



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Continuing
Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic:
Business Support and COVID-19 Check-in App**

Members of the Committee

Legislative Council

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC
(Chair)

Hon Meg Webb MLC

Hon Josh Willie MLC

House of Assembly

Ms Lara Alexander MP
(from 16 August 2022)

Dr Shane Broad MP
(Deputy Chair)

Mr Felix Ellis MP
(until 25 July 2022)

Mr John Tucker MP
(until 21 November 2022)

Mr Dean Young MP
(from 23 November 2022)

Table of Contents

Charter of the Committee	ii
Abbreviations and Acronyms	iii
Executive Summary	1
Summary of Findings	3
Summary of Recommendations	5
Conduct of Review	6
Background	10
Evidence	11
Business Support (Targeted Support Programs and Payments, Small Business).....	11
Financial Measures.....	11
Measures Taken Since August 2021.....	14
Financial Impact and Uptake.....	15
Support for Particular Communities	18
COVID-19 Check-in TAS App	29
Development of the Check in TAS App	29
Usage and efficacy of the App.....	30
Summary of Attachments	36

Charter of the Committee

The Public Accounts Committee (the Committee) is a Joint Standing Committee of the Tasmanian Parliament constituted under the *Public Accounts Committee Act 1970* (the Act).

The Committee comprises six Members of Parliament, three Members drawn from the Legislative Council and three Members from the House of Assembly.

Under section 6 of the Act the Committee:

- **must** inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any matter referred to the Committee by either House relating to the management, administration or use of public sector finances; or the accounts of any public authority or other organisation controlled by the State or in which the State has an interest; and
 - **may** inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any matter arising in connection with public sector finances that the Committee considers appropriate; and any matter referred to the Committee by the Auditor-General.
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DoH	Department of Health
DPAC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
DSG	Department of State Growth
GST	Goods and Services Tax
LGA	Local Government Area
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
MP	Member of Parliament
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
Omicron	COVID-19 B.1.1.529 variant
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction testing
PHS	Public Health Service
PIAG	Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grant
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
QR codes	Quick response code
RATs	Rapid Antigen Tests
TasCOSS	Tasmanian Council of Social Service
TCCI	Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Executive Summary

This Report described financial support provided by the Tasmanian Government to businesses negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Tasmanian Government provided targeted COVID-19 support to Tasmanian businesses of over \$160 million in grants and support packages since March 2020.

This Report has a particular focus on financial support provided to businesses negatively impacted by restrictions and/or workforce challenges related to the isolation and quarantine requirements and businesses impacted by the three-day lockdown direction on 15 October 2022 prior to the re-opening of the border.

As a result of a three-day lockdown direction, made in response to a positive case of COVID-19 in the community, approximately \$3.5 million of funding support was provided to impacted businesses. The three-day lockdown direction also resulted in the unplanned cancellation of the Unconformity Festival in Queenstown with funding support provided to impacted businesses in collaboration with the West Coast Council.

Following the Government announcement of 15 December 2021 as the date the border would re-open, the Department of State Growth:

- established a high level COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group, which met regularly to discuss emerging issues and coordinate a response;
- appointed a Director of COVID-19 Recovery to coordinate appropriate responses; and
- established a grants implementation framework to allow the Department of State Growth to rapidly roll out any business support as required.

The COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group, prior to the border re-opening, was responsible for the ongoing management of existing support programs and the coordination of intelligence gathering with businesses and industry associations. The COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group played a facilitation and communication role between business and Public Health and supported whole of government activities in preparation for border re-opening and the expected influx of additional flights and arrivals.

The work of the COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group informed the business financial support programs/rounds that were made available prior to, during and after 15 December 2021.

Three rounds of the COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program opened for the following dates: 15 December 2021 – 14 January 2022 (Round 1); 15 January 2022 – 14 February 2022 (Round 2); 15 February 2022 – 14 March 2022 (Round 3); and 15 March 2022 – 12 May 2022 (Round 4).

The Committee acknowledges the financial support provided to Tasmanian business. The Committee recommends the Government review the design and implementation of the various business support programs to inform the design of any future programs.

The COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was developed as a tool to assist in contact tracing and intended to support suppression of COVID-19. The app was licensed under agreement with the ACT Government.

The ACT Government did not charge the Department of Health for any updates or new releases for the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app with additional costs only incurred when a specific change was requested for the Tasmanian version such as to allow the app to display exposure sites.

Prior to the re-opening of the border, the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was a key resource in pursuing an elimination/containment strategy for COVID-19.

Following the re-opening of Tasmania's border, mandatory requirements for use of the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app became futile with the emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. Public Health focussed on use in high-risk venues and events, to support ongoing management of COVID-19.

The total expenditure by the Tasmanian Government on the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app to 15 February 2022 was \$113,499.13 (ex. GST). As at 17 March 2022, the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app had been downloaded 1,149,262 times on to Apple and Android devices, with 1,242,896,393 check-ins across a total of 56,942 registered locations/businesses in Tasmania and 408,469 Tasmanians linked their vaccination certificate to the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app.

The Department of Health rebranded the ACT developed app and enabled it to store collected data in Tasmania's contact tracing database. No data collected through the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was shared with external bodies.

The Committee acknowledged the value of digital contact tracing and recommended the Government maintain the capacity for effective digital contact tracing for future pandemics.



Hon Ruth Forrest MLC
Chair

18 October 2023

Summary of Findings

The Committee found:

Area	Finding
<p>Business Support (Targeted Support Programs and Payments, Small Business)</p>	<p>F1. The State Government provided targeted COVID-19 support to Tasmanian businesses of over \$160 million in grants and support packages since March 2020.</p> <p>F2. Specific funding to Tasmanian business was allocated in response to the border re opening.</p> <p>F3. Following the Government announcement of 15 December 2021 as the date the border would re-open, the Department of State Growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. established a high level COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group; b. appointed a Director of COVID-19 Recovery to coordinate appropriate responses; and c. established a grants implementation framework to rapidly roll out any business support as required. <p>F4. Three rounds of the COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program opened for the following dates: 15 December 2021 – 14 January 2022 (Round 1); 15 January 2022 – 14 February 2022 (Round 2); 15 February 2022 – 14 March 2022 (Round 3); and 15 March 2022 – 12 May 2022 (Round 4).</p> <p>F5. In response to a three-day lockdown direction issued on 15 October 2021, made in response to a positive case of COVID-19 in the community, approximately \$3.5 million in funding support was provided to impacted businesses.</p> <p>F6. The three-day lockdown direction issued on 15 October 2021 resulted in the unplanned cancellation of the Unconformity Festival in Queenstown with funding support provided to impacted businesses in collaboration with the West Coast Council.</p> <p>F7. The business community supported the roll-out of the various business support programs. However, there were some gaps and inconsistencies identified.</p>
<p>COVID-19 Check-in TAS App</p>	<p>F8. The COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was licensed under an agreement with the ACT Government.</p> <p>F9. The ACT Government did not charge the Department of Health for any updates or new releases for the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app. Additional costs were only incurred when a specific change was requested for the Tasmanian version.</p> <p>F10. The total expenditure by the Tasmanian Government on the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app to 15 February 2022 was \$113,499.13 (ex. GST).</p> <p>F11. To implement the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app, the Department of Health rebranded the app and enabled it to store collected data in Tasmania’s contact tracing database.</p> <p>F12. No data collected through the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was shared with external bodies.</p>

Area	Finding
	<p>F13. The COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was made mandatory to use from 1 May 2021 at a wide range of locations, businesses and events.</p> <p>F14. Prior to the re-opening of the border, the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was a key resource in pursuing an elimination/containment strategy for COVID-19.</p> <p>F15. Following the re-opening of Tasmania’s border, mandatory requirements for use of the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app were varied to focus on use in high-risk venues and events, to support ongoing management of COVID 19.</p> <p>F16. As at 17 March 2022, the COVID-19 Check-in TAS App had been downloaded 1,149,262 times on to Apple and Android devices, with 1,242,896,393 check-ins across 56,942 registered locations/businesses in Tasmania.</p> <p>F17. 408,469 Tasmanians linked their vaccination certificate to the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app.</p>

Summary of Recommendations

The Committee made two recommendations:

Area	Recommendation
Business Support (Targeted Support Programs and Payments, Small Business)	R1. The Government review the design and implementation of the various business support programs to inform any future programs.
COVID-19 Check-in TAS App	R2. The Government maintain the capacity for effective digital contact tracing for future pandemics.

Conduct of Review

On 23 February 2022, the Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into the COVID-19 related responses and measures taken by State Government.

On 24 February 2022, a media release and terms of reference was circulated and published on the Committee's website.¹

The terms of reference included the Committee undertaking further inquiries into the Tasmanian Government's continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The areas to be covered in the inquiry included measures taken by the Government (including relevant Public Health advice) to prepare for the State border re-opening on 15 December 2021, the return to school, the vaccination rollout, business support and the COVID-19 Tasmanian Check-in app.

Particular emphasis for the Inquiry was detailed as follows:

Re-opening of the Tasmanian Border

- the financial and public health measures taken by Government to prepare for the re-opening of the Tasmanian border to other mainland States on 15 December 2021;
- the Public Health advice that supported the re-opening plan; and
- the financial and social impacts associated with measures implemented to support the border re-opening including (but not limited to) impact on:
 - access to health services;
 - patient outcomes;
 - health professionals; and
 - the broader Tasmanian community and economy.

Return to School Plan

- the financial and public health measures taken by Government to prepare for return to school for students and staff for the 2022 educational year;
- the Public Health advice that supported the return to school plan;
- the financial, social and educational impacts associated with measures implemented to support the return to school plan including (but not limited to) impact on:
 - students and educational outcomes;
 - parents and carers;
 - staff; and
 - the broader Tasmanian community and economy.

