



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Guy Barnett MP

Wednesday 25 November 2020

MEMBERS

Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC
Hon Ivan Dean MLC
Hon Jo Palmer MLC
Hon Tania Rattray MLC (Chair)
Hon Jo Siejka MLC
Hon Josh Willie MLC

WITNESSES IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Tim Baker, Secretary, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Mr Tim Grant, Valuer General, Office of the Valuer General, Land Tasmania, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Mr Stuart Fletcher, General Manager, Land Tasmania, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Ms Deidre Wilson, Deputy Secretary, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Mr Bob Rutherford, Deputy Secretary, Industry and Business Development, Department of State Growth

Mr Sean Terry, A/G Executive Director, Energy, Office of Energy Planning, Department of State Growth

Mr John Diggle, Director, Inland Fisheries, Inland Fisheries Service, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

Mr Kevin Robinson, Director, Mineral Resources Tasmania

Ms Kate Kent, Deputy Secretary, Communities, Sport and Recreation, Department of Communities Tasmania

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

DIVISION 10

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment

CHAIR (Ms Rattray) - The time being 9 o'clock, Lynne, I would like to indicate we are ready to broadcast. Thank you.

Minister, welcome. This is Day 3 for Committee B of the Estimates Process and we welcome you to the table. Would like to introduce you to the members of the committee. You will already know them but I think for correctness, we have the honourable Josh Willie, the honourable Ivan Dean, I am Tania Rattray, the honourable Rosemary Armitage, and the honourable Jo Palmer, We have an apology from another member of our committee, the honourable Jo Siejka, who is unwell today. We wish her the best and hope that she's on the road to recovery. We also have with us our secretarial support, Natasha Exel and Allison Waddington, and Lynne from Hansard.

Minister, I will invite you to introduce your team at the table followed by an overview before you commence as the Minister for Primary Industries and Water. We are COVID-19 conscious in this place and seeing that we're live-streaming, minister, we want to make sure that we set the right example for the rest of Tasmania.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Madam Chair and honourable members. It's a great honour and pleasure to be here today representing the State Government. I introduce my secretary, Tim Baker on my left and Stuart Fletcher who's also on behalf of the department representing the Lands Titles Office and questions in the first output.

I would like to make some short opening remarks with respect to this very important portfolio. I am to be this portfolio minister with our agrifood plan for the next five years, being strong and sure we're -

CHAIR - It's clear that you do support the industry because you're wearing a badge saying, 'I love farmers.'

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for recognising that, Madam Chair, I'm a very proud minister for agriculture and fishing and salmon and the whole range of other things. But I do love farmers and we've just had International Farmers' Day. I wore it last week on that day. I thought today is very appropriate to wear it, particularly with respect to the announcement I'm about to make in regard to the importance of our farmers and our farming communities.

We are supporting our farmers and our fishers, very strongly as a government. We're supporting our seafood industry that's aligned with our industry roadmap to recovery and our budget has half a million dollars to support that industry specifically.

We're commencing a review of the Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995 and a study into the Tasmanian Ocean Business Incubator Concept. We're supporting our salmon industry with \$250 000 for the Marine Spatial Planning Exercise and Tasmanians should be proud of our fisheries and also of our agriculture sector which of course is a cornerstone of our

economy. I'm pleased to advise all members of this committee and the public that the latest agrifood score card for 2018-19 shows Tasmania's agricultural production is worth \$1.9 billion. That's up 7 per cent compared to the previous year with a total agrifood value of \$2.92 billion. The figure is \$266 million higher than the value of \$1.64 billion reported for the previous year and it includes reliable verifiable data on industries that are not reported by the ABS.

We're on track to achieve our target of \$10 billion by 2050, the Farmgate value. We are so pleased and proud as a government to be supporting the industry. To be working in partnership and to realise these very, very considerable success stories in this sector and the 7 per cent growth is very substantial. In Tasmania, we actually produce 4.5 times more food than we consume. It's pleasing to see that the 2018-19 - the value of packed and processed food production increased by 5 per cent to \$4.86 billion and international agrifood exports reached a record high of \$776 million. The 2018-19 year was a warm year, it was a dry year, many will remember. Certainly irrigation underpinned the performance of pasture as you've mentioned, Chair in the opening remarks, which I totally concur and speak often. Water is liquid gold. It is and it's delivering for Tasmania.

There's been significant support for our livestock industries; dairy, red meat, other livestock products grew in value with strong prices and growth in production volumes across most industries. These are pleasing results in the score card but the government is definitely on track with industry to reach that \$10 billion by 2050. We're continuing to deliver on the many initiatives in taking agriculture to the next level program, with \$12.3 million over the forward estimates providing support for industry development across agricultural sectors while supporting our regional communities.

For our farmers, as I've indicated, water is liquid gold. We've just seen the recent opening of the Scottsdale irrigation scheme in the state's north-east by the Deputy Prime Minister, acting Prime Minister at the time -

CHAIR - Without the local member being there, I might add?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I think parliament was in session. A number of us weren't able to be there in person and I know you, Madam Chair, would have loved to have been there. You are very supportive of irrigation projects, particularly in the north-east in your patch and agriculture has benefitted from this.

CHAIR - North of the state, minister, not just the north-east.

Mr BARNETT - Not just the north-east. Meander Valley right through Sheffield and to the East Coast and further south, so you cover a very large part of Tasmania. Some of the most beautiful parts indeed and very productive parts, Madam Chair.

With Biosecurity Tasmania, we're protecting Tasmanians. This is a priority for our Government and Biosecurity Tasmania is delivering for and on behalf of all of us and we're locking in, in this budget, a further \$6 million dollars to deliver the traveller assessment and border control across the state. Continued progress of the G2G Pass app and also the TAS eTravel system. That's also keeping out pests and disease. Keeping Tasmania free of those pests and diseases and protecting the Tassie brand. We'll do everything we can to support Biosecurity Tasmania and keeping Tasmanians safe in that regard as well. So we want our

borders to remain strong and we need to be flexible as we continue protecting Tasmanians from the threat of COVID-19.

Tasmania is the best place in the world to live and we've backed it in, thanks to the great leadership of our premier, Peter Gutwein. The Budget 2020-21 will also deliver infrastructure benefiting the Tasmanian community right across the state. The Dog's Homes of Tasmania and the Ten Lives Cat Centre, they do great work in caring and rehoming our dogs and cats. The Budget locks in \$400 000 or \$200 000 each to assist them with those critical infrastructure upgrades for this year. It was great to catch up with both organisations just a week or so ago to share with them more about that announcement.

They've got significant shovel ready buildings and projects on the go, and those funds will help progress them. The government is optimistic about the action we've taken across all our sectors to create the right environment for business, to be confident, to invest, to support and create jobs. It's particularly heartening in conclusion to say that during the COVID-19 pandemic, we've been working together with our stakeholders. I call it Team Tasmania. We've had many round tables with the key stakeholders across agriculture. I could share more about those important roundtable discussions and how we've worked together to respond to keeping Tasmanians safe and rebuilding our economy as we move through this coronavirus pandemic.

The Budget is delivering jobs, it's delivering confidence, it's delivering support for our community, and that's what the budget is all about. Thank you for the opportunity to share those opening remarks and I look forward to sharing the rest of our story during this interaction today. Thanks again to the department for their support in advance and for their support during the last 12 months. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. Parts of your opening remarks will be touched on through the output groups as we work through them methodically. We usually stay until we finish, and we get every one done.

Mr BARNETT - That would be great. Chair, if I could table and give to each of your members the Tasmanian Agri-Food score card 2018-19.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'll ask our secretary to collect those and distribute them. I might put in a personal request for one of those lovely badges that I might be able to procure at some stage in the future.

Mr BARNETT - Let's see what we can do.

CHAIR - We do like to start at the beginning of our output group, so output group 1.1, which is Land Tasmania.

Output group 1.1 **Land Tasmania**

CHAIR - I invite Mr Dean to open the questioning around that area. Thank you, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - Thank you, Chair. Heritage Tasmania will now come under the auspices of Land Tasmania. How will that fit in and what will happen there as to the workings of Heritage Tasmania? Does it happen now, or is it already in place?

Mr BARNETT - That is a very important question, it's an operational question. I will pass to my secretary, Tim Baker, to respond. Thank you.

Mr BAKER - Sure. Minister, as we spoke about yesterday as you indicated, that move has already taken place. It happened last week. It's a great opportunity for Heritage Tasmania, because Land Tasmania is the country's best place-based service. If you look at particularly the list, you look at other mapping services available, and the general technology space that's used, there are great synergies with Heritage Tasmania. We have consulted broadly with Heritage Tasmania and with Land Tasmania, and had really positive feedback. The other message I would want to put on the public record is that there will be no substantive change to the operations of either organisation. This is just a management change. It's a reporting line change. It's not going to result in changes to the way the general public interact with either of the two organisations.

Mr DEAN - So we will see the similar services that Heritage Tasmania have been provided, they will continue simply under a new leadership position?

Mr BAKER - Yes. I would take that even further and say you will see no change in the public interface with Heritage Tasmania. It will continue on that path of continual improvement that we're on, and we'll look to improve the services, but there will be no noticeable change for the general public.

Mr DEAN - The leadership within Heritage Tasmania, that position has been advertised, and that will be filled as soon as is possible? Minister, is that the process?

Mr BARNETT - I will pass to the secretary for operational questions.

Mr BAKER - We had someone acting in that role, a very experienced SES officer, and we'll be advertising the position on a permanent basis in the new year. It's just very close to Christmas, and starting off a recruitment process at this point would have been too late, so it's a number one priority for us in the new year, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - I will follow it up with the question that Heritage Tasmania and Tourism Tasmania have a close alignment.

Mr BAKER - They do.

Mr DEAN - I asked about the decision to take Heritage Tasmania into Land Tasmania, as to why it didn't go the other way into the Tourism Tasmania side.

Mr BAKER - Tourism Tasmania is not in my department, so that's not a decision that I could make. Our fundamental view remains that Heritage Tasmania is a place-based service. It's designed around place, and the best place-based organisation in Australia is Land Tasmania, so that fits really well. That does not take away from the fact that Heritage Tasmania interacts with a number of agencies across the rest of government.

Aboriginal heritage, there are synergies there, and you're right, Tourism Tasmania. The former director is now working on a project looking specifically at the way we can leverage our heritage assets to get better tourist dollars out of it. That's really the project he's doing is looking at the way that we can better integrate heritage into tourism, and that's what the former director is doing.

Mr DEAN - My concern would be having been closely involved with heritage over a long period of time in the state, I was involved in a report that was tabled several years ago now as to the position with Land Tasmania as to whether or not they are aware of that report. Are they aware of the recommendations which came from that report, and can we see some changes occurring? Some of those recommendations are being put into place because there hasn't been much of it happening up until now. I'm hoping that under this new leadership structure, control structure, we will see some of that happening.

Mr BAKER - A couple of points there if I may, through you. The first thing I would say is that there is a brief which talks about the fact that we've done a lot of work in relation to that inquiry. I know it was Mr Valentine as the chair of that inquiry, and we're very aware of it. A lot of the things that were suggested in that inquiry and in the final report we've delivered on. I can guarantee you, Mr Dean, that Land Tasmania is aware of the report and we're continuing to roll it out. The general thrust though, which was that there's more that DPIPW can do to integrate the department's amazing built heritage into the tourism offering is understood and is being rolled out.

Mr DEAN - That's good. I'll be watching closely as we move forward because of the importance of heritage to this state.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I note your comments and special interest in this matter, Mr Dean. You've had that interest for some time, and the expressions of your concern this morning and interest is noted.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for that.

CHAIR - The former head of Heritage Tas, Mr Baker just indicated has a new project. Where is Mr Smith's base now? Has he moved over with Land into the Land Tasmania building? I know that's been an amalgamated arrangement, so I'm interested in where he's working from. I'm interested in where he's working out of.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair. I pass to the secretary on that matter.

Mr BAKER - Projects of strategic significance in the department are delivered from one area, a centralised project management office, and that's where the former director is working.

CHAIR - So not in the Land Tasmania -

Mr BAKER - He's in the building, but he's not working in the Land Tas area. He's moved up to where other strategic projects are being managed within the department.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr DEAN - So he will not have any direct control over Heritage Tasmania office?

Mr BAKER - No. The new role doesn't include that.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for that.

CHAIR - Thank you. You had more questions?

Mr DEAN - I did, but go first.

CHAIR - We'll share it around.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you, Chair. Minister, are their protocols in place for staff members to access the LIST?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, of course. I can outline some of those details, but it's probably more appropriate for the secretary to respond to that in regard to those particular protocols. But the answer is yes, but I'll pass to the secretary to respond.

Mr BAKER - All systems access is controlled by the acceptable use policy that is within our department for all systems, and the LIST is no different to any other system.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, have any staff members faced a COVID-19 conduct investigation for accessing the LIST for personal reasons?

Mr BARNETT - The first thing I'd say is that the LIST provides access to property and title information and a range of other things. There are in excess of 390 000 users from state, Commonwealth and local government organisations, and government business enterprises. The Tasmanian parliament has similar access and I'm advised by the department that the people whose staff can use their Tasmanian government LIST accounts to examine known properties and addresses in order to research work-related issues, answer questions from members of the public or for training and example purposes. But to the specific part of your question I'll pass to the secretary.

Mr BAKER - Without going into specifics, I am aware of one case some years ago where a staff member was investigated under the State Service Act for misconduct for access to the LIST, yes.

Mr WILLIE - What year was that?

Mr BAKER - I'd have to take that on notice, it was some time ago. I'm happy to take that on notice.

Mr WILLIE - If you could take that on notice, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you, and the department attached to that would be useful as well.

Mr BAKER - Yes, we can get that back to you, Chair.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, why was your secretary accessing Franklin and Nic Street's property details through LIST? Are they related?

Mr BARNETT - You've asked some questions about that and I will pass to the secretary to respond.

Mr BAKER - I can confirm, Mr Willie, that the access that was - I assume you are referring to the RTI that was put. I can confirm to you that, first, that my access was consistent with the acceptable use policy but, second, there was no information shared with anyone outside of the department and that the access in particular you're talking about was used for one of research purposes, answering questions for members of the public or for training and example purposes. I can also tell you that it was reviewed by the deputy secretary and the general manager of Land Tasmania, all of whom said it was consistent with the acceptable use policy.

Mr WILLIE - The second part to my question, minister, was are they related, the secretary and Franklin MP?

Mr BAKER - Yes, he's my first cousin and I think that's well known, Mr Willie.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - Minister, looking at the Land Titles Office and the amount of dealings it has, can you give me the number of dealing lodgements that they had the last financial year and whether that's up on the previous year?

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question because they do an excellent job, it's important work that they do.

Ms ARMITAGE - They do, and I have had some dealings for a constituent of recent times and they have been excellent and gave me answers in a very timely manner.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for sharing that. It's always good we get the bouquets and brickbats, but thank you very much for sharing that.

Ms ARMITAGE - They didn't have to call back, they went straight to the answers and they came back to me within minutes. It was very impressive.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much.

CHAIR - Gold star award.

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely. I do have their name, so very impressive.

Mr BARNETT - Well, a gold star award - thank you. We have Stuart Fletcher here who is the head of Land Tasmania. If that's okay we'll pass to the secretary and/or to Stuart Fletcher.

CHAIR - Thank you, Stuart.

Mr FLETCHER - Thank you. In terms of dealings, I'll just go through.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, that's fine. It's good to see the numbers and changes each year.

Mr FLETCHER - The revenue collected to the Land Titles Office is currently directed to the consolidated revenue fund. The revenue raised by the Land Titles Office for 2019-20 through the collection of the statutory fees was \$20 million. This was \$1.8 million greater than the revenue budgeted for in 2019-20. The increase in revenue, amongst other things, reflects the volume of activity in property transactions and related searches and registration of the powers of attorney.

For 2019-20 there was a 4 per cent decrease in the number of transfers specifically lodged. Priority notices were down 3 per cent, mortgages were down 1 per cent. Discharges of mortgages, interestingly, was up by 7 per cent and we had survivorships up by 1 per cent, transmissions up by 3 per cent and transfers by a cent up, by 2 per cent. Caveats down by 36 per cent, which is also interesting. So variable changes. We've also had in the last three months a 20 per cent increase in the number of plans lodged with the Land Titles Office as well.

Ms ARMITAGE - Did you have a number of dealings? I noticed last year I think it was 92 000.

Mr FLETCHER - Total dealings was 83 279.

Ms ARMITAGE - So that's down considerably, a 4 per cent decrease, yet there's been a \$1.8 million cost more.

Mr FLETCHER - So the increase in the number of plans lodged would have an impact on that, because they're a more significant cost in terms of those particular types of dealings. It depends on the type of dealing, really.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. The FTE, has that remained static or has that gone up or down?

Mr FLETCHER - Largely static at the moment.

Ms ARMITAGE - I guess you can only get to a certain efficiency, then after that it doesn't really change much.

Mr FLETCHER - The Output Group 1.1, which is not just the Land Titles Office, that's our survey offices, offices of our general area and our mapping services was 78.14 in March 2020 of this year and in March 2019 it was 78.64 FTEs. So fairly static across that period.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

CHAIR - What's the average time to have a title issued, is there an average? Some would take longer than others. Is there an average time, minister?

Mr BARNETT - I'll check with Stuart on the average time.

CHAIR - Is there a benchmark?

Mr DEAN - Is there a policy turnover time that you have?

Mr FLETCHER - I can certainly talk to that. Recently there was the - I can't remember the name of the bill, the regulatory reform tranche 2 bill that passed both Houses of parliament. One of the components of that puts in a statutory time frame for the processing of sealed plans, similar to what the early issue scheme was, but the early issue scheme was never enshrined in legislation. That is a 15-day statutory time frame for, - what, in essence, happens is the developer or the representative of the developer will lodge the sealed plans with the council.

In parallel they can lodge the sealed plans under this new scheme at the Titles Office at the same time and the Titles Office can examine those plans in the same period of time that the council are reviewing the plans and sealing the plans. Then when they lodge the final plan, the final must be the same as the plan that was originally lodged at the same time it was lodged with council. Once the council have sealed the plans there's a 15-day statutory time frame. The other thing just to be aware of is that there is - every sealed plan is not the same. There's varying levels of complexity, also once we identify if there's issues with those sealed plans, we would need to go back to either the surveyor or the solicitors that are involved in it. There's a process there in terms of -

CHAIR - So is there an average?

Mr FLETCHER - So at the moment one of our performance measures in the budget papers and the annual report is the early issue scheme -

CHAIR - Is 96 per cent.

Mr FLETCHER - Last financial year that was 96 per cent.

CHAIR - Ninety-six per cent of complying, but I'm interested in the average time. You must have some KPIs, minister, even though there's some legislative requirements for issuing a title.

Mr BARNETT - Perhaps could I respond to that question and then pass to Stuart. We are very pleased Madam Speaker - oh, sorry Madam Chair -

CHAIR - I'm always looking for elevation, so go with it. I'm just not sure that Madam Speaker will appreciate it.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, she may not agree with that. From the budget, we're putting in an additional \$1.2 million which is \$300 000 over the next four years to support the LTO with improving the times and efficiencies and measures to get the job done. Your question is a very good one which is the KPIs around the LTO, but it's in addition to that we've got that extra funding in the budget, \$1.2 million. In addition to that, we've got \$2.4 million for regulatory assessments of the planning applications and more generally. You've got the Lands Titles Office, then you've got the other aspects that over the next four years regarding the regulatory process, the permissions permitting process, the approvals process and basically improving on those statutory time frames, which you're focusing on and you are rightly focusing on, under my view. Our message behind that is cutting the red tape, streamlining the process, so we can get the jobs done to support our building and construction industry. Get the jobs out the door, get the work done as efficiently, effectively and easily as possible so that money over the next few years will give a real boost to the Lands Titles Office and the approval process to support our building construction sector, get more homes built and get jobs out the door.

CHAIR - There has been some criticism that, without your title, no financial institution will loan the money that you need to put something on that piece of land, if it's a new title. That's why I was interested in that average time.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, the other good thing about our funding is it focused on moving to electronic titles, rather than the paper-based titles. We are sadly, you would say, towards the back end of other states and territories in terms of having a paper-based system. We need to be moving into the 21st century and, as a minister, I'm very keen to progress. I've met with other relevant ministers around the country. We've focused and talked about the importance of moving to an electronic system and so we've got this funding in the budget to help progress in this area. I'm very pleased, thanks to the Treasurer for agreeing to that request and the department is moving forward with those reforms, streamlining the process, cutting the red tape, and getting the job done, so that your constituents, my constituents, can -

CHAIR - Can get their title in their hand.

Mr BARNETT - Get their title as soon as possible and get the job done. Stuart, did you want to add to that?

Mr FLETCHER - The only other thing I'd add to that is the performance target you were referring to. The target in the last year's budget papers for 2019-20 was 90 per cent of plans lodged under the early issue scheme we would have titles issued within 10 working days. For 2019-20, we exceeded that target, with 92 per cent of lodged complying with the early issue scheme being registered in that period of time.

Mr BARNETT - I've mentioned moving into electronic conveyancing. This is going to be a real help and make things more efficient, improve the time frames. To make it not just easier and more effective for the department, but for the constituents and those that use it. So electronic conveyancing is coming. It's in part of my objective to reform the process, to make it easier for our constituents. The other thing I just want to add for the committee, during COVID-19, it's been particularly difficult. The department has responded by holding some of those fees back without the natural increases of CPI. So we've also extended the number of days, 235 days following the hardship direction in terms of trading terms. We've been able to help and support business and individuals in their interaction with government during COVID-19. A whole-of-government approach. This applied to Land Tasmania and what we're doing in this space. I'm pleased to say that we've been able to support the community through those terms of arrangement and payment terms and conditions options during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms ARMITAGE - One other area with regard to the Land Titles Office, and as I said, I did have very good service from them when I actually got through to them. I should question the hours that are worked in the Land Titles Office, and have a lot of people been working from home? Is that the issue with having difficulty getting through to someone?

Mr BARNETT - We did have people working in the office during COVID-19, but we did have a substantial number of staff working from home. My understanding in terms of the Land Titles Office at the moment is the majority of staff are back in the office.

Ms ARMITAGE - This was probably about six weeks ago and when I got through, I had, as I said, excellent service. But I did get rather frustrated at some time getting that man's

voice on the phone. By the time I went one, two, press two, press one, press whatever, to actually get to wait for a long time, then find that I was actually going nowhere and I was wondering whether that's the normal situation, where there are limited people in that particular area?

Mr BARNETT - Can I just jump in there?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - I want to make it very clear, obviously during the coronavirus pandemic, it's been particularly challenging, not just in the community but across government, so we've had to adapt and be agile. The secretary is very across this, we've had many of our departmental offices working from home.

Ms ARMITAGE - I thought that might have been the issue, yes.

Mr BARNETT - It's definitely been challenging but they've risen to the challenge in so many respects. I'm proud of the officers for what they've done to respond. We've all had to be agile. I think P for Pivot is a word that I've used in my office and in the public arena. We've all had to pivot in regard to our response to coronavirus and they've done it exceptionally well. It has been challenging. I might just see if the secretary could add to that.

Ms ARMITAGE - The assistance was excellent.+

Mr BARNETT - Wonderful men and women in the department delivering in so many respects.

Mr FLETCHER - So it's taking our whole-of-agency view for a moment. One of the challenges for our department is, roughly speaking, about half of the staff are in the field. We do include Parks and Biosecurity Tasmania and Agriculture. The staff who were actually able to work from home because they didn't have a field-based job, I best estimate is up to about 80 per cent of those staff worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic when it was at its height. That required an enormous effort to move technology. We had our staff literally picking up their computers and taking them home. We had to in a really express way set up an environment which would allow that to happen. A lot of those staff who worked in the field used home as their base and then went into the field rather than come into the office environment. One of the challenges for Land Tas as the minister has rightly pointed out is that it is still paper based. It's very hard to do home-based activity if you need to get access to a lot of those pieces of paper.

CHAIR - And big paper.

Mr FLETCHER - Yes, exactly. We have spent a lot of time and significant resource in scanning a lot of those records, but we also have a public-facing interface that we need to maintain. My staff across the department have done an extraordinary job of being flexible and working from home where they can. We then have slowly transitioned them back into the work place over the past three months. The other point I would make, too, at a broader level is that working from home has now become the norm for us, so our base line amount of staff who work from home or work more flexibly has increased and that's only a good thing for our department.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. I want to point out, it wasn't a criticism of staff. They were absolutely fabulous. It was just some times that I was getting a little frustrated when I couldn't get through.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much.

Mr DEAN - I was going to talk about the security that's built around LIST and all the databases. What are the available databases that are within LIST that LIST is working with. What is the security associated with that? You've got police as well involved in this; how do police access this? Are they required to do it through a certain particular office and provide certain reasons for wanting to access? How does this all work?

Mr BARNETT - I will pass to the secretary and to Stuart. The LIST is incredible. The amount of information available on the Land Information System Tasmania and my department normally at Agfest is out there and making available and of course we had to do it in the Cloud this past 12 months. They have this all explained to members of the public, if you want to see what's available on the LIST and how to use it. I encourage members of the public to come to Agfest to get on to LIST, check it out, see the amazing the amount of information which is publically available. Security is also important and the role of the police and the police checks and that sort of thing. I will ask, through the secretary, for Stuart to respond to that.

Mr DEAN - Also, can a lot of these programs can be simply accessed through our offices? How does it relate to a politician? What information should they provide in accessing all of this to ensure it's done as it should be done?

Mr BARNETT - There's a target of 2400 land-related datasets available. This was exceeded by 8 per cent in the last 12 months. There was a target of 2.35 million LIST website sessions which was exceeded by 6 per cent for that 12-month period. There's a lot of access by members of the public, but Stuart can provide more detail.

Mr FLETCHER - I can provide some detail in relation to your questions. I might go to your question about police in the first instance, which is a really good question because we're changing the way that we're providing access to the list to government agencies. Previously they would have had an account that sat within the LIST, but what we're migrating to is what's called an active directory federated service where police have their own use account similar to you would have in parliament, you'd have your own account. They sign in with that account so if, for instance, the police officer left the police force then their account would no longer be active on the LIST. That's the approach that we're moving to.

Education, we've already moved down that path; police, we're in the process of moving down that path. We're also doing work on the LIST that moves the control of the products and services which can be accessed from being managed within DPIPWE out to being managed within the police department, basically. So that's probably some of the key things we're doing in regard to security.

The number of databases that are accessed by the LIST - I couldn't answer that question exactly. It is significant - we not only hold data that's stored within our agency, so if you look at say, land titles information or some of the property or the mapping information, the heritage register, they're all held within agency databases and are accessed directly by our services. Then also available via the LIST are services that are exposed by other agencies, and they could

be web services exposed by the ABS, or they could be web services exposed by police. Their vehicle feeds, the fire vehicle feed, so there's security levels over those as to who can access those particular products as well.

Mr DEAN - Is it through this database that the police use to track their personnel? To track their vehicles as to where they are and what they're doing and so on? Is that through this?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass that to Stuart, that question.

Mr FLETCHER - My understanding and it could very well have changed from the last time I was made aware of this. For their vehicles they have a vehicle feed that goes into a private - I think it's a private provider that monitors where their vehicles are and they provide a feed that is directly linked to the list. There's security between that feed and the LIST so it couldn't be intercepted between.

Mr DEAN - Are you aware whether there's been an attempted breach of the protocols in relation to access of some of these more vital sites, security sites? Police in particular?

Mr BARNETT - In terms of police, that is very relevant to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management. He's available tomorrow. It's very directly relevant to him. I would like to mention the emergency services geographic information system is fantastic. I had a tour of the department six months or so ago thanks to the secretary and Stuart, and the information that they provide in terms of bushfires and emergency services and mapping and what's happening where, where the fires are going, where they are now, where they're going and the threats to the community, are really good. That information is incredibly important and there's a special section in the Land Tasmania LIST that deals with that. During those summer seasons in particular, they have direct contact with obviously police, fire and emergency services and the fire service. So, I just thought I'd mention that as well.

Mr DEAN - My question was to whether or not any of those breaches are known through the LIST, through the program, through the office of any inappropriate access within the police, I suppose, Telstra I think also?

Mr FLETCHER - Not that I'm aware of.

Mr DEAN - Not that I'm aware of, no. Thank you, Chair.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, we've established that your colleague, Nic Street, and your secretary are first cousins. I'm just interested in what the research and training purpose was for the secretary accessing Nic Street's property?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question.

Mr BAKER - I think I've already answered this question. I told you that of the 16 properties that I accessed over a five-year period, all of them were consistent with the acceptable use policy. I can confirm that at no time did I share any information relating to that property with anyone outside of the department. I can also confirm that the purpose of my access to that property was to answer a separate constituent concern. It is commonplace for DPIPWE staff to use known addresses to answer constituent questions and that's what I did.

Mr WILLIE - Through you, minister. You accessed Nic Street's property for a separate constituent concern.

Mr BAKER - Correct.

Mr WILLIE - Right. Through you, minister. You said that it was reviewed by your deputy.

Mr BAKER - No, that's not what said. Sorry, through you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - I'll answer the question. You asked the question and I'll attempt to answer it and I'll pass it to the secretary.

Mr WILLIE - I'm trying to recall what was said, but there was some sort of review or investigation into this. What were the findings of that?

Mr BARNETT - All right. Let's be very clear, the advice that I've received that the use was within and consistent with the department's acceptable use of ICT resources policy. It was reasonable and appropriate use, included use that is, for example, lawful, does not interfere with work or the work of other agency staff, is not a commercial activity or for personal financial gain, does not result in the agency incurring an inappropriate expense. So that's the advice I've received and clearly you appear to be continuing with these questions which appear to be somewhat political, so I'll just note that.

Mr WILLIE - It's a legitimate question, minister.

Mr BARNETT - This is the third or fourth question and the answer has been consistent in response. The secretary has provided that response that it's consistent with the department's acceptable use policy. I'll see if the secretary wanted to add to that.

CHAIR - I think the question is who reviewed that particular - is that the question, honourable member?

Mr WILLIE - What were the findings of that review?

Mr BAKER - The findings were that the use is consistent with the acceptable use policy of the department. That was confirmed - was the words I used - by the deputy secretary and the general manager of Land Tas who is responsible for the day to day operations of the system.

CHAIR - Does that tell us who reviewed?

Mr BAKER - As I said, it was the deputy secretary and the general manager.

CHAIR - Thank you. That's all we needed to know. The member for Windermere has a question in regard to consultants.

Mr DEAN - What consultants have been used through the financial year just gone? What were the reasons if any were used and costs and work carried out. From consultants used, what came of any consultant's advice which we may have had in their reports? What changes might have occurred and what's happening in that area?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question, of course, it's clearly an operational matter. Are you talking specifically about Land Titles Office?

Mr DEAN - Land Titles Office, that's on this line item.

Mr BARNETT - On this line item, no problem.

Mr DEAN - This line item, not across the department at this stage.

Mr BARNETT - It's not across the department.

Mr DEAN - That will come.

Mr BARNETT - Through you, Chair, I'll pass to the secretary.

Mr BAKER - I'm happy to take that on notice, and confirm and come back to you. I'd also make the point that any consultancy over \$55 000 would be on the tenders website. I'll come back and just triple confirm because I don't want to misled the committee.

CHAIR - The committee always asks for the quantum.

Mr DEAN - We do, and I'm not quite sure where we would ask that question on the consultancy within the department.

CHAIR - You could ask it now and we'll get it out of the way.

Mr DEAN - Thank you, Chair, I'll ask that now.

Mr BAKER - Again, I'll just probably take it -

CHAIR - On notice?

Mr BAKER - Yes.

Mr DEAN - The number of consultants across the department and the value and what they were used for and what we got from those consultants' report that might come in.

CHAIR - There also may be an indication if they are within Tasmania or outside. We're always interested.

Mr BARNETT - I think the secretary's indicated we'd like to take that on notice, but I'll pass to the secretary to respond.

Mr BAKER - You are right, Mr Dean, you do always ask this question and I always give the same answer. I'll just provide you with the list.

Mr DEAN - Sure.

CHAIR - With all due respect, given that we do always ask it, it would be probably prudent to have it ready for next year, which is not far away.

Mr BAKER - It's a very long list.

CHAIR - I know, but it's not far away when you think about. You'll finish this process and possibly go on a short break, and then straight into preparing for a new budget.

Mr BARNETT - You mentioned, Chair, about the locals. As a government, we are very buy-local in policy. We have a strong buy-local policy across government, across our GBEs. I want to put that on the record. You're aware of that policy, so we're very strong.

Ms ARMITAGE - In most areas, minister, I have been asking one on the notice paper for a while. I won't go into it, but it was a Queensland firm. It wasn't your area.

CHAIR - It was in Health, so we were -

Mr BARNETT - In health, was it?

CHAIR - We'll I hope it's asked in another place today.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much.

CHAIR - Minister, my question for the whole of the department.

Mr BARNETT - Apologies, Chair. The secretary's indicated a possible answer on one of those questions.

Mr BAKER - For the period 1 July 2019 to 30 July 2020, 50 contracts greater than \$50 000 were awarded in the department, and 88 per cent of these contracts were awarded to Tasmanian businesses with a community value of \$35 million. During the period, the department awarded five consultancy contracts greater than \$50 000. For these all contracts were all awarded to Tasmanian businesses. I can keep going, but as always, I can provide you with the list.

CHAIR - I was going to say, he would be happy with tabling of the list obviously at your discretion, minister, you'll look at it and make a decision whether the committee is to receive it as it is, or whether it's to be re-looked at.

Mr DEAN - Chair, if we could specifically be told information about the value of those consultants' reports as to whether or not anything's been enacted or anything's likely to be enacted arising from those reports. We had so many of them, then really nothing occurs.

Mr BARNETT - We will take that on notice. Thank you.

CHAIR - My question for the entire department is, what are the staff leave liabilities? COVID-19 has presented some significant challenges which we heard about at an earlier time that staff employees have had to cancel leave, be available for work and others who may not want to take leave if they can't go anywhere, minister. What are the staff leave liabilities for your department?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. I'll pass to my secretary, Tim Baker.

Mr BAKER - Some general comments about leave in the department over the COVID-19 period, I don't have that in front of me in specific numbers. I'm happy to come back and we can split that up by division as well. If you would like, we usually do that.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BAKER - I would make the first point that I have been amazed at the resilience of my staff in the department.

CHAIR - Not questioning that at all.

Mr BAKER - The most recent numbers I saw were that there hasn't been a large spike in sick leave taken.

CHAIR - No, this is leave liability.

Mr BAKER - The other point I make about leave is that because we've been in a crisis, our COVID-19 response, a lot of our staff wouldn't have taken leave because they've been working on the frontline.

CHAIR - Exactly.

Mr BAKER - There will be a slight increase.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'm happy to take that on notice.

Mr BAKER - One last thing -

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair. Just the secretary again.

Mr BAKER - I can also confirm for Mr Dean that Land Tasmania, believe it or not, has zero consultants in this coming -

Mr BARNETT - In that line. Thanks very much, Chair.

CHAIR - Obviously Stuart does all the consulting.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. He's a very effective member of the public service.

CHAIR - Thank you. If there are no further questions, we'll move now to 1.2, which is Valuation services.

