



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

REPORT OF DEBATES

Thursday 26 May 2022

REVISED EDITION

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Thursday 26 May 2022

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

QUESTIONS

Firefighters - Wages Agreement

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.01 a.m.]

With the soaring cost of living, real wages in Tasmania are going backwards at a rate not seen for over 20 years. Tasmanian firefighters are the lowest paid in the country, despite performing more duties than their interstate counterparts. They have had to resort to protesting outside your TFS conference in a bid to have their pay dispute resolved. Will you now step in and negotiate a fair deal for these workers who risk their lives to save ours?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. There has been some work done on the wages agreement with our firefighters, and the United Firefighters Union (UFU). The Government thanks all our career and volunteer firefighters for the work they do to keep us safe. It is one of the most important and challenging roles performed by our emergency services. We are very grateful for their frontline work and very thankful that they are there at our most vulnerable moments.

The Government will always negotiate in good faith. Throughout the negotiation process for new agreements, industrial action is managed in accordance with the advice from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Public Sector Industrial Relations Committee and the Service Management Office.

In respect to negotiations of our firefighters' wages, I am advised that negotiations commenced on 23 September 2021, for the Firefighting Industrial Agreement 2020. The negotiation team held bargaining meetings with the UFU. I am advised that six offers - five formal offers and a sixth verbal offer - have been presented to the UFU for their members' consideration. All of these have been rejected by the UFU. Offers were provided to the secretary of the UFU Tasmania branch on 6 October 2021, 5 November 2021, 27 November 2021, 21 December 2021 and 23 February 2022. A final offer was made by the Department on 4 April 2022.

The UFU elected bargaining representatives to consider the offer and subsequently advised that they would not be taking this offer to its members or accepting the offer. They have since advised that industrial activities and work bans commenced from 6 p.m. on Friday 8 April this year. The UFU has stated that work bans would not impact emergency attendance to fires.

On 21 April this year, I wrote to the UFU indicating disappointment that the UFU has now received six offers since October 2021, and that these offers have not been taken to the

UFU membership for a vote. These offers have provided a one-year increase of 2.35 per cent, effective from the first full pay period, commencing on or after 1 December 2021. The most recent offers provide certainty of back-pay to our firefighters. The most recent offer also provided for a two-year agreement with a salary increase of 2.3 per cent in year one and 2.5 per cent in year two.

The Government also committed to back-dating the pay increase to the first full pay period commencing on or after 1 December 2021, to ensure our firefighters gain the same 2.35 per cent pay rise that other public sector employees have already received. The Government has been negotiating in good faith with the UFU and the six offers are evidence of this fact.

Salmon Industry - Extension of Moratorium

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.06 a.m.]

Tasmania's vibrant salmon industry and world-leading supply industries are regional job makers and job keepers. We saw that during COVID-19 and we see that again today. Are you looking to extend the uncertainty you created for hundreds of Tasmanian businesses, the manufacturing companies, the ICT providers, the feed companies, the tradies, the transport companies, as well as the salmon companies who drive a nationally significant and sustainable industry by extending the moratorium beyond the 12 months that you committed to last year?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. There is no greater example of uncertainty than when you were last in government, when it comes to our resource-based sector.

Ms White - The companies will be interested to read this, Premier. You might want to think carefully how you answer.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The companies know very well, and the industry knows very well, that there is no greater supporter of the salmon industry than the Liberal Government. Minister Palmer outlined a forward plan yesterday in a very measured way.

As minister for primary industries for four years, I was very proud of our Government's achievements, not only strengthening the industry but strengthening the industry in terms of community expectations and compliance of the salmon industry. Producing the first salmon growth plan was part of that. The Government recognises the importance of maintaining growth in the industry but also ensuring that the industry is aligned with community expectations around compliance and environment. Significant improvements were made in that sense. Why did we want to do this? It is all about balance and ensuring that our salmon industry remains sustainable.

I recognise the huge contribution the salmon industry makes to rural and regional Tasmania and the flow-on effects throughout our community, with a production value of \$1 billion per annum. It is the single largest primary industry sector. We value the many small

and large businesses servicing the sector through manufacturing, net-cleaning, feed production, training, transport and of course logistics.

We are committed to delivering on the Government's priority of a new 10-year salmon plan that is centred on innovation, continuous improvement and world-leading practices. Development of the plan will also be underpinned by four principles - key principles in terms of the development of new research and innovation programs. Future growth lies in land-based and offshore salmon farming world's best practice through continuous improvement in regulation and transparency, including a review of fees and charges to ensure full cost recovery. What is important is what we have strengthened and that is strict independent regulation, including enhancing the independence and the role of the EPA and employing a new director of finfish compliance, which is now in place. There is no greater supporter of the salmon industry than the Liberal Government and a demonstration of that -

Ms WHITE - Point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 45, relevance. The question to the Premier - and I ask you to draw his attention to that - was whether the Government was extending their moratorium beyond the 12 months they outlined. This is a significant question that goes to whether the community and industry can have certainty.

Mr SPEAKER - I will accept your point of order on relevance but it is not an opportunity to add questions or to interrupt the Premier. I ask the Premier to continue. Again, relevance to the question was put but when aligning the answer, he is talking about the salmon industry.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There is no stronger supporter than the Liberal Government when it comes to the salmon industry and I know you are divided on this subject over there -

Ms White - No, we are not.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Yes, you are - attempting to muscle up on the side of industry. We recognise the importance of balance and sustainability. We have demonstrated that with our continuous improvement around regulations and compliance. There is no greater supporter -

What is certain is that this side of the House will always support balance and sustainability and the industry provides that absolute certainty far more than any of you mob over there.

Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995 - Review

**Ms FINLAY question to MINISTER for PRIMARY INDUSTRIES and WATER,
Ms PALMER**

[10.12 a.m.]

The current review of the Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995 will determine the objectives of our fisheries. Simply put, it will tackle the question: should our Tasmanian fisheries prioritise economic rents or prioritise local employment and jobs? Further, work to deliver the harvest strategy is still ongoing. Despite the fact that the proposed rule changes to the rock lobster fishery are currently out for comment, if you have been doing your job and listening to your stakeholders you will already understand that any intention by you to continue with the proposed expansion of the 60-pot area within the rock lobster fishery will see

a complete collapse of the local fleet. Will you put local jobs first and rule out expanding the 60-pot area?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. Maintaining the sustainability of our fisheries is essential for Tasmanians' way of life and to protect our marine resources for future generations. Increasingly, our fisheries are shared between commercial and recreational fishers, all of which adds to our social fabric and economic wellbeing. At the same time, pressures on fish stocks and the marine environment are increasing. Given this, we need a forward-thinking approach to our fisheries management.

Tasmania has some of the best fisheries in the world and we need to ensure our management frameworks are also world-class. The Government is also looking to ensure we support our productive industries with appropriate rules and regulations while ensuring they are simple, fit for purpose and provide for innovation.

The Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995 manages and regulates Tasmania's fisheries, is more than 25 years old and has never been subject to a major review. The review of the act, which commenced on 9 September 2021 is therefore an important process for the future management of our important fisheries. The review commenced with the release of a discussion paper in March of this year, with stakeholder forums held and written submissions received. The department is considering the stakeholder feedback before providing advice to me.

I am expecting later this year to release a draft white paper for public consultation on modernising our legislative regime and framework for managing Tasmania's living marine resources. It is very important that we all respect the process and that there are numerous voices in this space who all have a right to be heard.

COVID-19 - Protective Measures

Dr WOODRUFF question to MINISTER for HEALTH, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.16 a.m.]

Yesterday, Tasmania recorded 900 new COVID-19 cases, 51 people are in hospital and case numbers there have been high for over a month. The pressure on healthcare workers, ambulance and hospital functioning is immense. Our COVID-19 cases continue at high levels and winter is rapidly approaching. Vaccine immunity levels among Australians are dropping. The OzSAGE network of public health experts yesterday sounded the alarm on the number of COVID-19 deaths in Australia. In Tasmania, 71 people have died.

During the federal election campaign, you resisted bringing in known public health protections including indoor mask-wearing and ventilation standards to reduce COVID-19 spread. Will you introduce these protective measures now to prevent avoidable deaths, suffering and disability?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank Dr Woodruff for her important question. If ever there was a jurisdiction around the country, or indeed the world, that has managed the pandemic well, it is Tasmania.

Dr Woodruff - That's not how those 71 people's families feel, minister. Hundreds of thousands of people have been infected.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, member for Franklin. You have just asked the question. The Premier has not completed half a dozen words and you are interjecting on him. Please allow him to answer the question.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I expect I know how those families feel. I get the report the following day of case numbers, hospitalisations, people in ICU and deaths. As I said publicly the other day, my heart sinks every time I see a death recorded as a result of or with COVID-19. I want to assure all Tasmanians that we are removing restrictions to a point, safely and sensibly in line with national and Tasmanian Public Health advice.

Dr Woodruff - It's not safe.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We have followed Public Health advice all the way, Dr Woodruff. You know that.

Ms O'Connor - It's been bad advice. There are 71 dead people.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - It has not been bad advice, with respect. I will always stand up and stand in the corner for the representatives of Public Health led by Dr Veitch for their wonderful work under very difficult circumstances and decision-making processes. Dr Veitch is on the AHPPC which discusses these matters in a national context. We are taking sensible steps to remove these restrictions, including density limits, which is an important step in the ongoing management of Tasmania's ongoing transition to live with COVID-19.

As I have said, every death is a tragedy and I always extend my sincere condolences to family, friends and loved ones of those people who have sadly passed away.

You mentioned case numbers. Our case numbers have stabilised over the last month after the cases peaked in April. Although we continue to see some daily fluctuations, the seven-day average has been consistently around the 1000 COVID-positive cases per day since the start of this month. In the last few weeks we have seen a consistent number of COVID-related deaths, which reflects the fact that during the COVID-19 wave, the peak in COVID-19 deaths typically follows up to one month after the peak in community cases, which Tasmania experienced in April.

Over the coming weeks of course we want to see that reduced, but on comparison, we have very low death rates per capita across the nation, and the same for hospitalisations.

It has been a challenge for us, of course. We have been a vaccination leader in our country. Tasmania targeted and delivered double doses to 90 per cent of eligible people with an ambitious vaccination plan before opening the borders, and we opened when safe and we were ready to do so. We have not stopped there: we have continued the vaccination program.

As of 22 May, 98 per cent of those aged 12 and above have had their second dose; 70.6 per cent of those aged 16 and above have had their booster shot; and 63.59 per cent of five- to 11-year-olds have had their first dose. This is more than 11 percentage points above the national average. Second-dose numbers are 50.58 per cent, which is more than 12 percentage points above the national average. I would say that is too low. I want to get those vaccination rates up and well above the national average.

That has been consistent since we commenced our vaccination of five- to 11-year-olds, on 10 January this year, if my memory serves me correctly. I would like to see a higher vaccination rate with respect to those matters. While we are quite some way above the national average, I implore parents and carers to ensure that their children are vaccinated because, as we have demonstrated with our relatively low number of deaths, with our relatively low number of hospitalisations, our high vaccination rates have been the number one defence against COVID-19.

Community Service Organisations - Cost-of-Living Pressure on Resources

Ms JOHNSTON question to MINISTER for COMMUNITY SERVICES and DEVELOPMENT, Mr STREET

[10.22 a.m.]

Emergency relief organisations like St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army, City Mission, Loaves and Fishes and many more are stretched beyond their limits. They have more and more people who are crumbling under cost-of-living pressures seeking help. They tell me that their emergency food reserves are exhausted, blankets and clothing stocks are running low, and workers and volunteers are at their wit's end. What will you do to ensure that these organisations have enough food, blankets, personal hygiene products, towels, medical supplies and pet food to assist those Tasmanians who are doing it incredibly tough?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I acknowledge that cost-of-living pressures are rising in Tasmania, and that there is pressure on community service organisations to provide the services they want to provide.

