand for 2023-24 year overtime was \$12,286,789. The projected overtime amount for 2024-25 is \$13 million. We'll read it out numerically so I don't butcher it: \$13,030,989.

CHAIR - A lot of money for overtime. What is the primary reason for overtime? Would that be people on workers' comp, people turning up sick? Obviously, overtime is unexpected, or should be unexpected.

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Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy. Yes. there's a number of reasons. So certainly people being ill. We also have a number of unexpected hospital escorts and those sorts of things. There are some real challenges for us that we're trying to manage.

CHAIR - Thank you, members. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - I've got some. Thank you. I wanted to go through some details in the key deliverables areas for this line item. I'm imagining the increased prison therapeutics staff, that's listed as a key deliverable and has \$250,000 in the 2025-26 and in the 2026-27.

Now, tracking that back, it says it's extension of a budget initiative from 2023-24, but if you track that back further in that budget paper, it's an extension of a 2021 election commitment. Now, since that 2021 election commitment, so from the 2021-22 budget onwards, it's had \$500,000 a year allocated to it in 2021-22, 2022-23, then 2023-24, then 2024-25, and, now, where it's -

Mr SHEPHERD - Sorry. Which one are you talking about there?

Ms WEBB - Increased prison therapeutic staff.

Mr SHEPHERD - Right, yes.

Ms WEBB - So essentially, and no doubt a very necessary program. It's to enable the continuation of drug and alcohol intervention and therapeutic support in correctional facilities. So it's good to see it further extended and that it's been there since the 2021 election commitment, but I'm wondering why we've halved the investment in it for these two years in this budget. Is that because the need for the program has reduced, or is that a funding cut and a savings to be made?

Mr BARNETT - I'll just open my remarks in response before I pass to the secretary or deputy secretary. Certainly, as you've noted, it's a very important part of the prison service in terms of providing intervention programs, drug and alcohol, and other. It's quite a complex matter in terms of implementing those reforms because there needs to be a focus on rehabilitation at all times. Certainly, as a minister, I'm very pleased to be able to focus on that as a priority. In terms of the detail around those numbers, I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy, I mean, we also have a commitment of additional funding for some of these programs through the \$4.1 million that was previously allocated in last year's budget for correctional improvement programs.

Ms WEBB - Right. But then I'm trying to track money, because I think it's a really important area to be providing funding for. So it's great that across those years, since the 2021 election commitment was made, there was \$500,000 a year allocated into this space for increased present therapeutic staff for the drug and alcohol intervention support. So it looks on paper now - we've dropped that.

We've halved that amount down to \$250 000 a year for this year and next and then nothing further in the forward Estimates. My question is, is there less money being invested into those services in the prisons than there has been in the previous four years, or is it coming from another bucket of funding as suggested by Mr Shepherd?

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Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. Very important part of the services provided by the TPS and drug and alcohol services in the prison. You've indicated the funding support over the next two years, and as I've indicated earlier today, this is an interim budget. Obviously, May budget next year, there'll be further deliberations with respect to that in future years. It certainly remains a priority of the government and the correctional improvement program. I think there's \$4.1 million over four years for that, but I will pass to the deputy secretary to add to that answer.

Mr SHEPHERD - I'm not sure I can add much more than what I've previously indicated.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Then maybe I can make it even more set, cut and dried and simple. Are we delivering less in terms of this program and the support it provides to prisoners than we have in the previous four years because we're allocating half as much money to it, \$250,000 instead of \$500,000? Has there been a reduction in this service, either through the staffing of it or the resources provided to deliver it?

Mr BARNETT - There's a short answer. It's a very important program. I think the answer is no, but to outline how that applies, I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr SHEPHERD - Well, I don't have the breakdown of the figures, but as I've alluded to before, I don't believe that we are delivering any less what we've been delivering. It's just that the way that the funding is being apportioned is, as I've said, there's the \$250 000 for the next two years, and then there is additional money which is coming from last year's budget allocation, which is part of the \$4.1million.

Ms WEBB - Okay. So it's definitely not a reduced area of support or service in the prisons?

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy, I don't consider it is. In fact, I think we're going the other way, because we have additional funding that's been received, for delivering a dedicated new alcohol and drug treatment facility, which will be part of the new maximum-security unit that's going into RPC.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Moving on to one of the other -

CHAIR - Sorry, Mr Edmunds had a follow-up.

Mr EDMUNDS - Is that okay if I just -

Ms WEBB - Please.

Mr EDMUNDS - This is maybe more about the work programs, but how do the sheer numbers that you now have, how is access to those sort of work programs been impacted? You were talking about the dollars there before, but what about just the sheer number of people potentially wanting to access those programs, or, indeed, requiring more operational attention, rather than the programs? Are they impacted by the increase in numbers of prisoners?

Mr BARNETT - As I say, we've put a focus on the drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in the prison. We've recently passed legislation to expand those services to alcohol treatment orders, as well as drug treatment orders. I think that was in the last 24 months. I think

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the deputy secretary has outlined the priority we've placed on it, in terms of the funding support. I'll just check if the -

Mr EDMUNDS - What about the work programs, though?

Mr BARNETT - I'll just pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr EDMUNDS - Industries if you wanted to add to that.

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy, could I just seek clarification on what you mean by the work programs?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Things like -

Mr SHEPHERD - Industries?

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, and even programs where - I know, on the eastern shore, they do the walls, and the work program through the council and things like that. Are prisoners still getting access to those sorts of programs, or is the extra volume of people at the centre creating a work demand that means those sorts of programs aren't getting utilised?

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy, I think my answer would be that there are always pressures, but I'm confident that we're delivering at least the same, if not more of those programs. One of the commitments that the government has made is to fund the new Risdon kitchen. That's very close to completion now. So that will allow us to continue to employ 50 to 70 prisoners in the kitchen. It has also got a dedicated training facility in it.

The new Director of Prisons - and I don't really want to verbal Narelle, because she's here, but we've certainly been looking at what industries we're able to roll out. We are looking to do some new industries, but we've also been able to increase some that we've already got there. We've got things like the laundries and the textile industries, and they are all continuing to operate. Where we can expand, we are expanding.

Mr BARNETT - Can I just indicate, we're expending nearly - I think a little bit more than \$15 million for the new kitchen, which will be opening, all being well, before Christmas. There's a mention of the laundry, where they work. The kitchen will be an area where they can work, the laundry, where they can work. Various education and training facilities within the prison service, but also the section 42, where they work in the community, and that's an ongoing - I think you made mention to working in the community, in local government areas. That's an important part of our prison service, to provide opportunities for work, education. Certainly for me, as a minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation, I see that as really important, to get them in the best position possible, to transition back to civilian life. So rehabilitation, and then that education and training, to provide that best chance to move back into civilian life.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I come back to that, then, where I was at with it?

Mr SHEPHERD - Please.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Following on from Mr Edmunds as well - and I think the very good law reform we did do through the parliament, in the alcohol treatment orders, we'll

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probably deal with in Community Corrections, I suspect, because that would be, I think, where that lands, does it not? It's not an in-prison arrangement; it's in Community Corrections.

On this drug and alcohol intervention and therapeutic support which we were discussing just a moment ago, how - and my question was around, has there been a reduction in that service, or will there be a reduction in that service.

Perhaps a different way to come at this would be, how are people identified as requiring that support, and is every person who is identified as requiring that support while they're incarcerated receiving it currently?

Mr SHEPHERD - Thank you for the question. You are right in your assessment of the drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, that are important, as I've indicated earlier. In terms of how that program is rolling out across the service, I wanted to acknowledge the role of the new director and thank her for her efforts to implement these important policies and to running our prison. I think it was the first day in the role, I had the opportunity to visit the Risdon Prison and various parts of it, and had an excellent tour, thanks to the services of the director, Narelle Pamplin. I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms WEBB - Do you want me to reiterate the question?

Mr SHEPHERD - That would be good. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - I'm just interested to know, in terms of the drug and alcohol intervention and therapeutic support that's provided to people who are incarcerated, how is it identified that people require that support and are provided with that service? Is everybody who is identified as requiring it currently receiving it?

Mr SHEPHERD - I'll just get Narelle to -

Mr BARNETT - If the director is here - Narelle, welcome to the table. As I've indicated, thank you for your service, and the opportunity for me, in my first day in the role, to show me through Risdon Complex. The advice, before I pass to you, is that additional funding has allowed the TPS to better meet the demand for alcohol and other drug interventions. The TPS now offers one-to-one alcohol and drug counselling for any prisoner who has self-identified as being ready for support. Having said that, I will pass to the director, who knows far more about this than myself.

Ms PAMPLIN - Thank you for the question. Through you, deputy. There's two parts to the question. The first is, has there been a reduction in services, and the answer is no, there has been no reduction in services. We have four alcohol and other drug counsellors on staff. They've been maintained throughout this whole period. In terms of screening and the identification of need, it's done through a variety of different manners. So we are looking to uplift, in the very near future, the direction that we need to go, for clear screening tools. But at this point, it is self-identification, largely. Each person, through their case manager, when they come into prison, will identify their own individual needs, and those will be responded to. In terms of the four staff, they run a variety of programs. They run a number of individual sessions with those who request it, and we also have family interventions workers, who can work with families in a restorative manner as well.

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Ms WEBB - Thank you for that answer. Just to clarify, anyone who has been identified as requiring the support can access the support.

Ms PAMPLIN - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I move on to another -

CHAIR - Perhaps I might have a question first, if that's all right.

Ms WEBB - That's fine. I'm happy to fit around everybody else. I'll keep going for as long as you let me.

CHAIR - Thank you. Deputy, regarding double-bunking in the prisons, it is a reality that bunk beds have been installed in some single cells to accommodate overcrowding. Some inmates have expressed concerns about the safety and privacy risks associated with this move, which includes having to share toilets within the cell. What is actually happening to avoid safety issues and the double-up? Is there very much double-up happening, particularly in the - I think it's the Ron Barwick Unit?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. I think you've alluded to an issue that's relevant to all prisons throughout Australia. Many jurisdictions are in a similar boat, and managing the numbers and the capacity in different parts of the prison.

I should note that we're just rolling out the security arrangements, and that has caused some interruption to the various services in different parts of the prison. It's an important investment by the government, in terms of improved security across the Tas prison service, specifically at Risdon. In terms of the detail around that, I will pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy. We have a small number of what we call surge beds, which are our bunk beds. Our normal policy is, as best as possible, we will give everyone their own cell. There are some prisoners who would actually prefer to share a cell, so we do have some buddy cells where that can happen. But, as I say, normally we would be accommodating people on their own, but occasionally, particularly across some of the security classifications, we may have times where we need to have additional beds, and so we've installed some bunks into a number of the facilities.

In terms of the example that you have given in Ron Barwick, that is, as the deputy has alluded to, those extra beds going there are a response to the electronic security upgrades that we're rolling out across the whole of the Risdon site, and the fact is that, as we develop some of the units with the new security systems, we will have to decant those for the period of time that they're being worked on. So this is just forward planning from our perspective, so that we'll be able to, for a short period of time, accommodate people whilst those facilities are being fixed, and then the people will go back into them.

CHAIR - Have there been any issues? While you've actually had two inmates, have there been any security issues or any problems between them?

Mr BARNETT - I'll have to pass to the deputy or the prison director.

CHAIR - Yes. None you're aware of?

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Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy. Not that we're aware of. We've got a process of assessment before we determine whether or not it would be appropriate for someone to share a cell. So we go through a risk assessment, and we of course talk to the individuals involved, and then, based on that, we make a determination as to whether it would be appropriate or not.

CHAIR - Thank you. If you have one quick question, because we are running a little bit late on time. We have quite a few input groups to go.

Ms WEBB - That's okay. Thank you. I'll pick another one from the key deliverables here. The Family Violence Offender Intervention Programs has \$500,000 allocated in this financial year, and then nothing allocated across the forward Estimates. Clearly, that's an important program for us to be considering as an ongoing funded program within prison service. What's happening after this year to that program, given that nothing's allocated?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for that. Certainly, as you know, family and domestic violence is a top priority for our government and it crosses almost every part of government and government portfolios in Tasmania - across the nation. It's a very complex issue that's being raised at SCAG, and it's important to us in Tasmania, and we'll have more to say about that in the near future.

In terms of prevention and early intervention, it's crucial to addressing family violence and we've invested over \$100 million over five years for 38 actions to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence in Tasmania. I want to put on record my sincere thanks to the former premier, Will Hodgman, for his leadership in this space going back to 2015, from memory. I will pass to the deputy secretary to add to that answer.

Mr SHEPHERD - I'm not sure that I've got too much more than I can add.

Ms WEBB - Pretty straightforwardly, are we planning to continue it beyond this financial year?

Mr BARNETT - Well, this is an interim budget. Obviously, more will be said in the May budget. We do consider addressing family and domestic violence as a priority for our government and more will be said about that in the very near future. I've indicated, working with the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Minister for Women, Jane Howlett, that she and I will have more to say about that. We're providing the opportunity for members of the community to respond to our discussion paper on family violence reforms. That's an area that we do consider very important, and that'll be in the public arena very imminently.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. So it's a pretend absence of money in the coming years, we'd assume, then. On that program, how many people have completed it over the past - actually, how long has it been in place? A couple of years now? I can't recall, but across the time it's been in place, each year, how many people have completed it within the system?

Mr BARNETT - We have a number of programs within the system, but I will pass to the -

Ms WEBB - This is the Family Violence Offender Intervention Program.

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - Yes. As I say, we have a number of programs, but specifically on that, I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr SHEPHERD - Thank you. Through you, deputy. For the 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 period, we had 23 people enrolled in the Family Violence Program. Twenty-two completed it, one didn't.

In the EQUIPS Foundation, 75 enrolled, 45 completed, 18 are still participating and 12 not completed.

In the Dialectic Behavioural Therapy Program, 30 enrolled, 9 completed, 13 participating and 8 non-completed.

In the Making Changes Program we had 8 enrolled and they are all still participating.

New Direction Sex Offender Treatment, there were 31 enrolled, 23 completed, 8 are still participating and one not completed.

The Resilience Program there were 42 enrolled, 29 completed and 13 did not.

In Respectful Men, we had 24 enrolled, 21 completed and three didn't complete.

In the EQUIPS Aggression, we had 8 enrolled and those 8 are still participating.

It's a total of 241 people.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. It's great to hear that those programs are all occurring and some of them have good enrolment and completion data. That's obviously not all from this \$500,000 for Family Violence Offender Intervention Programs. What are the other funding sources for those programs?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. We'll just check with the secretary or the deputy secretary.

Mr SHEPHERD - There is additional funding from the Commonwealth government of \$1.5 million over four years, but within our appropriation from government, we also have full-time staff employed at the TPS whose job it is to roll out these sorts of programs.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Are you able to give me a total investment - funding investment - for the programs that you just listed? Are you able to provide that to us potentially on notice?

Mr BARNETT - Be more than happy to, on notice. The deputy would like to add to an answer.

Mr SHEPHERD - No, thanks. No, thank you.

Mr BARNETT - We'll take that on notice. Through you, Chair.

Ms WEBB - Sure. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - You don't have any burning question that you needed?

Ms WEBB - I would have asked about some of the others, but if you want to move on for lack of time, we can always come back if we end up with more time at the end.

CHAIR - Absolutely. No, that's a good idea. Okay, if we could move on to Community Corrective Services.

Output group 3.2 Community Corrective Services

CHAIR - The first question I would have is: what's the current staffing ratio of case managers to supervised offenders?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Through you Chair, I'll indicate that we do have the Executive Director of Community Corrections, Chris Carney. If you're happy for Chris to come to the table.

CHAIR - So looking very happy over the back and hoping to come to the table.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chris, for coming to the table. It's a very important part of our service, in terms of providing support for those in prison and to reduce reoffending, to promote rehabilitation, facilitating those significant outcomes for a safer Tasmania. But to be more specific to add to that answer I'll pass to Chris.

CHAIR - Would you like me to ask the question again, or you're all right?

Mr CARNEY - Yes. Through you, deputy. So the operational staff is drawn from the ROGS data. The 2023-24 data is the actual published data. We had 18.3 staff to offenders - operational staff - and we had 90.6 other staff, so they're support staff to offenders. What I can tell you is we have done the data and have submitted it for next year's ROGS as well, and both - it was 18.3 operational staff per offender. Oh sorry, 18.3 offenders per operational staff.

CHAIR - Offenders to staff. Otherwise, no wonder we've got \$13 million overtime.

Mr CARNEY - So it will go from 18.3 to 18.8 offenders per operational staff member.

CHAIR - So is that consistent with best practice?

Mr CARNEY - Through you, deputy. That means it's about average nationally at the moment. If you give me one second. So when we were 18.3, the Australian average was 19. It was actually more offenders per operational staff member than we had. We were below the national average, which is great.

CHAIR - No, thank you. Another question I would have, so what is the waitlist length for a person to receive a place at a drug and alcohol treatment facility if a person receives a drug alcohol treatment order?

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Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. Appreciate that, in terms of drug and alcohol treatment.

CHAIR - And obviously, does it affect the sentencing options for the court?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, yes. No, understand that, and I appreciate that. Maybe Chris is able to assist the committee? Thank you.

Mr CARNEY - Yes. Thank you, deputy, through you. The waitlist times do fluctuate quite significantly, and it depends on which service people are looking to get into, when exactly they're sentenced to the order. It doesn't impact their suitability for sentence to the program, however. If residential rehab is a genuine requirement for somebody, in order to help them manage their drug abuse issue, we will actively work with them whatever stage throughout that process they are.

It may actually start with a day program through a residential facility and build up to a residential facility. It may start that they're already in there by the time they get sentenced to the program. We're really just working with the person where they are at the time of their sentence. Then what that program does is it gives us an opportunity to continue to work actively with them to ensure that the next step in their journey toward illicit substance abuse issue management is tailored to where they are at that time.

It may be that when they start to enter the program or at our initial assessment, we make a recommendation that a residential rehab program would be the best program for them, but there's not one available, so we'll work with them with what's available, and then by the time there is a bed available, it may actually no longer be the best option for them. So we're going to make those dynamic risk assessments throughout our engagement with them to make sure the best intervention approach and model is how we target that order management.

CHAIR - Is availability of the programs simply a matter of resourcing, or are there other factors in play?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to Chris.

Mr CARNEY - Again, through you, deputy. I think what you're asking me about is availability of residential rehab beds, or are you asking about placements on the drug and alcohol program?

CHAIR - Placements on the program.

Mr CARNEY - There are still placements on the program currently.

