



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Guy Barnett MP

Tuesday 7 September 2021

MEMBERS

Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC (Deputy Chair)

Hon Jo Palmer MLC

Hon Tania Rattray MLC (Chair)

Hon Jo Siejka MLC

Hon Rob Valentine MLC

Hon Josh Willie MLC

IN ATTENDANCE

Hon. Guy Barnett MP, Minister for Trade Minister for Primary Industries and Water
Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction Minister for Resources Minister for
Veterans' Affairs

Ministerial Office

Vanessa Pinto	Chief of Staff
Will Joscelyne	Senior Adviser
Ben Davidson	Senior Adviser
Matthew Hochman	Senior Adviser
Tom Jackson	Senior Adviser

Department Representatives - DPIPWE

Tim Baker	Secretary, DPIPWE
Louise Wilson	Deputy Secretary
Deidre Wilson	Deputy Secretary
Wes Ford	Deputy Secretary (EPA Tasmania)
Jo Crisp	Manager Agricultural Development and Policy
Bryce Graham	Manager (Water Assessment)
Ian Dutton	Director Marine Resources
Ash Bastock	Aquaculture Coordinator
Graeme Woods	Manager Marine Farming Branch
Martin Read	Acting General Manager
Andrew Crane	Manager Policy Advice and Regulatory Services
Rachael Alderman	Acting Manager, Threatened Species & Conservation Programs
Kris Carlyon	Section Head (Conservation Services)
Rae Burrows	Acting General Manager Biosecurity Tasmania
Andrew Bishop	Chief Plant Health Manager (Tasmania)
Mr John Diggle	Director, Inland Fisheries Service
Mr Tony Wright	Manager, Finance and Business

Department Representatives – Justice

Bruce Paterson	Assistant Director Strategic Legislation and Policy
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Ministerial Office

Vanessa Pinto	Chief of Staff
Chris Gatenby	Senior Adviser
Matthew Hochman	Senior Adviser

Department Representatives - DSG

Kim Evans	Secretary, DSG
Amanda Russell	Deputy Secretary
Brett Stewart	Deputy Secretary
Kevin Robinson	Director Mineral Resources Tasmania
Alastair Morton	Director Forest Policy
Glen Dean	Director Finance

Ministerial Office

Vanessa Pinto	Chief of Staff
Stewart Pederson	Senior Adviser
Adam Foster	Major Energy Projects Lead
Matthew Hochman	Senior Adviser

Department Representatives - DSG

Kim Evans	Secretary, DSG
Amanda Russell	Deputy Secretary
Sean Terry	Executive Director Energy
Kim Enkelaar	Director, Energy Policy and Regulation
Stewart Sharples	Director, Major Energy Projects
Glen Dean	Director Finance

Department Representatives - DPAC

Craig Limkin	Deputy Secretary
Samantha Russell	Assistant Director Climate Change Office

Ministerial Office

Vanessa Pinto	Chief of Staff
Chris Gatenby	Senior Adviser

Department Representatives - DSG

Kim Evans	Secretary, DSG
Amanda Russell	Deputy Secretary
Retired Rear Admiral Steve Gilmore,	Defence Advocate
Lara Hendricks	Executive Director, Business And Trade
Glen Dean	Director Finance

Ministerial Office

Vanessa Pinto	Chief of Staff
Matt Hochman	Senior Adviser

Department Representatives – Communities Tas

Kate Kent	Deputy Secretary
Jen Hefernan	Manager Policy and Programs

Output 1.2 – Industry and Business Development

Mark Bowles	Deputy Secretary
Amanda Russell	Deputy Secretary Business Services
Glen Dean	Director Finance

Output 3.1 – Energy Policy and Advice

Kim Evans	Secretary
Sean Terry	A/Executive Director Energy
Kim Enkelaar	Director, Energy Policy and Regulation
Stewart Sharples	Director, Major Energy Projects
Amanda Russell	Deputy Secretary Business Services
Glen Dean	Director Finance

Output 4.1 – Forestry Policy and Reform

Kim Evans	Secretary
Brett Stewart	Deputy Secretary Resources, Strategy and Policy
Alastair Morton	Director Resources Policy
Amanda Russell	Deputy Secretary Business Services
Glen Dean	Director Finance

Output 4.2 – Mineral Resources

Kim Evans	Secretary
Brett Stewart	Deputy Secretary Resources, Strategy and Policy
Kevin Robinson	Director Mineral Resources Tasmania
Amanda Russell	Deputy Secretary Business Services
Glen Dean	Director Finance

The Committee met at 9 a.m.

CHAIR (Ms Rattray) - The time being as close to 9 a.m. as you can get I'll declare the Estimates process for Committee B and for the Minister for Primary Industries and Water and Inland Fisheries officially commencing. Thank you, Shae, we will commence the broadcast.

Welcome minister, day 2 for this committee and I'm not sure, possibly your first day. It is your first day, so we'll get all the scoops in today.

I will introduce members of the committee, although you will know them all but it's what I do. First up, on my right I have the honourable Josh Willie, the honourable Jo Siejka, myself Tania Rattray, the honourable Rosemary Armitage, the honourable Rob Valentine and the honourable Jo Palmer. Our secretariat support is Julie Thompson and we also have Natasha Exel who comes in and out assisting, and we have Shae from Hansard.

Minister, we look forward to the day with you, particularly you have a number of portfolio areas that this committee will scrutinise. We will invite you first to introduce your team at the table. Anyone who comes during the day, please identify who they are for the sake of Hansard.

We don't need to use sanitising for our chairs, we have some magic potion that cleans them automatically for 24 hours now, so that's okay.

Minister, I expect that you will have a brief overview and we will get straight into questions after that. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair and members of the committee. It's a pleasure and an honour to be here today and to respond to the questions through the Estimates Committee hearing. I'd like to firstly introduce my secretary Tim Baker on my left and then Deirdre Wilson also on my left, the deputy secretary. Likewise, Jo Crisp who's the acting general manager Agriculture and Water. Thank you for the opportunity to have those department representatives at the table. We'll have other representatives during the day which I'd be happy to introduce at the time, depending on the topic of the question.

CHAIR - We did have the pleasure of the company of both Tim and Deirdre yesterday, but welcome Jo, a new minister.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair. As an opening statement, thank you for the opportunity to speak about agriculture because it's a very exciting place to be and there's a very big future ahead. It's a fundamental pillar of our growing economy, particularly in rural and regional areas where jobs are so important. We have a vision of reaching a farm gate value of \$10 billion by 2050 and we are sustainably moving towards that, we're on track, which is really good, and we've got a range of mechanisms and policy initiatives to help us progress.

I'd like to at the start particularly acknowledge Biosecurity Tasmania. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been at the frontline. They have done a fantastic job. As minister and on behalf of the Government and all Tasmanians, I'd like to acknowledge their work and their service. They've gone beyond the call of duty in many respects. Through our securing Tasmania's future we've invested in stronger borders and protecting Tasmanians and Tasmania from biosecurity risk.

We've delivered \$3 million more to support an already strong biosecurity system with initiatives as the appointment of more biosecurity officers, including on our Bass Strait islands, Flinders and King Islands. I know how important that is to you, Chair.

In regard to our farmers, fishers and our rural communities, our policies are driving growth and prosperity and opportunity. It's through the Agri-Food Plan which goes to 2023, it's a five-year plan. We've got the competitiveness of Tasmanian agriculture through to 2050 and of course in the Budget, the \$50 million, one of the most comprehensive and visionary agricultural policies ever delivered in Tasmania.

Firstly, in terms of fresh water, it's arguably one of our most precious resources which underpins Tasmania's economy, environment and our way of life. We've invested \$30 million into our water resources and irrigation to support sustainable growth of our primary industries. It includes \$1.5 million over four years to implement our rural water use strategy which was released in March this year. It includes a new river health advisory project and improved monitoring and analysis. The Government values and actively supports education, research and development and that's fundamental to the success of agriculture, one of the key ingredients to success. We've got \$3 million for our Agricultural Development Fund, the ADF.

Chair, I'd also like to make an announcement this morning: we have a new agreement with the Victorian government to extend our Pacific worker quarantine arrangements. I'm very pleased. I've been in touch with Anne-Marie Thomas, my colleague minister in Victoria just this morning. She's rapt, I'm rapt for and on behalf of our agricultural sector in each jurisdiction. It's Team Tasmania operating and Team Australia working really well. The new agreement allows us to prioritise Pacific workers to support Tasmania's agriculture industry and bring in skills and experience to bolster the local workforce. It's a great example of states working together during COVID-19 to ensure our produce is harvested, to ensure our vegetables are harvested, our fruit is picked and got to market where it needs to be.

In addition to that, I'm pleased to report that Tasmania remains Australia's largest seafood producing state by value. In the last 12 months, Tasmanian seafood, agriculture and associated processing industries contributed to over \$1 billion to the Tasmanian economy. In addition, recreational sea fishing is a further \$160 million boost to the Tasmanian economy. The seafood industry is being one of the hardest hit, however, as a result of COVID-19 and we've continued to engage very closely with the seafood industry and recreational fishers to allow them to continue to fish.

We've got the Building Our Fisheries initiative, it's now been launched, a new \$3 million program that includes support for a \$2 million wild fisheries action plan. Very important, particularly in our rural and regional communities. Tasmania being an island state surrounded by water. Very important. We've got the sustainable industry growth plan for the salmon industry and that's been operating since 2017. It's a transparent framework for a responsibly managed and sustainable industry to meet the market demand for Tasmania's salmon products. Tasmanians can have confidence in this valuable local industry which provides thousands of direct and indirect jobs.

I will conclude, Chair, by saying there have been significant improvements with the industry and government working together and, as I say, Team Tasmania, as I often refer to, it's great to be working shoulder to shoulder with those stakeholders. I mentioned the

recreational sea fishing and we've got a 10-year recreational sea fishing strategy, as well as funding support for inland fishing.

In conclusion, I'd like to acknowledge the staff of my department, led by the secretary. I thank them for their support as a government and for and on behalf of the agricultural sector and our primary industries, because it's a Team Tasmania effort. They do a great job and I'm very proud to be their minister.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. I hope there's enough questions left there. It was quite an extensive overview but some important information, and that announcement around the Pacific workers and the extension of that project will probably be a very welcome announcement by those in our communities who need those specialised skills that we can't always seem to find locally. Thank you.

I will go straight down to my left and invite the member for Hobart to commence the questioning on 2.1 AgriGrowth Tasmania. Thank you, Mr Valentine.

DIVISION 10

(Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment)

Output group 2

Primary industries

2.1 AgriGrowth Tasmania

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you very much, Chair. My first question is in relation to the actual appropriation budget papers. Can you identify what activities are being funded by the 47.5 per cent increase to this output group over the forward Estimates, as compared to the appropriation outlined in last year's budget papers? Last year's budget papers, for what it's worth, page 284, it's in table 10.14 for those that might have those handy. There's been a 47.5 per cent increase in this output group. I'm interested in you providing detail on this. I noted that initiatives stated in the note to table 10.14 only account for around \$2.1 million of the \$3.5 million increase in funding as well. Can you tell me why there's such a big increase?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thanks very much for the question and yes, it certainly highlights the increased investment we've made. We've got the Rural Business Resilience Package, \$866 000. The Agricultural Development Fund which I've mentioned in my opening remarks, \$750 000 in that particular year, that's \$3 million over the forward Estimates. The Strategic Industry Partnership Program, which is \$500 000 over that year or \$2 million over the forward Estimates and the Rural Water Use Strategy Implementation, which is \$375 000 in that year.