1.2 Valuation services -

Mr BARNETT - Chair, is it all right if we bring the Valuer-General, Tim Grant to the table?

CHAIR - Absolutely. Welcome.

Ms ARMITAGE - We like the Valuer-General.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'm aware of that. He's had a few goes with the -

CHAIR - I think he's had a few terse emails of late. I'm not sure that everybody in Tasmania likes you at the moment, Tim, but we'll work through that.

Mr BARNETT - That's all right. I formally welcome Tim Grant.

Ms ARMITAGE - I don't think it's the Valuer-General's fault for the land tax.

CHAIR - No. It's the policy.

Ms ARMITAGE - It is. It's not reviewing that \$25 000.

CHAIR - We won't be asking the Valuer-General about the policy.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, we won't. It's not the right area.

Mr GRANT - You can still ask.

Ms ARMITAGE - No. I've asked questions already on notice.

CHAIR - First of all, we might as well kick off with the elephant in the room then, and obviously it is a policy decision. Minister, I amongst many other elected members possibly including yourself have received some correspondence over the past few weeks since the recent land valuation or valuation land tax demands have come out, and I'm interested in your position in regard to this. It's a government policy and you probably thrashed it out around the party table, but it is presenting some challenges to the Tasmanian community because of the significant increase and the way that land tax is assessed in this state.

What is your view, and what might we be able to present to the Tasmanian community to give them some confidence that (a), it might be looked at in the future, and (b), that there are ways which they can address this and not be put in financial hardship?

Ms ARMITAGE - You haven't read the media this week from previous estimates about land tax?

CHAIR - I've been reading a lot of other budget papers. I haven't got time to read every bit of media.

Ms ARMITAGE - It's not being addressed.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to respond on what is an important matter. Of course, our budget is all about creating jobs, building confidence. It's all about supporting our community. Land tax delivers \$124 million in that 2019-20 year. It's based on land value determined by the Valuer-General, who's sitting on my right every six years, as I think you're aware. There's an adjustment factor determined by the Valuer-General.

It's applied to the values each year, and I wanted to make it very clear the rates of land tax have not increased since 2010, so in fact before our government, 2014 right back to 2010 under the previous government, so no rate increases.

If people are having difficulty paying their land tax, they can apply to the Commissioner for State Revenue to defer that lump sum payment or to seek some support in terms of the payment of those instalments, and that's a general overview. I realise it has been in the public arena. Comments have been made publically in the parliament and outside the parliament, and we take on board those comments, but it is important to ensure that that land tax is available each year to assist in providing health and education, roads, and land tax is part of that. To make it very clear, rates of land tax have not increased since 2010.

CHAIR - The value of land, the increase, obviously.

Ms ARMITAGE - Can I follow up on that one before you go to something else.

CHAIR - Yes, by all means, before I go to something else.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes. I have asked questions specifically about this, and the query that I have. I know I have spoken to Mr Ferrall as well, and I appreciate that it's an easy tax to collect, and it's not likely to go, so I'm not going to go there. But the threshold of \$25 000, this is the question that I'm looking at. That's been static for, I think, since 2010, whereas many states have much higher thresholds. They're in the hundreds of thousands of dollars before they actually pay land tax. I'm wondering if that's something that the government could look at. They're not going to get rid of land tax, and it may not properly come quite under you. It's worth mentioning the fact that it is a \$25 000 threshold that's been there for an awfully long time. In WA it's probably about \$450 000 before you pay land tax.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks for the question. Of course, that's a very important question particularly for the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have asked these questions, but I thought as we're on land tax, it would be remiss not to.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I realise you're asking me as Minister for Primary Industries and Water responsible for -

CHAIR - With the line item of valuation service.

Mr BARNETT - Of course.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - And the valuation services are very important. That's why the Valuer-General is sitting on my right, and we can talk in further detail. Certainly, strong support for that government policy position which I've outlined. You are correct, no land tax is payable up to \$25 000 figure, or \$24 999 to be exact.

Ms ARMITAGE - Minister, do you believe that we'd have any land in Tasmania valued at that amount?

Mr BARNETT - Less than \$25 000?

Ms ARMITAGE - Less than \$25 000 that would be possibly subject to non-payment.

Mr BARNETT - I'm not aware, I guess it's possible.

Ms ARMITAGE - Unlikely.

Mr BARNETT - There would be very few parcels of land at less than that value, but there may be some and I'd imagine there would be some. But you would imagine it's a very small number.

Ms ARMITAGE - It would be a very minimal size.

Mr BARNETT - But as I say, there's been no increase in the tax since 2010. The value of land as the Chair has noted has increased over time and this assessment is made on a regular basis by the Valuer-General. That report comes back to the government and then the government responds accordingly. I think the Treasurer/Premier has made the position clear, likewise the Minister for Finance. I can assist in other ways if that could assist the committee.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

CHAIR - Can I take the minister to table 10.3 of the Performance Information, Output Group 1 on page 265 of your budget paper.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's the extra set that you've got there. They're not ring-bound, the extra set.

CHAIR - Yes. Every member of parliament is provided with a ring-bound set at my request some 12 years ago, I think. It was my request. I'm left-handed; I couldn't write in them.

Mr WILLIE - So fire away, Chair, with your question.

CHAIR - I'm looking at the objections resulting in an amended valuation, and it gives me a percentage which is only 0.26.

Mr BARNETT - That's right.

CHAIR - Obviously there is a significant number of valuations done, and I know that it's on a cycle. What the actual quantum is, not necessarily the percentage. When I don't know what the quantum is I can't really extrapolate it out as a percentage.

Mr BARNETT - You've asked quite a specific question. On page 265, the 0.26 per cent objection resulting in an amended valuation. I know the Valuer-General will be all over this. The Valuer-General is responsible for that area, and there are performance triggers.

Mr GRANT - In respect to the objection rate, in our fresh valuation contracts the contractors are required to have less than 2 per cent objection rate resulting in amendment to the valuation.

CHAIR - Yes, that's the target?

Mr GRANT - Yes, the target. The figure of 0.26 per cent shows a very low amount. I don't have that information available at this point, but I can make that available to you.

Mr BAKER - It turns out I do.

Mr BARNETT - So through you, Chair, we'll pass to the secretary.

CHAIR - That's why Mr Baker is the secretary.

Mr BARNETT - We've got a great team here, Valuer-General and the secretary.

CHAIR - Team Tasmania.

Mr BARNETT - Team Tasmania at work.

Mr BAKER - The number is 43.

CHAIR - Forty-three out of how many? How many people applied? It says this is objections resulting in an amended valuation, not everyone gets their wish if they put an objection in.

Mr FLETCHER - It was actually 43 objections in 2019-20.

CHAIR - And how many were successful in having an amendment?

Mr FLETCHER - Without me having a calculator in my head, 0.26 per cent of 43.

Ms ARMITAGE - It's not many.

Mr BARNETT - It sounds like a very low number, Chair.

CHAIR - Minister, in previous times Valuations Services have been quite a unique area of expertise and we have often had to have outside of Tasmania contractors to do this work. I know I've been critical, I think they probably sat in their office somewhere and put up a Google map and thought, 'Oh, yes, that looks about right.' But that may not be the case and I hope it wasn't. I'm interested in how we're going with those valuation services, and considering we have supplementary valuation services, are they also sourced from outside the state or within?

Mr BARNETT - You've raised a good question and it's something that I've raised with the department on a number of occasions. I'll pass to the department, but it's of course wherever possible we try to access those services in Tasmania. Obviously, some of those services are specialised services so I will pass to the Valuer-General to respond in more detail.

Mr GRANT - Chair, in respect to the fresh valuation tenders that my office calls for the provision of values to councils, yes, there are a number of contractors and we've just tendered again. There have been no directly Tasmanian firms that have applied. The firms that have applied, a number do have Tasmanian employees working in the state and living in the state, but they're mainland-based companies in most cases. In respect of your second question, which

was about supplementary valuations, the supplementary valuations this year, we completed 16 669, undertaken by staff within my office. They're all undertaken by Tasmanian-based staff working in the three offices, Hobart, Launceston and Devonport, working out of those offices.

CHAIR - There's no requirement for field visits? Were they able to be all done off a desktop?

Mr GRANT - The requirement for the supplementary valuations is that they are undertaken as a field-based review of the property, yes. In respect to fresh valuations, the requirement in the tender process is that residential valuations are completed by a minimum of a drive by, so they have to be on the ground. The other properties which is the commercial, industrial, rural properties, the requirement is that those properties are inspected and discussions held where possible with the owners to assess a valuation or to assist with the process. The residential properties which is the largest part of the rating base, or the valuation base, undertaken as a minimum of a drive by.

CHAIR - Not a bad job, driving around the streets of Tasmania, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's a minimum, of course. I'm sure that they from time to time get out and have a look around.

CHAIR - I hope they get out occasionally.

Mr BARNETT - I'm sure they do like the very wise professional valuers that they would be.

Ms ARMITAGE - It is disappointing that valuations are done on how good your house looks. Of course, the people who look after their houses are in some ways are penalised with a higher valuation and higher rates. But my question is with regard to a follow on from the Chair's question to do with Valuation Services and the fact that no Tasmanian firms had tendered. Does the department question why no Tasmanian firms tendered and contact them and ask? It would be interesting to know why they didn't tender.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you very much for the question, that's a similar sort of question that the minister put to the department. I'll let the department respond to that question which is a very good one. At all times we want to employ Tasmanians or people who are based in Tasmania or people living in Tasmania who provide those services in Tasmania. It's consistent with the buy local policy the government has. We want Tasmanians involved, build that capacity, get Tasmanians into those jobs wherever possible. Of course, from time to time that's not possible. I'll pass to the Valuer-General.

Ms ARMITAGE - Before you do, a further question. Saying that Tasmanian staff of those businesses who live in Tasmania, the question is too - and I know with engineering firms, the people may be in Tasmania, but they're actually not Tasmanian. They might be Victorian or from other states living in Tasmania for a period of time doing the work. Whether there are actually Tasmanians employed by a mainland firm, or whether they're people from the mainland, fly-in, fly-out who are living here for a period of time. There is a difference.

Mr BARNETT - There is a difference. I'll pass to the Valuer-General. My point is that they might be mainland firms but they might have a base here or offices here or people here.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, I accept that. I've just had this issue with engineering, with a different area, that they're not necessarily Tasmanians.

Mr BARNETT - Okay. For sure.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. Valuer-General.

Mr GRANT - We were due to go to a fresh valuation this current year. We did call tenders for that process. Tenders were in the process of being awarded, and then we decided to cancel those. Well, not to award the tenders because of the impact of COVID-19. In that round of tenders, there was one Tasmanian firm which put a tender forward, and no contracts were rewarded. There was no feedback to those people. We've just readvertised and tenders closed last week. Unfortunately, no Tasmanian firms applied this time. In response to your question - your understanding on why they haven't - not doing that -

Ms ARMITAGE - Will you seek feedback from them? Yes.

Mr GRANT - Most of the Tasmanian firms are fully occupied with their private work. The other issue we have at this point in time is that we call tenders every second year. If there was a Tasmanian firm set up to do this sort of work, they'd only have work every second year - every two years. They're fully occupied in their work at the moment. We're still in the tender process with the current one tenderer. I will discuss it with the firm which did tender last year and not again this year, whether there's any reason why they didn't do that. In respect to one tendering firm, there is a Tasmanian valuer working in Tasmania who lives in Tasmania who does work for that firm.

Ms ARMITAGE - Who knows the Tasmanian landscape.

Mr GRANT - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - We all know the issue to that from several years ago.

Mr GRANT - That's correct, yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - One further on the tender, can you give me an indication of the actual cost? Obviously, it's difficult when it's out to tender again, but the tenders came in last year, so what's the general cost of the valuations?

Mr GRANT - The general cost, if we can do it on a per valuation basis, it does depend on the makeup of the municipality, comparing something like Kingborough to something like West Coast. The average cost is between \$10 and \$23 or \$24 of valuation. To return to my office, the completed valuation role for each of those municipalities - some of those municipalities are only quite small, and some involve a considerable amount of travel to get to those properties, so the cost is a bit higher in those ones.

Ms ARMITAGE - But the overall cost for the state would be -

Mr GRANT - In the region of -

CHAIR - A lot of money.

Ms ARMITAGE - A lot of money, yes.

Mr GRANT - Well, the overall cost - I mean, the councils -

Ms ARMITAGE - Hence why it's every two years.

Mr GRANT - Yes, that's right. It's about \$3 million total for the revaluation cycle every two years, and that cost is then met by councils, and that pay the tender price. The quality assurance of that process is run by my office.

Ms ARMITAGE - So you facilitate.

Mr GRANT - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, minister.

Mr WILLIE - I just want to go back to the land tax issue if that's all right. The bill shock is real, and not everyone who has to pay land tax is necessarily a wealthy person. Was any consideration given to smoothing out the valuation process so that we don't see these huge hikes.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question, Mr Willie. To make it very clear that the land tax rates haven't changed since 2010. Of course, there was a Labor-Greens government for four years and it was during that four years that Mr O'Byrne wanted to remove the concession for shack owners.

Mr WILLIE - Chair, this is not related to my question. My question was related to the valuation process.

Ms ARMITAGE - He really is working to get rid of it.

Mr BARNETT - If I can make it very clear, shack owners would have been dealt with thousands of dollars more.

CHAIR - We only need one - and the minister did talk about political questions earlier.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

CHAIR - So I'd like to remind everyone at the table that we ask a question. We provide an answer, and we don't get political about it. It's a genuine question and we need a genuine answer. That's it.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. The genuine answer is highlighting the consistency from 2010 through to now that the land tax rates have not increased. The only changes that were mooted or proposed or changed were those under the Labor government where they wanted to remove the previous concession for shack owners.

Mr WILLIE - My question was about the valuation process, not the land tax.

Mr BARNETT - It was deemed a shack tax, and we opposed it, and then were elected to government. There is no shack tax.

Ms ARMITAGE - You were going to get rid of land tax, with respect, if I recall.

CHAIR - So the question from the honourable member is around government's intention to smooth out the valuation, to take the shock of the increases out. That was the question.

Mr BARNETT - I've indicated in my first response, and which the Valuer-General has confirmed there's been no increase since 2010. Those assessments are made every five years. There are adjustment processes which are put in place over that period of time. I will ask the Valuer-General to indicate how those adjustments occur over that period of time.

Mr GRANT - The fresh valuation process is undertaken once every six years. Every year, my office is required to assess adjustment factors that would apply to those valuations to bring them up to a current value as at the previous October levels. In assessing that, what we're looking at is all sales that have occurred in those areas to see the general increase in values in those properties. The adjustment factor is a very broad-brush approach because it applies a single factor for a particular type of land, so residential land in Clarence, for instance. We're looking at sales of all the properties in Clarence, and seeing what has happened in that period.

It's not an individual reassessment of each property, and while we can break that adjustment factor down to localities if a locality is moving at a faster or slower rate than the average rate -

Mr DEAN - Which happens.

Mr GRANT - Which does happen, yes. We do have areas which we have applied a separate rate to within municipalities. That's as far down as we can go. We don't go down to small localities, suburbs and that sort of thing. It's based on the locality basis. But yes, there -

Mr WILLIE - Would it be much of a resource impost to get down to a finer level?

Mr GRANT - It would be, because it becomes almost a revaluation every year, as such, to get down to that level. I have been getting considerable amount of feedback from taxpayers, and as an example we were looking at a waterfront locality down in South Arm. Part of the waterfront properties hasn't been so much an increase, but directed behind that, the rear blocks in the same locality have been showing an increase. Applying a factor even to that very small locality has to take into account waterfront and rear land. It's not broken down to the level which is causing the issues in some respects. We are getting feedback from those waterfront areas. There have been substantial increases in values in those areas, but it's not a fresh valuation of each property. It has to be a broad-brush approach on that locality, is what we're looking at. It's not an easy exercise, and we do a considerable amount of sales analysis to confirm that is happening in that market to assess those values anyway.

Mr WILLIE - So it's not an easy consideration just to move that process out.

Mr GRANT - It's not at all, no, and other states do it a different way by having a more regular, full revaluation cycle, which comes at a cost. So Victoria currently has an annual

revaluation cycle, so every property is revalued every year. Other states are on two- or three-year cycles.

Mr WILLIE - Which would stop the bill shock.

Mr GRANT - The purpose of providing the adjustment factor process prior to that - before that came in, there was a revaluation one - and every six years, there was a complete bill shock, a jump in that six-year period. The adjustment factor program is trying to assess whether there's been a steady increase or decrease. We have examples of decrease as well. Where there's been some increase, there will be a steady increase in those values rather than a shock from 2010 to 2016 levels. It's not a revaluation of each property, and it's a broad-brush approach showing a general increase in that locality or that municipality for that class of property: residential, commercial, industrial, rural. We do break it beyond that so it's - we're comparing all the residential sales to come up with a factor for Clarence, for instance anyway, as it was last year.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for that response. Mr Dean, you have a final question.

Mr DEAN - My first question related to this issue, and it could come under the COVID-19 thing, but whilst the Valuer-General is here, I was going to ask you, minister, and that is that the issue with the land valuation increases. The complaints that I am getting are from landlords, saying that the very intention - their position is because it's the tenant that always pays this in those properties, they're not in a position to pass that onto the tenants because of where we are with COVID-19 and so on. So has any allowances been made for that in relation to these land value increases?

Mr BARNETT - That's best answered by the Valuer-General. The whole purpose of these adjustment factors is to spread that increase over the period of time and based on the valuations of the previous five years. It's quite a complex matter. I will ask the Valuer-General to respond.

Mr GRANT - The office undertakes the adjustment factors in March of every year, and we undertook the assessment to look at the factor to be gazetted for this current year. So in March we undertake a full - well, that's when we actually gazette it. Up until that point. Effectively, we're looking at sales up until about October last year. So that pre-dates any impact of COVID-19, so we cannot consider the impact of COVID-19 beyond October. The act is quite clear that I have to have regard to the general level of values which applies at the previous October. Therefore, when it becomes March next year when I issue next year's adjustment factors, we'll be looking at all the sales up until October this year which will take into account the impact of COVID-19 on properties and see what impact it's having on those on rentals as well as land values as well.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for that answer.

Mr BARNETT - Just related to that, to assist Mr Dean, in regard to housing tenants in Tasmanian government housing, the rent relief available - just to make it clear, the government has not increased the rent during this difficult time for those housing tenants. There're some 12 500 households across Tasmania and social housing with more money in their hands as a result, and that's the cost to the budget of rent relief of some \$6.7 million that benefits those 12 500 Tasmanians.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for that. The municipal valuations that are taking place this year, is it, or whenever the next lot to take place? Last Estimates you were looking at about six or seven municipal revaluations. Who's on the list to be done next? Are we right up with that or are we behind, minister? Sometimes we get a bit behind, and we're going back to my time as mayor and so on when we used to have some issues here with some of these municipal valuations being extended for periods and there being a sharp increase. Are we keeping up with them and who's now on the list to be revalued?

Mr BARNETT - A fair question. It's next year when that will take place in 2021. The Valuer-General might outline that process. It was issued for fresh valuations for Central Highlands, Davenport, Hobart, Huon Valley, Kentish, Kingborough, Latrobe, Southern Midlands, West Coast and West Tamar. I'll pass to the Valuer-General for next year.

Mr GRANT - Thank you, Mr Dean. The six-year cycle would have resulted in those municipalities being done that year which would have been released next year. That tender process was stopped due to COVID-19. The reasons were that getting contractors into the state at the time was an unknown and what impact on values COVID-19 was going to have was an unknown at that point. It was chosen not to award those tenders. They have just been re-advertised and that will result in a seven-year cycle for those municipalities. Those municipalities will be due to have their valuations started next year. They won't be issued until about May 2022.

As you may be aware, West Tamar was a municipality which the contractor failed in that one on the six-year cycle. They were put back to that current cycle, so that made them eight years. Now unfortunately it'll be a nine-year cycle for that municipality because of the delay due to COVID-19. That is a concern, but we had no other way of doing that at that time anyway.

Mr DEAN - Yes. The next municipal area on the list after the ones we've just identified were identified in last year's Estimates as well, will they now blow out by another year or two years? This is going to be a critical period where land valuations have gone up quite steeply, where we will likely see that sharp increase, so, the further it is extended, then the fewer complaints we would have if -

Mr GRANT - The normal round of revaluations would result in the other next round being done the following year. I'm going to have discussions with councils and local government authority and to LGAT as well because it will cause concerns to the office and how we run that. It may be required that those municipalities go out to a seven year - the statutory allowance is once every seven; we have been doing it once every six, but given the proximity of the last revaluation, just being, to that time. I will have those discussions with councils about extending those cycles for one year to get them back into line with the other ones.

Mr DEAN - And who's on that list?

Mr GRANT - For that we'd be getting back to Break O'Day again. Sorry. No. Derwent Valley, Dorsett, Flinders, Glamorgan-Spring Bay, Glenorchy, King Island, Launceston, Sorell, Tasman, Waratah-Wynyard. On the current cycle they'd be due to be issued in 2023, but we were looking at pushing for 2024.

Mr DEAN - So the cycle is that you do so many councils, over 29, every six years.

Mr GRANT - Correct. If I can. Every two years we're valuing a third of the state effectively. So that's the cycle we're going through.

Mr DEAN - Thank you.

CHAIR - Cycles work well in the Legislative Council, the member might note.

Mr DEAN - True.

Mr BARNETT - Chair, we have the answer to your question on annual leave if you'd like that now or later.

CHAIR - Leave liability. Fine. Thank you.

Mr BAKER - Page 143 of our annual report this year indicates that annual leave has gone up \$1.1 million and long service leave has gone up \$1.3 million, but that is over around a \$30 million total liability which, I must say, given the year we've had, isn't a bad result.

CHAIR - Much appreciated. One to take off our list, so thank you. Minister, I invite you to move to Agrigrowth Tasmania. I thank the Valuer-General, Tim, for his time today and let you get back to the office and do whatever you need to do.

Output Group 2 - Primary Industries

CHAIR - Who are we going to have joining us? Stuart, you're leaving us as well. Thank you. We're just doing a chair rotation, Deidre, to comply with COVID-19. You can either sit on the left or the right of the minister.

Mr BARNETT - So I pass on a hearty welcome to Deidre Wilson, as I've indicated, our deputy secretary in the Agrigrowth section, and supported, of course, and joined by myself and our secretary.

CHAIR - We'll join you with that hearty welcome.

Mr BARNETT - Well, I'm not surprised. It's a hearty welcome all around.

CHAIR - Okay. Thank you very much. Agrigrowth. Thank you very much for the glossy, minister. There are some key facts there and you did indicate the Farmgate value of \$1.9 billion, up 7 per cent. Agrifood, gross value \$2.92 billion. You also talked about record overseas food product exports of \$768 million, up 4 per cent. Let's talk about some of those numbers. You're absolutely certain that you're on target for the 2050 \$10 billion aspiration?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I am certain of it, Chair. Not only certain of it, I'm excited about it together with the stakeholders in the agriculture and, of course, as fishing and aquaculture. It is a very important part of our economy, it's a cornerstone. It's more important as a sector of our economy than in other states and territories. We produce four and a half times more than what we consume when it comes to agriculture. It's a world class premium product. We're backing it in, obviously, with our funding support across the board, so not just water which is now some \$85 million up from \$70 million to fast track the water irrigation projects.

In particular I note the significant success of dairy, beef, lamb and mutton and other livestock industries. Dairy is \$458 million; beef, \$334 million; lamb and mutton, \$139 million and other livestock \$65 million. We've had good spring rains and it's looking good at the moment. But, of course, this is for the 2018-19 year. In terms of vegetables, they are doing well and our cherries, berries and other fruit is definitely on the up. You would have seen the polytunnels out and about. Yes, there is heaps of them not just in the north and north-west, but all around the state. The cherries, berries, blueberries and blackberries in particular.

The cherries exported through to Asia are a big market; they get a premium price for that premium product. In addition to that, potatoes, wine grapes and field crops. There's been a significant increase in further planting of wine grapes. What that means is further growth in the years to come for our wine businesses, so it's not just a one-off. You will see further increases in production for our wine sector. You'll see further growth on the east coast in your patch, Chair, my patch as well. But also in the Tamar Valley, Derwent Valley.

We are rich with fertile soil, and I'll wrap up by saying there are four key ingredients to our success in my view. There is the fertile soil, the cool climate, the access to reliable water and, fourthly, our enterprising farmers and agri businesses, Chair. They are the four key ingredients that make me so proud to be their advocate and a minister in this Gutwein Liberal Government. We're delivering on that and you can see from the scorecard the 7 per cent increase says that we're on track to 10 billion by 2050. This will mean jobs in those rural and regional communities which are so important out there as a result of that success, and we continue to back it to the hilt.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. There are a number of questions and I won't take them all because other members will have some. How are we going to get that product off that land and into those markets? It's fair to say that without importing valuable labour into the state, it is going to be the biggest challenge we have faced as a state for many years. In my neck of the woods on a regular basis lots and lots of what we call 'the backpackers' who come in, they do the heavy lifting when it comes to being on the back of a potato harvester or the back of an onion dig up, picking fruit, doing all those jobs, milking dairy cows.

Unfortunately, not all the people that are not working see those jobs as one that they want to take up. I say that with the greatest respect as I have worked on the back of a harvester and I have milked cows. I've picked blueberries but for my own pleasure, not for selling them. They're not easy jobs. How are we going to get this fantastic product that we have right across these areas into market without those backpackers?

Mr BARNETT - You've asked an important question, Chair, and you're on the money. Our objective as a government, together with key stakeholders, is to get the fruit picked, to harvest the vegetables, to crush the grapes and get it to market. You've nailed it right there, and that's why we need the workers and the workforce to do the job. It's caused a lot of dislocation and challenges. I mentioned in my opening remarks about the roundtables working together, team Tasmania, and only last night I was talking to Fruit Growers' Tasmania Peter Cornish about this very issue that you've just asked me about.

To say that we're working together, we've delivered a \$1.9 million budget initiative released some months ago now to support the fruit industry, the farmers, the vegetable growers, the wine industry to get the workers into those jobs. Our top priority is Tasmanians. Tasmanians, Tasmanians, Tasmanians, into those jobs.

CHAIR - How are we going to do it though, how?

Mr BARNETT - I'll give you the heads up. We're doing the marketing, the advertising, the training. We've got the harvest trail website, some 40 000 views already on that. There's now an expectation that we're going to have double the number of Tasmanians in those jobs. So last year about 3000, this year an estimated 6000. This is good news. I thank Tasmanians for taking up the call. There's more to do; there are more jobs available. There are more jobs registered on the harvest trail website, please go there, check it out, register your name and apply for a job picking fruit, harvesting the vegetables, crushing the wine, getting it off to market. So far so good, we're working well but we're going to have to continue to work well. That \$1.9 million to support the industry to do the job. In addition we're getting a seasonal workforce from the mainland. You mentioned about the backpackers, these are seasonal workers who've been on the mainland.

CHAIR - But a lot of our backpackers are from overseas, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Correct, and a lot of our workforce in the past have been seasonal workforce from perhaps the Pacific or other nations, and it is part of our Pacific Labour Scheme.

CHAIR - European young people love to come to Tasmania.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, they do and they're not coming now in the same numbers because of COVID-19. That's why we've pivoted, using that word 'P' again. We've responded, worked with the industry and delivering to meet their needs to get the fruit picked and veggies harvested and off to market. So we've got the seasonal workers coming from the mainland. We've worked with my federal colleague, minister Littleproud, and the federal department. I've worked with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, it's been fantastic across government, working with the federal government - to get a seasonal workforce coming to Tassie.

In addition, we've signed up for the Pacific Labour Scheme. Tasmania is signed up into that and we're now able to access Pacific labour whether it be from East Timor, whether it be from Tonga or Vanuatu. They can come in as a special case as long as they're COVID-19 safe, under special conditions. Thank you to my department for the hard work. I know my colleagues here on the left, particularly the deputy secretary could comment on the importance of getting that labour to Tasmania. I know we all want the produce picked and off to market.

CHAIR - Minister, you talked about working with your federal counterparts and Mr Littleproud. That's fantastic. Obviously that's what you want as a state; you want to have that working relationship. Is there anything the federal government can do around making sure those people who are not working and are fit for work can take up some of these opportunities and whether it's a condition of their payments as a JobSeeker that they do? If there's positions in their areas it's difficult to work outside of where you live because some people don't have transport in those more outlying areas. Getting public transport let alone getting to the farm gate is very difficult. Is there anything that you've discussed with your federal counterpart about that arrangement where there is a requirement for people who are looking for work - JobSeekers - to take up positions that they might not necessarily think is their first choice? You don't always get your first choice in this life.

Mr BARNETT - There are a number of parts to that question. The first one, I'd just like to address the transport issue. Part of our \$1.9 million budget initiatives working with our stakeholders - fruit growers, TFGA, Wine Tasmania - is transport. We've got funding support in that, so we're finalising those details at the moment with those key stakeholders to get the workers that are in the cities whether it be Hobart, Launceston, Burnie, Devonport wherever the cities are to the market, to the harvest site.

CHAIR - Farm gate.

Mr BARNETT - Farm gate. That's progressing really well, so we've got funding support. We predicted this. We had our round tables. They said this will be a challenge, how do we get our workers out there? That's exactly what we've done. We pre-empted that. We're ahead of the game, and we've got that transport. So that's the first thing.

CHAIR - Okay, tick.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, give that a tick.

CHAIR - Tick.

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Mr BARNETT - That's nice to get a tick, Chair. You asked about the working holiday makers from overseas. A lot of those are at the university, so we're working with University of Tasmania, and we have a very cooperative arrangement with them promoting this opportunity for those many international students who happen still to be in Tasmania, to get them out to the marketplace, to the harvest sites. Whether it be the Derwent Valley, the Tamar Valley, wherever across the state. I know the deputy secretary's itching to provide more information.

CHAIR - And our federal counterpart?

Mr BARNETT - With respect to the federal counterparts, obviously that's a matter for the federal government. In the discussions we've had with them, they certainly are aware of the concerns which we have about providing incentives for people to get out -

CHAIR - That's the word, an incentive.

Mr BARNETT - We need incentives. We're providing those incentives as a state government with that advertising and marketing. You can actually earn good money picking fruit, harvesting the vegetables.

CHAIR - I know you can.

Mr BARNETT - You've done that.

CHAIR - But it does take hard work.

Mr BARNETT - It is hard work.

CHAIR - People need to understand that it is hard work, but there is good money.

Mr BARNETT - There is.

CHAIR - There is no such thing as not paying the appropriate wage in our state.

Mr BARNETT - Can I make it clear, those rates are known, there are awards, and you can make good money. I was born and raised on a farm, as you know, Hagley Farm School boy. I was the Barnett brothers bale carting service, not just to our family, but to other surrounding farms.

CHAIR - But you probably did that for free, if you don't mind, minister.

Mr BARNETT - No, I earned 3 cents a bale at the time, and it wasn't a lot of money, but as a little kid it was -

CHAIR - It probably paid for your first car though.

Mr BARNETT - It was something better than nothing, but it was good to be working there with my big brothers. I would like to pass to the secretary/deputy secretary as well on this important matter because they have done a fantastic job, my department on this, working with the stakeholders. I talked to the fruit growers last night. They are grateful for the support and help that we've provided. TFGA, the other key stakeholders, transport workers and the transport industry, all the key sectors, our federal colleagues as well. I just am very grateful. It's been a very difficult time, and these round tables have been so successful, Team Tasmania at work. We've been delivering. I will pass to the deputy secretary and the secretary if you'd like to comment.

Mr BAKER - I'd say this is the number one priority for the department in the agriculture space. We've been working day and night on this issue. I thought it might be useful, before I ask the deputy to speak, to provide some numbers for the committee if that might help to quantify the size of the issue we're dealing with and the challenge. Some indicative numbers about the number of workers required, noting that they're based on the survey we conducted with industry or that was conducted with industry. They don't take into account an increase or a decrease in overall productivity on farm it's hard to know if there's going to be more fruit or less to pick, or the productivity of the workers, which is something that you've indicated, so they are our best educated estimates.

If we take last year as a normal season, there were approximately 9000 seasonal workers in Tasmania, and about 3000 of those were local workforce. The remainder were made up of interstate, overseas, and student visa workers. So that's about 7000. What's important to remember, and the minister did touch on this, is we classify interstate workers as pickers who work down the coast. They may have come from anywhere - backpackers - and there is a sort of a picking trail which follows the weather down the Australian coast, starting in Queensland and coming down to Tasmania.

This year, what it's looking like is that assuming it's 9000 again, industry has set the target to double, so they'll have 6000 Tasmanian workers, which leaves us 3000 to be filled from interstate, on student visas and from the seasonal worker program and the Pacific Labour Scheme. Our best estimate from talking to industries, it's going to be around 700 to 1200 who are required from seasonal workers and the Pacific Labour Scheme. That's our best estimate, and we're confident. Industry know that it's going to be tight. We know it's going to be tight. The challenge has been set to get those workers in.

The other point I would make is that I've spoken to a lot personally to a lot of farmers over the last six months and in the last three or four weeks, and it is patchy. Some farms, their model is very different, and they have a set of workers that they're ready to go. It just depends very much on what they're growing, whether they're large or small. For the big growers, what they are starting to think about is how can they move their workers around the country as a whole. Tasmania's weather conditions and climate, the picking in some fruits is later in the year. So like cherries, they're able to move the workforce around. That's the quantum of the problem and what we're dealing with, it's a challenge. It's going to be tight. Industry and the department are working really closely together, more than we ever have before. I chaired a round table that the minister's spoken about because we understand the impact of making sure, as the Premier has said, every piece of fruit gets picked.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BAKER - Did I steal your thunder?

Ms WILSON - You did. Very well covered, I would say.

CHAIR - Okay. Anything to add?

Ms WILSON - I would only add that it is a multifaceted approach and we are also represented on national committees, the agricultural senior officials group, so when you talked about some of the challenges around workforce participation, we raise those issues nationally, and that's just about saying that collectively there's an issue across the country, and collectively we all need to be driving to support our primary industries.

CHAIR - All right.

Mr BAKER - Yes. That's a really good point.

CHAIR - Thank you. That was a very fulsome response to my possibly fulsome question. I got on my hobby horse a little bit. I want to wear one of those badges that you've got.

Mr BARNETT - Fair enough, Chair.

CHAIR - In regard to note 2 in the budget papers, the variation in AgriGrowth Tasmania reflects the funding for taking agriculture to the next level initiative, and the agriculture workforce resilience initiative, which is what we've talked about. Then it says a decrease in AgriGrowth in 2021 and subsequent years primarily reflects the progressive completion of these initiatives. If you're looking to take your government, and you as minister taking agriculture to the next level, and meeting that 2050 target of \$10 billion, why have you decreased the budget in subsequent years? We need every dollar we can get to get to that target.

Mr BARNETT - I can see where you're coming from, and let me clarify. The agricultural workforce resilience package is a one-off package of \$1.9 million over two years to address the COVID-19 pandemic concerns -

CHAIR - I understand that.