We have done a number of things to deal with cost-of-living pressures since we came to government, some of which I detailed yesterday in my response to the motion that Labor put up in their private members' time: in last year's budget alone, \$1.3 million in COVID-19 support for long-term food security for Tasmanians; \$1.3 million for temporary visa holders; \$351 000 to Volunteering Tasmania; \$250 000 to support medical health and frontline volunteers, including fire services and paramedics; and \$350 000 to TasCOSS to assist the community sector to adapt and respond to COVID-19. There was \$4.3 million across 2018-21 to support Tasmanians in need, including for food security measures and action to address the cost-of-living pressures.

As I said, there was \$1.4 million for emergency food relief during COVID-19. We have provided \$1.8 million over three years in increased funding for Foodbank and Loaves and Fishes Tasmania's mobile food vans since 2018; and also \$1.2 million to COTA Tasmania to support their services.

We are very proud of the support that we are providing to the community sector. As I said yesterday afternoon, at the 2021 election we included \$3 million for emergency food relief providers for the next three years. This includes increases in base funding for our critical food distributors, Loaves and Fishes Tasmania, Foodbank Tasmania and for the essential services of Gran's Van, Loui's Van and Missionbeat. The Tasmanian Liberal Government is proud of a strong record of funding support for Loaves and Fishes and, as I detailed yesterday afternoon as well, we provided support to St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army for their COVID-19 care packages to support people who have had to isolate during COVID-19, either as a close contact or somebody who has contracted it.

We will continue as a government to support these community organisations. I meet with all of these peak organisations on a regular basis and we will continue to work hard with them to make sure that they get support they need to provide the services Tasmanians in need require.

Trade Performance - Update

Mr TUCKER question to MINISTER for TRADE, Mr ROCKLIFF

Can you advise the House on the highlights of the 2020-21 Tasmanian Trade Scorecard and what the Tasmanian Liberal Government is doing to support Tasmanian businesses increase their export potential to one of the closest neighbours and key trading partners?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Lyons for his question. With his experience in agriculture, he has a very strong interest when it comes to trade, particularly as it relates to primary industries.

Trade is a fundamental driver for long-term economic growth in all regions of Tasmania. More trade will deliver more jobs and all Tasmanians will benefit. The latest Tasmanian Trade Scorecard, for 2020-2021, which I have here, shows that our exports are going strong despite ongoing challenges in domestic and international markets. This trend has continued with exports soaring to a record \$4.6 billion for the 12 months to March 2022. This is 24.5 per cent higher than the previous year and is the eighth consecutive month in which the rolling 12-month totals exceeded the \$4 billion mark. These trade results are impressive given the global trade environment, and highlight the innovation and resilience of Tasmanian exporters.

The trade scorecard is a check of progress against the goals of the Tasmanian Trade Strategy 2019-2025. It focuses on the areas of building trade in key sectors, showcasing Tasmania in primary markets, supporting trade logistics and market access, and building export capability in Tasmanian businesses. Key outcomes of the scorecard include almost 1500 businesses accessing a Tasmanian government trade-related service across the year and more than 450 Tasmanian businesses were promoted directly to or within the target export markets. Tasmanian exporters benefited from a staggering 126 million site visits from around

the globe via our direct digital engagement through platforms such as Trade Tasmania, Instagram, Facebook, Wechat and Forbes.

Importantly, just under 97 per cent of businesses surveyed indicated that they were satisfied with the service they received, well ahead of the Tasmanian Trade Strategy KPI of 80 per cent. Businesses such as Cape Grim Beef said trade activities like the Experience Tasmania campaign increased brand awareness in the US by over 200 per cent. Fantastic. Two livestream activities in China increased sales for the in-market distributors by 30 per cent for Tasmanian wine and 20 per cent for Tasmanian red meat.

Overall, the scorecard shows that our goods and services exports reached \$5 billion over the 2020-2021 financial year, keeping us well on track to achieve our ambitious target of \$15 billion in export trade by 2050.

Trade deals and export growth are outcomes achieved through long-term commitments and effort by both government and, of course, industry and business. Developing trade in international markets can be highly competitive and we need to ensure that we are not lost in the crowd. We need to maintain our market presence to ensure that we keep front of mind with our international trading partners. As a premium market-focused state, we can always be seeking new higher-value markets for existing exporters as well as businesses new to export.

Earlier this month, expressions of interest opened for businesses to participate in a New Zealand trade mission, which will take place in late July and early August this year. New Zealand is an important international visitor and trade market for Tasmania. Our annual exports are already valued at around \$100 million. It is significant. We want to expand on this and see further opportunities to grow markets, particularly in the key sectors of advanced manufacturing, science and technology, food and agribusiness, resources and energy, maritime, and defence.

New Zealand also offers excellent opportunities for businesses starting their export journey. I encourage them to reach out to the team at Trade Tasmania to assist them in making those first steps to enter into the global marketplace.

The Government is committed to helping our exporters be globally competitive, to assist them expand their presence in markets around the world, to attract more investment and create more local jobs for Tasmanians.

Rock Lobster Fishery - Expansion of Pot Area

**Ms FINLAY question to MINISTER for PRIMARY INDUSTRIES and WATER,
Ms PALMER**

[10.31 a.m.]

I thank the minister for prioritising the completion of the Living Marine Resources Management Act. That needs to happen before any significant changes happen to the rock lobster fishery industry. Given that this critical work has not happened, how can you possibly guarantee that no small fishers will be worse off as a result of the proposed expansion to the 60-pot area in the Tasmanian rock lobster fishery?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I am aware that there are some really challenging issues facing the rock lobster fishery at this time. The important debate on these issues should not extend to casting aspersions on the professional expertise and integrity of IMAS and scientists. It is important that this process consider and assess the proposals on their merits and how they may impact stocks and both commercial and recreational fishers.

I understand that the 60-pot issue is a long-standing issue and it has diverse views within the industry. The pot issue raises issues that affect operations of different operators in different views. An owner-operator might be differently impacted than a fisher who leases all their quota. I understand that access to quota is an important issue in the fishery. I also understand that the fishery has faced severe economic challenges through COVID-19 and then restrictions to access the key China market, with corresponding reductions in the price of lobster. Increased operational costs such as fuel also impact fishers. Understandably, some operators see increased efficiencies and reduced operational costs as key.

I assure the member and all those in this House that I am listening to the diverse views, listening to all stakeholders, before I make any final decision on these issues.

Budget 2022-23 - Delivery of Core Services

Mr O'BYRNE question to PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.34 a.m.]

On Budget day, after eight years of this Liberal Government, the issues with the delivery of Tasmania's core services continue to worsen on your watch. We have one of the worst statewide ambulance response times in the country, and our public hospitals are buckling under the pressure. Our nurses, our firefighters and many of our public sector workers are some of the lowest paid in the country. Our housing crisis worsens year-on-year and vulnerable people are being turned away from shelters in record numbers. NAPLAN results are going backwards and the cascading list of failure of and the delivery of infrastructure promises has compounded Hobart's traffic congestion issues.

The hallmark of this Government's time in office has been spin, overpromising and chronic underdelivery. If your previous budgets have failed to deliver improvements to key services that Tasmanians rely on, why should Tasmanians believe this Budget will?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for his wide-ranging question covering housing, health, education and infrastructure. The member does not have to wait too many hours for Mr Ferguson to deliver his first Budget. I will be very proudly standing beside him, because a good budget in difficult times -

Mr O'Byrne - Beside him, or just slightly behind him.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr O'Byrne - Sorry.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We have demonstrated since 2014 that with core service delivery we invest in the areas that matter.

We have dramatically increased the number of teachers in our schools and the support for our students in schools across Tasmania. We have built an education system, strengthened by the Education Act 2016, that builds equity into the delivery of education across our state.

What I mean by equity is that we support our students and reduce barriers to them engaging in learning. That is why we signed in November 2017, if my memory serves me correctly, a 10-year bilateral agreement with growth funding in education, focusing on the areas that matter and focusing on supporting students who have barriers to education, our students with disability. We have a nation-leading model for supporting students with disability. That funding is going directly to the needs of the students.

Trauma is another barrier to education. Trauma-informed practice is so important in supporting our teachers and professional development and that extra support our students need.

You mentioned housing, Mr O'Byrne. We recognise that that is a challenge, particularly in strong economic times, regarding house prices and rental pressures. That is why we have invested \$1.5 billion to support the construction of 10 000 new homes. We are well on track with our commitments.

Mr O'Byrne - Those numbers do not add up.

Mr ROCKLIFF - There will be more information today, when it comes to housing.

You mentioned health, Mr O'Byrne. You mentioned the paramedic Ambulance Tasmania workforce. I have spoken about the 243 increase in full-time equivalents since 2014; our commitment at the last election for 48 paramedics, of which we delivered 44; our commitment to upgrading the vehicle fleet. There are 30 vehicles with an investment of \$9 million.

Our innovation in the emergency service has created secondary triage and the PACER team. We are supporting a growing health workforce, which has increased by 1200 over the past 18 months or so, from 1 July 2020 to 30 March 2022. We are also investing in key areas of productivity and improvement in the patient-focused health system.

You mentioned the budget. What will be in the budget is \$150 million across the forward Estimates for our digital strategy, which has been overwhelmingly welcomed by Australian Medical Association and other key stakeholders. That is a 10-year commitment of \$475 million to have nation-leading digital technology fully integrated between public and private health. We are decimating the paper work in health, and increasing our patient care.

Mr O'Byrne - Decimating health outcomes for the people of Tasmania.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Our record is strong when it comes to the key deliverables.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. I will give the House a little bit of time to quieten down. There has been a question put to the Premier. He is answering it. It is Budget day so there will be a lot of discussion around finances and so forth. Please do not interject on the Premier. Premier, if you could resume.

Mr ROCKLIFF - What was much needed when we first came to government was reversing Labor cuts in Health and rebuilding our health system. I know 2013 is some time ago, so I will not remind the parliament of the 2011 Budget when they ripped \$100 million out of Health. I do not need to remind Tasmanians because they have not forgotten it. I do not need to remind Tasmanians of the job cuts, nurses staff cuts, beds closed and beds put in storage. That was the legacy of the previous government.

This Government is about opening up beds and employing more nurses and health professionals.

Mr SPEAKER - I call the member for Bass, Mrs Alexander.

Ms O'Connor - I do query that. She was the third up.

Mr SPEAKER - I have called the member for Bass.

Budget 2022-23 - Gender Budget Statement

Mrs ALEXANDER question to MINISTER for WOMEN, Ms PALMER

[10.41 a.m.]

Can you inform the House about the gender budget statement that will be delivered today as part of the 2022-23 Tasmanian Budget?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. The 2022-23 Tasmanian Budget will be a milestone budget for the Tasmanian Government because today the Tasmanian Budget will include a gender budget statement for the first time. The gender budget statement will highlight initiatives and projects from across government that will support outcomes and target inequalities for women, men and gender-diverse Tasmanians.

The statement will highlight new funding as well as continued delivery of initiatives from the 2021-22 budget. This year's statement is an important first step and we plan to develop it in future years. The gender budget statement will be framed around the priority areas of economic security, leadership and participation, safety and health and wellbeing. These areas are related because investment in one of these areas benefits the others.

A gender budget statement is a key initiative identified under the Tasmanian Women's Strategy which guides the Tasmanian Government's work towards achieving gender equality. Other initiatives proposed under the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27 include initiatives that will embed gender impact assessment into the everyday work of government.