All in all, it's an increase of \$2.45 million in the 2021-22 financial year and it certainly reflects that additional funding, and it's partially offset by a reduction in funding from the Red Meat Livestock Production Strategies, \$50 000, and the Dairy Farm Extension, \$72 000. Because those projects had been completed in the funding previous round taking agriculture to the next level. I'm happy to ask the secretary or the deputy secretary to add to that if that would be useful.

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Mr VALENTINE - Yes, thank you very much. It's just that difference between the \$2.1 million you're talking about or \$2.4 million I think you said but I think it's \$2.1 million and the \$3.5 million increase. What's happening with that other \$1.4 million?

Mr BARNETT - Through you, Chair, if I can pass to the secretary.

Mr BAKER - Yes, so there are two additional factors, Mr Valentine. The first is across the board indexation has occurred, which has lifted the - well, the tide goes up as you know with that, and in addition the corporate overhead has been re-worked in that area so we'll probably get to this later in the session. So AgriGrowth has picked up an additional allocation of the corporate overheads as part of a re-working of the overhead, which happened when we created the new agriculture and water division. It's not in the list, the minister said.

Mr VALENTINE - So we'll deal with the FTEs -

Mr BAKER - So there's a bit of off and on as we go through as a result of that. FTE hasn't changed. What happens in our department because we're a large multi-functional department, the corporate overhead gets reviewed and calculated every year. The corporate overhead has IT, HR, finance facilities and a range of other costs in it, project management. What we do is we assess the best way to apportion that across the agency and this year with the relatively minor restructure that occurred and the creation of the Agriculture and Water Branch we have just reapportioned that so I suspect as we go, minister, I'm going to get questions about offs and on as we go down the line but a large chunk of that money is indexation, as well as that reapportion of overhead.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you for that. I appreciate that level of advice. The performance indicators for the output group are shown in table 10.4 on page 290. They express performance simply in raw figures whereas the notes to the indicators indicate references to trends and projections. Are you able to provide details of the underlying trends which this output group is seeking to meet and the extent to which realised results are meeting those trends? Quite clearly it's disjointed basically.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question, Mr Valentine. I'll pass to Deirdre Wilson, our deputy secretary.

Ms WILSON - I just want to be clear, are you talking about the value of prime industry sectors?

Mr VALENTINE - Yes.

Ms WILSON - Okay. In terms of the gross value of agriculture, obviously this Government has its agricultural target. In terms of food production and value add, we don't have a particular target for that, this is just reporting what industry value is. We do use our Agri-Food ScoreCard to report on that.

Mr VALENTINE - It's just that if you're doing that, we have no understanding what that bulk figure means. Whether it's above your target, below your target. Do you understand?

Ms WILSON - Yes.

Mr VALENTINE - Maybe for future years you could look more particularly at that sort of reporting so that we can get an understanding as to whether you're on target, below target, above target.

Ms WILSON - We tend to do that reporting in other documentation but I'm sure -

Mr VALENTINE - Anyway, it's just an observation there.

Mr BARNETT - Can I just pass to the secretary who would like to comment -

Mr BAKER - Just a couple of points made through you, minister. The first one I would make is that that's essentially what the AgriGrowth ScoreCard does. It sets the trend information and that comes out annually and I'm happy to provide that. The second point I would make is that it's a dangerous path to play with these performance indicators because when we do we generally get quite a lot of negative feedback. In fact, I think we got some negative feedback last week, minister, in the House about some changes we made, or improvements, as we saw them, to these KPIs. So I'll take what you've said onboard but I guess I would say we will tread with caution because when we change them we tend to be criticised heavily for seeking to change the performance indicators.

Mr VALENTINE - Through you, minister, I can appreciate what you're saying about it causing a few concerns when you change the indicators but if the indicators don't mean anything to us, in terms of the outcomes, what's the point of having them?

Mr BAKER - Through you, minister. I completely agreed with you, Mr Valentine, and I will undertake to continue to review them but we will do it very cautiously and we'll do it – and we'll make sure we have very good notes when we do it, because we do get criticised quite heavily for changing it.

Mr VALENTINE – Maybe there's time for change.

Mr BAKER – I might remind you of that, Mr Valentine, in 12 months' time.

Mr VALENTINE – Yes.

Mr BAKER – When we change it.

Mr BARNETT – Can I just make a note? You've asked some good questions, but we've - the Agri-Food ScoreCard is something that is really appreciated by the industry sector and the sectors across agriculture and the primary industry sector, and it breaks down each of those sectors and how well they are doing compared to the previous year and the previous year from that, and this is it. This is the 2018-19 ScoreCard and it's always a little bit dated, so the next one coming out, I think it will be in the next couple of months. It's due September, October every year.

It is really appreciated by those sectors because it gives a really good analysis of where they are at in terms of that sector. Now, it's fair to say –

Mr VALENTINE – It's only in comparison to the last year. I'm just –

Mr BARNETT – Correct. No, and I'm picking up on your point because it does have trends over time and it has the cold hard facts from the previous year, so absolutely, and it's the farm gate value. Now, where I'm interested in, and I think you are and perhaps others as well, is the value-add and the processing, because, you know, getting more analysis and understanding of the supply chain and not just the farm gate value.

Now, I think there's going to be a bit more work to be done in that regard in the months and years ahead. But as a very base analysis, this is a great ScoreCard to have and we do use it for analysis, research, education, awareness, and building confidence in terms of that and our initiatives, you know, how are they going in terms of KPIs. This is a very important KPI, so it's possible that we could add to this in the months and years ahead. But I certainly appreciate your question.

Mr VALENTINE – Thank you.

CHAIR – A good scorecard is always the Powranna saleyards, minister.

Mr BARNETT – Yes.

CHAIR – That will tell you how it's going.

Mr BARNETT – That said, that's a –

Mr VALENTINE – That's true enough.

Mr BARNETT – Indeed. Straight from the horse's mouth, as it were.

Mr VALENTINE – I think my next question is probably not going to be worth anything because of what you've just told me, so I think we'll wait for that to appear, but it would be good to be able to have something close to being released close to the Estimates so we've got some good information to be able to ask questions on, in that regard. But I mean, October to -

Mr BARNETT – Yes, we've had the ABS stats out, of course, and the most recent ABS stats which are on the public record. I'm very pleased to advise that the – in terms of agriculture production across Australia is at 0.4 per cent. Tasmania, 14.7 per cent. So it's an outstanding result and these are the most recent ABS statistics. Now they get updated every month, but in any event, it shows that Tasmania is kicking goals when it comes to agriculture and I'm so pleased and proud to be working with the key stakeholders to get those sorts of results.

Mr VALENTINE – The percentage increase there is significant. Your target is to grow the value of the agriculture sector in Tasmania, as I read, ten-fold to \$10 billion by 2050, in fact. What work has been done to actually set a target like that? Now, just bear with me, and I just want to read you my thoughts on this. I was putting this down and I think I just want to put this before you. By that I mean, have we looked at whether or not we have enough sustainable liquid gold, as you term it, water to make that a realistic target? Can our streams and rivers cope with the nutrient load that might result from such a vision?

Can our road infrastructure cope with it? Do we have enough tax revenue to maintain the infrastructure to sustain that level of production? Do we have enough arable land to deliver that dream? Or is it gradually being swallowed up by development, housing, and all of those

sorts of things? We often see people wanting to develop good arable land, and we know we have the protection of Agricultural Land Policy, but it's not – sometimes has pressure put on it.

All of those aspects are important to consider and I just want to be assured that there's been some real work behind arriving at that target and that we have a better than even chance of hitting it, rather than it being just a thought bubble perhaps.

CHAIR – We continue to talk about it.

Mr VALENTINE – So give me some comfort, minister, it is what I'm after.

Mr BARNETT – Absolutely, Mr Valentine. Thank you very much for the question. I think each of those many questions in that contribution I could respond for a very, very long time.

Mr VALENTINE – We won't need that.

Mr BARNETT – However, we won't go that way, but I would like to give you confidence that we are working to a plan, and that plan is the Tasmanian Sustainable Agri-Food Plan 2019-2023. So that's our current plan. It's a five-year, or four-year plan, and we're working to that plan and the plan is working. We're on target to get to that \$10 billion by 2050. It shows that we need investment in a whole range of areas that's consistent with our – the Competitiveness White Paper which was released some years ago that I mentioned in my opening remarks. And yes, it is a target, but it's underpinned by government investment in a whole range of areas, and I think you asked about water as one and road infrastructure is another. It's all part of a bigger plan to grow our economy in a sustainable way.

With respect to water, I'm happy to answer further questions about that. That is the whole reason we pulled together the Rural Water Use Strategy which is funded \$1.5 million in this budget. It's based on nearly two years of consultation and feedback from farming communities and rural areas throughout Tasmania, and that strategy is a long-term strategy going well into the future to ensure that we have a balanced approach, that river health is cared for and looked after, and that we have the wise use of water. So they are a few short remarks to say that, yes, we do have a plan and we're working to the plan.

Mr VALENTINE – I guess my concern is, certainly with climate change, we don't know what's going to happen with water. We're putting our faith and trust in the fact that that liquid gold is going to fall from the sky. We know, a few years back now, under minister Groom, if you remember, you know we ended up having to import diesel generators to keep ourselves alive. Now that might be a management thing with the hydro, but it would be comforting to know that we've got strategies in place to be able to underpin this. I know you've got irrigation projects and all of those sorts of things, and I think they're very good; don't get me wrong, I think they're very good. But we've got that fundamental issue of whether we're going to have enough water.

Mr BARNETT – Yes. With respect to water, I'd be delighted to speak more fully on that because we've got \$30 million in our budget to support our water resources, the wise use of water, and of course further irrigation development, some \$23.7 million for irrigation purposes. Water, yes, it is liquid gold but it must be used wisely. That's why we developed

over a two-year period plus the Rural Water Use Strategy. That's why we've funded it to ensure the wise use of water going forward.

That's why we're funding the River Health Project with two new offices in the department to ensure that we care for our water, that we do more monitoring, more managing; that is all part of the Rural Water Use Strategy which I –

Mr VALENTINE – Environmental flows and things like that?

Mr BARNETT – Yes, which manages the environmental flow, and I've got – look at this. Joe Crisp is offering the Rural Water Use Strategy. But I've got my own.

CHAIR – One that we've prepared earlier.

Mr BARNETT – Yes, look at this; March 2021. So it's in here, and in addition to that we have established at my request the Rural Water Roundtable of all the best brains in Tasmania to manage and consider the wise use of water, and Deidre Wilson, Deputy Secretary, chaired that roundtable just a few weeks ago and there will be several more meetings between now and Christmas to consider exactly those questions of yours in terms of the challenges we've got with water and also the opportunities we've got with water, and it will be consistent with the Rural Water Use Strategy.