Mr BARNETT - which are before us. The package includes marketing and advertising effort for Tasmanians to be part of it. It includes transport to be part of it. It also includes Safe Farming Tasmania. It is extra resources to provide that support. We've got an extra support there to provide support for businesses, agri-businesses to operate in a COVID-safe environment. COVID's not going to click our fingers and disappear. We've got a two-year plan to progress through the coronavirus pandemic, and to ensure that we get the fruit picked, the veggies harvested, and the grapes crushed so that we can get it to market. That's the objective. It is very challenging, and it will remain challenging over the summer, particularly during that December to March period, which is the peak time for the harvest, particularly for those berries and the vegetables that are relevant. I will see if the -

CHAIR - But taking agriculture to the next level, which is in my view, and tell me if I'm wrong, that's the vision for the 2050 target of \$10 billion, is it not?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I will pass to the secretary. He's itching to respond. We have \$150 million commitment that we took to the election. We won the election and we're now rolling out that \$150 million commitment for agriculture and our primary industries.

CHAIR - And the scorecards looking good.

Mr BARNETT - And the score cards looking good.

CHAIR - But we're still a long way off \$10 billion.

Mr BARNETT - But we're on track, Madam Chair, and that's the good thing.

CHAIR - So why are we taking away that budget allocation?

Mr BARNETT - There's no taking away of the \$150 million commitment, that's locked -

CHAIR - The decrease in Agri-growth Tasmania -

Mr BARNETT - Okay, let's address that, the Chair's itching to respond.

Mr FLETCHER - Have I got promoted? The secretary -

Mr BARNETT - The secretary. I'm looking at -

CHAIR - I'm the Chair.

Mr BARNETT - I'm looking at the secretary.

Mr FLETCHER - Thank you, minister. What I would say is that these are the regular ons and offs. As programs come to an end, a new program's come on. I've got a long list of all of the things we're delivering. We will be back at the budget committee table asking for more money in agriculture when these programs come to an end. It's just the way the Treasury budget the program. If it's a four-year program; it comes to the end of the program. I'm sure the minister can tell you there is lots of work going on here and we'll be back asking for more money and more initiatives. It's literally the ons and offs as we roll out three of the programs.

CHAIR - So we're not taking our foot off the pedal when it comes to agri-growth in Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - The answer is no. The answer is that the foot is on the pedal. It will remain on the pedal. We've committed huge money in terms of the \$150 million, but particularly the bulk of that is for water and irrigation projects, Scottsdale being the most recent.

CHAIR - We will talk about that later. There's not much in the forward Estimate.

Mr BARNETT - There's a good amount and I'm expecting further funding support. If you quiz me on that, Madam Chair, I'll be delighted to respond and talk about our plans for liquid gold across the state to turbo charge our agriculture sector. It's been an honour working with our stakeholders. We are delivering and we will continue to deliver. We are on track for that target of \$10 billion by 2050. It's one of the most exciting and special opportunities for Tasmanians delivering jobs in those rural and regional areas.

CHAIR - Thank you. I can't take any more questions because it's not fair on other members of this committee. Ms Armitage?

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, Chair. Minister, thank you for the scorecard booklet, it's been very interesting. My question with regard to that, it's on page 27. What are we doing to safeguard our main exports to China? I noticed in the scorecard: honey exports, \$1.4 million with \$0.5 million going to Hong Kong; wool, \$21.6 million with \$17.3 million going to China; and hides and skins, \$3.8 million with \$3.7 million going to China. China has trade restrictions that are impacting on Australia. They may not be impacting on these areas at the moment, but aren't we doing something to safeguard and make sure that these areas don't join the other areas of lobster, sugar, wine, coal, barley, timber, copper ore, concentrate, some of the areas that China at the moment is restricting from Australia?

Mr BARNETT - It's a really good question and I can understand that. China is a very important export market for us. It's an important trading partner.

Ms ARMITAGE - In some of the areas, most of it is actually going to China -

Mr BARNETT - It's about a third of our exports in that regard.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - So say \$319 million for last financial year.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm looking at hides and skins, though, \$3.7 million or 3.8. I understand that the total, but in some of the areas, it's almost all their exports.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, you mentioned abalone and rock lobster, and it's over 80 per cent in that space. I think you've noted that, and I'm just giving you the global picture of nearly \$320 million -

Ms ARMITAGE - No, that's fine. It is of concern though, the trade restrictions.

CHAIR - That's right.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I would like to be able to share a response -

CHAIR - And I'm sure very concerning for the -

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'm with you, Chair, and I can understand where you're coming from. That's why we have a plan to ensure that we continue to build our markets with China.

CHAIR - Can you share that plan?

Ms ARMITAGE - What about elsewhere?

Mr BARNETT - That's if I could, Madam Chair. And we have, thanks to the deputy premier and our minister for trade, our trade strategy which is to build our market with China and ensure that those relationships are maintained, but also to build other markets across the globe. In terms of that Tasmanian trade strategy, there are five broader markets of engagement that the state government is pursuing through our Minister for Trade and through the department. We want to make sure we have the balanced approach so that we can get our exports to market and it's not all the eggs in one basket, as some might say. In terms of India and Japan, that's right, very important markets, America and North America and even into Europe.

Those initiatives are progressing and we need to maintain close engagement with our federal counterparts. I say a big thank you to our federal counterparts in this regard. Senator Jonno Duniam has helped us in the productive industries in terms of agriculture and seafood, which is his area of responsibility. Minister Litterprodt, Simon Birmingham, who's the minister for trade, so through the state government we have ongoing consultation with our federal colleagues. They have an important role to play in ensuring and building and maintaining good relationships with China, but also other countries as Mr Dean's indicated some of those very important other markets that we have in our sights to grow. That ensures there's diversification. There's opportunity to grow those export markets and I meet with my stakeholders and talk about these important matters, seek their views and feedback. So it's not just the seafood sector. You've mentioned timber and forestry as well. Mining and mineral processing is more than half of our exports.

Ms ARMITAGE - Wine?

Mr BARNETT - That's 6 per cent of our exports. And of our wine sales and so export is not that bigger impact, influence on the wine sector because most of it's domestic as in local or Melbourne Sydney mainland market. China is not a big market in our wine sector, but important to the wine sector. It's relatively not that significant.

CHAIR - High value, though.

Mr BARNETT - Most of the high value, I think you'll find is still in the domestic market, but it's because that proportion is quite low, relative to the other markets. Of course, it's all important and we don't dismiss that for one moment. We work closely with Wine Tasmania to ensure that we get good outcomes.

CHAIR - \$10 a glass for Milton Pinot Gris in Hobart town. Beautiful.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm just looking at some of the media here and this was early November, which is not that long ago, with China, that there were possibilities that some products weren't going to be cleared through Customs. It was rumoured at the time but it says with other industry groups, also on the edge about the reports, the trade minister, Simon Birmingham, declared on Wednesday that Australia expected its biggest trading partner to play by the rules. Obviously China is a big partner. My question really was whether the Tasmanian Government was having talks with China as opposed to - obviously the federal government is seriously involved. Jonno Duniam has always been very good with any issue that I know that I've had with constituents and I'm sure with trade. When you read the concerns with China, I'm concerned that while we might be looking at Japan and India and other areas, any new trade area takes some time to come on board. If we were to lose China as trade for some of these areas in our booklet, that were here, it could be a real blot on our market for some of our growers with nowhere to actually sell.

Mr BARNETT - You've raised some very important points in that question. There was a whole range of questions. The first thing is that we are working very positively and well with our federal colleague. You mentioned Senator Duniam and his strong support; Senator Birmingham, who has consistent interaction with Jeremy Rockliff; and, as a former senator, I know many of these colleagues at the federal level. They are working well with us and doing everything we can to maintain and build our relationship with not just China but other markets to build those other markets. We do have an interim trade action plan thanks to Jeremy Rockliff. I was at the launch many months ago in Launceston that the silos there and -

CHAIR - I don't think I was invited.

Ms ARMITAGE - Or me.

Mr BARNETT - Okay. Well, we'll note -

Ms ARMITAGE - So please don't touch on those ones we don't get invited to.

Mr BARNETT - We'll note that. It was a great event with key stakeholders there. I think it was only in the recent week or two that both Jeremy Rockliff and I met with Senator Duniam and we talked about the rock lobster industry. We met with the industry to talk about the challenges ahead. They are very professional. They do a great job. They look after their workforce in a professional and an appropriate way, and it is important that we maintain those standards. Whether it's the award conditions, whether it's having a COVID-safe environment, they've responded with the COVID-safe environment concerns. We've funded Safe Farming to help them respond to the COVID-safe environment. In terms of the accommodation, I hadn't seen it or had a personal inspection, but I want to be very clear that it must be done in a professional and proper way that meets all of our standards here in Tasmania.

Mr DEAN - I'm surprised because it's quite a big development. You can probably Google it. It is another big, new complex that's just built for accommodation towards the Port Arthur side of it. It's a big development.

Mr BARNETT - There's a lot happening in that space because of access to water in the south-east, stages one, two, and three. I know we come into that later, but you talked about Sorell in the south-east. It's being transformed as a result of access to water, access to growing

fruit and vegetables, and a big, new winery just south of Sorell. A huge winery being built there with a local - actually, Western Australia investor.

Mr DEAN - It's on the road into Dodges Ferry. You're right, it's a big development.

Mr BARNETT - And the same investor is building in and around Richmond. I did have a personal inspection of that winery that's being developed. It's fantastic.

Mr DEAN - That's an area that wouldn't have run a bandicoot for a week before the water came through. Now that the water's through -

Mr BARNETT - You're right. Spot on.

CHAIR - Final question in this area.

Mr DEAN - My next question is the berry farming. If we look at the Hillwood complex, and I think that that's probably one of the biggest in the state, which is in my electorate.

Mr BARNETT - The Dornaufs, yes. I've been there.

Mr DEAN - The Dornaufs. There's a massive growth area there. There's another fairly big complex developing at Orielson. You've talked about the berry market. Where is that going in the state?

Mr BARNETT - It's going up. It's going north, as in positively, significantly. If you look back 10 years, there was hardly a berry industry in Tasmania. I mean, we've grown so much. You'll see in terms of the score card: berries, \$115 million; cherries, \$63 million; other fruit, \$53 million.

Mr DEAN - Is there any area of produce that we're currently looking at that we're really not doing so well in at this present time in this state? What's the developing markets?

Mr BARNETT - I'm glad you asked that question, because we've got \$3 million in our budget for our agriculture innovation fund. We're working with the Tasmanian industry of agriculture, so that's something I know members around this table are interested in, and we can talk more about it. That's looking at innovation, looking at opportunities into the future. Our agriculture research farms - that's a very clear focus for them. There are a lot of opportunities. As I say, 10 years ago we didn't have much of a berry industry and now it's going gangbusters. It's providing jobs in those rural and regional areas. That's what we're all about as a government, creating those jobs.

Mr DEAN - That's what that funding is about. It's about -

Mr BARNETT - The three million?

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's an innovation fund.

Mr DEAN - Looking at what we can do.

Mr BARNETT - It's looking at research, development, extension, education. One of the recent examples is blueberries; to ensure that they are innovative and responding, and remaining free of pests and diseases.

CHAIR - We'll talk about the research stations and the capital funding when we get to capital investment.

Mr BARNETT - The actual figures on berries, just on that \$117 million: volume, 20 per cent increase; value, 21 per cent increase. So you can see we're going north big time. This is great news for Tassie.

Mr DEAN - Dornaufs have covered about - I don't know how many hectares they've covered, but if you drive through the Hillwood area there now, it's massive.

Mr BARNETT - It is, and Hillwood berries and the Dornauf family together. They were in the media the other day, and I've been talking to them regularly during COVID-19. Agriculture is a great career as well. It's not just for grabbing good money during the summer season. You can have a great career. And they're a supervisor in that place. Started off picking fruit, years later, and now they're in a very senior position in the business, and it's fantastic.

Mr DEAN - They started off in dairy too, I think.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. The Dornaufs are back into the Meander Valley, a dairy background. This is terrific.

Mr DEAN - My last question is on staff movements in this area. There was a move I think to get them all - well, not all, but a lot - into the north of the state where a lot of the agriculture is occurring. Where are we with the staff movements going into other areas within the state, and what -

CHAIR - As in the staff in the department -

Mr DEAN - In this department. No, well -

Mr BARNETT - In the department?

CHAIR - Is that what you -

Mr BARNETT - I'm happy to talk about that, yes.

Mr DEAN - I ask you to talk in this area as well and within the department. It's a good time to ask that question as well.

Mr BARNETT - Let me touch on the department in the time we've got. The fact is that we're on track. If you remember our policy position promise to the election, 100 staff moving north, and I think the latest figure is 53, so we're on track. All that's progressing very well. I visit the northern offices and the north-west from time to time. Obviously it's an operational matter, so I'll pass to the secretary. As of 31 March 2020, 53 positions have been filled in the north under that northern recruitment policy. As a northern member, I'm sure you'd be pleased, but it's all part of our plan to ensure that our regions are supported. And why not have 100 of

our DPI close to the stakeholders, close to the industry, understanding their needs, responding to their concerns? It's working well.

Mr DEAN - Into what areas in the north have these people gone?

Mr BARNETT - Into Stoney Rise at Devonport, Prospect in Launceston, but I'll let the secretary respond in more detail if required.

Mr BAKER - I actually think you answered that one pretty well, minister. We're on track, and we have done some capital work at both sites to enable the growth, and that's happened, and we're just - we're on track.

Mr DEAN - To get to the hundred?

Mr BAKER - Yes.

CHAIR - Okay. We will suspend and we will return at 11.30. Please join us for a cup of tea, a break, stretch your legs, whatever you need to do. Go for a run. I won't be, but others might. We'll see you back at 11.30 a.m.

The Committee resumed at 11.31 a.m.

CHAIR - Welcome back, everyone. I will invite Lynne to recommence the broadcast.

Welcome back, minister, and I hope everyone had an opportunity to stretch their legs and grab a cuppa. I will indicate to everyone that for our suggested timetable, we're around 11 line items behind, so we're going to smarten up the questions and we're going to tighten up the answers, thank you.

2.2 Marine Resources.

Mr BARNETT - Chair, can we bring the relevant officers to the table?

CHAIR - Absolutely.

Mr BARNETT - Marine Resources, we have Deidre Wilson, and Ian Dutton on my right.

CHAIR - Thank you, Ian. Welcome.

Mr DUTTON - Thank you, Chair.

Mr BARNETT - And we have our aquaculture coordinator, Colin Shepherd, here as well, who's also on Ian's right.

CHAIR - Welcome, Colin.

Mr SHEPHERD - Thank you, Chair.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'll be quick with my questions. Minister, what effect has the coronavirus pandemic had on Tasmania's marine farming industry?

Mr BARNETT - It's had a big effect. That's why we responded so quickly at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. I put on the record my sincere thanks to the Premier, our state Treasurer, for his decisive leadership during this very difficult and challenging time.

We've implemented more than \$5 million of support to the aquaculture and seafood sector and that support's been well appreciated - it's actually \$5.5 million - and direct financial support for two stimulus packages announced by the Premier and me. We had licence fees for rock lobster, giant crab, finfish fishers and the abalone divers, and levies for shellfish growers have also been waived. So there's been a lot of support provided. Likewise for freight support into Asia and China - again, thanks to the federal government and Senator Jonno Duniam in particular.

Ms ARMITAGE - My second question: key performance indicators, and for aquaculture, KPI, the 2019-20 target was \$873 million with the 2021 target, \$990 million - a

significant lift to be aiming for from one year to the next. Can you give me the rationale behind this lift and how does the department expect to reach it?

Mr BARNETT - The industry has identified the salmon industry for sustainable growth. As a government we support their efforts to grow to \$2 billion by 2030. As you've indicated in and around \$800 million at the moment, we've got specific figures on that. I'm more than happy to pass to the secretary or the deputy secretary, or Ian Dutton, with respect to the specific figures but we're very pleased with the sector. It's been very difficult. We've had our round tables, during the COVID-19 pandemic, team Tasmania working together, and we've delivered - we've had support from the federal government for which we're grateful. A lot of those the seafood exports go into the Asian market and specifically China. In terms of salmon, the main market is our domestic market - Melbourne, Sydney and across the country. I encourage all Tasmanians to eat more seafood and specifically Tasmanian seafood wherever possible.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have a bit of a different question here and I'm assuming that either you or the secretary can answer it. Back in October 2020 it was in the media that a Tasmanian government department gave aquaculture giant, Tassal, a permit to keep up to 20 trapped seals in empty salmon pens. At the same time, the department was investigating allegations that the company broke the law by doing exactly that. What actually happened with that? What was the outcome of that?

Mr BARNETT - It's an important question.

Ms ARMITAGE - It's an interesting anomaly there, yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I'm making sure that we've got that interaction. The first thing I'd want to say -

Ms ARMITAGE - I don't want names or anything like that.

Mr BARNETT - No. As a government - just to make it very clear - we have a seal management framework. It is in place. It started in 2018. There are minimum requirements under that framework that apply. There is interaction between fur seals and marine farms on a regular basis. You can understand that and we can understand why. I want to make it very clear -

Ms ARMITAGE - We've been down there and we've seen it.

Mr BARNETT - I know. The Legislative Council has been there on the west coast, I think. You were at Macquarie Harbour and elsewhere, I understand -

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, Macquarie Harbour.

Mr BARNETT - which is excellent. You will see that as a result of those fur seals, there's risk to human safety and that's an issue. There's a risk to industry operations and you have the issue of the welfare of those seals. As the minister responsible for animal welfare, we take that very seriously.

Ms ARMITAGE - If you could add, about my next part, you might as well add it into the same answer. How will the natural disruptions to marine activity such as this be managed humanely in the future? Perhaps that could be included in the answer to save time, Chair?

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's right. To save time I'd just confirm that we have a seal management framework, which started in 2018. We have ongoing work between my department and the industry representatives, the key stakeholders, particularly the three major salmon companies. They meet on a regular basis to discuss the implementation of the seal management framework. I pass to the secretary to respond in more detail on that and also the first part of your question.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

Mr FLETCHER - In relation to the first part of your question, the department was informed of the issue you're talking about in 2016. We undertook a comprehensive investigation into the matter consistent with the standards that we use for investigating potential. I say 'potential' breaches of compliance. The brief was provided to the Director of Public Prosecutions, and based on his advice, no charges were laid. So at the same time, so we did issue a special permit. What's important to recognise though, is the two were completely separate. So one is an issue to do with the potential breach of compliance breach and the other was a request for a permit. We can't stop issuing permits while we're conducting investigations and I've answered many questions before here about the length of time it takes for these compliance investigations, but we do it in a measured and controlled way. At the end of the day the permit was assessed on its merits and the compliance activity was undertaken on its merits.

It is also worth me saying though that in relation to the matter, Tassal has been the company involved and they have been in the public domain on this. They've been very clear publically that no seals were harmed in holding them, prior to the relocation. It was done at the time as part of the relocation of seals, which is an activity that we no longer undertake and is no longer a part of the seal management framework that the minister has just talked about.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. I do have other questions. But others might have questions.

Mr DEAN - I was going to raise the issue of the abalone farming. What's happening in that regard?

Mr BARNETT - We are proud Tasmanians and as a proud minister to say that we have the largest wild abalone fishery in the world. It's very important for jobs in rural and regional areas. I think you're talking more about on island?

Mr DEAN - I'm talking about the land farming of abalone and whether that's gone at all. I know we're breeding.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I visited one of those last year down on the Tasman, south of Sorell. I will pass to Ian Dutton to provide more detail in that regard.

Mr DUTTON - Thank you, minister, we do have an increasingly growing farmed abalone sector in Tasmania, producing over 200 tonnes. To give you a sense of comparison, in the wild abalone sector that the minister referred to, it is about 1000 tonnes this year. It's about 20 per cent of the wild production.

Mr DEAN - What's the growth rate of farmed abalone?

Mr DUTTON - It's fairly comparable with wild farming. There is some selection breeding that goes on like most wild farming - most farming operations that would enable acceleration of growth. But it is currently a fairly well-funded and well-founded industry from a science point of view.

Mr DEAN - Does it seem like it might be a growth industry, in regard to the land farming of abalone?

Mr BARNETT - The visit I had was very positive; it was a very substantial on land farm. There are significant challenges for them in the circulation of water, keeping a clean environment, and also keeping out pests and diseases and that type of thing. It's really important that we protect our environment. We don't want any of those diseases getting into our marine environment. As a government we see that as important. I will ask Mr Dutton to respond in more detail.

Mr DEAN - I also asked this question because there seems to be a conflict between the person who wants to get a few abalone, the numbers they're entitled to get, against the commercial operations. It is the same with crayfish. How are we managing and working with that?

Mr BARNETT - We can talk more about that but Ian Dutton can respond to that, particularly the first part of the question about the importance of caring and managing the on-land abalone farming.

Mr DUTTON - These farming operations are very carefully regulated between ourselves and biosecurity. They're inspected by the chief veterinary officer for disease control, as the minister indicated. We have very complex and comprehensive control programs on waste discharges, husbandry procedures; all those kinds of things. It is interesting that the value of farmed abalone is not as high as wild abalone. There's a very large production of farmed abalone in places like China that doesn't attract the same market premium as wild abalone does. That's one of the interesting differentiations between the two.

Mr BAKER - Through you, minister, that said, farmed abalone is a \$10 million a year industry in Tasmania, so it's not insignificant.

Ms ARMITAGE - The abalone productivity improvement program: the industry-led initiative. I am wondering whether there are any similar programs the department might pursue, and has the private sector indicated enthusiasm for doing so?

Mr BARNETT - I can respond to that. I think you're referring to the abalone re-investment fund which is a \$5-million fund. We have worked with the industry: team Tasmania working together, the Abalone Council of Tasmania working with the government and through IMAS and my department specifically. I'll ask Ian Dutton to respond but it's a

\$5.1 million initiative over a five-year period. One of those initiatives relates to combating *Centrostephanus*. *Centrostephanus* is a pest that's impacted our marine environment, particularly on our east coast. In fact, up to 15 per cent of that marine environment has been impacted by *Centrostephanus* and we are very concerned about that. We had a recent event at IMAS some months ago - Ian Dutton is nodding - and that was an important event because it highlighted the importance of combating the *Centrostephanus*.

As a result of that funding support, there is now becoming a more viable industry where you can actually retrieve the *Centrostephanus* from the marine environment and send it to the processing facility at Margate. They use the shell for fertiliser and then they export the roe. The roe is what you would call an acquired taste but many of our friends and colleagues in Asia love it. So now we're creating a market out of that. It's becoming more viable and I can advise that more than 1000 tonnes of *Centrostephanus* have been removed under these programs in the last two years. More detail from Ian Dutton.

Mr DUTTON - I think you nailed it there in the detail.

CHAIR - We think you nailed it as well. Thank you, Mr Dutton.

Mr DUTTON - The only additional thing I'd offer is there is an exhibit on the *Centrostephanus* at IMAS which will be open as soon as their COVID-19 restrictions allow and I encourage anyone interested in following up to look at the story in more detail.

CHAIR - There used to be a factory at Goshen, you might recall, and members who went on my electorate tour have had -

A member - What's the common name?

CHAIR - Sea urchin. But that factory is no longer operational. To Mr Dean's question around the challenges between recreational fishers and commercial fishers, a brief overview would be appreciated.

Mr BARNETT - I think you've nailed it there, Mr Dean; there are challenges. Of course, we've got to try to get a balance. We want to make sure there's fish for the future, so we need a sustainable growth plan and sustainable fishery. I wear the hat 'Fishing for the future' or 'Fish for the future'. That means we've got to prepare for the future.

As a government we're responsible for and on behalf of the fishery, our fishers, and the workforce in those rural and regional areas to get the balance of that number so that it's a viable biomass and it's sustainable for the future. We have a total allowable catch: there's relevant numbers for the commercial fishers and for our recreational fishers and that's reviewed on a regular basis. It is all based on science and evidence in terms of that assessment that's made and it's a difficult decision. Yes, it does come to me but it's based on evidence and science from the department, from IMAS, from the fishers and the feedback that we get across the board. It is a very important question and we've got to try and get that balance to ensure there's a sustainable fishery for the future.

CHAIR - Follow up question in regard to that, minister, the lines of communication between yourself, the department and both recreational and commercial fishers. At times they

have been strained. Can you give this committee an assurance that they are open and transparent and everyone has opportunity for input?

Mr BARNETT - Everyone does have opportunity for input; in fact, it's encouraged. I'm very strong on community engagement on getting feedback from not just the recreational fishers but also the commercial fishers. I have regular meetings and interactions with both. I meet with the researchers, I meet with the scientists, I meet with my department and Ian Dutton meets with them regularly. I'm excited about the recreational fishing strategy which is a 10-year recreational fishing strategy. It has been going through a process all this year. The department has led that on my instruction and in the first half of next year I hope to deliver a draft of the 10-year recreational fishing strategy. I'd like to release that so that we can all have confidence going forward. We want to encourage this as part of the Tasmanian way of life: recreational fishing is a very important part of that. I'm a keen fisher, both inland and sea fishing. I showed off one of my photos holding a fish to you just yesterday, Madam Chair.

CHAIR - Sydney Harbour Bridge in the background.

Mr BARNETT - My dear wife and I did have an opportunity to visit my grandchildren over the weekend, first time in seven months. Yes, I did grab a little bit of time for fishing on Sydney Harbour and was successful catching a salmon and a number of tailor and I loved it. Of course, there's no better place to fish than Tasmania. We have all the best spots in the world.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, final question from Ms Armitage.

Ms ARMITAGE - Talking about fishing, there would have been 50 000 or 52 000 four-kilogram fish that escaped from the from the salmon farm. I'll combine these into one question, minister, to save some time. At this early stage, what measures is the department taking to investigate the recent fire, if you are, at the Huon Aquaculture enclosure and are there any anticipated immediate or longer-term adverse effects expected to the environment as a result of this fire? It has also been reported that between 50 000 and 52 000 four-kilogram fish have been lost as a result of the fire. What does that mean in dollar terms particularly to the industry?

CHAIR - A nice Christmas for somebody who can catch them.

Ms ARMITAGE - Obviously, a good area to be fishing at the moment, but the seals don't get it.

Mr BARNETT - In answer to that question I would say how important the industry is to Tasmania.

CHAIR - Yes. Terribly tragedy.

Mr BARNETT - They employ thousands of Tasmanians, particularly in those rural and regional communities. The aquaculture and salmon industries are vitally important. There's no greater supporter of the industry than our Liberal Government. I can advise that Huon Aquaculture has notified the department of the incident on one of those marine farm leases, as you've outlined. I've spoken to Peter Bender personally, and they are looking into the matter. It is a serious concern. They are disappointed, of course - some 50 000 to 52 000 fish. I will pass to Ian Dutton to respond. Ian has had some contact directly about the impact on Huon Aquaculture, their staff and the environment.

Mr DUTTON - We've been delighted by the prompt response of Huon. We were notified very promptly yesterday morning. We began talking about action plans, response plans, very quickly. We're working with IMAS currently on a follow-up study. There was a previous large escape of fish studied in some detail by Professor Jeremy Lyle at IMAS, and he concluded there was little impact on the environment and that over time we could expect the fish to be caught either by recreational fishers or, as you say, by predators or by natural attrition.

Ms ARMITAGE - Seals will be very happy.

Mr DUTTON - Yes. This is probably not the best time of the year for seals; they'll be off doing other things at the moment. We don't think there will be a major impact, but certainly a lot of boats. As you may be aware, we have a very active social media presence with our recreational fishers. We provide a lot of guidelines to recreational fishers and encourage them to use best practices and things like gill netting and other responses that they may use to catch the fish.

Ms ARMITAGE Thanks, minister.

2.3 Supervision of Poppy and Hemp Crops

CHAIR - We'll move now to the supervision of poppy and hemp crops. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your input for marine resources.

Mr BARNETT - I have our deputy secretary Deidre Wilson at the table.

Mr DEAN - My first question relates to the comment made by the Poppy Growers Tasmania chief executive, Keith Rice, in about May this year. I'll quote what he said, 'At this stage a reduction in elective surgeries across the globe due to the coronavirus crisis had impacted on demand for opioid pain management materials'. He went into some other detail about that. Was there any impact on the poppy crop position?

CHAIR - Number of hectares?

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Keith Rice is an old hand and he's been a great advocate. It's such an important industry for Tasmania. The poppy industry is very tightly regulated, as you're aware. During COVID-19, there's been an impact all around the world in terms of access to morphine, which our poppies are used for, with the big market being the US in particular. There's been a lower demand. Low demand may continue through 2020. The area sown to poppies in 2021 is expected to be comparable to last season when over 11 000 hectares were sown. The feedback I'm getting from the growers and from the major stakeholders in that space is that's the expectation.

Mr DEAN - My other question is also around productivity in the area of poppies. With other states now growing poppies - I think we've got Queensland, the NT and Victoria; I'm not quite sure who of the other states are. Is that likely to impact on our position of poppy production in the state?

Mr BARNETT - Mainland poppy production has not had a material impact on poppy production in Tasmania. It's had a little impact, but not material or substantial impact. You've got the two major poppy processors still based in Tasmania and they've been here for many decades. My family grew poppies, as well as peas, carrots and potatoes. It's been very important not just the Meander Valley, but across the state. There has been a significant reduction in the area sown since 2013-14, but that's over seven or eight years. But they are focused on increasing productivity. I was out with Keith Rice last summer at Roderick O'Connor's property at Connorville at the back of Cressy. They've increased production, and productivity. They're trying to increase productivity per hectare; that's part of their plans going forward.

Mr DEAN - Better producing, improved quality.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I'll pass to the secretary or the deputy secretary if you'd like to add to that.

Ms WILSON - Minister, you've summarised that really well. The long-term trend in market and supply has been highly influenced by the USA FTA decisions, but the minister otherwise has explained the situation well. I consider we have a world-wide reputation of high quality, legally sound poppy production.

Mr DEAN - My other question is in relation to our hemp crops currently in the state. Can I be given some background on where they are going, and the alternative uses that are being considered? In last year's Estimates there was discussion about possible moves to include some of the product from these plants into food. What are we doing with those other things that come from it in it considering the food chain as well?

Mr BARNETT - Last night I had a chat to Tim Schmidt, the president of the Hemp Association for Tasmania. I'm pleased to advise that we're providing further support for their extension of their executive officer to do the work to support the hemp industry, some \$72 000.

Mr DEAN - It was Tim who came and had a discussion with me about this some a while back.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I was on his farm a month or two ago at the back of Deloraine. He's a wonderful advocate. Minister Rockcliffe and I and other members of parliament, Labor and independents, were at their annual association dinner a month or two ago. There's very positive feedback in terms of poppies. Again, Tasmania was Australia's -

Mr DEAN - We are on hemp plants, not poppies.

Mr BARNETT - Apologies. In terms of hemp, we're one of Tasmania's largest producers of industrial hemp, producing over 30 per cent of Australia's total industrial hemp crop. The farm gate value is about \$5 million. We have \$150 000 support over three years for the Hemp Association, so we're backing them in. The main thing you should be aware of is that a review of the Industrial Hemp Act 2015 is taking place. I've announced that not so long ago. It needs reviewing. We want to get an update. You were asking about what else can we do with the hemp and the industrial hemp?

Mr DEAN - Absolutely. That came out of last year's Estimates, that there needed to be changes to regulations to allow this to happen. Tim also raised with me the position of the stalk of the plant being used for compost and so on, which they were unable to do at this stage without the proper authorities to cover on those points.

Mr BARNETT - I've had similar discussions with Tim in the past, and we've met with the department and discussed that. That's one of the reasons I'm having the review of the act and the regulations under the act. Tim was very pleased with the review. I mentioned it at the annual meeting just a few months ago.

CHAIR - Time frame for that review, minister?

Mr BARNETT - I'll check on the time frame, but we're working through those issues. We've announced it. I'll check if the secretary or deputy secretary has a time frame.

Ms WILSON - In the coming months, for sure.

Mr BARNETT - Anyone who wants to have input and feedback on that. You mentioned hemp straw, and being able to use that in a commercially viable way to make it more productive and viable for the farmers. We're getting that feedback. There will be a review. We'll get that report and recommendations, and then respond to it as a government.

Mr DEAN - There's no progress made since Estimates last year through to now, in looking at changes to regulations to provide the opportunities for the product used in food and so on?

Mr BARNETT - The progress is that we're funding them \$150 000 over three years, and they are actively promoting their industry, which we support. We have a strategic industry partnership plan. We've just announced a further \$72 600 to build on that good work. We have the review taking place of the act and the regulations to look at how can we innovate, how can we be more flexible? We're already delivering 30 per cent of Australia's industrial hemp. Of course, all this is different to the medicinal cannabis. I know you know that.

Mr DEAN - It is, yes. It is THC.

Mr BARNETT - It's quite different.

Mr DEAN - Yes, absolutely. Totally different plant, which is very not much good to other people, really, in many respects. Can I ask a question about the farmers? Are they taking up all the opportunities to grow the hemp product?

Mr BARNETT - The feedback is - yes. It's based on a viable product, and they have to determine on behalf of their business, their farm as to whether they grow potatoes or peas or poppies or hemp. Tim is a big advocate, as you know, and I've been out inspecting his hemp on a recent visit, and he's well-versed in the area. But other farmers have to try to work out and get a balanced approach as to where they get their income from. There was a level of positivity at the recent annual general meeting. I think you will get that feedback if you talk to the hemp growers around Tasmania, and specifically Tim. We stand with them to progress the hemp industry in Tasmania in a positive way.

Mr DEAN - There's a lot of talk about this and it's been going on for some time, but as Tim was saying, not a lot of action or progress. That is the question. How is progress going to be made? What will we see developed, say, this year?

Mr BARNETT - We're progressing with them. We've got the review. We've got funding support. We've just increased funding support, as I've just announced today, and Tim was very pleased with that support. We'll keep working with the industry. I'll just check if anything further to add from my secretary or deputy secretary.

Mr BAKER - Nothing further.

CHAIR - We'd appreciate coming months to be short coming months, not long coming months. Thank you. Mr Willie, we're going now to resource management and conservation. Thank you.

Output group 2

Natural and cultural heritage

3.1 Resource management and conservation -

Mr WILLIE - Thank you, Chair. Minister, when you look at the line item, there's a footnote that explains the decrease in funding across the forward Estimates is because of a completion of land care action fund. Are there any plans to continue this after that's completed, or get those things going again? Maybe you could outline what that fund has done.

Mr BARNETT - As you know, I was a big fan of land care as a senator for Tasmania in the federal parliament, and likewise in the Liberal government. We have doubled funding for Landcare Tasmania. I'm proud of that initiative, and now we're rolling out our land care actions grants through Landcare Tasmania, through the TFGA. They are rolling out really well. I was out west just not so long ago at Chris Kilby's property on the Meander River. They're fencing off, keeping the riverway clean, to keep the cattle getting into the river. The Kilbys are wonderful farmers near where I was born and raised.

That funding is \$1.8 million under the land care action grants program. We've had cows out of creek projects, \$200 000. We've got the NRM support for the NRMs as well. They do terrific work, and they are involved in supporting our natural environment, supporting our primary producers, our primary production. And we've got the weed action fund as well, which is \$5 million over the forward Estimates. Happy to answer further.

Mr WILLIE - The second part of my question was, when they are completed, as per the footnote, are you planning to continue them or start a new round?