COVID-19 Vaccination Uptake and Rollout

- the financial and public health measures taken by Government to support and encourage COVID-19 vaccination uptake;
- the Public Health advice that supported these measures including accessibility to vaccinations across all age cohorts;
- the financial implications of the vaccine rollout to the State; and

¹ See [Media Advisory – 24 February 2022](#) on the Committee's website

- the impact on employment in sectors where vaccination was mandated to continue employment.

Targeted Financial Support Programs and Payments

- the financial and public health measures taken by Government to support businesses impacted by COVID-19 since August 2021;
- the financial impacts associated with these measures; and
- the uptake, timeliness and adequacy of the financial support measures.

COVID-19 Check-in App

- the Government's role related to the Tasmanian COVID-19 Check-in App with regard to the application's:
 - development;
 - effectiveness;
 - use; and
 - associated costs
- the Public Health advice that supported the use and development of the COVID-19 Check-in App;
- the advice in respect to the effectiveness and privacy considerations of the COVID-19 manual check in process; and
- the future planning in relation to tracking and tracing.

This Report is one of three separate reports related to the above areas of inquiry and is focussed on the planning and preparedness related to Targeted Financial Support Programs and Payments and the COVID-19 Check-in App.

The Committee wrote to the then Premier Hon Peter Gutwein MP and the following Ministers to advise them of the Committee's intentions and invite them and their respective departments to make a submission to the inquiry:

- Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP (Minister for Health)
- Hon Roger Jaensch MP (Minister for Education, Children and Youth)
- Hon Jane Howlett MP (Minister for Small Business)

On the 21 March 2022, the then Premier Gutwein wrote to the Committee seeking an extension of the deadline for Tasmanian Government departments to respond to the enquiry from Friday, 25 March 2022 to Thursday, 14 April 2022. This extension was granted by the Chair and communicated accordingly. The response was received by the Committee on 21 April 2022.

Premier Gutwein announced his retirement from Parliament and as the Member for Bass on Friday, 4 April 2022. Parliament was subsequently prorogued from Wednesday, 6 April 2022 and did not resume until Tuesday, 3 May 2022. By convention, all Parliamentary Committee activity ceased until the relevant Chambers (Legislative Council and the House of Assembly) reappointed the Committee.

On 12 May 2022, the Committee was re-established and noted the new Premier Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP retained his Minister for Health portfolio and the new Minister for Small Business, Hon Madeleine Ogilvie MP, taking over the Hon Jane Howlett’s portfolio.

The Committee wrote to the relevant Ministers and invited them to attend the Committee’s public hearings into the Inquiry. The ministerial public hearings were held at Committee Room 2, Parliament House as follows:

Friday, 17 June 2022	Friday, 24 June 2022
<p>Hon Roger Jaensch MP Minister for Education, Children and Youth</p> <p><u>Department of Education Representatives</u> Tim Bullard (Secretary) Jenny Burgess (Deputy Secretary Strategy and Performance) Kane Salter (Deputy Secretary Corporate and Business Services) James Burrows (Manager, Office of the Secretary)</p>	<p>Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP Premier Minister for Health</p> <p><u>Department of Health Representatives</u> Kathrine Morgan-Wicks (Secretary) Lisa Howes (Director, Office of the Secretary) Dale Webster (Deputy Secretary, Mental Health & Wellbeing) Dr Mark Veitch (Director of Public Health) Dr Tony Lawler (Chief Medical Officer & Deputy Secretary, Clinical Quality, Regulation and Accreditation) Craig Jeffrey (Chief Financial Officer)</p> <p><u>Department of Premier and Cabinet Representatives</u> Jenny Gale (Secretary) Craig Limkin (Deputy Secretary, Policy & Intergovernmental Relations)</p> <p>Hon Madeleine Ogilvie MP Minister for Small Business</p> <p><u>Department of State Growth Representatives</u> Kim Evans (Secretary) Mark Bowles (Deputy Secretary, Industry & Business Development)</p>

The Committee wrote to the relevant Ministers seeking their responses from the questions taken on notice during the public hearings. The responses were received as follows:

- 5 July 2022 (Hon Roger Jaensch MP, Minister for Education, Children and Youth), and
- 26 July 2022 (Hon Madeleine Ogilvie MP, Minister for Small Business).

The Parliament was prorogued again between 1 and 16 August 2022 following the resignation of Hon Jacque Petrusma MP on 25 July 2022.

Parliament was suspended from 13 to 27 September 2022 (following the passing of a condolence motion of both Houses in commemoration of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).

On 2 November 2022, the Committee resolved to receive the one public submissions from the Tasmanian business community. The Committee also resolved to publish the public submissions (see Committee website). In addition, the Committee resolved to invite representatives and nominated individuals to public hearings.

Further public hearings with Tasmanian business community, were held on Thursday, 23 February 2023 and were held at Committee Room 2, Parliament House:

Thursday, 23 February 2023

Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Michael Bailey (Chief Executive Officer)

Background

The Committee tabled its first report into its inquiry into the Government's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic (No. 13 of 2021) in August 2021. That Report published 35 findings and 16 recommendations (see 'Completed Inquiries 2021 – 2022' on the Committee's website for further details.²)

This series of three reports seeks to make publicly available, detail related to the actions taken and decisions made pursuant to the 2021 Report and subsequent decisions and actions taken by government in preparation for the reopening of the State border on 15 December 2021, including relevant Public Health advice, to:

1. prepare for the State border re-opening on 15 December 2021;
2. the return to face-to-face school attendance for the 2022 school year;
3. the COVID-19 vaccination rollout; and
4. targeted financial support programs and payments for relevant businesses and the efficacy of the COVID-19 Tasmanian Check-in app.

As at 12 October 2023, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Tasmania stood at 305,453 and 313 deaths.³ This is compared to the Australian 11.6 million confirmed cases with 23.18k deaths nationally. Globally for the same period, 771.2 million confirmed cases and 6.96 million deaths.⁴

This Report (three of three) specifically deals with the Business Support (Targeted Financial Support Programs and Payments) and the Tasmanian Government's COVID-19 Check-in App.

² See https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/58356/covid-1920inquiry20final20report20full20signed.pdf

³ See Tasmanian Department of Health COVID-19 Weekly Statistics, total cases since 15 December 2021, <https://www.health.tas.gov.au/health-topics/coronavirus-covid-19/current-risk-level-and-statistics/weekly-statistics>

⁴ See COVID-19 Data Explorer, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-cases>

Evidence

Business Support (Targeted Support Programs and Payments, Small Business)⁵

The Committee was informed the Tasmanian Government had provided targeted COVID-19 support to Tasmanian businesses by providing over \$160 million in grants and support packages, benefiting thousands of Tasmanian businesses since March 2020. This support had been a critical measure for businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Following the announcement of border re-opening in December 2021, the Department of State Growth (DSG):

- established a high level ‘COVID-19 Recovery’ coordination group, which met regularly to discuss emerging issues and coordinate a response;
- a Director of COVID-19 Recovery was appointed to coordinate appropriate responses; and
- a grants implementation framework was established to allow DSG to rapidly roll out any business support as required.

The key activities managed by the ‘COVID-19 Recovery’ coordination during the pre-border opening period were the:

- ongoing management of existing support programs and coordination of intelligence gathering with businesses and industry associations;
- playing a facilitation role between business and Public Health organising forums and information products (videos, content on Business Tasmania’s website and newsletter) and seeking to ensure key business questions were addressed; and
- supporting whole of government activities in preparations for border re-opening and the expected influx of additional flights and arrivals.

DSG actively monitored developments in other states who were weeks, or in some cases months, ahead of Tasmania in terms of virus spread in the community to see what impacts were being reported and what, if any, initiatives other jurisdictions were putting in place to support businesses.

During this period, DSG was actively monitoring and responding to issues arising with small businesses, public transport, logistics and freight, and the events and tourism sectors in Tasmania.

Financial Measures⁶

In addition to the social and economic support packages that were released at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (reported in the Committee’s previous Inquiry - *Inquiry into the*

⁵ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry (https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/59157/2022042120tasmanian20government20submission20to20covid-1920follow-up20inquiry.pdf), p.46

⁶ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.46

Government's Economic Response),⁷ the Committee was informed of a further range of measures developed by Tasmanian Government agencies specifically in preparation for the re-opening of Tasmania's borders to ensure that Tasmanian community was well supported during the transition to living with COVID-19.

Financial measures to support business on and after the border re-opening included:⁸

- support for the hire and drive sector totalling approximately \$3 million;
- support for the events industry totalling approximately \$3.85 million;
- \$3.5 million for the arts sector in addition to \$12 million made available since March 2020; and
- \$8 million in grants and a new \$50 million loan scheme to support the tourism industry.

The Committee was further informed of the Department of Communities Tasmania's administration of a range of initiatives to support individuals and communities at and following the re-opening of the border:⁹

- in January 2022, an additional \$100,000 funding to the Salvation Army to enable the provision of groceries and essential items to vulnerable Tasmanians in isolation due to COVID-19;¹⁰
- in January 2022, \$280,000 to Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) to develop and administer the COVID-19 Service Continuity Supplies Fund which helps provide Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to community service organisation workers;
- \$752,000 to various Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) who have provided financial and other support to Temporary Visa Card Holders;
- 6,192 loans for over 7,600 essential products and services totalling \$6.8 million distributed as part of the No Interest Loans scheme;
- \$500,000 investment in the Agricultural Show Grants Program which will run for an additional two years to 2024; and
- \$10 million in funding available through Improving the Playing Field, an initiative that offers financial assistance to upgrade sporting facilities and amenities:
 - in December 2021, 43 allocations totalling \$1.5 million were made under the small grants stream (>\$50,000); and
 - in March 2022, 41 allocations totalling \$8.4 million were made under the large grants stream (<\$500,000).