Working towards gender equality is an exciting and a critical challenge and it is more important than ever that we strive to achieve gender equality in Tasmania, because gender equality is good for everyone. Societies with greater gender equality have stronger economies, they have lower reports of violence against women, healthier populations and higher levels of female education and workforce participation.

This is a government with integrity and heart. It is one that is courageous and accountable and delivers on its commitments. As we finalise the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27, our Government is taking action to support and empower women and girls in Tasmania. In particular, we will focus on reducing barriers to women's economic participation and increasing opportunities for participation and advancement in industries in which women are traditionally under-represented. The gender budget statement is a relatively simple step that we can take in tackling some of the systemic barriers to gender equality. I am pleased and honoured to be standing here today as the Minister for Women to welcome this very important development.

Members - Hear, hear.

COVID-19 - Infection Rates in Educational Settings

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for EDUCATION, CHILDREN and YOUTH, Mr JAENSCH

[10.45 a.m.]

Health department data reveals almost 40 per cent of primary school-aged children have not had a single COVID-19 vaccination and half have not had a booster. These vaccination rates have remained stagnant for weeks, pointing to your Government's failure to prioritise vaccination uptake for five- to 11-year olds who have been sent into classrooms unmasked. Can you please update the House on how many children in government primary schools have tested positive for COVID-19 this school year? We also ask for the same up-to-date information on infection rates for high school and college students in the public school system you administer.

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I share, we all share, your concerns. As the Premier said earlier in his contribution on COVID-19, we need to boost the vaccination rates of our young people. We are ahead of the national average but we need to do more.

I can confirm that in term 2 our COVID-19 cases in schools have been at around half the level that they were at the end of term 1. Active student cases in our schools are trending fairly consistently at around 1.5 per cent of our student population, under 1000 students in our state government schools of a population of around 60 000 students in total.

In terms of the specific cohorts you ask for, I will see what information I can get for you when I can, if we have it in the form you have asked for, but -

Ms O'Connor - You have answered it before.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr JAENSCH - Ms O'Connor, I do not have that information with me to give you here today. I will definitely seek that information that you have asked for and I will check the *Hansard*. You asked for a number of pieces of data -

Ms O'Connor - Infection rates for primary, high school and college, this year.

Mr JAENSCH - We have been able to keep our schools open and provide our young people with the opportunity to continue face-to-face learning. We have been very grateful for the support and hard work of our teaching staff and our school leadership groups, our school communities -

Dr Woodruff - You're very secretive about these numbers. They're not available.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr JAENSCH - I am not secretive about numbers, Dr Woodruff. I have offered to bring the information that Ms O'Connor asked for and there were a number of pieces of data that she asked for. We will review the *Hansard* and ensure that we bring that data.

I am full of praise for our schools, our school communities, our families who have worked with us to ensure that our schools can stay open and can stay safe. As we have COVID-19 in our communities, what we have seen is that the incidence of COVID-19 in our schools is reflective of its existence in our communities more generally. The precautions we have taken to ensure that our schools are safe have prevented there being spikes in COVID-19 cases in our schools and we have been able to maintain face-to-face learning for the vast majority of students. Importantly, where students have not been able to attend school because there have been positive COVID-19 cases or are symptomatic, or in the past have been close contacts, the majority of those students have been able to continue their learning through our virtual learning centre and there has not been an interruption to their ability to keep learning through this period.

It has been a great disruption. We have invested heavily in our schools and we have been grateful for the cooperation of parents and families, our school communities, in ensuring we can keep our schools open. We have a better vaccination rate of five- to 11-year olds than other parts of the country but it is still too low. We need to grow it further and through Public Health and with our Health department we will continue to promote opportunities for families to get their younger children vaccinated.

YMCA Launceston - Request for Funding

Ms O'BYRNE question to MINISTER for SPORT and RECREATION, Mr STREET

[10.50 a.m.]

After serving the Launceston community for over 140 years, the YMCA in Launceston is set to close its doors on Friday, 3 June. You have been provided with a funding request and a plan to allow the service to operate as they try to resolve their ongoing funding issues.

It is true that you have failed to save ice sports in Tasmania. It is true that you have failed to save Tasmanian participation in the SSA national footy competition. Will you now please act to save the Launceston YMCA, to support the hundreds of community members who use it

and the 26 jobs it supports? Or do you not have any money left after pledging \$750 million towards a floating stadium in Hobart?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I have talked to her about this. She has contacted my office and we have provided more than one briefing on our conversations with the YMCA, Launceston City Council and other stakeholders who are interested in that facility. I am aware of the concerns about the potential closure of the YMCA. We have discussed the situation with the centre manager, Rachael Dobson, and the owner of the facility, the Launceston City Council. I have also discussed this with local members who share their concerns, Ms O'Byrne and the member for Launceston in the other place.

There are several operational challenges, such as a decline in membership, that have prevented the organisation from providing a viable business case to maintain its existing operations into the future.

Launceston City Council has provided some support to the facility in the form of rent relief. However, council has said it can no longer justify providing this support, nor can the Government consider funding for a business model that is unviable.

Our Government does not want to see the YMCA become insolvent. That is why we explored options that would have allowed its members to continue using the facility, such as a shared tenancy arrangement. I am advised that Launceston City Council is exploring tenancy options to support continued community access to the facility, including the basketball courts. The Government, has encouraged options for the YMCA to coexist under a shared tenancy agreement which would enable them to operate viably. They have unfortunately rejected this arrangement.

I note the hypocrisy of Labor and Josh Willie stating in another media release that I have overseen the closure of the facility -

Ms O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I am not sure we are supposed to reflect on members in the other place but I really want some kind of action on the YMCA.

Mr SPEAKER - It is not a point of order.

Mr STREET - I did not hear what the point of order was.

Ms O'BYRNE - The point of order was on relevance. I am not sure that reflecting on members of the other House is answering the question about people who are losing their jobs at the YMCA next week.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr STREET - I am reflecting on the hypocrisy of Labor putting out another press release. The federal candidate for Bass wrote to me last week about the YMCA and how important it was to the Launceston community. I then spent the last three days of the federal election campaign waiting for the funding commitment from federal Labor which would now be delivered under Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. They have committed nothing.

Ms O'Byrne - Are you saying that you did not do anything because you were waiting for someone else to bail them out?

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms O'Byrne - You are actually the minister for Sport.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms O'Byrne - You are the minister. Is anything your job?

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Byrne, order, or you will leave the Chamber.

Mr STREET - The Government has worked with the Launceston City Council, with the YMCA and with other organisations within Launceston to try to find an arrangement that was viable for the YMCA, that was suitable for the Launceston City Council and would have led to a shared tenancy arrangement that led to more people using the facility. Unfortunately the YMCA rejected it. There is nothing that I can do about that.

Budget 2022-23 - Social and Affordable Housing

Mr ELLIS question to MINISTER for STATE DEVELOPMENT, CONSTRUCTION, and HOUSING, Mr BARNETT

[10.54 a.m.]

Can you update the House on how this year's budget will be supporting more Tasmanians to get into the housing market through the most comprehensive social and affordable housing market program in our state's history?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for his question and his strong interest in this important matter. Tasmanians deserve a roof over their head; accommodation that is safe and secure. It is a priority.

Today we will deliver the most ambitious and comprehensive social and affordable housing action plan in the state's history. The state Budget will be released later today. I congratulate in advance the Treasurer for delivering this Budget. It is a Budget with heart and will include, over the forward Estimates, an investment of a record \$538 million into social and affordable housing, in homelessness initiatives, with \$204 million in this year.

We are investing more than ever before to build social and affordable housing - 1169 homes by 30 June next year, to meet our target of 1500 homes, referred to by the Premier. We have a plan for the next 10 years. This is to deliver 10 000 homes by 2032. It is an unprecedented \$1.5 billion commitment. The cornerstone of this is the establishment of Tasmania's new housing authority. It will build, deliver and acquire homes as well as partnering with the not-for-profit community sector. I am honoured to be the minister.

We know Tasmanians are still doing it tough. That is why we are investing more than \$36 million in wraparound services for homeless Tasmanians - those who are vulnerable.

Ms O'Byrne - Or the ones you are about to make homeless when they get evicted.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, member for Bass. You are on thin ice.

Mr BARNETT - We have 17 special homelessness services, including shelters which often provide those first steps towards a transition to living independently and improving their health and wellbeing. The Budget will include \$6.85 million for Safe Spaces in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart. I visited the Safe Spaces in Launceston last week. I visited the Night Space with Hobart City Mission earlier this week, and the Day Space yesterday. I thank Harvey, Ewan and Hannah for the tour. I was able to meet Tracey, who had years doing it tough and was grateful for the support she received in the Safe Space and the transition to community housing - a house of her own.

There is a lot more going on. I want to outline the \$16 million for supported accommodation facilities for older Tasmanians in the north and the north-west.

Opposition members interjecting.

Mr BARNETT - Mr Speaker, there seems to be incessant interjecting from the Labor Opposition. They are not interested in the important initiatives for housing and homeless Tasmanians.

Ms White - Because you are letting them down. People are being evicted right now. Your hypocrisy is galling.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr BARNETT - If they are not interested, perhaps they could go somewhere else. We are interested and the Tasmanian public is interested.

Ms O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I feel grievously misrepresented by that. I am representing constituents who are being evicted today and tomorrow. This minister cannot say that we do not care.

Mr SPEAKER - That is not a point of order. If members are aggrieved, they can ask for a personal explanation or raise it on the adjournment. It is not a point of order.

Mr BARNETT - I am speaking about the important initiatives for Tasmanians doing it tough - vulnerable Tasmanians - and I hope you are interested in these initiatives. There is \$3.2 million over two years for disbursed youth to independence homes, \$2.5 million to support the operation of the Devonport men's shelter, \$172 000 for the operation of Bethlehem House crisis units, \$277 000 for the Hobart Women's Shelter emergency response. This is on top of the builds that are already under way.

They are still not interested in these initiatives, Mr Speaker. There is \$4 million for the expansion of Magnolia House to support homeless women and children, \$2.2 million for Launceston Youth at Risk Centre and \$4.5 million for the expansion of Thyne House.

Tasmanians have a proud history of home ownership. We want to improve that, to help Tasmanians into their own home. That is why the Budget is funding packages, incentives designed to increase and support home ownership, to make it more accessible and affordable, including the First Home Owner Grant, unlocking more residential land, lifting the land tax thresholds, stamp duty concessions. There is a whole range of initiatives in this Budget and that will be delivered in a few hours' time. I am proud of that and looking forward to it. We have the new shared equity program, but there is so much more.

I will wrap up and say that this is a Budget with heart. We want to support vulnerable Tasmanians, those doing it tough, and to indicate there is a lot more work to do. I have said that before, and I will say it again: there is a lot more work to do, and I look forward to working with those in the community to ensure that on behalf of all Tasmanians we deliver. We are delivering on our plan. As for those on the other side, we will wait for their plan and their alternative budget, which has never been delivered in the past.

King Island - Shipping Issues

Dr BROAD question to PREMIER, Mr ROCKLIFF

[11.00 a.m.]

It is clear the Deputy Premier has made a complete mess of shipping to King Island. Bad decisions by him and TasPorts are costing King Island businesses thousands of dollars, adding delays to their freight schedules and hurting their competitiveness. Your Deputy Premier has apparently misrepresented the mayor, who is now demanding a public apology, and TasPorts is refusing to meet the King Island Shipping Group. Fast, reliable, affordable shipping is essential for King Island to thrive. Will you step in and fix your deputy's mess?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Having served the electorate of Braddon, including King Island, for 20 years, I can well understand the angst and interest from islanders in respect of shipping. It has been a long issue. There are not too many times I have attended the island over many years when shipping and freight logistics does not come up in conversation because it is very clear that King Island relies on regular and reliable sea freight services including for the key commodities such as fertilizer coming inbound, and livestock, outbound.