Mr VALENTINE – Because what I hear is that there's going to be a lot more water falling on the west coast and far, far less on the east coast. The transfer of water from west to east is obviously going to be a part of it. Have you got strategies in place to make that happen?

Mr BARNETT – We've got strategies to respond to climate change. Climate change is a key part of our thinking. It's been addressed in the Rural Water Use Strategy. It's a key part of that in terms of how we respond to climate change, and I think some of the comments are absolutely acknowledged. I'd certainly like to have my secretary and/or deputy secretary to add to those answers.

Mr BAKER – Sure, minister. The first point I would make about DPIPW is that climate change is almost at the core of everything that we do as the department's lead environmental agency. But the one area that I would point to specifically is the enterprise suitability mapping work that we've been doing. This is a combination of using all three elements of – pardon me, there's a lot more than three – but three of the key elements. The environmental information, the agricultural information, and also the mapping through Land Tasmania, the country's pre-eminent geo-mapping servicing.

What the enterprise mapping does is basically it looks at – and looks at terrain, and there are 32 different crop types that we're looking at and we're starting to model what climate change will do to those crops. Where if you're in this area, these are the things you should be concentrating on and what you should be thinking about growing, what the likely changes are going to be, and that information is now all available for free on the list. So farmers and –

Mr VALENTINE – I was just going to ask about the list.

Mr BAKER – Farmers are now going to the list more than ever before for this information. Anecdotally –

Mr VALENTINE – It's got an agricultural layer.

Mr BAKER – It does, and anecdotally at - I think the minister and I were both up at Agfest this year and it was one of, if not the most popular stall we had. We had the line-out of the tent of farmers wanting to get that information and understand how to get access to it. Importantly, as I said, this is information that is freely available to the ag sector.

Mr VALENTINE – But they're not having to pay for it?

Mr BAKER – No. They can go in and there's a list layer, and we're continuing to build on that information. The latest climate futures projections have now been processed into it, so we're continuing to build the model and it's providing important information for farmers as they start to plan what the next five, 10, and 15 years look like. As the minister said, it's helping us to work on the strategy. It's giving us better information about how we're going to hit that target, what those crops might be, and where they're going to be.

Mr VALENTINE – I've got two more questions, Chair, just to give you a heads up there. Regarding our markets, no doubt you're aware of the old saying about being careful not to place all your eggs in one basket. Can you let us know what the government's doing to strengthen their resilience in the marketplace in that regard?

Mr BARNETT – Are you talking export markets, or -?

Mr VALENTINE – Yes. Yes.

Mr BARNETT – Yes, because we've got markets in the mainland and then export markets.

Mr VALENTINE – No, I appreciate that. I'm talking about international exports.

Mr BARNETT – Sure, yes. No, I'd be happy to and I think we've got a portfolio area on trade which I'm happy to expand upon. But yes, we have a trade strategy which we're acting on, and I was there at the launch and I acknowledge Jeremy Rockliff, my former Minister for Trade who has done a great job in launching that and working hard to ensure that we have plans to grow our trade. We've just hit \$3.9 billion in exports, just \$3.88 to be exact. It's fantastic news for Tasmania because exports means jobs. And we've just hit a record last month, another record this month, so we're going well.

However, there are certain parts of our export markets that have been hit by COVID-19 and by also certain markets. For example, with China, that is still easily our largest export market from Tasmania, but for certain sectors like wood, seafood, abalone, rock lobster, and wine hasn't had a big effect, but the tariffs have gone up for wine. But I guess my point is that we are growing our trade markets and we intend to diversify, grow the China market, but grow the other markets, and we've more recently appointed trade advocates in Singapore reaching out to the south-east Asian market, more than \$700 million per year market for us.

The US, we've got a trade advocate there, Emily Midson, and then in Japan, in Tokyo. We've got a trade advocate for Tokyo and we caught up with ambassador recently when he was in Tasmania. We have a plan to grow our export markets, which will support –

Mr VALENTINE – It's just that resilience – it's just if one of those close off and they're a major market, then –

Mr BARNETT – We've found the challenge, particularly in terms of export of our goods have increased markedly. In terms of services has come undone, and you think of education, for example, particularly in your electorate, and Hobart in particular has had an impact, or the lack of international students. Of course that's had an impact with COVID-19 and the overseas markets, but as a result, we have been able to grow our goods and our export markets. Exports mean jobs and that's another reason Tasmania's economy is doing so well, because our exports are growing and we're backing in that through our trade strategy. It's a team Tasmania approach, working with our stakeholders, working with our exporters, and we've got a lot more to say about that, but that's the short answer.

Mr VALENTINE – Thank you, and the last question is about the harvest trail website, an ICT question for the secretary. He was complaining I hadn't asked any questions about that.

Mr BARNETT – I'm sure the secretary is at the ready.

Mr VALENTINE – But it's not really about – I mean, it is an ICT product, I suppose, but I'm really interested in knowing how we washed up last season in our unpredictable COVID-19 world, how many Tasmanians were employed in those harvesting jobs. How many temporary visas were issued because I know you're talking about prioritisation of Pacific workers from the island nations that we have around us or to the north of us. So, how did we wash up in that?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Thank you very much for the question. The wash up under very challenging circumstances was pretty jolly good, and Tasmania has been acknowledged as a standout across Australia. It's to the great credit of our stakeholders and my department together with the Department of Premier and Cabinet that we've worked so well together, team Tasmania, to get the job done. To pick the fruit, harvest the vegetables, crush the grapes, get them off to market and, all in all, it's been a great result. I'm really wrapped, but it was really challenging. Last year the department did what's called an environmental scan to assess how many jobs were needed in addition to our local workforce. We always said top priority, Tasmanians, Tasmanians, Tasmanians, but we always knew that we'd need those extra workers to harvest the vegetables and get it off to market. So, we've largely done that. We had countless roundtables with myself as minister and the department. The department working with the industry to assess what are our needs; can we meet those needs and then get the job done. So, with an analysis of last year, I might just pass to Deidre Wilson who's done so much good work in this space. I want to acknowledge Deidre's terrific work with her team to get this work done.

CHAIR - Before Deidre answers, she might like to pull that microphone just a tad closer. Thank you. I know you've been having a few hassles with it, but it's there for a reason.

Ms WILSON - Yes, it is. So, we did a lot of work looking at the previous season and what was required of the agricultural workforce. Based on that, the government put in place a seasonal worker program of a \$1.9 million agricultural workforce resilience package. Part of that package was around promoting local jobs.

We have anecdotal information about the jobs that were taken up, and also some information from the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment which reported that 2074 jobs had been filled by local job active participants in Tasmania since 1 July 2020. The highest percentage of total horticultural placements in the period across all states. There were additional placements via the harvest trail recruitment agencies and employers direct. So, I've got that general information. I was just going to see if the acting general manager had any other information to add or whether that's what we've got at this stage.

Ms CRISP - Thanks very much, Chair, and through you, minister. So, as Deidre said, we do have a lot of anecdotal evidence and we also have the local job active participants who have been recruited, and so from the Commonwealth's perspective Tasmania has very much shone in terms of recruitment. We do know that the harvest job's website has had, as at 30 August 2021, 94 981 visits, so that's unique page views, and that at the moment as we lead into the harvest season there's 403 jobs that are currently advertised. Of course, as we progress through the harvest season we'll see, you know, 2000 or more. Last year I think we peaked at around about 4000 jobs advertised through that site.

Mr VALENTINE - Do we do anything with regard to making sure that those seasonal workers that are coming in from our Pacific areas - that they're paid the same as our local people?

Mr BARNETT - Absolutely. Yes, yes and yes.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Very important. Those terms and conditions for their employment are the same.

Mr VALENTINE - Is that something we set, as something that -?

Mr BARNETT - It's set under an award. It's consistent with either the state or federal award, whichever's relevant, but they are paid the same as any Tasmanian. In addition to that, they are supported to come here in terms of the quarantine arrangements. So, thanks to the Treasurer and Premier for that support, and I must say again, thanks to Victoria for a - team Australia, the partnership we had last year, and I've just announced this for the coming season, to Mary and Thomas and Victorian Government with 1500 seasonal workers from Pacific island are coming through to Tasmania and then obviously flying through to Victoria.

Mr VALENTINE - It's the Mercure Hotel, wasn't it, that they were -?

Mr BARNETT - Well, where they'll be this year I don't know. I think that's a matter for Communities Tasmania.

Mr VALENTINE - Anyway, thank you. You've answered my question.

CHAIR - I'll ask later on in the other output area that covers this about how many will stay in Tasmania.

Mr BARNETT - For sure.

Mr VALENTINE - So, thank you, Madam Chair. I've gone through most of my questions.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - The Secretary had one thing to add if that's okay.

Mr BAKER - One final point if I may. Just to help the community with the scale. The minister mentioned that we've been out talking to industry. These are the projected numbers for this season, to give you a sense. The total amount of workers required is 9800. The projected local workers is 5800 and the projected international workers is 4000; however, of that 4000, 2200 are already in the country because they've stayed in the country so they've been working up and down the coast. They tend to follow the sun is how they work. There will be about - it's estimated 1800 will be coming in via the seasonal worker - the international workers coming in. That's an estimate, but that's - based on the work we've done that gives you a sense of the scale of workers that are needed to make the industry go over the -

CHAIR - It still leaves a significant shortfall.

Mr BAKER - No. That adds up.

CHAIR - That covers it.

Mr BAKER - Yes.

Mr VALENTINE - This is all to do with backpacker problem, not -

Mr BAKER - Well, yes. As you said, the international work is split, as I said, 2200, they'd be almost your traditional backpackers who have stayed in the country and they follow the sun up and down the coast, and then there's the 1800 who come in specifically to pick and then go back to country.

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, okay. Thank you very much for that.

CHAIR - We might drill down a little bit more on that later.

Mr BAKER - Yes, I'm happy to answer.

CHAIR - Thank you. It's in another line item.

Mr BAKER - No problem.

CHAIR - Thank you, Ms Siejka, and then I'm going to Ms Armitage.

Ms SIEJKA - I had a question, minister, about output 2.1. It shows the funding for AgriGrowth Tasmania declining over the forward Estimates, and it appears it's mainly due to the taking agri crops to the next level initiative. What's going to replace that? Is there anything intended to replace that? I mean, obviously there's that drop in the Estimates, but what's the thinking or the intention around that?

Mr BARNETT - Well, I think the 2.1 AgriGrowth Tasmania - I think there's a range of initiatives there that need to be covered off, so I might just check with the secretary or the deputy secretary to provide the detail. Thank you.

Mr BAKER - The deputy secretary is giving me the answer, so you might as well just give the committee the answer.

Ms WILSON - Through you, Chair. We've already indicated that the increase for 2021 reflects the additional funding provided as part of the election commitment, and we've gone through those. A rural business resilience package, agriculture development funds, chief industry partnership program, rural water use strategy. There is a decrease in 2022-23 with the completion of the funding of a Tasmania taking agriculture to the next level initiatives. There are a range of government initiatives that we'd be progressing which have been identified. Some of those that are finishing - the programs have ended and we're moving on to the new programs.