In addition, the following grants were available to support eligible Tasmanian workers and self-employed people who lost income or earnings due to the impacts of COVID-19 and who did not have access to relevant leave entitlements:¹¹

⁷ See https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/58356/covid-1920inquiry20final20report20full20signed.pdf

⁸ These measures do not include the additional funding and resourcing provided for the planning and preparation of Tasmania's health system and schools.

⁹ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.3

¹⁰ In addition to the \$817,174 that had previously been provided to the Salvation Army and Red Cross to support this work.

¹¹ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.4

- the Australian Government’s Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment¹² is a scaled payment based on the number of hours lost (\$450 if at least one day up to 19 hours is lost; or \$750 for hours or more) due to having, being a close contact, or caring for someone with, COVID-19;
- the Tasmanian Government’s Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grant (PIAG)¹³ provided assistance under a number of categories:
 - \$750 for 7-days isolation or quarantine (for those who cannot access the Australian Government payment);
 - \$250 for those attending, or impacted by, a COVID-19 vaccination; and
 - \$250 for those attending a PCR¹⁴ test.

Since 15 December 2021, 54 applicants for the PIAG have been paid grants totalling \$22,500.

At the public hearings, the Committee heard from Mr Craig Limkin (Deputy Secretary, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, DPAC) with respect to how the particular supports to Tasmanian community groups were determined:

Ms WEBB - I was interested to hear about how it was determined that those particular supports were required, and were required at that level?

...

Mr LIMKIN - The State Recovery Committee, which includes representatives from each agency, met regularly during that period of time, and debated and discussed the needs from the community.

There was a needs assessment process through our recovery partner framework, where matters were identified, brought forward and then determined going on that. Based on that, recommendations were made to government and the Government made decisions on funding requirements.

Ms WEBB - ... have they been fully expended and utilised?

Mr LIMKIN - I would have to take that one on notice, and check whether they have been fully expended, because a number of the programs ran over a period of time and they are still in process.

Ms WEBB - Can I also ask then how will it be reported on in terms of the utilisation and the impact of those amounts provided?

Mr LIMKIN - Each grant deed or mechanism where we have signed up with these organisations has reporting back to the Government, so that we can make sure we get the outcomes and outputs as we wanted.

¹² See Australian Government COVID-19 disaster payments: a quick guide (21 January 2022), https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp2122/Quick_Guides/COVID-19DisasterPayments [Accessed 15 October 2023]

¹³ See Caring for the Tasmanian community through COVID, Premier Peter Gutwein (9 January 2022), https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/site_resources_2015/additional_releases/vaccinations_for_5-11_year_old_set_to_open/caring_for_the_tasmanian_community_through_covid [Accessed 15 October 2023]

¹⁴ polymerase chain reaction testing

*Most of these are focused on outputs, given the time and the quickness that we had to put these in. Normally, we would look at outcomes for the community, but it was a decision we made because of the speed that we had to act.*¹⁵

Measures Taken Since August 2021¹⁶

Since August 2021, a range of measures had been introduced, or taken to support, small business in Tasmania. These have included:

- opening the first two rounds of funding under the COVID-19 Micro and Small Business Border Closure Critical Support Grant program. This program saw over 4,000 small businesses share in more than \$73 million in grants;
- \$3.5 million in support to Southern Tasmanian business impacted by the 15 October 2021 Lockdown Direction;
- increase in support provided through Business Tasmania and advice to eligible business under the Enterprise Centres Tasmania program;
- \$1.2 million over four years to support access to specialist advice through the COVID-19 Small Business Advice and Financial Guidance Program;
- series of industry forums organised by DSG and attended by Public Health and Worksafe. These forums gave business a chance to be briefed about changes to COVID-19 response settings and ask questions about specific issues (e.g., how to respond to cases in the workplace);
- partnership between DSG, Business Tasmania, Tourism Tasmania and Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide messages to promote public health information using existing newsletters and dedicated hotline support services; and
- announcement of the COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program January 2022.

The COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program targeted business whose operations were impacted due to:

- critical staff were required to isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19, or
- being forced to close due to a Public Health Direction, or
- have suffered a significant reduction in demand.

Three rounds of COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program had been opened on the following dates:

- 15 December 2021 – 14 January 2022 (Round 1);
- 15 January 2022 – 14 February 2022 (Round 2); and
- 15 February 2022 – 14 March 2022 (Round 3).

These support packages, as detailed above, did not include industry specific support provided to the transport, arts, tourism and events sectors.¹⁷

¹⁵ Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Premier Rockliff\)](#), p.46-47

¹⁶ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.46

¹⁷ See [Attachment A – Targeted Business Support Programs](#)

Financial Impact and Uptake¹⁸

The Committee was informed of the uptake and costs for individual support programs. The Committee was provided with evidence detailing each grant program. The Government's submission stated the uptake of these grants demonstrated how Tasmania's suite of business support programs had been successful in supporting businesses in need. Many of these programs were ongoing at the time of the submission (April 2022) and the Government noted these support measures would continue to be reviewed to ensure they provided the right levels of support to the right people.

The table below provides details of the funds distributed through each of the grant programs:

Grant/Program	Details
COVID-19 Micro and Small Business Border Closure Critical Support Grant	\$73 million distributed to 4,000+ small businesses between October 2021 and January 2022
Lock Down Direction support – Southern Tasmania	\$3.5 million distributed to 2,847 businesses in November 2021
COVID-19 Small Business Advice and Financial Guidance Program	Commenced 27 September 2021 and open until 20 May 2022, or funding is depleted To date 220 businesses had received \$318,500
COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program – Round 1	\$1.8 million provided to 949 businesses
COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program – Round 2	\$1.65 million provided to 749 businesses
COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program – Round 3	Opened on 16 March 2022 and applications close 5 April 2022. 345 applications to date with the assessment process underway.

At the public hearings, the Committee heard from Hon Madeleine Ogilvie MP (Minister for Small Business) and Mr Mark Bowles (Deputy Secretary, DSG) with respect to the first two rounds of funding under the COVID-19 Micro and Small Business Border Closure Critical Support Grant program:

Ms OGILVIE - We have had many businesses that were in very different sets of circumstances. A grant program is always one that's done by application so it was up to businesses to come forward and seek that support. We do have to give great credit to those who engaged with it. We do feel that we lead the way as a state with that business support.

I can share with you that on 13 August 2021 the Tasmanian and Australian governments announced a jointly funded \$20 million business support package, and that did help businesses with the ongoing impacts of those border closures, and losing our external markets particularly in tourism. We did have feedback while the program was open that

¹⁸ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.46-47

led to a review of the eligibility criteria, we were listening and I know that we were responsive to that.

A subsequent decision was made to close the program on 1 September 2021, but to open a revised version, which was the COVID-19 Micro and Small Business Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program on 3 September 2021. We announced that the existing support package would be boosted from \$20 million to \$50 million, so you can see it started to grow at that stage. That was jointly funded by both the Tasmanian and Australian governments. Over two rounds, this renewed grant program - which was the Border Closure Critical Support Grant Program - dispersed over \$73 million to 6,000 individuals. I should note that many small businesses received grants in both rounds so there was some ongoing support where businesses needed that sustained investment.

The Department of State Growth also provided what they called 'supercharged' grant payments to those businesses who were successful in their applications prior to 14 September 2021. They were made without requesting further additional information, so it was a grant program that really extended from the support that was already in place. As I've said, listening to the sector, that was an effort to alleviate some of the effort the businesses had to go to, to try to get the grants. They had a lot on their plates with trying to keep their businesses alive, and if they were able to show that their trading position hadn't changed, then we were able to just respond very quickly in that relevant trading period to give them the additional amount for Round 2.

In Round 1, just over \$43 million in grant funding was provided to 3,129 businesses, and in Round 2, almost \$30 million was dispersed in grant funding to 2,910 businesses. I do have some key statistics which you might be interested in. There were five tiers: Tier 1 was \$4,000, Tier 2 was \$8,000, Tier 3 was \$20,000, Tier 4 was \$35,000 and Tier 5 was \$60,000. For each of those tiers, in Tier 1 - which was the small amount - 669 businesses were successful; in Tier 2 1159; Tier 3, which was that \$20,000 layer - 1007 businesses; Tier 4, 266 businesses - that was \$35,000 layer; and importantly, Tier 5, which was the \$60,000 level, 28 businesses were successful. I do have the total numbers which you get by - ..., but basically you can see that the middle section was where the demand was, that's between \$8,000 and \$35,000, and then with some outliers as well. That was the total grant round of \$43,078,000. The second round reflected that distribution also, and I think you were interested in that, because it would have been many of the same businesses. So a very similar trajectory across Tiers 1 to 5 for that second grant round.

...