Mr BARNETT - That will be considered in the context of future budgets, but you can be assured our Government is very supportive of land care. We have a history of supporting land care and land care grants and our natural environment, so you have that level of assurance.

CHAIR - I'm happy to take it on notice - can we have a list of those recipients and the quantum of grants that have been issued?

Mr BARNETT - I don't have the full list with me. I've met many of the recipients. They are very grateful. I was out at Tim Schmidt's property at the back of Deloraine, at Red Hills, and the Quamby land care action group were recipients there. There are so many volunteers. There are more than 200 land care groups around Tasmania. They're all full of volunteers. The spirit of volunteerism across Tasmania is brilliant, and we have one of the highest rates of volunteerism in Australia right here in Tassie.

CHAIR - We punch above our weight, minister, a well-known fact.

Mr BARNETT - If we could take that on notice, Chair.

CHAIR - That's fine. Mr Willie, apologies for interrupting your line.

Mr WILLIE - No, that's good information to request. Minister, if we look at table 10.5 - I think it's under this line item - I'm interested in the devil program and the management of wild Tasmanian devils.

Mr BAKER - That's the wrong output. That's the Minister for Environment, Tassie devils.

Mr WILLIE - The same with threatened species as well, I assume.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Threatened species is Roger Jaensch, Minister for Environment.

Mr WILLIE - I'm interested around the actuals and the target being 170 for the next year.

Mr BARNETT - Sure. Just to clarify, what's the question?

Mr WILLIE - It's about the number of devils within the secure Maria Island population.

Mr BARNETT - That's clearly minister Jaensch's portfolio.

Mr BAKER I know the answer.

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to the secretary.

Mr BAKER - And we'll use Martin as well. The answer to your question, granted that it is in another output, is that we've reduced the number of devils on Maria Island. As you would be aware, that's a relatively new initiative, and we're just working through what the right number of devils are to be on Maria Island. There's also Forestier, which is similar.

Mr BARNETT - I will introduce Martin Read, our resource management and conservation director.

CHAIR - Welcome, Martin.

Mr BAKER - We're learning more and more about what's a sustainable number to introduce into areas, Maria Island being a good example. It's not a reflection in the total number

of devils decreasing. It's just the number of devils in captivity we're putting back into the wild. I'd be happy to talk about it with my notes in front of me tomorrow.

Mr WILLIE - How do you get to 170 in the projections for next year? It's just how many you're introducing?

Mr BAKER - That's right.

Mr WILLIE - So ramping that up.

Mr BAKER - Yes, that's right.

Mr BARNETT - We're whetting our appetite for tomorrow, Chair, for the questions from Mr Willie. We're trying to be flexible and helpful in advance of tomorrow's interview with Mr Jaensch, Minister for Environment and Parks.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Dean, I think your question is worth asking in this line item.

Mr DEAN - Either here or biosecurity.

CHAIR - Have a go here, and if we don't have any luck, we'll go on.

Mr DEAN - It's in relation to the fallow deer issue; I'm not sure which is the best line to raise it in.

CHAIR - It's certainly about conservation.

Mr BARNETT - We're happy to respond on deer.

Mr DEAN - It's creating an enormous problem, minister. And there was another

Mr BARNETT - I'm happy to respond.

Mr DEAN - big piece in the paper again today in relation to it. They are a pest. They are creating and causing enormous problems for some farmers. A paddock was shown to me and I thought they had to be farm deer. I said that you could not have that many deer in a paddock like that. And they said no, they're wild deer just congregating in this paddock.

CHAIR - Are we in the right area, minister? We can hold it over if you'd like.

Mr BARNETT - Well, more -

Mr DEAN - Biosecurity might be the better area, probably?

Mr BARNETT - We're more than happy. Let me be flexible, Madam Chair. We will try to respond to the member's question. We have Louise Wilson at the table.

CHAIR - Do we need Deirdre to come? No? Okay. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - We have the secretary and you have the minister who can assist you regarding deer and other matters. Do you want to summarise your question?

Mr DEAN - My question is, in summary, it's becoming an enormous problem. It was an introduced species to the state and farmers want to know how it's going to be controlled. What's the control mechanism moving forward?

CHAIR - When is the Government going to act on the recommendations of the select committee inquiry in to wild fallow deer? Excellent recommendations and they're sitting on a shelf somewhere going nowhere.

Mr BARNETT - Madam Chair, would you allow me to respond?

CHAIR - Absolutely.

Mr BARNETT - The Government has been very active and energetic in its response to the Legislative Council's select committee on deer and we've responded to that in a whole range of ways. But it's all about getting that balance right in protecting our primary production, our natural environment as well as ensuring that there's a resource for our recreational hunters, which is part of our traditional hunting resource and part of the Tasmanian way of life. It's about getting that sensible balance. You're right in terms of the history of the deer, and brown trout were introduced as well more than 150 years ago. We have responded to that Legislative Council report. We have undertaken the recent research in terms of the numbers, which you would be aware of - over 50 000.

Mr DEAN - The tip of the iceberg, the gentleman was saying in the paper today.

Mr BARNETT - Today's report is based on a senate inquiry and that's coming from one part of the sector. Let me be very clear, we have a professional, comprehensive, well-funded summary and report and research on the number of deer in Tasmania. Over 50 000. In addition to that, as a government, we established the Tasmanian Game Council. We established the new Game Services Tasmania to have a special, dedicated focus in this space. We have made more reserves available: now up to 10 separate reserves for recreational hunters to be out there enjoying the hunting season. In addition to that we have introduced the Crop Protection Permits that last for five years. We've removed quotas and tags for both game licences and crop protection permits for antlerless deer. We've extended the season. We have been very active in this place and on top of that, we had a comprehensive aerial survey to collect the numbers. We know where we are and I've announced in recent times plans for a deer management strategy, having taken advice from your former colleague and friend, Mr Hall.

CHAIR - Who is chair of the Game Council.

Mr BARNETT - He is. That's why I wanted to recognise our colleague and friend, Greg Hall. I know others around this table would recognise that as well. He's doing an excellent job as chair of the Game Council. They meet regularly. They provide advice to the department and they provide advice to me. They provide advice to the secretary. We've been very active in this space and I'm pleased and proud of our efforts. We have big plans going forward and getting that balance right is a priority.

Mr DEAN - Good to hear. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - I'm not sure if this fits either, but it's to do with the Cat Management Act and the passing of that.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'm the cat man.

Mr WILLIE - Given the passing of the Cat Management Act, which will result in a greater number of cats being surrendered, why has the Ten Lives Cat Centre only been funded for one year?

Mr BARNETT - There's a little slight misunderstanding there. The Ten Lives Cat Centre has been funded for infrastructure upgrades, some \$200 000 to support their plans for up to a \$1 million upgrade. I congratulate Noel Hunt and everyone at the Cat Lives Centre. That funding support will help them. They do terrific work. They are grateful and appreciative. I was out there a couple of weeks ago. Likewise, the Dog's Homes of Tasmania was provided with \$200 000. I'm very thankful to the parliament for passing through the Cat Management legislation. It's received good support. We are all about responsible management of our cats, whether they be domestic cats, stray cats and feral cats which are a menace. It's not a good time to be a feral cat in Tasmania and we're targeting them.

CHAIR - We didn't get them registered, though, minister.

Mr BARNETT - A certain member in the upper House, through you, Chair, being yourself, was interested in registration but the will of the parliament didn't support that.

CHAIR - One step at a time, minister.

Mr BARNETT - We are progressing one step at a time in a very positive way. The Cat Management Plan, which is a five-year plan, has been embraced in the cat management legislation. It's been passed, and I am pleased about that having worked with the key stakeholders, and Ten Lives Cat Centre is one of those key stakeholders.

CHAIR - Do they get funding other than the capital infrastructure funding? Are they funded by the government at all?

Mr BARNETT - No, not to my knowledge. There may be one-off funding from time to time. This is one-off funding for infrastructure. We do have the \$1.4 million for our Cat Management Coordinators around the state. They support local government in their work and they support our community, those cat lovers. We have one of the highest pet ownership rates in Australia in Tasmania. We love our pets, we want to care for them, and we want to be responsible for them. Domestic cats, stray cats and feral cats: we've got a plan for all three.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, infrastructure upgrades are important but you would imagine there'd be more resource required to care for the cats as well? Are there any plans to provide some funding to the centre to do that?

Mr BARNETT - The Ten Lives Cat Centre is one of many companion animal entities around Tasmania. You'd be aware that the RSPCA is one of those and we fund the RSPCA to provide that important work for and on behalf of the community, particularly regarding animal welfare. Jan Davis is the CEO and I meet with her from time to time. About other companion animals, we had round tables during the COVID-19 pandemic, working together, discussing

how you look after and care for your pets during the coronavirus pandemic. They were successful and productive round tables.

The Ten Lives Cat Centre has a sustainable funding model as do many of the other animal entities that support their pets around Tasmania, whether it's cats or dogs or others. We are very focused on education and awareness, and we have funded that. Education and awareness, as I've said during the second reading debate and during the recent cat management bill debate, and as the member opposite has just indicated, is a step by step thing. Education and awareness, responsible management of our cats - we've got a campaign supporting Scruffy the cat, who's in the social media talking about the important way to care for our cats. Scruffy the cat is out there. Check it out on Facebook.

CHAIR - Is Scruffy talking or somebody else?

Mr BARNETT - No, it's actually somebody talking but Scruffy the cat is an example of how you can care for and look after your cats in a special and responsible way.

Mr WILLIE - Those infrastructure upgrades you talked about: will they be in place for when the limits come in? There's going to be a number of cats surrendered at that time, you would think.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's a good question. I do not know the exact timing of that but my understanding is that the infrastructure upgrade of the Ten Lives Cat Centre and likewise the Dog's Homes for Tasmania is within the next 12 months. They're doing a terrific job. They do have a lot of work to do and they have a lot of volunteers as well. I will check if the department can provide more detail to your question and if the secretary can assist.

Mr BAKER - The answer is yes. The current plan is to have the infrastructure in place in time.

Mr WILLIE - Other places like the RSPCA have a surge capacity, I guess, for that point in time when there are limits on households.

Mr BAKER - What I would say is we're having active discussions with all these groups but as I said, specifically relating to the money and issue budget, the plan is to have that infrastructure in place. I will also say, in relation to the specific questions about the Ten Lives, there hasn't been a request to the department for additional funds.

Mr WILLIE - We're about to go into the budget process, so if any of them are listening, perhaps they might put in a request.

Mr BARNETT - That's right, and next year's budget as you know has been announced by the Premier to be in August next year, I think it's the 26th. You've identified the budget process. I always appreciate feedback from stakeholders on their concerns or requests and I am happy to put those through to the Premier and Treasurer for consideration in the budget committee.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. We would like to move to water resource management. Do you need some changes at the table?

Output Group 4

Water resources

4.1 Water resource management -

Mr BARNETT - We welcome Christian Jackson to the table in terms of Water and we have Deirdre Wilson, our deputy secretary again.

CHAIR - Thank you. I will invite Mr Willie to open the questions in regards to this area.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, as a state we're lucky with our water resource, but I'm interested in the impacts of climate change and what the department is doing to monitor that across our water resource, whether it be for farming purposes, preservation or water usage. I'm interested in whether the department is starting to notice the impacts of climate change, what measurements have been put in place to monitor that, and what the modelling is into the future around our water resource.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Chair, I appreciate that and the importance of water. You're right. Tasmania is blessed with a wonderful water resource. It's one of our great natural advantages. We have 1 per cent of Australia's land mass, 12 per cent of Australia's rainfall and 27 per cent of Australia's water and storage. The wise use of that water is a top priority, whether it be for hydroelectricity, for irrigation purposes or for other purposes.

Water in our budget was \$70 million then a further \$15 million to fast track our irrigation projects which are all about long-term planning. We're talking about plans for 100 years. You talk about climate change, and ask a very good question about climate change and how it impacts on Tasmania. This is about future-proofing Tasmania and agriculture, delivering opportunities because water is liquid gold, as you've indicated earlier, Chair, quoting me. I appreciate that because water is important in those rural and regional areas.

We have five irrigation projects progressing. I can outline to you that we've already completed stages 1 and 2 now in tranche 3. Those five are the Don, Wesley Vale, Sassafras, Northern Midlands, Fingal and Tamar. They are progressing thanks to the money in our budget for that and they are on track and delighted. There will be further interest from our farming communities, particularly in the south-east and the Southern Midlands.

Getting back to the climate change issue, it's definitely long-term planning, future-proofing. I'll pass to the secretary to respond in more detail with respect to your question.

Mr BAKER - There are two elements to this question. The first is that the department was a significant contributor into the Climate Change Action 21, and that had three main initiatives relating to agriculture which we are involved in: irrigation, which the minister has covered well, but also enterprise suitability mapping to provide farmers with better information on climate change risk, and opportunities, including best locations for where to grow, based on climate change. We are also partnering with dairy farmers to reduce fertiliser related emissions and costs.

At a headline, at the whole-of-government climate change response area, they are the three initiatives that the department is heavily involved in and working with the Department of

Premier and Cabinet which has the lead on climate change. In addition to that, the Competitiveness of Tasmanian Agriculture 2050 white paper that was put out included a number of initiatives relating to climate change as well. They included a 250 000 dairy-specific round On Farm Energy Audit and Capital Grant Program which has gone really well. It's a program designed to help farmers, in this case specifically dairy, to look at the amount of energy they're using, get a good understanding of how much energy they're using, and then how they can reduce that.

I should say, as the chair of the TIA, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, which the government funds, there are a number of initiatives inside TIA, as we call it, which are climate change specific. So, Mr Willie, it is a significant issue for the department. It's one that we're in up to our necks, if you like, and there are a lot of things going on in that space.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you, minister. In terms of our water resource, what are the impacts of climate change and what's the modelling around that? At the moment we're in a La Niña weather pattern; there's more rain on the east coast but over the long term. Are our water resources going to change? Are the catchments going to change? Is there any sort of overarching trends we can expect, and is the department modelling that?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to the secretary, thank you.

Mr BAKER - My deputy is whispering in my ear, minister. The first thing I'd say is that as I mentioned at the outset, we are doing what we call sustainability mapping around the likelihood of catchment areas and also looking at the climate change risk, and I should say opportunities as well because as the climate changes there are upside opportunities. What that's about, Mr Willie, is looking at what are the best crops to grow and where, and where is water going to be, because water is moving as a result of climate change. Do you want to add anything else, Deirdre, through the minister?

Ms WILSON - First of all, nationally, climate change is an important issue that is considered by ministers through the admin group and also once again at the senior officials group through AGSOC. There's a climate change task force with notional coordination around research and innovation. We've also got the rural water use strategy that the minister has released which talks about the key issue of sustainability and looks at water management in a changing climate and the tools that we might need for the future.

I also note that Tasmania in the past and I believe still continues to be a leader in terms of modelling for climate change. Christina may be able to add to this. We did the Sustainable Yields project a number of years ago which gave some forecast of broad range modelling of different conditions based on climate change scenarios from the IPCC at that time.

Mr WILLIE - Is that a public document? Would we be able to have a copy?

Ms WILSON - It would have been, yes.

Mr WILLIE - Could you provide that to the committee?

Ms WILSON - Christina, I'm not sure if we've done any recent modelling but, as I say, I think we were nation leading when we did that.

Mr BARNETT - Chair, if we could pass to Christina Jackson to provide further detail to the member's question.

Ms JACKSON - That's correct. The Sustainable Yields project was in partnership with CSIRO and it was possibly around 2012; I can't quite remember the dates. All the reports are online for each specific catchment. The department is now waiting for new information from the Bureau of Meteorology that should eventuate a model in the near future. Also, through the National Water Initiative which Tasmania has been a signatory to now for about 15 years, there's recently been established a sub-committee to look at water planning and science for climate change risks and that group is meeting for the first time next week. That's trying to look at it at a more strategic national level about some of the issues associated with water planning. Our models are updated with all the hydrological data that's obtained on an ongoing basis across the state, so there's always more information that's being put into modelling and hydrological analysis for all the rivers with this stream gauging.

Mr BARNETT - We're doing more monitoring of our water flows and our streams and rivers, so we're getting more up-to-date information. You asked about methodologies but that monitoring - you've got to be able to manage it, you have to measure it and we do measure it very consistently in those rivers and streams. I see there's some 81 stream gauge stations continuously monitoring river levels and gauging river flows, operating 13 stream gauge sites that also have continuous water quality monitoring equipment.

Through our water and irrigation projects, we're drought proofing our farmers and those land owners in that area because you've got access to reliable water. In addition, there's the rural water use strategy. That's out for public comment. We're getting feedback from the key stakeholders as we speak and we'll have more to say about that in 2021.

Mr BAKER - Probably the pillar that I missed, Mr Willie, is biosecurity. We are looking at a new risk assessment framework for biosecurity, looking at change to the biosecurity profile as a result of climate change. So that's the other big piece of work that's going on at the moment.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - One other thing - drought. We are very focused on drought and responding to drought, we have been very proactive working with the farmers and the rural communities. We've got funding support for those drought affected communities. You would know particularly on the east coast there have been very difficult conditions for more than five years. That's why we provided that funding support through Rural Business Tasmania. Likewise, through Rural Alive and Well (RAW), we've provided funding for mental health. Under our weeds action fund, we provided funding support to respond to weeds during times of drought. We're very focused in supporting those rural communities in need.

CHAIR - If you would, minister, turn to table 10.6, the performance information output group 4 on page 271. You talked about the tranche 3 five schemes and listed those. The total volume of water licensed for irrigation, the actual is 870 000 mega litres for 2019-20 and the target for 2020-21 is 900 000 mega litres. It's a 30 000 mega litre increase. I'm interested in whether - obviously that won't be any of those tranche 3 schemes - but will it include the completion of the tranche 2 schemes in the 2020-21 target? Help me understand where they are.

Mr BARNETT - I assume that would include Scottsdale but I'll need to check. Scottsdale has just been completed and announced by the Deputy Prime Minister a week or so ago.

CHAIR - And will be operational January?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's operational effectively now in the lead up to this season.

CHAIR - They're probably using it now then, because it's quite dry.

Mr BARNETT - Exactly. The water started flowing in recent weeks, as you know, and the irrigators and farmers are very pleased about that. I'll check if the secretary would like to add to that answer.

CHAIR - So that 30 000 mega litre increase is the target for 2020-21?

Mr BAKER - I think that's a good one for us to take on notice.

Mr BARNETT - We can get more detail for you. We have plans for growth. As you know, we've finished tranches 1 and 2. We're at five projects for tranche 3.

CHAIR - But I doubt any of those five schemes under tranche 3, will be online.

Mr BARNETT - No, I make it very clear that they won't be online. The Don is the first to be online. You will hopefully see a spade in the ground by the end of the first quarter of next year, so by 31 March. It won't be online in this financial year. They normally take between two to four years to build, with design and construction.

CHAIR - Two years when you have no issues.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. We want to do it as quickly as possible. We've got funding in our budget for it so we want to get on with the job. We've streamlined the process of dam approval processes, not just for on-farm dams but for these irrigation projects as well.

CHAIR - For water storage as well, that's right. That brings me to my second question, minister. It is regarding the safety of dams. This area has a regulation around that; it talks about the range of legislation policies for water management efficiency and sustainable allocation, use of surface and groundwater resources and safety of dams. Dam safety audits are undertaken in this area; how many and at what cost?

Mr BARNETT - Dam safety it is a priority for our government and the department. We're active in this space. I'll check if the secretary or deputy secretary would like to respond to that.

Mr BAKER - I'm aware they do take place. We can come back on the specific number and cost.

CHAIR - Thank you, our secretary will be taking note of that. Members, any other questions in regard to water resource management?

Mr DEAN - One question on salination. What work is being done in these areas that are now getting plentiful supplies of water where they've never had it before? The south-east is a good example of that.

CHAIR - Even the bottom end of the Midlands.

Mr DEAN - Yes, the bottom end of the Midlands - we see a lot of production happening through the Midlands with potatoes and other crops. What is the long-term impact on that soil and that ground?

Mr BARNETT - You're talking specifically about salinity and the impact of the water and irrigation as a result of that. That's one of the reasons we provide funding support for the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, and there's very significant funding support - \$7 million over a long period of time. We have a partnership with the University of Tasmania. They do that research, they provide those reports. We have a TIA advisory board made up of farmers, key stakeholders, to get practical outcomes. Specifically, on the salination side of things, I'll see if there's any further particulars through the secretary or deputy secretary.

Mr DEAN - This particularly is relevant, as I said, to those lower rainfall areas. We're now cropping heavily and along the north-west coast and so on. Those very rich soils, I think, can take it. You can crop those paddocks with the same paddock year in, year out and farmers are doing that -

CHAIR - Not with the same crop you can't, there's got to be crop rotation.

Mr DEAN - But they're cropping it very regularly. My son is one of those.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I know where you mean too, at the back of Woodsdale there.

Mr DEAN - Yes, there as well but my son's got property at North Motton. Very rich volcanic soil.

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

Ms WILSON - There's a few elements. When it comes to Tasmanian irrigation schemes, farm management planning is part of the process, so you can ask TIA some more about that. That can include irrigation, conditions around salinity and environmental indicators. TIA also has a water-for-profit program, which is looking at irrigation sustainability. So not all irrigation schemes will be the same but as I say with the TIA schemes, they have a focus on sustainability and one of those factors is salinity and environmental indicators.

Mr DEAN - Are they regularly tested and monitored, or is it left up to the farmer?

Mr BARNETT - Can I make one comment about the farmers? I love farmers, I'm wearing the badge today. I know all of us around this table have a similar disposition. Farmers are some of the best conservationists in the world, because they need a sustainable farm, and that's what they plan for for the future. They do their checks and reviews and assessments, they do their research. They rotate their crops, they make sure that their soil is fertile and remains so. They use fertiliser as when appropriate. They are very good conservationists, and they want a sustainable future. When you ask what's the government doing - we monitor these

matters. We fund research and development through TIA, working with the university, and with others as well. We put a lot of faith in our farmers, and we're backing them in every way we possibly can.

CHAIR - Those water access plans have to be completed at the change of every crop, from my farming background.

Mr BARNETT - That's it.

CHAIR - I know I'm not here to answer all of these questions, but I know about WAPs. Moving now, if you will, minister, to 6.1, a very important area - biosecurity.

Output group 6 Biosecurity Tasmania

6.1 Biosecurity -

Mr BARNETT - Biosecurity, very important.

CHAIR - I can indicate to the secretary that we will be breaking at 1 p.m. for lunch regardless of where we are.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have lots of questions in product integrity.

Mr DEAN - There's no really heavy matters after mineral resourcing. Forestry.

Mr BARNETT - Don't say that. You'll jinx us. Chair, I introduce to the table Rae Burrows, our acting director of Biosecurity Tasmania, who's been doing a terrific job, as have all members of the Biosecurity Tasmania team during these difficult times. .

CHAIR - Welcome, Rae. First time to the Estimates process?

Ms BURROWS - It is indeed, yes.

CHAIR - Welcome. This will be a new experience, and hopefully it'll be one that you'll quite enjoy. I'm going to ask Mr Dean if he would like to commence the questioning around this important area.

Mr DEAN - My first question is around the significant increase in funding for this coming year. I think it's about \$2 million. Can we get some explanation around exactly where that will go, what it will do, what it will bring in, and the benefits of it? In asking this question, I recognise the importance of biosecurity to the state. It is critical.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you very much. There are two initiatives I'd like to draw to our attention. One is the \$2.6 million that you referred to, which is significantly bolstering Biosecurity Tasmania, increasing the number of support people we have at our borders, and bolstering biosecurity, which overarching. The message is keeping Tasmania's brand clean, pure, fresh, natural, free from pests and disease. It's a key ingredient to our success. You can never eliminate it altogether. It's about reducing the risk wherever possible. We have plans, biosecurity measures at our border, post the border, and pre-border. That \$2.6 million is

identified in the budget for that. In addition, we have just announced \$6 million to bolster our response to COVID-19. I'm happy to respond to that as well when you're ready.

Mr DEAN - So that \$6 million is in addition to the \$2.6 million?

Mr BARNETT - Correct. I'll just touch on the \$6 million, then I'll pass to Rae Burrows to provide further particulars. It is to assist the government keep Tasmanians safe. It's to assist at the borders, at the airports and at our ports to keep Tasmanians safe. This is a boost to provide further personnel. I was with Rae Burrows just a week or so ago when we made this announcement to provide that support, to keep Tasmanians safe, because you're having people fly in. I was one of those on Monday when I came back. We're having more people, with the Good2Go pass, the health e-Travel process, health assessments at the borders - you would notice if you'd been through the airports. There are more people there, Biosecurity Tasmania, making those assessments. There is a lot of work being done both at our airports and at our ports. I will pass to Rae Burrows to provide further particulars after some comments from the secretary.

Mr BAKER - I will allow Rae to speak in a moment, but it is important that I put on the public record the work that this team has been doing. At the start of the pandemic, it was pretty clear that we were going to need to do something at the border. But these are staff who generally were not doing anything like the work that they're now being required to do, and they are doing an outstanding job led by Rae, who's the operations manager in her day to day job. And just at a high level, so the money will be spent on approximately 80 staff who will be employed at the border -

Mr DEAN - Eighty additional staff?

Mr BAKER - Additional staff, yes, who will be employed at the border for COVID-19 work in November and December of this year, particularly as we see the numbers ramp back up. It will also be used for the continued operation of the Good2Go pass, which is run by the department and e-Travel systems. But we were today talking through the operational matters that are happening at the airport right now.

CHAIR - Are these casual staff?

Mr BAKER - They're fixed-term and casual staff.

CHAIR - Can we have a breakup of that before we go to Rae?

Mr DEAN - And the length of the fixed term.

Mr BAKER - Yes. As I said, I don't have those details in front of me, and we are literally in the operational planning stage at the moment of how we're going to roll this out, but I'm happy for Rae through the minister to talk -

Mr DEAN - Happy for that to be taken on notice.

Mr BARNETT - If we just allow Rae to respond, and then we can take any further questions on notice if required.

Mr DEAN - Sure.

Ms BURROWS - Yes, there are 80 staff that we've allocated for a fixed term of six months because at this stage, we don't actually know how long the COVID-19 response is going to be ramped up to this sort of level. They're casual, fixed-term staff. They're casual, because as you can probably appreciate, the flights come in early morning and late at night. There's no point in having somebody on that's not doing anything during the middle of the day, so the plan is that we make the best use of those staff by having two shifts for the day.

We worked out that it takes between six and seven staff per flight to do the arrivals processing that Biosecurity Tasmania is now responsible for, and Biosecurity Tasmania is also coordinating the other agencies at the borders as well. We have that coordinating role too. And we can't forget the *Spirit of Tasmania*, which comes in at 6.30 most mornings, and from 6 December, I think it is, they start their double sailings as well. So they will have two shifts as well.

Mr DEAN - Where will these staff come from, and what's the training? If you're bringing 80 new staff in and doing these specific duties of security and so on, what's the process there, and when will they be ready to hit the ground?

Ms BURROWS - We have seasonal staff who come in as a matter of course around summer. We've been doing that for the last three years. About two months ago, we did the recruitment process for those seasonal staff. As you can appreciate, because of the current COVID-19 environment, we had 300 people state-wide who went for those positions. A lot of them were considered suitable, but during interview weren't actually recommended for the positions that were available, and there was only sort of 20 positions that were available. With those people that were considered suitable, we've rung them and offered them a contract. They've started their induction yesterday, and they will be on the ground tomorrow because the statement of duties is very similar. They're working at the borders, albeit these seasonal staff are more at the produce borders, i.e. places of AQPs, but it's the same sort of job - just inspecting people rather than produce.

Those people are starting on the ground tomorrow, and we've been working with Searson Buck as our preferred contractor through DPIPWE. They're interviewing the remaining people. They started interviews this week; I can't remember exactly what day. They're expected to hit the ground in the next two weeks or so. The people have been inducted in the normal DPIPWE induction process. We also have an induction package that we developed for our staff right at the beginning of COVID-19 during March, and it's being updated as the rules have been updates do we've run all the staff through that as well, the new staff.

Mr DEAN - While talking about this, if I can go to table 10.8, page 275, where we're looking at the effective screening of all passenger transfers from Bass Strait ferries and major airports. It says screening of all passenger transfers. Then we go down to footnote 7. At the bottom of that footnote, the last sentence in it says, 'The target of 100 per cent relates to the results of audits and checks of internal processes and systems rather than 100 per cent of individual passengers.' The measure was introduced in 2017-18.

In the top part we're saying effective screening of all passenger transfers but in the footnote we're saying no, that's not going to be the case, that it will relate to the internal systems rather than the passengers. I want to know why we've got that contradiction in the two. What is going to happen?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it may appear so, and I will ask the secretary to try to explain or clarify your question. On the numbers, Biosecurity Tas, can I just give you the numbers?

Mr DEAN - Sure.

Mr BARNETT - Exactly the numbers. In 2014 - because it's been a real priority for our government since we've come to office - the frontline operational staff of Biosecurity Tasmania numbered 79, consisting of 21 permanent part-time staff, 58 permanent full-time staff, and no seasonal casual staff. Currently, the number of frontline staff, field staff, totals 116 consisting of 10 permanent part-time staff, 63 permanent full-time staff, four fixed term full-time staff and 39 seasonal casual staff. I thought you might like that for the record.

Mr DEAN - Absolutely, minister, and I'd like to know where those employees are and where they're stationed.

Mr BAKER - This is a very important point, minister. The numbers you just read out are before we add the 80.

Mr DEAN - Yes, the 80 is on top.

Mr BARNETT - The 80 is on top of that. I will pass to the secretary to clarify your question.

Mr BAKER - This is a good operational question raised at the border every day.

Ms BURROWS - As the minister has mentioned, that footnote is pre-COVID-19. As you no doubt will be aware, our commitment is to target 100 per cent of the passengers coming through with detector dogs' teams and our biosecurity inspectors from Hobart and Launceston airports. I believe that is what the footnote was referring to. At the moment, however, and since March 26 or when we started the COVID-19 response, we have been asking every single passenger who comes through on every single flight, both private and commercial, and the *Spirit of Tasmania*, biosecurity questions and checking them as well as doing our COVID-19 testing. So, it is 100 per cent of the passengers arriving through now.

Mr DEAN - That is on both the *Spirits*, that will be also on the aircraft coming in. I'll just ask the question again, why is the footnote -

Mr BAKER - One is referring to making sure we have a team there for every flight, and the other is applying a risk-based approach pre-COVID-19, I should say, to the passengers on the flight. As you'd be aware, as you come through the border you'll see biosecurity there but we won't stop every single person - this is pre-COVID-19 - and ask them biosecurity related questions. What we're saying is, we'll be there for every flight and then we'll apply the standard risk-based approach for when people come across the border.

Mr DEAN - My other question, minister, relates to the potato situation and the South Australian importing of potatoes into this state. There was a lot of angst in relation to this, a lot of angst from the potato farmers in this state in particular. What have we learned from that and what went wrong? I would have thought that in doing that that we would have talked to the industry in this state and that they would have been a part of the processes in putting all of this together and bringing in potatoes from South Australia. I understand why we've got to

have imports/exports and so on, to different places and states. But what have we learned from that? Is it a position of where the TFGA, I think, was very concerned that we weren't doing this in the right way, and that we could introduce a risk disease to this state as well?

Mr BARNETT - I know you're a big supporter of our agriculture sector as others are around this table. I'll make it very clear that we have to ensure that our trade and biosecurity arrangements remain in place and they're upheld. We don't want to be breaching any of those arrangements, and we have arrangements that are national and also international. We trade with the mainland, and you know how important it is, we talked about Bass Strait earlier. That's important.

In terms of potatoes and the issues that you've raised, I have met with the key stakeholders; I've met with the TFGA and I'm pleased to say the TFGA has welcomed very positively the government's response to the concerns that have been raised. I'm happy for the secretary to respond, but just to make it very clear in terms of consultation, it could have been better. I made that clear publicly, privately, elsewhere. As a result of that, going forward for any major product coming into the state, there will be consultation with the relevant stakeholders going forward. Further, in terms of decisions made, they will be released quarterly. There's full transparency, full openness.

Having said that, we then appointed an independent reviewer to assess the decision and I should put on the record my thanks to Andrew Bishop, the Chief Plant Health Manager. He was at the forefront of this, he's responded to it; and the independent reviewer, Lois Ransom was her name, she's a former Australian chief plant health officer. She did the review, came back and said, 'Look, it's technically sound', and made three recommendations around the review decision. They were taken on board and implemented in full. In addition to that, we've also responded to that with what's called an IRA, so that's a review assessment of the potatoes and whether they should be assessed and in what manner they should be assessed.

We've set up a round table with the key stakeholders, meeting with the department around that. So that process is now progressing, that IRA. TFGA is on the public record saying thank you to the government for their initiative in responding. They've supported that; I can read you a number of quotes. But they basically welcomed the review report and its recommendations and we're very grateful for that. It's a very important question. I will pass to the secretary to make sure I've provided a comprehensive response and add to that response if that's okay.

Mr DEAN I'll just add on, aren't we growing sufficient numbers of potatoes in this state to supply our market? That's the other question, and that's a question being asked by a lot of people.

Mr BAKER - It's a good question and it's a question that we continually ask ourselves, which is how can we improve in the department and something that we're very committed to. The first thing that came to mind when you asked the question for me, Mr Dean, was that I think one of the lessons that have been learnt out of this process is that we need to do more about getting a better understanding in the community about how the national biosecurity system works. We've had an accelerated process of that over the last few months, as we've now talked about IRAs and all the different rules and how they work.

The second point I would make is that as the minister has indicated, we could and we will be doing better now in the way we inform. Not consult, inform. It's really important that

we talk about that difference. When decisions are made by independent statutory officers like the highly qualified one at the end of the table here today -

Mr BARNETT - Can I interrupt and formally introduce and welcome Andrew Bishop, our Chief Plant Health Manager.

CHAIR - Welcome, Andrew.

Mr BARNETT - I'll put on the record my thanks to Andrew for his efforts during what has been a difficult time and for his service to the people of Tasmania and the potato industry.

Mr BAKER - When independent decisions are made by independent statutory officers like me and Mr Bishop, it's important that we explain not just the decision but why, and we've got some lessons out of that. We've indicated now that as part of our active disclosure, we will be releasing and informing. The third issue the minister touched on is consulting, the need to consult on the rules and the way the rules work. In this world, it's through the Import Risk Assessment. We've kicked off a process now to review the IRA for potatoes and to do it in a really constructive and consultative way.

The other change as the minister's indicated is, even though it's an independent statutory decision, where it's a statutory decision that has impact on the whole of the state or a large part of the industry, we've also undertaken to consult in that area as well. It's important that we get this balance right though, Mr Dean, because some of the permits we issue are very minor and they might be for very small things and we don't want to kick off a massive consultation process and slow farmers and business down. So we've got to apply a risk-based approach to that. It might be for one plant that someone's bringing back into the state for compassionate reasons which we've had recently and Andrew has approved.

They are the kinds of things, you don't want to do an industry wide consultation on. We're now consulting on what does significant mean for industry, so that we can talk to them about what are your expectations about when we should be consulting, when we should be informing, or when we should just be getting on with doing it. That's the process we're doing now. There's been a lot of good learnings for us through this. I'll reiterate the minister's point about Andrew and his team. We are very lucky to have Andrew and we're very lucky to have the skilled and qualified team.