Ms SIEJKA - They're funded in a separate area, then, obviously because the money drops off or the funding drops off?

Mr BAKER - Thank you. Through you, chair, secretary. I'd make two points. The first thing is in the agriculture area, a lot like other areas, we had this discussion yesterday about parks. We don't know what impact COVID-19 is going to have, so it's very hard to start to think about what programs are going to look like too far in advance. The other point I would make strongly as the Secretary is that when we've asked, the government has delivered on that funding. So, we're working through now with industry.

We're talking to industry about what those programs might look like, and it's our strong expectation, and I think the minister's as well, that you will see a next round of initiatives hit. Usually in a pre-COVID-19 world we'd be able to plan this out a lot further in advance. What we're doing now is talking to industry about the effects that COVID-19 is having and making much more justly defined decisions, so -

Ms SIEJKA - The funding allocation is not there to, sort of, draw on at this stage. So, you're suggesting that that will appear?

Mr BAKER - Yes, it will appear in the out years once we get there. I think the point that the Secretary's made that I'd like to emphasise is that we are responding to the challenges we have at the time, and that is COVID-19. We have bent over backwards. We have responded. We've put funding in our budget last year. We put funding in our budget this year going forward. The Secretary has outlined and then they will respond to the needs of the industry at the time to ensure that we get the job done to meet our targets to put food on the table for Tasmanians and export our products into the markets where they need to go. So, we'll respond in an agile way.

Ms SIEJKA - Okay. Thank you. Minister, we've heard from local growers that they're having trouble securing sufficient container capacity to transport time-sensitive precious Tasmanian produce to the markets overseas, in particular vege growers. Can you outline what steps you've taken to support those local growers and producers so they can continue to deliver

their products in that time-sensitive way? I imagine that COVID-19 played a role in this too. Can you provide some detail here?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'd be happy to respond to that, and firstly by saying isn't it a wonderful problem to have?

CHAIR - Not enough container space. Not if you've got fresh food waiting to be exported.

Mr BARNETT - Well, isn't it a wonderful problem to have that you've got so much demand and you can't meet the demand? We are absolutely working with the key stakeholders and the key producers to get the job done. There has been an increased demand which is the point about our exports are on the up, and our markets on the mainland. It has been disrupted by COVID-19, particularly in Melbourne and Sydney. I can advise that in terms of freight and logistics sector, they are reporting strong demand and record freight volumes for the 2021 year. Bass Strait domestic shipping operators continue to provide reliable, efficient and competitive services and there is high demand, and that high demand, fortunately or unfortunately, has caused some disruption for international shipping services. We're certainly cognisant of that, and through the minister, Mr Ferguson, his office and his department, of course, transport and logistics in that space, we liaise very closely to support our sector.

Ms SIEJKA - So, what sort of - if you could break down what sort of steps that you've been taking to help that because I imagine it's quite stressful for some of those producers and they're looking to you for information?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it has been challenging for some of those producers; there's no doubt about that. We have regular roundtables with those producers and with the key stakeholders. I did that throughout COVID-19 and still do it. We have an agricultural roundtable on a regular basis, and either the Secretary or Deidre Wilson chairs those roundtables. There's also a freight and logistics roundtable, and that's convened by Mr Ferguson, Minister for Infrastructure. They've met twice since March 2020, and it includes representation from key freight providers, including shipping lines. I'll just pass to the secretary, if you'd like to add to that answer.

Mr BAKER - Look, to be honest, I think you've covered it, minister. I think the minister Mr Ferguson and State Growth and my colleague Kim Evans, we've had a number of conversations about this and it is a challenging area at the moment. This is a global trend; it's not a Tasmania problem. I think using a similar model to the model that's been used in DPIPW about the roundtables and bringing people together, and also from talking to primary producers a lot. What we're hearing is there's a lot more collaboration between producers than there probably has been before in the past. It is stressful for them, but we're doing everything we can against a challenging global environment.

Ms SIEJKA - So that would involve, I guess, collaborating with the minister Mr Ferguson to advocate for particular needs in industry?

Mr BAKER - Yes, and not just the minister Mr Ferguson. Senator Jonathon Duniam who's sort of a counterpart at the federal level with some really good news in terms of international freight, IFAM, so that's just been extended. That's an announcement which was made a few weeks ago. So, we're very pleased about that. We've sort of lobbied - I've written

to my minister for trade counterpart, Dan Tehan, about that and I'm absolutely delighted the federal government stepped up and extended that.

So, that'll provide freight assistance into the international markets. I think that should be noted. The other good news to report is that Australia Post has just changed their policy in the last few weeks, you know, to the great relief of so many Tasmanians, small, medium-sized business, and others. Bruny Island Cheese is an example. So, you know, they were going to stop that. I'm glad that there was a lot of representation, a lot of advocacies. Senator Jonathon Duniam and his colleagues lobbied on that, and I thank him and the federal colleagues for doing that. I know certainly Gavin Pierce was active, and I'm sure Bridgette Archer on this as well. Nevertheless, the point is that's been changed, it went to the small business ombudsman. That ombudsman provided a report and recommendation, and Australia Post responded to that. So that's a good result.

Ms SIEJKA - Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Armitage.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you Chair. Now I'm assuming that you might be able to comment on this. I realise that it's limited by state growth, but the AgriGrowth Loan Scheme, are you able to give me an update on how that's going and how many applicants you've had and -?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Excellent question. The AgriGrowth Loan Scheme, it's one of the very successful schemes of the government, and we try and support those in agriculture to progress their plans and developments.

Ms ARMITAGE - The Young Farmer Support Package as well.

MR BARNETT - Yes, we can come to that as well. But could I pass to Jo Crisp, who's the acting general manager in this space, to provide a report.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

CHAIR - Possibly a list of those recipients?

Mr BARNETT - Well, we have to be careful on confidentiality, but I'm sure -

CHAIR - We always ask. We always get the same answer, but we always ask.

Ms BARNETT - Or even the number. I think probably the list might be difficult if not, but the number that we've had of the young farmers and the others? Or even an area? Would that make - north, south, northwest?

Ms CRISP - I can tell you that, in particular, the Young Farmer Provisions have been very successful over the last three financial years. From 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 there were 11 young farmer loans approved, \$16 428 million worth of loans. From 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 there were 10 loans approved, \$9 824 million worth of loans. From 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 there were six loans approved, \$7 832 million worth of loans. They were the young farmer loans provision under the program, which is I think a very successful addition to

the program. The low interest loans up to \$3 million for standard AgriGrowth loans. From 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 we had one loan, \$400 000. 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 we had three loans \$2 455 million worth. Last financial year we had seven loans, \$3 687 million worth of loans. There's been a strong level of enquiry which provides a pipeline of activity, and there are two loans in progress which are subject to decision, but perhaps likely to be supported.

Ms ARMITAGE - With the young farmer, boasting 11 and then 10 and then six, it's obviously getting less. Are there the same amount of people applying and they're just not qualifying? Or less people applying? I'm just wondering, what are the reasons when they don't qualify? I'm assuming that more than 11 apply.

Ms CRISP - Yes, absolutely more than 11 apply. I don't have the figures with me, but there's a lot of interest in the program. However, support's provided across state growth in a range of different areas, including this program, and so sometimes they need to have a business plan put together and they work with a consultant to be able to achieve that before they actually go through the program.

It really is about the right fit at the right time for the right person. I would also note that in recent times interest rates in banks have been so low that sometimes that has also been an alternative for farmers. Obviously this program is intended to meet the gap where the banks won't support, but it's a viable initiative that needs to be progressed. The government comes in in that sort of area where the market market's sort of fallen over.

Ms ARMITAGE - Was there less money available? Just about the young farmers, particularly when you look at it was 16 and a half million then nine eight, then seven eight, so was there less money available? Or was it just simply that less people either replied or were successful?

Ms CRISP - I'd have to do a bit more analysis on the program to be able to actually answer that question. Obviously it's administered by the Department of State Growth.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, I understand that it's difficult.

Ms CRISP - But I would say that the money is reinvested as it's repaid, and so there's a cycle of more people coming in to be supported.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, look, appreciate it. Because I do appreciate that it's delivered by state growth, so thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and through you Chair, just to finish and answer to Ms Armitage's question. In our election policy we committed to continue the AgriGrowth Loan Scheme for up to \$3 million and then also for the young farmers up to \$250 000. I wanted to give you some assurance with that regard to the coming years.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

CHAIR - Minister, can we talk about the research farms that we have in the state? I'm interested in where we are with the support for those research farms that do such a fantastic job for the industry.

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Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much Madam Chair. They do a fantastic job, you're right. Would you like me to speak broadly to that now with -

CHAIR - Yes, I'm interested in what funds have been provided.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, for sure. Then we can drill down -

CHAIR - What hasn't hit the mark at this point in time, but will do in the future I'm sure.

Mr BARNETT - For sure, yes. First of all, one of the key ingredients to success in agriculture is research development and extension. That is absolutely noted by this government, and my predecessor unfortunately gained significant support for agriculture in that regard.

Thanks to Jeremy Rockliff, we've committed \$7 million. First being the 2018-19 budget to modernise our TIA research farms. The government in 2021 invested \$5 million into a \$7.4 million project over five years with the university of Tasmania. I signed that with the Vice Chancellor, that's an agreement with TIA to upgrade both the Elliott research farm on the northwest coast, and the Forth Side research farm on the northwest coast, centres of excellence in dairy and horticulture research. Work at Elliott is well underway with construction of a new rotary dairy set to commence in November 2021, a few months away. I'm very excited about that, had an update from Mike Rose from TIA - the acting director of TIA - and I visited Elliott a number of times. I'm really looking forward to that, that's a real shining light for the dairy industry. As you know we've just hit 961 million litres, so that's a record for our dairy industry milk production, fantastic.

CHAIR - I put that on the record last week in my contribution to the budget spread.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Tania Rattray, for that. Acknowledging the dairy industry, very important in your area, but across Tasmania. So, kicking goals there. But there's a recognition that dairy's important, we want to back it in, we're providing those millions of dollars. Dairy Australia is also providing up to \$7 million of funding support which is fantastic. There's a real recognition that Tasmania's leading the way when it comes to the dairy industry. Happy to share more on that.

Then likewise we've got the Elliott multi-million dollar upgrade there for horticultural research, and again I visited there vegetable production, irrigation use, wise use of water, and we're investing \$750 000 at the Cressy research farm, which I know you know very well Madam Chair. Particularly for infrastructure upgrades, irrigation purposes, pipelines for irrigation, drainage works, training facilities upgrades. It's a co-investment with the Upper Murray Seeds entity there.

To wrap it up and then we can have some further follow up questions no problems, is the feasibility study and working with the Fruit Growers Tasmania for Grove research station which is down in the Huon. Fruit Growers Tasmania, were working with them on a feasibility study on how we could use that facility for fruit growing purposes, and for research development and extension. That work's ongoing as we speak. We'll have more to say about that once that work's completed.