Mr BOWLES - For the first round, we requested quite a lot of information from the business, including their annual turnover as the reference period that determined what tier they were in; then also the impact in terms of turnover. So, the hardship test for most of our programs, including that program, was a 30 per cent decline in revenue. For the first round, they had to provide evidence of that decline. In the second round, because we recognised the degree of hardship that many businesses were in, we made a balanced decision around how much administrative burden we wanted to put on businesses. For the second round, they could re-log in, affirm that all of their existing details were still correct, and affirm that they were still in hardship, and they would get the second round. Not all of them did that. Some of them, self-assessed that they weren't in hardship, in the

*second round; but many did, and because the original annual reference period was the same, they would stay in the same tier.*¹⁹

Minister Ogilvie presented a breakdown of the number of successful Tasmanian business applications by local government area (LGA):²⁰

LGA	No.	LGA	No.	LGA	No.
Break O'Day	135	Flinders Island	21	Launceston	832
Brighton	99	George Town	96	Meander Valley	130
Burnie	56	Glamorgan/Spring Bay	219	Northern Midlands	104
Central Coast	114	Glenorchy	726	Sorell	127
Central Highlands	30	Hobart	2,094	Southern Midlands	32
Circular Head	94	Huon Valley	266	Tasman	99
Clarence	532	Kentish	49	Waratah/Wynyard	42
Derwent Valley	82	King Island	85	West Coast	78
Devonport	135	Kingborough	443	West Tamar	109
Dorset	97	Latrobe	55	Total	6,981

The above table was supplemented with the following information from Minister Ogilvie:

Ms OGILVIE - ... I also have a little bit of information, if you are interested, on the top industry sectors - another way of sort of looking at the data. The top industry sectors, together with a number of funded applications - and I can give you the total amount of funding by sector.

*Hospitality - that is, food and beverage – 1,103 applications were funded, totalling \$16,133,000. For accommodation, there were 937 funded applications with a total amount of funding of \$10,676,000. In transport, there were 1,648 funded applications, with a total amount of funding of \$8,530,000. For retail and sales, there were 709 funded applications with a total of \$7,259,000 funded. Travel and tours - as you would expect, were badly hit as well - 522 funded applications with a total amount of funding of \$6,838,000. It's helpful to see it from that perspective as well, across sectors.*²¹

In replying to a question taken on notice related to the number of applicants for the two rounds of funding provided under the COVID-19 Micro and Small Business Border Closure Critical Support Grant program, and the percentage of applicants receiving grants in both rounds and round two only, Minister Ogilvie provided the following data:²²

¹⁹ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.2-3

²⁰ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.4

²¹ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.4

²² Letter to Hon Ruth Forrest MLC Chair – COVID-19 Public Hearing - Responses to Questions taken on Notice, 22 July 2022

Total applicants approved for funding ²³	No.
Round one	3,129
Round two	2,910
Total funded applicants	6,039
Percentage of funded applicants under the first round that subsequently received funding under the second round	84.95%
Percentage of funded applicants that only received funding under the second round	15.05%

Support for Particular Communities

In a joint press release (dated 14 January 2022) from the then Premier Peter Gutwein MP and Hon Jane Howlett MP (then Minister for Small Business), detailed support for Tasmanian small business, particularly King Island businesses negatively impacted by a COVID-19 outbreak and public comments by Government advising visitors to avoid travelling to King Island.

The media release stated:

*This package will provide welcome support for businesses on King Island that were impacted by the recent outbreak.*²⁴

The Committee sought further detail from Minister Ogilvie and Mr Kim Evans (Secretary, DSG), related to the support for Tasmanian small business, particularly King Island businesses and the cancelled Unconformity Festival in Queenstown as a result of a COVID-19 positive case being at large in the community in mid October 2021:

CHAIR - Picking up on King Island, the Government media release about that caused significant harm to the businesses on the island and the tourism area. ... Was particular attention paid to King Island because of the Government's action that saw a negative impact on the island?

...

Mr EVANS - We implemented several initiatives to try to support businesses from the islands, particularly from the island's tourism operators and the economy more broadly. We developed a travel incentive program which provided \$300 towards the cost of accommodation and tourism experiences on the island, undertaken between 1 May and 31 July this year [2022].

The program launched to consumers for ballot registrations on 7 April [2022] and closed on 10 April [2022]. There was a process to redeem vouchers in addition to that, to try and stimulate more travel. Sharp Airlines introduced a 'red-hot winter return' fare of \$300 per person between Hobart and King Island. You would be aware of the support that we've provided to Sharp Airlines to get direct flights from Hobart to King Island and to Flinders.

²³ Figures may differ from previously released data due to applications being reviewed

²⁴ See '[More support for Tasmanian small business](#)' media release, 14 January 2022 [Accessed 4 July 2022]

Tourism Tasmania also supported those initiatives by putting in place a \$100,000 promotional campaign in partnership with the local industry and council. What we tried to do in response, given all of a sudden there were not a lot of visitors to the island - for very real reasons - was to try and look at ways that we could support visitation to the island and promote that visitation.

Ms OGILVIE - ... business confidence is a real thing and I appreciate, even though I was not in the seat at the time, that it was a very difficult time for everybody. I know that the Department and the previous minister did try very much to reach out and do all that we can do for the businesses on King Island. Just yesterday, I had a roundtable with the Regional Chambers of Commerce, and King Island participated in that, and I heard more about the challenges going forward.

...

Mr EVANS - Through Government and Business Tasmania, we were in contact with a lot of businesses that were reporting impacts due to cancellations owing to COVID-19, and we did send a delegation to the island. Representatives of the Department travelled and met with a whole range of businesses about their individual circumstances, and also with local government industry representatives to try and get a more detailed picture of what the impacts were and designing the sorts of supports that we could then put in place to try and stimulate increased demand and deal with the impacts on those individual businesses.

CHAIR - I want to go to the \$3.5 million in support to the southern Tasmanian businesses impacted by the 15 October 2021 lockdown direction. Can I have a breakdown of the sorts of businesses and how much they were paid, and did it also include the businesses that were impacted in Queenstown by the cancellation of Unconformity, because some of those were food businesses that travelled up from Hobart? Was that included in the \$3.5 million? ...

Ms OGILVIE - At a higher level, the southern lockdown emergency support, or support for southern Tasmanian businesses that were required to go into lockdown, was as a result of a three-day lockdown direction that was issued on 15 October 2021. As you say, almost \$3.5 million was provided in support. The Government felt that it acted quickly to implement the support program, and it was available to eligible businesses from the affected local government areas of Brighton, the Central Highlands, Clarence City, Derwent Valley, Glamorgan/Spring Bay, Glenorchy, Hobart City, Huon Valley, Sorell, Southern Midlands, Tasman, and Kingborough.

I am assuming, ... that the location of the business, for example, a food business that perhaps travelled to Unconformity but is based here, would have been eligible as a southern business. ...

Mr BOWLES - There was a separate program administered in partnership with West Coast Council. We provided an amount ... to the West Coast Council, which they then distributed to the impacted businesses with criteria that we agreed upon. ...²⁵

...

²⁵ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.6-7

Mr BOWLES - Upon cancellation of the Unconformity event, we engaged with the tourism and hospitality industry and the West Coast Council and other key stakeholders. An agreement was formed between the council and the Department of State Growth that one-off payments of \$500 would be made available for impacted businesses in the retail, tourism, and hospitality sectors and in addition, reimbursement for damaged, perishable goods of up to \$10,000 per business.

So, the West Coast Council and Department of State Growth agreed to fund those grants on a 50/50 basis and both the Department of State Growth and the West Coast Council agreed to contribute up to \$25,000 with that grant program closing in March. I understand that discussions were ongoing between the Unconformity Festival and Events Tasmania with regard to its future.

CHAIR - Just with regard to the \$25,000 each from council and state, how much of it was actually provided to businesses?

Mr BOWLES - I would have to come back on the acquittal. That is dependent on the acquittal that the West Coast Council needs to provide to State Growth.

CHAIR - Right. So, whatever was spent, you [DSG] were going to pay half of it, is that right?

Mr BOWLES - That is right.²⁶

In replying to a question taken on notice regarding the acquittal of the West Coast Council payment associated with the cancellation of the 'The Unconformity' festival scheduled between 14 and 17 October 2021, Minister Ogilvie advised:²⁷

A joint grant program (West Coast Business Support Grant Program) between the Department of State Growth and the West Coast Council was implemented to support West Coast local businesses that were financially impacted as a direct result of the cancellation of the 2021 Unconformity festival.

The Department of State Growth administered the program, and the program was advertised locally through the West Coast Council websites and their channels.

On 10 December 2021, Department of State Growth wrote to West Coast Council confirming that the program has been administered and provided the following breakdown and an invoice for their joint contribution:

- *total number of unique applications received - 19 applications*
- *total number of unique applications paid - 16 applications for base payments and 5 applications received additional payments for loss of perishable goods*
- *total value of applications paid - \$10,476.86*

²⁶ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.9-10

²⁷ Letter to Hon Ruth Forrest MLC Chair – COVID-19 Public Hearing - Responses to Questions taken on Notice, 22 July 2022

The grant amount paid under the program was split equally between the West Coast Council and the Department of State Growth.

With respect to the \$3.5 million State Government Lock-Down Direction support (Southern Tasmania) initiative, the Committee heard further details from Minister Ogilvie and Mr Evans:

CHAIR - Back to the \$3.5 million, can you go through the criteria and the sort of businesses that were supported through that?

Ms OGILVIE - ... From 21 October to 1 November 2021, grants of \$1,000 were available to any business with a minimum turnover of \$25,000, that was forced to close for the duration of the southern lockdown.

A grant of \$750 was available to any business with a minimum turnover of \$25,000 that was able to open, but with restrictions, due to the southern lockdown. I was thinking about markets and things like that.

I can report that 3,398 applications were submitted, with 3,141 of those approved for either a \$750 or a \$1,000 grant - a very high rate of success. That totalled over \$3.1 million.