Mr DEAN - Aren't we able to grow enough potatoes in this state? That was the other part of that question.

Mr BAKER - The answer to that question is probably yes. What I would say is, 4.5 times more food is produced in this state than is consumed and we need area free status, and we need a national biosecurity system to allow our cherry growers, our other growers to use that system. The national biosecurity system is the best friend that growers ever had in Tasmania and we can't be doing anything that undermines that system. That is my strong advice to the minister, and it's the strong advice from Andrew and Rae and others to me. If the national system allows it, if the risk is acceptable. We live in an environment where we've got free trade between states and we do not want to get into a situation where cherry growers, for example, can't export because some states are deciding that they don't want to recognise our pest-free status.

Mr DEAN - So is this a case where South Australia came to us and said we want to import our potatoes into Tasmania? Is that how it happened, or did we go to them? How did it occur?

Mr BARNETT - In terms of that detail, let's just ask Andrew Bishop to respond to that.

CHAIR - And we're into our lunch hour. So the longer you take, the less time you have to eat.

Mr BARNETT - That's fair enough. But it's a very important point and it's a good question so we'll just ask Andrew Bishop to respond.

CHAIR - Thanks, Andrew.

Mr BISHOP - I just wanted to take a step back in terms of import requirements. The range of import requirements we have are all built on import risk analyses. They all have consultative stages built into those and in fact the import requirement not only in relation to potatoes was developed by a working group with industry involvement. That applies across the board with all our import requirements. In this particular case, getting back to the question you just asked, we have a process of conditional exemptions that can be put into play for various reasons and these provide some currency if you like to the import requirements that we have. Some examples, which the secretary mentioned, which are the bulk of the sorts of things would be something like a plant pot with, you know, the stillborn child's ashes in the plant pot and they want to bring that across. We will work with the originating states authorities, enable that to occur and address any biosecurity issues. That's the more common one. In this particular case, this was a recognition of an area free from status of a state which South Australia have gained their two main certificates which are part of an Import Requirement 9. It was a recognition of that, which then would enable if that particular company wants to export, then they would be able to export.

How it actually works is an applicant can - it's available on the website - they can put in an application to seek a conditional exemption or an import requirement variation. I emphasise this is a conditional exemption. We don't just exempt people from import requirements, or we wouldn't have them in the first place. If a conditional exemption is issued there's a range of requirements that go with that as well both specific and general and it can vary depending on what the import is. So it's initiated by an applicant. Any individual, any company can initiate that. Then that's assessed through our own process of internal risk analysis.

Mr DEAN - So the company in South Australia came to us and said we want to export our product to Tasmania?

Mr BISHOP - They wanted access to Tasmania through another company, basically. Which is basically supplying products. It was a backup plan, so my understanding is they're not intending to send the potatoes to South Australia. They want an opportunity.

Mr DEAN - Right. Okay.

CHAIR - I have a question in regard to the biosecurity obligations around providing effluent pits and truck wash for the stock carters in the state. Smithton and Pyengana don't cut the mustard. I know they're saying that local government will do it. Well, local government

doesn't appear to be that interested. What are we going to do to meet a community expectation around this really important issue?

Mr BARNETT - We have invested \$2 million in our budget to support agricultural hygiene, and you refer to truck washers specifically. We have established an agricultural hygiene network, which I established not so many weeks ago, that meets with my department on a regular basis. On top of that, we are very thankful for the federal government's \$4 million support for truck washers and for agricultural hygiene. You mentioned Smithton and of course that's up and running, Powranna. I'm not sure if you were there, at the official opening, where I was in the back of the truck holding a hose - a high pressure hose.

CHAIR - Of course I was there.

Mr BARNETT - You were there watching and cheering and yes, I got a bit wet and dirty. But I did the job at Powranna. As you know the Northern Midland Small Business Association is operating that entity and I was there at Powranna a week or so ago at one of the sales. There's a fair bit of work going on between the department and the industry around spending that money rolling out our hygiene network plans and I'm happy to pass to the deputy secretary, Deirdre Wilson.

CHAIR - I've had a meeting with Chris Buza and he's been fantastic. But unless you've got a council area that's willing to put up their hand and take them on, they are not going to happen. So it's up to government to drive it. My view. Isn't that your view, as well, minister?

Mr BARNETT - Madam Chair, very important objective and I know you're thinking it's probably in particular of the north-east. I know how important the north-east is, particularly in terms of hygiene on trucks and transport. But if I can pass to the deputy secretary.

CHAIR - But it's a community expectation now. Nobody wants to follow a stock truck that's carted stock from Pyengana and needs to go to Smithton and not have somewhere to offload their effluent. Nobody wants to follow them. No matter where they come from.

Mr BARNETT - That's right. That's why I'm pleased the government's got \$2 million in our budget to support this very important matter, and in addition to that, the \$4 million from the federal government, so we're very grateful for that. We're working shoulder to shoulder with the industry, transport operators to get the job done and there's a lot of work going on behind the scenes, for which I'm very grateful. I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms WILSON - I would re-emphasise that our state-wide reference group has some really key participants: Livestock Transport Association, TFGA, TAPG and Cradle Coast Authority and the Tasmanian Transport Association. As the minister said, he's been to a meeting. The reference group meets regularly and it is about understanding need and demand and to assist us to identify potential proponents. Our project officer, Chris, who you've mentioned, did help get the Powranna truck wash up and he has worked hand in glove with them in working through the issues, and it's a very successful facility now. He understands what it takes to get up a truck wash and he's very good at looking to find communities of interest, people that may be interested in partnering.

I'm not saying that that's easy, though. It is complex, it is difficult, but I think we put it as no stone unturned to both understand the need, but also to look for partners. We're actively

engaged with the north-east and the Dorset Council and with looking to see if there are potential other proponents.

CHAIR - And in the south of the state?

Ms WILSON - In the south, we are doing a study to examine the disposition and structure of the livestock sector, so we want to understand - like we did for Powranna and Smithton - where are the flow-throughs and where are the ideal locations. It doesn't necessarily need to be a Powranna-size facility everywhere. So that's determining what facilities are needed and what might be viable in the region, so we're working on that right now. It's due to report in the near future, and that will help guide where we look for partners and where we look for proponents and what size and scale and what would work best for the industry.

CHAIR - Okay. That reference group has been meeting for three years, so it's taking too long, but I understand there's been a group meeting.-

Ms WILSON - This has been through a number of stages, but this group is more recent.

CHAIR - I'll be keeping a watching brief on this because it has to have something done to it. When you travel to Smithton from some of those northern areas you do not go via Powranna, so there's a lot of effluent that comes out of the various cartage contractors. It is not acceptable by the community any longer. When we've got to focus on biosecurity, we need to put our focus there as well, and I say that as an elected member.

Thank you, minister. The time being 12 minutes past 1, we will re-convene at 12 minutes past 2 p.m. Thank you. .

The Committee suspended from 1.13 p.m. to 2.14 p.m.

CHAIR - Welcome back, minister.

Mr BARNETT - You understand the secretary's unable to be here, but I'm well supported by my deputy secretary and the rest of the team.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. That's fine. We will head right back into your area of Minister for Primary Industries and Water and go straight to product integrity.

6.2 Product integrity

CHAIR - I remind not only members but yourself, minister, that we need to catch up some time.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Thank you, member for Launceston.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have given my questions on notice and that should save some time. With regard to bees, we know around Australia there were some problems with the Varroa mite

and some other pesticides that cause problems for our bees. How is Tasmania managing with pesticides and mites and any other parasites that might affect the bees and their habitat?

Mr BARNETT - There was a discussion over the lunch period, and I can indicate bees are very important part of agriculture and our environment. We're very grateful for the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association. We have a very close contact with them. Lindsay Bourke who you would know, member -

Ms ARMITAGE - I do know him.

Mr BARNETT - a very fine man, and a wonderful leader in this area. As a Government, we provide support, \$750 000 in our budget for the Bee Industry Futures fund. We also work with the federal government, the former minister for primary industries and provided some support for research purposes into the bee industry. With respect to the specific question around the insects and the impact on bees, perhaps if I pass to my deputy secretary for further detail.

Ms ARMITAGE - And pesticides also affect them.

Ms WILSON - Tasmania's in a fortunate position with respect to our bees, as we do not have Varroa mites. Nor do I believe we have some other pests in other parts of the country, such as small hive beetle, hence our bees are actually quite sought after for being disease-free. Biosecurity Tasmania has an industry support officer, Karla Williams. I mention her because she's wonderful and works very closely with the industry. Because of our fortunate disease-free status with respect to bees, Biosecurity Tasmania has strict import requirements for live bees, particularly queen bees and also with respect to any hives, so anything that might house bees are inspected.

Regarding pesticides used and bees, the minister would back me up in saying bees are very important to our agricultural industries and that farmers will use chemicals in accordance with labels. Where we have bees that come in for pollination, they are very aware those bees are coming in to do a job and their chemical management needs to take that into account.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. My next question is to do with horse meat. I notice on the DPIPWE website it says -

In the light of the horse meat substitution issue affecting parts of the European Union, Food Standards Australia New Zealand has confirmed that meat substitution is unlikely to occur in Australia,

It doesn't say it won't. It just says it is unlikely. I noticed now it's been an issue once again with COVID-19 that the question has been raised about food scandals on the horizon in Europe, given the difficulty getting meat and other foodstuffs. Could you comment it saying unlikely as opposed to not happening?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'd be happy to comment and then pass to the deputy secretary. As a former lawyer who acted for the Elders International and the Australian Dairy Corporation, when I worked for the Taft law firm in Washington DC, the issue of meat substitutes and whether it be horse or beef -

Ms ARMITAGE - Pigs often are substituted for beef in hamburgers.

Mr BARNETT - Very important issue, particularly in the international arena. Having some experience in this prior to my senate days and prior to now, it is an important issue. It's primarily an issue for food safety and the Food and Drug Administration in the US, and likewise here in Australia. Food safety is not in my area but of other ministers. I'm sure the deputy secretary would be happy to respond in the best way she can. Regarding horses, we have a Minister for Racing in Tasmania. In terms of animal welfare, I'm responsible and have an assurance in terms of animal welfare matters. We take them very seriously. In fact, we've strengthened the laws. We've increased the penalties on animal welfare and happy to put that on the record. On the specific issues you've raised I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms ARMITAGE - It's probably more likely, minister, rather than happening in Tasmania with the horses, because as I was speaking to the deputy secretary before, when you go to buy bacon, for example, if you have a look at the back you'll see that most of the product is from overseas. It might have been processed here, but it will say 'from overseas product.' It's more likely it's coming into the country and the possibility - rather than something happening with our horses, if it happens at all that it's coming in that sort of state.

Mr BARNETT - Sure and I'll definitely pass to the deputy secretary. Any of these matters if they are imported from interstate or overseas are relevant to the federal government.

Ms ARMITAGE - But it's still product integrity coming into Tasmania.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, of course. Some of these matters are very important in Tasmania. I'll pass to the deputy secretary.

Ms WILSON - I reiterate that's true if a product is coming in nationally and is labelled a particular way would be a matter for both the national food regularity body, FSANZ, as well as the Justice department. Truth in labelling is the vernacular form for it. In other words, people can't label something which it is not and if they do, penalties will apply. I had a quick look at the website, which took me to the meat substitution risk in Australia. That report where it said it was unlikely was from FSANZ and their conclusion was in Australia there are strict consumer protection food acts, consumer protection laws and regulation of abattoirs.

To bring it back to biosecurity, Biosecurity Tasmania through our Primary Produce Safety Act accredits abattoirs and pet food facilities. There are seven abattoirs managed by Biosecurity Tasmania and two are federally export orientated regulated by the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment. We look after abattoirs which are for human consumption and we have no abattoirs licensed for human consumption of horse meat, our knackereries are for pet food.

The distinction between the two is important, there are bi-annual inspections of abattoirs and we also go to the knackereries. If we were to see animal species not licenced to be slaughtered at an abattoir, that would raise an immediate red flag. We would be saying that's not a species of animal lawfully able to be processed through the abattoir and we would investigate. The other reason why we also regulate our pet food industry is for the same reason, so we can understand what's going through those facilities and is also a check on meat substitution. Nationally there'd be similar regulations relating to abattoirs and pet food

producers which would give - one can never say it will not happen, but at least some protections.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. One last question to do with the oysters and the Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome. I believe all assistance measures have now ceased with regard to this. Do we have any future control program arrangements proposed to ensure we don't have problems as we've had in the past? Is there anything expected or proposed for the future?

Mr BARNETT - We have an ongoing relationship with Oysters Tasmania. I commend Ben Cameron, the former president for his leadership and also Sue Grau, the Executive Director. They do a great job and we have regular contact. I acknowledge that and likewise with the department. Biosecurity Tasmania has ongoing discussions with Oysters Tasmania regarding POMS. That's what you're referring to?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, it is POMS.

Mr BARNETT - As to the ongoing POMS control arrangements and actions, we have plans as a Government with the industry to develop an Oyster industry biosecurity program based on POMS, to be implemented within the Biosecurity Act. I must put on the record how pleased I am it was passed through the parliament, landmark legislation, pulling together seven pieces of legislation into the one. It's everybody's responsibility, of course. Biosecurity Tasmania to protect the Tasmania brand and the POMS permit system is being maintained by Biosecurity Tasmania. I will pass to the deputy secretary, if she'd like to add anything further.

Ms WILSON - No, I think that's the current situation. Biosecurity Tasmania manages any movements, for example, and it is around controlling POMS as best we can.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you very much, minister. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Any breaches of product integrity?

Mr BARNETT - That's a broad question. Anything in particular you were thinking of?

CHAIR - No, I was thinking that there might have been a particular product not meeting the standards.

Mr BARNETT - I will pass to the deputy secretary. It's a broad question but if there is some detail there perhaps the deputy secretary could respond.

Ms WILSON - Biosecurity Tasmania works with food safety auditors in the primary industry sector to audit particular businesses, meat, eggs, seafood, sea sprouts, pet food and produce transport. There were 270 regulatory food safety audits conducted on behalf of Biosecurity Tasmania during 2019-20. All I've got at the moment is there is a small number of non-compliances identified, however, in all cases corrective actions have been taken to achieve compliance.

CHAIR - That's all we need to know. We have touched on this through the output groups, but it is important the member for Rosevears asks the 90.2 COVID-19 response and recovery. Thank you, Ms Palmer.

Output Group 90
COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.2 Seafood industry growth and recovery -

Ms PALMER - We have heard continuously through today about how COVID-19 has interrupted our year and our lives so dramatically. I'm wondering if you could update the committee on measures to support the agricultural sector during COVID-19?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can. That's a really important question because they've needed that support and the Government has provided that support. First, because they are an essential service. Agriculture we heard earlier today produces four and a half times more than what we consume and we identified it as an essential service right up front. We acted; we responded. Likewise, worked with our federal colleagues to ensure agriculture is protected and preserved and provided the support needed. We received very good feedback, in particular from the TFGA, Fruit Growers Tasmania, Wine Tasmania and all the key stakeholders.

I mentioned the round tables earlier in the day which we started with, the Agriculture Coordination Group. I can't thank the stakeholders enough for coming to that round table with their challenges, concerns and with a cooperative positive approach - team Tasmania. We worked together, chaired by my secretary and then also my deputy secretary. It worked really well as we worked together shoulder to shoulder to get the job done. In addition to that, we've had the agribusiness workforce round table, very focused as the Chair outlined in one of those earlier questions on the seasonal workforce issues. Round tables again driving objectives and action to ensure we have the workforce in those places to pick the fruit, harvest the veggies and get it off to market.

In addition, supply chain integrity groups regarding processors, meat processing. Victoria, as you would be aware, had some serious issue COVID-19 outbreak and had to cut back big time. Thanks to the work of our meat processors in Tasmania, we've got the job done, and delivered food to the market so consumers could enjoy. We've had the FarmPoint helpline enhanced with \$1.9 million support, Safe Farm handling support again providing a COVID-safe environment on the farm in agribusinesses all around Tassie to support those jobs. Likewise, we've worked very closely at the national level with the national minister and with their support and Senator Jonno Duniam. The Tasmanian Liberal Senate team has been great. Gavin Pearce and Bridget Archer have all been at the forefront of providing support for agriculture in Tasmania during the coronavirus pandemic. On top of all that, are our budget initiatives to back-in agriculture, and we're backing it to the hilt. I appreciate the question.

CHAIR - Thank you. I think that's covered both questions. Any questions, members, on grants and subsidies? I have one question -

Ms PALMER - I'm sorry, Chair, I do have another question on 90.6 if you're happy for me to do that.

CHAIR - Yes, that's fine.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much.

90.6 Agricultural workforce resilience -

Ms PALMER - Minister, I've heard from a number of industry groups how they value the support of the Tasmanian Government through the strategic industry partnership program, and I'm aware that this was recently extended. I'm just wondering if you could update us on this important program.

Mr BARNETT - I am pleased to update the committee on that important program. It's the strategic industry partnership program. It's supporting our key stakeholders in that space on fruit, wine, transport and hemp. I mentioned the Tasmanian Hemp Association; they've got their \$72 000. I was pleased to talk to Peter Cornish from the Fruit Growers Tasmania last night, \$112 00 over 12 years to support their efforts to provide that support in a time of need. Awareness raising, education, skills development in this industry to get the message out and provide the jobs in that sector. In addition, I can advise the committee, \$95 000 was provided to Wine Tasmania. Again, for training, and skills development in that space.

Workshops for the wine producers, cellar door sales are particularly important. They've had a tough time during COVID-19, the lack of customers, visitors to the cellar door. This will give them that support in the coming years, and the member for Rosevears remembers that wonderful launch we had in the West Tamar supporting Wine Tasmania. Sheralee Davies was there, you, me, and many others. The Livestock Transport Association, we've given them support for the period ahead.

I'll also mention Sustainable Production Research and Training Inc (Sprout). I talked to Jennifer Robinson yesterday. She was delighted. She was pleased, because these are the small, boutique producers of not just organic, but small producers of livestock products, and they're all around Tasmania. We want them to get out there, collect the information and the data so we're better informed on how we can support them going forward. I thank Jennifer Robinson and Sprout Tasmania for what they do. They're a very active, small organisation, but they do a terrific job, promoting that online education, development, engagement with their members and the communities in which they live and work, really appreciate their support. I'm delighted with those strategic industry partnership programs. They're working well. And again, Team Tasmania, working with the industry to get the job done, creating jobs, building confidence and supporting our communities.

CHAIR - Thank you. Thank you very much, minister.

Grants and Subsidies

CHAIR - In regard to grants and subsidies, does the funding for the Scottsdale Pork Abattoir come under grants and subsidies or capital investment?

Mr BARNETT - That would come under the Minister for State Growth, Mr Ferguson. I can advise as you might have seen publicly, it's in your patch. It's in the north-east. Very important to the pig industry and the pork industry in Tasmania.

CHAIR - We won't have any industry without that facility.

Mr BARNETT - You won't have an industry without processing. I've had a lot of feedback over the last 12 months to two years. And, of course, TQM stepped into the breach

at Devonport. Devonport City Abattoir is taking over from JB Swift, as you might recall. I'm very grateful to Swift and TQM for providing that processing facility at Devonport. There's funding support for Scottsdale Pork to provide access to a processing facility for our pigs. It's a very important part of our meat industry.

CHAIR - Are you aware of how many jobs that will generate, minister?

Mr BARNETT - Not exactly, but I know it's a good number of jobs in the north-east. It will preserve and support ongoing jobs for the pig industry across Tasmania.

CHAIR - I couldn't agree more. Any other questions, members, around grants and subsidies? If not, I'll move to capital investment.

Capital investment

CHAIR - Minister, in regard to the research stations that we have in Tasmania, I'm particularly interested to get your commitment to the investment that is needed at the Cressy Research Station. We know that Upper Murray Seeds has been doing a great job in regard to that particular research station. I'm just looking to see where your mind is when it comes to the support for that research station.

Mr BARNETT - You are a very strong advocate for your community and your ongoing lobbying of the relevant minister - as in me - is consistent. It is a very important facility for the future. You're specifically referring to Stewart and Kate Sutherland who do a wonderful job at Burlington Berries, and employ dozens of people across the road at the back of Cressy in terms of berries and fruit. We have a vision to grow our agricultural research services, to grow research and development, and that's across the board at our various agricultural farms in the north and also down south at Grove, and we're talking to and meeting with the fruit growers about that.

In that regard at Cressy, Upper Murray Seeds has put forward a proposal. That's been carefully and positively considered by the government, and we'll have more to say about this in the not too distant future. I will be there at the opening on 10 December. I was very honoured to be invited to do the opening, and to provide that support wherever possible. Infrastructure is a key focus there because that will be ongoing. They have a lease for a period of time, and we want to ensure that those benefits flow through to the public in due course.

CHAIR - Such an important piece of infrastructure for not only the agriculture industry, but for that particular region in our state. The improvements they have undertaken and completed at the research station are fantastic, and I've looked over those myself.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, as have I.

CHAIR - I'll look forward to those further announcements.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair.

CHAIR - Any other questions in regard to capital investment? If not, minister, can I invite you, if you need, to change personnel, as we are at Inland Fisheries.

Inland Fisheries

Mr BARNETT - I welcome John Diggle to the table, and thank him and the Inland Fisheries Service for their excellent service to Tasmania, and our world class inland fishery.

CHAIR - I invite Ms Armitage to begin the questions. Thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'll start with the Salmon Ponds, and the fish kill recently due to waste contamination, which I believe resulted in the loss of an entire series of genetics such as the Brook trout genetics. What provisions have been made by the Government to remediate this key ecological issue?

Mr BARNETT - I will pass to John Diggle to report further about that. As the minister, I was extremely concerned when I heard about the fish mortality event at the Salmon Ponds on 23 September this year. Since the incident, the advice I have - and I can give you this detail - a total of 120 000 brown trout fry and 13 000 rainbow trout fry, 43 Brook adult trout brood stock, and 28 adult display fish have died. As a keen angler and fisher, and as minister responsible for fisheries, I take this matter very seriously. I raised my concerns directly with the secretary of my department and am advised that the independent Environmental Protection Authority is undertaking a full investigation of the matter. I advise the EPA is investing significant resources into investigating this event. This has included collecting a range of samples and survey information related to the alleged release of pollution into the Plenty River. Further, I'd like to advise that an Environmental Protection Notice was served on 25 September 2020 requiring the removal of pollutants from the land that could cause further contaminated runoff to the Plenty River. The EPA has and will continue to ensure that the EPN is complied with as they continue to undertake the investigation. Further as this is an active investigation, I'm unable to provide comment on the matter, and I want to make that clear.

The Inland Fishery Service advised that despite the event, fry have been raised in sufficient quantities to meet the restocking program requirements for the coming season. Further, the IFS advised that fish in the display ponds have recovered and the Salmon Ponds remain open. I encourage Tasmanians to visit the Salmon Ponds wherever possible. Enjoy that time, it's a wonderful tourist and general asset. I also understand that IFS is not aware of any subsequent water quality concerns at the site. Having said that, John Diggle is sitting on my right and might have further to add.

Mr DIGGLE - In response to your question around brook trout - we didn't lose all of our brook trout restock. It was around half.

Ms ARMITAGE - So you lost a lot of trout all up?

Mr DIGGLE - We did lose a lot of trout fry, yes. .

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. To follow on from that, have any other fish in other areas been killed due to waste contamination such as waste in the Tamar River?

Mr DIGGLE - That's not really a matter I can comment on. That'll be an EPA matter.

Mr BARNETT - It's certainly a matter for the EPA. I'm not aware of it. I think you have minister Jaensch as responsible for the EPA.

CHAIR - No.

Mr BARNETT - Well, it is certainly a matter for minister Jaensch, but it's not something that I could comment on, unfortunately.

Ms ARMITAGE - Okay. I might have to follow up with him. Another question, looking at page 93 in the Inland Fisheries Service Budget book, or on page 94, it says, 'To expand IFS's Anglers Access Program across priority lakes and rivers, in the north-west, north-east and Derwent catchment, funding totalling \$200 000 has been provided for three years 2019' - hang on, maybe it's a year, that's not there. I think I'm all right with that. Forget that one. Let me go to something else.

Mr BARNETT - The Anglers Access Program is fantastic.

Ms ARMITAGE - We'd love you to tell me how it's going.

Mr BARNETT - It's working really well.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes. I was looking for the other 50 000 but I think I've missed a year there.

Mr BARNETT - The Anglers Access Program, I can tell you the angler's love it. They always want more access wherever possible but we are delivering as a government on top of that and we've got funding in the budget for it. As you know we do fund the Anglers Alliance Tasmania as a peak body and we provide further support for anglers' access wherever possible.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm pleased I found that extra \$50 000. The member for Windermere told me he's not going to continue these questions that he's asked in parliament so I will just -

Mr DEAN - I'll be continuing them, but not here. I'll be continuing them, I can assure you of that.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's okay, I understand that. He was happy for me to ask about the Arthur's Lake Trout Fishery. The low number of trout at Arthur's Lake was advised to be recovering as of mid-October. Can you expand on how this number is rising and what measures Inland Fisheries are taking to assist?

Mr BARNETT - I can, but I think John Diggle, our director, will have more detail. I'm aware of the concerns of some anglers with respect to Arthur's Lake. Those concerns have been raised with me. They've been raised with John Diggle. It has been improving, it's recovering, albeit slowly and the IFS, I'm advised, expect that to continue to improve over a period of time. They do surveys, and assess the catches. There was a report in October. I'll pass to John Diggle for further information.

Mr DIGGLE - Arthur's Lake has natural recruitment, so we're not looking to stock it at all to try to supplement the fishery. We think there's adequate spawning recruitment at Arthur's Lake so that part of it's fine. It has had a productivity issue since 2009, when it rapidly filled with the breaking of the millennium drought. That caused some issues in the carrying capacity for Arthur's Lake and the population did struggle around that time. As the minister mentioned,

it is recovering slowly and this season it has fished particularly well, with lure anglers and fly anglers recording good catches even through into November - and that's numbers of fish, getting good bags of fish. It's well on the road to recovery now and we're expecting its performance to start to come back to normal.

Ms ARMITAGE - We wouldn't be removing any from Arthur's Lakes to the Salmon Ponds to help out there with the loss that we've had in the Salmon Ponds?

Mr DIGGLE - The fish we lost at the Salmon Ponds were fry. We raise sufficient fry at the Salmon Ponds to meet our stocking program. We don't need to take any fish from Arthur's Lake to supplement the Salmon Ponds.

Mr DEAN - So there's breeding stocks there for all that.

Mr DIGGLE - We collect over Liawenee Canal.

Mr DEAN - That's right. It's the trout run.

Mr DIGGLE - Yes. We take eggs from there to the Salmon Ponds and hatch them out and then stock from there.

Ms ARMITAGE - And you stock from there.

Mr DEAN - That's how it's done.

Mr DIGGLE - We also do adult transfers from Liawenee, from certain fisheries where adult fish are more suited.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. One more question - the \$300 000 over four years, from 2018-19 towards the freeze of inland trout fishing licences, how is that tracking and how well has that been subscribed?

Mr BARNETT - A key ingredient to the Tasmanian way of life is our recreational fishing, including inland fishing. That's been a very popular decision that we've made prior to the last election.

Ms ARMITAGE - You've had a lot of people taking it up?

Mr BARNETT - A lot of people taking it up. I can give you those details of the people taking it up. Of course, we've had COVID-19, but we've had our incentive program with the \$10 000 tagged trout. You might recall Fiona Batterham, 12 years old, Hagley Farm school girl - some people say I rigged it. That's not true, although I was a Hagley Farm schoolboy. The \$10 000 trout has been a real incentive and that was from Lake Rowallan. There are four other lakes so I say to Tasmanians get out there, go and catch those other four fish that are tagged. Get a \$10 000 trout. You can do that until the end of the season which is 2 May next year.

John Diggle might have the latest numbers, but there's been an increase.

Ms ARMITAGE - How much have we left? About 300 000?

Mr BARNETT - I'll just say in terms of the numbers, licensed anglers, which was part of your question, there's been an increase. John, you've got those figures for the increase in licensed angler's numbers?

Mr DIGGLE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - In fact I've got the details here. As of 19 November, 18 089 angling licences have been issued for 2021. This is a 6 per cent increase on the same time last year. Notwithstanding COVID-19, people are getting out there. There's a real incentive; government incentives are working and we're working with the sector to enjoy that fishing and make it available for Tasmanians to enjoy.

CHAIR - Tasmanians were encouraged to go fish. Depending on where you put your boat in, if you had to put a boat in, and I think people in Launceston were a little bit disadvantaged

Mr BARNETT - Yes, there was a period of time where it was challenging, I agree.

Ms ARMITAGE - It was. My last question, thank you. What outcomes have thus far been achieved through the implementation of the fisheries digital transition project? A program to maximise efficiencies for fisheries and management and quota monitoring through the use of digital licensing and reporting platforms.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I just give you a heads up. That's the previous item. So that's sea fishing.

Ms ARMITAGE - Is it?

Mr BARNETT - It's relevant to commercial fishing. There has been good progress. We're cutting the red tape, we're streamlining the process. It's a \$5 million program over a number of years. Ian Dutton, who was here on my right a few hours ago, is working with the industry. The industry is responding. They appreciate that. They are working with the department. In fact, I visited the department that's working on this a few weeks ago.

Ms ARMITAGE - I knew you'd be across it minister.

Mr BARNETT - It's working well. It will take a number of years but it's progressing. We're streamlining the process so that those commercial fisherman can get out there and catch the fish and don't get caught up in the paperwork. As a government, that's what we want. We want them to do what they're good at, and that's fishing. These are for the commercial fishing operators. We're in a digital age, we're making life easier and that's what the initiatives all about.

Ms ARMITAGE - I appreciate the answer. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. On page 96, minister, can you explain why the employee benefits go up in 2022 and then fall away again in 2023.

Mr BARNETT - Page 96?

Mr WILLIE - Yes. Under Employee Benefits, under Liabilities.

Mr BARNETT - Are we on -

CHAIR - Volume 2.

Mr BARNETT - Sorry. I'm on -

CHAIR - You're on the big volume.

Mr BARNETT - That sounds an operational question, we'll just get to page 96 and Liabilities.

Mr WILLIE - Yes. Employee Benefits. They go up in 2022 and then fall away again the following year and I am wondering why that is.

Mr BARNETT - In terms of liabilities. 2022, so it goes from 667 to 722.

Mr WILLIE - And then back to 618.

Mr BARNETT - And then back to 618. That's a forward Estimate for 2023, so that's obviously a few years out, but let's see if the deputy secretary has a response. We can always follow up.

Ms WILSON - Minister, we may need to follow up, but that normally relates to ons and offs.

CHAIR - An extra pay period? We've heard that before.

Ms WILSON - I don't know. I'd have to have a look.

Mr WILLIE - Just seems odd.

Ms WILSON - Sorry. I normally bring my book, but I didn't.

Mr WILLIE - While we're having a look at that, I have some other questions on this page. Why does IFS have \$2.9 million in reserves under Equity?

Mr BARNETT - John Diggle can provide more details. They own a number of assets around the state, whether you call them in reserves, they are important part of the service provided to over 20 000 anglers across the state, not to mention our licensed interstate and overseas angler.

Mr DIGGLE - Yes. We operate a little bit differently to the budget agency, so we actually hold cash and carry cash forward. Our situation is a little bit different and why we will have reserve. We get an appropriation through the department each year, but also generate our own revenues and hold our own bank accounts and manage our cash that way to meet our operation through the year. Our grant is partial. We retain revenue from licence sales as part of our budget also. Yes, we're managing reserves to manage our cash flow through the year.

Mr WILLIE - Right. Minister, is there an explanation on why it goes up from 2020 to 2021 to that new level which is then maintained through the forward Estimates?

CHAIR - The interest is next to zilch at the minute.

Mr BARNETT - I can check with the deputy secretary and John Diggle. My details are the rents and investment in the 2019-20 year totalled 439 000, equivalent to 12 per cent of total revenue. Then 2021 is 537 500, equivalent to 16 per cent of total revenue. That's rents and income. Does that help?

Mr WILLIE - No. Can we take this on notice? An explanation on the employee benefit for 2022 and why it falls away again, and also the increase in reserves from 2020 to 2021.

Mr BARNETT - Are you happy to take that on notice unless you have an answer, John?

Mr DIGGLE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - So we'll take that on notice, no problem. Thanks, Mr Willie. We'll do that.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you.

CHAIR - That it, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Dean would like to go whitebaiting.

Mr WILLIE - I've got one more actually.

CHAIR - You've got another question?

Mr WILLIE - Yes. If there's an explanation of what 'other equity' means in the statement of the financial position?

CHAIR - There's three questions there.

Mr WILLIE - If there's an explanation for that, minister.

Mr BARNETT - John, do you want to answer that, or do you want to take it on notice?

Mr DIGGLE - We need to take it on notice because I think this relates to the accounting standards and it's a detailed finance question.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Okay. We'll get back to you. We'll take that on notice.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Mr Dean, and I'm mindful, I'd like to be gone out of this area by 3 pm, so that's six minutes.

Mr DEAN - Mr Diggle would be expecting this question in relation to offences in the inland fisheries areas. The number of offences through the financial year, what the offences have been for, and any other issues that might've arisen in relation to difficult anglers. Whether there have been any assaults or any of that type of behaviour on our inland fisheries personnel.

Mr BARNETT - If I kick it off and partly answer because we've got 10 authorised officers responsible for enforcement.

Mr DEAN - Ten.

Mr BARNETT - I know you're focused on enforcement and compliance, which is a really important matter under the act. Fisheries officers inspected 2417 -

Mr DEAN - Individual licences?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Individual recreational angling licences. And 157 recreational whitebait licences.

Mr DEAN - Licences.

Mr BARNETT - You were asking about that earlier.

Mr DEAN - Yes. Whitebait.

Mr BARNETT - These operations combat the whitebait poaching. It remains a priority for our Government. Last year the IFS was successful in securing one of the largest individual fines ever imposed under our inland fisheries legislation. It's a good result. The IFS worked cooperatively with police, MAST and Parks and Wildlife Service to enhance our compliance efforts across the state, particularly in the central highlands.

Mr DEAN - And quantum on that occasion?

Mr BARNETT - I don't know specifically the answer to that question. I'll see if John Diggle does.

Mr DIGGLE - No, I don't have the detail. It was a significant number of fines due to 28 charges. It was multiple offences.

Mr DEAN - When we say 'multiple offences', minister, is that in relation to just one area of fishing?

Mr DIGGLE - There were repeated offences over a period of time.

Mr DEAN - I see. The same type of offence over a number of -

Mr DIGGLE - Yes, for \$23 000 in total.

CHAIR - Expensive fish.

Mr DEAN - And that was whitebait, minister?

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Mr DEAN - What would be the impact of that on the whitebait fisheries? It's a sizeable fine and we're trying to protect this industry.

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question on the impact on the whitebait.

Mr DEAN - And the area?