While the nature of shipping on Bass Strait can be volatile and unpredictable, the *John Duigan* has operated for King Island since 2017, when the former commercial service by SeaRoad Mersey was withdrawn due to its replacement being too large to berth at Grassy. The *John Duigan* is owned by Bass Island Line, a subsidiary of TasPorts. Other commercial freight shippers also service the island, including to and from Victoria.

As last year's TasPorts annual report shows, the service has come under significant financial pressures, with low cargo levels and vessel utilisation. During 2020-21, Bass Island Line made a net loss of some \$4.4 million which was a significant factor in TasPorts' consolidated loss of \$2.2 million for the financial year. Alternative commercial freight shippers have clearly increased market share and the financial performance of Bass Island Line declined.

In light of these losses, a new operating model was established in early March this year. The Government, as we always do, will continually work closely with TasPorts as it manages Bass Island Line, as well as with the King Island community and customers of the service.

I am aware that the CEO of TasPorts is on the island speaking with the mayor and other key stakeholders today.

Dr Broad - He won't meet the shipping group.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I believe the CEO is on the island today and I have absolutely no doubt in my mind at all that those discussions will be very fruitful. I particularly understand the interest of islanders when it comes to the shipping service and the importance of it in terms of inbound freight including fertiliser, as I have said, and indeed their key export market outbound as well.

We are engaged in dialogue. I understand our Minister for Infrastructure, the Deputy Premier, has also engaged with the King Island mayor, and we will always work with the King Island community to ensure a regular, consistent and affordable King Island shipping service.

Devonport Showground - Closure for Harness and Greyhound Training

Mr WINTER question to MINISTER for RACING, Ms OGILVIE

[11.05 a.m.]

On 22 April this year, north-west coast harness and greyhound trainers met at Spreyton Racecourse to hear about Tasracing's plan to clean up the horrible mess that has been the closure of the Devonport Showground for racing and training. These trainers are struggling and some are questioning their ability to keep going. At the meeting, participants asked why no interim training facilities had been organised, despite it being known for months that the Devonport Showground could no longer be used. No clear answer was given. Can you explain to these critical industry participants why they still have nowhere to train today?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I know he is a supporter of the industry, as am I, and that he genuinely wants to represent his constituents and I concur with him on that.

The Tasmanian Government is a strong supporter of the Tasmanian racing industry which generates more than \$185 million in economic activity and supports more than 5800 people who are either employed in the industry or are direct participants.

The Devonport Showground has been a vital piece of infrastructure for our racing industry for some decades. Following agreement between Tasracing, the Devonport Agricultural and Pastoral Society and the Devonport Showground project, racing activities relocated from the showground at the end of March 2022. The last harness meeting was conducted on Sunday 20 March and the last greyhound meeting was conducted on Tuesday 22 March.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government remains committed to new harness and greyhound tracks on the north-west coast and will invest \$8 million into the project. I note the decision by the Tasracing board to cease works at the preferred location of the proposed harness and greyhound tracks at Palmers Road, Latrobe due to the findings of an ECOTas report. The decision to cease work at the Palmers Road site in Latrobe was very disappointing for participants in the north-west. However, work has already commenced on identifying a new and more suitable site and I am advised that the work is well advanced. The ECOTas report identified the Palmers Road site as a high priority for conservation management which obviously presented a number of ecological challenges which made development of this site unviable.

I agree that, whilst this has been a setback, our Government's commitment remains for this exciting project which will ensure harness and greyhound racing has a long future in the north-west.

Mr Winter - They are homeless.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, member for Franklin.

Ms OGILVIE - I have recently met the project team on the north-west coast and remain in regular discussions with Tasracing about this matter. Any new proposed site identified will also involve extensive community consultation, similar to that undertaken with residents in proximity to the Palmers Road site.

Parks and Reserves - Government Investment

Mr WOOD question to MINISTER for PARKS, Mrs PETRUSMA

[11.08 a.m.]

Can you provide an update on how the Tasmanian Liberal Government is strengthening Tasmania's future through continued investment in our world-renowned national parks and reserves?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for his question and his interest in the important work that this Government is undertaking to protect, preserve and support our world-renowned parks and reserves. Our investment in our parks since 2014 has been unprecedented and this continues in the 2022-23 Budget with a commitment of \$144 million for our Parks infrastructure to ensure that our special natural places are protected and presented in ways so that people of all abilities can enjoy the natural and cultural values they contain, while also helping to drive our regional economies and create jobs.

I am pleased to announce that the Budget includes funding of \$8 million to continue the boosting national parks rangers and frontline staff initiative. Our Parks and Wildlife Service frontline workers are highly skilled and have the expertise to sustainably manage, maintain and promote our parks and wilderness areas, including Tasmania's 19 spectacular national parks and over 800 reserves.

In addition to caring for Tasmania's wild and special places, our rangers, field officers and other dedicated Parks and Wildlife staff undertake bushfire planning and suppression activities, working with local communities and volunteers, presenting and interpreting natural and culture values, maintaining visitor services and facilities, and undertaking compliance and enforcement.

This Government recognises the rich cultural and environmental understanding that Tasmanian Aboriginal people have. This is why the Tasmanian Government supports joint land management between the Parks and Wildlife Service and Tasmanian Aboriginal people and is providing \$1.3 million for Aboriginal cultural burning in Tasmania. This builds on our cultural burning pilot program, which delivered cultural burning grants to Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations. This initiative will support Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations to undertake cultural burning on reserved land. Importantly, this Government recognises that Aboriginal cultural burning in Tasmania is only undertaken by Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area covers a quarter of Tasmania and is recognised through the World Heritage conventions as having both cultural and natural values, and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, the protection of which is of global importance for all generations. As a key outcome of the TWWHA Management Plan 2016, the TWWHA Biosecurity Strategy 2021-2031 was developed to respond to the threat of invasive weeds, animals and diseases.

I am pleased to announce that the Budget provides \$3.27 million to implement the TWWHA Biosecurity Strategy. This strategy was developed following an intensive risk assessment which considered natural events and management in recreational activities that occur in and around the TWWHA that could spread or introduce invasive organisms. It identifies seven goals to address biosecurity risks in the TWWHA as well as providing a framework covering aspects such as leadership, planning, communication, documentation, training, education, research, compliance, coordination and emergency response.

Other initiatives in the 2022-23 Budget includes \$6.48 million for the reserve activity assessment reforms project. This supports our commitment to develop amendments to the National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002 to recognise the assessment process as a statutory process and further improve transparency and opportunities for public comment and appeals.

As part of our commitment as a signatory to the COAG Intergovernmental Agreement for an Electronic Conveyancing National Law, the Budget also includes \$1 million for Lands Tasmania to enable Tasmania to actively participate in the regulation, development and implementation of a single electronic conveyancing system.

I am delighted that the botanic heart of Hobart, the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, will receive additional funding of \$1.05 million and the Wellington Park Management Trust an additional \$1.1 million.

Tasmania's natural areas hold a special place in our hearts. This is why this Budget is about making Tasmania's priorities our priorities and strengthening Tasmania's future by protecting and maintaining our iconic assets. Through culturally sensitive and environmentally sustainable visitation to our national parks, reserves and Crown lands, we can not only ensure that our future generations can also explore and learn about our state's unique wild places but

also ensure our wild places will be passed on to our future generations in even better condition than they are today.

MESSAGE FROM LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Appropriation (Supplementary Appropriation for 2021-22) Bill 2022 (No. 14)

Mr SPEAKER - I am in receipt of a message from the Legislative Council:

The Legislative Council has this day agreed, without Request and without Amendment, to a Bill intituled 'A Bill for an Act for the appropriation of \$441 739 000 out of the Public Account for the services of the Government for the financial year ending on 30 June 2022.'

C. Farrell, President
Legislative Council
26 May 2022.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

COVID-19 Response

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House take note of the following matter: COVID-19 Response.

I listened carefully to the Minister for Health's responses to our questions this morning, including my question about our preparation for winter. As an epidemiologist, I put on the record my concern that the Government is continuing to rest its entire public health protection response to COVID-19 on vaccines. We have a huge problem with the level of vaccine uptake in Tasmania. We have had very high levels of two doses - 98.9 per cent, I think, at the moment. That has been amazing. The Minister for Health keeps referring to Tasmania's great track record. Well, that was our great track record. We did get the highest rate of vaccine uptakes among the over 16-year-olds initially.

However, here we are, and the borders have opened. Liberal and Labor governments around the country, led by Scott Morrison, decided to let COVID-19 rip. We have a new false narrative that we can live with COVID-19, as though that means it will have no impacts on us personally and as a community. We have to juggle how we live with the continuing development of a global pandemic. New subvariants are happening all the time. There are four new ones listed in Australia that I am aware of at the moment. It is very important to strike a balance here. We do not want to live in a lockdown state. There is no doubt that Tasmanians, Australians, do not want to live like that but we are being presented with a false binary choice. It is not a binary choice - it is a continuum of responses.

Our Health minister and now-Premier has promised from when we opened the borders that we would listen to the evidence and respond appropriately. Well, the evidence has been very clear. More people are dying in Tasmania than ever before. The cases in Australia are

some of the highest in the world. The deaths from COVID-19 are some of the highest on the planet. We have, for the first time in modern history, the highest mortality rate in Australia from an infectious disease.

The Greens are concerned on behalf of all the people that contact us, encouraging us to keep talking about the science, the reality of the public health data - the little that we can get access to - and the cognitive dissonance between governments that talk on one hand about caring and listening, and doing everything they can and, on the other hand, ignoring what public health experts and any person on the street would understand are the clear public health protections we could be taking to bring down COVID-19 infections. Why would not we want to do that?

You only have to talk to a nurse, to hear as I did the other day, the story of a nurse in frustration posting a picture of herself with a mask on, on a Twitter post, saying she has been working every day for a year. She had spent the last year caring for COVID-19 patients. Her husband is a clinical specialist. He also cares for COVID-19 patients. Every day she goes to work and she puts on a P2 or an N95 effective face mask. She cares for people with COVID-19, highly infectious Omicron, and she has not been infected.

It is abundantly clear that there are many things that we could be doing, and the minister has just said, 'All of our response is based on vaccines'. Well, we have 50 per cent of our most vulnerable people in the community, children five to 11 years, with zero protection and 40 per cent of that group have had no doses at all. One in three 16- to 50-year-old Tasmanians is not properly protected, is not vaccinated, and has not had a booster. They are effectively not protected against COVID-19 and we have waning protection happening with vaccines. We know that they are dropping. Figures vary depending on what sort of things you are measuring, but they are dropping by 20 per cent over a four-month period.

We are coming into winter. It is abundantly clear we are overwhelmed in our hospital system. The ambulances are being affected. Ramping is being affected. The Launceston General Hospital has their medical ward closed at the moment because of COVID-19 cases and positive staff. In addition to all the other problems we have in our hospital system, we now have the problems of healthcare workers who have been working for months at this very high level.

It is not good enough for the minister to say this is normal, this is stable. It is stable at a very high rate, that is the point. A very high level of cases are being reported every day and they are predominantly avoidable. It does make a difference if you wear masks. It is not a big deal. It is not going to stop people going to businesses. If we normalise ourselves to wearing masks, like people in many Asian countries have done, we will find that it actually opens up opportunities and it certainly does not leave us with a possibility of serious, long-term complications from long COVID that for many people will last the rest of their life.

Time expired.

[11.22 a.m.]

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Minister for Health) - Mr Speaker, I thank Dr Woodruff for bringing this on as a matter of public importance. I note her professional expertise in some of these matters and her interest as well.