An additional payment of up to \$10,000 was also available for those businesses that lost perishable goods in fridges, that had to be discarded as a direct result of the lockdown order. Two hundred and ninety-two businesses were approved for loss of perishables grants, totalling \$333,000. Again, a thank you to Business Tasmania and its communications team and the work that was done very quickly to help in this very unusual situation.²⁸

The Committee asked Minister Ogilvie and Mr Evans how DSG worked with Public Health during the COVID-19 period:

Mr WILLIE - I have some questions on the re-opening plan and what was in place, Minister, and what consultation your department did with public health. Obviously, there was a very clear plan for the re-opening, but once the border opened, we saw a number of those plans not go to plan and in some cases the plans were abandoned. We saw contact tracing abandoned. We saw business hot spots, where they were being listed on Government websites, abandoned. I'm interested in how the Department was working with Public Health through that time? ... Making sure that Public Health understood how those decisions were impacting business. Through that time, we saw businesses in the media saying that their whole business had dried up.

Ms OGILVIE - It was a very difficult time. Even yesterday I sat with a group of business owners in Hobart from a range of different sectors, and the emotion about that time is still very real. ...

²⁸ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.7

Mr EVANS - There was very close consultation or involvement with my agency in those decisions - understanding, of course, that they were decisions based around public health. We could provide information and we were in close dialogue, almost on a daily basis. For example, I was part of the heads of agency COVID-19 Coordination Committee, that would meet sometimes twice a week to oversight and provide input into the development of the re-opening plan. Officers within my agency were similarly engaged; that was really important because we had a lot of planning to do on our side, from the communication perspective, with businesses that we can access through Business Tasmania, to make sure that they had the right information and as comprehensive information as was possible in the lead up to the re-opening decision and then through to re-opening itself.

I can't go chapter and verse into every last piece of detail, but I can say that we were very closely involved with public health.

Mr WILLIE - I guess, Minister, your hands would have been tied because some of these decisions were being made at a national level, such as close contact protocols. That also impacted business; if you were a close contact, you couldn't go to work.

Ms OGILVIE - Yes, and again as a new minister; but certainly, I was around during all of that time and probably much like you was receiving a lot of cries for help from the community generally, and businesses.

We were all very aware of the necessity to follow public health instructions at all times.

We weren't in a position to put something else in that prime position when we have public health directions, and we followed those directions at all times. It did mean that there were serious impacts across a range of fronts in small business, unfortunately. But with great resilience, grit and determination, they took some of those blows.

That's from a political perspective, that's the answer I would give, that public health takes primacy when those directions happen. Having said that, I think what my Secretary would say is they did absolutely everything they could to try to keep things going as well as they could in that circumstance.²⁹

With respect to the COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program and the perception of a 'shadow lockdown' after the re-opening of the border, Minister Ogilvie and Mr Bowles stated the following:

CHAIR - Minister, as I understand it, this was to assist businesses in which staff were critical in their role in keeping the business open and the money that was provided for that. Can you provide some further breakdown of the funding provided for that, ...

...

CHAIR - ... There was almost a shadow lockdown when the borders re-opened and a lot of the more vulnerable people in our community, older people, people who were very anxious did not go to hospitality events at all. They just stayed at home and did not even

²⁹ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.7-8

go shopping. So, did this pick up that activity or was that more in the broader business support grants?

Ms OGILVIE - We had four grant rounds, which did go across quite a period of time and the way the grant program works is the business obviously, if it is suffering financially or has other issues, will put an application in. So, the reason for that during the pandemic would be part of why they would come forward. You have talked about the shadow lockdown, I am not sure what the technical term is, but if there was a reduction in sales and profits for whatever reason during this period, a business would be able to put an application in, so I think that helps.

CHAIR - Under this particular program?

Ms OGILVIE - ... Certainly, businesses that were suffering, particularly if they had that trajectory across the four grant rounds and the Department was familiar with that business, they would understand where their profits were headed. It might be helpful if I give a bit of an overview about those four grant rounds and how they operated and you have specifically asked about a particular point in time during those grant rounds.

...

Ms OGILVIE - ... At the high level, we know over \$165 million has been provided across business in COVID-19 specific support. The Business Impact Support program was developed to assist businesses experiencing a downturn due to loss of customers or staff during specified periods originally as the result of the borders opening.

Over four funding rounds, the Business Impact Support Grant program has provided businesses with the opportunity to access between \$4,000 and \$40,000 and has resulted in more than \$6.5 million in grants flowing directly to almost 3,000 businesses ...

Mr BOWLES - With this grant program, like others, there was a hardship test. It was a 30 per cent revenue downturn test.

CHAIR - From what point? This is well into the pandemic now. A 30 per cent reduction from when?

Mr WILLIE - Based off JobKeeper eligibility? Is that where it came from?

...

Mr BOWLES - Yes, 30 per cent was chosen to be consistent with the national test that we believed would be the most appropriate test. For example, in Round 1 applicants were required to demonstrate a minimum 30 per cent reduction in turnover between 15 December 2021 and 14 January 2022 inclusive, compared to the same period for the previous years. That could be due to either critical staff being required to isolate or being forced to close due to a public health direction or having suffered a significant reduction in demand.

With the subsequent four rounds, those reference periods effectively moved by one month. If they were able to show that they continued to be suffering from a revenue decline by 30 per cent or more with reference to the equivalent month a year before they would receive the next round payment.

...

Ms WEBB - ...We have some details there about the quantum of money in total in each round and the number of businesses. Would it be the case, Minister, that similarly to the other grant round we discussed a short while ago that some would have carried over and been the same business into each round?

Ms OGILVIE - I will need to check that but it is logical that would be the case.

Ms WEBB - I would be interested to know similarly as it was with that last grant round program we discussed; what proportion then, and how that looks statistically in terms of businesses as they are tracked through those rounds? ...

...

Mr BOWLES - The information that we have at hand is for Round 1, there was \$1.96 million dispersed; for Round 2, there was \$1.685 million; for Round 3, there was \$1.620 million; and for Round 4, there was \$1.210 million. I don't have a comparison of exactly which businesses tracked through.

Ms WEBB - ...The information in the submission that we received, Minister, is that in Round 1, it's described as \$1.8 million provided to 949 businesses; in Round 2, \$1.65 million provided to 749 businesses; et cetera. I am interested to know, of the 949 in the first Round, how many of those carried through to make up what proportion of 749 in the second Round, et cetera. Is that able to be provided?

Mr BOWLES - I don't have the statistics in front of me; but our understanding from talking to the businesses is that most of the businesses that were eligible in the first round then carried through. There were very few businesses that came in for the first time in subsequent rounds; most in the subsequent rounds had received one in a previous round.³⁰

In replying to a question taken on notice, Minister Ogilvie advised:³¹

Seeking statistics on the four rounds of funding provided under the COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program, in particular, of the businesses that received funding under the first round:

- *What proportion subsequently received funding under the second, third and fourth rounds?*
- *What proportion of businesses only received funding under the second and subsequent funding rounds?*
- *What proportion of businesses only received funding under the third and subsequent funding rounds?*
- *What proportion of businesses only received funding under the final funding rounds?*

³⁰ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.10-12

³¹ Letter to Hon Ruth Forrest MLC Chair – COVID-19 Public Hearing - Responses to Questions taken on Notice, 22 July 2022

Total applicants approved for funding ³²	No./Percentage
Round one	950
Round two	766
Round three	732
Round four	546
Total funded applicants (Rounds one to four)	2,994
First Round	
Percentage of funded applicants under the first round that subsequently received funding under the second round	14.73%
Percentage of funded applicants under the first round that subsequently received funding under the third round	12.46%
Percentage of funded applicants under the first round that subsequently received funding under the fourth round	10.12%
Percentage of funded applicants that only received funding under the first round only	12.72%
Second Round	
Percentage of funded applicants under the second round that subsequently received funding under the third round	13.66%
Percentage of funded applicants under the second round that subsequently received funding under the fourth round	10.55%
Percentage of funded applicants that only received funding under the second round	5.81%
Third Round	
Percentage of funded applicants under the third round that subsequently received funding under the fourth round	11.89%
Percentage of funded applicants that only received funding under the third round	5.54%
Fourth Round	
Percentage of funded applicants that only received funding under the fourth round	3.13%

The Committee heard the State Government did not keep statistics on the number of businesses that may have closed permanently due to COVID-19 since the borders re-opening nor those whom may have closed after receiving money under the Government's COVID-19 business support programs:

Mr BOWLES - The data that we track is the bankruptcies administrations data that the Australian Financial Securities Authority publishes, and also the Tasmanian Treasury. For example, there were 34 bankruptcies in the March quarter. It doesn't provide information about the reason for bankruptcies, but that was 34 in total which included personal bankruptcies and business bankruptcies. While that is an increase of 13.3 per cent from the same quarter the previous year, the general trend in Tasmanian bankruptcies has gone down. For example, prior to 2017, there were over 100 bankruptcies per quarter. That's the main figure that we would track.

Ms OGILVIE - Not terrible news.

³² Figures may differ from previously released data due to applications being reviewed

Ms WEBB - It's one indication, isn't it - but a lot of people who might have closed their business because it was no longer viable won't necessarily have gone bankrupt. I think it's not quite as indicative as I was looking for; but perhaps we aren't able to track that picture as carefully as we might.

Ms OGILVIE - We generally don't do that, from a Government perspective. To find that sort of information, you need to talk to some of the liquidators about who they are working with and why...³³

Minister Ogilvie and Mr Bowles informed the Committee further of the Government's interventions to support Tasmanian small business over the period:

Ms WEBB - ... I am interested to understand a little bit more about how you have gauged the effectiveness and the use of the resources that were created, which sound really positive... The one I will start with is the dedicated hotline to provide information and support, and presumably point people towards opportunities for support like the grant rounds.

Have you got some details you can provide about the usage of the hotline? Not just outright calls taken, that would be an obvious one; but the nature of support provided through the hotline and how that looks as a picture, and how you have evaluated its effectiveness?