CHAIR - Right. There is no intention to offload any of those facilities, Minister?

Mr BARNETT - No intention. Correct.

CHAIR - Certainly an important aspect of R&D for those industries.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, absolutely. We're doing a feasibility study at Grove. I want to be very clear, and it depends on what comes out of that feasibility study as to exactly how we use that facility going forward with the Fruit Growers Tasmania. We'll be working shoulder to shoulder with Fruit Growers Tasmania on that feasibility study, and the report and recommendation that comes from that.

CHAIR - Members, any more questions on this particular line item? If not, we'll go 2.2, which is Marine Resources. Ms Armitage, thank you.

2.2 Marine Resources

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you Chair.

CHAIR - Are you bringing someone - just wait for Alice to bring someone in?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, our marine representatives.

CHAIR - Right. So, who's leaving the table? Jo? Thank you, Jo. Hope that wasn't too painful for you.

Ms CRISP - I survived.

CHAIR - That's what I like to hear.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks Jo.

Ms CRISP - Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - This will be Ian Dutton coming to the table.

CHAIR - Ian, do you want to come up the other end please? Okay, no that's all right. Sorry, I didn't realise there was two coming to the table.

Mr BARNETT - Graham Woods on my right, Ian Dutton on my left.

CHAIR - Welcome Graham, and welcome Ian. Sorry, I didn't realise there were two coming. I was trying to spread the load across the table.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, Chair. I have asked the Minister some of these questions previously, so shouldn't be too painful at all. Can you provide please an indication on the feedback on the draft recreational sea fishing strategy 2021-2030. I have quite a few anglers in my electorate that are very interested.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can, and I can indicate to you that we've had a lot of feedback. I'll pass to Ian Dutton shortly to give you a bit of an update on the detail. Very positive feedback, we've had a lot of consultation, more than 12 months on the recreational sea fishing strategy. It's a 10 year strategy, it'll be a first for Australia. It acknowledges the fact that we have over 100 000 Tasmanians that love fishing. It's part of the Tasmanian way of life, and yes, I'm one of those.

CHAIR - I was going to say, and you too Minister. One of those.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. There's probably a few around the table. Few hands going up. It's part of the Tasmanian way of life, so we acknowledge that. We're backing it in, we're supporting it. Hence the 10 year recreational fishing strategy. Of course, on top of that we've got our \$2 million support for upgrades to pontoons, jetties, fishing devices, and any other initiatives to support and encourage fishing, and particularly making it more available for women, young people, and children. So, that's all part of the strategy, and we've got a draft strategy that's been out for some time. We're in the final stages of working out the final version of the recreational fishing strategy. Mr Ian Dutton can provide more information if that's possible.

Ms ARMITAGE - That'd be good. If you could also point out what issues have been raised, perhaps, by the recreational fishers?

Mr DUTTON - Thank you. I was very delighted with the process we've undertaken over the last 18 months of the rec fishing strategy. We've had four effective rounds of public consultation beginning with an expert consultation, moving through a public survey. We have 3200 responses to the survey that was online, a terrific response relative to the population involved. Then subsequently when we released the draft plan earlier this year, we had about 120 public submissions on that, plus some organisational submissions from big bodies like TARFish.

We then had a series of meetings around the state, and in fact earlier we'd had a series of dialogues also in 26 regional centres around Tasmania. We brought those together this time to four regional centres, Burnie, Launceston, Hobart, and St Helens, and they were very well attended. I attended the Hobart meeting, there were about 70 people there at that forum, it was a very lively and frank exchange, and we've not synthesized that input. Obviously, there's a diversity of views but a very broad range of issues was consistently raised with us. Particularly three things I'd highlight. One was the importance of recognising recreational fishing. The strategy had its origins and the concern by the recreational fishing community that they were somehow not as valued as commercial fishing was. This strategy recognises the importance of recreational fishing in Tasmania, with something like one in every five Tasmanians participating, with many folks licenced now to participate in those fisheries.

Secondly, another key issue was to do with access, promoting better access, particularly for shore-based access. That's very much a centrepiece of the government's commitment in the most recent election. We have now launched the Better Fishing Grants program already, a small grants program, up to \$100 000 to fishing clubs and others to promote that. There will be a larger round coming forward shortly. Then, finally, promoting greater participation in fishing by a more diverse group of folks, particularly women in fishing. There were a number of barriers there, and so we've actually targeted that as a specific strategy in the actual overall

strategy. So, a series of key things have come out of the process, and we expect that to be finalised and put forward to the minister in the coming weeks.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. On to a slightly different area, but still to do with, obviously, the strategy. Is there any evidence to suggest that the numbers for the King George whiting are increasing? That's something that has been raised with me considerably by members of the community that like to fish, and have concerns about the King George whiting, and feel that they are increasing. Do you have any evidence to suggest the numbers are increasing?

Mr BARNETT - Do you mean the fishing numbers, or the number –

Ms ARMITAGE - The actual number of the fish. Because I believe that there weren't too many, and the numbers were – that you were able to catch less.

CHAIR - You might like to ring Nick Crawford.

Ms ARMITAGE - The bag numbers, I think you call them.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I caught up with Nick Crawford just a few weeks ago in St Helens. He has always provided very helpful advice when it comes to fishing, but I'll pass to Ian Dutton in terms of the specifics of that question.

CHAIR - Do you know where the honourable member can let her constituents know where they can catch them?

Ms ARMITAGE - They already know where they can catch them.

Mr DUTTON - King George whiting are becoming more common. But there's a number of issues around King George whiting. The bag limits were reduced from 30 to five in 2016, and the main focus there was on the sand whiting, which is a smaller, more prolific species that's able to withstand greater fishing pressure than King George whiting. But they've expanded - the King George overall has expanded in Tasmanian waters due to increasing water temperatures.

We're seeing a lot more range adjustments in species that were not once common in Tasmanian waters come into Tasmanian waters. It became necessary for the first time to implement individual bag limits for those species. All those settings, all those limits were informed by work undertaken by IMAS under our Sustainable Marine Resources Cooperative Agreement. They do a stock assessment for us. They provide advice, and what's a sustainable take. The settings were adjusted back in 2016 accordingly, based on that IMAS advice.

Ms ARMITAGE - At the moment the bag limit is five. Are we looking to increase the bag limit from five up to seven or 10?

Mr DUTTON - We are always monitoring those stock status changes with IMAS, and if there's an opportunity to increase those recreational bag limits we would certainly look at that opportunity, yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - At the moment, though, there's no plan?

Mr DUTTON - There's no plan currently.

Ms ARMITAGE - Currently there's no plan. What number of commercial fishers have endorsement to use nets to catch King George whiting?

Mr DUTTON - There's just under 40 endorsements currently in Tasmania in total. I would have to look specifically at the details, which of those are King George whiting permitted.

Ms ARMITAGE - Well, if you could take that on notice, that would be really good to actually know, how many they can catch.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, we can take that on notice.

Ms ARMITAGE - That would be good, thank you. Also, can you advise on feedback you've had regarding the Flathead for the Future strategy?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, the Flathead for the Future strategy is a key part of the draft plan. The feedback has been very positive, because it's backed in with some funding support; \$250 000. Now, that's part of the draft. We're looking at that very carefully. The feedback has been very positive. I mean, flathead is - you could call it the backbone of our recreational fishing, sea fishing sector, and it's acknowledged. In different parts of Tasmania, there's - the numbers go up and down, but that's why we want to have a recovery program for our flathead to do everything we can to ensure that there's an opportunity there for our recreational fishers. I'll just see if Ian or the Secretary would like to add to that.

Mr BAKER - I would ask Ian to talk to this, but the only point I would make from the department's point of view is, it is an absolute key priority for us. I mean, flathead is the backbone of the recreational fishing industry, and I think all of us who grew up fishing in Tasmania have caught flathead. Ian and I, and Deidre and the minister have been talking about what we can do to bolster those numbers, because for a lot of people, it is an entry-level fish, and the numbers have gone down, Ian, haven't they?

Mr DUTTON - It depends where.

Mr BAKER - In certain areas.

Mr WILLIE - Where are those areas?

Ms ARMITAGE - They're always down when I'm catching them.

Mr DUTTON - Through the minister, responding to that, sand flathead are particularly important for recreational fishing in Tasmania. About 1.6 million sand flathead are caught in Tasmania each year. The majority of those are released. We retain about 700 000, which, when you think about it, that's with 100 000 rec fishers, that's about seven flathead per rec fisher licence that we know of it. It's pretty important as a species as the minister and the Secretary indicated, and we've really come to appreciate that their status is quite variable.

Having grown up in Tasmania and fished in most of Tasmania's waters as a kid, coming back to Tasmania 30 years later and rediscovering what the status is like, it's been an interesting journey for me. I was down to the Tasman Peninsula recently, caught our bag limit in no time at all. Great fishing down there. I've heard reports from people saying it's been very variable the year before. They seem to come and go a little bit, but there's clearly a need for greater stewardship, which is very much emphasised in the rec fishing strategy.

We were delighted to receive this commitment of funding under the Flathead for the Future program. It will let us begin to really plan that stewardship approach that was so inherent in the success of the Tuna Champions program. The sand flathead program is modelled very much on the very successful Tuna Champions program that has been implemented by IMAS in other jurisdictions around Australia. It's really got the fishers involved in thinking about their own responsibility for that sustainability of stock.

It's something that we took for granted for far too long, and we're building that ethos of stewardship amongst the Tasmanian recreational fishing community now through programs like this, and it's particularly important for sand flathead. Like a lot of things, the waters of Tasmania are changing. The East Coast of Tasmania is one of the fastest changing areas of water in the world. It's about four times the rates of global warming, the oceans. We would expect to see ecosystem changes affecting the habitat and affect the fish. How do we adapt, how do we adjust to that will be a key part of the Flathead for the Future program?

In other jurisdictions, like Victoria, they've actually begun programs of breeding, a bit like my first colleagues at IFS do with trout. They've actually started to reintroduce ocean species back in from land-based hatcheries, which is another way of supplementing those stocks. We're going to be looking at those options and others. But it really is a key species. We are very much on it right now, and I'm delighted to have the support of the government to be able to start this program.

Mr BAKER - Through you, minister, I think it's also important to get a really good understanding, a base understanding of numbers, where they are, in order to build the best strategies. What we won't be doing - and I've discussed this at length - is jumping to a solution without understanding, getting a really good base understanding of the science. Once we've got that, we can build a strategy, and I think that's really important. That's the lessons learnt, but there's been successes and some failures in other jurisdictions.

CHAIR - The honourable member has one final question, and then we'll go down to Mr Willie.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. It is regarding bycatch. Are you encountering much resistance to measures like the installation of vessel monitoring system of Danish seine vessels, to monitor adverse commercial bycatch? Because I know bycatch can be quite an issue.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks for the question. I will pass to Ian Dutton, if that's all right.

Mr DUTTON - Thank you. And, yes -

Ms ARMITAGE - Whether it's intentional or non-intentional, the bycatch.