I have to say that the Tasmanian Government's number one priority has been the health and safety of all Tasmanians throughout the pandemic. We have implemented a number of supports and measures to support the Tasmanian community, business and the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationally, while other jurisdictions opened their borders at 80 per cent vaccinated for 16 years and older, we waited. We set the higher benchmark of 90 per cent vaccinated for 12 years and older. That was the sensible thing to do, because it would give Tasmanians that higher level of protection needed and ensure our hospitalisations rates were lower. In the weeks leading up to the borders reopening we saw the emergence of the new variant, Omicron, and the BA.2 Omicron variant since that time.

Our Public Health measures have not been singularly focused on vaccination. We have been very focused on vaccination rates because that is the number one line of defence, but also our booster program, our safeguards in high-risk settings, continued social distancing and the use of masks has been important and has helped us to avoid our health system being overloaded and as much as possible keep Tasmanians safe.

Since opening the borders last year on 15 December, we have experienced one of the lowest hospitalisations rates in the country, of which I again spoke this morning, but vaccination has remained our key safeguard and we have led the nation and we are still leading the nation in many respects. Our vaccination rates in the five to 11 age group is lower than I would like but it is still 11 per cent or 12 per cent and has been consistently above the national average.

As we stand today, 98 per cent of Tasmanians aged 12 years and older are fully vaccinated and over 50 per cent of those aged five to 11 are fully vaccinated, while around 70 per cent of those aged over 16 are boosted. Just as we stepped our way through COVID-19 cautiously and responsibly we transitioned to living with COVID-19 just as sensibly and in a very measured way. Significant planning was undertaken by our health system in the lead-up to borders opening, including the rollout of a very strong vaccination program, increasing the bed capacity within the health system, securing sufficient quantities of antiviral medications for patients with COVID requiring care in our hospital, as well as significantly increasing our ventilator capacity and PPE supplies.

Our hospital preparedness has also been supported by employing an additional 1259 full-time equivalent staff between July 2020 and March 2022, with further recruitment for new beds underway. I said that this morning in answer to a question. While hospitals have experienced pressure, due to our strong planning and effective escalation management, health services have continued to function effectively throughout the pandemic. Tasmania is not alone when it comes to the pressures on our health system. The success that we have had in this area, in part, has been due to the success of our hospital avoidance program, COVID@home, which has shown great innovation, providing virtual care to COVID-positive patients and therefore minimising the demand for hospital services.

Right now we are in a transitional phase where we are stepping down our safeguards one step at a time to safely adjust to living with COVID-19 in a highly vaccinated society. We are acting on Public Health advice every step of the way. We removed masks, except in vulnerable settings, in March and we reduced restrictions on close contacts in line with the national position in other states and Public Health advice and the current epidemiological position in Tasmania, with a downward trend in cases, confirming that we have passed the peak of our recent COVID-19 wave.

I want to ensure that we speak as well on our winter strategy which we launched in March this year, outlining our preparations as a health system to manage the additional pressures related to the return of flu, alongside COVID-19, within the community. We are expanding some of the tried and tested approaches that have served us well in managing COVID-19.

There are five key elements to this and they are important:

- (1) target increased COVID-19 vaccination rates and record flu vaccination rates;
- (2) increase the level of testing within the community and within high-risk settings to detect both COVID and influenza;
- (3) increase hospital avoidance by expanding the scope of COVID@home and community case management facilities to manage high-risk patients with other respiratory illnesses such as flu;
- (4) maintain the additional bed capacity established in our hospitals to respond to COVID; and
- (5) continue to build and maintain COVID and flu treatment stockpile.

To help manage these winter pressures, we are investing an additional \$1.5 million on top of our existing COVID-19 health funding. From 23 May, Tasmanian providers have delivered 164 248 flu vaccines which represents 30 per cent of the population vaccinated against flu. I am advised we are tracking very well in comparison to other areas, but what is particularly pleasing is that of the more vulnerable population, almost 63 per cent of people over 65 have been vaccinated. I would encourage all Tasmanians to think about getting their flu vaccine.

We are part of the national immunisation program for infants aged six months to five years of age, the over 65s, and the vulnerable between those age groups. I want to remind Tasmanians that flu vaccinations are free in our state clinics and I would encourage Tasmanians to get the flu jab and be up to date with their COVID vaccinations as well.

[11.29 a.m.]

Ms DOW (Braddon - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Labor Party on this matter of public importance, and indeed that is what it is. I find it interesting to hear the Premier talk about the fact that we did wait until the 90 per cent mark before the Government opened the borders in Tasmania on 15 December. That was because Tasmania is in quite a unique situation because of our ageing population but also because of the level of chronic disease Tasmanians live with, and I think also because of our regionally dispersed populations and highly dispersed populations across Tasmania.

It is interesting that there was such an emphasis on that by the Government yet we have not seen that dedicated focus, emphasis and high level of promotion around the importance of boosters and the vaccination program for five to 11-year-olds across the state.

The Premier and Dr Woodruff are quite right, and I have said it before in this place, that booster rates and five to 11-year old vaccination rates are too low in the state and we need to make a dedicated effort to raise those. They are our best protection.

We are on the cusp of a perfect storm in Tasmania. You only have to look at what is happening at the Launceston General Hospital - the impact of COVID-19, the outbreak in ward 5D, the incredible pressure being experienced by the emergency department and the fact that the staff are having to turn patients away. People are being encouraged to source other support to help them with their medical conditions in the community.

We know there are shortages of general practitioners across our community and long waiting lists to see your GP. That is only going to exacerbate that problem in the community.

As we see more people with flu and COVID-19 over winter, it is not going to be uncommon to see these pressures on the Royal, on the North West Regional Hospital and on the Mersey Community Hospital. It really is the cusp of a perfect storm.

I want to understand from the Premier the plan for rolling out. I understand there will be the free vaccination clinics where you can get your flu shot while you are there. That is a great initiative at some major population centres around the state. Will the booster shot be available at the regional flu clinics being rolled out across the state? It would be good to do that. Will we look at initiatives such as Bunnings on the weekend for flu shots and boosters over the coming weeks, to make sure people who are working during the week or busy in their daily lives have an opportunity to have their vaccination ?

That was very successful. It took a long while for the Government to roll it out, but when they finally it was very successful. I would encourage the minister and the Premier to look at that as an option as we approach winter.

I do not think anyone in this place thinks that the many cases of COVID-19 across our community is not an important thing for us to be talking about and for us to be advocating for better support for our community.

Ms O'Connor - Well, you just have not.

Ms DOW - We have.

Ms O'Connor - No, you have not.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms DOW - We have, Ms O'Connor. There are plenty of times when I have spoken about that in this place.

Ms O'Connor - Only when we have brought on a debate.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms DOW - Mr Speaker, it goes without saying that we are thinking of those Tasmanians who have lost their lives to COVID-19 and to their families as well.

Ms O'Connor interjecting.

Ms DOW - That is not rubbish and I take offence to that, Ms O'Connor. That is completely out of line and you know that.

Ms O'Connor - You misheard me.

Ms DOW - As I said, it is important that this matter of public importance be brought forward today. One of the other issues we need to be thinking about is our workforce across Tasmania and how COVID-19 is impacting on that. Nowhere more plainly can that be seen as across our health care settings. I want to read what Emily Shepherd from the ANMF in today's *Examiner* has to say. It is really important. It highlights the underlying structural problem across our health system when it comes to the number of staff that we have.

The Premier proudly announces the increases in staff over the past 12 months. The Government does not talk very often about those who are leaving. It does not talk very often about the intellectual property and the years and wealth of experience that we are losing as Tasmanians who have given years of their lives to working in our health system retire, leave or move interstate where they are paid better, where there are better conditions. We do not hear the Government talk about that. It is a significant problem for Tasmania that we are losing those well-equipped, knowledgeable staff out of our health system. Ms Shepherd said about the Launceston General Hospital -

... the issue has been compounded by low staffing numbers with nurses working double shifts to meet demand.

I know that they had hundreds of vacancies in March this year and we are dealing not only with COVID-related sickness but we are also dealing with all these vacancies and just exacerbating the issue of staff having to work double shifts and overtime to keep the services running.

Mainland competition and an ageing workforce means experienced nurses were leaving the hospital with not enough qualified staff to fill the gap - an issue that the ANMF say the Government could have avoided if it implemented a workforce strategy in 2018.

That is a really important point because we have not done the planning regarding the workforce in the Tasmanian health system. We are going to see problems with filling vacancies and providing services to Tasmanians, services that Tasmanians are in dire need of and that they are finding they cannot get access to now. The LGH right now is the perfect example of this. It is the perfect example of the storm we are going to see in winter across our health system.

[11.36 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - That was a very ordinary contribution from Ms Dow.

Mr Speaker, we have entered the age of normalising the mass infection of people with COVID-19 and normalising mass death. So far in Tasmania, since the borders were prematurely reopened, on average three Tasmanians a week have died. Every day, on average,

50 Australians are dying to COVID-19. We are enabling the mass infection of children who are taking the virus home to their families, in some cases to parents who are immunocompromised.

We are living in an age of mass-denialism. Living with COVID-19 means living with constant reinfection because the evidence is clear that herd immunity is a myth. We have evidence now that people can be reinfected within weeks. Yet I hear people in this place who have had COVID-19 previously saying when they have a sore throat it could not possibly be COVID-19 because they have already had it this year. That is unscientific and untrue.

I wonder sometimes whether our Public Health officials are reading any of the data or the science that is coming in. If they are, they would be strongly advising governments to reintroduce protections and advising government to have better measures in place to prevent mass infection.

Has anyone in Public Health in Tasmania spoken to the minister about the hundreds of cases worldwide now of severe hepatitis in children linked to COVID-19? There is a Chinese Academy of Sciences preprint paper which found that a COVID-19 variant mimics human liver protein that may trigger T cell autoimmunity, potentially damaging the liver. The authors suggest it could explain a surge in childhood hepatitis.

Victorian Public Health, at the very least, every day across all its social media platforms puts out information to people about how to avoid infection. It advises the wearing of masks. We get nothing like that here. We got from the Minister for Health and from Ms Dow a totally unscientific contribution, which is all about vaccination only. As Dr Woodruff outlined, the experts are very clear that you need to have high vaccination rates and other protections in place.

The Minister for Health talked about the low hospitalisation rate. Hospitalisations are increasing along with deaths. Part of the reason that we have been able to make hospitalisations look lower is because of the COVID@home program and community care-based treatment. We have been contacted by constituents who felt that they were on death's door who were being made to participate in COVID@home or sent off to a community facility to keep them out of hospitals. Living with COVID is a myth.

They have found that there is an eight-times increase in reinfections with Omicron. As I said earlier, people are being reinfected within weeks. I know, for example, Senator Jordon Steele-John, the Greens Senator, contracted COVID-19 in March, went down, and then, in late-April, got it again and got it worse - reinfection.

We would like to know why the Government is not advocating for more broad access to antivirals. Professor Raina MacIntyre says:

It is disappointing that GPs have not been provided guidelines on rapid treatments for COVID-19 within the community.

Everyone should be able to access antivirals. They are simple, proven, available measures like the asthma preventer inhalant budesonide which may prevent severe complications, but there are no guidelines for community treatment. There are two effective

antivirals which can reduce hospitalisation rates and one is widely prescribed in other countries, but access is severely restricted here. Why?

I refer members in this place to some of the science. In the *Nature Communications Journal*, for example, there is evidence of accelerated biological ageing in COVID-19 patients. We have a paper here that talks about the effect of COVID-19 on prenatal lung growth which finds that in pregnant women who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, normalised foetal lung volume was significantly reduced.