Ms OGILVIE - ... We had a huge amount of positive feedback from the business community about the single point of contact, and the responsive[ness] of Business Tasmania. Certainly, I am so proud of the work they did over two years in a very difficult situation. They flexed into a new customer service mode, and have continued that.

The feedback has been very strong and good and I think Business Tasmania is in really good shape, at the moment. That is an overview.

The hotline would have been just one of the ways that people were connecting into Business Tasmania for help...

Mr BOWLES - During the peak of COVID-19, the Business Tasmania service was expanded from its pre-COVID-19 level of 2.6 FTEs up to 25 FTEs per day. That included staff that were redeployed from other areas of the agency. At peak periods, we also used contract staff.

Since 1 July 2021, Business Tasmania responded to 9,042 calls from businesses seeking assistance regarding COVID-19 queries - in particular, the Check in TAS app, COVID-19 safe events, and general business queries on how to access the range of COVID-19 support programs.

Business Tasmania also engages with over 12,700 businesses via the weekly electronic newsletter. That mechanism was also utilised in real time whenever there was a change

³³ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.13-14

to the public health settings that impacted businesses. That would be then distributed through that mechanism as well.

To add to that, Business Tasmania provides ongoing assistance to businesses with information on licensing and permits through the Australian Business Licence Information Service. Other grants and eligibility services, assistance on employing staff and linking them to Fair Work Tasmania, and also referrals through to the Enterprise Centres for more detailed business advice.

In addition to Business Tasmania, where there are other businesses that work in particular sectors, such as tourism and hospitality or advanced manufacturing or science and technology, they would have other ongoing support from those relevant sector teams in the Department.³⁴

At the public hearings, the Committee heard from Mr Michael Bailey (CEO, Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry) on behalf of the TCCI with regard to the financial support to business impacted by the re-opening of the border:

Dr BROAD - In terms of the business support, if you started again and if, unfortunately, we had another pandemic, what would you like to see changed about the way that the business support rolled out, the thresholds? Are there any sort of learnings if you were going to make a recommendation, how can we do this better, that you would be putting across?

Mr BAILEY - I think I would. I wouldn't have a 30 per cent figure [decline in revenue to qualify for support], I would probably have a sliding scale of support. I think Government did well to get money out quickly, but again there were gaps in who could get any sort of support too. So, we had some businesses that were slightly too big for State Government support, slightly too small for Federal Government support.

CHAIR - They hadn't been in the business long enough to demonstrate the percentages.

Mr BAILEY - Yes, or they had a bumpy year before, a whole bunch of anomalies. The Government did their best to try to address these, I should say too. I would look at a sliding scale. I would look at being a bit more flexible with some of those rules around the outside. Also, really take into account and hope that the Federal Government acted faster, so we could look at what the Feds were doing and try and to mesh in with their approach. I don't want to be critical of Tasmania's response; I think our response was great, but they are the sorts of things that I would certainly look at.³⁵

³⁴ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.15-16

³⁵ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(23 February 2023\) - \(Various\)](#), p.27

Committee Findings

- F1. The State Government provided targeted COVID-19 support to Tasmanian businesses of over \$160 million in grants and support packages since March 2020.
- F2. Specific funding to Tasmanian business was allocated in response to the border re-opening.
- F3. Following the Government announcement of 15 December 2021 as the date the border would re-open, the Department of State Growth:
 - 1. established a high level COVID-19 Recovery Coordination Group;
 - 2. appointed a Director of COVID-19 Recovery to coordinate appropriate responses; and
 - 3. established a grants implementation framework to rapidly roll out any business support as required.
- F4. Three rounds of the COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program opened for the following dates: 15 December 2021 – 14 January 2022 (Round 1); 15 January 2022 – 14 February 2022 (Round 2); 15 February 2022 – 14 March 2022 (Round 3); and 15 March 2022 – 12 May 2022 (Round 4).
- F5. In response to a three-day lockdown direction issued on 15 October 2021, made in response to a positive case of COVID-19 in the community, approximately \$3.5 million in funding support was provided to impacted businesses.
- F6. The three-day lockdown direction issued on 15 October 2021 resulted in the unplanned cancellation of the Unconformity Festival in Queenstown with funding support provided to impacted businesses in collaboration with the West Coast Council.
- F7. The business community supported the roll-out of the various business support programs. However, there were some gaps and inconsistencies identified.

Committee Recommendation

- R1. The Government review the design and implementation of the various business support programs to inform any future programs.

COVID-19 Check-in TAS App³⁶

The Committee was informed the Check-in TAS application was introduced on 1 December 2020 and use of the app was made mandatory from 1 May 2021 at a wide range of locations, businesses and events. Prior to the re-opening of the border, the Check-in TAS app was a key resource in pursuing an elimination/containment strategy for COVID-19.

Following the re-opening of Tasmania's border, and in line with the move at both state and national levels from the virus suppression phase of the pandemic response towards the living with COVID-19 response phase, mandatory requirements for use of the app had been varied to focus on use in high-risk venues and events, to support ongoing management of COVID-19.

The purpose of the app was to provide the Public Health Service (PHS) with a quick and reliable tool to collect contact tracing information to enable contact tracing of positive cases of COVID-19 while Tasmania aimed to reduce the risk of community transmission of COVID-19 and maintain an elimination/containment strategy. The development of an app for contact tracing purposes, replacing other means of contact tracing (such as manual check-in), supported contact tracing required by directions under section 16 of the *Public Health Act 1997* (the Public Health Act).

Development of the Check in TAS App³⁷

In November 2020, Tasmania entered into an agreement with the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government to accept a licence for, and provision of, support services for the use of the Check-in app developed for the ACT. To implement the app in Tasmania, the Department of Health (DoH) undertook work to rebrand the app and to store data collected in Tasmania's contact tracing database. A further amendment to the app was requested by Tasmania to allow the app to display exposure sites. The Check-in TAS App had also undergone penetration testing and a threat and risk assessment, which checks for vulnerabilities or security flaws in the app.

The ACT Government did not charge DoH for any updates or new releases for the app, and only incurred additional costs when a specific change was requested for the Tasmanian version. The total expenditure by the Tasmanian Government on the app to 15 February 2022 was \$113,499.13 (ex. GST).

At National Cabinet on 19 September 2021, all jurisdictions agreed to integrate an individual's COVID-19 digital certificate into state and territory check-in apps to provide users with another way of storing and showing proof of COVID-19 vaccination. To support this, Services Australia and DoH entered a formalised agreement for the exchange of information to allow users to add their COVID-19 digital certificate to their Check-in TAS App. This allowed Tasmanian Police to access information about individuals' vaccination status, which supported the public health direction from 6 December 2021 requiring patrons to be fully vaccinated, to enter venues where there was stand up drinking, such as pubs and clubs.

³⁶ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.48

³⁷ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.48

The information recorded through the Check-in TAS App was automatically stored in the right format within DoH for rapid response contact tracing, if required, and automatically deleted after 28 days.

DoH collected personal information through the app for contact tracing purposes. The Government submission stated DoH would not use or disclose information collected through the app for any other purpose (unless it was required by or authorised under law to do so). Information about the app's privacy policy and data use was available on the app and on the Tasmanian coronavirus website.

The purpose of taking contact details of people entering designated premises was to facilitate contact tracing in Tasmania. The requirement for people to provide details, either through the Check-in TAS App, or manually, was in line with a direction issued by the Director of Public Health under section 16 of the Public Health Act. There had been a number of versions of the direction on contact tracing throughout the pandemic. However, it has always been clear in the direction that the collection of information, manually or through the app, was for:

- the management, detection, notification, treatment or prevention of the spread of COVID-19, and
- to manage the threat or likely threat, to public health posed by COVID-19.

The direction also stated that information collected must not be used for any other purpose, other than authorised under the Public Health Act. Failure to comply with a direction issued under section 16 of the Public Health Act was an offence.

If businesses that were no longer required to comply with the Contact Tracing direction continued to collect such information, using a third-party app or manually, they were required to make it clear the information was not being collected for DoH or for the purposes of contact tracing.

Usage and efficacy of the App³⁸

The Committee was informed the Check-in TAS App had increased functionality to enable users to store vaccination status information and display exposure sites. As at 17 March 2022, the Check-in TAS App had been downloaded a total of 1,149,262 times on to Apple and Android devices, with 1,242,896,393 check-ins across a total of 56,942 registered locations/businesses in Tasmania. A large portion of users linked their vaccination certificate to the app, with 408,469 certificates linked.

Information from the Check-in TAS App was used during 2021 to inform users of their potential exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19. At this time, the objective was to eliminate COVID-19 in Tasmania and prevent cases of community transmission.

The Check-in TAS App had been utilised by PHS for contact tracing purposes and, since the changes to close contact definitions, for identifying high-risk exposure sites. PHS used the app successfully to identify potential close contacts of COVID-19 cases, primarily between

³⁸ See Tasmanian Government – Follow-up Inquiry, p.49

September 2021 and January 2022, with the app identifying premises positive cases visited and those who may have been exposed. The app assisted in a quicker and easier way to collect this information as the manual check in process required extensive resourcing requirements for PHS, took longer to receive information from premises, and relied heavily on the individual accurately remembering their movements.

On 27 January 2022, the Premier announced a review of the use of the Check-in TAS App in response to the high levels of community transmission. The review acknowledged that contact tracing information was extremely valuable where community transmission was not widespread but was now most useful to help manage a large-scale outbreak or super spreader events.