Mr BARNETT - This is all related to the Duck River. In and around the Duck River. On six occasions during September 2018 this particular person was caught illegally fishing for whitebait. Totally illegal as at the time the Duck River was closed to the taking of whitebait. The penalty should be a warning to anybody who wants to breach our fisheries laws that they will be dealt with in accordance with the law. It's a priority for our Government.

Mr DEAN - It's not finalised yet?

Mr BARNETT - He's been fined \$23 000.

Mr DEAN - Has the fine been paid or recovered?

Ms WILSON - We wouldn't know the answer to that question.

Mr BARNETT - I don't know the answer to that.

Mr DEAN - Right. I was wondering if that's the case. How many many offenders were during the whole year - that's one referred to. Have we got the number of offenders that would've been served infringement notices or other offences for the year? Normally, Mr Diggle answers that very quickly.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'll pass to the director, Mr Diggle.

Mr DIGGLE - The prosecution offences for 2019-20 - we had 35 in the Magistrates Court. Some of those may relate to previous years that were heard. Infringement notice and conditional cautions - we had 61. As the minister pointed out, there were the other checks. The total value from fines was \$38 655 for 2019-20.

Mr DEAN - When did the championships event take place?

Mr BARNETT - A year ago, almost to the day.

Mr DEAN - And that was covered in the last Estimates?

Mr BARNETT - Last weekend of November and the first week of December. I remember it well because I was there.

Mr DEAN - We talking about 2019, are we?

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Mr DEAN - So it wouldn't have been covered. Was it successful? Of course we read a lot about it, but can you give me details on that activity?

Mr BARNETT - Absolutely. It highlights the fact we have a world-class trout fishery, to start with. It's a world fly fishing championship, and the last time was 1988, here in Tasmania. So we're very proud of that. We secured funding support and that event. I think there were 23 separate teams from 23 separate countries and around Australia, more than 800 competitors, and team members and others, who came to Tasmania.

Yes, it was a great success. Unfortunately, or fortunately, it was very windy for those five to six days. The feedback I had from the international competitors was that it was one of the best championships they've ever attended, primarily because of the hospitality they received. As you know, it was based out of Launceston. You had the two rivers, the Meander and Mersey, and then the three lakes - Woods Lake, Little Pine Lagoon and Penstock Lagoon. They loved it and really appreciated it. I enjoyed supporting them and being there at the occasion in advance, and then the final dinner in the Albert Hall. I'm not sure if you were there?

Mr DEAN - No, I wasn't.

Mr BARNETT - Many hundreds of people. The French won the championship, and a British-Anglo won the individual championship. They raved about it. You can see it on YouTube and social media and elsewhere. The Inland Fisheries Service has promoted it as part of our promotion - the fact we have a world-class trout fishery, get out there and enjoy it. Come to Tasmania if you're interstate, overseas. I expect we'll be feeding off and leveraging off that world championship for years to come.

Mr DEAN - That's great. There was a lot of promotion on it, and we wanted to ensure you had all the resources that were necessary for this event, so we raised it a number of times. That's great.

Ms ARMITAGE - That was when we had the terrible weather.

Mr BARNETT - Five days of very windy weather. But they caught - how many fish, John?

Mr DIGGLE - I can't recall the number. They caught thousands of fish.

Mr BARNETT - Thousands of fish, it's incredible. That's how good they are.

Ms ARMITAGE - Many of them were probably used to weather like that, particularly from the UK and Scotland.

CHAIR - Minister, I would like to now invite you to focus your mind on your ministry of Resources. Thank you very much, John, always good to catch up with you.

Mr BARNETT - I thank all the departmental officers relevant to DPIPWE for their service and support today.

CHAIR - We'll endorse those thanks, minister. They do a mighty job.

Mr DEAN - John, does a great job in his area. He's got a good reputation.

Ms WILSON - Minister, before we finish, I have a slight correction of the record.

Mr BARNETT - Okay.

Ms WILSON - This is relating to our policy of moving 100 people north. We quoted a figure from 31 March of 53. The new figure for November, which has just been used in another brief, was 56. It's just a difference in the timing between March and November, but the actual number now is 56.

CHAIR - So 53 now becomes 56. Thank you.

DIVISION 11

Department of State Growth

Output Group 4 - Resources Policy and Regulatory Services

4.1 Forestry Policy and Reform

CHAIR - Minister for Resources, we would very much appreciate you introducing your team at the table.

Mr BARNETT - I welcome and introduce on my left Kim Evans, department secretary, and Al Morton, director of forest resources. Chair, if you're happy, I'll share some opening remarks?

CHAIR - Absolutely.

Mr BARNETT - A very important sector, Resources is crucial to the state economy, providing employment and opportunities, particularly in regional areas. We're very passionate about protecting and promoting this sector, particularly during the greatest health and economic crisis that we've seen since World War II.

In short, every job counts. I repeat that, every job counts. The resources sector has been delivering in that regard. There's certainly no greater friend to the mining and mineral processing sector than our Liberal Government. There are over 5000 jobs in that sector, and more than half of our exports are from that sector - over \$2 billion annually, that's how important it is to the state economy. During COVID-19, we've had serious challenges, but we've worked very closely with the industry, and I thank the industry for that.

In recent months, you would have heard the good news in terms of the sale of TEMCO, ensuring ongoing employment at Bell Bay. The sale and proposed reopening of the

Beaconsfield gold mine, the multimillion dollar investments at operating mines including Savage River, which I visited a couple of months ago, and also at Renison, and an increase in the royalty income for the first six months compared to the same time last year.

Our Budget is backing the sector with \$1.6 million for our Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative to help the mineral sector find new greenfield development sites, and boost those regional communities. We also have \$450 000 as part of our mining sector innovation initiative, which is helping Tassie stay at the cutting edge when it comes to technology and mining practices. We have \$150 000 in the Budget for our Geoscience Initiative, again supporting access to geoscience data to find the mineral assets that they need.

In short, the coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on mineral exploration expenditure nationally, and Tasmania is not immune. These trends for exploration expenditure for the 12 months to June 2020 came in at \$11 million. The Explorer Support Package in June 2020 was an initiative in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and the Government implemented those support measures.

We're starting to see signs of recovery in exploration. You might have noticed a 50 per cent increase in exploration licence applications in the calendar year 2020 to date, when compared with the average number of applications for the previous three years.

In terms of forestry, there is no greater supporter of the forest industry. You know I'm a strong supporter, Chair, and others know that. We have thousands of direct and indirect jobs in this sector, \$1.2 billion support for the economy. It's a cornerstone of our economy, particularly in those rural and regional areas. In short, wood is good. It's sustainable; it's renewable. It's the ultimate renewable, it's important domestically, interstate and for our export markets.

The harvesting, haulage, processing and export of forest products continued through the pandemic but at reduced levels, despite some significant supply chain impacts and challenges. So it's been tough during this time but we've provided the support they've needed, further roundtables with the industry, working shoulder to shoulder to help them get their product to market.

The importance of the resources industry should not be underestimated. We're currently experiencing downward pressure on whole log exports in terms of both volumes and prices in exports, particularly vis-à-vis China, and plantation woodchip exports have experienced reduced prices with exports also experiencing significantly reduced volumes. As I've indicated, we're working closely with the industry. I've hosted two forest industry roundtables to directly address those challenges faced by the sector and one area wood supply chain we're very aware of suffered more than others as forestry contractors. That's why we instigated the 500 000 Forestry Resilience Package to support those contractors.

We're backing the sector, we're backing it in and we'll maintain close contact to ensure that we get those jobs in rural and regional Tasmania and support those in the resources sector.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. I acknowledge that you have been a strong supporter of the forest industry, so we'll start with forestry policy and reform and then go to mineral resources after that.

You've just indicated in your opening statement that woodchip exports are down and you have provided \$500 000 to contractors to support them. From the talks you've been having around those roundtables, is that enough to support the industry? It is such an important industry and I agree wholeheartedly with that.

Mr BARNETT - I'm happy to address the support package. It is really appreciated by the industry. It is \$500 000. It's proactive and we've just extended that support. The funding goes to the industry, to Rural Business Tasmania, to provide that counselling and support and then it goes direct to those forest contractors that need it. If they put in an application they can get up to \$15 000 based on that application and that counselling and support from RBT and their experts.

CHAIR - Has it been fully subscribed as yet?

Mr BARNETT - No, and that's why I extended it to some weeks ago. Applications can be made to Rural Business Tasmania by calling 1300 883 276, so for any forest contractors out there, that's the phone number. But they know that, we know that. We're backing them in and we'll continue to support them.

CHAIR - Does this output group cover the southern resource transport subsidy as well?

Mr BARNETT - This output we can talk about, there's no issues whatsoever and the department is here to assist in that regard as well. In terms of that, we have just announced in the Budget \$5 million for equity transfer from STT - because they've made a profit for the third year running based on our reforms, which we're very pleased with - through to TasRail. That will assist with upgrades to TasRail for new logtainers made at Triabunna from Graeme Elphinstone, who you probably know quite well, and you would know, Chair, very well.

CHAIR - Absolutely, he's doing significant business in the Triabunna and east coast area.

Mr BARNETT - Exactly, couldn't agree with you more. He's employing apprentices, kids out of school, giving them training and development skills. It's fantastic. This funding support will help TasRail to get those logtainers to make it more efficient and easy and streamline the process so that the forest industry, particularly in the south, can get their product to market through to Bell Bay on TasRail. Potentially in terms of traffic on the road, you're going to have more on the rail, so that's obviously positive in that regard. It's going to increase and improve the supply chain for the forestry industry, particularly in the south of the state.

CHAIR - What was the previous year's quantum of subsidy for southern resource transport?

Mr BARNETT - I think you're referring to the funding support that has concluded for that subsidy going north for those two particular operators in the past.

CHAIR - Do we have that quantum? I'm happy for you to take it on notice if you need to.

Mr BARNETT - That's in the previous financial year, I think, so not in this financial year.

CHAIR - So that's concluded and there is no subsidy other than the \$5 million of equity transfer that has been given to TasRail to make sure that they can have the appropriate carriers for the resource heading north?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, but I wouldn't call it a subsidy at all. It's an investment to improve the forestry supply chain for TasRail to get the product to market. It is a \$5 million equity transfer from one government business enterprise, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, through to TasRail. Minister Ferguson is very pleased about that; we jointly announced that initiative together just a couple of weeks ago.

Mr EVANS - Minister, I was just going to add that it is important to say it's not a subsidy. This is about assisting with capital upgrades and infrastructure to improve the supply chain.

CHAIR - The subsidy has concluded, so will that put pressure on those operators and contractors who were using that subsidy to get their product to the northern part of the state?

Mr BARNETT - Those entities always knew that it was coming to an end. It has concluded, it is at an end. We are becoming resilient as an industry - when I say 'we' I mean the forest industry - and in our round tables and when I go around the sawmills and elsewhere, that's the feedback we're getting. They're skinny margins, but they've been doing it tough, many of them, as you would know, Chair, and as a government we continue to support them to ensure efficiency of product to market.

CHAIR - I would like to ask in your policy moving forward about Special Species Timber and access to that? That's always been one of the areas that Tasmania has prided itself on, being able to have access to those speciality species timber resource to produce some of those fantastic products that we are well known for. There's obviously been some negotiations around that. Are we still on track to provide that required amount of access to resource?

Mr BARNETT - You've raised a really important project. Here we are sitting in the committee room 2 -

CHAIR - I know, at this beautiful table.

Mr BARNETT - at this beautiful special species table, Huon pine, and we've got Tasmanian oak in this room as well and Tassie blackwood above us. I'm pleased and proud to be part of an industry delivering special species into the marketplace, delivering tables, desks, chairs, furniture, boatbuilding, all special species. Of course, if we had total lockup these places around these forests there would be none of this. It would not be available. As a government we don't support that. In fact, one of the reasons we were elected to government and re-elected again is that we didn't support all those lockups.

Special species timber is very important. Andrew Denman is doing a great job on behalf of the sector. I met with him some weeks ago. He's doing a lot of boatbuilding, as you may know, so access to that resource is important and we will continue to do what we can to ensure they continue to have access, unlike perhaps other members of parliament in another party.

CHAIR - So are we on track to provide that access? That's the question.

Mr BARNETT - The future potential production forest obviously provides long-term certainty. As you remember, it is designed as a wood bank for the future - wood is good - and special species access to that space is important to the FPPF over time. I will check if the secretary or Al Morton might wish to add in terms of access to the special species timber. Celery-top pine is another one. We have had a special species management plan in place since 2017. I should also mention hydro wood, it's fantastic. At Lake Pieman, I've been out there on the barge and they go in and harvest the trees under the water, bring it out, process it and send it off to Melbourne and Sydney, and across Tasmania, make good money. It is part of the Tasmania brand, clean, fresh, pure, natural, and this is important to our industry, creating jobs particularly in those regional areas. I'll just see if Al would like to add to that.

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister. The important point is that the current volumes of specialty timbers are coming off the permanent timber production zone land estate managed by Sustainable Timber Tas. There has been some decline in those volumes that's been happening for a period of time, and that's been acknowledged. It's well understood, and part of that is as STT transitions into regrowth and plantation, there will be less volumes coming off their land, in effect. But the key -

CHAIR - How are we going to keep the industry going then in that area?

Mr MORTON - That was one of the key reasons for the Special Species Management Plan in 2017, which was looking at the framework and some of the volumes that were available on other land types where special species harvesting can lawfully occur subject to approvals, so land types or land tenures such as the FPPF land, but also conservation areas.

CHAIR - I'm just looking at that microphone now because it's -

Mr MORTON - I'm pretty quiet.

CHAIR - Yes, you are. You're a very soft speaker.

Mr MORTON - Sorry. Also conservation areas in regional reserves, so the Special Species Management Plan of 2017 set out the framework and also mapped some of the volumes available on this land where special species can lawfully occur.

Ms ARMITAGE - Supplementary. About the celery timber that I know they need for boatbuilding, is there sufficient? I'm of the understanding that there's a great shortage, and there could be a lot more work in the industry if they could get more celery to actually build some of the boats that people want.

Mr MORTON - Yes. You're probably referring to the celery top pine.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

CHAIR - Sorry, yes, celery top pine.

Mr BARNETT - We're coming from the department, and a lot of the questions probably are relevant to Sustainable Timber Tasmania, which is coming up in a few weeks' time. Unless our -

CHAIR - Doesn't it relate to policy? Government policy access -

Ms ARMITAGE - Being accessible?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, of course. And that's what I say, you actually have to apply through island -

Mr MORTON - Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

Mr BARNETT - through Sustainable Timber Tasmania, and they can certainly provide more detail. I'll just check if Al's got further detail.

Ms ARMITAGE - It's whether it's there. I can recall when we did the - was it the TFA that much of the area that was put aside didn't actually have the timber it was put aside for.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - So it's pretty hard to get it if it's actually not growing there, and a lot of it - if I recall, if I can, a lot of people went and had a look and said it was mainly button grass.

Mr MORTON - In terms of the volumes of celery top pine coming off the permanent timber production zone land at the moment, yes, a question best directed to STT. My understanding from them in their annual report is that they said that they met their performance targets, and they would say that they're meeting demand. There's always a question about demand as well.

Ms ARMITAGE - I know there's a huge demand.

CHAIR - It would be an interesting one for us to follow up then if they're meeting demand. That's not exactly what we're hearing on the ground but you might have different sources.

Mr BARNETT - No, can we be clear? I think we're on the same page. It is very difficult to access some of the special species timber because of so many lockups over so many years. And as a government, we came to power - thank goodness - in 2014, and we tore up - you mentioned the TFA. We tore up the Tasmanian Forest Agreement because that was all about locking up more of Tasmania. We were elected 2014, elected in 2018, and wherever possible we want that timber to be available. Your feedback and the member, Rosemary Armitage's feedback is broadly correct. It's difficult to access some of that timber because of so many lockups over so many years. We're doing our level best to make that timber available, but of course it's an ongoing challenge, and we'll have more detail through STT budget estimates.

CHAIR - But, minister, that depends a lot on government policy and reform. So that was really the basis of my question. Are we on target with our policy and reform - or you as a government - on behalf of the Tasmanian community to be able to deliver those expectations and outcomes for the Tasmanian community?

Mr BARNETT - Well, I don't think you've got a government that's more pro special species timber in history than the Government you're sitting under at the moment and the minister that's in front of you.

Mr EVANS - Minister, I might just add, STT actually set an annual performance target in their statement of corporate intent, and they report on that on an annual basis. If you look at those annual reports, it is showing a pretty good performance. But as Al said, the supply issues you'd really need to take up directly with STT.

I was going to add, off the back of your comment about Hydrowood, which might be of interest to the committee, that the University of Tasmania recently produced a report about the availability and physical properties of submerged timber resources more broadly. They have identified that up to 300 000 cubic metres of wood may lie beneath Lake Gordon, Lake Pieman, Lake Mackintosh, Burbury and Murchison. So we're looking pretty broadly and innovatively at how we can supply special species timber.

CHAIR - It comes to the cost of getting that timber out and processing it, whether it makes it achievable to actually use it. That'll be something that the industry will make a decision about because if you can't get the economic value out of it, and you only have to ask Mr Rutherford about that, then you won't do it.

Mr EVANS - That's right.

CHAIR - Mr Dean, I know you've been itching to get started in this area, as we all are.

Mr DEAN - Yes, there's a couple of issues. It's probably not quite on this area.

CHAIR - Well, have a go and we'll see.

Mr DEAN - My question relates to the real concern of the boatbuilders - the Andrew Denmans, of course - the furniture builders, the craftspeople and all of those about their access to Huon pine. Ongoing forever, right, as to - Huon pine's a real concern.

Ms ARMITAGE - I think it's the celery, isn't it? The celery top -

Mr DEAN - No, Huon pine is what I'm wanting.

CHAIR - It's probably both.

Mr DEAN - What strategy does the Government propose to ensure ongoing supply of millable Huon pine sawlogs to Tasmania's boatbuilders, furniture makers, craftspeople, once the supply of Teepookana is exhausted? Whilst that's a Sustainable Timber Tasmania issue, I'm just wondering whether it can fit into this area in some way, because surely this area would be looking at providing timber into the future, wouldn't it? I don't know.

Mr BARNETT - Look, that's why we did what we did years ago, and that's established the wood bank through the - what's called the FPPF land, the Future Potential Production Forest land. An application can be made by Andrew Denman or anybody else to access special species timber on that land, so the 356 000 hectares -

Ms ARMITAGE - If the particular type of timber is there, obviously.

Mr BARNETT - That's right.

Mr MORTON - And what the Special Species Management Plan works are, because there are significant volumes of the six specialty timbers on FPPF land, conservation areas and regional reserves.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. So that's really the point. So that's why we set up the wood bank. If we had not done that, let's make it very clear, it would not be available. Like, zero. Zero access. So we've created that wood bank. It's still there. It's open for an application to access that land. And in addition, you can also make an application under conservation area land for specialty timber, and it's got to go through due process and has to get properly assessed in the usual way.

Mr DEAN - My next question comes from - what is the position in relation to the Bob Brown appeal that he has taken at this present time as to the future of timber in this state, and policies and reforms and everything else that we talk about, should it be successful? I would have thought that we would have done some work, minister, on this just to look at it closely, see what the repercussions could well be for the state.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, let me be very clear. This is a matter before the courts.

Mr DEAN - Yes, it is.

Mr BARNETT - In fact, the federal court for early December, so I wouldn't comment on the matter. However, I am able to say that the Regional Forest Agreements have put Tasmania in good stead. We were the first state to sign a regional forest agreement. In fact, I signed that with the then premier, Mr Hodgman and our federal counterparts in terms of the five year - 20-year extension, just a few years ago in your electorate, Neville Smith Forest Products in Mowbray. That's where it was. We are pleased and proud of the Regional Forest Agreement. It provides a resource security, but also provides conservation measures which are important across the state.

That Bob Brown Foundation action is at foot, so I don't intend to comment on that, particularly as we are within weeks or days of that particular Federal Court -

CHAIR - That's a fine, Al. I'll see you at afternoon tea break about that.

Mr MORTON - Sorry, Chair.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's a federal court matter weeks and days away. Early in December.

Mr DEAN - Right. Has there been any consideration given to if it was successful what it would mean? Surely that, minister, you would have looked at a fall-back position.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. You would also understand, I hope, that I can't comment on any matters on the federal court matter before us. As the relevant minister I wouldn't want to do that. As a lawyer I wouldn't want to do it. You can be assured, based on my track record and

the track record of our Government, of strong support for the forest industry in Tasmania. There is no stronger supporter than our Government. With that in mind, you have a level of assurance that we have a plan for the future. That is one that sees a prosperous and a sustainable forest industry that's well managed and preserves the right of people to work. We've talked about workplace protestors before. That's on our radar and very much a priority for the Government to ensure that people have a right to work when they go to work.

Mr DEAN - Being a bit of a miller myself, I have a strong interest in forestry.

CHAIR - He's got a mobile mill, so he declares an interest.

Mr DEAN - I'm unsure whether this question fits in this area. It relates to permits required for organised activities on PTPZ land. Does that relate to this area or would that be straight out Sustainable Timber Tasmania, it would be.

Mr BARNETT - In terms of permits?

Mr DEAN - Yes. Can you please give some examples of the types of activity where a permit would be required? It relates to permits, so does it fall into reform policy?

CHAIR - STT.

Mr BARNETT - It would be STT.

Mr DEAN - So that will be saved for next week or a couple of weeks' time.

Mr BARNETT - A few weeks' time.

Mr DEAN - And that's what they're related to.

CHAIR - Are there any areas that you and your Government are looking at in reform for forestry? Is there any area that you're addressing your mind to right now?

Mr BARNETT - I'm always thinking of ways to support the forest industry. I'm working with the department and the industry to provide a level of assurance and support. They are aware of that, the department's aware of that. We've recently, for example, announced support for bioenergy. We are developing a bioenergy vision which is, as you know, not just forestry but it might be other agricultural products, waste products, waste to energy. Bioenergy is using those forest products that in the past haven't been so valuable. That would be just one example.

CHAIR - Pellets?

Mr BARNETT - Pellets. Wood pellets is another example, which is part of the bioenergy vision. I could ask Al to add to that answer if you would like, Chair.

CHAIR - Well, if there are others, we'd appreciate having some indication of what they are.

Mr BARNETT - I think it's bioenergy space.

Mr MORTON - Bioenergy technologies or other forestry reforms?

CHAIR - Yes, forestry reforms. Because this is reformed policy and reformed -

Mr DEAN - Could we touch on the Foreco position when we had a briefing on a particular pellet they were going to produce, the black pellet I think they referred to it as, which was more durable and could keep easier than the current one that's being produced at Mowbray.

Mr BARNETT - We funded that and supported that with Foreco over close to two years. It was up at Bell Bay, in your neck of the woods, Mr Dean. That particular project wasn't deemed to be commercially viable. They were looking at using that plantation timber chipped and then into pellet and off to Japan in this case. It wasn't deemed to be viable, but that's why the Government is always out there trying to support them wherever possible, funding feasibility studies. We continue to do that. Our policy reform agenda's based on the fact that we want more on-island processing, more value adding, more jobs on the ground. That's what's driving our policy reform.

CHAIR - Okay. Did you have anything else to add to those reforms? The bioenergy and the pellets are the only reforms?

Mr BARNETT - We have a range of reform measures under consideration. I can't go into further detail other than to say that we're looking at on-island processing, downstream processing, value adding, jobs creating. We have \$5 million in the Budget for that forestry supply chain with TasRail, woodtainers that are being manufactured on the east coast. So there's a lot going on. We're looking at innovative ways to support the sector. We've provided funding support for research and development through the NIFPI grants. That's \$2 million of state Government money with \$2 million from the federal government. I'm working with the federal government on other options. All I can say is watch this space. I've recently met with the Australian Forest Products Association CEO, Ross Hampton, who's been in Tasmania. We're working very closely with the industry on other options. You'll no doubt see more in 2021.

CHAIR - Some of us have already met with Nick.

Mr DEAN - I think Parattah falls in this area. A lot of work is being done. Is that fully operational?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it is. It's an excellent question. I'm so pleased you asked. This is a funding support initiative from TasRail and the Government. You remember the Evan Rolley report?

Mr DEAN - Yes, I do.

CHAIR - Now, that's a blast from the past.

Mr BARNETT - It was a very important recommendation. We acted on that recommendation to upgrade Parattah, which is not far from some of your family members out the back of Oatlands there. I'm looking forward to visiting there in the not too distant future. That is operational. I met with the CEO of TasRail a couple of weeks ago with Mr Ferguson.

It gets resource from the east coast, south-east and the south to Parattah and then straight up to Bell Bay. It makes it easier, more efficient and streamlines the process for the industry.

CHAIR - If only we still had a north-east rail link. Wouldn't that be helpful, minister? We'll move now to mineral resources.

4.2 Mineral resources

CHAIR - Al, we appreciate your input today. Do you have another advisor, minister?

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

CHAIR - So, we'll do a chair change. Thank you very much.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair. We have Kevin Robinson from Mineral Resources Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you, Kevin. Welcome.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair. It's great to welcome Kevin to the table.

CHAIR - I'll invite Mr Dean to open the line of questioning on mineral resources, another important resource for Tasmania.

Mr DEAN - A question on the staff situation. Have all the staff relocated to Burnie that are going to go there? Where else in the state are staff located in relation to this line item?

Mr BARNETT - I'll kick it off and then pass to Kevin. The answer is, yes. Burnie is a hub for our mining and mineral processing sector. That's why the Government took that policy initiative to move those MRT services out of Burnie. I visited there many times. They do a great job. Burnie is in the hotspot. The Tasmanian Minerals, Manufacturing and Energy Council is based up there. It was a four-stage relocation process that's rolled out progressively with 12 staff now located in Burnie. There are a further 9.8 FTEs as statewide positions. The final stage of the relocation -

Mr DEAN - That's 12 at Burnie and there's still 9.8 elsewhere, that's what we're saying.

Mr BARNETT - They're state-wide positions. I will ask Kevin to provide further details, but you've got the Mornington core library still based there. I've got more to say about that at some stage.

CHAIR - Might be a bit difficult to move that, minister.

Mr BARNETT - No, it's a very important, access to the core library.

CHAIR - No, but it would be difficult to move it, relocate it.

Mr BARNETT - You're quite right. I wonder if Kevin or the secretary might like to add to that.

Mr EVANS - I might just add a bit of context before I ask Kevin to speak. The relocation project is now complete, and Kevin can go through the precise numbers but it is important to understand as part of that commitment and the long-term agreed plan, all the functions that can be undertaken outside the core library were to be relocated to Burnie. There is a range of specific functions which are reliant upon access to the core library which remain in Hobart associated with the core library. The relocation is complete to the maximum extent possible within that context.

Mr DEAN - How many are here then, in the library, and are the senior people within Mineral Resources in Burnie, the very senior people at the top of this organisation?

Mr EVANS - I'll pass to Kevin.

Mr ROBINSON - The current situation is that we have 9.8 full-time equivalents in statewide positions. That includes the management at MRT and myself.

Mr DEAN - That's here in Hobart?

Mr ROBINSON - No, these are state-wide positions. My official address is Cattley Street in Burnie and I have two offices because I also have some linkage with the core library as well. In Burnie we have 12 people, at Rosny we have 26 and Mornington, five people. That's 31 people equivalent to about 27 FTEs in the south. Then we have 9.8 full-time equivalents state-wide.

Mr DEAN - What do you mean 'state-wide'?

Mr ROBINSON - We're not just doing work in the south, we're involved in work across the state.

Mr DEAN - Domiciled where?

Mr ROBINSON - The management is domiciled in Burnie.

Mr DEAN - So the nine we're talking about are domiciled at Burnie?

Mr ROBINSON - That's correct but they move between the offices. For example, I would be in the Burnie office every two to three weeks and the other management would be spending at least 25 per cent if not 100 per cent of the time at the Burnie office per month.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for that. I've got a question on the funding, minister, and I think I've got this right. There is a significant decrease of about \$3 million and it continues to drop for the next two years and then we see a slight increase on the forward budget. I understand that a lot of that decrease is about the staff movement being completed and so on but I would ask that question. What is the position of this area with the budget as it's currently written?

Mr BARNETT - In terms of the budget, I'm happy for the secretary to comment on the detail, but we're backing in the sector with \$2 million to create jobs in terms of export with drilling grants support. We've got the geoscience support, \$150 000, and more than \$400 000 of support across the industry. I think you're talking more about the budget papers.

Mr DEAN - I am.

CHAIR - That's what we're here to scrutinise, minister.

Mr BARNETT - These are in the budget papers, but I think he might be talking about the staff.

Mr DEAN - No, these figures were taken from the budget papers and I was trying to refer to it.

Mr BARNETT - Sure.

Mr DEAN - That's what, if you look across the years, the amounts I've referred to are.

Mr EVANS - I'll make an initial comment and then pass to Kevin to fill in the detail. The decrease in 2021-22 that you're referring to reflects the funding profile of the mineral exploration grants program and the relocation of MRT to Burnie which I understand is also linked to the development of the Mornington facility.

Mr ROBINSON - That's correct, secretary. We will be spending \$2.365 million or thereabouts on the expansion of the Mornington core library facility as part of this relocation program at stage 4, the final stage. The aim is to spend the majority of that in the coming year, and then you'll see clearly that part of the funding completed. Also it's the roll-off of initiatives over that period of time. We have the roll-off, as the secretary said, of the mineral exploration grants program, the MRT relocation and also the mining sector innovation initiative which completes in 2021.

Mr DEAN - I will go straight to Bell Bay now, minister. There's so much activity occurring there in relation to this area, minerals, production and so on. Paul Lennon, in a recent press release - I think this was a meeting where he talked about aluminium fluorides and these productions - said that aluminium fluoride was a strategically important mineral product which allowed aluminium smelters to operate efficiently. He said that Australasian aluminium smelters imported more than 30 000 tonnes of aluminium fluoride et cetera. He's talking about that being at Bell Bay, those activities occurring there. Where are we with that and if I can throw into that the bauxite as well, what's happening in that area?

Mr BARNETT - You might have been referring to Paul Lennon as chair of Australian Bauxite Limited.

Mr DEAN - Yes, I am - the outline with all those project benefits. I'll make sure I get that right for you - 'Aluminium's environmental credentials'. It relates to Alcore as well. They made a certain number of announcements, what ABX's chairman Mr Lennon described as 'the biggest milestone', all happening at Bell Bay.

Mr BARNETT - There's sort of two parts of the question. It's Australian Bauxite Limited, of which he is chair, and then Bell Bay and the benefits and opportunities there for mining and mineral processing for industry and export out of Tasmania, and our renewable hydrogen industry. Bell Bay is identified as a hydrogen hub for Tasmania and I'm hoping for Australia.

Australian Bauxite Limited is a company on the stock exchange. The last advice I have is in August 2020 they announced they'd completed a sale of 33 000 tonnes of cement-grade bauxite dispatched from Bell Bay. This is accessed from Bald Hill near Campbell Town, just on the north side. You would have seen it if you're driving north. I visited there, in fact, when your former colleague, Paul Harriss, was the minister all those years ago. Anyway, he's speaking on behalf of a company, but Bell Bay is really an excellent facility because it has access to road, rail and port, and we will back it in. I'm not sure if you want to provide more detail to your question.

Mr DEAN - If I can just say what Mr Lennon said and I wanted to say what we know about it and what Mineral Resources know about it. Mr Lennon said that Alcore planned to build its first production plant at Bell Bay in an industrial precinct which had an aluminium smelter, a manganese smelter, and an aluminium powder plant, all powered by hydroelectricity. Alcore's refine and recycle strategy involves the conversion of smelter waste into aluminium fluoride for recycling back in the smelter which would improve the environmental credentials of Bell Bay aluminium. He said aluminium fluoride is also used in the next-generation rechargeable lithium ion battery industry. He then went on to talk about ABx's next bauxite sale being due to be shipped from Bell Bay by 19 August.

Mr BARNETT - I can respond to that in terms of Alcore, because that's what you're referring to.

Mr DEAN - Yes, that's what I'm referring to, yes.

Mr BARNETT - And the advice I have, and I can refer to Kevin in a moment, but it's developing the world's first production of aluminium fluoride from the recycling of smelter waste and low-grade bauxite, and uses the aluminium-related parts of the core technology. There's a patent pending, apparently, so Alcore's plan is to be the first producer of that aluminium fluoride in the southern hemisphere, providing the potential to increase the security of supply for aluminium smelters in Australasia and elsewhere in the southern hemisphere.

Alcor is building its first production plant at Bell Bay in northern Tasmania, that's the advice I've received, and I will ask the director to comment on that shortly. Alcore recently moved to the design stage, appointing the engineers, Clough Engineers, and recruiting Dr Mark Cooksey, who's recently been appointed the position of Alcore CEO. I might leave it there. I'll pass to the director to add to that, if that's okay.

Mr ROBINSON - Thank you, minister. The Alcore process is still in a stage of evaluation, and so the company is now advancing from a laboratory confirmation to an engineering validation program, and to confirm a process performance. I believe the availability at Bell Bay of renewable energy is one of the areas that's attracted them to that site, and so therefore they're very keen to progress it, but once they get full validation of the process.

Mr DEAN - I have another question, Chair, but go to somebody else, and we'll see if we can come back.

CHAIR - Thank you. Anybody else with a question around this? No? Mr Dean, you can finish your couple of questions and then it'll be good to get into energy.

Mr DEAN - Yes. I just want to go to page 317, and the program abandoned mining lands rehabilitation projects completed. In 2019-20, 60 per cent have been completed, so a huge percentage of abandoned sites have been said to have been rehabilitated. What sites haven't been rehabilitated at this stage, minister? Which are the ones we're still working on?

Mr BARNETT - The law in Tasmania of land disturbed by mining or excavation work, is to be rehabilitated to the satisfaction of the director of mines, who's sitting on my right. That's a requirement. Rehabilitation work is undertaken on abandoned mining sites in Tasmania as funded through the Rehabilitation of Mining Lands Trust Fund. Having said that, it's best to pass to the director, who can provide further and better particulars.

Mr ROBINSON - We have a number of projects at any one point in time, but obviously there are many places in the state which we would like to be able to rehabilitate, and we have to select a range of them and start working through that situation. We've been working on drainage management at Aberfoyle coarse tailings; the dam safety assessment and water quality monitoring at Balfour; ongoing weed control at Frankford and Sisters Hills; and we've been looking at a number of other sites. The reason we only spent 60 per cent as opposed to 100 per cent of the funds last year was that we have a large project at Rossarden we're working on. And it was the availability of people at the time and the fact that because of the size of the project we needed to undertake further work before we spent the money.

Mr DEAN - Is that work being undertaken by the department? Is it not the responsibility of those that - or I guess they've well and truly gone, a lot of these organisations and companies - is that it? And it's now left with the department?

Mr ROBINSON - That's correct. These are historical workings that we're working on. As I said, we do a selection. There is a panel of involvement on the trust, so we do have the Tasmanian Mining, Manufacturing and Energy Council; Cement, Concrete and Aggregates Australia; Sustainable Timber Australia; DPIPWE has a member, a representative from the EPA; as well as Mineral Resources Tasmania. We chair that rehabilitation trust.