Mr DUTTON - Correct. We are, through the minister, looking at a range of options to VMS in Tasmania. We currently have one of the lowest uptake rates of VMS amongst our commercial fleet of any jurisdiction in Australia. There are only about 30 boats that currently have VMS installed on vessels. We've been consulting with the peak bodies - the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council, the Tasmanian Rock Lobster Fishermen's Association, and others about the expansion of VMS in those fisheries. We see a willingness to expand the application of those, particularly for the social licence that brings with it. It helps people understand the nature of the catch.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Willie.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. You talked a bit about the sustainability of scaled fish. I'm just interested in other species, like scallops, abalone, rock lobster.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, we can answer those questions as well, maybe one at a time. Thank you for that. But I think the key point that the Secretary mentioned, that I want to emphasise, is that these decisions are based on science. I have advisory councils as a minister for rec fishing, and also for crustaceans, and sea fishing more generally, there are different advisory councils. I wanted to say thank you to those advisory councils which are made up of really key thinking strategically placed stakeholders, and they provide good advice on that, and it's based on science.

I think Ian Dutton referred to IMAS earlier. There's a lot of research that goes on, and I just want to say it's really good, having IMAS based here in Hobart. They provide excellent advice. We also get advice obviously through the Department, and Graham can talk more about that as well if need be, but - and also CSIRO. I want to acknowledge CSIRO. Ian, I might pass to you. Mr Willie has asked a number of questions there, the different - rock lobster, abalone, and scallops. If you can kick it off.

Mr DUTTON - Thank you, minister. Through you, again, to the member; as the minister indicated, there's a very longstanding, terrific arrangement between the Department and the university. The Sustainable Marine Research Cooperative Agreement, that's been close to 20 years now in implementation, provides a framework for us to undertake all of our stock assessment work through IMAS. Every fishery that's of importance, and other fisheries that are emerging important fisheries are subject to a stock assessment, on a schedule that we determine, based on setting things like the total allowable commercial catch.

For example, the scallop one you mentioned, we just reopened the scallop fishing in Tasmania for the first time since 2015, based on advice from IMAS-based surveys. It's really quite a comprehensive process. It not only involves the scientists, but also then shares the results with industry, and then provides a recommendation to the minister, along with the science and the Department's recommendation. A really comprehensive, science-based approach that underpins all of our commercial fisheries and our recreational and indigenous fisheries as well.

Mr WILLIE - The scallops, it sounds like the overall health is improving. What about rock lobster and abalone?

Mr DUTTON - So each fishery is in a different point, as you may have seen. Abalone - I'll start with that, if I can - have gone through a significant reduction in total allowable

commercial catch over the last 20 years. We've gone from a peak of about 4000 tonnes 20 years ago to about just over 800 tonnes this year. Again, some very hard decisions have had to be made, in terms of producing that to a sustainable level, particularly on the East Coast. I'll highlight the East Coast, the challenge for abalone.

We've gone from a total catch in about 2006 of 1800 tonnes between the southernmost tip of Tasmania right up to Musselroe Bay, which is called the eastern zone, down to about 220 tonnes currently. If you actually take away the most productive part of that around the arctines, if you go from Cape Pillar to Musselroe Bay, we're down to less than 20 tonnes currently. So that's been a number of factors in there, but particularly the impact of climate change and ocean warming, and the introduction of the range extended pest species *Centrostephanus rodgersii* or the long-spined sea urchin, which has really impacted the habitat for abalone on the East Coast. I'll come back to that if you like in a bit more detail later.

With rock lobster, a similar strategy; we've had in place a longstanding program now to try and recover the virgin biomass, or the population of rock lobster in Tasmania, from a low - in parts of the East Coast, of around 8 per cent of virgin biomass to 20 per cent by 2023, and statewide, to 25 per cent statewide. We're on track at the statewide level. There are some challenges on the East Coast. But again, these are all really comprehensive science processes that are very much informed by leading experts. We've got some of the best scientists in the world around rock lobster and abalone, particularly here in Tasmania. We work very closely with them on that approach of recovery.

CHAIR - Thank you. Supplementary, Mr Valentine?

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, thank you very much for that. There's something - a motion that's going to be coming before the Legislative Council, actually in relation to abalone. The concern obviously being expressed by the recreational abalone fishers that their take is going to be severely reduced, while the commercial side takes the majority of the cake. You talk about working with industry, but are you also working with the recreational abalone sector? Because they are really concerned about this, about them not being basically pushed out of the scene when it comes to what they can take.

Mr BARNETT - Maybe if I kick it off, and then I'll pass to Ian, because Ian is all over this, and - let's be very clear. We had to make a very tough decision with respect to the abalone catch for the commercial sector. I cut that by 18 per cent, just for the coming season, to 833 tonnes. They have received a significant cut.

Mr VALENTINE - The commercials?

Mr BARNETT - The commercials. I just put it on the record: They have received a significant cut, the commercials, and that has an impact on their business, on the processing, on the jobs, and the flow-on effect. But it's a decision made based on science, based on evidence, based on advice through Ian and IMAS and the university and others. We've got really good people looking at this very carefully, you know, year in, year out. In terms of recreational limits, obviously - I will pass to Ian on that, but the east coast of Tasmania obviously is where there's significant pressure.

We have what's called the Abalone Reinvestment Fund, which is a \$5 million fund, which the Government supports. It's based on the contribution through - it's over a five-year period

and it supports the abalone fishery. When I say that, it supports not just the commercial, it supports the recreational fishing. For example, *Centrostephanus*. This is something climate change - they've come down from Victoria and New South Wales - this is the long-spined sea urchin - and, sadly, it had adversely impacted up to 15 per cent of our marine life on the east coast.

Mr VALENTINE - We're hoping lobster will help out with that, though, aren't we?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's part of the solution.

Mr VALENTINE - Sort of the synergy between bringing larger lobsters across to the east coast.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. It's part of the solution. But we built a mechanism that encourages the divers to actually take out the *Centrostephanus*. In the 2018-19 year, we got 1000 tons. Then the 2020-21 year we got the second highest record, with 450 tons. I've been down to the processing factory, where they crush the shells, take out the roe and then they send it off to Asia, into the Asian market.

Mr VALENTINE - So it is being processed.

Mr BARNETT - So it is being processed. That's fantastic. And now we're trying to create a sustainable processing business out of the *Centrostephanus*. So it's a -

Mr VALENTINE - There was one in St Helens.

CHAIR - Yes, we already had one.

Mr BARNETT - It's a clever strategy.

Mr VALENTINE - There was one in St Helens.

CHAIR - Goshen.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Yes. Well, that's right.

CHAIR - Wasn't sustainable.

Mr BARNETT - No. Well, we want to ensure that they are sustainable. So that's what we are trying to do. But I might just pass to Ian, because you've got some more information on abalone and, particularly, on the recreational side.

CHAIR - Can we make it fairly brief? Or we're going to be another hour behind, like we were yesterday. Thank you.

Mr DUTTON - I appreciate that, Chair. Through you, minister.

Mr VALENTINE - Same culprit.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr DUTTON - Just on the recreational bag limits and the decision made to reduce those on the east coast only from 10 to five, that was a decision made on balance around the state. Where is the need to really apply that limit? We were finding that it was a very high level of recreational pressure on those inshore abalone. Unlike other species, this is the important difference biologically. It all starts with the stock. I point out that abalone are localised spawners; they don't distribute very far. So when you take out an abalone population which is very accessible, in a place like Coles Bay, it doesn't come back in a hurry. So you've really got to be very careful about that bag limit.

We've provided the opportunity, which - we're hearing back from recreational fishers that five is a reasonable limit. And when you think about it, five abalone is a pretty good sized feed for most families. Ten was a lot. We're the only jurisdiction in Australia that was still allowing people to take 10 abalone. This was a cut made on balance. So far, we think we've got it right, because people - if they really want to go and get a large feed of abalone, they can still go west; it's still a 10 limit out there.

Mr VALENTINE - And lobster?

Mr DUTTON - Lobster? Again, we have a resource-sharing policy currently, based on allocating 79 per cent of the east coast to commercial catch and 21 per cent to recreational catch. We are actually, to be honest, quite challenged by that, because it's very hard to maintain the rec fishing catch within that limit. We don't account for the recreational fishing catch to the same extent as we do - every lobster that's caught commercially, there's a counter for it on a docket that's legally enforceable. We only have estimates of the recreational catch. We're currently working on - one of the innovations we've got underway currently is an app to enable us to better catch, better track the recreational catch on the east coast.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you.

CHAIR - You'll have to get up early to do that, I'll tell you.

Mr VALENTINE - Well, they get up early to pull their pots.

CHAIR - They do. Yes. Thank you. Ms Siejka, last question in this area.

Ms SIEJKA - Chair, I think the answer to this question will be not dissimilar to the one I asked previously, which was about the forward Estimates.

Mr BARNETT - Right.

Ms SIEJKA - The Budget for marine resources dropping off in those outward years. Yes. If you could talk to that, because it - yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I think the -

Ms SIEJKA - Current level of investment's not there.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. No, the answer is the same. We'll consider those priorities as the Budget allows in future years, but I'll pass to the secretary to expand.

Mr BAKER - I think this is - through you, minister. I think you have answered the question. It's, once again, a matter of working out what the impact of COVID-19 is, being more agile than we have in the past, but it is the department - and my expectation, and I'm sure the minister's expectation, that the new initiatives will be funded out into the out years.

Ms SIEJKA - So just to clarify, yesterday heard from another minister - and I think you were at the table as well - about the Premier, sort of, having a pool of funds in which to draw on.

Mr BAKER - Yes.

Ms SIEJKA - So that's the same scenario that would occur -

Mr BAKER - Yes.

Ms SIEJKA - Is that that's a sort of sitting and waiting -

Mr BAKER - Yes. That's the COVID-19 -

Ms SIEJKA - Yes.

Mr BAKER - - fund that the Premier's allocated.

CHAIR - I think the money's been spent already, just in the first day.

Mr BAKER - Well, certainly, a good amount of it has, but that's what it was for - to be used -

Ms SIEJKA - All right.

Mr BAKER - - as and when required for those purposes.

Ms SIEJKA - You're expecting that investment will be at the same level, once you've pulled on that?

Mr BAKER - I think we can - just to clarify - where there are COVID-19 specific requirements - for your benefit, minister, yesterday we were talking about, obviously, Parks, something close to your heart, and the Parks revenue stream, and that is clearly a COVID-19 related cost. Then the expectation is we would draw on that COVID-19 fund. I wouldn't want to leave you with a perception that the only funds available to draw on are the COVID-19 funds. If it is just a general budget allocation - there's been plenty of conversations between myself, the secretary of Treasury and the minister and the Premier Treasurer about the need for funding across to DPIWE once we get a better understanding of how COVID-19 is going to wash through.

Ms WILSON - That'll be determined through the Budget.

Mr BAKER - It will go through the standard budget process. Thank you, Deidre.

CHAIR - I can see a lot of RAFs coming up.

Mr BAKER - Yes. I think we did set the record for the most RAFs -

Ms SIEJKA - Thank you.

Mr BAKER - - in a cross-government last year.