CHAIR - Right.

Mr CARNEY - At the moment, as of last Wednesday, we had 74 people who were actively on drug treatment orders in Tasmania, and there are 120 places that are available. So there's lots of room there, and that really has to do with court referrals. The program can fluctuate quite significantly, and it can take a little bit of time to build up again, just because the assessment program that we undertake to ensure that it's the right fit model for people in

partnership with obviously the courts and in partnership with other support services that engage with that program is invested. It is lengthy.

It is ensuring we're making sure that if somebody is sentenced to that order, it is the right order for them, simply because it is a very, very difficult order to get through. Obviously attached to the back of that order is a prison sentence, so if we don't get the right people through the door and it isn't the right fit option for them, it can be quite significant in terms of what a breach of that order can mean for them.

So there are lots of places available, and that really depends on referrals from the court to the court and then the assessments that we undertake and the recommendations that we provide to the court. They have a number of assessments that are active at the moment they're still considering and contemplating, but there are placements available in all locations and all regions across the state to manage the kind of work that comes through.

Again, what we do see - sorry, just what we do see at the beginning of those orders sometimes is that people do get onto them and then they move off them. So we do see a little bit of a failure rate right at the beginning. It's not about failure, it is just about they get on the program, they last a few months, it really isn't a good fit for them, so then the court's take a new approach to it. But it does take a little bit of time to build it back up again.

CHAIR - No, thank you. I do have more questions, but I'm sure others do.

Ms WEBB - I've just got one.

CHAIR - Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - In terms of the key deliverables listed, the Community Corrections managing high-risk offenders that is listed there, which has \$1,380,000 this year and across the forward Estimates each year, it says it's for operational funding to manage high-risk offenders orders and case manage and monitor dangerous criminals and high-risk offenders post-release, including psychological assessments and secretariat services. Can you give a breakdown of how those funds will be used across those different elements of this funding bucket?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for that. It's obviously a really important area for government and our community to make Tasmania a safer community. My advice on 6 November, Tasmania had seven offenders in the community on high-risk offender orders. Obviously, we passed the legislation, and it commenced in June 2021. In terms of the risk assessments and dangerous criminals, I'll see if Chris Carney, through the secretary, is able to assist the committee.

Mr CARNEY - The additional funds were made available to support the secretary of the department who manages the risk assessment committee, which is the multi-departmental committee, that it's made of high level decision makers across the Department of Health, DPAC, Justice, the Police - there's another one - members from across agencies to try to make an informed decision - the DPP - is of course there as well. Thank you, minister.

So that committee is - sorry, it's engaged to try to make some recommendations to the DPP around who would be suitable for a high-risk offender order. That committee is supported by a secretariat, so some of that funding is used to pay for the secretary to that committee. Part

of the role of that committee is also to refer people for assessments with a forensic psychologist to determine whether they meet the suitability and eligibility criteria for high-risk offender orders that can then support the referral to the DPP and a recommendation around whether an order should be made.

So part of the funding is carved off for that. The rest of the funding is actually supporting the case management of those offenders when they are released into the community on high-risk offender orders and some additional money that's made available for current dangerous criminals who may have a pre-release order that requires intervention and support and specific actions to be taken prior to the court making a final assessment around a high-risk offender order application.

CHAIR - Thank you. Are you able to provide the breakdown of those different elements from this \$1.38 million that's being applied? We've been doing a range of these things already, so has there been a step-up in the demand for the activity we have to undertake in this space? Or why is \$1.38 million required extra each year for the next four years?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. In terms of the step-up, in terms of the demand, I think I will pass to Chris, but I'm advised in terms of the first part of your question, we might need to take that on notice to assist the committee.

CHAIR - Sure. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - I'll just check if the secretary or Chris could assist in the second part.

Ms BOURNE - Maybe, deputy, I can start, and certainly pass to Chris. I think when the scheme initially commenced as part of - or going back to discussions we had earlier in the day around that budget process and how do you best determine need and demand for the service, we're obviously in a much better place to consider what funding the DPP, Legal Aid, Community Corrections and the department in providing the secretariat support need to actually do it appropriately to meet demand. I think in a crude sense that work has led us to be able to make better articulated or a better articulated case to government about what we need.

I think the work that the secretariat does also not just in supporting the committee but in keeping a running check of offenders in the system who may be approaching time for consideration by the committee and needing to work backwards to make sure the committee has enough time to consider them appropriate reports so that we don't get caught out by, you know, someone potentially having an early release date of a couple of weeks' time and the committee not having considered whether an application should be made. So that's my view in terms of why - we have much more information to assure government about what we actually need to make sure across the entire system. This new scheme is actually able to function effectively. I'll pass to Chris to see if there's anything he'd like to add through you, deputy.

Mr CARNEY - Through you, deputy, thank you. I will just add that in the 2022-23 financial year, that risk assessment committee that's chaired by Kristy profiled 41 people, and then in the 2023-24 - and that's all people who were eligible. So that committee profiled 41 people, and we had seven forensic reports that were actually ordered from that.

In the 2023-24 financial year, it dipped a little where we only had 17 people who were profiled through that committee, and then we ordered eight reports that year. So more people

got a forensic report. Then last year, we actually profiled 55 people. There has been a significant escalation. We had a little bit of a drop, but then - and I think the 41 people was also catching up because it was kind of the first year that that committee was there. So we had a bit of a catch up, and then we had a drop down, and then it went up quite significantly last year to 55 people, and, again, we had eight reports that were ordered as a result of that.

I think also from a case management perspective, my service is now seeing these people actively on the ground. So the first person was released - I want to say it was 2022. So the first person was released in 2023. It was 15 May 2023 was the first person in the community, and we have steadily built up to have - currently we have seven, and there are an additional couple in custody as well who are working their way through it.

So the numbers are continuing to increase. The risk is continuing to increase. The work that we're putting in place is continuing to increase. So I think that just supports some of the information that Kristy was providing around. We're now better able to articulate what those risks and issues are to be able to know what funding we require.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Is there an explanation for the uptick back to 55? I mean, I understand that 41 in the first year was a catch up because it was a new arrangement. The dip down to - is it 17?

Mr CARNEY - Seventeen.

Ms WEBB - Seventeen. A jump back up to 55 seems like a lot. Is there any explanation about that, and if so, can we model forward what we expect to see, and are we basing our funding on that modelling?

Mr CARNEY - Through you, deputy. I think part of what we saw in - so I think the first year was a bit of an anomaly, and the second year was almost a bit of an anomaly as well. Most of what we're seeing has to do with the COVID spike that we saw through prison. Most of these people are serving an extended period of time. So we are able to, in some ways, model forward.

The problem is the offences that can leave you eligible for this order may not necessarily give you a really lengthy criminal sentence inside, and so what we are trying to do as an organisation, and what the secretary that supports the Risk Assessment Committee does, is really takes a quite proactive approach in identifying those people early and often so that we can make sure we get the assessments undertaken as quickly as possible.

I think there is some opportunity that we are going to continue to have as we grow and evolve in this space to be able to project forward how many of these shorter sentences we're going to be, but in a lot of ways, the program is at the mercy of the courts and the sentencing that is undertaken there. I think the 55 is again, probably, an anomaly like the 41 was as we continue to just work our way out of COVID and find a new normal.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - We might assist the committee and indicate - because we've passed recent legislation in terms of high-risk offenders extending its remit.

CHAIR - Yes, that's right.

Mr BARNETT - I might just pass to the deputy secretary indications with respect to that legislation and what impact that might have on our community.

Mr SHEPHERD - Through you, deputy, it was just - the point was that, as you're aware, with the recent amendments that have been made, we're increasing the number of serious offences by an extra 18. So I think there'll probably be an impact of that.

Ms WEBB - They'll anticipate an increase.

Mr SHEPHERD - Yes, yes.

Output Group 3.3 Enforcement of Monetary Penalties

Mr GAFFNEY - For those people listening, this output is responsible for the collection and enforcement of monetary penalties imposed by courts, police, local government, and other public sector bodies. Penalties include fines, compensation orders, pecuniary penalty orders, and costs.

My question here is I'd like to understand the flowchart of how that works. For example, if an individual owed \$500 and didn't repay that money, what's the flowchart? How would that be addressed? Because, obviously, they don't pay. Then there might be an increased fine, or there might be a penalty. I want to know that so I can ask my other questions flowing from that.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. Because it's the NPS, I wonder whether Wayne Johnson, our director of NPS, might be able to assist the committee because Mr Johnson knows a whole lot more about this area than myself.

CHAIR - Mr Johnson always has a figure for us.

Mr BARNETT - Right. Let's welcome to the table Wayne Johnson.

Mr JOHNSON - Thank you, Attorney-General. Might be helpful if I give you a bit of an outline of a traditional fine that might come to us. If I pick the example of a speeding fine. If you were to receive a speeding fine, you would receive that in the mail from State Growth or from police. That comes to us pretty quickly. If that's day zero, approximately, well, you have 28 days to pay: 28 days to pay, to seek a withdrawal, to apply for potentially a payment arrangement, or to elect a court hearing.

Now, within that 28 days, MPES will issue a statement at about the 14-day mark, might be a little bit after that, but we send that as a courtesy reminder. There's no requirement under the legislation for that to be sent, but we find that some people pay as soon as they receive the ticket, other people need a reminder, other people after they get that reminder still fail to pay. So the statement at the around 14-day mark.

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At around the four-week mark after we receive it, we will send an SMS reminder. Now, we have thousands of mobile telephone numbers that we gather from various sources. So ideally, you would get an SMS reminder at that mark. Then at the six-week mark, if you haven't contacted us, you haven't paid, we would send - a six-week mark would be an enforcement order.

We try to send the reminders ahead of moving to the enforcement order, which is provided for under the act because an enforcement order currently adds \$102.50. So that means it is more difficult, then, for the customer to pay it back because the fees get paid back first. So whether you're the police, and that money goes into the public fund, or whether you're a council, the fees get paid first.

By sending the reminders, if the person then pays on the reminder, that money goes straight to council or straight in the public fund rather than to the fees. So that's at the six-week mark.

If there's still no contact, still no payment, at the 10-week mark or thereabouts, so around day 70, we may decide to issue a sanction. Probably the most common sanction is a licence suspension. So that's an extra \$61.50. So then further fees on top.

At the same time, at about 10-week mark, or day 70, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles sends out a letter as well saying, 'I've received a direction from the Director of the Monetary Penalty Service directing that your licence be suspended'. So your licence will be suspended in 14 days' time', and a date is nominated. So that gives the recipient a further 14 days and they get two letters, one from us and one from the Registrar of Motor Vehicles, to pay before that licence suspension takes effect.

After that, if people still don't pay, we would look at other sanction options. That might be suspension of a vehicle registration. If the person owns land and they owe more than \$1000, it might be a charge over the land, and they get two notices in that respect. If we know that they're employed, it might be a redirection of salary or earnings.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. My question would be, say that individual received a notification, 'You now owe an extra \$102 because you haven't paid within the certain amount of time.' They pay the \$102. How much time then do they have to pay the original \$500?

Mr JOHNSON - Through you, Attorney-General. At any time after the fine comes to us, they can contact us and ask to pay by instalments. Under section 27 of the act, they can do it over the phone or they can fill out a form and send it in, tell us what their circumstances are, what they can reasonably afford to pay. They can do that at any point. We encourage it. Ideally, once they receive the infringement or once they receive correspondence from us, they would contact us, usually by phone, and discuss a repayment arrangement.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you very much. That's very helpful, because some of us have individuals who come in to see us. Some of them are dodgy and don't want to pay - not all of them - but some of them just don't have the capacity to pay, and they just find it snowballing in that they don't have the budget management skills to actually address the issue.

We work with quite a number - when I'm saying that, I'm saying five a month - who will come and see me about not being able to pay that in. It's working through them. Most of them

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are young males who don't know how to budget. That helps me understand that process. I'm just wondering is that common?

Mr BARNETT - I'll refer this, but the part-payment plan is absolutely front and centre. I will pass to Mr Johnson.

Mr JOHNSON - Thank you. Through you, deputy. It's very common. The reminder process that we have in place, in addition to what I've mentioned, when payment arrangements are set up, they get a number of chances with us. It's not in the legislation, but if they miss a first payment, we will send them a SMS reminder. If they miss a second payment, we send them another SMS reminder. In the time that I've been at the Monetary Penalties Enforcement Service, that's become apparently. Lots of people need lots of reminders.

Mr GAFFNEY - What's the average repayment of a portion? Say, 10 per cent of what's owing? If they had a payment plan, is there a figure that you come up with, or is it an individual thing?

Mr JOHNSON - Through you, deputy. It all depends on people's circumstances as to what they can afford to pay. A common repayment amount, if they're receiving welfare benefits, is \$25. If I can add also, if people cannot afford to pay, they can apply to perform monetary penalty community service orders. Not many people choose to apply for that, but we'd certainly welcome those applications.

Mr EDMUNDS - A quick follow-up on that, just a very short one: I presume that if someone puts forward a petition to the court or something to stop it that that 28 days is paused while any sort of clarity needs to be sought on any issues?

Mr JOHNSON - Through you, deputy. Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, thank you.

Mr GAFFNEY - Two questions, then: the explanation of variation notes that the decrease in enforcement of monetary penalties in 2028-29 reflects the completion of the enforcement of monetary penalties automated traffic enforcement program. Given that so far the implementation of automatic traffic enforcement's gone relatively well, do you anticipate any risks that may cause this program to take longer or cost more than budgeted?

Mr BARNETT - That's probably a difficult question, predicting the future, but I'll just check.

Mr GAFFNEY - We can put it on notice.

Mr BARNETT - It's still always challenging to predict the future. I'll just check if Mr Johnson can assist.

Mr JOHNSON - Through you, deputy. I'm not sure what the plans are that State Growth has for their safety camera system. What I can say from where we sit is that there has been a significant increase in the amount of penalties that are referred to us for collection. I understand, in large part, that is due to the rollout or more hours for those cameras, but I'm not aware of any plans they might have to increase or reduce them.

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Mr GAFFNEY - This is probably a question for you, deputy. I note that the Victorian government recently announced a trial to test smart enforcement traffic cameras, which can detect red light, bus lane, seatbelt and mobile phone violations, as well as average speed and number plate recognition. While the current speed cameras we have monitor some of those items, the website of speedcameras.tas.gov.au notes that the average speed or point-to-point cameras do not currently operate in Tasmania. Does the current budget reflect the intention to eventually trial these, or is there an anticipated impact? I'm just wondering what the government intention is.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for that. I'm not the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport so probably can't be specific. In terms of the 12 months to 30 June 2025, there were more than 14 million mobile speed camera infringements referred to MPES compared to 9.9 million for the same period in 2024. I'll just check if Mr Johnson has anything further to add, noting we're a different agency.

Mr GAFFNEY - Sorry, could you say those numbers again? That's quite interesting.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. In the 12 months to 30 June 2025, there were more than 14 million in mobile speed camera infringements referred to MPEs compared to 9.9 million in the previous 12-month period.

Mr GAFFNEY - That's huge.

Mr BARNETT - I'll just check if Mr Johnson has anything further to add to the answer.

Mr JOHNSON - No, Attorney-General. That is correct.

Mr GAFFNEY - But the roll-on impact of that on the organisation is, if you've got 40 per cent increase in fines, that flow-on effect to you guys having to do your job is enormous. In light of that, has there been an increase in staff to be able to address the increase in workload that you've got just through the new camera situation, and is that reflected through the budget, I suppose?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. The staffing establishment at 30 June 2025 was 23.1 FTEs. They were obviously based out of Rosny. The majority of the collection and enforcement action is undertaken by mail, telephone, email and SMS, as has been indicated by Mr Johnson. The head count is 25. Mr Johnson might be able to add to that, but we obviously consider this each year as the budget's being developed.

Obviously, this is an interim budget. May next year, more significant focus will be put into these matters. Certainly through my secretary, there'll be an opportunity to put forward views with respect to the importance of the service and estimated efforts and resources required going forward. I'll just check if the secretary would like to add anything.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. The only thing I would add, as the member has noted, the 2024-25 Budget, there was the additional funding allocated to MPES over four years to address that increase in the referral of infringement notices. I understand the team recruited an additional four staff or thereabouts to manage that demand.

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Over the forward Estimates, as Mr Johnson's alluded to, the department will continue to monitor that demand to determine whether we need to seek additional funding to enable the enforcement service to keep up with processing those fines, noting that we have received additional funding over the course of four years, commencing last year. It's something we'll continue to monitor.

CHAIR - Thank you. One quick question, because we've got 40 minutes for the next five line items.

Mr GAFFNEY - My question is there. I was really impressed with the way that your agency is going through and contacting people when they don't have to and all of that sort of thing, trying to help the individual. If it's not funded appropriately, one of the things that goes first up is that extra legwork you do to try and help people not get into that, 'Here's an extra penalty.' There's sort of a social fabric there or social network or responsibility. I like that approach, and it's just unfortunate if the funding doesn't match what we're trying to do here.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I think it's an observation perhaps to note.

CHAIR - Observation, yes.

Mr BARNETT - I do note, as the secretary has, that we have increased funding in the 2024-25 Budget \$693,000 over the next four years per annum.

Output group 5.1 Victims Support

CHAIR - We will move to 5.1 Victim Support. If we have tight questions and tight answers, as we have five line items and 40 minutes to go. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I hope this is the appropriate part to ask. Does the - sorry, I'll give people a moment to get to the table.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, member for Montgomery. Victims of crime. It is a very important area.

CHAIR - Would you like to introduce the people at the table?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I would. I would like to introduce Ross Smith and Jennifer Lee. Ross Smith's our deputy secretary and Angela McCrossen, our Executive Director for Justice Support Services.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you very much. The question I had was, does the department do any survey work to understand if victim support is effective or not?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Very important area, victim support. The government takes it very seriously. I will pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr SMITH - As it's articulated in the budget papers, Justice Support Services reflects a reorganisation within the department where we can bring services together that actually deal

with people who need the assistance of the justice system, and I wouldn't say actual survey work, but we're looking, through Ange's leadership, about how we build a little bit more ability to hear the victim survivor voice in the development of our services. So not so much a paper survey, but more listening to people who might have something to tell us on. I wonder if Ange could articulate on that.

Mr HISCUTT - I guess the question could be rephrased.

Mr BARNETT - Perhaps. Could we perhaps pass to Angela McCrossen.

Mr SMITH - Certainly.