Mr DEAN - I have more understanding of that now. One other question, which is about Mt Lyell. Where are we with that, minister? It's been going for a while, and I remember having a briefing down there. We visited a site six or seven years ago, where we said that it was being kept in a position of where it could be reopened. Where are we with the ETA? Are we very closer to that mine opening? And Beaconsfield too, I suppose. I can throw that in as well.

Mr BARNETT - Let's start with Mt Lyell, and Vedanta are the current owners. You're quite right, it's in care and maintenance, and has been since 2013-14 when there were those mine deaths, you might recall, and there's still inquiries in that regard. Mt Lyell is an iconic part of our mining industry, over 100 years old, one of the oldest mines in Australia.

We're pleased of what they've done in the past, and we're still hopeful for the future. We as a government have invested \$9.5 million to bring forward the restart, to support the business during those difficult times, and that was supported by the West Coast Council and the community. We've got \$25 million of assistance for any future buyer of that mine. So, Vedanta now has it on the market, as you may be aware.

I was there a month or so ago. I met with the management, got an update on how they're going. They're sounding very positive. That's because they have an excellent resource, access to copper, gold, zinc, tin. There are a range of different metals. I'm not sure about the tin.

Mr ROBINSON - Not tin.

Mr BARNETT - Sorry.

Mr ROBINSON - And it's a very small deposit of zinc.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. So, it's mostly copper, because it used to be Copper Mines of Tasmania, CMT. Anyway, we're keeping close contact with the company. I will pass to the director for comment further because it's a really important, iconic mine. It's an important part of Queenstown's fabric, and the mining industry in Tasmania.

Mr ROBINSON - We're aware of the sale process. We keep in close liaison with the management on an ongoing basis. Macquarie Capital is managing the process of the sale for Vedanta. There has been, I understand, a lot of interested parties, and an information memorandum has been sent to those interested parties. It will be a staged sale process, and I believe they'd like to be able to conclude the process in the first quarter next year.

Mr DEAN - Right. So that's moving.

CHAIR - And before we leave minerals -

Mr BARNETT - Sorry, just on Beaconsfield, that was the final part of your question. I'll try to be quick, Chair. Beaconsfield is very important. NQ Minerals is progressing on that. I visited there with the now member for Rosevears some months ago. All the documentation has been signed. We visited the plant, and in terms of that progressing, we remain hopeful. They see potential for contributing up to 260 jobs, which would be fantastic, and \$80 million annual expenditure once in full operation. It's one of the most productive mines in Tasmania, it has been in the past for many years. I was there - and I'm sure you would have been too - during the Beaconsfield disaster as a senator, every day during those 14 days when the men were underground, and it was a very tough time. Sadly, we lost Larry Knight, but Brant Webb and Todd Russell survived, and we celebrate that.

Mr DEAN - We do. So that's good news that it's moving.

CHAIR - Cornwall Coal in Tasmania? I don't see as many coal trucks on the road.

Mr BARNETT - They are mostly rail, Chair, from Cornwall Coal through to Railton to Cement Australia. And then they make their cement and send it down to Devonport and off to market.

CHAIR - Yes, I understood that, but they used to cart quite a bit of coal on the road as well, but I don't see that so much now. Yes, it is good that it's on rail. Absolutely.

Mr BARNETT - That's right. It's an important part of the mining and mineral processing sector -

CHAIR - And Fingal Valley.

Mr BARNETT - You pre-empted me in my response as an important part of the Fingal Valley. It's used domestically at Cement Australia. I visited there and met with them some months ago and been underground with the company. They do a good job. It's very professionally run, as you would be aware.

CHAIR - I do know that.

Mr BARNETT - We're pleased and proud of the work they do.

CHAIR - They certainly provide a lot of employment right through to the east coast.

Mr BARNETT - They do.

CHAIR - It's good they still have that market for their product.

Mr BARNETT - Last financial year about 226 000 tonnes of coal produced.

CHAIR - It would be useful to have a break and then deal with energy, COVID-19 Small Business Energy Support Grant Program and veterans affairs. So whatever that takes us, anything before 7.30, we'll be happy with. We will suspend for a 10 minute break.

The Committee suspended from 4.01 p.m. to 4.14 p.m.

CHAIR - This is the home straight, minister. We're going to head straight into the area of energy, which you have responsibility for as the minister.

DIVISION 11

(Department of State Growth)

Output group 3

Energy Policy and Advice

3.1 Energy policy and advice -

CHAIR - Energy policy and advice. Another important area in Tasmania's future and sustainability, I expect. Do you have anything to provide to the committee, or do you want to hop straight into questions? We can do that as well.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair. In terms of an opening remark, I am pleased and proud to be Minister for Energy. I think I'm the most energetic Energy minister in all of Australia, Madam Speaker - Madam Chair.

CHAIR - I still like Madam Speaker, but I know I can't have it.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. We've got a lot to offer in Tasmania. We've got 2 per cent of Australia's renewable energy in terms of what we use, but some 25 per cent or thereabouts of Australia's renewable energy. And we've set some very bold targets. As you know, these

targets recently passed your House, our House, with strong support our plans to not just be 100 per cent fully self-sufficient in renewable energy by 2022, but 200 per cent by 2040. So big plans, big targets, but I believe - and we have every expectation of reaching those targets.

We're on track to reach the 100 per cent by 2022 and we won't be blinkered by this success. We have plans to continue to grow. In terms of renewable energy, we're building on our world-class water resource, our world-class wind resource. That means it's windy a lot of the time in certain parts of Tasmania. We have three renewable energy zones, and this is setting us up really well for what we want to do.

So we've set this, what's called globally-leading renewable energy target. We're one of the few jurisdictions in the world that are approaching 100 per cent, and we're pleased and proud of it, and we're going to make the most of it.

Regarding our Renewable Energy Action Plan, we've got a draft that's been out there since April. We're getting feedback on that. We're responding to that. We've also produced the kid's version, and I want to hold up the kid's version, as in giving young Tasmanians their say on the draft Renewable Energy Action Plan. Guess what? So many of my colleagues in the parliament, as in adults, think that this is actually a more readable, enjoyable, informative version than the previous version released in April.

So this has been well received by Tasmanian students across Tasmania. We're getting feedback on this from the students. Why is it important? Because this is their future. Our children are our future. They have views on energy and renewable energy, and I'm absolutely delighted to say we're taking on board their views, and prior to the end of this year, we'll release our final Renewable Energy Action Plan. Thanks to the department and all those who have had input into that action plan.

In addition to that, big plans: Project Marinus, Battery of the Nation. Yes, this will deliver billions of dollars of investment. In fact, \$7 billion - in excess of - thousands of jobs, improved energy security, and downward pressure on electricity prices. That's what Tasmanians want and desire. We have what the rest of Australia and what the world wants, and that's low-cost, reliable, clean electricity, and we're on track. Because we have that, it's consistent with the Tasmanian brand, so we believe that we will invest. We will find more investors wanting to come to Tasmania to manufacture widgets or provide a service, whatever, because it's part of the Tassie brand: clean, fresh, pure, natural. Well done to Todd Babiak and Brand Tasmania for what they're doing. I'm so keen to promote the Tasmania brand, and renewable energy is a key part of that going forward.

Renewable hydrogen. Renewable hydrogen is Tasmania's superpower. This is such an exciting an opportunity. It's a new industry. Bell Bay has been identified as a renewable hydrogen hub. Likewise, Burnie on the north-west coast. We have so many opportunities for this new industry going forward, and I'm pleased to say that this has been recognised at the *Financial Review* national conference yesterday where they say Tasmania is likely to lead Australia in being a renewable hydrogen manufacturing facility. So we now have two entities on the public record saying that they want to produce renewable hydrogen here in Tasmania, and they're going through a feasibility study. Those two entities are Fortescue Metals and Origin Energy, and I'm very grateful for their special interest in this matter, and I'm just putting that on the record.

We've identified three - through the expressions of interest process for renewable hydrogen, three companies to gain access to that funding for the feasibility study. So that's Origin Energy, Able Energy, and likewise at Port Latta, and Savage River as well, that company headed up by Ben Maynard. So we're on track, and it's very exciting indeed to be leading in this space, and we're getting terrific feedback on our Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan. We have a whole range of recommendations out of that, and I've released feedback on those recommendations and what's in that action plan. I've released that today and I'm happy to discuss that in further detail in due course.

CHAIR - Minister, I don't believe you introduced your team at the table?

Mr BARNETT - I'd be delighted to introduce the team. On my left is Bob Rutherford.

CHAIR - An experienced campaigner of Estimates.

Mr BARNETT - So experienced that Bob Rutherford is a professor - actually lectured me in macroeconomics or was it microeconomics at the University of Tasmania back in 1980. That's how experienced Bob Rutherford is and I'm still listening to his advice and appreciate it greatly. On my right is Sean Terry, Director of Energy Policy in the department. He's a very busy person, delivering terrifically well with a wonderful team in the energy area and has a lot to do.

CHAIR - Before we open the questionings, is it macro or microeconomics? We need to clear that up right now.

Mr BARNETT - Don Challen taught me in the other one.

Mr RUTHERFORD - Which makes it absolutely clear I taught the minister in microeconomics.

CHAIR - Micro, thank you.

Mr RUTHERFORD - Which is entirely appropriate in this portfolio.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - I recall receiving a distinction, for which I'm very grateful. You may have been a little more generous than you could have been. I accept that.

CHAIR - He may well have known where you would end up, minister. I'd like now to hand over to Mr Willie on energy policy and advice.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you mentioned it in your overview, but how much funding is being provided by the federal government, state government, the AEMO and any other funding source for Marinus and pumped hydro projects?

Mr BARNETT - That's a very big question. It's slightly complicated but more than happy to outline. First, with respect to Marinus Link. We have an understanding and support from the federal government through ARENA, together with Hydro Tasmania with \$10 million for the feasibility study undertaken and released February this year. In addition, we received

\$56 million to progress the design and approval process for Marinus Link, for which we're very grateful.

In addition, Hydro Tasmania supported by the state Government is delivering up to \$30 million to assess the preferred pumped hydro sites in Tasmania. Those three sites are Lake Rowallan, Lake Cethana and Tribute Power Station on the West Coast of Tasmania. We hope to be in a position in the not too distant future to identify the preferred site to undertake that pumped hydro project. I'm happy to provide further detail, and pass to Sean Terry for further information.

Mr TERRY - The \$17 million through the Energising Tasmania initiative, which is for skills development for the renewable energy sector. You've covered all the other funding support, minister.

Mr WILLIE - One of those the minister listed was 'up to 30', could you qualify that? Is it 30 or it's just what's required?

Mr BARNETT - No, it's up to \$30 million, which is what I said in my answer through Hydro Tasmania.

Mr WILLIE - So it is 30.

Mr BARNETT - That's on the basis of the agreement we have with the federal government, of the \$56 million they have provided to support progress on the design and approval process for Marinus Link, which comes to financial investment decision by 2023-24. The pumped hydro assessment is ongoing, but we should see an answer on the preferred site in the not too distant future.

Mr WILLIE - To clarify, the federal money for Marinus?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, we're delighted to receive the \$56 million to progress the design and approval process. They've also supported the ARENA funding, which is a federal government entity for the feasibility study. They've also supported the \$17 million for Energising Tasmania to build the workforce for the future. That's in Jeremy Rockliff's area, Minister for Education, Training and Skills Development. Ray Mostogl is the chair of that particular support group which provides advice to the minister and is, as you know, executive director of the Tasmanian Minerals, Manufacturing and Energy Council.

Mr WILLIE - Of that \$56 million, how much is being spent, where has it been spent and what is remaining?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to the director of energy policy and see if Sean Terry can assist in that regard.

Mr TERRY - I'll do my best.

Mr BARNETT - Of course, [inaudible] provide support through the department and then through to TasNetworks.

Mr TERRY - That's right. The \$56 million was made under a project agreement, a grant from the Australian government. We provided \$50 million to TasNetworks to progress the early works phase, the DNA phase, \$6 million of that has been retained by the Department of State Growth to do a lot of the policy work that supports the project development. My recollection - I'm happy to check that - is that the \$50 million there was \$30 million and \$20 million cash-flowed in the respective budget years. As to what they spent, what they do is essentially they acquit it to Treasury who will then basically send them the funds to cover that cost. We expect at the moment on their current spending trajectory, those funds will expire probably halfway through 2021. The government's commitment is there's \$50 million available for TasNetworks to progress the early phase work.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you for the clarification. Can you provide some detail on the other \$6 million? Has that all been spent or is that ongoing?

Mr TERRY - Yes, once again, my recollection of that \$6 million, we've expended about \$1 million of that which goes to support a whole lot of the policy work we need to do to support Project Marinus. Looking at fair cost allocation and the ownership and governance structure. You would have seen the RET work we've done, a lot of the environmental and approvals on Marinus. Policy development aspect we need to get sorted to be able to progress Marinus. But the actual project delivery is done by TasNetworks.

Mr WILLIE - Through the minister, the \$6 million is for consultancies or in-house staffing?

Mr TERRY - Mainly in-house, but it's a combination. When we don't have in-house expertise, yes, we'll go and procure additional support.

CHAIR - Is that expertise available within Tasmania, or is it expected the department will have to look outside of Tasmania, minister?

Mr BARNETT - We are very pro-Tasmania wherever possible, buy local employee local.

CHAIR - So is this committee.

Mr BARNETT - I'm delighted the committee is of the same view and we're all on the same page. It's an important priority for the Government but if you do need expertise outside of the state from time to time -

CHAIR - I understand that.

Mr BARNETT - That's a matter I'll pass to Sean Terry to respond to.

CHAIR - I'm sure you've had a look around already, minister, to see what's available.

Mr TERRY - That's right. In terms of any external procurement we follow the Government's procurement guidelines.

CHAIR - Over 50 000.

Mr TERRY - Over 50, and my understanding is there is a mechanism for looking at local capacity as part of the Government's procurement policy. We certainly apply those principles, but where we can't source it internally in Tasmania, yes, there's external consultants used from time to time.

CHAIR - Minister, I have a series of questions provided to be asked on energy and Marinus Link. I've heard the responses just been provided on components of Marinus Link. Who will pay for the Marinus Link? Is it a combination of what you've just explained to eh committee?

Mr BARNETT - It's an understandable question and we're going through a design and approval process for financial investment decision in 2023-24. The feasibility study made it very clear it is both technicality feasible and commercially viable. In addition to that, the federal government has identified it as a priority infrastructure project, one of the top 15 in Australia. In addition to that, the federal government identified it as one of the top three transmission projects to be undertaken in Australia and provided \$250 million in the federal budget for that and have identified the merit of what's called an SPV - special purpose vehicle - for that. In addition to that, the Prime Minister has announced that it should be fast-tracked in terms of the development and approval process, noting that none of those processes will not be applied but that resources will be applied to the planning and approval process to progress that as soon as possible. It's a priority for the Prime Minister.

In addition to that, the Australian Energy Market Organisation, which is the independent entity that sets up what's called the integrated system plan for the short, medium and long term for our energy system in Australia, has identified Marinus Link as an essential part of that infrastructure going forward. Not only Marinus Link first cable - 750 megawatts - not only Marinus Link second cable, but also the design and approval process. They are all what's called actionable projects under the integrated system plan. This is fantastic news for Tasmania. That means that when an investor - and you asked the question about who's going to own it - that means when you get to -

CHAIR - Who's going to pay for it, I asked.

Mr BARNETT - I think that's a related question. It means that when you get to a financial investment decision the investors will be lining up to invest in this project because it'll have a guaranteed rate of return for the long term. We're talking 20 years, 40 years over that integrated system plan. We're talking long-term guaranteed rate of return, and whether it's a financial institution or some sort of investor, they'll be lining up, knocking on the door saying, 'Can we invest?' That's very encouraging and really positive, so that's why we feel very positive about the prospects of Marinus Link unlocking so much renewable energy development in Tasmania: \$7 billion of investment, thousands of jobs, improved energy security, and downward pressure on electricity prices.

CHAIR - That brings me to one of my questions. You mentioned downward pressure on prices. Does that mean that prices go down or not? This might well be that economics lesson we're looking for from Bob Rutherford in this case. That's the question being asked.

Mr BARNETT - The backdrop to it is that under our Government we have contained electricity prices in Tasmania, regulated for residential and small business customers. We have amongst the lowest electricity prices in Australia, and for medium and small businesses, the

lowest in Australia. That's really good news. As a government we have cost of living and cost of doing business as top priorities, so we want to keep the pressure down.

In addition to that there was 1.38 per cent reduction from 1 July, just a few months ago. That's great news. It's terrific to see that reduction in electricity prices in Tasmania for those regulated customers, and we're pleased and proud about that going forward. It's the law of supply and demand. With more renewable energy in the marketplace you will find that as a result of that access and competition there will be downward pressure on prices. I'm happy for the economic gurus sitting next to me, either Bob or Sean, to -

CHAIR - Sorry, Sean, you'll get your time in the sun sometime soon.

Mr BARNETT - It sounds like, Bob, you're in the hot seat.

Mr RUTHERFORD - The crucial thing to understand is nationally, a massive change is occurring in the energy mix. The take-up of solar on the mainland has been incredible and affected the balance in those national markets. The problem with both solar and wind in other jurisdictions is it's not firm energy. Our energy through a link would provide a firm backbone in energy to the mainland, and therefore in that process it lowers the overall system costs that would have to be incurred in order to use the large increase in solar in particular that's occurred over there. We are absolutely on firm ground against the background of what is happening on the mainland and the inevitable decarbonising of the electrical system with the closure of the coal plants, to say that our energy through Marinus will put significant downward pressure on prices nationally.

It's very important. That's why, as the minister has outlined, it's a very important national initiative and why the benefits occur substantially in the mainland states, and that links to the sort of principle which would inform who pays, because we normally have a basic principle in economics that the beneficiary pays.

CHAIR - Listen up, members. You might not hear all of this again.

Mr RUTHERFORD - That's the basic background. I'm sure that Sean can fill out what's happening in the Tasmanian market but as the minister said, because we can bring this renewable energy into a system that already has the impoundments and the capacity to drive them harder with pumped hydro, we would have the lowest price for firm renewable energy in the country.

CHAIR - We really appreciate that. Thank you, Bob. A decision on the fair cost allocation was due by the end of September. When will we know the outcome and what the fair cost allocation is determined to be? Someone's been doing their homework.

Mr BARNETT - Very understandable where that question is coming from. It's an important question, and the director of energy policy has talked about fair cost allocation, the beneficiaries pay principal. If the benefits flow through to the mainland consumers then you would expect those consumers to pay for those benefits that accrue. As Bob has indicated, that access to affordable, reliable, clean electricity is definitely in Tasmania's best interests. That is under discussion with the energy minister's council, of which I'm a member, with other colleagues. That report is due to the council by 30 June next year and then further advice will be taken following that report.

CHAIR - Okay. We have a supplementary to Mr Rutherford's address to the committee from Mr Dean, so to make the necessary impact we'll take it now.

Mr DEAN - My concern with this whole thing, minister, is that the position we were just given by Mr Rutherford was almost the identical spiel we were given when sewerage and water changes were made from local government to where we currently are, where the consumer was told that they would see cheaper prices for sewerage and water in this state. That did not eventuate at all and the people have been burned.

The position that's coming to me at the present time from consumers is to say that if Marinus and these things go ahead it's all very well to say we will see downward pressure on these prices, but how will that actually happen? I said by interjection a moment ago that that would simply mean that rather than an increase of 5 per cent a year it will only be 3 per cent or 4 per cent a year. How can we satisfy the public out there, the people who will pay for this at the end of the day, the consumer, that this will happen and they won't be burned yet again?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I can understand where you're coming from if some of those views are being presented to you in the way that you've described.

Mr DEAN - Yes, they have, and I'm surprised if they haven't come back to other members.

Mr BARNETT - I'm not disputing that for one moment but we have a track record as a government to keep downward pressure on prices, and in terms of nominal increase, a bit over 2 per cent on our watch, for regulated residential customers some 12 per cent reduction and for regulated business customers, some 19 per cent over that period of time in real terms. We are all about addressing costs of living and costs of doing business; that is part of our DNA in our state Liberal Government. We are very focused on that. We've got strong support from the federal government, for which we're very grateful. And it's really important that there is fair cost allocation. We should not pay any more than our fair share, and we've made that very clear - the Premier, myself and other members of the government.

CHAIR - In amongst that modelling, has there actually been any modelling done on the impact on residential prices at all, or is that the next part of the next stage, if you like, through that consultant?

Mr BARNETT - As I say, the Energy Ministers Council has met. Further work is being done on the fair cost allocation methodology, and that work is being undertaken and lead by the commonwealth, with the support from the states. I will ask the Director of Energy Policy to add to that answer. From our point of view, it's very important that there's fair cost allocation across the network. The point that Bob Rutherford made earlier, about the transition in the electricity market, is the demand for reliable or dispatchable electricity, and that's between 6000 to 19 000 megawatts going forward. We've got what the rest of the nation needs and wants - affordable, reliable, clean electricity. I'll ask Sean Terry to respond in addition to what I've said.

Mr TERRY - It's important to realise there's two elements to price. There are the network charges. That's the transmission and the distribution, so that's getting the power from the generation to the end user, and that's the fair cost allocation issue. That's essentially what

that deals with. At the moment where you've got an interconnector which crosses two jurisdictions - for argument's sake, South Australia and Victoria or Tasmania and Victoria - the cost of that interconnector is usually shared 50/50 between the two jurisdictions. Now, with Marinus, where more than 90 per cent of the benefits flow through to the NEM - that's Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia - that doesn't work for Tasmania. If there's no change to the current cost allocation, Tasmanians are bearing a disproportionate share, and the government's been pretty firm on that.

CHAIR - We won't wear that.

Mr TERRY - That's right. Exactly. The energy security board has done some work on a whole range of models about what a fair cost allocation would look like. They've looked at issues like postage stamp allocations. They've looked at issues such as where the energy benefits emerge, and they've also looked at energy flow. If you look at a jurisdiction like New South Wales, they may not necessarily get all the energy benefits, but there's so much interconnection that goes through New South Wales. There's a whole lot of energy. There's a whole range of models. What is clear is that the current model doesn't work for Marinus, but it doesn't work for a whole range of other interconnectors in the NEM also. That's why, off the back of the ESB, we've delivered that preliminary work. I think it was the September date.

CHAIR - Yes, due by the September.

Mr TERRY - That's right. The Commonwealth now has picked that up. Because to give effect to it, you can do all the modelling in the world, but to give effect to it, you need to change the rules. There's a whole kind of mechanism and a process under the national arrangements to change the cost allocation rule. The commonwealth is going to pick that work up now with jurisdictions, and Tasmania's put its hand up to be part of that commonwealth-state working group. It's pretty early days, so we've only literally just performed the working group, but there's some reporting deadlines. I think there's an interim report that's got to come back early in 2021, and the final report in June 2021. But that'll just show all the winners and losers under the current rule. What we really have to do is give effect to it through the national rule changes, and that's another conversation that needs to happen.

That's on the transmission side, and then you've got the actual generation, so that's the generation and the consumption. The market generally drives those kinds of costs. That's where we think Marinus will put downward pressure on what we call wholesale energy prices. That's the cost of generation. Because the counterfactual of not doing anything, if coal was going to retire, is that prices will go up. That's what happened with Hazelwood when that retired. Wholesale energy prices skyrocketed. It's more about the counterfactual of not doing anything on the assumption that thermal generation is going to leave the sector. Does that make sense?

Mr DEAN - The other thing that concerns the public is the FIT, the feed-in tariff, for solar that they make on their rooftop panels and so on. We had the grandfathering policy in place for a period, 29 cents per kilowatt hour or whatever it was, close to that. And that's now been reduced to well and truly under what Hydro sell it for. Aurora had sold off to other users now, about 9 cents, isn't it? Or even less than that, I think, per kilowatt hour. What we've got to do is to try to satisfy the public that there will be real benefits, given they have experienced some of these issues that I've referred to. We've now got to try to satisfy them that it will be to

their benefit at the end of the day, not just to the benefit of South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and so on. We are going to get a real benefit out of it.

CHAIR - The government won't sign up to it if there's no benefit for Tasmania. Is that clear? Or is that your position?

Mr BARNETT - Of course we won't sign up unless it's to the benefit of Tasmania and Tasmanians. It's got to be for the benefit of Tasmanians. Now, we're talking billions of investment, thousands of jobs, energy security, downward pressure on prices. There are so many benefits. But of course, we will do what's in Tasmania's best interest. But specifically, to answer your question about the feed-in tariff. I'm happy to respond. It's 8.47 cents per kilowatt hour, currently. Of course, the decision was made under the previous government for the phasing out of that, and we extended that support of 5 cents for a further 12 months. And now, as I say, it's 8.47 cents.

Let's be very clear. We've put a cap on electricity prices in Tasmania. Under our government, they are regulated. Residential customers are regulated. Small and medium sized business customers are regulated. They are capped. On 1 July this year, they've gone down. They were capped at no more than CPIs, you might recall, for a number of years. Then 1.38 per cent down. This is good news. That's what you want wherever possible - downward pressure on those prices. Going forward, just remember, we've made a promise. In fact, the former Premier and I made the promise at Lake Gordon to have the lowest regulated power prices in Australia by the end of 2022.

CHAIR - Are you on track?

Mr BARNETT - Regulated for residential customers and business customers. That's a promise I intend to keep, and the government intends to keep. Just bear that in mind. Now, we're talking about electricity prices. Tasmanians are a top priority.

Mr DEAN - The problem there, minister, is you might only be in power for the next two years.

Mr BARNETT - Hopefully that might encourage others to express a view at the ballot box as to what they think. Of course, under the previous government, there was a 65 per cent increase.

Mr DEAN - I hear what you're saying.

CHAIR - I feel sure any government would want to keep that as a policy.

Mr BARNETT - There was a 65 per cent increase. Look, it's a policy which we're proud of, and we're working towards it. And the wholesale electricity price, that work is ongoing. Treasury is doing a lot of work in that space. As you say, Chair, we're on track and we've got amongst the lowest prices already in Australia, and we have a very good track record, and we intend to keep to that promise.

Mr DEAN - Can I just ask a question on where will the thousands of employees come from? The extra energy that we need to produce to put through Marinus and so on, I suspect?

Mr BARNETT - Well, these aren't my figures. These are figures independently assessed in terms of the benefits for Tasmania, so the thousands of jobs over the life of the project. Of course, it's quite a long life for the project, for Marinus Link, and it will unlock a whole range of other renewable energy projects, whether it be wind - primarily wind in those three renewable energy zones - northwest, northeast - sorry, northwest and west, northeast, Central Highlands, and through to the centre. Those are the three renewable energy zones in those areas in particular, and I would say they are the prime areas. But, of course, the benefits will flow across the state.

And as those projects get up and going, on top of that I should mention - through you, Chair - is the hydrogen industry. Renewable hydrogen. This is a whole new industry. In terms of the jobs flowing out of that, well, that'll be very significant, particularly up in your space at Bell Bay, Burnie, Port Latta. As I've said, Grange Resources has a project, a feasibility study at Port Latta, in terms of pelletising their magnetite at Port Latta using renewable hydrogen. We're very excited about our plans for the future that will create jobs, particularly in those rural and regional areas.

CHAIR - Minister, you talked a lot about the federal government, and working with the federal government on this initiative of energy and energy policy. It is pushing for a national framework to enforce increased transparency on state and territory governments' energy policies. Do you have some feedback to the committee on this?

Mr BARNETT - I do. I'm more than happy to give you feedback on that. I'm sure our director of energy policy can add to the answer. This has been on the table for some time. The federal government has been active in this space. It's primarily targeting the mainland states, where there's what you'd call free-flow of action and activity in the marketplace. It's not so relevant to us in Tasmania with regulated prices for both residential and business customers. So it's not entirely relevant to us. I'll ask the director of energy policy.

CHAIR - So they should have said, with the exception of Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - Well, I'll pass to the director.

CHAIR - It was a Crikey article earlier today. You read everything in this job, as you know.

Mr TERRY - Yes. I'm not sure if that's referring to gas market reform and transparency. There's a whole national agenda to progressing a number of reforms.

CHAIR - 'The recent Energy and Climate Summit hosted by the *Fin Review* was followed by speeches calling for an end to indecisiveness on matters of market reform as well as complaints about states going it alone on energy policy'. From AGL, Brett Redman. You probably know him personally.

Mr TERRY - Yes. I'll talk about the national energy reform. There's a whole agenda on national energy reform. That is all premised on the basis that we're going to transition out of thermal generation, such as coal, into more renewable sources. The historic system has been centralised thermal generation, putting Tasmania aside, in the mainland, based around brown and black coal.

CHAIR - Coal.

Mr TERRY - Now what we're moving towards because of climate change and emissions reduction, is variable distributed energy resources. There's a whole national reform agenda to manage that transition. That's being progressed through the Energy Security Board and through the National Cabinet arrangements. It's fair to say other jurisdictions are putting in their own policies. New South Wales just released a whole renewable energy development plan so they can expedite their own renewable energy development agenda. Same with Tasmania. We put in our Tasmanian renewable energy target. So I suspect that's what they were talking about.

Now, I can go through all the elements in the national reform agenda, but it's quite complex. One of the other things about national energy reform is technological advancements. So customers can participate more in the energy market, with things such as solar rooftop PV, electric vehicles, batteries, ability to control your appliances. You'll get rewarded for that and you'll be able to participate in the market. That's what that whole reform agenda is about. To manage that transition, but also to allow consumers greater participation in the energy market. Other jurisdictions are impatient and they're progressing their own initiatives.

CHAIR - It sounds like the Coalition government is getting a bit impatient as well. From reading that, how accurate that reporting is? We can only assume that what you read is what you read.

Mr BARNETT - We have close interaction with the federal Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor, and he has no doubt that we have a Tasmania-first energy policy. We want to focus on benefits for Tasmania, notwithstanding that there is major transition in the national energy market with the move away from coal to the renewables.

The thing we have that the others don't have is that dispatchable reliable electricity. When the wind is blowing, the sun is shining, that's great, but when it's not, what do you do? Tasmania has that affordable, reliable, clean electricity. It's part of the Tasmania brand. We have the trifecta.

CHAIR - It built our state, minister.

Mr BARNETT - One hundred years plus. We're proud of that history and heritage.

CHAIR - Another question I have is around the processes. What are the processes in place to identify customers who are eligible for an electricity concession and to ensure they are claiming the concession they are entitled to?

Mr BARNETT - I'm happy to respond on concessions and then pass to the Director of Energy Policy. I think concessions is a matter for Treasury and the State Revenue Office. Tasmania boasts one of the most generous concession schemes in Australia, some \$45 million per year. We support those doing it tough, those that are on concessions with a generous system to provide welfare and a safety net for them. In addition, during the coronavirus pandemic we were able to provide support through Aurora Energy, a \$5 million COVID-19 support package.

CHAIR - We'll get to that; we won't ask that question just yet.

Mr BARNETT - No problem.

CHAIR - Thank you. Obviously it's around identifying those eligible. At the moment we would use those who are entitled on a concession benefit and pensioners?

Mr BARNETT - Those on a concession benefit under our policy. That's why we have a generous system. In addition to that, during the coronavirus pandemic we've identified those doing it tough. I'm happy to respond in due course on that.

CHAIR - I don't want to take any questions that the member for Rosevears might have on this. Minister, it's been suggested tens of millions of dollars have been spent on reports and case studies modelling Project Marinus. Do we have any idea of what it's cost so far?

Mr BARNETT - It's a major national infrastructure project. It's identified as a priority project not just Infrastructure Australia but the federal government, as I indicated in my opening remarks. I'm happy to pass to the director if he has any further advice.

CHAIR - I was interested, it's not on my list of questions.

Mr TERRY - I'm aware of two reports into a second interconnector, not necessarily Marinus. The first one was the Tamblyn report. That was when the current Government was elected in 2014. It had a commitment to look at the pre-conditions for a second interconnector. That was handed down with the findings that a second interconnector was viable under certain circumstances. The one is the business case assessment that TasNetworks had undertaken with the support of ARENA and their own source funding. That was released in December 2019. We've basically said that Marinus was positive under a whole range of scenarios.

CHAIR - But it would be difficult to quantify how much has been spent at this point?

Mr TERRY - I think it's on the public record, that was a \$20 million report, the business case assessment. ARENA funded \$10 million and \$10 million was funded by TasNetworks. I can't recall the cost; I don't think it was anything near that. Off the top of my head I'm thinking perhaps \$1 million. I can go back and check that.

CHAIR - All right. I think there might be a figure flying across just before we leave that area because I'm going to Mr Willie at the other end of the table. It might save taking it notice later.

Mr TERRY - There may have been other reports that I'm not aware of.

Mr BARNETT - The Tamblyn report was 2014. It's been superseded by the business case study which was jointly funded by the state and federal government through their various entities.

CHAIR - Yes. Minister, you realise this portfolio is new to this committee. We've been cramming flat-out to get ourselves across this area, because it isn't an area we have provided that forensic lens to in the past. We've left it to Committee A, who have done an exceptional job. We continue to learn something every day, hence my desire to have Mr Rutherford and Mr Terry here to teach us some economics around energy. We'll go to Mr Willie, and we can always take that answer if there is one. Thank you, Mr Willie, to the minister.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you. Minister, I just wanted a bit more clarification on the questions from before. Is there a date you can provide that the state Government first received the \$56 million from the federal government?

Mr BARNETT - It was on the public record. There was a memorandum of understanding in terms of the \$56 million. The date of that MOU is on the public record. It's on a website. Do you have the date for that?

Mr TERRY - It actually pre-dated my arrival into this position, but I think that money was made available in the 2018-19 financial year. Can I just find a -

Mr BARNETT - I can tell you that it was consummated - as in verbally consummated. It was February 2019, because I was on the Diabetes Tasmania Pollie Pedal having conversations with the federal minister at the time. Now, when it was signed - here we go, 24 February 2019 - 'announced it would provide \$56 million to progress the design and approval phase of Marinus Link to allow for a financing investment decision'. So, there you go. It was signed on 28 March.

Mr WILLIE - Okay. A little bit more explanation around the profiling with TasNetworks, why it is split over two years.

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to the director.

Mr TERRY - I'll do my best. Currently in the Budget Papers, in 2021 there's \$36 million in the current financial year. There's \$36.7 million available, and it looks like there was \$15.7 million expended in 2019-20. That's more than \$50 million, though. No, sorry, that includes our \$6 million at State Growth. So, it's basically \$15.7 million expended in 2019-20, \$36.7 million in the 2020-21 budget, and then \$1.7 million and \$1.7 million afterwards, and I suspect that \$1.7 million is the State Growth funding. According to the Budget Papers, all the Marinus funding is expected to be expended, or the vast bulk of it, in the 2020-21 financial year.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, if the \$6 million runs out - you've just said it's through the forward Estimates, though. Is there a chance that runs out?

Mr BARNETT - We have every expectation further funding will be made available to ensure that Marinus Link progresses through the design and approval process. That's a strong position of our Government. Likewise, the federal government. Of course, that's a matter for future budgets and budget processes.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks for that clarification.

CHAIR - Mr Dean, I think we're heading towards the end of this area.

Mr DEAN - I've got questions in relation to the wind towers that are going through the Central Highlands area.

CHAIR - The corridor.