CHAIR - Yes. Thank you. We'll move now to 2.3 Supervision of Poppy and Hemp Crops. Couple of questions I have in regard to this area. Licensing is now up to a five-year period. So what impact does that have on the supervision of poppy and hemp crops?

Mr BARNETT - Can I just indicate we'll probably need Jo Crisp.

CHAIR - We'll do a change.

Mr BARNETT - Jo Crisp. So if Jo could come back again.

CHAIR - Thank you, Ian.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Ian and Graeme. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Ms WILSON - But in the interests of time -

Mr VALENTINE - We wore him out.

Ms WILSON - - for you, minister, I could answer that.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I wonder, in the interested of time, Chair -

CHAIR - All right.

Mr BARNETT - We're trying to be agile. Chair, we're being very agile -

CHAIR - Sorry.

Mr BARNETT - The deputy secretary can probably help answer that question -

CHAIR - Right.

Mr BARNETT - - if we could pass them to - in the interests of time.

CHAIR - Okay. All right.

Mr BARNETT - Could I pass to Deidre Wilson?

CHAIR - All right. Well, somebody needs to get the order of these output groups sorted, and it's not this committee - it's your department, minister, if it's going to be simpler.

Mr BARNETT - Well, we're ready to answer the question.

CHAIR - Yes. So thank you.

Mr BARNETT - We're all set to go.

CHAIR - Five-year licensing.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Deidre Wilson.

Ms WILSON - Through you, Chair. The question was whether five-year impacts on compliance?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WILSON - It doesn't impact on compliance activities, because the activities relate to the conditions on the licence. Whether that licence is one year or five years, you know, the conditions are still enforceable. So yes. So unless you had a particular concern -

CHAIR - But it's obviously - if you've got a five-year licence compared to a one-year licence, then you've got less work to do. So I'm just interested in how that's going to affect that supervision. Does that mean that there's less work to do, if you've got a five-year licence rather than a one-year licence?

Ms WILSON - Well, in administrative terms, we've got less work, but in terms of our field offices and what they do in terms of compliance, the activities are the same, whether you've got a one-year or five-year licence.

CHAIR - Five-year licence. Yes. No, that -

Ms WILSON - Yes.

CHAIR - That was my question.

Ms WILSON - Yes. No, a fair point.

CHAIR - My second question is what education is being considered if any for visitors to the state who like to hop over the fence and get themselves a photo opportunity and take a souvenir poppy while they're doing it. I don't know if they can't read the signage or they just don't understand that it's not just a pretty flower.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

CHAIR - Has the minister has put his mind to that particular issue.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. The department has the Poppy Control Advisory Board chaired by Mike Stevens, who you might recall. So that's very much at the forefront of our minds. I meet regularly with Keith Rice - or from time to time - a very active advocate for the poppy growers in Tasmania. But I will pass to Jo Crisp for more detail on that answer.

Ms CRISP - Thank you very much, Chair. Obviously, for the Poppy Advisory Control Board, security matters are of optimum concern. Any interference, obviously, is particularly concerning. The PACB works closely with the Poppy Industry Public Safety and Education Committee, which is PIPSEC, on public awareness campaigns around safety and to address the public health risks of ingesting poppies. PIPSEC has representatives from all three poppy processes, Poppy Growers Tasmania and the Drug Education Network. We don't have any clear evidence that tourists are, in fact -

CHAIR - I've got some.

Ms CRISP - All right. Yes. Obviously, we have to balance communication need with the need to also ensure that we're not creating the risk of copycat interferences. So those sorts of things are balanced very carefully.

CHAIR - Right.

Mr BARNETT - PIPSEC also has the Drug Education Network represented on that body.

CHAIR - Yes. It's possibly not local, so much. It's obviously others that might be visiting the state, albeit that we don't have as many of those, at this point in time.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

CHAIR - But that's my advice, minister, around just that photo opportunity and a souvenir opportunity.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Well, I would emphasise -

CHAIR - More signage?

Mr BARNETT - - What Jo Crisp said - is that security is really important to the poppy growers and the poppy - and the Government. So we need to do what needs to be done, to ensure that people are aware, and that - yes, there's signage, as you know, on fences and gates and so on, and there is surveillance, but poppy companies - as you would know, they have representatives in the field, and they continue to move around. We obviously have Tasmania Police, who are also aware of the importance of supervision and security.

CHAIR - Not a lot of police patrol rural roads if you, you know - they don't particularly.

Mr BARNETT - Well, we've got more police now than in the past.

CHAIR - I know. Fifty more.

Mr BARNETT - There'll be more -

CHAIR - Fifty more.

Mr BARNETT - In the future too. So that's encouraging, particularly in our rural and regional areas.

CHAIR - All right. Thank you, minister. I'll continue to hopefully do my bit to educate those visiting our state.

Ms SIEJKA - Mine's really a supplementary, and it's about security and compliance breaches in the sector. If you could give us an update on whether there have been any and what's happening to manage that.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can. And I'll -

Ms SIEJKA - As opposed to just let through -

Mr BARNETT - Yes. No, no. That's fair enough. It's a good question. This is an ongoing challenge for not just the Government but the state. Security is important. Every year there is non-compliance, and we need to keep that as low as possible. There are poppy thefts. Is that poppy thefts in particular you're interested in or -

Ms SIEJKA - Yes. But just generally, I'd imagine. Whether or not it's thefts or people -

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Well, look, the interference -

Ms SIEJKA - Security breaches in general.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, security breaches. So I'll just see if - I've got some details here, so I'll just summarise what I've got here - and that is that poppy interferences are a cause for concern; they're taken seriously. Around 5200 poppy heads were reported stolen during the 2020-21 season, in 17 separate incidents. Yes, that's a concern.

Mr BAKER - What we can do - through you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - I wonder if -

Mr BAKER - You can take -

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass that on to the secretary.

CHAIR - Well, we did actually have that yesterday.

Mr BAKER - We can take -

Mr VALENTINE - We had poppy security -

Ms SIEJKA - It's best to put also to the relevant -

Mr BAKER - Yes, we can take that on notice.

Ms SIEJKA - The other related aspect to that is I wanted to know about was are there any compliance issues in the sector and whether or not any, in particular, that you were needing to deal with or issues that were emerging?

Mr BARNETT - Well, we take it very seriously as a government, and that's why we have a Poppy Control Advisory Board. They take it very seriously. Poppy Growers Tasmania take it very seriously. We have the education and awareness stakeholder group that Jo Crisp just referred to. There are field offices as well that represent the board. So they're proactively patrolling poppy crops and conducting inspections, ensuring the growers are meeting their obligations to provide secure growing areas.

Ms SIEJKA - Has there been any compliance issues that you've aware of or is that system working?

Mr BARNETT - Well, as I say, there are some thefts from time to time, which is obviously a concern, and that's a breach of our rules and regulations. So that needs to be taken into account and those people dealt with. I might pass to Jo Crisp to add to that answer.

Ms CRISP - Thank you very much Chair, and through you, minister, obviously we take our obligations very seriously, so we work closely with the Australian government to fill Australia's obligations under the international drug conventions, including the United Nations single convention on narcotics drugs, and that's why overseeing security matters for Tasmanian crops is so much of a priority. We have our PACB field officers who patrol the crops, and as you can imagine as we're getting to the season, they patrol the crops very carefully and undertake regular inspections. That's how we see when there are interferences, those interference numbers our minister has reported and so 5245 capsules were stolen last financial year, and of those eight were recovered, eight recovered in 17 different interferences. Now as we know once an interference is detected it's reported to the Tasmanian police who investigate that matter, and they manage any criminal activity in regard to that matter.

Ms SIEJKA - Thank you, we did hear some information from that side of things the other day.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, so are you happy for us to take your first question on notice, we can give you more information if you'd like. We'll do that, Chair. We'll send that to you.

CHAIR - That'll be fine, thank you very much. I'll move now to 3.1 Resource Management and Conservation, and we're going to keep these questions tight and answers tight, thank you minister, Mr Valentine.

3.1 Resource Management and Conservation

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you, had a little bit of guidance there. Last budget papers showed a gradual reduction in appropriation as the land care action fund was winding down, but this year -

Mr BARNETT - Sorry, just apologies, can you just repeat that question?

Mr VALENTINE - Last budget papers showed a gradual reduction in appropriation as the land care action fund was winding down, but this year it's going back up. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22. There are amounts like \$591 000, \$624 000, \$209 000, \$164 000, across the Estimates, all increases year on year. What's happening there, can you shed any light on that? There's no note to guide the way.

Mr BARNETT - I thank you for the question.

CHAIR - And we have two new people at the table as well, minister.

Mr BARNETT - That's right, and I'd like to welcome to them, Louise Wilson, welcome Louise, Deputy Secretary Corporate Heritage and Lands, and Dr Martin Reed, acting General Manager, Natural and Cultural Heritage.

CHAIR - Welcome to you both.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I think the answer to the question is our election commitments, so 2018-19 we announced a \$1.8 million investment in land care action grants, that program was established to provide state funding over the forward estimates. Then during the recent election the government announced an additional \$900 000 to extend the program for a further three years to expand the program to include carbon farming initiatives. During the election I'm pleased to advise that we announced \$250 000 for the carbon farming advice rebate pilot program, and carbon farming opportunities can be complex to consider, and the delivery of both programs has been designed to assist landowners access information, support, and assistance to enter the carbon credit market through the Australian government emissions reduction fund. My counterpart, Angus Tylor, Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, under his department there is an opportunity through the emissions reduction fund to gain access to some of that funding for some of the carbon farming and other emission reduction initiatives. We're wanting farmers to be aware of that, and to recognise it, and be available to access that through this pilot program fund of \$250 000.

Mr VALENTINE - Okay, thank you. What other conservation acts has the department been undertaking other than moving the lobsters to the east coast, what other conservation actions are being undertaken in regard to resources. I appreciate there's a bit of a fine line here between conservation per say, but this is about conservation of resources, correct?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, sure.

Mr VALENTINE - Because I did have someone approach me -

Mr BARNETT - No, we can answer that. It's a good question actually, and there's a lot that we're doing in that space. First of all I've mentioned the land care action grants, which are very important through the TFJ and through land care Tasmania, they do a great job, both entities, getting it out into those rural and regional areas. Another commitment that we gave during the election was to support our resource management organisation, so NRM, southern resource management, and cradle coast resource management, and we've provided ongoing funding over the forward estimates for those organisations. Now they do a lot of conservation measures in terms of land management and also our flora, our fauna, and ensuring that our farm and agricultural land is more productive. There's work in our rivers, in our waterways, obviously -

Mr VALENTINE - Cows out of creeks?

Mr BARNETT - Cows out of creeks, well that's another initiative, so that's supporting dairy Tasmania, and we have a cows out of creeks program, so several hundred thousand dollars.

Mr VALENTINE - it was 200 last year, but what is it this year?