Ms McCROSSEN - Through you, deputy. Justice Support Services is - so we launched in May this year, so there's quite a bit of growth, I guess, and joining up of these services that we're undertaking currently. One of the key priorities I'm working on at the moment is developing a service charter, so setting up expectations around what people can expect when using any of our services, and that would include a real-time feedback loop and a quality assurance for those themes and trends that come through. Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Apologies on the understanding of what this group is, but it mentions in its output the coordination of access to counselling and psychological care and direct personal response for people that have experienced institutional child sexual abuse. Has the take-up for that been what has been expected? I guess you would have had some level of what you expected to come through in that. Has it matched that expectation or has it been greater or less?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. I'll pass to my right.

Mr SMITH - In many respects, these were existing services that were provided.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes.

Mr SMITH - We've brought them together.

Ms McCROSSEN - Through you, deputy. We have a known number of applicants who, in the very early stage, identify that they would like a direct personal response or psychological care and treatment. There is quite a significant difference in those who identify to those who then contact to put that in place. There are also circumstances where they may contact to be linked up with a psychologist or a therapist, and that might stop and start throughout a period of time. In terms of what we were predicting, I guess we could only predict the number of applicants who identified a desire to access that sort of support, but it's quite a significant difference to the actual uptake.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. So there's been less uptake than expected.

Ms McCROSSEN - Less. Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for that.

CHAIR - Thank you. Any other questions?

Ms WEBB - I'll follow on from that a little bit. It sounds like a good idea to have brought them together into one space. Excellent. Probably lots of good synergies to get from that. Can you give us a full list of the programs that have been brought together in that space? I don't think it's listed here in the budget papers, probably not in the entirety. If you can't give it now, we can take it on notice.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. I think the secretary is able to assist in how that's been pulled together.

Ms WEBB - I'm mostly just interested in a full list of the different programs.

Ms BOURNE - Certainly. Through you, deputy, and I'm sure Ms McCrossen will correct me if I miss any. The Child Abuse Royal Commission Response Unit, Victims of Crime, Office of the Public Guardian, the Registrar to Work With Vulnerable People and the Safe at Home Unit. Have I missed any? Victims Support, of course.

Ms WEBB - In this too, is there an intention to work out into the community sector providers of victim support services in different ways? Is there a formal relationship between the way you've brought these groups together in one entity and working out into the community providers?

Ms BOURNE - So I think, through you, deputy, noting the comments Ms McCrossen made about the service charter and other work on foot to formalise that engagement further. Without breaching any confidences, certainly myself and Mr Smith and Ms McCrossan have been informed by hearing directly from people who have utilised our system in the past and have felt that it's been a bit fragmented, which has been really, really critical to inform the output group restructure.

Without speaking for Ms McCrossen, I think it's certainly a key priority of her and the teams, and certainly mine, to further refine this approach, because I think it sets a good example of how other parts of the agency and government more broadly can prevent operating in silos when you're managing a person's experience throughout the system, whether that's the justice system or engagement with the state service more broadly.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Output group 5.2

Victims of Crime Assistance and Redress

CHAIR - Thank you. If we have no other questions. We could go to 5.2 Victims of Crime Assistance and Redress. Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. Very quickly here, there's so much movement in this space. I'd like to understand how you work out a forward budget - how do you work out that budget over four years - it's high obviously this year and it's gone down - but how do you project that amount of money?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's a good question. It's obviously a priority for government and the secretary's indicated how we've pulled that together and recently established that, as

Ms McCrossen's leadership there is greatly appreciated for the Justice Support Services. Certainly as Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Corrections, Rehabilitation, I have feedback from the secretary directly with her department. I've met regularly, obviously, but they provide that feedback to me and that then comes through in the budget process. This is an interim budget. We've got May next year. I don't know if the secretary could outline in further detail how that is worked through in the budget process.

Ms BOURNE - Certainly. Through you, Attorney-General, and then Mr Smith may be able to go into a little more detail, and potentially, Mr Wailes. I think there is the split between appropriation funding and reserve by law funding, which we do in a similar way to the appropriation for civil claims and redress, use a best approach, using the evidence that we have before us, evidence around current claims and projected future liability, to work with treasury to anticipate that amount as best as we can. Mr Smith, anything you wanted to add?

Mr SMITH - I suspect Mr Wailes may be able to talk in detail about the actuarial processes that underpin that.

Ms BOURNE - Yes.

Mr WAILES - Yes, so we engage an actuary to prepare an actuarial assessment of our expected redress and civil claims with relation to child sexual abuse in state care. Without going through the 45-page document in any detail, what they do is they make estimates on the number of claims that we'll get and when we'll get them, how big they'll be, and the basis for those claims.

For example, if they're AYDC or out-of-home care, compared with a school claim or a health-related claim, come with generally different liabilities, whether they be larger or smaller. And there's also inflation and discount rates. So they're clumped together into five-year components, and the liability that we have, which you'll notice in the balance sheet, runs for 70 years at this stage. So it doesn't include any claims post 1 July 2025, but next year's assessment will include them up until 30 June 2026.

Mr SMITH - Yes. Thank you. That's all I had.

CHAIR - Thank you. Any other members with a question?

Ms WEBB - Just a quick follow-up on that. I'm just interested in the fluctuation across the forward Estimates then in this line item. We're dropping down this year from the previous year \$107 million down to \$84 million, then back up in 2026-27, back up to \$124 million. Is that a particular anticipated cohort of redress claims that we're expecting to come through?

Mr WAILES - Through you, deputy. There is an expectation, and I'm unaware if we've received it formally, for a second Ashley Detention Centre class action. So that's currently cash flowed within the budget to occur in 2026-27.

Ms WEBB - Okay, so that explains that.

Mr WAILES - So that explains the spike. Then the runoff is on the basis that we expect to receive claims sooner rather than later, and also the National Redress Scheme only currently has a limited timeframe.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Then in terms of the forced adoption steps we're taking, which is very admirable to be addressing those affected by that horrific historic practice of forced adoptions up to the 1980s, are we still actively seeking expressions of interest for individuals affected by that? Is that process still open, and what's the timeframe by which expressions of interest are hoped to be received and then potentially actioned?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. As you've indicated, it's a very important initiative that the government announced in recent times, and I thank the Premier and my colleagues, and of course, the individuals and families affected, and the women specifically affected.

Ms WEBB - Mothers and the children.

Mr BARNETT - Of course. I've indicated the message of the parliamentary apology back in 2012. I've indicated not just my Cabinet colleagues but across the parliament, including your good self, through you, Chair, for your advocacy. In terms of that, we are obviously transitioning to a position where we want to make those payments as soon as possible, but we need to establish the scheme next year, but we will have transitioning arrangements that I've discussed with my department and my secretary.

I've noted, obviously, the Victorian Redress Scheme payments of 30 000 redress payments, but our scheme will include ongoing counselling support. People have asked why mothers have to wait. Well, we want to act as quickly as possible. I'll just see if there's anything else specifically to your question that I can assist with.

Ms WEBB - Is there an allocation here in the budget relating to this specifically?

Mr BARNETT - My understanding is it's not allocated in the budget. As you know, it's a more recent announcement. There's more work that needs to be done in terms of what is in the May budget, but we also want to be in a position to act as soon as possible in terms of transitional arrangements, and so together with my department, we are acting to be in a position to establish those transitional arrangements. I will pass to the secretary to assist the honourable member in the committee.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. As you've said, no allocation in this budget, but certainly we've already engaged with Treasury in making arrangements, ideally for inclusion in the May budget, as we work to scope the nature of the scheme. The first step, obviously, as the deputy has said, is to consult widely with the community to make sure that we get those scheme settings right.

I think, Ms Webb, your earlier question around that consultation process is effectively open-ended at this stage. There's no end date. We continue to receive a steady stream through our Have Your Say portal on our website and are taking all of that feedback into account as we seek to establish the scheme and provide further recommendations to government about how that looks.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Output group 5.3
Office of the Public Guardian

CHAIR - Thank you. If there are no other burning questions on that area, if we go to 5.3, the Office of the Public Guardian.

Ms BARNETT - Yes, please, go ahead.

CHAIR - Thank you, deputy. My question is, with the reforms that came into place in 2024, which replaced the best interest test with a will and preference test, which consequently meant that the substitute decision makers should only override the wishes and preferences of persons in narrow circumstances, including the prevention of serious harm, or whereby doing so would be unlawful, can you expand on how this new test applies?

Mr BARNETT - We might have the Public Guardian with us, Jeremy Harbottle, who can assist the members at the table.

CHAIR - That would be great. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - I welcome Jeremy Harbottle, if he is here. He is here, I'm advised. We did pass some amendments in terms of the reforms that you've outlined, and those reforms came into place on 1 September 2024. Again, I thank the TLRI for their work, for the reforms that have been implemented. But the Public Guardian, I think, knows far more about how and when, in an operational sense, those reforms have been implemented.

CHAIR - Expand how the test applies, and probably what sort of circumstances could a person's decision be overridden by their guardian, what safeguards are in place to ensure that it isn't abused. Thank you.

Ms BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair.

Mr HARBOTTLE - Thank you. Through you, deputy. The most practical aspect of this is the serious harm test. So the majority of instances in which we're appointed, we're effectively giving effect to the person's will and preference, or we work with them to support them to make their own decisions, essentially. Where there is serious harm, that's the main catalyst for us to override their will and preference.

It might be, to give you an example, you think of someone who is being discharged and their choices are really - their options are really going home, where there's probably potentially a higher level of risk, or they can't be supported depending on their regional location, or a supported living arrangement where they would receive a level of care that would reduce the risk. That's probably the most likely scenario where we would override their will and preference. They may want to go home, for example, but that can't be safely supported. That would sort of trigger that serious harm consideration in terms of their will and preference.

CHAIR - Thank you. Just one more question. For emergency orders, through you, deputy, what evidence of immediate risk of harm must be provided? Who assesses it, and what criteria is used to do so?

Mr BARNETT - I pass to the Public Guardian.

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Mr HARBOTTLE - Through you, deputy. That's predominantly the arena of the Tasmanian Administrative Civil Appeals Tribunal. The TASCAT would be the body that would determine whether or not that immediate risk of harm threshold had been satisfied.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do we have any other questions?

Ms WEBB - Are there any instances where there has been an appeal against a decision made and taken further in the last couple of years?

Mr HARBOTTLE - Through you, deputy. My understanding, and this is a matter for TASCAT, there have been appeals against a TASCAT appointment. In terms of decisions, there's a process for a review of decision by a guardian. As I was saying at the initial answer, most of our work now, post-legislative change, is really about supporting people to give effect to their will and preference. I think we would like to minimise or reduce the number of safeguarding decisions that we're making, so where we're overriding those will and preferences and really stick to the threshold that's been established in the legislation for those.

It doesn't mean that people are necessarily happy with the decisions we've made. In some respects, you may have family members who are unhappy with the decision, because quite often, ironically, because we are giving effect to a person's will and preference, it may be a different outcome to what family members or other key people in their lives may have been looking for through our appointment.

Ms WEBB - I see that as a positive, because the will and preference of the person should be paramount. I'd still have issues about the immediate harm or the serious harm, just because there's a dignity of risk argument to be made there as well, but I'm interested if you have data on any of that. I'm trying to get a sense of how it's played out since we've moved to that newer model, which is a good one, and to what extent it's proving to be contentious where there might've been either more appeals against those sorts of things or less. Do we have a sense of that?

Mr HARBOTTLE - The annual report from my office that was tabled I think last week has some data in it acknowledging that realistically the legislative change only came in in September. We haven't got a full-year effect yet. I'd expect to see that data grow over time in terms of longitudinal measure.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Could I have one last question with regard to people with fluctuating cognitive capacity? How are they supported to make decisions under this new act? Through you, deputy.

Mr HARBOTTLE - Through you, deputy. It varies. A good example is people who may have an underlying intellectual disability but they also have a mental health diagnosis. When they're unwell, their capacity reduces, and we may have a greater level of decision-making on their behalf. When they are well, they require minimal support from us, and they're able to engage with their support coordinator through the NDIS, if that's where they're being supported, or the mental health worker directly, and they require very little from us.

It's the ebb and flow and depends on the complexity of the decision they're being asked to make, and it's also dependent on their own personal health circumstances as to how we can best support them and to what level.

Output group 5.4

Safe at Home

CHAIR - If we could go item 5.4, Safe at Home, Ms Webb.

Mr BARNETT - Certainly. Just quickly, Chair, we have an answer to add to a question that was asked earlier.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. Ms Webb, in terms of your questions around appeals of TASCAT decisions.

Ms WEBB - In the area of the Public Guardian?

Ms BOURNE - That's right. From 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, there were 12 appeals filed with the Supreme Court with respect to decisions of TASCAT, which is a 33 per cent decrease from the previous year. One was related to the guardianship stream, 10 were related to personal compensation, and one was related to the resource and planning stream, if that gives an idea of -

Ms WEBB - Yes. I'd be interested to know how many related to the Public Guardian in prior years before we move to a new model. If that's in your report, no doubt I'll be able to track that.

Ms BOURNE - Yes. Through you, deputy.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Safe at Home?

CHAIR - Yes, Safe at Home.

Ms WEBB - We're talking about Safe at Home. I wanted to check. We've got a pretty consistent model here that is well established. It's now 21 years old, I think. One of the things I'm interested in in an overarching way is, given the timeframe that we've had this policy model in place, when was it last comprehensively reviewed, and when would it be due for the next comprehensive review?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for that. As I alluded to earlier in terms of family violence and the Safe at Home family violence service, it's very important. We are very pleased to be releasing the discussion paper in terms of family violence together with the Minister for Women, Jane Howlett. It's titled 'Strengthening our responses to family violence in Tasmania'. I certainly encourage community feedback on the vast array of issues that've been set out in that discussion paper: definitions, behavioural programs, system abuse and penalties for offenders.

That'll be a substantive process, the consultation spanning over several months to aid the government shape future reforms for the *Family Violence Act 2004*. I know this has been at

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the front of mind of many in the community and stakeholders and the like, and of course builds on the five-year action plan and the \$100 million to supporting 38 actions to prevent and respond to family violence some years ago. I won't say any more at the moment. I will pass to my deputy secretary to add to the answer.

Ms WEBB - If I could just zero in a bit, I'm specifically interested in a comprehensive view of the Safe at Home model, not the broad *Family Violence Act*. I'm asking you about Safe at Home. Is that a part of this broader review of the *Family Violence Act*? Will it be broken out as a distinct aspect of that review?

Mr BARNETT - It's a very comprehensive discussion paper. It has different parts to it, but I will pass to the deputy secretary and/or Ms McCrossen.

Mr SMITH - Thank you. Safe at Home has undergone four reviews over a period of time. I think we had a review of the *Family Violence Act* in 2007, including Safe at Home service system, there was a review of the Safe at Home integrated response system in 2008, and the internal performance review in 2014, and family violence service system review in 2019.

When we discussed this with some of our interstate counterparts, they still regard this in terms of a response system to family violence as still ahead of the pack. That is because of how agencies between police, Child Protection and everything share information and work together on a situation that protects the person at most risk, and that is the victim.

I would say - and through Ange and our colleague, the manager of Safe at Home, as well - we're keen to be able to build from here and start work a bit closer with non-government service providers, which I would argue that we probably haven't done as strongly as we should do. We're starting that service now, and it's something that I think that we need to do, particularly including the Family Violence Alliance, which we're looking to make greater connection with as well because I think we can drive limited funds further if we're working in a more cooperative and collaborative way.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that. I agree that Safe at Home is an excellent model and was well ahead of its time. I did an assignment about it when I was doing it my post-grad public policy studies, in fact, 15 years ago. One of the things I wanted to ask about in relation to it is it's mentioned in, I believe, the department's annual report that the Safe at Home strategic plan 2025-29 has been endorsed by you, Attorney-General, and presented to Cabinet in May for noting. Is it in place now and being implemented and, if so, is there any funding attached to the implementation of that strategic plan in this budget?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thanks very much for that. Certainly, it's been a priority for our government. It is forward facing. It is new. It's, I think, nation-leading, the Safe at Home family violence service. In terms of the detail around that, I will pass to perhaps Ms McCrossen to respond.

Ms McCROSSEN - Through you, deputy. Yes, it is implemented. There isn't a specific funding allocation to it. Most of the activities are across all of our different agencies working together to streamline, tweak, work more closely together. We're expecting for that strategic plan to be fully implemented within existing budget.

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Ms WEBB - In terms of the flexible support passages for victim survivors fleeing domestic violence, which can provide all sorts of immediate practical supports in that situation, it says that in 2024-25, there was \$330,000 allocated, which provided support to 167 victim survivors. What is the modelling for the package in 2025-26, this financial year, for the amount that will be provided and the number of victim survivors to be assisted this year?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. As I've indicated, the support for our victim-survivors is a top priority. In terms of the detail to the question, I'll see if we can assist the honourable member. To Ms McCrossen. If not, we can certainly take it on notice, but I'll just see if we can assist the honourable member.

Mr WAILES - Through you, deputy. The funding to be provided from DPAC through the Family, Sexual Violence - I can't remember the name of the program - is the same amount for next year, \$330,000.

Ms WEBB - Same amount? Okay.

Mr WAILES - The department has been supplementing that slightly where there have been additional costs in recent years.

Ms WEBB - Through you, Attorney-General. In terms of receiving a package of assistance through that funding, what are the criteria for receiving that? How are recipients identified or referred to that assistance and how is the amount that they get determined?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I'll pass to the executive director, Ms McCrossen.

Ms McCROSSEN - Through you, deputy. The applications can come from the victim-survivor themselves or a support person. The ICC, which is the Integrated Case Coordination forum, which meets every single week in each of the regions, review each of the applications and the recommended dollar amount. It is very flexible in line with its title, so there isn't a maximum or minimum amount that we're looking to pay for each application. They're quite individual in nature.

Ms WEBB - In terms of the victim-survivor applying, essentially, for it themselves, are they made aware of that immediately that that's an available support?

Ms McCROSSEN - Yes. Through you, deputy. We do have a number of touch points within our system and whether that be Department of Justice, ourselves or police, health, child safety, the fact that each of those agencies are at the table talking about matters and also seeing these applications, it's a high referral pathway that is recommended. Yes.

Ms WEBB - What proportion of the people being supported - victim-survivors coming through the system - access the flexible support packages?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Whether we've got that detail to hand, we will check, otherwise, we could take it on notice.

CHAIR - Perhaps we could take it on notice, owing to having a short time left and I know there's another couple of areas to go.