We also have an alarming paper which has been put out on super-antigens and SARS-CoV-2 in the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute's *Pathogens* paper. It talks about COVID-19 potentially having a super-antigen in it. Super-antigens are potent antigens that can send the immune system into overdrive. SARS-CoV-2 causes many of the biological and clinical consequences of a super-antigen. It says:

Urgent research is needed to better understand the long-term risks being taken by governments whose policies enable widespread transmission of a potential super-antigenic pathogen.

It says:

Super-antigens have been shown to impact central nervous system function and are implicated in the development of neurological conditions and cardiovascular dysfunction. Super-antigens are implicated in the development of auto-immune disease.

It also says:

Some countries seem willing to tolerate high levels of infection, provided their healthcare systems can cope. This approach is predicated on the belief a level of protected population immunity can be achieved and sustained and the impact of reinfections will be less severe.

If SARS-CoV-2 contains a super-antigen or super-antigen-like protein or triggers a super-antigenic host response, this strategy may prove a grave error. The effect of a super-antigen is dependent on dose exposure, genetic predisposition, environmental conditions and immune response.

Business as usual on COVID-19 is totally unacceptable. We now have around close to one in three Tasmanians who have been infected with COVID-19 and the evidence is clear that living with COVID-19 means they will get infected again and again. Given that, the evidence tells us COVID-19 hammers our T-cells and suppresses our immune system.

What we are talking about here is dire for Public Health and we urge the Premier and Minister for Health to start reading some of the science and taking this much more seriously in order to protect the health of Tasmanians, which is his job. I hope that he will read some of the science that has come in because it is very clear that the approach the Tasmanian and Australian governments are taking is wrong.

[11.43 a.m.]

Mr TUCKER (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, as leaders, all of us have a duty of care to ensure we are dealing in fact and following the health advice. I am not sure whether the Greens Leader was herself fearful or whether she was creating fear for the sake of politics.

Ms O'Connor - There is one epidemiologist in this House and it is Dr Woodruff. I just read you the science.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr TUCKER - The Greens Leader has publicly gone against independent Public Health officials, questioned their integrity and, worse than that, recklessly spread fear and misinformation into the community.

Ms O'Connor - I have just given you the science. You didn't listen to a word.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr TUCKER - It has been more than disappointing to see the Greens Leader throw away the science -

Ms O'Connor - Why don't you deal with what Dr Woodruff said if you don't want to listen to me? Listen to the epidemiologist.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Mr TUCKER - which she says she prides herself on understanding.

The health, safety and wellbeing of Tasmanians has been our number one priority throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. At every step of the way during the pandemic, we have acted on the advice of Public Health. I believe they have done a particularly good job here in Tasmania.

Ms O'Connor - Rubbish.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. Another word and you will be out.

Mr TUCKER - Our Public Health measures such as the vaccination and booster program, safeguards in high-risk settings, the use of masks and continued social distancing has helped us to avoid our health system being overloaded.

Our strong efforts to plan and prepare for COVID-positive patients in our hospitals has been invaluable for ensuring that our health system was well prepared. To ensure we are ready to respond to the change in COVID-19 circumstances the Department of Health put in place comprehensive COVID-19 escalation management plans that describe the operational actions to be taken by the state's major hospitals and related facilities in response to COVID-19.

Health services have continued to meet demand during the COVID-19 pandemic and Tasmania continues to have one of the lowest rates of admitted patients for active COVID-19 cases compared to other jurisdictions. It demonstrates the value of having a plan.

Significant planning was undertaken by our health system in the lead-up to borders opening, including the rollout of a very strong vaccination program. The health system preparedness plan included employing an additional 1259 FTE staff between July 2020 and March 2022 with further recruitment for new beds underway; increasing the bed capacity within the health system and gradually bringing on an additional 152 beds as staffing allows; securing surge capacity of up to 211 COVID-19 ward beds across the state and up to 114 ICU surge beds; securing sufficient quantities of antiviral medication for the treatment of COVID and other supportive medications for patients with COVID-19 requiring care in hospital; as well as significantly increasing our ventilator capacity and PPE supplies.

While our hospitals have experienced pressure, due to our strong planning and effective escalation management health services have continued to function effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tasmania has not experienced the same system pressures and disruptions we have seen interstate. In part, this has been due to the success of our hospital avoidance program COVID@home, which has shown great innovation, providing virtual care to COVID-positive patients and therefore minimising the demand for hospital services. Where hospital care is required, COVID@home includes a direct admission pathway to prevent patients from attending the emergency department unnecessarily.

Members will be interested to hear that since the program commenced in December the COVID@home data through to 11 May shows that 15 302 people have received care in their own homes. This has been a significant contributor to Tasmania continuing to have one of the lowest rates of COVID-related hospital admissions when compared to other states. Community case management facilities are established to accommodate symptomatic COVID-positive patients who require a high level of clinical supervision and support that can be provided by COVID@home but do not require hospitalisation.

Three case management facilities across the state have over an 85-bed capacity. Community case management facilities have supported over 470 positive cases since the borders opened. In addition, our hospitals have used telehealth for outpatient clinics, based on the clinical need of the patient.

Although the Omicron variant has presented different challenges, it is pleasing to see that despite community transmission, the number of COVID-positive cases in hospital has remained relatively low. Regional health emergency management teams and the THS emergency operation centre are constantly monitoring and reviewing the impact of COVID-19 on our health services and considering the appropriate escalation levels.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Tasmanian Government, I wish to personally, sincerely thank all our hard-working and dedicated frontline health staff, who have shown great resilience in responding to the challenges of safely managing COVID-19-positive patients within our health system.

Our settings and restrictions will continually be adapted and adjusted in coming months, in line with public health advice as we live with COVID-19.

Time expired.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Mr STREET (Franklin - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the sitting be suspended until the ringing of the bells.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 11.52 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.

MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2022 (No. 23)

Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2022 (No. 24)

Mr SPEAKER - Honourable members, I have a message from Her Excellency the Governor:

In accordance with the provisions of section 38 of the Constitution Act 1934, the Governor recommends to the House of Assembly -

- (1) In respect to the financial year ending 30 June 2023, the payment out of the public accounts of the sum of \$6 993 286 000 for the purposes referred to in Schedule 1 of the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2022 and detailed in the agencies' information in support of the Estimates for the year.

In accordance with the provisions of section 38 of the Constitution Act 1934, the Governor recommends to the House of Assembly -

- (1) In respect to the financial year ending 30 June 2023, the payment out of the public accounts of the sum of \$43 203 000 for the purposes referred to in Schedule 1 of the Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2022 and detailed in the agencies' information in support of the Estimates for the year.

TABLED PAPERS

Budget Papers

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Treasurer) - Mr Speaker, I lay on the Table the following papers:

- The Budget (Budget Paper No. 1); and
- Government Services (Volumes 1 and 2) (Budget Paper No. 2)

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2022 (No. 23)

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2022 (No. 24)

First Reading

Bills presented by Mr Ferguson and read the first time.

ATTENDANCE OF MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Mr SPEAKER - In accordance with the resolution passed by the House on 26 May 2022 I now invite members of the Legislative Council to enter the Chamber to listen to the Treasurer's speech.

I welcome the members of the Legislative Council and all members of the Gallery, including Senator Wendy Askew.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2022 (No. 23)

Second Reading

[3.04 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Braddon - Treasurer) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the bill be read the second time.

Mr Speaker, colleagues and members of the Legislative Council, over two years ago our world faced challenges and uncertainties brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Governments were tested on their ability, responsiveness and leadership. The Tasmanian Liberal Government took swift action, leading the nation in protecting our community in business and social supports and in bold initiatives to rapidly recover and build.

The pandemic caused economic volatility and we responded with strong actions that secured a more resilient economy. The challenges are not over and we must build on the gains made. As the new Treasurer I intend to continue the Liberal tradition of the previous eight budgets in building business and community confidence through strengthening our economy and by delivering on our commitments.

This means we can focus on what matters to Tasmanians - health, education, housing and building safe, inclusive thriving communities. The Rockliff Liberal Government's vision is for Tasmania to be a place where everyone is encouraged and supported to be the best they can be. To achieve this, we will harness our comparative advantages, create more opportunities for Tasmanians and maintain a robust economy. The 2022-23 State Budget is about strengthening Tasmania's future, delivering for all Tasmanians.

Mr Speaker, responsible budget management has been a hallmark of this Government and today's Budget is built on these foundations. This has enabled the Government to navigate the worst of the pandemic, providing economic and social support measures in excess of \$1.5 billion. Those measures have worked.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, the Tasmanian economy remains strong. Since we came to Government 26 000 jobs have been created around the state and the unemployment rate is at 3.8 per cent, the lowest level on record and half what it was in March 2014. Business confidence is up, resulting in more investment and jobs. For nine consecutive quarters the Tasmanian economy has led the nation in the CommSec State of State reports, holding the mantle of the best-performing economy and ranking highly in the key economic indicators.

Tasmanian exports of goods are at record highs, growing by almost 25 per cent to reach \$4.6 billion in the 12 months to March. Retail trade was \$665.9 million in March, 15.3 per cent higher than before the pandemic and a staggering 45.5 per cent higher than when we came to government. In 2020-21 our economy grew by 3.8 per cent, the second-strongest growth in Australia and more than double the growth experienced in the national economy. In 2021-22 the Tasmanian economy is expected to grow by 3.75 per cent, while state final demand is estimated to grow by 6 per cent. Treasury forecasts that above average economic growth will continue into 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Having a strong economy has allowed the Government to invest more into health, education, housing and community infrastructure. It has also given us the capacity to do more in this Budget to keep our children safe and deliver on our commitments.

Although our economy has recovered well from the impacts of the pandemic the world is currently witnessing a volatile economic environment. The global economic outlook deteriorated following the invasion of Ukraine and lockdowns in China, affecting key manufacturing hubs and putting pressure on supply chains.

These events have translated into higher costs for Tasmanian households and businesses. The Government understands the pressures this places on household budgets. That is why this Budget provides over \$305 million in concessions to support vulnerable Tasmanians to meet essential costs of living, including the cost of water and sewerage, electricity and council rates. It includes \$39 million over four years in concessions for water and sewerage bills and, importantly, this concession is indexed annually in accordance with movement of CPI for Hobart to ensure the value of the concession is maintained.

A further \$79 million in council rate remissions will be provided over the next four years, while electricity concessions of \$186 million will also be provided to eligible concession card holders to help manage their electricity bills. To ensure the value of the concession is maintained, the electricity concession daily rates are revised annually to reflect any change in the standing offer prices approved by the Tasmanian Economic Regulator.

We also have amongst the lowest regulated electricity prices in the nation and we are working with Aurora not to pass on the costs associated with the Aurora Plus app. Over the past seven years, in real terms regulated energy prices have decreased by 18 per cent for residential customers and over 27 per cent for small business customers.

The Government is also supporting lower fuel prices through the FuelCheck website and app which continues to put competitive pressure on fuel prices. We have also delivered the lowest vehicle registration premiums of all of the states and territories and introduced quarterly registration payments to help bill smoothing for households.

This Budget strengthens Tasmania's future. Despite the impact of COVID-19 on our economy, we are carefully getting the Budget back on track and into surplus over the forward Estimates. In 2023-24, we will return to a net operating surplus of \$19.1 million with \$32.2 million in 2024-25 and \$30.5 million in 2025-26 as we transition to living with COVID-19. The Budget also provides the flexibility needed to ensure we can respond to emerging issues.

For this purpose, the Treasurer's reserve is maintained at \$300 million over the Budget and forward Estimates. I have also tasked Treasury with providing advice to me on strategies to ensure our debt levels remain within manageable limits into the future, so we can again use our balance sheet to shield Tasmanian jobs and families should external shocks to our economy occur in the future.