The app was most useful when case numbers were low and the goal was to aggressively suppress the spread of COVID-19 and when numbers were higher to manage risk associated with large gatherings and exposure sites with risk of increased transmission. The Deputy Director of Public Health reviewed the types of locations in Schedule 1 of the Contact Tracing Direction and determined that lower-risk settings be removed from the Schedule from 18 February 2022.

Since 18 February 2022, persons had only been required to check in at high-risk locations including certain large events, pubs, clubs, casinos, bars and gaming venues. Owners and operators of venues no longer required to collect check in information had been advised to remove QR codes from display but retain these resources in case changes to epidemiology require recommencing checking requirements.

The Committee was informed of the changes to the use of the Check-in TAS app following the reopening of the border and the incursion of the more highly transmissible Omicron variant from Premier Rockliff and Dr Mark Veitch, Director of Public Health:

Dr VEITCH - Most of the planning we did was built around the prospects of a strain that had more or less the transmission dynamics of the Delta strain. We had seen our colleagues on the mainland managing outbreaks of Delta with extensive use of check-in apps and alerts about hotspots. This is really a scaled-up way of doing traditional contact tracing and case management with some additional technological supports. That worked reasonably well for the most part on the mainland.

.... As it turned out it was Omicron almost from the start. We had a few Delta cases but it was effectively the highly transmissible Omicron strain...

As the case numbers mounted very quickly with Omicron it became clear that to ask people where they had been when they were potentially infectious turned out to be Tasmania as a whole. There were very few places where you could confidently say no one was at risk. It would have been misleading to the public to be overly specific when we needed a really general precautionary approach and awareness that you could get crook with COVID-19 any day. With that rapid transition to a widespread infection, it wasn't feasible to be listing specific sites.

...

Mr WILLIE - It would be useful for the Committee in our reporting to have that timeline, and any check-in app changes too.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The check-in app was introduced 1 December 2020. It was a key resource in pursuing the elimination containment strategy for COVID-19. It ceased being used in all settings on Monday 2 May [2022] this year.

Mr WILLIE - If the data was used up until that point, was that for those higher risk settings and not identifying close contacts in those settings and trying to trace the sequence?

Dr VEITCH - We kept it in place in certain high-risk settings and events. It was a just-in-case mechanism in case we needed to deal with a large outbreak in those settings. Its use, as the Premier just mentioned, as an aggressive containment strategy to identify anyone in the setting where a case could have been, became futile once Omicron became widespread.³⁹

The Committee also heard from Premier Rockliff what the State Government's position was with respect to a variant of concern entering Tasmania at a future date and likely use of the Check-in app:

Mr WILLIE - Premier, if we do see a variant of concern, are we likely to see the return of any measures such as the check-in app, or going back to old contact-tracing methods - or will it be a continuation of the status quo?

Mr ROCKLIFF - We will be always guided by Dr Veitch and the team at Public Health, which have carried us in very good stead to this point. All the matters and measures we have had in place previously, such as Check in TAS, can be reinstated if necessary.

...

Mr ROCKLIFF - ... I think the decision-makers at the time - people within and across departments, people on the ground - were incredibly adaptable to what was - as I recall as Health minister over that Christmas - clearly a very challenging time.

As Ms Morgan-Wicks has said, that real challenge peaked at a time when people were on holiday, between Christmas and New Year. We managed as best as we possibly could at the time, and it was supported by some very dedicated people across our whole of government.⁴⁰

At the Public Hearings, the Committee sought further details as to the usage and support of the Check-in TAS App from Minister Ogilvie, Minister for Small Business and Mr Kim Evans (Secretary, DSG):

Mr WILLIE - Minister, what feedback did your Department provide about the Check in TAS app? There was a period towards the end where people thought that we're all

³⁹ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Premier Rockliff\)](#), p.33-35

⁴⁰ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Premier Rockliff\)](#), p.35

having to check in, and the Government is not using it. We did hear this morning that they were using it in high-risk situations.

Ms OGILVIE - ... The check in app was really a remarkable very quick invention at the beginning of the pandemic, so credit for tech skills getting that going.

...

Ms OGILVIE - It was introduced on 1 December 2020; it was to be used as a resource for that elimination and containment strategy, and I think we all know how that was deployed. It ceased being used from 2 May 2022, but the information you've just shared is that Public Health can trace individuals who've attended areas of concern still through other means and measures, working with event organisers, if you think about ticketing and those sorts of things or through social media to message attendees. My personal experience is people know who they've been with when you get the call, 'oh, my family, we've just been tested, just be aware', so that social network is quite strong here in Tasmania as well.

There was case tracing in high-risk settings such as aged care, hospitals and schools with other prevention mechanisms in place as well, and exposure site reporting. Due to the nature and spread of the Omicron variant, the Public Health advice was that reporting of exposure sites was no longer an effective tool in managing COVID-19 cases in the community.

... It was just one of the means of collecting that information and there was obviously a change and we did rollback the need to use the check in app over time...

Mr EVANS - One of the important roles that we played was as a conduit for information to businesses, and Government did provide us with some additional funding to set up an education and support service for small businesses. We had a dedicated call centre set up via Business Tasmania to answer any Check in TAS app-related questions, providing advice and support regarding how to use the app.

In addition, we set up a team who moved around the state; they visited some 40 towns and cities providing free face-to-face support, knocking on businesses' doors, including visits to King Island and Flinders Island. People could access information through the dedicated website and call centre, but they also got contact face to face in all sorts of regional towns right across the state.⁴¹

With respect to Check-in TAS app, the Committee heard further details from Ms Kathrine Morgan-Wicks (Secretary, DoH) and Dr Veitch:

Ms WEBB - ... You mentioned 2 May as the date it [Check-in TAS app] officially stopped operating. Given we're now past the 28-day period that required deletion of data, can you confirm that we're no longer retaining any data from the Check-in TAS app?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - That is my understanding. That was a programmed feature of the application.

⁴¹ See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Minister Ogilvie\)](#), p.8-9

Ms WEBB - There were particular circumstances described in legislation where data could be shared from the Check in TAS app to other agencies - for example, the Police. Across the period of time the app was operating and data was available, were there any instances where there were requests for sharing of data from the app by other agencies such as the Police?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - I am not aware of any instance in which data was provided to Police from the Check in TAS app.

Ms WEBB - Were there any requests made for data from the Check in TAS app?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - My understanding was that there had been one early request, which was declined.

Ms WEBB - Was that from Police?

Ms MORGAN-WICKS - From Tasmania Police, yes; but noting the terms and conditions in which the application was launched and which all of the information available to the public, it was for Public Health use only.

In relation to the data there were a couple of instances where Check in TAS information may have assisted in outbreak management where people would have been contacted and those contacts would have been recorded in other public health systems. For example, our Maven system, Maven would retain that data in terms of the management of that particular outbreak, I cannot dispel that, but not in the form of data held within the Check in TAS app.⁴²

Committee Findings

- F8. The COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was licensed under an agreement with the ACT Government.
- F9. The ACT Government did not charge the Department of Health for any updates or new releases for the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app. Additional costs were only incurred when a specific change was requested for the Tasmanian version.
- F10. The total expenditure by the Tasmanian Government on the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app to 15 February 2022 was \$113,499.13 (ex. GST).
- F11. To implement the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app, the Department of Health rebranded the app and enabled it to store collected data in Tasmania's contact tracing database.
- F12. No data collected through the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was shared with external bodies.

⁴² See Transcript of Evidence [Public Hearings \(24 June 2022\) - \(Premier Rockliff\)](#), p.42

- F13. The COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was made mandatory to use from 1 May 2021 at a wide range of locations, businesses and events.
- F14. Prior to the re-opening of the border, the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app was a key resource in pursuing an elimination/containment strategy for COVID-19.
- F15. Following the re-opening of Tasmania's border, mandatory requirements for use of the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app were varied to focus on use in high-risk venues and events, to support ongoing management of COVID-19.
- F16. As at 17 March 2022, the COVID-19 Check-in TAS App had been downloaded 1,149,262 times on to Apple and Android devices, with 1,242,896,393 check-ins across 56,942 registered locations/businesses in Tasmania.
- F17. 408,469 Tasmanians linked their vaccination certificate to the COVID-19 Check-in TAS app.

Committee Recommendation

- R2. The Government maintain the capacity for effective digital contact tracing for future pandemics.

Summary of Attachments

Attachment A Targeted Business Support Programs

Attachment A – Targeted Business Support Programs

Support for Small Businesses since August 2021

In October 2021, The Government opened the first of two rounds of funding under the *COVID-19 Micro and Small Business Border Closure Critical Support Grant* program, which saw over 4 000 businesses share in more than \$73 million in grants to assist with the impacts of COVID-19.

The Government also supported those Southern Tasmanian businesses who were required to go into lockdown as a result of the Lockdown Direction issued on 15 October 2021 for three days and provided almost \$3.5 million in support.

It's not only financial support that the Tasmanian Government has provided, but crucial support was also increased through the Business Tasmania service and free business advice provided under the Enterprise Centres Tasmania Program. These services are ongoing and continue to provide assistance to businesses navigating the current operating environment.

Well before the border opening date was set (September 2021), the Tasmanian Government allocated \$1.2 million through the *COVID 19 Small Business Advice and Financial Guidance Program* over four years to ensure the business community can access specialist advice and resources as businesses navigate the changing environment arising from COVID.

- Round one of this Program opened on 27 September 2021 and will remain open until 30 May 2022 (or when the annual funding has been fully allocated, whichever occurs first).
- To date more than 220 businesses have been awarded a total of more than \$318 500.

Following the announcement of the border opening, the Department of State Growth organised a series of industry forums to give businesses the opportunity to be briefed on changes to settings and to have their questions answered on issues like how to respond to positive cases in their workplaces. Public Health and Worksafe attended all forums.