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Mr BARNETT - Be happy to take it on notice. Through you, Chair, we'll take it on notice.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt has some questions on working with vulnerable persons, and I notice there's no line item.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, if I could clarify that first. The revenue from appropriation does not have a line item for working with vulnerabilities is in the expenses. Could I seek clarity on that.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, of course you can. We have Mr Ross Smith, who's directly responsible to assist the committee.

Mr SMITH - So there's no direct appropriation. It is funded from the registration fee.

Mr HISCUTT - Right. So that's why that's not -

Mr SMITH - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - I'll get back to my question with that answer. I've certainly had a lot of concern among volunteers, especially older volunteers, that it is becoming administratively and cost prohibitive to volunteer, which I think is potentially having major negative effects for the people who need that volunteer work the greatest.

Do you have any response to any activities, through you, deputy? Any activities that the government might be doing to make it easier for people to access working with vulnerable people cards or make it cheaper? I recognise that there was a conversation about making it free for volunteers, but that would then, of course, affect the revenue side of that. Over to you for comment.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. I'm happy to pass to the secretary or deputy in one moment, but it is obviously a priority of government and trying to make it as cost effective as possible for all in the community, including those in the community sector, as well as important role of volunteers in our community. The legislation has been put in place. I think it's best that the deputy secretary respond or the secretary respond to the details around that in terms of the costs and the flow-on effects going forward.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. Pertaining to volunteers in particular, as part of the interim budget the government's committed to RWVP fee relief for volunteers for two years, and so from 1 January 26 to 31 December 2027, the government will cover the costs of the check for volunteers, therefore making it free to obtain registration. I think that answers the member's question. There was a second part that I potentially missed?

Mr HISCUTT - No, no, two follow-ups. That answered that part of the question, and I guess one item in here is an increase on the RWVP part significantly next year for the - thank you - reflects the funding profile for an e-project, and I guess also then countering that with if we're going to reduce the fees that we take and then increase the expense by nearly \$5 million, from memory. Yes, from \$4 million up to \$10-and-a-half million - how that is going to be resolved. Page 120 of the budget is the expense.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for questions about that particular project. Certainly we're expanding the scheme to close the gaps in child-related activities and increase protections for the broader categories of vulnerable adults. Changes to the scheme have been made in three phases over the course of the next few years. We've talked about, obviously, volunteers and the support for them over that two-year period, as the secretary's outlined, but the three phases will result in the legislative changes to the regulations, the removal of the seven-day and emergency management worker exemptions. Those changes are complete and were implemented 1 April this year.

The introduction of new regulated activities to protect new categories of vulnerable people in 2026, and the introduction of nationally consistent aged care worker registration during 2027, and of course, all these matters have been discussed at SCAG and they're relevant to all of Australia and we've already done a lot of work in this space.

Expanding's also helped the government respond to the relevant recommendations from various inquiries, and you've heard about the commission of inquiry Royal Commission and the like. Part of the expansion, we're introducing a new IT system which, of course, is providing a more efficient processing of applications and assessments and to enhance user experience for individuals and organisations. I might pause there and see if the deputy secretary would like to add anything.

Mr SMITH - No, you've covered quite well. With this new system, so it's quite clear that we had to deliver something that could cope with the load increase, reportable behaviour by people more aware of their obligations to report across the system coming out of the Commission of Inquiry. Also I think you mentioned burdensome processes as well.

I think what we're looking to be able to do with this system developed here, is to be able to make sure the ability to share information across other regulators and other enforcement bodies is improved. We'd expect our system, as a result of this, that the management and administration of the RWVP system will become more efficient as well as more effective.

We probably had a system that reached the end of its useful life, and through this we think we'll probably have something that'll allow us to not just share things within state government bodies, but also as part of the SCAG commitments, that we'll be able to share that information and receive that information across from other jurisdictions as well.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - We have two minutes.

Mr HISCUTT - Following up from that, I guess the question was really how is that being funded, though?

Mr SMITH - Some of that is going to be through our own internal resources. Some of that is also through the Commonwealth because we're able to secure some additional funding as part of the aged care rollout around the aged care sector moving to more comprehensive registration for workers in that sector nationally.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

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Ms WEBB - A quick question. So just clarifying that there's no appropriation, but we're having a big jump this year. Is that the federal money that's coming to bring us from \$4 million up to \$10 million?

Mr SMITH -Yes, in part, and also the additional - I think the deputy spoke about the expansion where we'll have a greater number of registrants as well. And we've got internal registration.

Mr BARNETT - Gavin, did you want to add anything?

Mr WAILES - Probably only through you, deputy, that, as Mr Smith has said, we will incur costs next year - or this year and the following year - on the new IT system, which has increased the funding commitment on page 120, as you've outlined. We're also continually in conversations with the Commonwealth to try to obtain additional funding as well, to cover the project cost.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Members, do we have any questions on capital investment programs? Keeping in mind we will cut into lunch now if we do, but that's all right.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Probably not going to delve into that.

CHAIR - Any questions? Not on capital investments?

Ms WEBB - Not with 30 seconds to go.

CHAIR - No? Well, thank you very much, Attorney-General. We will see you back here at 2.45pm for the Integrity Commission.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - If you could stop the broadcast, please. Thank you.

The Committee suspended from 1.45 p.m. to 2.47 p.m.

CHAIR - Nice to be back again, minister.

Mr BARNETT - It's a pleasure to be back. No problem at all.

CHAIR - Pleased to see you.

Mr BARNETT - Good to be here.

CHAIR - If you would like to introduce the people at the table now.

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Mr BARNETT - Thank you again, Chair. So Kristy Bourne, my secretary. Then also at the table is Ellen McKenzie, the chief executive of the Integrity Commission. Naomi Edwards, the director of compliance and oversight. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you. Well, our lead-off question would be from Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate that. I've just got a couple here to get us going. In the first instance, just to elaborate on some of the detail that's in the budget paper in relation to the Integrity Commission, I note that it says, on page 14, with some explanation there about variations, that the 2021-22 Budget funding for investing in misconduct prevention, education and oversight has finished.

I'm particularly interested to know, in terms of that funding, across the years that it covered, what did it achieve, what was it directed at, and how does completion of that funding, what does that mean now? In terms of staffing and activities and roles, and the work that it was doing, how is that now going to be built in?

Mr BARNETT - I will pass directly to Ellen McKenzie and the team at the table, but I just wanted to put on the record my sincere congratulations to Robert Hay KC, who is the new Chief Commissioner - you would have seen that announcement in recent days - and to say how pleased we are with his appointment, and to support the role of the commission. I wanted to acknowledge that appointment, his experience and expertise in his space, and look forward to working with him and of course the Integrity Commission. Thank you for the question. I'll pass to the Chief Executive.

Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General, Chair, the purpose, as I understand it, of that additional funding, was to bolster the education and training delivered by the Integrity Commission. The impact, I suppose, of the cessation of that funding was a significant reduction in the resourcing of that section of our organisation. I could perhaps best demonstrate that by indicating that as between 2023-24, when that funding was in place, compared to 2024-25, when that funding no longer existed, we were only able to offer 54 per cent of the training in 2024-25 that we were able to offer in 2023-24.

Ms WEBB - That's interesting, to hear that. In terms of what that funding achieved when it was in place, from the 2021-22 budget, it was essentially to bolster core functions of the commission, rather than anything additional, or specific time-limited projects. Would that be right?

Ms McKENZIE - I'm not aware - through you, Attorney-General, Chair - whether there was any specific purpose it was directed to. My understanding was that it certainly was fed into our ongoing training and education function.

Ms WEBB - Okay. The other aspect that's mentioned here in this explanation on page 14 of the budget paper, number 2, talks about the additional funding, from 2024-25, of oversight and compliance program, which is continuing to this year, in this budget. That specified funding, what is the focus of that? What is that providing? Is it core operations, or is it a specific additional program that's being put in place?

Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General, Chair, I understand that the purpose of that additional funding was to address the commission of inquiry findings. It has certainly

been the case that there has been a significant uptick in the notifications that we've received since the commission of inquiry.

Forecasting ahead to the future, when that funding will no longer exist, that does present an issue for us, because we expect that there will be quite a significant increase upon the enactment of the mandatory notifications legislation, which we think will come into effect somewhere around the middle of next year.

We've already seen - if I could take, again, comparing last year's figures, so 2024-25, going back to, say, 2022-23, there has been a one-third increase in the notifications we've received, as between those two periods. It can only be anticipated that there would be a significant further increase, so there's an immediate difficulty there for us, in terms of being able to adequately resource our monitoring and compliance function upon the enactment of that legislation.

Ms WEBB - So when I look at these numbers that are here, and the line item, as it's there in the table 16.1, on page 12, the revenue from appropriation for the Integrity Commission, it drops into the 2025-26 year, from \$3.7 million or thereabouts down to \$3.6 million; ticks back up in 2026-27, to \$3.8 million or thereabouts, and continues across two years at that level. So in terms of this budget oversight and compliance program, what element of the funding does that represent, what quantum?

Mr BARNETT - If I quickly commence, and then I'll pass to the CEO, in terms of the funding for the Integrity Commission. Of course, this is an interim budget, and as I've indicated, the May budget, there'll be further deliberations, obviously, between now and then, to address the government's objectives of ensuring that we support the important work of the commission. There's a mention of the mandatory notifications bill that recently passed the parliament through our House, your House.

Of course, there is an expectation there will be an increase in the workload for the commission as a result of that bill passing. Obviously, I'll talk directly to my secretary, and we'll have further discussions with the CEO and the Chief Commissioner around that, and of course other legislation flowing from the COI and the Weiss review, the Cox review, of course, that we expect to be progressed, hopefully, in the first half of next year. There'll be more said and done. But as I say, we're heading towards the May budget.

We do take the work of the Integrity Commission very seriously. I thank them for their work, and that workload is expected to increase, as the Premier has noted and I've noted on the public record in the past. We'll work our way through with the department, and of course with the Integrity Commission, to deliver the resources necessary to support the work of the Commission.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, deputy. In terms of reading the budget paper here, to me it looks like we've got a cut in funding from 2024-25 to 2025-26. Would that be fair to say, given the numbers right there in that table? If that's so, what's the impact in terms of staffing in the Commission?

Mr BARNETT - I think, the 2025-26 interim budget, you'll see revenue from appropriation increase in this financial year.

Ms WEBB - Not since last financial year, no. Can you point me to the table that shows that?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I think the secretary might have it. It's in front of us. There's a flow-over from the previous year, of unused funds, I think might be a better way to explain it.

Ms WEBB - So it's not the appropriation table.

Mr BARNETT - Well, we can refer to the relevant sections if you like, and the Chief Executive might be able to assist the honourable member more directly. As I've indicated, we want to respond to the needs of the Integrity Commission and the May budget, and obviously, going forward, we'll have that opportunity. We've just passed legislation, mandatory notifications. There's more reform, there's more work to do, and the future budgets will reflect that. But on that particular matter, perhaps I'll pass to the CEO.

Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General and Chair, in relation to the funding for the current 2025-26, there was a rolled-over amount of money, of \$175 000, which approval was given to give to us, and that is going to support some of the work that we're going to be doing, in terms of the staffing in the organisation.

Ms WEBB - Right. Why was that rolled over? Why wasn't that used in the 2024-25 budget?

Ms McKENZIE - Part of the reasoning for that was that we had extended periods in 2024-25 when there was no CEO, and there were acting arrangements internally. Further, there was no director of complaints and oversight for a number of months as well. I think they're probably the main two reasons why we had some leftover funding.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. On that sort of overarching funding question, we know as a matter of fact that our Integrity Commission is one of the most poorly-funded integrity entities in the country, in terms of the work that it has to do. Does the Integrity Commission put in a budget bid? Will it be expected to put in a budget bid ahead of the May budget next year, and for that to be a very clear identification of the resources required to do its statutory role?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, and I'll pass to the secretary in terms of processes of how budgets are put together, but I will certainly have direct feedback from my secretary in the department, and, of course, likewise, directly with the chief commissioner and the CEO, who I meet with from time to time all throughout the year. I'll just pass to the secretary perhaps to add to that.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. The CEO of the Integrity Commission is the head of agency for the commission. So the budget process is not required and should not be required to come through the Department of Justice, but certainly the CEO and I talk in terms of priorities, and if there's further opportunity for me to engage with government about the needs of the commission, but the Integrity Commission progresses its budget submissions separate to the agency and would be provided with the same information that my agency's provided at the commencement of that submission process around timeframes and parameters and those sorts of things about the submission process.

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Ms WEBB - Thank you. So is the expectation, then, that a budget bid of some sort goes straight to Treasury from the commission, from the CEO as the head of agency?

Mr BARNETT -Yes, is the answer.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I move on to another area, unless others have follow up questions on it?

CHAIR - I might ask a different question, if that's all right, if you're going to another area. If you'd be able to advise me, the number of complaints that were received for the last financial year, 2024-25, the number under investigation, and the number finalised in that financial year.

Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General and Chair. In the 2024-25 period, we received 166 complaints. We commenced two investigations, and we concluded five. We also commenced one own motion investigation and concluded three. I'm not sure whether you require any more information to that, but I can go further and give you the number of notifications as well.

CHAIR - That'd be good, if you could.

Ms McKENZIE - So in that period of time, we received 129 notifications, and there were 47 from the police, and I think that's a global number. So 47 out of the 129 were from Tasmanian police.

CHAIR - Out of the 166, how many of those were actually not accepted, deemed not to come under - that you weren't actually going to investigate? Because I accept that you might not have actually had the resources or the manpower to investigate them all, but how many of them are actually not going to be investigated or refused?

Ms McKENZIE - If you'll just excuse me.

CHAIR - No, that's fine. I'm happy for you to take it on notice, if that's easier. I don't have a problem.

Ms McKENZIE - What I could do, is I could run through some statistical information that's available in our tri-annual reports which map every quarter.

CHAIR - Would you like it to take it on notice? That'd probably be easier.

Ms McKENZIE - If that is acceptable to the Attorney-General, that might be easier, because, otherwise, I'm probably giving you a slightly inexact picture of the figures.

CHAIR - I'm very happy to receive it at a later time.

Mr BARNETT - Happy to take it on notice if the CEO is happy to take it on notice.

Ms McKENZIE - Yes, thank you.

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CHAIR - That would be good. Thank you. Do we have any questions down this end before we go back to Ms Webb? No. Okay. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. How many investigators do you have on staff currently?

Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, please.

Ms McKENZIE - We have currently five - sorry, four investigators currently.

Ms WEBB - Is that four FTE or four total people?

Ms McKENZIE - That is 3.7 FTE.

Ms WEBB - Three point seven. In terms of those investigators, have you got capacity amongst that team to run a complex investigation from start to finish in a way that we would understand a matter of high complexity might require?

Ms McKENZIE - We do because one of those investigators is a principal investigator who has very significant, lengthy experience investigating allegations of misconduct.

Ms WEBB - Has that person been with the commission for long enough to have done a complex investigation for the commission already?

Ms McKENZIE - Yes, he has.

Ms WEBB - One of the things I was wondering about was in relation to the fact that we did have a gap in time where we didn't have a chief commissioner, and the board member position was still open, and it did take us a little while to get those filled and approved and back in place. Is it accurate to suggest that there was a period of time where a quorum of the board could not be achieved and, therefore, certain statutory roles in the act couldn't be undertaken this year?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Of course, these matters are very important, and it was managed obviously through the department. I might refer to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy, through you. Certainly during the period between Mr Melick no longer being chief commissioner and the appointment process to appoint Mr Robert Hay KC, and noting that there was an expression of interest process for a member position as well to replace an existing member who took up another position in TASCAT.

There was a great deal of discussion between myself and the CEO about managing the board's business. I don't wish to speak for the CEO and deputy. She is probably best placed to talk about the arrangements, but there certainly, as I understand it, is a number of delegated functions that sit with the CEO that enabled her to undertake business as usual, so to speak, noting that there was a period where the board did not have a quorum. I understand that that was able to be managed, but it might be appropriate for the CEO to talk in more detail.

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Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General, the position is that under the act, I have the power to make decisions in relation to complaints and assessments. So the work in relation to decision-making for complaints and assessments continued during the interregnum, if you like, between the cessation of Mr Melick's tenure and then the appointment of Mr Hay.

The only thing that could not happen was a meeting of the board where, for example, the board would be making a decision about the outcome of an investigation. But to make up, I suppose, for the lack of there being a chief commissioner, I instituted an arrangement whereby I was regularly consulting with the two remaining board members and any significant issues that needed to be resolved, you know, by way of correspondence or whatever else it might be, I had a process of consulting with them as needed.

Ms WEBB - Right. Was that all documented ahead of time, like, that arrangement was put in place before the conclusion of Mr Melick in the chief commissioner role and the gap that was on the board, or is it just an assumed arrangement because of the way the act is written?

Ms McKENZIE - Again, it's not so much a case, I suppose, of a formalised arrangement. It's just that there were two board members available there to be consulted, and if needed, I consulted them.

Ms WEBB - Was that minuted or documented at that time as it went through so that, for example, if there were decisions that a board - the board would normally make, and they would have minuted them, I presume, and things like that. Were your decisions taken on behalf of the board, minuted and documented throughout the time?

Ms McKENZIE - Again, through you, Attorney-General, none of those consultations involved matters that would ordinarily fall under the remit of the board. They were consulting about correspondence or responses to perhaps media inquiries or such like. It was not part of the actual functions, per se, if you like, in terms of board decision making under the act.

Ms WEBB - So across that time, there were no decisions that would normally have been decisions of the board - no decisions of that nature were taken across that period of time?

Ms McKENZIE - Again, no, there were not.

Ms WEBB - Did that hold anything up, then, in terms of progressing matters either under investigation or matters to do with the work of the commission?

Ms McKENZIE - Inevitably, there were matters that had there been a board, there would have been a board meeting where decisions, for example, would have been made about, say, an investigation matter.

Ms WEBB - So in terms of the appointment of Mr Hay to the role, which is pleasing to see someone in the role, has now the work of the board recommenced? Do we have a board quorum back available again now, and has that board met?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I think it's best for the CEO to respond.

Ms McKENZIE - Yes. We now have a quorum, and there will be a board meeting early next month.

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Ms WEBB - Back on track early next month. Can I move on to another area? Is that all right?

CHAIR - I might just ask about cyber security. I notice in your annual report that you endeavour to make ongoing improvements to the processes and systems in order to protect information, address cybersecurity concerns and enhance operational capabilities. Can you just give me an update? I believe there was a major update in the learning management system which enhances security of the system. Would you be able to give me a little more information on that?

Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General. Unfortunately, I'm not across the detail across the enhancement of that system.