Tasmania's GST share is important for our state and we will not take a backward step in advocating our clear position on this issue. It has always been the position of our Government that the GST no worse off guarantee should continue in perpetuity. As a small state, we should not be losing out to other states that are swimming in mining royalties and posting multi-billion-dollar surpluses. This will be a test of the new federal government and whether they will govern for all. It will also be a test for the new government whether it can control national inflation as promised without reneging on any of the commitments made to Tasmania.

The health of every Tasmanian continues to be our highest priority. We continue to allocate more funding for health than any previous Government. In this Budget, health expenditure will increase to \$11.2 billion and now accounts for 33.6 per cent of the Budget's total operating expenditure compared to 28 per cent in 2013-14. We will spend on average \$7.3 million every day on delivering health services to the Tasmanian community.

To meet demand pressures in our hospitals, we are investing a further \$50 million to lock in the beds we opened in preparation for border changes last December. This is complemented with more than \$12 million for public-private partnerships to meet demand and the Government's \$196 million statewide four-year elective surgery plan to deliver more surgeries sooner.

The Government is already investing significantly in community and GP-led health care and hospital avoidance programs. This Budget includes \$30 million for the Community Rapid Response Service across the state. The Budget also invests into our rural hospitals, with \$17.7 million for the safe staffing model and \$3.8 million for additional staff.

As a major initiative, this Budget begins a game-changing investment into digital health, with \$150 million allocated over the next four years to continue improving access to health care. This significant investment will provide for a fully integrated health care system while increasing capacity and efficiency by better connecting our community health care and hospital sectors so more Tasmanians can access the health care they need where they need it. This, of course, builds on our Government's investments in regional telehealth, which has been embraced by clinicians and patients.

Like other jurisdictions demand for ambulance services is increasing. This Budget provides Ambulance Tasmania with \$48.6 million for paramedics. This investment will fund an additional 11 paramedics for the Huonville and Sorell ambulance stations, providing fully

qualified paramedic crews on duty, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This builds on the 243 extra paramedics we have recruited since 2014.

Our highly successful southern Emergency Mental Health Co-Response model, also known as PACER, pilot has supported over 400 four hundred clients, with 74 per cent remaining in the community instead of being transferred to hospital. We are continuing this important initiative with \$9 million. We will commence the north west PACER pilot in early 2023 as we move to a state-wide model.

The 2022-2023 Budget provides \$2.6 million dollars for a new safety and quality team to improve clinical outcomes and \$6.5 million dollars for the continued delivery of the mental health reform project, including the rollout of adult acute care and continuing care models in the north and the north west.

We are also continuing to invest \$45 million dollars in our child and adolescent mental health reforms. This year new services will be established, including a youth forensic service and a specialist service for children in out-of-home care.

The Budget provides \$20 million to continue implementation of the recommendations of the Roy Fagan Centre review to further improve patient care through older persons mental health services. Funding of \$1.5 million is provided to continue implementation of Tasmania's overarching mental health plan, Rethink 2020, with a focus on suicide prevention.

We are committed to ensuring those seeking alcohol and other drug treatment can get the right care when and where they need it. We have allocated \$7.5 million over two years to continue the implementation of the reform agenda for the alcohol and other drug sector in Tasmania and \$1.3 million to support the Tasmanian Drug Strategy to reduce the harms associated with the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

This Budget includes a \$654 million investment over the next four years for upgrades at all four major hospitals, and investment into rural hospitals and community health services. With the inclusion of the Government's investment in digital health, we will invest \$1.5 billion into contemporary health infrastructure over the next decade.

The Government is taking unprecedented action to assist more Tasmanians into homes. While our economy is strong we also know that many Tasmanians are doing it tough and there is more work to do. That is why the Government is implementing the most comprehensive and ambitious affordable housing strategy in Tasmania's history.

Through this Budget the Government will invest up to \$538 million into social and affordable housing and homelessness initiatives with \$204 million in 2022-2023 alone.

We are also on track to build 1500 homes by June next year, rising to a total of 10 000 new homes by 2032 as part of our 10-year \$1.5 billion housing package. We are making good progress in establishing Tasmania's new housing authority, which will be tasked with building and acquiring these homes as well as partnering with our community housing partner organisations to increase supply and deliver more affordable homes than ever before.

Our existing measures to build more houses and make it easier to get into the housing market are making a difference to Tasmanians. We have underpinned new building activity

through the ancillary dwelling program, the First Home Owner Grant and the Tasmanian HomeBuilder Grant. More than 1062 blocks of land statewide have now been approved under the Headworks Holiday program, with another 116 currently being assessed. To further expand planned supply this Budget extends the program, doubling the residential land rebate available from \$15 million to \$30 million.

Since coming to Government, our First Home Owner Grants have helped more than 4000, mostly younger, Tasmanians into their first homes. In this Budget we extend the \$30 000 First Home Owner Grant to 30 June 2023.

We are also helping Tasmanians on lower incomes buy their own home with enhancements to our shared equity program, which reduces the deposit needed to only 2 per cent, taking effect in July.

The Government's Ancillary Dwelling Grants Program continues to progress well, with over 185 new dwellings being developed under the program as new long-term rental stock. The Budget provides an additional \$2.5 million to the program for a further 250 new ancillary dwellings to add to the rental stock. The property-value threshold for stamp duty concessions has been increased to \$600 000 to reflect increases in property prices and ensure assistance is available to those entering the market.

The Private Rental Incentives Program is being funded with a further \$9 million over three years to encourage property owners to make their properties available to rent to low-income households.

The Government continues to invest record amounts into education, skills and training with expenditure in this Budget of over \$8.5 billion. We want all Tasmanians to have the opportunity to gain the skills they need to reach their full potential.

Learning from home throughout the pandemic highlighted the need to be flexible and to ensure students have access to remote learning. This Budget provides \$4 million for more laptops and tablets for students, which is in addition to the \$1 million already invested in this technology.

After parents and teachers, we know that our school leaders have a big impact on student outcomes. This Budget provides \$5 million to support principals' professional growth and lead improvements in learner outcomes.

We are also investing \$3 million into expanded resources such as digital materials and online subscriptions for State Library users around the state.

The Government is providing high-quality inclusive education for students with disability through the needs-based funding model. We will commission an independent evaluation of the model next year and engage with the new federal government on our longstanding concerns about funding distribution.

The Government is investing in the renewal of ageing student and school administration systems with \$12 million to replace and modernise digital business systems.

The Budget also allocates \$250 million in infrastructure investment for new and upgraded schools around the state to build and improve classrooms and essential facilities. This includes \$15 million for the redevelopment of Cambridge Primary School; \$11 million for the redevelopment of Exeter High School; \$14 million for the Hobart City High School campuses; \$22 million for the new Legana Primary School; \$46 million for the new Brighton High School; \$18 million for the new K-12 Sorell School; \$19 million to revitalise Cosgrove High School; \$24 million for the six new child and family learning centres; and \$17 million for the support school package, including North West Support School.

We want more Tasmanians to access the vocational training they need. Last year's budget invested almost \$100 million to transform TasTAFE into a government business fit for purpose in our booming jobs market. Funding of over \$37 million was allocated to employ 100 extra TasTAFE teachers. Now we are providing a further \$7 million for additional support services for those extra teachers. An additional \$5 million is also provided to complete the development of the Water and Energy Trade Centre of Excellence.

In conjunction with the federal government, the Jobtrainer Fund has provided low- or no-fee training places for people looking to upskill or retrain. This Budget provides a further \$8 million to extend the Jobtrainer Fund.

Upskilling people to work in the state's growing building and construction industry is a priority for the Government. Our \$9 million High-Vis Army initiative is already supporting Tasmania's peak industry associations to develop workforce capability through a range of training and skills initiatives. This Budget provides a further \$1 million to support the building and construction industry to attract even more skilled workers to this booming sector.

We are fortunate to live in one of the safest places in the world and this Budget continues investments into our police, justice, corrections and rehabilitation systems. Since 2014 we have funded an additional 329 police officers, bolstering the front line and our criminal investigation capability.

This Budget provides \$15 million to establish new multi-disciplinary centres to ensure victim/survivors of family and sexual violence receive immediate and integrated support in a safe place.

We are also investing in policing infrastructure in our regions with \$12.5 million to upgrade the Bridgewater Police Station; \$6 million to refurbish the Launceston Police Station; \$7.5 million for the new St Helens Police Station; and \$1 million for the upgrade of Rosebery Police Station.

The Budget allocates \$6 million to replace the automatic vehicle location systems, \$3.7 million for new forensic scientific instruments and \$760 000 to replace police pistols.

We are also continuing to invest in Tasmania Police's ICT systems, with \$39 million provided over the next four years. There is \$10 million allocated to the Large Vessel Replacement Program and \$8 million to complete the Sorell Emergency Services Hub.

All these investments again demonstrate the Government's commitment to providing our police and emergency services with the resources they need to protect Tasmanians.

The Government is committed to reducing the rates of criminal reoffending with a renewed focus on rehabilitation in our corrections system. We have already invested in more rehabilitation programs in prisons to support successful reintegration into the community.

This Budget also allocates \$17 million to complete the new Southern Remand Centre and \$13.8 million over four years to support its safe and effective operation.

The Correctional Primary Health Service is allocated \$7.5 million to meet staffing recommendations from the Coroner, Custodial Inspectorate and Prisoner Mental Health Taskforce, increasing prisoner and detainee access to mental health services. We know that the more services that support rehabilitation, the safer our state will be.

We are also investing \$3.6 million to replace the mobile duress alarm system and \$1.3 million for body scanning technology, while \$8 million is provided for critical infrastructure maintenance in our correctional facilities.

Our Safe at Home family violence service system is nationally recognised as an integrated justice response to family violence. We will invest a further \$4.9 million into these services. There is also \$12.5 million allocated for the first year of Tasmania's third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan, which will build upon and embed the successful initiatives implemented in the first two action plans.

Tasmania's children are very precious to us all. A critical priority of the Government is to continue the implementation of the key recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into the Department of Education's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Funding of \$36.4 million is provided over four years to help keep children safe and to implement all 20 recommendations from that inquiry. The Budget also allocates \$5.4 million for the Child Safety Service to support improved outcomes under the Strong Families Safe Kids child safety redesign.

There is \$6 million for the continuation of the Transition to Independence initiative. This is supporting young people exiting care to build independent skills, to maintain engagement in education and training. We are providing \$4 million for intensive family engagement services to ensure the safety of children and help prevent them entering statutory care. There is \$2 million for the Out-of-Home Care Accreditation and Carers Register to improve standards and monitor progress against the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse.

Our Government established the commission of inquiry in order to ensure that our most vulnerable are protected and past wrongs can never be repeated. We thank victim/survivors and their families and loved ones for their bravery in coming forward. These are challenging and distressing issues to share but these stories must be heard and the lessons need to be learnt so we can ensure that children and young people in this state are safe and have the best possible start in life. We all agree on that. With the commission's hearings underway we must allow the process to take its course, independent of government. I reiterate our steadfast commitment to acknowledging past failures of governments, going back decades, to ensure the future protection of our children and young people. The Government will continue to respond to what we hear through the commission and to its recommendations in due course.

This Budget provides an additional \$2.2 million towards the whole-of-government coordinated response to the inquiry. This is in addition to the over \$10 million already

committed for the establishment and conduct of the commission's important work. As Treasurer, I will ensure that the commission is fully funded to undertake its work, whatever is required, remembering always that our children are precious and deserve our love and protection.