Business Tasmania also developed a series of short videos with Worksafe, which addressed a lot of the questions asked at these forums and supported Worksafe in developing updated COVID Safe planning guidelines to reflect the opening of the border.

The Business Tasmanian and Tourism Tasmania newsletter were also widely used to promote information from public health to businesses throughout this period. In addition, funding was provided to the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) to provide a workplace relations hotline and counselling service, specifically to assist businesses navigate issues arising from the border reopening and vaccination requirements. The service was provided throughout December 2021 and January 2022.

In mid-January as the impacts of COVID became more significant for businesses, the Premier announced the *COVID-19 Business Impact Support Program* which was available to Tasmanian businesses whose business operations were impacted due to:

- critical staff being required to isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19, or
- being forced to close due to a Public Health Direction, or
- having suffered a significant reduction in demand.

In round one, applicants were required to demonstrate a minimum 30 per cent reduction in turnover between 15 December 2021 and 14 January 2022 inclusive, compared to the same period in the previous year (15 December 2020 and 14 January 2021). For newly established businesses the comparable period was 15 November to 14 December 2021. A total of 949 businesses have received funding of over \$1.8 million.

A second round of the Program opened on 15 February and closed on 8 March 2022, and required businesses to demonstrate a minimum 30 per cent reduction in turnover between 15 January and 14 February 2022 inclusive, compared to the same period in the previous year (15 January and 14 February 2021). For newly established businesses the comparable period was 15 December 2021 to 14 January 2022.

To date more than 749 businesses have been approved for funding totalling more than \$1 650 000.

Round three of the Program opened on 16 March and will close on 5 April 2022 and covers the period February 15 to March 14 2022. To date more than 345 businesses have applied for funding and the assessment process has now commenced.

Support for Major Businesses

Maintaining operational continuity has been a key risk for many of our major industrial, mining and mineral processing companies and State Growth has been liaising with the major industrial and mining companies in the State in order to feed information into Public Health during the period.

The key issues for these businesses were how they could maintain critical operations if and when key specialist staff became COVID positive or were quarantined as close contacts.

A key part of the Government's response to this was the introduction of the 'close contact' exemption processes allowing asymptomatic close contacts who were key workers essential to business continuity to still work if needed. This was done within the National Cabinet framework.

While this mechanism has been largely unused by these larger businesses, having it available for business planning has been critical.

Support for the Public Transport Sector

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period, a key objective has been to ensure that the community continues to have access to essential transport to support the functioning of the community and economy.

State Growth has worked proactively with bus and ferry operators during the transition period to "COVID normal" operations.

A key part of this has been working with operators on principles and planning for managing disruptions to the public transport network, should employee shortages from isolation or quarantine impact service delivery.

Other support for contracted public bus operators provided since the start of the pandemic has included:

- a fare amnesty in 2020 to prevent the need for drivers to handle cash on board when sanitizer was in short supply;
- additional payments to support an increased cleaning regime on school and general access buses; and
- a public information campaign to encourage passengers to be socially responsible when using buses, including checking in.
- supply of a stock of masks to be stored on vehicles, to support customers to complete their immediate travel following a mask mandate being issued at short notice.

Support for the wider bus industry included:

- deferral of accreditation audits due between 1 April and 30 September 2020 by six months;
- heavy vehicle fee relief for 12 months for businesses materially affected by the pandemic;
- a registration freeze for up to 12 months for business vehicles; and

- temporary suspension of Regular Passenger Service authorisations by the Transport Commission by agreement with the operator.

Support for Hire and Drive Sector

COVID-19 led to a short-term supply shortage in the hire and drive sector.

To seek to address this, in December 2020, the government supported the entry of peer-to-peer car rental platforms (Car Next Door and Eevee platforms) into Tasmania, matching private vehicles with people wanting to hire motor vehicles.

The Government also provided several initiatives to support this sector including:

- Business Vehicle Registration Relief Package which permits operators to freeze the registration of a vehicle while it is not being used (approximately 1 400 vehicles at estimated cost \$0.7m);
- Hire and Drive Reimbursement Program which provides \$1,000 for each next vehicle registered by a Hire & Drive operator (\$2m);
- Hire and Drive Premium Relief Package which was available prior to the commencement of the reimbursement program which waived the MAIB Premium (\$0.03m);
- Cancellation of registration (approximately 3 000 vehicles) at no cost and re-registration if applicable also at no cost.

In the lead up to the border opening, State Growth also liaised with car rental companies to monitor their supply of vehicles and to encourage them to have adequate supply.

From 15 February 2022, in response to the issues arising from lack of taxi drivers, taxi networks and operators were able to apply for up to \$600 per new driver to help offset some of the cost of recruiting new drivers. New eligible drivers were also given more time (until 1 May 2022) to submit a National Police Certificate and a Medical Clearance.

Events

There were already several support programs in place for Event organisers prior to the border opening.

In July 2021, The Government released a \$1.5 million Regional Event Recovery Fund to support Tasmanian regional events to build organisational capability and event sustainability.

The Event Ready Grant Program (running since September 2020) also existed to support events with COVID-19 safety planning and helps event organisers meet the additional requirements and costs associated with planning and delivering COVID-19 safe events. More than \$320 000 was provided in grants in round one, and an additional \$500 000 is available in round two.

More than \$1.25 million was provided from the Event Infrastructure and Critical Support Small Business Program which assisted small businesses provide vital event infrastructure and other services that are essential to the running of events whose operations had been substantially impacted by COVID-19 restrictions; and

Events Framework

The Safe Events and Activities Framework (Events Framework), guided by Public Health advice, came into effect on 1 December 2020. This provided a clear way forward for Tasmania's Sports, Arts and Events Industry and is supporting event organisers to plan for and host larger events in a COVID safe way.

In line with the Government's glide path to living with COVID, the Events Framework was updated with the revised framework coming into effect from 1 November 2021. This revised Events Framework provides clear and simple guidance to event organisers around the application process.

As at 8 March 2022, there have been 697 applications to the Events Framework.

Arts + Screen

The cultural and creative industries have received a comprehensive package of financial support from the Tasmanian Government in response to COVID-19. This package includes over \$12 million in new and ongoing support measures – administered through Arts Tasmania since March 2020.

The Tasmanian Government's Cultural and Creative Industries stimulus package, announced on 26 March 2020, included new funding of \$1.5 million and new operational measures of over \$2 million.

The initiatives offered under this stimulus package included:

- The Arts and Screen Digital Production Fund (\$500 000)
- The Tasmanian Contemporary Music Fund (\$250 000)
- Additional Screen Development Fund (\$250 000)
- Additional arts organisations funding (\$500 000)

Operational measures included the extension of contracts for arts organisations in receipt of single year or final year funding through Arts Tasmania's Organisations program (approximately \$2.3 million).

Loan repayments for both Arts Tasmania's COLLECT art purchase scheme and low-interest loan scheme were suspended for during the peak of COVID-19.

The Tasmanian Government announced an additional \$4 million in the 2020-21 State Budget to support the arts.

This included:

- \$2.5 million over two years for a new Arts and Cultural Support Fund
- \$1 million over two years towards Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) activities
- \$500 000 over two years additional funding to Screen Tasmania's Screen Innovation Fund

The Arts Recovery Support Initiative provided funds to artists, arts organisations and arts businesses that lost earnings because of COVID-19 restrictions.

The 2021 Election included new commitments for the arts to assist in sector recovery. These commitments included:

- \$200 000 for a Creative Support Small Grants Fund to support Tasmanian artists;
- and an uplift of \$1.2m per annum for arts organisations.

The \$2 million Live Performance Support Program was launched in March 2021 to give the sector confidence to plan live performances in Tasmanian theatres and other venues throughout 2021. This program has been extended to support eligible arts activities until 30 September 2022.

In addition, the Live Performance Reactivation Program 2021-22 was a \$1 million program announced on 16 March 2021 to support the delivery of new larger-scale professional live performance productions in Tasmania. This funding supported 12 organisations and artists to present a total of 205 performances around the State to a projected audience of more than 37,300 people, engaging 822 Tasmanian artists, arts workers, and technical staff.

Tourism

\$8 million has been committed to a new Tourism Innovation and Development Grant Program which is open and currently accepting applications. The fund will provide grants to continue to enhance

Tasmania's world-class experience reputation and enable key projects across the state to be realised.

As noted above, In recognition of increasing visitation to the State requiring a greater supply of rental vehicles available for hire, the Hire and Drive Reimbursement Program was extended to support hire and drive operators impacted by COVID-19 to re-establish their vehicle fleets.

Funding of up to \$2 million has been allocated to the program, and to date more than \$1 626 000 has been provided to hire and drive operators and newly registered vehicles to accredited car sharing platforms.

Other support available to the Tasmanian tourism sector includes:

- \$1 million towards a Mental Health Support Program with \$125 000 and \$60 000 allocated to the THA and TICT respectively to deliver industry-specific mental health programs.
- Additional support of \$300 000 to small businesses in the Tourism and Hospitality sector was provided via a partnership between the Tasmanian Hospitality Association (THA), Tourism Industry Council Tasmania (TICT) and Collins SBA to deliver business continuity and cash flow advice.
- \$500 000 was provided to extend the business planning support program, as well as \$1 million to support Tasmanian travel agents in recognition of the significant and ongoing impact of the pandemic on their businesses.
- A new \$50 million loan scheme was introduced to assist Tasmanian tourism operators to rebuild and regain visitors and customers as travel returns to normal, providing an opportunity to build resilience and innovate. The initiatives that are supported under this scheme will contribute to achieving the identified priorities of our T21 Visitor Economy Action Plan 2020-22.