CHAIR - If you'd like, I am happy to take that on notice as well, if that certainly helps. It's an interesting area, cybersecurity, and something that's very relevant these days.

Mr BARNETT - I think the finance directors at the table might be able to assist the CEO. I'll just check.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr WAILES - Through you, deputy. Yes, I could probably provide just a little bit of context. The Integrity Commission utilises a service level agreement with the department, and so they use the same information technology and the same systems that we do. They have enhanced cybersecurity through our much larger team than they would have by themselves. Also, the learning management system that we use I believe they use as well. That is regularly updated as well.

CHAIR - That was the enhancement that actually was coming through the parliament's or the government's cybersecurity, because I notice here it says 'a major update which enhanced the security of the system'.

Mr WAILES - Yes. A number of our systems are in the cloud SAAS systems, which are regularly updated by the vendors who hold those as well. We receive annual updates on all those systems, and cybersecurity is obviously one of the key components of those upgrades.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb, you have further questions?

Ms WEBB - Thank you. You mentioned before, in relation to investigators, the 3.7 FTE currently with the commission. What's the total FTE for the agency?

Ms McKENZIE - Attorney-General, through you, and Chair. The total FTE at present is 13, and the headcount is 14.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. How many of those have joined the commission in the last year?

Ms McKENZIE - I believe it's three.

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Ms WEBB - Three new staff in the last year as part of that 14 staff complement. Thank you. Is that a similar turnover rate to previous years?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. If we could take that on notice.

Ms WEBB - Sure. Thank you. We'll send you the questions on notice, but I'll probably ask for the three years previous leading in so we can see a trend there. The other thing I wanted to ask about was the funding to implement the Weiss review recommendations and the implications that has for the commission. Has that been modelled and identified, what will the funding requirements be, and have you either already or will you soon be advising government on what that funding requirement is going to be for the commission?

Mr BARNETT - Maybe if I kick off on that one to respond to the honourable member, the government's obviously introduced our mandatory notifications legislation in recent times and plans to respond to the Cox review commission of inquiry and the Weiss review with draft legislation, and that's expected to be released before Christmas for consultation, feedback.

Once that's settled, we'll need to take advice from the Integrity Commission and the department and elsewhere with respect to the resources necessary to implement the very significant reforms that are coming to our parliament. Of course, that's subject to success through the parliament as well, but I'll just check if there's anything else the CEO would like to add.

Ms McKENZIE - Yes, thank you, Attorney-General, if I could. We had previously done some modelling earlier this year. We'll go through a process quite shortly again to do some modelling, but we already anticipate that we will be identifying to government our need for an injection of funding to support some additional resources coming on board at the commission to enable us. It's really a twofold thing, one, to manage the work that we anticipate will come to us from both the mandatory notifications legislation, perhaps also some of the other amendments that are to be made to the act.

There's also the recent recommendation made in the first Woolcott report about there being a suggestion that there be mandatory ethics training for all senior managers within the state service. Inevitably, as we are meant to be the body that provides education and training in the ethics and integrity space, that will lead to a significant uptick in our workload again, which would mean that we will need additional resources in our education and engagement team.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Can I ask a question about you were giving some statistics before about investigations commenced and concluded, and I mentioned investigations commenced and concluded. In terms of the investigations that are concluded, are those reported in any way? Are they tabled in parliament? Do you just report them publicly in any sense when you've concluded a report?

Ms McKENZIE - Through you, Attorney-General. There are a number of things that could happen at the conclusion of an investigation, but a typical outcome could be, I suppose, one or both of the following. One could simply be that we write to the relevant agency to notify the agency of the outcome of the investigation, and quite often that brings with it perhaps a number of recommendations about systemic changes that might be required within that agency or some education needs that we identify as a result of the investigation.

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The other thing that could also happen is that there be a report tabled in parliament in relation to the outcome of the investigation. That is a matter that is determined by the board. In fact, the board determines the outcome of all of those investigation matters, and tabling a report in parliament is one such outcome.

Ms WEBB - They go straight to an agency. Is it then only in your annual report that we would see that those investigations had been concluded and then actioned in that way, or do they not get reported publicly?

Ms McKENZIE - In relation to that question, in our annual report, we do report generally, I suppose, on the outcome of investigations. In those matters where the board decides to table a public report, there's a public report. There may also be something that ultimately emanates from our process of monitoring what the agency then does once we've reported to them the outcome of that investigation. That in turn could lead to us doing further work, which might in turn lead to a further public report.

Ms WEBB - Were there any monitoring reports done in this previous financial year?

Ms McKENZIE - Where we conduct ongoing monitoring of a matter, sometimes we're not satisfied with the way the matter has been handled and we conduct an audit. That audit might lead to a public report. Sometimes, we run a project, and similarly that might also lead to a public report. I'm just reminded by my colleague again, that we did four audits, for example, last year. None of those resulted, however, in a public report, but again there would have been a process of communication with the agency concerned.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

Mr EDMUNDS - To go back a bit to the timeline for the legislation that you were talking about that's going to go out for consultation this year, do you have an idea about when we might see that in the parliament?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. The expectation is in the first half of next year.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - So we put it out, we need to get the feedback. It's very comprehensive, so we're looking for a long period of consultation and then take on board the feedback.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - So that's the expectation at this stage.

CHAIR - Now we're over time, I think, too. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - I think we're over time for this group.

CHAIR - Well, we are slightly, yes.

Ms WEBB - So I think we'll move on.

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CHAIR - So if we could move on now to the Ombudsman.

DIVISION 21

Office of the Ombudsman

OUTPUT 1

Office of the Ombudsman

CHAIR - Decisions of complaints referred to the Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner and Right to Information. Thank you very much for your time.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Just thought it was important to finish the last questions that we actually had.

Ms WEBB - No, I've always got more.

CHAIR - Only a few minutes, yes.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair. I welcome to the table the newish Ombudsman, Grant Davies. Before I welcome him officially to the table, I put on record my sincere thanks to Richard Connick, the former Ombudsman, for his many years of service to Tasmania and the parliament. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you. As I have the lead questions in this one, I'll start off by congratulating you and thanking you for being here today.

Mr DAVIES - Thank you very much.

CHAIR - First of all, can you tell me, the FTEs? So how many staff?

Mr DAVIES - We've got approximately 35 FTE, and that's spread across the Ombudsman team, the Energy Ombudsman, the Health Complaints Commissioner, the Right to Information Team, the Custodial Inspector, the NPM, and the Official Visitors.

CHAIR - Are there any vacancies, or is that a full contingency?

Mr DAVIES - I'm employing to the Deputy Ombudsman at the moment, so that was the - and we are employing some - in the final stages of employing some additional staff in the custodial, in the NPM, and the Right to Information team.

CHAIR - Is there any difficulty in finding applicants? I know in the past - I won't say which department - but we've often been told that the real difficulty is in actually finding people, because in the private sector salaries are so much higher, it's often difficult to get applicants. Has there been a difficulty getting applicants or you have a good contingency?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy, I apologise.

CHAIR - Sorry, through you. That's for you, deputy. Sorry. It is.

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Mr DAVIES - I think the nature of Tasmania as a fairly small and distinct state creates challenges for employing a variety of staff. Having said that, we are not seeing any difficulty filling those positions at the moment.

CHAIR - That's good. I'm looking at the annual report, the health complaints. I'm noticing, interestingly, most of your contacts are received - I can tell you the page - page 11 of the 2024-25 annual report, minister.

Mr DAVIES - Yes.

CHAIR - It's just interesting that the complaint form, the inquiry percentage: zero. Thirty-five complaints, 8 per cent of the total; that the prisoner phone line, 122. Are you able to tell us what the majority or the type of complaints that would be coming from the prison? Is it lack of time outside the cells or - it's just interesting. 122 is quite a large number.

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. We receive a variety of complaints. It can be about medications, it can be about - because it's in the health complaint space, it's about medications, it's about adequate treatment, it's about access to medications that they might have had available externally but aren't available.

CHAIR - Right. So it's not about health and going up. I wasn't sure whether it was because it affects their health, actually, being in lockdown. So it's more about medication?

Mr DAVIES - Also through you, deputy, I think if you remove one person's human right, like liberty, the others suffer.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr DAVIES - But I've now been to a number of the prison services and had a look at the health facilities there, and in terms of the availability of health services, I think I would not have particular concerns about provisional health services.

CHAIR - Thank you. My last question in this area, so when a complaint and complainant engages with the Health Complaints Commission and the Ombudsman - so what information is specifically provided to them so that they understand how the complaints investigation process works? In other words, what's done to explain the limitations of the Health Complaints Commission - sorry, through you, deputy.

Mr DAVIES - Sure.

CHAIR - And the Ombudsman, and educate and inform complainants about its work? In other words, how are their expectations managed?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. A big part of our work is expectations management. We have a process, and I'll be very general here, you know, we receive a complaint, we assess whether the particular service has addressed that complaint in the first instance. If they haven't, we will provide it back to them for them to address.

If they have, we make an assessment about whether it's something that falls within jurisdiction, whether it's something that we conciliate, whether it's something that we

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investigate. Investigations are resource intensive, so we don't do very many of those, but we do know that in preliminary inquiry - which is our shuttle negotiation phase, if you like - we resolve a high proportion of those complaints.

CHAIR - No, thank you. Other members. Mr Edmunds? Ms Webb?

Ms WEBB - Yes, thank you. Got a few matters to follow up on. This is a question for the Ombudsman, if I may, through you, deputy. As noted in the 2024-25 annual report, on page 5, your predecessor Mr Connock states that the office now administers six major jurisdictions, that the new functions have not always been accompanied by additional resources as they've been added, and that 'The office is at capacity and could not take on any new functions without real commitment and adequate resourcing.'

I'm wondering from you, how confident are you that the complaints referred to the Ombudsman's Office across those different roles will continue to be responded to in a timely manner? Although we periodically have top-ups poured in to help on specific things like RTI backlogs, is this funding sufficient to undertake the statutory roles that you wear?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. In terms of timeliness, I think there's been a significant piece of work done, particularly in the RTI space, but also in the health complaint space around getting through a backlog and managing our outstanding complaints. In terms of resourcing, my predecessor, Mr Connock, made it clear that in his annual report - because bearing in mind it's not mine, it's Mr Connock's - that resourcing would be required.

I think if you ask any statutory office whether they want more resources or not, they're going to say, 'Of course we do.' But there's a pragmatic approach here where we - for example, I have reallocated a particular resource from one area of the office into another to fill a need. I think we will need to do a little bit more of that to be able to move forward. But I do think there's some recurrent funding will be required in the future.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that response. I understand shuffling deck chairs is necessary at times, but it's not an ideal approach, and while, of course, any statutory officer would of course say, 'I'd like more funding,' I am going to the point of: can you do your statutory roles in a timely and effective way? I think I'll take the last part of your answer, unless you correct me, that more funding, more resourcing, is likely to be required.

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. I think we are at capacity. I don't think we can absorb any additional functions beyond what we're doing and still meet those time limits. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask in particular, to drill down about the TNPM, so the Tasmanian National Preventative Mechanism that we have seen previously and had it quite clearly articulated to us by your predecessor, that funding that had been allocated previously was really only sufficient to employ someone in that role but not for them to do their actual job, to actually do the visits to the places of detention that the act requires. In terms of what's in this budget for the TNPM, can the TNPM actually do their role or can they just be employed to sit at a desk? Through you, deputy, for that.

Mr DAVIES - Yes. The NPM has been provided with some additional funding that's enabled us to employ some staff to undertake the work of the NPM.

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Ms WEBB - Great. So in your opinion then, you'll be able to undertake the role - the statutory role as it's required by the act, with this funding in this budget?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. We'll be able to commence the work of that office.

Ms WEBB - It'd be interesting to speak with you about it this time next year.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt, first question.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Just a quick one. On page 61 of budget paper 2, the employee benefits, cash outflows, obviously accounting for the 27th pay in 2025-26, but it does then trend downwards. I'll give you a moment to get to that page. Just wondering if that does indicate a decrease in staffing levels in that department into the forward Estimates.

Mr BARNETT - Through you, Gavin. Would it help if Gavin's here, or please feel free if you're - yes, it may be helpful if the Director of Finance could assist the honourable member.

Mr WAILES - Certainly. No worries.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

Mr WAILES - Through you, deputy. So there are some staffing - some funding decreases in that the - in the 2024-25 budget, the increased monitoring of the Ashley Youth Detention Centre, there was \$200,000 for two years. This year is currently the last year of that funding, also noting that the Office of the NPM has received an additional \$250,000 this year for two years. So those are two temporary additional funding allocations. The NPM did receive \$300,000 per year permanently in the 2024-25 budget last year.

Mr HISCUTT - Okay. I don't know if that does explain, as in between 2027-28 and 2028-29, there's another reduction there of \$60,000 or \$70,000.

Mr WAILES - So in the 2024-25 budget, there was COI additional funding for right to information, additional staffing for investigation, review and education, which was funding for four years.

Mr HISCUTT - So there will be reduced staff because the project will be finished?

Mr WAILES - Correct. Well, at this point.

Mr HISCUTT - At this point.

Mr WAILES - That funding will be discontinued from that year, noting it's an interim budget.

Mr HISCUTT - All right. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Webb, you had more questions?

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Yes, I'll keep going. Back to the Tas NPM, I noted earlier this year the Association for the Prevention of Torture, the APT, Senior Advisor, Mr Ben Buckland,

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joined your office director on visits to police stations, watch houses and court buildings around the state and that a report of that inspection is expected in the second-half of 2025. Is that report still on track and will it be delivered before the end of the year?

Mr HUBER - Through you, deputy. Mark Huber, the -

CHAIR - You might want to say your name and position again.

Mr HUBER - Mark Huber, the Director of the Office of the Tasmanian NPM. That report is still ongoing. We are adding to it. We visited the brig on the new *Spirit of Tasmania*.

Ms WEBB - That was because of a question I asked on a tour of that boat.

Mr HUBER - So we've been engaging with TT-Line to receive some policy documents and information about that, and that will be included in the report. We are also still engaging with departments on data.

Ms WEBB - Do we have a timeline on potentially when to expect that report? Through you, deputy, and through the Ombudsman.

Mr HUBER - Through you, deputy. I would say we are aiming for first quarter of next year.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I'm excited to hear that you visited the *Spirit* boat, because I did ask about the brig when I was taking a tour of the boat and whether it got inspected by a TNPM. May I move to another area?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - So in terms of the RTI area, I wanted to ask, in that space, we have our push rather than pull model, in our legislation at least, if not in practice, and education is a big part of that role, and obviously that's part of what your office does broadly across the state service to try to help people undertake their responsibilities better under RTI act.

Instrumental to that is the Ombudsman's manual, which is available on your website, which was first published in 2010. Are there any plans to update the Ombudsman's manual to ensure it reflects the range of amendments to the act and determinations and things that have been learned from those determinations across the years, the intervening years since 2010?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. Yes, there are plans. Understandably, the focus has been on reducing the backlog in the RTI space, but now that we have some breathing room there, we are starting to focus on updating our guidelines in relation to that.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Is that a this year priority, or when do you expect that becomes possible to progress?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. It'll probably be in the first half of next year.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you. In terms of trying to keep things updated, particularly as you have been churning through that backlog and trying to reduce it, and no doubt noting

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learnings that can be applied then from the things that you're observing and then correcting in decisions made in other agencies, is there a mechanism by which you're collecting and collating that in preparation for the new guidelines or in preparation for sharing that as an education tool across the agencies?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. We'll certainly be examining all those issues and updating that guidance in relation to that. I can't tell you exactly how we're going to progress with that, but certainly we'll be ensuring that it's a contemporary set of guidelines and ensuring that we don't get into a situation where it's been a number of years since we've updated them in the future.

Ms WEBB - In terms of the backlog, are we at a point that you can confidently say the backlog is virtually clear and we're now sort of operating in real time dealing with reviews of RTI decisions, or are we still some distance from that?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. We are perilously close to saying it's business as usual. We still have just a few outstanding matters that are a little bit over 12 months old, but we should have that under control within the first quarter of next year.

Ms WEBB - Okay. In terms of the staffing of the agents of your team, and you mentioned you've been doing a bit of shifting about to meet requirements and roles, are you able to give us - I know we asked for an FTE for your agency already, but are you able to give us the details of different roles in different areas and responsibilities?

Mr DAVIES - Just one moment, please.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I think -

Ms WEBB - Take it on notice?

Mr BARNETT - Happy to take that on notice, if you're happy.

Ms WEBB - Totally fine.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - Not a problem.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could ask a question with regard to prison official visitors. I'm assuming it's something that's still occurring, and I think in the past Mr Connock was actually telling us that they were advertising for more prison official visitors, so I'm interested in whether you have a full complement, whether it's difficult obtaining them, how many you might have. I'm sorry, through you, deputy.

Mr DAVIES - So we have two staff. I've got two paid staff in that area. There are 13 community-based official visitors comprising of seven mental health official visitors with one member in the northern area of the state and five in the south. And prison official visitors comprise of a team of six with one northern member and five in the south.

CHAIR - So the northern members would visit -

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Mr DAVIES - Launceston, Burnie, the northern half of the - through you, deputy.

CHAIR - So they're not in the north-west? I wasn't sure. So there are no North West Regional Hospital - no, I was wondering if you had any volunteer - or any official visitors from the north-west as well? So just in the north and south, and they cover the state between them?

Mr DAVIES - Yes, they cover the state. We've got a couple of people based in Launceston, which then service the rest of the north.

CHAIR - Thank you. We have time for another question, Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - I have another one on the official visitors then, while we're on that topic, noting that in the report that was tabled for 2024-25, under the *Mental Health Act*, of the activities of the official visitors in that capacity. I was just interested - 138 complaints received from patients in approved facilities. Most of the report that was tabled for 2024-25 under the *Mental Health Act* of the activities of the official visitors in that capacity. I was just interested to hear of 138 complaints received from patients in approved facilities. Most of the complaints resolved following discussions with relevant clinical staff. Is there a way that the matters that have been raised in those complaints are sort of documented to look for potential systemic issues that should then be a matter of inquiry or investigation?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. There are official visitor reports that are brought back to the office and collated, and the manager or the principal officer of that area is very attuned to thematic issues that arise out of those visits.

Ms WEBB - Has that occurred where there's been an identification of a thematic area of concern, and that then has resulted in a more broad-based inquiry or investigation into it at a systemic level?

Mr DAVIES - That's a little more tricky for me to answer.

Ms WEBB - You haven't got the background with the agency.