Mr Speaker, the Government initiated a comprehensive review into the Public Trustee late last year. While the findings were tough to hear, the review provided an opportunity to continue to improve its processes and better provide client focus. To support the transition, the Budget provides \$4.3 million over four years to implement the review's recommendations, and a further \$4.3 million to meet the costs associated with the delivery of the Public Trustee community service obligation.

The Government is also reviewing local government to create a more robust and capable system of local government that is ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future. Funding of \$1.6 million is provided for this review. The Local Government Board will provide recommendations on the future role, functions and design of local government and the structural and legislative reforms required to meet these objectives.

The Government is also committed to implementing the findings of the independent review of the Tasmanian State Service, and \$2 million has been provided for this purpose. The Budget also allocates funds to a number of our key statutory offices, including \$900 000 for the Integrity Commission for education and oversight functions; \$1.2 million for the Office of the Ombudsman to improve health complaints resolutions; \$7.6 million for the operation of the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal; and \$400 000 to further support the establishment of the new Tasmanian Disability Commissioner.

Mr Speaker, the Government is committed to delivering better outcomes for Tasmanian Aboriginal people by working in partnership to close the gap, protect culture and heritage, and co-design our next steps toward reconciliation. This Budget provides an additional \$2 million for Tasmania's Closing the Gap implementation plan. This funding will focus on building the capacity of Aboriginal community organisations across Tasmania to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people. The Budget also supports an expanded program of cultural burning in partnership with Aboriginal community organisations, with the provision of \$1.3 million over the next four years.

Within Health, \$1.5 million is provided to implement our action plans for improving Aboriginal cultural respect across Tasmania's health system and supporting improved health outcomes for Tasmanian Aboriginal people, and an allocation of \$500 000 will be provided to support the next steps toward truth-telling and treaty through processes co-designed with, and led by, Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Mr Speaker, for the first time, this year's Budget includes a gender budget statement. This statement is one way we can highlight our policies and the actions we are taking to create a more inclusive Tasmania. To support this work \$800 000 is allocated to the Tasmanian Women's Strategy, which will guide our work for gender equality. Funding of \$740 000 is allocated to develop a woman and girls in sports strategy to provide clear and effective strategic leadership for increasing female participation in sport. We are investing \$450 000 to support increased gender and cultural diversity across our resources sector, and \$450 000 to promote women's leadership in hospitality.

Our state is stronger and more prosperous because of our vibrant and diverse community, and we want to ensure Tasmanians of all cultures and backgrounds have equal opportunity to contribute and succeed. To progress these aims, the Budget provides \$180 000 towards the Tasmanian Multicultural Policy and Action Plan.

Volunteers are the backbone of our communities and \$440 000 will be provided to support Volunteer Tasmania's safeguarding volunteer project.

The Council on the Ageing Tasmania has been allocated \$1.2 million to continue coordinating Seniors Week and implement activities under the Active Ageing Plan. With the construction of the new Devonport men's shelter on track for completion by January, the Budget provides \$2.5 million for its operation.

Mr Speaker, the success of the JackJumpers has reinforced the value of sport in our community. Funding of \$1.5 million is provided in the Budget for the AFL team taskforce and stadium feasibility study to enable the important work of the AFL licence taskforce. Funding of \$1.5 million is also allocated to Stadiums Tasmania to develop a 10-year statewide stadiums plan.

The Budget provides \$1 million over the next four years to support the staging of the Ironman 70.3 Tasmania even in Hobart, which is expected to attract more than 3000 visitors when the first event is held in February. Funding of \$400 000 is provided for a mountain bike pump track at St Helens on the east coast. Funding of \$964 000 is allocated to the Cadets Stipendiary Steward Program to provide career pathways for young people wanting to work in Tasmania's racing industry.

The Government understands the importance of building the economy and supporting our industries in businesses both large and small to be confident, sustainable and competitive. That is why this Budget leverages our comparative advantages by providing \$1 million for power network upgrades to support the historic reopening of the Dolphin Mine on King Island; \$800 000 to enable Mineral Resources Tasmania to provide enhanced services and information to our growing minerals and constructions sectors; \$2 million to support the enhanced role of Infrastructure Tasmania in delivering government infrastructure projects; \$377 000 to develop a new 10-year salmon plan, allowing industry and the community to identify new long-term actions for a successful and sustainable industry; \$400 000 for the ShellMAP industry market access program; \$1.9 million for the implementation of the Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan; \$200 000 for resource security in the forestry sector initiative to inform the Government's strategic approach in achieving long-term, sustainable wood resource security; and \$535 000 for the National Water Grid Authority's science program to encourage the environmentally conscious sustainable use of water and promote innovation and growth.

Mr Speaker, as international borders reopen, now is the time to take Tasmanian products to the world. This Budget allocates \$1.8 million for the 2024 trade and investment mission to showcase the products of Tasmanian exporters and continue growing our export markets. Tasmanian products are prized for their high quality right around the world and attract a premium price. To better promote Tasmanian products, Brand Tasmania is allocated \$500 000 to establish the Tasmanian marks certification scheme which will be used to promote our unique products, goods and services. We are not only looking beyond our shores but we are also looking to the skies. The Budget allocates \$500 000 to the Tasmanian Space Technology

Seed Fund, which will support the growth and development of Tasmania's emerging space industry, funding research and development projects for the space economy.

Tourism is a vital part of the Tasmanian economy, especially in our regions. In recognition of the importance of Tasmania's tourism sector, the Budget provides \$10 million to secure the sector's continued recovery from the impact of the pandemic and maximise Tasmania's resurgent visitor economy. Tasmania welcomes around 20 000 visitors from New Zealand each year and we expect this to increase through the introduction of new direct flights. We are providing \$2 million for inbound tourism support to enable Air New Zealand to deliver a direct service between Hobart and Auckland.

Mr Speaker, the Government is committed to protecting our environment and promoting the benefits of primary industries and agriculture in Tasmania. This Budget allocates \$8 million to Tasmania's independent Environment Protection Agency to perform environmental assessments, while also providing a further \$2 million to meet operational costs. This Budget provides \$3.3 million to implement the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Biosecurity Strategy to respond to the threat of invasive weeds, animals and diseases. In addition, \$1.3 million is provided to strengthen biosecurity on the Bass Strait islands by funding full-time officers on Flinders Island and King Island.

With a Budget allocation of \$6.5 million, the Reserve Activity Assessment Reform Project will enshrine in legislation an independent panel to assess and review significant proposals, a process for administrative appeal, and the publication of leases and licences.

The Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens is the second oldest botanic gardens in Australia. It is a show-piece for the state's precious flora. To continue to sustain our gardens, an additional \$1 million is provided over four years, to meet its operating costs and to fund a review of the Gardens strategic master plan.

The Budget also allocates \$300 000 to support the operations of the National Trust in managing its heritage properties and to facilitate strategic business transformation activities.

The findings of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements were delivered in October 2020. The Government welcomed that report.

Consistent with the recommendations, we have increased resourcing for bush fire risk mitigation, and we are investing in indigenous fire management as well as further research into natural disasters, compound events and resilience. In this Budget, a further \$5 million is provided to implement the commission's recommendation.

The Budget also includes \$144 million for maintenance, restoration and upgrades of our parks and reserves infrastructure, including \$18.7 million for the next iconic walk in the Tyndall Range on the stunning west coast.

We will strengthen Tasmania's future by investing to grow and diversify our economy and build its resilience. We are powering ahead to meet our ambitious climate and renewables targets. Net zero emissions or lower from 2030 and 200 percent renewable by 2040. These targets will drive productivity and economic growth. They demonstrate leadership and diversify our economy into new industries and opportunities.

Tasmania is a leader in climate change action, having achieved our target of net zero emissions in six of the last seven years. In November 2020, Tasmania achieved 100 per cent self-sufficiency in electricity from our renewable sources. Tasmania's enviable emissions profile will deliver brand benefits and generate investment and jobs.

The Budget includes \$800 000 to implement the recently released Renewable Energy Coordination Framework, which prioritises the actions necessary to support the future growth of our renewable energy sector.

We will invest a further \$2.3 million towards transitioning the government fleet to electric vehicle by 2030. This will reduce our dependence on imported fuels, increasing demand for our renewable energy and reducing emissions and operating costs. This has the added benefit of bringing more electric vehicles to the Tasmanian used car market.

The Budget also includes \$9.8 million to support our nation leading target of nett zero emissions from 2030, and towards our next Climate Change Action Plan to identify practical actions to reduce emissions.

We are also well on the way to implementing the historic agreement we made with the Australian Government to deliver Marinus Link, and Battery of the Nation. Working with our government businesses, we will match the Australian Government's funding to support Marinus through to final investment decision, while Hydro Tasmania will provide up to \$58 million for the Tarraleah Power Station, as part of the broader Battery of the Nation project.

Our bold plan to be a globally significant producer of green hydrogen from 2030 is also gaining momentum, with Bell Bay in northern Tasmania the perfect location for a nation-leading green hydrogen hub.

In our growing state, the Government is continuing to invest in next generation infrastructure for Tasmanians, which builds better communities, provides better services, opens more opportunities and creates more jobs.

The Government will invest a record \$5.6 billion over the next four years in infrastructure for our hospitals, schools and communities.

In addition to the health, education and housing infrastructure already outlined, we are investing \$222.9 million into critical infrastructure in our law and order system, including \$91 million towards the new \$270 million northern prison, and \$37.5 million for the Burnie court complex.

We are again making record investments into our roads and bridges with \$2.7 billion in this Budget. This investment includes \$731 million for the new \$786 million Bridgewater bridge, which has now received planning approval, demonstrating the first use of the major projects legislation and removing the final hurdle to construction starting this year

The Budget invests \$633 million over the next four years for Roads of Strategic Importance right around the state while also providing an \$81.5 million boost in maintenance of the state's network of roads and bridges, lifting the total maintenance spend by more than 26 per cent to \$388.5 million over the next four years.

The Budget continues to provide funding for other critical road infrastructure. This includes \$166 million to progress the Greater Hobart traffic solution; \$112 million towards the ongoing improvement of the Midland Highway; \$85 million for the Urban Congestion Fund; \$60 million to continue implementing the Launceston and Tamar Valley Traffic Vision; \$51 million for the South East Traffic Solution; \$42 million for the Algonia interchange and Kingston bypass duplication; \$22 million for the Channel Highway bypass of Huonville.

Importantly, \$64 million is provided for road safety projects, while \$17 million is allocated to new Park & Ride facilities to give commuters choice and reduce congestion.

The Government delivered a trial of our new Bellerive to Hobart ferry last year. It has proven a great success with around 600 passengers per day using the service through the summer period. This Budget provides \$19 million over the next four years to lock in this exciting new service between Hobart and Bellerive, so that our recent success is made permanent. The initiative also includes funding for the design and construction of a floating pontoon at Bellerive and infrastructure to improve all-weather passenger amenity and the general upgrade of the wharf area.

This is a deliberately comprehensive budget. A responsible budget. A budget that shows in detail that we can lead with both our hearts and our minds to secure a future that delivers for all Tasmanians. The Budget is about listening to Tasmanians and making their priorities our priorities. It is about investing in the future, using our strengths and building on the strong foundations we have established since 2014.

The Rockliff Liberal Government understands the current pressures on household budgets from tragic, unjust and complex world events beyond our control. We also understand the supports that families need, and because of our responsible management we are getting the Budget back on track and providing those supports.

I commend this bill to the House.

The Members of the Legislative Council withdrew.

Tabled Papers

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Treasurer) - Mr Speaker, I lay on the Table the following papers:

- Budget Speech - Strengthening our Future - Delivering for all Tasmanians
- Tasmanian Budget 2022-2023: Overview
- Tasmanian Budget 2022-2023: Gender Budget Statement

Debate adjourned.

The House adjourned at 3.49 p.m.