Mr DEAN - The corridor. I'm not quite sure exactly what stage that is at now, but I've had approaches from people who are looking at setting up some form of committee to take this matter further. They are saying that people in and around the area - people who will be impacted, people who use the area - have not been consulted. Their concern is that they're getting all of this information coming back about the size of these wind towers, the noise they cause, the structures, the clearing that will be necessary around them, the visual impact, the bird life and so on through the Central Highlands area. At this stage, what consultation has taken place generally with the public?

Mr BARNETT - The first thing I'd say is community engagement is really important, and it's a priority for the Government, and for me. I have contacted and communicated with all relevant proponents on the importance of community engagement. Second, the National Wind Farm Commissioner, Andrew Dyer, is an excellent operator. He's been to Tasmania. Obviously during COVID-19 it's been challenging, but we've had ongoing engagement with the commissioner, and encouraging people to make contact with the commissioner, and the commissioner to make contact with the relevant proponents and members of the public.

I'll just go back one step, just to say Cattle Hill Wind Farm, in the Central Highlands, has now concluded. It has been built. That's some \$300 million-worth, 150 megawatts, and some 48 turbines. It's owned by Goldwind Australia. I say congratulations, well done on that project. It's now part of our effort to get to 100 per cent fully self-sufficient in renewable energy. Of course, Granville Harbour on the west coast is finalising their construction as we speak, and the turbines are running thick and fast down there, which is really good.

CHAIR - I don't think they're going fast. I think they might be going thick and slow.

Mr BARNETT - It depends on the speed of the wind and how it's managed. In terms of Cattle Hill, there are some 63 000 homes that are powered by about 150 megawatts. You've raised some good points in terms of community engagement, and I get that feedback as well from time to time from constituents - residential and others.

CHAIR - Around the Deloraine area, we've been getting some feedback.

Mr BARNETT - Not just in the Deloraine area, but across the north-west coast. That's more to do with the transmission line developments, and that has to go through federal, state and local government planning and approval processes. I'm a very strong supporter of community engagement wherever possible, so I appreciate your feedback. I get some of that feedback as well, and that's why I support community engagement wherever possible.

Mr DEAN - Minister, my position is it would be disappointing to see obstacles thrown up, actions being taken and so on, simply because there has not been reasonable consultation with the people, the public, who will be impacted in some way or another. And it's critical, in my view, for this project to get up and continue. People-power is pretty powerful.

Mr BARNETT - Absolutely. You're probably aware the Clean Energy Council has codes of practice and best practice guidelines. I've met them, talked to them, and support and encourage that. I've written to proponents, as I say, to support community engagement, and to follow wherever possible those guidelines for best practice management.

CHAIR - Before we leave this area, I'd like to invite Bob to share with the Committee anything he thinks we need going forward in this area. It's really important. When you're starting to get across a new area, it's important. Did we miss something?

Mr RUTHERFORD - I think the questioning has been comprehensive, Chair. It's always important in this area, which is a technical area, that there's an understanding of the measurements, which are complex. I'm sure the director can assist with that understanding, which from the questioning you already have, of the nature of the Tasmanian energy system. And fundamentally, as the minister stressed, how it differs from the mainland energy system, in which inheres the change in our balance of advantage.

I can remember when the first link was put in. We were at times importing baseload coal-fired power in the middle of the night at negative prices. And that's because it was cheaper for Loy Yang and the other big stations to keep running hot than to turn the heat down. But if they're kept running hot, they have to send the juice somewhere. As thermal coal declines on the mainland, the balance in their system is shifting from that sort of underlying baseload thermal power to the variable power situation they will have. That transforms the balance in the national market and changes the balance of advantage.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. I'd like to move to 90.18, which is the COVID-19 Small Business Energy Support Grant Program, a really important program. Ms Palmer. Thank you.

Output Group 90

COVID-19 Response and Recovery

90.18 Small business energy support grant program -

Ms PALMER - Minister, I note that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic there have been a range of impacts across many parts of the Tasmanian community. Can you please explain the actions in your Energy portfolio taken to address the broader custom impacts associated with COVID-19?

Mr BARNETT - We understand the impact of COVID-19 on Tasmanian customers, both residential and business, small medium and large and, in particular, microbusinesses. So we've responded to that and, firstly, as I've indicated, a 1.38 per cent reduction in July was certainly well appreciated. That's \$7 million in savings or some \$29 per average customer for some 243 000 residential customers. So that's a good saving, and we've mentioned the concession, \$45 million for those concession schemes.

In addition to that, Aurora Energy has a \$5 million COVID support package. They've spent more than \$1 million of that, but there's funds still available. I encourage Tasmanians who are doing it tough to make contact with Aurora Energy. Those colleagues around the table, if you know customers doing it tough, ask them please, to contact Aurora Energy. In addition to that, you might recall from 1 April for that quarterly electricity bill for small business, those eligible small businesses, some 20 000 small businesses, with a cost of up to \$20 million to the taxpayer to support them through that difficult time for that quarter from 1 April onwards. A lot of them were doing it tough, no customers, lack of revenue across the economy.

CHAIR - They still have a power bill.

Mr BARNETT - It's been really tough, but we've responded to that and delivered in that regard. On top of that, we've provided that support through our budget more generally with a billion dollars in our budget to support businesses and our community push through the coronavirus pandemic. As the Premier has said on a number of occasions, we remain cautiously optimistic that we will get through this. We're now in the stage of rebuilding the Tasmanian economy, supporting our community and delivering those jobs and that confidence in the community. So I think we've responded, and we are certainly aware of the impacts to the local community and it's a very good question.

Ms PALMER - Certainly acknowledging a wide range of customers have been impacted and not just those connected to the main grid, can you speak to the committee about how the Government has supported embedded network customers during the pandemic as well as any other initiatives relating to embedded network customers?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can. The embedded networks could be lost or forgotten. They haven't been under our government. The embedded networks means if you're in a shopping centre, and whether you're a doctor or a nurse or a dental practice or a florist and you don't get your electricity bill direct from Aurora Energy or a retailer it comes through an embedded network. We have provided support for those customers and the small business customers primarily, some microbusinesses of less than five employees. Based on an application process, they've been offered \$1000 to support them during those difficult times.

In addition to that, based on that feedback, we have extended the time for applications because we also want not just those incorporated businesses but also sole proprietors. So if you're in an embedded network and you're a sole proprietor you can also apply and that application process is still available. I encourage you to apply: \$1000 to support you to pay those electricity bills or other bills, it's \$1000 based on your application. It's a really good plan, I thank the department for assisting me and the Government to rollout that plan, because it's a really good process to support those businesses doing it tough.

Ms PALMER - Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - Minister, you know, acknowledging that small business is the backbone of this state, and it certainly has been a focus, of all members and the Government in previous times. I know your departmental people have put in an enormous amount of work doing what they can to support small business, and on behalf of the committee and my colleagues in the Legislative Council, we would like to thank them all for that. It's been exceptional.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Minister, that concludes our area of scrutiny for Energy, and we'll now move to Veterans' Affairs. You may well need a change at the table.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much.

CHAIR - Thank you, Sean; thank you, Bob. Much appreciated.

DIVISION 2

(Department of Communities Tasmania)

Output Group 4

Disability Services and Community

4.6 Veterans' affairs -

CHAIR - Minister, would you like to introduce your team at the table, and then we will commence with the area of Veterans' Affairs.

Mr BARNETT - I'm pleased to welcome to the table Kate Kent, director of Community Affairs, and also Courtney Hurworth who supports us in the Veterans' Affairs area. I receive terrific support from the department and it is greatly appreciated. If possible, I'd like to make some opening remarks on Veterans' Affairs and to -

CHAIR - We'd be surprised if you didn't, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. As you know, I'm a very keen supporter of our 10 500 veterans and their families all around Tasmania. Just to say upfront, COVID-19 has impacted them. It's been a really tough time, but the Anzac Day service earlier this year went really well under the circumstances, down on your veranda, at your doorstep, on the street at dawn. It was wonderful, Tasmanians embraced that and I want to say thank you to the Tasmanian people, thank you to the RSL Tasmania for leading that process. The commemorative service on Anzac Day was very special, like no other. I used that term before, but it was certainly unprecedented, for sure. We had a special service hosted here by the RSL with the Premier, myself and others at Anglesea Barracks.

Regarding the Budget, we're backing it in. I don't think there's ever been a government that has provided more support for our veterans and I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to be their minister. Some \$240 000 in grants to 52 eligible RSL and ex-service organisations during COVID-19 with special grants to help them through this time. So \$10 000 grants primarily, or up to \$10 000, based on that application, to some 52 entities.

In addition, this past year has been really important with the 75th anniversary of World War II, and I know Mr Dean and others around the table would be aware of that. We've also got the 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War, and it's been a really special year in so many ways.

We've provided that support for those organisations during the pandemic, but in addition for RSL Tasmania as the peak entity, \$110 000 with indexation; and the Teddy Sheean Memorial Grants Program of \$100 000 a year for three years for repairs and maintenance to RSLs. I should note, chair and colleagues, that it's been renamed. This program has been renamed the Teddy Sheean VC Memorial Grants Program.

CHAIR - Congratulations.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, chair. We're delighted with that renaming.

We've got \$225 000 partnership with the Parks and Wildlife Service for the local veteran-run organisation, Point Assist, for the Veterans Active Recreation Program for returned services personnel. They came back just last week, and I called the director of that service. It went very well. They had a number of veterans on that program out in the southwest, out in the bush, and it was really terrific support.

There's also support for Dago Point, \$100 000 for the veteran centre up there being supported by the Vietnam Veterans Association, Terry Roe and his colleagues. So, congratulations for what they're doing. And further, you would all be aware of the Anzac Day Trust winding up legislation, which is now delivering in spades for Legacy Launceston and Legacy Hobart, some \$40 000 shared each year under a new four-year grant deed.

And also, very importantly, Chair, the co-funding - \$60 000 each with the Federal Government and \$60 000 from the State Government - to assess the merits of the veterans' health and wellbeing centre or services in Tasmania. I've followed up on this and I want to say thank you to Darren Chester, federal minister for Veterans' Affairs, my colleague and friend, for his support in that regard. And that study is now being undertaken by the University of Tasmania, with consultation under way. For those interested, please reach out to the University of Tasmania, or contact my office and we can ensure that consultation occurs, and we get your feedback on the best way we can deliver that service.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that 10 August was a special day for Tasmania, and particularly the Sheean family, with the phone call from the Prime Minister to me to say that he would be recommending a Victoria Cross.

CHAIR - And yourself, minister. A special day for yourself.

Mr BARNETT - It was a special day for myself, yes. As soon as I got off the phone from the Prime Minister, I called Garry Ivory, a nephew of Teddy Sheean, and then we let the tears flow. I won't say too much more, but we were very happy - tears of joy, they were. Two days later, Her Majesty the Queen through the Governor-General, approved that as well, so we're delighted with that. And of course, 1 December, next week, we will have the great honour of both being attendance at the investiture where Garry Ivory will receive the Victoria Cross from the Governor-General at Government House with the Sheean family members, with the Chief of Navy, Royal Australian Navy personnel.

This is the first VC ever for the Royal Australian Navy, the 15th for Tasmania, and the 101st for Australia. So, it's a great honour, and of course 78 years after 1 December 1942 when the Armidale went down in the Timor Sea. It's an absolutely amazing story. I want to pay a great credit and tribute to Garry Ivory, the nephew, for his long campaign, some 32 years.

Mr DEAN - He didn't give up.

Mr BARNETT - He didn't give up. We met the Governor-General a few days ago at Latrobe when he kindly visited with Mrs Hurley. The family and the veteran community are deeply gratified by that. The government has announced \$50 000 support for a statue to be built at Latrobe in honour of Teddy Sheean. And with the support of the Federal Government through Gavin Pearce, for which I'm very grateful, we expect something similar and for that statue to be built to honour and pay respect to Teddy Sheean.

CHAIR - And the VC cross will sit?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'm glad you asked. Garry Ivory, on behalf of the family, has agreed to generously donate the VC itself to the Australian War Memorial, and that'll be presented next week, the day after the after the investiture. There will be a special service at the Australian War Memorial at 5 pm, at the Tomb of an Unknown Soldier, and there will be a Last Post, and I have been invited to lay a wreath on behalf of the people of Tasmania, which I am very excited about, so it'll be a great day.

CHAIR - Congratulations.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - You certainly have been a champion for the outcome that's been well-deserved. On behalf of this committee, the Legislative Council and the entire population, the people of Tasmania, we say thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. It's a great honour.

CHAIR - Mr Willie, would you mind opening the line of questioning? Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. Before I do so, the member for Pembroke was very keen to ask these questions.

CHAIR - She was.

Mr WILLIE - She hasn't been able to join us, so I'll ask some questions on her behalf. What support, minister, is the State Government providing for mental health services for veterans?

Mr BARNETT - Mental health services for veterans is primarily a federal government responsibility. Darren Chester leads that, and those services are being provided. It's probably a question best for the federal government, but as a State Government we also provide support - mental health services through a range of measures, through the Active Recreation program, \$225 000 through Point Assist. They're doing some really good work. Likewise, at Dago Point, \$100 000 plus the granting of the Parks and Wildlife hut at Dago Point, Lake Sorell, and Vietnam Veterans are doing a terrific job in upgrading that facility.

Further, we're providing \$60 000 for the health and wellbeing services. A feasibility study is being undertaken by the University of Tasmania. Their report and recommendations is due in early 2021, so I'm looking forward to that report and recommendation, seeing what it says, and then following up with the federal government in terms of providing funding support for those services to provide that centre or services, and would expect to have further discussions with my federal colleagues in that regard soon after that report is delivered.

Mr WILLIE - You said it yourself in the overview, COVID-19's been particularly hard on our veterans in the state, and unfortunately we're in a recession, and it probably will be there for a little while. What state-based employment initiatives are available for veterans and their families?

Mr BARNETT - First, I would like to correct the record. We're not in a recession. We have had a tough time, but we're certainly not in a recession. In fact, the level of confidence -

Mr WILLIE - Well, the federal Treasurer is saying we're in a recession as a country, and the state budget is projecting that we will be in a recession.

Mr BARNETT - We'll have to agree to disagree on that, and if the Premier and Treasurer was here he would have a different view as well. We're doing everything we can in our budget to support 25 000 jobs, and the budget is all about creating jobs, confidence, and supporting the community. The biggest infrastructure rollout in Tasmanian history, some \$5 billion over the forward estimates.

Mr WILLIE - My question, minister, on state-based employment initiatives that are available for veterans and their families -

Mr BARNETT - Yes. That's why I needed to correct the record before I got to that part of the question. I'm happy to ask Kate Kent to respond in that regard. This is primarily a responsibility for the federal government, and we're doing everything we can. We work with the RSL. We fund them, and they have special project funding as well. I'll just see if Kate Kent can add anything to that answer.

Ms KENT - Thank you, minister, through you. During COVID-19 the funding that was provided to the RSLs and other ESOs was enabling those organisations to maintain employment support, so that was the grants the minister mentioned. Regarding an ongoing employment work for veterans, we work really closely with our Commonwealth counterparts through the ministerial round table. It's been one of their issues of discussion.

As the minister said, primarily it's a Commonwealth responsibility, however sharing of information across jurisdictions occurs around where there are employment programs and what they might look like, particularly working closely with DVA around people transitioning out of the defence forces each year, and how jurisdictions take advantage of those skilled people coming into the workforce as well. There are policy discussions at that level about employment strategies and also participation in contracting and other things like that are all part of those discussions, that's at a senior officials' level at the moment.

Mr BARNETT - I could add that I have a Veterans' Reference Group. It's chaired by John Withers, and he does a terrific job. They meet every few months. They look at the employment strategies that are available, and that's under consideration at the moment. It is one of their topics for consideration. They look at a whole range of issues relevant to veterans, so I'm looking forward to getting feedback from the Veterans' Reference Group on that matter.

Mr WILLIE - What support has been given to counter the aging RSL membership? What sort of support has been given to the RSL clubs around Tasmania to recruit new members?

Mr BARNETT - They get a good deal of support from the state government. They've been identified as a peak body, and receive \$110 000 a year, as I've indicated earlier, in addition to the \$50 000 special project; they did some work on that. Kate or Courtney might want to comment on that particular project which identified the profile of the RSL community in Tasmania and the veterans, and their age and background and their history. So that's been a

useful piece of information to provide better decision making for us and for the RSL going forward.

Mr WILLIE - And probably at an individual club level too.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. It's fair to say some of the clubs are doing better than others. Some are finding it very challenging and are struggling. The COVID-19 grants have been really well appreciated. I know the member for Rosevears has been active on the West Tamar with some of those clubs including down at Beaconsfield. I think there were some 52 recipients of those grants, and that's been well appreciated.

CHAIR - Can that be tabled, minister, the list of those, if that's possible?

Mr BARNETT - I don't have any problem with tabling them.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - They're on the website, but I'm happy to table that as well.

Mr WILLIE - I know Lenah Valley got one, in my patch, I'm a social member there. They're doing some upgrades, which is good.

CHAIR - It would be nice to have the list for completeness.

Mr BARNETT - Absolutely, be delighted to. I will check if Courtney could comment on the report. Please feel free to comment on that profile report, if you'd like to, Kate or Courtney. Is there anything you would like to say?

CHAIR - Thank you, Courtney.

Ms HURWORTH - We provided funding, and RSL undertook a research project specifically on the profile of veterans in Tasmania. The report that was published in May includes a range of recommendations on how to increase services for younger veterans and increase membership of younger veterans. RSL is in the process at the moment of implementing those recommendations, and that also includes the formation of a stakeholder reference group to provide ongoing advice about how to better meet the needs of younger veterans.

Mr WILLIE - What sort of engagement was with younger veterans around making services more relevant to them?

Ms HURWORTH - The project undertook a wide range of consultations, not just through RSL sub-branches but through a number of other service providers. That project is forming part of the feasibility study for the Wellbeing Centre as well, and that will then go beyond the consultation that was done for that project and look even further at younger veterans.

Mr WILLIE - Was there any engagement with younger veterans who aren't engaged with any services? Is there a way to do that, possibly, I guess, in collaboration with the federal department?

Ms HURWORTH - They would have had a lot of engagement with DVA around that.

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I made contact with the federal minister and also the department meets with the DVA or the Department of Veterans' Affairs at the federal level from time to time. We have a good relationship with them, and we get feedback from them on how we can better service our veterans wherever possible. Of course, RSL Tasmania has a responsibility themselves, to do whatever they can to build up the younger members and to grow their membership and to be a viable organisation. I encourage those around this table and other members of parliament to please go to your local RSLs. Mr Dean and others around the table are very active in that space, but if you've got ideas and suggestions, please feed back to your local RSL. Please feed back to the RSL Tasmania, and likewise, please feel free to feed back to me as the relevant minister.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, I'll use a personal example. My cousin did two tours of Afghanistan; he's not engaged with any service. I'm interested in whether you were able to reach out to people like that. He'd be your classic sort of person that those sort of views would be very valuable, I would imagine.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, you make a good point. They would be really valuable, and you've used a good example. If there's any way we can reach out in that regard, it'd be important to do so. It's primarily the responsibility of the federal government and the transition from the service back into civilian life, is really tough.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, I know.

Mr BARNETT - We've talked about mental health and wellbeing, and let's put it on the table, suicide is at a higher rate for our veterans particularly post-service and as they move into civilian life. That's on the record so I'm happy to note that and we need to do all we can; hence the merit of the health and wellbeing services feasibility study being undertaken by the university, and that's why I'm so keen to have a look at that report and recommendation when it comes out. I should note that it's not solely focused on veterans; it's primarily focused on that, but also first responders, so police and emergency services are being consulted. The Police Association, for example, has input, which is great, and we'll look forward to that report and recommendations when it comes out in the first quarter of next year.

Mr WILLIE - I'll hand over to some other members. I've got more here if we need.

CHAIR - Thank you. A question, minister, in regard to these grants and congratulations on the government for the initiative, no issue in that. It's just that it's interesting that there's really a diverse range of grants here. A lot of them are \$10 000, no problem, one for \$20 000. But a lot of the others are only around \$4000, \$3000, \$274, so can you give us some idea why there is such a variation? Is it the fact that some clubs have meals and wages and others have more volunteers? Is that really the basis of the variation?

Mr BARNETT - It's based on an application process, so the club has to apply and they do what they believe is in the best interests for the club. I might ask Kate Kent to respond in terms of eligibility and criteria and provide further detail.

CHAIR - The maximum grant obviously wasn't \$10 000, because one club got \$20 000. But a lot out of that list received 10 000.

Mr BARNETT - I think there were two lots of grants. There was a \$10 000 and then another \$10 000 grant which they could apply for. Kate Kent - if you're happy to respond?

CHAIR - There's a second round.

Ms KENT - So these were the COVID-19 grants, and I'll be happy to table the guidelines which again, are available on the website. But they were primarily focused on keeping people in work; so, primarily focused on the commercially operating RSL clubs, sub-branches, ESOs or other organisations that were potentially going to lose income because they were having to close due to COVID-19, or incur costs related to that. So RSL sub-branches, ESOs and other organisations that lost income as a direct result of the COVID-19 restrictions and need help to sustain or support their service delivery; and sub-branches, ESOs and other organisations that incurred additional costs as a direct result of the COVID-19 restrictions. Primarily related to that.

CHAIR - Is the fund fully subscribed? You said the second round, is that still open or has closed?

Mr BARNETT - It's a different round. It's closed is my understanding, and the funds have been nearly fully subscribed, and the applications have been out there, all the 52 out of - there's a bit more than that, in terms of the numbers, based it's based on an application and it's up to the organisation.

CHAIR - Up to each club.

Mr BARNETT - I'll give you an example. In our space, Longford RSL, I was there a few weeks ago. Now, they've had issues with COVID-19 like many other organisations. Eight ball and - what's the other one?

CHAIR - Darts?

Mr BARNETT - Eight ball and darts. Of course, they couldn't do it, and that was up to 40 per cent of their income. So how do they operate, meet their commitments?

CHAIR - How do they meet their commitments, that's right.

Mr BARNETT - And they employ people - they have lots of volunteers also and much appreciated by that organisation.

CHAIR - My last question and I'll hand over to other members. You will have seen that the St Helens history and memorabilia - sorry, did I? No, I'll let you ask it then. Sorry. We had a discussion about it. It's been a long day.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's all right, when we did discuss it the Chair said you take it because you found it.

CHAIR - And then I wrote it down.

Ms ARMITAGE - It was regarding the \$20 000 damage to the East Coast Veterans Centre and is the Government looking to contribute or assist?

Mr BARNETT - Let me respond.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - I called the president and the secretary within 24 hours, Gary Graham and Debbie Shield. In addition, the president of the local RSL, Wayne Cubitt. Wayne stayed in his car throughout the night to protect the premises after the incident occurred. I won't go into the incident, but it caused significant damage right through their front door and window, impacted adversely and detrimentally a number of assets, including the mannequin damaged forever. Yes, I've had contact directly with them.

I'm disturbed like everybody else in the community particularly, in and around St Helens, because they do such a good job supporting our veterans. They provide wellbeing and support in different ways and so many volunteers are in and out of that wellbeing centre and the facility.

CHAIR - And they reach out right through the valley.

Mr BARNETT - They reach out and not just St Helens. It's St Marys. All around that area. The east coast is impacted. Pleased to say they are able to join me down here for Vietnam Veterans Day the year before last and last year. They do a great job. I've got that feedback. They do have access to insurance and we are at the ready if any further support is required. I suspect the community will step up and provide that support, knowing that local community and organisation. But they know -

Ms ARMITAGE - I imagine they would have an excess.

Mr BARNETT - They know I'm ready to support as and when required, but I suspect the community will respond once they sort out their insurance issues.

CHAIR - I'd like to thank the member for Launceston for taking such a keen interest.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's all right. You could have really run with it. It didn't really matter.

CHAIR - As long as we get it on the record.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - With regard to the Teddy Sheean Memorial Grants Program, it was wonderful Teddy Sheean is finally received the recognition he deserved. I note \$50 000 in funding for the first round has already been allocated, is that the whole \$50 000?

Mr BARNETT - I believe so.

Ms ARMITAGE - So when is the second round? Obviously, it's two rounds a year.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, two rounds a year, \$100 000 with \$50 000 per round.

Ms ARMITAGE - When do they forward you each so that people know when to -

Mr BARNETT - It's every six months or so. I'll check with Kate Kent on the exact dates.

Ms KENT - We can certainly keep members advised about when they open.

Ms ARMITAGE - It would be good we can let the groups in our areas know. I should declare an interest I am the patron of the northern area or the national service mens -

Mr BARNETT - Very good, thank you for what you do to support them.

Ms ARMITAGE - They're a great group.

CHAIR - And also supporting your husband.

Ms ARMITAGE - He is a member because he is a nasho. But it was quite correct they are an older group because they are obviously national servicemen.

CHAIR - Young at heart.

Ms ARMITAGE - Well, my husband is one of the younger and he's in his 70s, so they are certainly an older group. The \$225 000 Veterans Active Recreation Project, where does that go and what does that actually encompass? I'm wondering how veterans actually apply and how it works for them.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's \$225 000 over three years and undertaken by Point Assist. Mark Direen is the director of Point Assist, who I've met and phoned last week when they came back from their active recreational activity in southwest Tasmania. They had a number of veterans on that trip and that's done over a three year period. It's outdoor recreation for returned service personnel in a national park environment. Mark Direen is a former Australian Special Forces team leader, a high-risk environment consultant, 25 year career in the military, security and adventure travel fields. They've developed a program that delivers a challenging outdoor experience, providing camaraderie, teamwork, focus on mental health and wellbeing, links to pathways to training and employment.

This was a matter that Mr Willie indicated or expressed a concern about earlier - and it's in the outdoor education and/or ecotourism environment. The first trek was scheduled for June 2020, but delayed during COVID-19 and just concluded last week.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's for younger veterans as you mentioned the word 'challenging' outdoor.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - I was thinking of my national servicemen. Many of them are retired and looking for things to do, but they would be in their 80s, even though they're reasonably fit. Not for that age group, really.

Mr BARNETT - I'll check on the criteria.

Ms KENT - I don't think there's criterion in terms of age, really, minister. But certainly, it is -

Ms ARMITAGE - It did say challenging.

Ms KENT - Aimed at being a challenging outdoor experience.

Ms ARMITAGE - And if they were interested, where would they apply?

Ms KENT - Through Point Assist.

Ms ARMITAGE - Through Point Assist.

Ms KENT - The partnership has been developed also in conjunction with Parks and Wildlife, because it is undertaken in the parks.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, Chair.

Mr BARNETT - I should indicate you're as old as you feel because Ivan Dean and I did the Kokoda Track together in 2008.

Mr DEAN - I wouldn't mind doing it again.

Mr BARNETT - And look at you. You're a picture of health and wellbeing, so well done.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - And he doesn't have an electric bike yet.

Mr DEAN - No, I won't have one for a long time.

CHAIR - Mr Dean, on that note, I'll hand over to you.

Mr DEAN - In asking questions, I've identified an interest because I am a veteran. I am a national serviceman, and also saw war service. The Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize didn't take place this year, and normally there is funding in the budgets of about \$135 000 for it. What happened to that money? Was it in the budget for this current year that it didn't take place? It's highly unlikely it will take place next year, because normally the process of getting the students ready and all of the rest of that is well and truly under way now. What's the position with that memorial prize, minister?

Mr BARNETT - The Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize is a fantastic program and initiative supported by the Government for \$135 000 a year. Yes, it is in the Budget, and I know you're a former -

Mr DEAN - I did it the year before Kerry.

Mr BARNETT - I've been designated member on a number of occasions and haven't been able to participate because of travel reasons, Cabinet and for other reasons. Travelling overseas is not appropriate this year. It was not possible, so those grade 9 students from last year couldn't go this year. We are planning through the department and looking at opportunities for next year domestically. We're not looking at overseas.

CHAIR - The war memorial or something like that.

Mr BARNETT - We're looking at all the options and the department's considering that and putting those views and suggestions through to the minister as we speak. But we are planning to provide something special, at least domestically on island in Australia next year. We're looking at those options carefully and have more to say in due course. It is an important program and I really appreciate your interest and support for the program, because I know how supportive you and other members around not just this table, but in the parliament across the political divide.

Mr DEAN - Maybe our colleagues in New Zealand might be an appropriate position to take some of these students. It was extremely disappointing for the students that missed out. I'm aware of some of them. Have they just simply missed out because of age or will they be considered for what might take place next year?

Mr BARNETT - They are absolutely in the game. We still have contact with them. They are a wonderful group of kids that I have contact with, the department has contact with them. So we're looking next year for those students. As well as another group for next year. There will probably end up being two groups next year. So we're looking at that. We don't want anybody to miss out. Especially those that have done their research on their digger.

I've done research on Albert Dilger from Swansea on the east coast. That's been in train for a while. Yes, very good question. We are planning that for next year and we'll be running a competition for years 9 and 10 also next year.

Mr DEAN - My next question is around the Veterans' Reference Group. What work are they continuing to do and what programs or opportunities have they identified to you as the minister responsible?

Mr BARNETT - It's an excellent group. I appreciate their contribution and feedback, not just the department but to me as well. John Withers is the chair, he does a great job.

They were formed in December 2018, so they haven't been going that long, a couple of years. They met four times last year, they've have three meetings this year notwithstanding COVID-19. The next meeting, I understand, is scheduled for December.

I'm happy to put on the record not just Brigadier John Withers as the chair, but Natalie Sankey, Josh Miller, Alison Merridew, Phillip De Bomford, Grant Herring, Cheryl Arnol and Dr Jon Lane. They are all very competent, capable people. They provide feedback on a whole range of measures, including assessment of the Teddy Sheehan grants.

They look at some at some of our priorities. They've had input into the development of the active recreation program that Point Assist is undertaking. As I say, the Teddy Sheehan program. They have had input in to the selection of the Vietnam Veterans' Association to

support the Dago Point facility upgrade at Lake Sorell. They inform themselves of contemporary veterans' policy and matters of interest to veterans and their families; feedback on mental health and wellbeing issues. They provide advice to the Government on other issues, including the development of the mental health and wellbeing strategy, and that national action plan which I mentioned which is being undertaken by the university. Also Tasmania's response to the Veterans' Ministerial Council.

During COVID-19 they provided advice and feedback on how we can better support out veterans. So they do a good job. I'll just check if Kate Kent would like to add to any of those observations.

Ms KENT - The only thing I'd add would be in relation to Mr Willie's comment about the impact of young veterans. The Veterans' Reference Group, in particular Dr Jon Lane, Alison Merridew and Josh Miller, would be strong advocates for the issues facing younger veterans. That's the initiatives they bring to the table. They've very keen for those issues to be considered and addressed through the state Government and the Commonwealth.

Mr DEAN - My other question relates to the inquiry that's going in relation to our Afghanistan veterans and return servicemen. I'm not sure how many of those we would have in this state, but is there a number on that? What's support's been given out to those veterans because of what they would be going through and feeling?

Mr BARNETT - Obviously it's a federal government responsibility. The Brereton Report that you're referring to is incredibly important and moving. The federal government has already set up a Commissioner for Veterans and Defence Suicide. The SAS review undertaken by Brereton is sober reading. Our government is not directly in service delivery. That's the federal government with veterans. But we do treat it very seriously and we welcome the release of the report.

Mr DEAN - We don't know if any of those SAS returned servicemen from Afghanistan are in the state. Obviously we're not sure of that.

Mr BARNETT - These are individuals. DVA may have some records of that.

Mr DEAN - I would have thought they would have had the records.

Mr BARNETT - The state Government doesn't have that information because we're not in the area of service provision. We have ways of supporting that cohort through some of the initiatives I've outlined today. It's a very difficult area and I'll be talking to Darren Chester about this when I meet with him next.

Mr DEAN - It would be worthwhile raising an issue such as this with them because they would need that support, I would think.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Mr DEAN - My last question relates to free entry for veterans accessing parks, areas, walks, trails and so on.

CHAIR - A parks pass.

Mr DEAN - Yes, a parks pass. I think there are passes for seniors. Was there some work done on this? What's the position?

Mr BARNETT - They are available for concession card holders. And you mentioned -

CHAIR - Do they have to apply?

Mr BARNETT - Let's see if Kate Kent can assist on concessions in parks.

CHAIR - Sometimes a barrier for a lot of people is the application process.

Mr DEAN - It is.

Ms KENT - They get concessions for fishing licences, but I will need to follow up on the parks and wildlife concessions, unless Courtney's managed to find something.

CHAIR - Courtney has an answer.

Ms HURWORTH - There are a range of discounts if you hold specific DVA cards through Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service. It isn't free from what I have here, but there is a discount for getting into different parks.

CHAIR - It might be something for the reference group to pursue.

Mr DEAN - I'm of the view - and I have had approaches from veterans in relation to this - that they ought to have free access. That's what they're saying. I don't disagree with them because I am one myself. They should have free access because of the service that they have provided to the country.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Mr DEAN - It should be considered.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. My advice through the Parks and Wildlife Service that we're checking, there's a 20 per cent discount. Courtney mentioned the concession. The advice I have here is 20 per cent discount on annual and two-year national park passes. That's available to the holders of the DVA pensioners card. In addition, these things are discussed at a federal level at the ministerial council meeting from time to time, either once or twice a year. We try to get a consistent approach across Australia to support our veterans.

Ms ARMITAGE - Should I add that in Victoria they give free SkyBus transfers to veterans.

CHAIR - That should be consistent.

Mr DEAN - Free public transport in some states too.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, and that's not 20 per cent. It's actually free.

Mr BARNETT - We'll check on Metro buses. Unless you know, Courtney, about Metro buses?

Ms HURWORTH - I will look it up.

Ms ARMITAGE - And if you're gold or white card.

Mr DEAN - It should relate to all veterans. It's really discriminatory when we say you have to be the holder of a gold card or a white card. For any veteran, in my view, who has served the country; these discounts shouldn't be just there for those with those cards. All veterans ought to be entitled to some of that support, which doesn't really impact on the government.

Mr BARNETT - Most veterans would have a DVA card, wouldn't they?

Mr DEAN - No, they don't all have a white card or a gold card or any of that. There are many -

CHAIR - You'd have to prove you're a veteran though, wouldn't you?

Mr DEAN - They might have that, but that's not what we're talking about. As I understand it, they're saying they must hold a white card or a gold card.

CHAIR - You're asking for all veterans regardless of being a card holder.

Mr BARNETT - Can I make a suggestion, Chair?

CHAIR - Yes, of course.

Mr BARNETT - That we take this question on notice, and we come back to you and the committee with a summary of the concessions, because they do get concessions. The question is exactly where those concessions are and how much they are, and which - as I say, we try to get it consistent around Australia. But they do get concessions. Regarding the particular details, can we take that on notice, come back to the committee, and provide that to the committee?

Mr DEAN - Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Members, if there are no further questions, on behalf of the committee, minister, I sincerely thank you and all of your support team you've had during the day for your responses to our questions. Particularly, thank you for your indulgence around taking questions that may not necessarily have been specific to your portfolio areas, and the suggestions of where we might find those answers, and also the responses that you will provide. It is very much appreciated, and we wish you all the best for tomorrow.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair, and I thank members of the committee as well as other members, Kate and Courtney here, and other members of the department who have supported me throughout the day. It is much appreciated.

The Committee adjourned at 6.01 p.m.