Mr DAVIES - That's right.

Ms WEBB - That's fine.

Mr DAVIES - Without misleading you, I would like to say yes, but I'd need to take that on notice.

Ms WEBB - Okay. That's fine. I was interested to note, too, in the report that it said that no complaints had been received from a child patient during this reporting period. Is that unusual? Do you know in times past - in years past or in recent years, have there been complaints that would normally have come from, potentially from children, patients visited?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy. I think children speaking up is often a very challenging space irrespective of the environment, bearing in mind that this is a mental health environment or a prison environment. The prison environment is well-serviced by the custodial inspection team from the Ombudsman's office, but in terms of mental health official visitors, I think it's very difficult to step into that space and have people approach you.

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Ms WEBB - Do you know whether there - was it the situation that there were fewer visits to children patients during that time, which might have been a smaller pool from which a complaint might have arisen?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, deputy, I would need to take that on notice. I don't have it before me at the moment.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Any further questions? No. Thank you very much for the time at the table. Thank you.

DIVISION 19

Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

OUTPUT GROUP 1

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

1.1 The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

CHAIR - We will now move to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, if there are people you'd like to bring to the table. I see Mr Coates.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I think Mr Coates would be a most appropriate person to come to the table. Daryl Coates, DPP.

CHAIR - Welcome, Mr Coates. I'll just get organised there, and then we'll - are you ready? I'll just let the deputy find where you're up to.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, all good.

CHAIR - No, that's fine.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Well, our first question is to Mr Edmunds.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. In his annual report, the DPP says that the criminal backlog remains challenging, and there's been a 60 per cent increase in the last four years. While his office has worked hard to continue to finalise as many as possible, the DPP says that to reduce the backlog, a 'significant multi-faceted' approach is required that would increase funding to his office, increase funding to defence council, aka Legal Aid, and increase resources to the Police Disclosure Office. What are you doing to address these recommendations?

Mr BARNETT - First of all, thank you very much for the question. I thank the DPP for his long and distinguished service to the justice system in Tasmania and the people of Tasmania. Having said that, happy to refer to the secretary in a moment or the DPP, indeed, as well, but it's clearly a very complex matter.

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I take it very seriously, and that's why I've re-established the Justice Forum where the DPP sits with, obviously, the Chief Justice, Chief Magistrates, Solicitor-General, Law Society and all the other key stakeholders as chaired, obviously, by myself and the secretary and matters of court backlog and challenges in delivering efficiencies across our justice system are discussed, put together.

It's been a number one topic, I think it's fair to say, over the last many meetings of the Justice Forum. It remains at the forefront of our minds, and the role of the DPP and the office of the DPP is very important. I'm not sure if the secretary can add to that, but I'll just check. Thank you.

Ms BOURNE -Thanks, deputy. Without speaking for Mr Coates, of course, in a general sense, the backlog issue which we've talked about earlier in the day is a result of many factors, and it's a system - or a systematic challenge, I should say, requiring coordinated effort across the sector, whether that be disclosure of police material, expert reports, availability of defence counsel and court sitting time, but Mr Coates may wish to elaborate on his comments, deputy.

Mr COATES - I think you missed out one important factor that I suggested in my report, which I-

Mr EDMUNDS - Might be about to ask about that.

Mr COATES - That has been discussed at the Justice Forum, and that is an increase - sorry. That is a statutory discount for early pleas of guilty, which could have the effect of defence counsel having a look at matters earlier to consider whether it is going to be a plea. If it's been a plea and it's an early plea, then that has a significant effect on the system.

Firstly, it means police and forensic science are not working on cases that they don't need to work on. Our office is not working on cases which can be resolved very quickly, and court time is not taken up with listing of a trial. It's not going to be a trial, but as you can see from the figures in my annual report, there's been an increase in the number of committals of some 60 per cent in the last four years and an increase of finalisations of over 50 per cent. Our offices in this past financial year finalised 50 per cent more than they did four years ago.

Mr EDMUNDS - So you've pinched the number as much as you can.

Mr COATES - Yes. The backlog increased, although I think by 14 numbers last year.

Mr BARNETT - I could just add to that through you, Chair, to indicate the government's very serious consideration of that and the positive consideration of the discounts of sentences, the discounts of sentences as a result of the early plea of guilty. As the Director of Public Prosecutions indicated, that would have a flow-on effect through the justice system in terms of defence counsel, but more broadly through the system. It's something that I'm positively considering.

The department's responded to the DPP's initial thoughts and views and providing a number of options that I'm currently considering and indicating to the committee and to others listening of strong and positive consideration of that objective.

PUBLIC

Mr EDMUNDS - So you view that as, perhaps, the best lever to pull to challenge - to take on some of those challenges covered in the first question at this stage?

Mr BARNETT - I think the first point is that it's a very complex matter, and that's why the Justice Forum has been looking at this very carefully over the course of more than 12 months and will continue to do so. It's a multifaceted response that's required, but the initiative of the, you know, discount on early pleas of guilty is definitely towards the top of the list in terms of further action to respond to the need for court improvement and backlogs, there have already been a range of measures implemented, appointment of associate judge, of course, criminal listings that I made reference to earlier today, and, obviously, an appointment of acting judges, which is ongoing, including support for the Magistrates Court in a range of areas.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you. The DPP also says that while he is very supportive of his staff, they are relatively inexperienced. What are you doing to attract and retain experienced legal practitioners and provide training and professional development?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr COATES - Through you, deputy. We've recently had two new very senior positions created in the office. We've employed another senior person, a level 4 legal practitioner, as a counsel in our criminal section. We've obtained a number of people from interstate. In respect to training our junior staff in particular, we have a monthly Friday afternoon session, where a senior practitioner takes all our level 1 and 2 lawyers through a topic.

We have two-day inhouse conferences, where we have a mixture of internal speakers and outside speakers. For example, we've got one coming up in early December, where we have obtained a Crown prosecutor from New South Wales to give training on a new provision of the *Evidence Act* that's been in New South Wales for a lot longer than us.

We've got Kate Warner coming along to give a lecture about sentencing. We do that twice a year. A number of people go to the Australian Crown Prosecutors Conference, which is once a year. Our Witness Assistance officers go to a conference once a year. They're the things we do in respect of training.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thanks, Chair.

CHAIR - If I could just ask you with regard to bail, I notice on page 9 of the DPP annual report 2024-25, it says, 'Bail applications again increased from 532 to 578, which represents a 60 per cent increase since 2021-22.' I know that says 'bail applications'. I'm assuming that's not actually bail applications that were granted.

Mr COATES - No, no. That's bail applications in total.

CHAIR - I'm wondering how many of those would've been granted. Do we have a number?

Mr COATES - Yes. If you go to page 4 in the annual report - no, sorry. Just the number.

CHAIR - It's just good to have it on the record. That's all.

PUBLIC

Mr COATES - Sorry, page 18 of the annual report. Of those 578 bail applications, 318 were granted, 177 were refused, 47 were withdrawn, 27 were adjourned sine die, and eight there was found to be no jurisdiction.

CHAIR - Thank you. Given the number of crimes that are often committed whilst on bail, are we looking to any reform proposals? I can remember several years ago that there were plans to remove bail or might've been suspended sentences, but have we actually looked at any reforms to do with bail?

Do we use electronic bracelets, or what type of monitoring do we use when someone is actually on bail to try to ensure that they're actually not committing crimes? I know one of the things we often hear is that someone committed crimes again when they're on bail, obviously which breaks the bail.

Mr BARNETT - 'Yes' is the answer. We're looking at it very seriously. The *Bail Act* reforms are well under way. I've brought this to the justice forum in recent meetings. I am imminently about to release a *Bail Act* reform bill. When I say 'imminently', whether it'll be this side of Christmas or the other side, but not too far away.

There's a lot of work that's been done by my department in consultation with all the relevant direct stakeholders, like the DPP sitting on my left, and we're just having another round of feedback from the justice forum. Then we'll release that for consultation feedback, and consolidate much of the good work that's already been and is acknowledged in the common law, and putting that into legislation to provide clarity and purpose with respect to our bail legislation.

CHAIR - With the consultation, if it's released before Christmas, consultation period won't be over the Christmas period. Will it continue?

Mr BARNETT - There'll be a commitment to adequate time for consultation. It's very important, and it's actually a quite complex piece of work in terms of the *Bail Act* reform. There will be absolutely adequate time for feedback and response from all key stakeholders.

CHAIR - Outside the holiday period, yes.

Mr BARNETT - That's right, yes.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - I've got one area of questions I'm quite interested in, and it's around the Attorney-General has recently announced that, subsequent to the coronial project that was under way relating to body parts that'd been given without consent to the R A Rodda Museum at UTAS and held there across decades, the coroners completed their part of looking into that matter, and the Attorney-General has indicated that he has referred matters potentially for investigation to your office arising out of that.

I'm just wanting to follow up. Can you confirm whether work is under way looking at that and if it's complete already or, if not yet complete, whether there's a completion timeframe that you could indicate?

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - Again, I'll refer to the DPP. Of course, I want to confirm again how seriously I take this matter, and the government does as well. I've referred, as you know, to the Tasmania Police. I thank you and others who've raised their concerns with me. I want to indicate to the families concerned sincere apologies, and an apology will be provided in due course as appropriate following further consultation with the relevant families.

The Minister for Health will obviously provide a ministerial statement in the coming weeks in December and then provide an opportunity for an appropriate apology, where members of parliament can contribute as appropriate and, of course, the families affected can be involved in that in the first quarter of next year. In terms of the role of the DPP, I'll pass to the DPP. As you know, I wrote to the DPP and the Tasmania Police in the early stages, when I became aware of the concerns that had been brought to me.

Mr COATES - Through you, deputy. I haven't done anything, because I don't have an investigative function.

Ms WEBB - You're waiting for TasPol.

Mr COATES - As I understand, it's been referred to Tasmania Police. If they ask me for advice or send a file to me, I'll consider the matter.

Ms WEBB - Right, and it hasn't arrived to you yet. Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Any further questions, Mr Edmunds?

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm fine, thank you.

CHAIR - Mr Gaffney? No. Thank you very much. You have an early minute.

Mr COATES - Yes. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Coates. Really appreciate it.

The Committee suspended from 3.56 p.m. to 4.15 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, deputy, and your team. If you'd like to - sorry, I've caught you there.

Mr BARNETT - No, not at all.

CHAIR - If you would like to introduce your team at the table.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. Through you, Chair, I welcome to the table, obviously, my secretary, deputy secretary, Ross Smith, and the acting WorkSafe Tasmania Executive Director, Brad Parker.

CHAIR - Thank you. Our first question from WorkSafe Tasmania is from Mr Hiscutt.

PUBLIC

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I just wanted to ask approximately how many businesses are assessed each year, and then what percentage or how many are issued with improvement notices?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the questions. Clearly an operational question, so I'll see if the gentleman on my right can assist the honourable member. Thank you.

Mr PARKER - Thank you. Through you, deputy. During the 2024-25 year, there were 1652 workplace inspections conducted by inspectors, and out of that, there were 515 improvement notices and 144 prohibition notices issued.

Mr HISCUTT - How many of them were multiple - do you know - of those 515, was it 515 businesses or?

Mr PARKER - Yes, that'd be multiples. I wouldn't have the exact number.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. So fewer than that?

Mr PARKER - Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. Might I say we had WorkSafe through a business I was working for a year or two ago. Very impressed with them. They were there to help, which was really good.

Mr PARKER - Thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - However, just a question on top of that, through you, minister, does WorkSafe take any quantification - that's - might not be the right word - for how much it may cost a business to bring itself up to achieve those improvement notices? Do we know how much that has cost businesses, the visits that you have? Not that it should be a problem, I just would like to know if that's quantified at all.

Mr BARNETT - I don't know if you can put an estimate on it. I'll just check with the Executive Director.

Mr PARKER - No, it's very difficult to quantify the cost of compliance. The legislation is quite specific in regard to the duties and obligations of the duty holders. We work with industry to get a good compliance outcome, and if there is some ability to achieve a good outcome without putting workers at risk, then we certainly work with businesses to achieve those outcomes.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I suspected that might be the case, but wanted to see whether that was measurable at all. Could you advise of any new methodologies WorkSafe has been undertaking to reach more small businesses in Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. Well, certainly small businesses are the backbone of our economy, especially in our rural and regional areas. I'll pass to the executive director.

Mr PARKER - Our work in regard to dealing with small business is quite comprehensive. We have an advisory service which provides services directly to small

business. We deal with complaints on a regular basis, through which would come through our helpline. We actively try and cooperate with businesses to achieve compliance.

We've got the National Compliance and Enforcement Policy that provides a framework from which we operate, so we educate and inform before we move into the compliance and enforcement activities. We provide publications and guidance material to support industry to achieve compliance, as well as providing them adequate time to guide them through that process.

We are very much focused on ensuring and collaborating with businesses to get compliance. We've got a number of programmes we're rolling out at the moment that are dealing with small business, because they are most of our clients, given the demographics of the Tasmanian industry, but we also need to balance that with ensuring that businesses and workers aren't exposed to risk.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you very much for that. Just another couple. Just wondering what the turnover rate for WorkSafe staff was this year, and how the vacancies are for inspectors across the state.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. We'll pass to the director, if he's got that detail with him. If not, of course, he could take it on notice, but let's just check if he's got that, or the deputy secretary.

Mr PARKER - No, I've got it. Through you, deputy. The turnover is approximately 13 per cent in the last year. We currently are running with some vacancies, so we have 48 inspector positions, and as at 30 September we had 10 vacancies across the state. I believe since then, one of those positions has subsequently been appointed, and those positions are - we've got four vacancies in the south and three in the north-west. Attracting inspectors is challenging in some of those remote areas, and we've also got two in the mining sector. Again, specialist skills, and the traction into the market is quite difficult.

Mr HISCUTT - That, from memory of reading last year's estimate, seems like a similar number to that. Is there any policy decisions, deputy, that may be able to assist with that, or any comments you'd like to make?

Mr BARNETT - Well, certainly the first point is that it's a very important part of the work of the Department of Justice. Retaining and attracting skilled work health and safety inspectors is a priority of government. I know the deputy secretary would like to speak to it, but it's a multifaceted approach that we take as a government to building a strong and sustainable workforce. Obviously, you've got to be competitive in the marketplace in terms of those recruitment strategies. You've got to look at career pathways, targeted outreach, highlighting, you know, the meaningful impact of the role of an inspector. Having said that, I'll pass to the deputy secretary to add to the answer.

Mr SMITH - Yes, thank you, deputy. It is, like many areas within the State Service, it's difficult to attract and retain staff. Some of the things we're doing in terms of the WorkSafe inspectorate is implementing an agreement we have with the unions in the last wage agreement about broadbanding, which might allow inspectors to be able to move upward in bands, provided they meet certain criteria, as well, without sort of like a formal promotion that encourages them to stay longer.

We've also been involved with the union and with the inspectorate around putting on additional staff to assist, train and retain their skills, because we feel as though, whilst it's hard being competitive in the market, you know, for people that are expert in this area as well. One of the strategies we have, as well as implementing the broadbanding, is looking at how we can bring people on who've got an interest in work health and safety but haven't yet necessarily developed the skills to be a competent inspector, that we can fast-track them about building their skills and capacity and ability to go out on work site visits.

So yes, we've got a number of initiatives that look at how we improve those sort of skills and our ability to sort of be somewhere that if someone's looking to get into work health and safety, that WorkSafe's a good place to start, because we'll train you and we'll develop you, and you might go somewhere else, but it's a good place to come and learn the ropes.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. The ropes, yes. Thank you for that. I also had another question regarding workplace injuries and what the trend is looking like with workplace injuries. Are we trending up or down? What about fatalities in that instance as well.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. Again, an important question, workplace injuries, and we take it very seriously as a government, but I should indicate it's more of an operational matter, and I will pass to those on my right in a moment. I've said before, I say it again, very clearly, safety is a top priority for our government. It's everyone's responsibility, in fact, across government, across the community, and we want to continue to work on the work that's already been done in our workplaces, and we want to be the safest in the country when it comes to safety in the workplace, and ensure that workers can go home safely to see their families at the end of every day.

In terms of the details, we can assist you in that regard. I've got some updated figures in 2025 and 2024. Maybe I can share that with the committee now, if you'd like.

There've been 5253 workplace injuries reported in 2025 to the end of August. So quite recent, and that compares to 5459 for the same period in 2024. So a slight reduction. There were 8080 workplace injuries reported for 2024 compared to 8312 injuries reported for 2023. So on average, there are 22 Tasmanians injured at work each day, and although this is a significant reduction from the 28 people injured each day 20 years ago, it's still too high.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Gaffney has a follow-up.

Ms HISCUTT - I was just going to - I didn't have any more questions. I want to say after 15 years of working in small business manufacturing, just always had positive interactions. Just wanted to pass that along.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - I was wondering, deputy, do you have any breakdown of the industries that have the most prolific injuries? Is that an easy -

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - You can either table it or -

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - I've got a summary here, if you want to give me -

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes. I'd be interested.

Mr BARNETT - A quick overview in terms of the industries with the highest number of injuries to date in 2025, so correlating to those numbers I was making reference to. So health care and social assistance, 914; public administration and safety, 864; manufacturing, 577; construction, 536 and education and training, 455. I'll just check with the colleagues on the right, executive director, if there's anything else you could add to that answer.

Mr PARKER - No.

Mr BARNETT - No. Happy?

Mr PARKER - It's a priority industry. Those are the priority industries for us as the work we do.

Mr GAFFNEY - Have the top five changed in order over the last three years? Has there been any noticeable decrease or increase in one of the sectors concerning injuries, or has there been an industry which has markedly improved its safety record by the work it's been doing, perhaps, that you can-

Mr BARNETT - I think I can kick it off, and then I'll pass to the executive director, but certainly there's been an increase in terms of mental health and wellbeing impact injuries, absolutely increase in recent years, but in terms of more detail, I'll pass to the executive director.

Mr PARKER - Thank you, deputy. The agriculture sector is an area where we've seen some decline, but it's still not significant, and we've been working through the delivery of the Safe Farming Program to try to enhance capacity and get better compliance in that area. That program is seeing some positive results, but not to where we'd like to see it.

The construction sector is seeing some decline, but again, not significant. As you would have picked up from the original comments from the deputy, the numbers are still hovering about the same each year. So we're not seeing any significant decrease across the board, and our healthcare and social assistance appear is trending down, albeit ever so minimal.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you.

CHAIR - Interesting. Deputy, do you think it's an increase in mental health, or do you think it's people more willing to actually admit that they now have a mental health problem?

Mr BARNETT - I think it's probably both, but I'll just stand corrected by the colleagues on my right, executive director, but it's definitely an issue that's grown in past years.

Mr PARKER - Through you, deputy, yes. We are seeing an increase in the reported claims in that area. I think there is a level of acceptance across the community to mental health injuries.

CHAIR - That it's actually okay to say now that you have a mental health problem.

PUBLIC

Mr PARKER - Yes. We see that coming through, but we also are seeing more reporting, and those types of injuries are particularly difficult to manage people back to work. They're complex claims. They take longer to get people back to work and typically cost a lot more.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could ask with regard to the asbestos contamination alert with decorative sand products, I notice on your website the affected products include, but may not be limited to - now, I'm not sure if you say Kadink sand, Educational Colours Rainbow Sand, Creatistics Coloured Sand and the other decorative sand, and it mentions that it's been sold nationally, including Tasmania. I'm wondering have you discovered or identified many of these products in our schools or other businesses? I notice on the site, it's associated that it may actually have or contain asbestos.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question, and I will pass to the executive director, through you, Chair. Of course, Work Health and Safety Regulator Brad Parker did issue a release on behalf of WorkSafe on 14 November and certainly on behalf of the government and, indeed, WorkSafe. The health and safety of children, families and workers is our absolute priority. WorkSafe Tasmania acted immediately when contamination was identified, issuing a safety alert and working closely with national regulators on a full recall.

WorkSafe Tasmania is also working closely with the Department of Education, Children and Young People to assist with identification and removal, and I certainly urge anyone who believes that they may have these products to stop using them and follow the safety instructions on the WorkSafe Tasmania website.

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has published a national recall notice including photographs and retailer information to assist community awareness, and WorkSafe's advice is to stop using the affected products immediately and follow WorkSafe Tasmania's disposal instructions. Having said that, I will pass to the Executive Director to add to that answer.

CHAIR - So through you, yes, minister, just to ascertain whether we actually have had information that there has been some discovered in Tasmania?

Mr PARKER - Through you, deputy. Yes. The product has been sold within Tasmania. It was sold through a range of different outlets including Officeworks, Kmart, Woolworths and a number of other different ones, and that list is growing. People should have a look at the ACCC website because that list is growing. We've been working through with the various organisers, schools and childcare care facilities and those sorts of areas that have been using the product or have purchased the product.

CHAIR - We know that some schools and childcares do have it or have had it.

Mr PARKER - Yes. There are indications that it is present or has been present in a number of those facilities.

CHAIR - Is there anything else that the government or WorkSafe can do to ascertain that there hasn't been any danger or any effect in those premises where they've had children particularly?

PUBLIC

Mr PARKER - The advice to those facilities is to - the preliminary information is that the sand - the quantity of asbestos in the sand coming into the country is not known at date. There's tests being undertaken at the moment, but it is expected to be quite low. The precautions that have been outlined are primarily to mitigate that risk, and it's up to the businesses to work through and identify whether they have that product and then get appropriately-qualified professionals in to give them advice to assess the risk and determine what controls are necessary.

Mr SMITH - And from a Department of Justice - we've been working with senior officials in DCIP, around helping them to clarify that risk. I think they've brought on some additional expertise to help them in being able to assess and manage the risk at whatever sites that are identified where they have some of these products.

CHAIR - So would they - and I appreciate that you're not the Education minister, and we do have the Education minister later this week, but in these circumstances, if they are in a public school, would they be notifying the families? I guess there's a thing where it's a bit of an unknown. I appreciate it's an unknown at the moment with regard to how much is in these, is something that's an ongoing issue.

Mr BARNETT - No. As I said earlier, WorkSafe Tasmania acted immediately. That notice was made publicly on 14 November. They acted immediately. That contamination was identified. They've issued a safety alert, working closely with the national regulators on a full recall, and is working closely with the Department of Education, Children, and Young People to assist with the identification and removal of any relevant product.

CHAIR - But do we know how long it's been in the state? That's, I guess, a question of how long. I know we've identified it now, but I'm just wondering how long ago it was purchased. Is it something very recent that they've identified it's just come in, or could it have been here a year or two?

Mr PARKER - Through you, deputy, the product is - 2020 was when it was initially started being imported, and there's still work being undertaken in regards to assessing the size and quantity of the particles involved, and because that also goes to the risk of whether they're respirable or whether they are not something that is going to cause harm is part of the process.

It's not clear as to the quantity of the asbestos material within the sand. There's a number of unknowns still which we're working through.

CHAIR - No, thank you. I appreciate it. Any further questions for WorkSafe? No? Yes?

Ms WEBB - Maybe. I'm interested in the grants that go to the two assist programs, the Worker Assist and the ones with the TCCI. Are they just ongoing, set arrangements, or do they get reviewed or updated? I noticed in the annual reports they seem to just be sort of carried over each year, potentially. Can you provide some detail about those grants.

Mr BARNETT - In terms of the grants and the advisory services and, certainly, the WorkCover Board, Tasmania funds a range of advisory services delivered through WorkSafe Tasmania and external service providers. I've got the Chair of the WorkSafe board sitting on

my left, Kristy Bourne, who's also my secretary. I wonder if, to assist the committee, my secretary responded accordingly.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, deputy. Through you. As you've indicated, the WorkCover Board funds a range of internal and external services to support worker health, safety and well-being, as well as provide information, advice and education. In summary, the funding provided to external organisations to provide some of these services are not ongoing, in a sense. The board ordinarily reviews those services and the provision of those every three years also and follows a request for tender process to do a market scan of services available to provide those services.

Ms WEBB - When was that last done, that request for tender process?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, deputy. I don't have the precise date in front of me, but it was earlier this year, and we're still working through the outcome of at least one of those.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

4.3 Consumer, Building and Occupational Services

CHAIR - Thank you. Any further questions? If there are no further questions, members, thank you very much from WorkSafe. Thank you, deputy. We will go onto to Consumer, Building and Occupational Services. I'll just give you a moment to change people at the table.

Mr BARNETT - Could I welcome Robyn Pearce to the table, who's the head of our Consumer, Building and Occupational Services, and thank Robyn for her work in support of myself, my office and the government.

CHAIR - Give Robyn a second to get ready.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Gaffney has the first question.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, deputy. When I went onto the site to look at some information, I was amazed at the range of responsibilities CBOS has, and it seems to be going as well. My first question would be the question of, say, for the last four years the FTEs that you have to help the organisation function. I realise it's bringing on more programs all the time, but it would be helpful to understand the last three or four years of the FTEs.

Mr BARNETT - The FTEs?

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - For sure. Let's see if Robyn Pearce can assist.

Mr GAFFNEY - If you don't have it right at hand -

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - I think we should have that. I've got 30 June 2025, CBOS employed 74 staff. The full-time equivalent position is 71.5. I'll just clarify if the CBOS director agrees.

Ms PEARCE - Thank you. Yes, through you, deputy. That's our figures as at 30 June, the staff at that point in time. We don't have the figures from the previous years, and I think that it would be quite confusing, the figures from previous years, because there has been some changes in the arrangements. Some of the functions that were in CBOS, like Working with Vulnerable People and Planbuild, are no longer within CBOS, so comparative data will be somewhat difficult to provide.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. The skills surrounding that responsibility, did those people stay with CBOS, or did they go to where that transferred to?

Ms PEARCE - They went with the function into the other areas.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. That helps. I would like to understand the relationship between the financial assistance package for consumers affected by construction company failures, and then it looks as though the future home warranty insurance scheme is to be completed. If we go to the financial assistance package, when was that introduced, and how many times has that been enacted since its introduction? How often has there been funding forwarded to those impacted by construction company failures?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. This goes to a little bit of detail in operational matters, but the financial assistance is provided. As you've correctly noted, the government's *Residential Building (Home Warranty Insurance Amendments) Act 2023* passed both Houses of parliament. Was assented to on 16 October 2023. In terms of the detail around that half of that question, I wonder if the deputy secretary or the executive director could assist.

Mr GAFFNEY - Sorry, how many?

Mr SMITH - Two hundred and twenty two consumers have lodged claims; 219 claims have been paid to 205 consumers. The total value of those claims is \$13.027 million since it started, with the average claim paid of \$59,485.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. The future home warranty insurance scheme was touted to come in the middle of this year, I think. There may have been a delay, but it's just because of the nature of the beast. Could you update us on where that's at at the moment?

Mr SMITH - We're working with the Department of Treasury and Finance on the appropriate model there to be able to move that forward until that's determined, the implementation of the home warranty insurance model. You can probably see in the budget papers for the financial assistance package funding has been continued for a further two years. The government's indicated its intention that that'll remain in place until the home warranty insurance is up and running.

Mr GAFFNEY - That's good. Does that explain, then, the significant decrease in the Consumer, Building and Occupational between 2026-27 and 2027-28? You're assuming that that's going to decrease by 2.5.

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - Yes. As the deputy's indicated, we've got an allowance in the budget for the next two years for that building financial assistance package to go for the next two years.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. That's all I had.

Mr BARNETT - I think that's a good summary.

Mr GAFFNEY - Unless there's a question I've missed.

Mr HISCUTT - I'm wondering the role that CBOS has. This comes from some specific constituents that have had issues with councils in relation to regulations that are governed by CBOS. The question is how do we educate councils or what processes do you take to educate councils to understand the regulations?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Education and awareness of the role of CBOS is important, and I can indicate it's now my second time in this role. I'm very pleased to be back in this role as the minister for Consumer Affairs responsible for CBOS, and very pleased with the leadership being provided by Robyn and her team and can certainly outline the important role of education and awareness and communications with local councils and the like.

Ms PEARCE - Thank you. Through you, deputy. CBOS engages with what we call the permit authorities, because that's what they are from our context, on a regular basis. For example, our technical people will go out and visit all of the councils to provide them with advice. Two years ago, the plumbers went around and did a visit of all of the councils.

We're currently in the middle of our building specialists doing exactly the same thing, working their way through the councils to find out and understand what their issues are, what their challenges are, where there may be a lack of consistency.

We meet up. I've met myself with all the heads of local government. We in the middle of the year ran a permit authorities forum as well, which will be a regular feature going forward. In addition to that, what's been clear over the course of this year - we've run forums with a range of different stakeholders.

We will be bringing together another forum where we have our building surveyors, together with our permit authorities, because they're both co-regulators, and there's lots of overlaps, and there's lots of things between the three regulators. We'll be able to help work out, by sitting down and understanding where there are inconsistencies, where are the points of tension, what is it that we can look to, to untangle there. So that's likely to be held early next year.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I'm not sure if this is a question or a statement, but I guess there seems to be - regulation is obviously there, but there's an education piece in how to overcome the issues that I find a lot of constituents have, that, instead of just saying, 'No, you can't', it's the, 'But here is the options to overcome it'. So I think that's a piece that needs to be pushed to the permit authorities.

Ms PEARCE - As always, there will always be a mix of views and opinions when it comes to interpreting regulation. That may vary from the regulator, including us, may have

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different opinions at times to building surveyors, to permit authorities, to the licensed practitioners who are undertaking the work, and trying to get some consistency in that understanding is complex.

It's a very detailed technical area, with lots of pieces of technical information. So one of the challenges that we're setting ourselves at the moment is trying to work out how can we detangle it and make it simpler and easier for people to understand and navigate.

Mr HISCUTT - I don't envy that role.

Ms PEARCE - It will be an interesting challenge.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - So just quickly on that, to follow up - and thank you very much for the question; I think you've really touched on an important issue for small and medium and other businesses all around Tasmania. I think in the past, it's probably fair to say that consultation perhaps wasn't delivered in an optimal way, but I've got every confidence that they're going forward.

Consultation with the relevant stakeholders is definitely on the improve. I have a business background, as you know, small business background, and it is important; we want business to be able to get on with the job. We want to cut the red tape, streamline the processes, and focus on, obviously, quality outcomes, and focus on safety and the like. But we don't want anything that's excessive and overburdening to business large and small.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could ask a couple of questions - sorry.

Mr EDMUNDS - That's okay. You go.

CHAIR - The same matter - no, we've done the same matter. Mine is different.

Mr EDMUNDS - So is mine, different. It's fine. Go for it.

CHAIR - No, you go first. Go on.

Mr EDMUNDS - You're the Chair. I think we should-

CHAIR - Exactly. I'm going to be generous. Go first.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Mine shouldn't take too long. Thank you. Has CBOS considered analysing and publishing data on total active bonds by location, as is available in other Australian jurisdictions, to enable better monitoring of the private rental market through its administration of bonds?

Mr BARNETT - I'll just see if we can assist you with the administration of bonds.

Mr EDMUNDS - As in, that's what informs the data.

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Mr BARNETT - Yes. I think the executive director could assist.

Ms PEARCE - So that information is currently published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Mr EDMUNDS - With Tassie stuff as well?

Ms PEARCE - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - All right. There you go.

Ms PEARCE - So it is available through the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and has been for some time.

Mr EDMUNDS - Great.

Ms PEARCE - We are currently, though, also looking at whether we can create a bit of a dashboard that's going to provide that information on a ready basis from Tasmania. So that's a body of work we'll probably start looking at in the new year.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes. Great. Would that - either can you tell me now, or will that data show how many sort of short-term rentals were previously rented in a long-term rental market?

Ms PEARCE - No.

Mr EDMUNDS - No. How would we get that information?

Ms PEARCE - That information isn't currently available, and whether it can be produced is something we'd have to explore. It requires bringing together two separate databases of information, and certainly, we find that addresses are stored in many different and wonderful ways, that can make data cleansing and matching extremely difficult to be able to do.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Then back to my first question, about the ABS disclosures, do you know how regular that is? Is that an annual thing?

Ms PEARCE - Through you, deputy. No, I don't have the frequency, but we can certainly provide advice on it.

Ms WEBB - Yes. I would like that too, actually, just to follow up on that, just what that ABS product is, and its frequency, so we can know - and also, is it relating to Tasmania; can you put it on your website, so that it's easy to find for people who want Tasmanian data on that?

Mr BARNETT - We'll take it on notice and provide a response that's hopefully useful to the Committee.

Mr EDMUNDS - Thank you.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Thank you, deputy. Deputy, can you outline how the Rental Deposit Authority is performing in relation to bond processing times, and what are you doing to ensure the system is working efficiently for tenants and property owners?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question, in terms of the bonds. So let's just see - yes. So in terms of the Rental Deposit Authority and the Residential Tenancy Commissioner, they're continuing to provide stability, support and continuity within the retail industry. The Commissioner's bond dispute process continues to ensure only legitimate claims are awarded from tenant bonds, and that tenants have an opportunity to disagree with the claims.

The commissioner's authority to investigate unreasonable rent increases assists in keeping individual rent increases within market norms, to reduce instances of price gouging. The commissioner's authority to investigate complaints and issue orders to ensure compliance with the *Residential Tenancy Act* continues to provide an avenue for tenants to enforce their rights under residential leases.

So in terms of the exact details to your question, as of 1 July 25, the Rental Deposit Authority held 48 478 active bonds, totalling \$72.08 million. As of 30 June 25, the Commissioner received 37 unreasonable rent increase applications, for the 2024-25 financial year. Twenty-two applications were received for a single address, for retiree living. The Commissioner received 145 complaints and one request for an exemption from a minimum standard, the 2024-25 financial year. I hope that assists the honourable member.

CHAIR - Thank you. It does. Now, I had another question that, you're probably going to tell me it's for the Premier, but as we've been mentioning short stay, it's that I have received advice this week with regard to the government releasing a draft short-term rental accommodation tax levy bill, and I accept it came out from the Premier's office.

But we did discuss earlier about consultation, and I note that the consultation for this particular bill is from 2 December to 27 January. Would you agree that that probably is not an opportune time? I mean, short stay obviously - as I said, we've been talking short stay in under CBOS. It just seems a very difficult time for a consultation period for short-term rental accommodation.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. Of course, it's -

CHAIR - And I do accept it's probably the Premier.

Mr BARNETT - It is primarily a matter for the Minister for Housing, actually, and actually the Premier directly.

CHAIR - It came out of the Premier's office.

Mr BARNETT - From the Premier's office. I'm not sure - in terms of the consultation process, certainly consultation is very important. And in terms of that time frame, I'm not across the exact details.

CHAIR - For short-term rental, holiday accommodation.

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Mr BARNETT - It has been discussed and consulted heavily already. I think everybody would agree with that. This is an election commitment, of course, from the previous election to this one, and it's been on the government agenda for some time. I don't think anybody -

CHAIR - It's just a consultation period.

Mr BARNETT - I don't think anybody is surprised as to where we're up to, and I think that's probably the best way to answer that question at the moment.

CHAIR - It's just a consultation period, that was all, even though it's on the agenda. I accept that, and I accept that it doesn't come under you, but it's just that we had been mentioning short-term, and it seemed opportune just to bring it up.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Does anyone have any other questions? Ms Webb, do you have a question?

Ms WEBB - Yes. I've got one from earlier, that I've raised, because it relates into the rental bonds space as well, and the funding that is derived from the interest that is made on that repository, and what then is allocated to the Tenants' Union as legal support into the rental space. My understanding is, and the Attorney-General mentioned before that there's 48 478 bonds in the 2024-25 year. The interest accrued on those was \$3.1 million, I understand, and that included an increase of \$552,000 over the previous year. That's in the annual report on page 59.

I'm looking for some clarity about the interest that's accrued. How is that allocated in terms of how is it used? Where does it go? Is it, in fact, a quarter or less than a quarter of that that goes to the Tenants' Union for funding? If so, what is that amount?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. You fairly noted this at the beginning of our hearings earlier today, and we indicated it to be on the agenda for later today. Thank you very much for the question, and I'll pass to the executive director, Robyn.

Ms PEARCE - Thank you. Through you, deputy. While we certainly recognise the Tenants' Union of Tasmania performs an important role supporting tenants and the interest in advocating for that group, the work cannot be funded from the Rental Deposit Authority. It has not in the past. Section 48Q of the act prevents the interest earned on bonds being used for any other purpose other than the authority's expenses, charges and obligations that are incurred or undertaken by the authority in the performance of the authority's functions.

Ms WEBB - All right. My mistake. I must have misunderstood. Actually, perhaps where I was going with that was a comparator to say we make \$3.1 million in interest in a year, yet we fund the Tenants' Union only half a million dollars. And yet, into this space, they are a crucial component of support to particularly vulnerable Tasmanians. So how is the \$3.1 million spent then?

Ms PEARCE - Through you, deputy. The \$3.1 million is spent to fund the rental services team within CBOS. So that is the team that handles all of - looks after my bond, looks after all of the queries that come in from renters from the Tenants' Union, handles all of the disputes as well, as well as doing communication education.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - What does the education look like? What is that element of it? Is that community education to tenants and landlords?

Ms PEARCE - So the education is - it is through our social media, through our website, through our newsletter. We have a specific website for renting in Tasmania as well, and from time to time we support the Real Estate Institute of Tasmania with some of their activities as well, although that's also supported through the property agent's fund.

Ms WEBB - Right. So the money that might be going to the Real Estate Institute, where does that come from?

Ms PEARCE - So if that is for training and education - so, sorry, my mistake, that's from the property agent's fund, is where that money comes from.

Ms WEBB - Okay. In terms of the bond, the tenant's bond revenue projections for the 24th - sorry, for the 2025-26 year, noting it went up half a million or more in the previous year, what are we projecting for 2025-26?

Ms PEARCE - We don't have a - projection?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I think the Finance Director, Gavin Wailes, is about to sit down and share some words of wisdom.

Mr WAILES - So we include estimates within the budget papers, but they're very much - sorry, through you deputy, but they're very much driven by the number of bonds, but also the interest rate as well, which can change. We also just use the Treasurer's interest rate, which is set by the Treasurer as opposed to the markets themselves.

It's probably worth noting that the interest during COVID was insufficient to actually fund the operations of the rental services team. Any additional that is earned but not used is retained to continue earning interest to ensure that if we do have reductions in interest rates again in the future -

MS WEBB - You can cover those gaps.

Mr WAILES - That we can cover them, yes, that's right.

MS WEBB - So the projections then, based on what you've just described in terms of what you use to make projections, what's our projection potentially for 2025-26 this year?

Mr WAILES - From memory - and I'd only be going on memory, I haven't got the figures to hand.

Ms WEBB - That's fine.

Mr BARNETT - Do you want to take it on notice?

Ms WEBB - Sure.

Mr BARNETT - We're more than happy to do that.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Thank you. That'd be good.

Mr WAILES - I'd rather not guess.

Ms WEBB - I'm also interested to know whether there's any trend or is there consistency in that number of bonds that we hold in that arrangement? Looking back over recent years and then of course through to the 48 478 that are in the 2024-25 year.

Mr BARNETT -Yes. I noticed we have got figures from 2023-24. I don't know if you wanted to make mention of those?

Ms PEARCE - Yes. Certainly. I've got them back to a few years. In July 2024 it was 47 736. April 2023, it was 46 197. June 2022 was 45 597.

Ms WEBB - So we're tracking up a sort of steady increase?

Ms PEARCE - Correct.

Ms WEBB - Was that for your assessment of that?

Ms PEARCE - Correct.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT -Thank you very much, Chair.

CHAIR - No, thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Sorry, Chair, I think Mr Wailes might have additional comments.

CHAIR - Mr Wailes. Thank you.

Mr WAILES - In relation to that interest question, I've just confirmed, and it is the figure that we have in the statement comprehensive income, so the interest expected to be earned on the RDA account in this financial year is \$3.651 million, and it's on page 134 of the budget papers.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much.

CHAIR - Budget paper number 1?

Mr WAILES - Yes.

Division 11

CHAIR - Thank you. Deputy, we are now on our final output line. I know you're disappointed. You're hoping to go longer. But we actually have Trade, and we have Mr Hiscutt with the first question.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

PUBLIC

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2 - Just a short pause while we grab our papers.

CHAIR - Absolutely. Yes, yes. Certainly. I'm getting ahead of myself, getting a bit excited seeing it's the last.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2 - That's all right.

CHAIR - Okay. If we could suspend for a moment, please. Suspend the broadcast just for a moment.

The Committee suspended from 5.02 p.m. to 5.03 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, deputy. As I said, we're on the homeward straight, and we have Trade. If you'd like to introduce those at the table.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I would like to introduce Michael Mogridge, my deputy secretary of the Department of State Growth, on my left, and likewise Cameron Shield, whose title is Senior Director of Trade.

Mr SHIELD - That's correct.

CHAIR - Very appropriate.

Mr BARNETT - I'm happy to do a short opening statement.

CHAIR - If you would, certainly.

Mr BARNETT - I'll try to keep it as short as possible.

CHAIR - No, we're going well for time.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the opportunity. Certainly very pleased and proud of our small business state, Tasmania, and it's the backbone of our economy, particularly in our rural and regional areas.

As minister for Small Business, I certainly want to shine a spotlight on the important role of our small businesses across Tasmania. We now have, 42,648 small businesses in Tasmania as of June 2024, employing fewer than 20 people. They represent 97 per cent of all businesses. Eighty five percent of all small businesses are micro businesses of fewer than five employees.

Tasmania has the highest business survivability rate in the nation, with many small businesses serving their communities in a wonderful way. In the past year alone, the number of small businesses in Tasmania grew by 1.7 per cent, showing strong confidence in entrepreneurial growth.

When I talk about confidence, the NAB survey which came out last week put Tasmania on top of all jurisdictions in Australia in terms of confidence. The Business Council Australia Regulation Rumble report came out and Tasmania came second out of all the states in terms of punching above our weight and delivering as minimum regulation and red tape as possible.

PUBLIC

In terms of the business services that's provided through Business Tasmania Services, Business Advice Service, the Workplace Relations Helpline - the budget outlines the funding support that provides that.

In terms of Trade, we're absolutely delighted that Tasmania's hit more than \$6.1 billion in exports in the last financial year, a 5 per cent increase. Exports means jobs, and we're pleased and proud of the record of our exporters in Tasmania.

I'm absolutely delighted to, again, being the minister for Trade, fast on the heels of the Premier in his role as minister for Trade. We have the Tasmanian Trade Action Plan that's delivered all 20 actions, generating more than \$50 million in new sales and outcomes. This year we're investing \$2.6 million in trade initiatives, including the international business development network, the industry-led trade missions and, of course, the Accelerating Trade Grants Program, which I think is one of our best.

The Bitwise Agronomy that I visited recently with the Premier is a great example of what these programs achieve - that's just in your area, through you, Chair, in Launceston. Bitwise uses AI and smart imaging and delivers brilliant outcomes, and is now employing 10 people and delivering that expertise internationally.

In closing, Small Business, Trade and Consumer Affairs - our message is clear: we're getting on with the job. We're delivering as a government. We're building confidence, supporting growth and ensuring every Tasmanian business and others have the opportunity to succeed.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Looking at the table 12.2, the expense for trade drops off by nearly \$13 million to 2028-29 from 2024-25. The explanation note says there are fixed-term budget items that presumably are ending. Does this mean that the government is not then further investing in trade, especially in light of things like the AUKUS defence deals and where our advanced manufacturing sector and energy sector could be heading towards in the future?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. I will pass to the deputy secretary shortly. In terms of the initiatives that are available and under way, we take it very seriously. We are getting on with the job of delivering and we're excited by that. I'm certainly excited as the relevant minister and, in terms of the new trade strategy, we're working on that.

There's consultation on that as we speak. We're getting feedback on it and that will hopefully be available and announced in terms of our trade strategy through to 2030 and beyond by mid-next year. There's a lot of work and effort that's gone into that.

This, of course, is an interim budget, as we indicated earlier today. There will be a May Budget, of course, next year. The department support for Tasmanian exporters remains in place, with services continuing to align with the various priorities. I'll pause there and pass to the deputy secretary. Mike, if you could add to that answer.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, deputy. I think that's right. I echo those sentiments. I suppose what I would add is what sits within the Trade portfolio is also some advanced manufacturing and defence-related funding, which is discrete to the Trade portfolio and has its

own funding alignment with the year on year. I think it's true to say that we recognise the trade strategy is going to be finalised early next year. That's going to be one of the key influences for how we forward plan the actions to support the trade team moving forward.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. So this current budget doesn't include any allowance for what may come from that in the forward Estimates? At this stage, that'll be a surprise in the May Budget for us?

Mr BARNETT - I can't guarantee what will be in the May Budget, but the trade strategy we've put a lot of time and effort into it this year. It goes through to 2030 and beyond. It will provide clear advice to government and the community in terms of what's important for government, and set out those priorities. That'll clearly be in place in the first quarter - first half of next year. The budget's in May, so I can't predict the budget at this stage.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. Can I ask what trade missions have been organised for this year, if any?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, you can, and we can advise the answer. In terms of the trade missions, I can indicate that I will be in Korea and Japan in about a week's time for a week. It's a very important part of our trade strategy. Korea is the second-biggest market for us outside of China, and we have very important relationships that we have to build and develop, particularly in terms of the Antarctic and Hobart being the gateway to the Antarctic.

Of course, international education is important, our renewable energy resources and opportunities there. Then next year is Singapore and Indonesia in the first half of next year; the USA in the second half of next year. That's the summary for the next 12 months, but there's a lot more work that goes on behind the scenes.

I want to give a shout-out to our trade advocates. They're in various locations, half a dozen around the globe. Recently appointed, obviously in Korea, we have one in Japan, Singapore, the USA and China, of course. Vivian Zhao, in China, does a wonderful job and she's been there for a long period of time and absolutely delivers brilliantly. I get feedback from businesses and others that are over there, and they provide positive feedback on the role of those trade advocates, and more recently with Vivian's effort in southern China.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. I appreciate those answers. In relation to trade, I know you mentioned \$6.1 billion this year. How is that trending in real terms, adjusted for inflation and things like that?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I remember releasing that information at the Australian Maritime College because they play an important role as well. So it's a 5.2 per cent increase. I must say that that increase compares to the national average, which went down. So it's the second-highest outcome for our exports in history.

The trend is positive, and the 5.2 per cent increase indicates very good results for Tasmanian exporters. As we know, and as I said, exports mean jobs for Tasmanians, hence the record employment: 51,000 extra people since 2014 employed in the Tasmanian economy, and 4 per cent is now our equal lowest on-record unemployment.

PUBLIC

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for that answer. What strategies are we using to manage uncertainty in the global market. Obviously, positive news recently with the tariffs on beef lifted for Tasmania. A challenging question, I know, but it's -

Mr BARNETT - No, it's a very good question, and of course a lot of that will come through the trade strategy through to 2030 and beyond. I want to pick up your point about beef and tariffs on Tasmanian beef. We made representation through the federal government to the US and, of course, President Trump has recently removed that 10 per cent tariff down to zero. So that'll be a great boost to the Tasmanian beef industry. I made a public statement today highlighting the benefits of that to our agriculture sector, and we're very, very pleased with that result.

We have been active in lobbying through the federal government in that and in other areas, more specifically diversification and - clearly is one of our key messages coming through, building on our strengths as a state, and we've got our focus, obviously, on food and agribusiness. We've got focus on advanced manufacturing, science and technology, other service businesses. I've made mention of the Antarctic services based out of Hobart to be the gateway to the Antarctic.

Of course, engagement in both Korea and Japan in the coming week or so in that regard, and I pay a tribute to Dr Tony Press and the Antarctic Gateway network that do a great job for and on behalf of Tasmania. I'll have more to say about that international education I've indicated.

So yes, there's a lot more to do to build on our strengths, our competitive strengths, of which we have many in Tasmania. We're an island state. We are the only state that has a statutory authority to promote the Brand Tasmania, which is pure, clean, fresh, natural, and I'm very pleased and proud of that. I'm wearing the badge today to promote the Tasmanian brand, which is Tasmanian.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for the answers.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - I thought you were going to say, 'Wood is good', there for a second, just saying. I mean, but it was good. Just a couple of questions about - I know that you've outlined the trade missions for the next couple of years, which I think is a good thing to cement those, especially in those countries you've mentioned. What are potentially some new markets or new products, and what come from left field that you weren't aware of probably two or three years ago? Are there any of the products that have been doing well, but you're seeing a downturn in that investment, and how can you bolster those? So it's a quite a broad range of -

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's a good question.

Mr GAFFNEY - I'm interested in financially, how do you help products that are just trying to lift to the next level to get themselves some exposure, and do you still have those grants, product grants, that can help out and, if so, how do you do that?

Mr BARNETT - It is a very good question. Watch this space because when the new strategy is released in the first half of next year, you will see the full gamut multifaceted

approach to our trade strategy to 2030 and beyond. Every single portfolio I'm involved with has a long-term strategy underneath the strategy action plans to get to where we need to go.

We've already had success in diversifying our markets. I put on the record congratulations to our exporters and others. As you know, China has been a very large part of our exporters, more than 40 per cent in the past. That's now come down to a more manageable level, a very important part of our markets. But we have diversified, and you asked about new markets, certainly in terms of Indonesia, Thailand. India is definitely a growing market. As you know, it's becoming a stronger part of the economy across the globe. As I say, there'll be more to say in our trade strategy in the first half of next year.

In terms of food and agribusiness, our berry industry has grown very significantly, double-digit growth over many years now - raspberries, blueberries, and cherries. Cherries into Asia has really been a significant growth area. I will pass, perhaps, to the deputy secretary and/or Cameron to add to the answer to assist the honourable member.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, deputy. Just to add to that, diversifying the strategy obviously contemplates some of our renewable components as well. You would have seen recently Kamuda's interest from Malaysia, which was in part a product of some of the initiatives that have been rolled out through Malaysian trips prior. That will be going to some of our preliminary findings in relation to the trade strategy consultation, the need to take us from, in some respects, some bespoke, but really successful programs of trade work, and unpacking and exploring what the next step is for Tasmania, and particularly as we're stepping forward with our broader energy strategy and the like.

Mr SHIELD - Certainly, through you, deputy, to your point around how are we supporting that next generation, if you like, the way in which we're structured, we have our trade development team, which works with businesses to build export capabilities and to build their capacity. Through that, we have our accelerating trade grant program, which is a very successful program in bringing great reward to businesses and really great return on investment.

In terms of some of those areas where we see potential growth, we're looking at not only traditional goods, but also service industries as well, and we've seen some recent investment in that as well through data centres, as deputy secretary Mike said here. Looking at our renewables and our value proposition around 100 per cent renewable energy as well, it's becoming a very attractive value proposition.

Mr GAFFNEY - Just give me an example, take something like our kelp industry, which has been getting a lot of exposure, I suppose, internationally at the moment with what their studies are showing. How do you help that industry move forward if they need a capital investment, or they need contacts? How do you help them, and are you helping that industry?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. I'll pass it to Cameron.

Mr SHIELD - Deputy, through you, again, we are actively engaging with that industry. We've worked specifically with businesses like Sea Forest. We've worked very closely with Marinova, which is a previous Tasmanian exporter of the year. Our trade advocate in Korea at the moment is actively engaged and working with Marinova, seeking new markets and new opportunities so we can grow their business and also put Tasmania on the map as a world leader in utilising the seaweed and that sector more broadly.

PUBLIC

Mr GAFFNEY - My last question is that you'll have other states in Australia that may already have a relationship and a rapport with a country or a market that we need to get into. Do you have connections with other states and jurisdictions with their like-minded organisations that we have here, and how do you nurture that or foster that?

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question. I think in many of the markets, we have trade advocates in those markets. But the other jurisdictions are bigger and much more resourced so we have to be a little bit more strategic and thoughtful about that. We have some very good and active trade advocates in those markets that I mentioned earlier. We are looking to, obviously, Southeast Asia in terms of access to markets. I think I mentioned earlier, but Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, real opportunities there. Of course, we now through Hobart Airport are looking at exports into Southeast Asia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and working with Hobart Airport directly.

I appreciate that engagement, and both the Premier and myself, and of course the Minister for Tourism are actively engaged there. We look forward to seeing a return on funds invested for Hobart Airport, which will deliver faster access into Asia of our products.

Mr GAFFNEY - I suppose I was more focussed on which other states in Australia you might link up with and have a relationship with to further their product and your product.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, there's a senior officials group, obviously our Minister for Trade, Don Farrell, senator and former colleague and friend from South Australia, the federal minister for Trade, but there's a senior officials group of trade and investment. So through Michael and others, they have engagement in that regard. But I might pass to either Michael or whoever would like to add to that.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, deputy, yes, and we are actually meeting in the next couple of weeks for the senior officials meeting. That's that opportunity, as you say, to make sure when we're thinking about Team Australia and how we can actually stand on the shoulders of giants, if somebody's already done a lot of heavy lifting with a relationship, how do we piggyback off that and make sure that Tasmania is benefiting from those existing relationships.

Mr GAFFNEY - Good. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do we have any other -

Mr EDMUNDS - With the talk about Brand Tasmania, can I ask a question about the budget? Because the budget papers show less funding for Brand Tasmania over the forward Estimates to the tune of about \$215,000.

CHAIR - I think that might be the Premier.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, it is, but we've just been talking about it, like, how important it is and how proud we are of it. So perhaps to get the views from you about how a cut in funding for Brand Tasmania assists small business, and that reduction in funding and how that might impact Tasmanian operators.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question.

PUBLIC

Mr EDMUNDS - I probably wouldn't have asked it if we hadn't had the last eight to 10 minutes of talk about how good it was.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. Through you, Chair, as I indicated earlier, Brand Tasmania has an important role to play. We're the only jurisdiction in Australia with a statutory authority. We've made those investments over many years, including under the former premier, Will Hodgman, and I credit Will Hodgman for his excellent initiatives and efforts in that regard, and of course Peter Gutwein and Jeremy Rockliff accordingly.

So it's a multifaceted approach, as I said earlier. It's a complex matter. We have to use every string in the bow that's possible to make a difference to promote Tasmania. We're doing that as a state. I'm doing it. The Premier's doing it. All our portfolio ministers are doing it. We're doing that front and centre, and we're putting Tasmania first.

Mr EDMUNDS - My question is, how does a cut in its budget of 10 per cent assist you to do that?

Mr BARNETT - Well, you haven't heard the Premier's response. I recommend that you hear from the Premier with respect to his views with respect to Brand Tasmania.

Mr EDMUNDS - I mean, we've got the handcuffs of line items on us. I don't really understand how your statement can go unchallenged, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Good opportunity tomorrow, I suggest, to ask the Premier more directly.

Mr EDMUNDS - The whole thing was a waste of time, then, wasn't it?

Mr BARNETT - You'll be assured of our strong support for all our exporters and businesses in Tasmania as a result of the advocacy that we have for them.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. And if we have no further questions? Thank you very much and your team for appearing today.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to present and look forward to following up with those questions on notice and in any other way possible to assist the committee.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Stop the broadcast, please.

The Committee suspended at 5.25 p.m.