Mr BARNETT - I think it's in that range but let me just check if we've got that. I know Ms Wilson would have that answer on her fingertips, but she's not here at the moment, but we will check that for you in terms of cows out of creeks, so just hold that and we will get it to you very shortly. I'll just see if Louise Wilson might want to add to my answer in terms of land care Tasmania, NRMs and other conservation measures that the government supports and undertakes. I'm thinking of course the support we provide to fish care, bush care, and the wonderful volunteers that do so much good work around Tasmania, and we try and support them in different ways as well, but Louise Wilson might want to add to that answer if at all possible.

CHAIR - Thanks Louise.

Ms WILSON - Thank you Chair, and through you, minister, in the natural and cultural heritage space, and in my division, we actually do a lot of monitoring and research that advises other decision makers and other conservation efforts. For example, we do extensive wildlife monitoring of animals, birds, as well as wombats and possums, kangaroos, et cetera.

CHAIR - What about wild fallow deer?

Mr BARNETT - We monitor them as well, very carefully.

Ms WILSON - We also support the penguin advisory.

Mr VALENTINE - Sorry, I'm just talking about the resource related ones, conservation of resources, not conservation per say. Do you understand what I'm saying, so you know lobster's a resource, abalone's a resource, you could arguably say now the spiny sea urchin is a resource. So are there many other conservation programs happening that are based on resources.

Mr BAKER - I guess building off what Mr Dutton said earlier, through you, minister, what's really important to understand is we take a species-by-species approach. We're doing, and Ms Wilson's right, we're doing significant monitoring across those species, particularly species that are a resource, and then based on the advice we get we're putting in place appropriate management plans for each of those resources, whether that be abalone, crayfish, salmon, other wild caught fish, the approach in the agency is to use science-based evidence, and then put in place appropriate management plans. That does require, as the minister has indicated, from time to time making difficult decisions, particularly trading off between the recreational fishers and those professional fishers, but you know, we could literally talk for the rest of the day about each of those species and the work that we do.

Mr VALENTINE - It's okay. It's just that I understand the fine line in this item, so just my last question if I might, Madam Chair. The land care action grants are being rolled out through the TFGA now, how did this come about, I'm just interested to know, and what the total land care funding is, and how's that funding being acquitted, presumably not by land care?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can answer that question, thank you for the question, I will answer your earlier question in terms of cows out of creeks and the election campaign, \$100 000 via Dairy Tasmania, that's on the back of the previous cows out of creeks several hundred-thousand-dollar commitments, so that's still ongoing which is an excellent program, it's great working shoulder to shoulder with Dairy Tasmania.

CHAIR - That's only about 100 cows, you know, the cost of a cow.

Mr BARNETT - Well, every little bit helps to protect our waterways, our rivers, and the dairy sector is really focused on ensuring a sustainable dairy sector going forward, and to protect our waterways, they are very much at the forefront of that. It's not just funding, it's a culture, it's an education, it's initiative as you say, Madam Chair, to get the job done. To ensure that we have sustainability through everything we do, which is exactly to the point, and I'll pass to the secretary and Louise Wilson. We're funding both land care Tasmania and the TFGA, ever since I was in the senate, I've always been a big supporter of land care Tasmania and what they do, and I'm very grateful for the opportunity to continue to provide that support, and they do a great job, and TFGA likewise do a great job. That's why we're backing in the land care program, but I'll pass through to the secretary and or Louise.

Mr BAKER - Yes, so through you minister, I guess this is an example, Mr Valentine, about the advice provided to government from the department was that in groups like land care and the TFGA, are by their very nature better connected to farmers on the ground, and to what's going on on the ground. It's in no way a disrespectful comment about my department or our department, but our belief is that not for every grant scheme, or not for everything we do, but these community-based organisations often have their finger on the pulse in a way that we can't. We take it on a case by case basis, but in this case we believe, and the advice we provided government was that the TFGA and land care were better placed to help push that grant money out than a group of, quite frankly, bureaucrats in Hobart and Launceston.

Mr VALENTINE - So they don't come into conflict at any point?

Mr BAKER - Well those kinds of conflicts are always managed, and those conflicts exist in our department, but at the end of the day we form the strong view that the TFGA and land care were the best organisations in Tasmania to provide those grants.

Mr BARNETT - Can I add one thing that might support where you're coming from Mr Valentine? The government in 2018, doubled the funding for land care Tasmania, so it was some \$960 000 over four years. We've recognised them as a really important organisation, they've got many hundreds of land care volunteer groups in all parts of Tasmania on the ground. I'm so pleased and proud that there would be a land care group near you, so go out, talk to them, meet with them, work with them, and say thank you for your service, clearly, they are - all the funding we provide, and support is just to help them do what they're already doing, and it really gives them the capacity and a boost. In terms of that investment of that I can assure you it's many, many times that in terms of the benefits for our natural environment in agriculture and protecting our natural environment and our flora and our fauna.

Mr VALENTINE - Is cultural burning happening through that program, or is that on a separate one?

Mr BARNETT - I think that's a separate one, yes.

Mr VALENTINE - Okay, thank you.

CHAIR - We are approximately seven-line items behind time, so the honourable member for Elwick, Mr Willie, for water resource management 4.1. Do we need a change at the table? Thank you, Mr Willie, fire away.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you Chair, minister, it concerns TasWater, but you might be able to make a comment on it. What's been implemented to protect our world class oyster farmers from the ongoing TasWater spills that occur, and the shutdown for example of the operators in Woodbridge and Pittwater.

Mr BARNETT - All right thank you, of course this is a question for TasWater but let me come back to that and I'll do my best to answer, but at the table we've got the deputy secretary Deidre Wilson and Bryan Graham.

Mr GRAHAM - Bryce Graham.

Mr BARNETT - Bryce, apologies Bryce, so manager of water assessment, and of course Jo Crisp is still here.

CHAIR - Just a rotation.

Mr BARNETT - That's it. So TasWater of course I'm not the minister, I am the minister for water but not for TasWater, that's minister Ferguson, and of course they are a separate entity owned by local government, but let me see if I can -

CHAIR - If they're getting into the waterways if they're impacting on the waterways -

Mr BARNETT - Can you just repeat the question?

Mr WILLIE - What's being implemented to protect our oyster farmers, and there's been a couple of TasWater spills that have occurred in Woodbridge and Pittwater. You might not be the minister for TasWater, but you'd certainly have an interest in the oyster farmers' side and preserving those waterways for that produce.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, all right, and I'm certainly very interested in water and oysters, as the minister for both, and support them wholeheartedly. Oysters Tasmania - a shout out to Sue Gray who's just finished up as the executive officer. I thank her for her support, and to Ben Cameron, the president, who does a great job supporting Oysters Tasmania.

In protecting our shellfish and oysters, in particular, I'm pleased to advise that the National Water Grid, which is through the Australian government, has provided \$10 million towards infrastructure upgrades that will assist management of sewerage infrastructure in shellfish lease areas, and those two areas are as follows: \$5 million for shellfish lease water quality improvement program to upgrade sewerage pump stations close to shellfish lease areas. Second, \$5 million for an expansion of the Penna Recycled Water Scheme. This will contribute to mitigating sewerage impact in the Pittwater estuary. Clearly fantastic news for Tasmania and for the shellfish sector with that injection of funding support that will go towards TasWater undertaking those improvements and those upgrades. I thank the Australian government and

put on record my thanks to Michael McCormack, the former Deputy Prime Minister who I worked with us on this.

I wrote to the federal government recommending a number of these initiatives and I'm pleased to advise that four of those initiatives have been met with a \$5 million commitment, and those are the two initiatives that I've just referred to. I'll just check if the secretary or anybody else would like to add to that.

Mr BAKER - Through you, minister, a couple of points. The first one is that obviously we have ShellMAP, the regulatory body that helps in regulating the oyster industry and they, together with me and - in fact, the minister met with TasWater on a number of occasions to discuss this issue. I don't want to speak to TasWater, but what I would say is that TasWater acknowledged that they do have ageing infrastructure and they're working through those issues. We're doing everything we can to help, particularly around the monitoring, so that what we're able to do is either get better information about spills so that oysters can come out, can be harvested quicker.

So if they know, if they get some form of advanced warning they're able to do that, or help TasWater to prioritise what infrastructure needs to be upgraded to reduce these spills. But it is an ongoing issue and the announcement, the recent announcement is a very good next step in helping to resolve these issues.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you. If I could move on to another topic, minister. In the election, you made a promise to secure a further \$100 million in funding to supersize tranche 3 of the irrigation projects. What specifically do you expect this extra funding to deliver?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. To be very clear, the commitment that we gave in the election was \$50 million for agriculture, \$30 million for water, and \$23.7 million for irrigation projects specifically with respect to the five irrigation projects which are as follows: The Don, Wesley Vale, Sassafras, Northern Midlands, Fingal, and the Tamar. That's the short answer, but I can expand on that if you would like.

Mr WILLIE - If you want to expand on it, go for it.

Mr BARNETT - We have -

CHAIR - We don't need a full rundown of each of them.

Mr BARNETT - No, I'll try to keep it concise. I'm trying to fit with the committee's -

CHAIR - I'm trying to help here.

Mr BARNETT - objectives to support you. We had already secured \$100 million from the federal government prior to the last election for our water infrastructure projects going forward, which is a fantastic commitment by the federal government. Because water is liquid gold, because the farmers are responding so positively, and they're commitments to that water increase, for example, in the Northern Midlands; it tripled from 8000 megalitres to about 24 000 megalitres. That's fantastic. They want the water. They know it's good for agricultural productivity and they are delivering on that.

We, in our budget, thanks to Peter Gutwein, the Treasurer and Premier, agreed to put \$23.7 million to increase our funding commitment so that the farmers could get what they needed for their commitments. It's being supersized, and what a wonderful challenge to have for a government. So the formula is \$2 from the federal government, \$1 from the state government, \$1 from the landowner, altogether public private partnership, and delivering in gold, as in liquid gold, for our farmers, landowners, increased productivity, increased jobs in those rural and regional areas. You've seen it all around Tasmania. It's working for us. We've already got 15 irrigation schemes done and dusted and we've got another five on the drawing board with big plans after that as well.

Mr WILLIE - What happens to those five, minister, if you don't secure the additional funds from the federal government?

Mr BARNETT - They are all ongoing. In regard to the additional funding, there's a process that we have to go through, and this is where there was a misunderstanding I think from your federal colleague in Canberra and I think your state colleague last week in the state parliament. I'm happy to outline -

Mr WILLIE - I don't think it's a misunderstanding.

Mr BARNETT - I'm happy to outline the process, but you have to put in a business case to the federal government to gain that funding. We've put in the funding support in our budget but the business case still needs to go through to the federal government department, the Rural Water - National Water Grid Authority and it needs to be assessed and reviewed. We have every expectation that when that business case goes in, Tas Irrigation - they've done it before, they'll do it again. I met with them last week. They're all ready to go, but that takes to put that in. You get an assessment back and then the funding will flow. So the funding is there but you have to go through a process. They don't just pick it out of the air and say, here's the money. There is a process.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, your initial request got knocked back. Have you gone back to the authorities with the relevant information? The additional information?

Mr BARNETT - I'm being verballed now, so that's not the case. I wrote to the former deputy prime minister and minister responsible to give him a heads-up of our request for \$100 million to meet our supersizing thanks to the farmers request for more water. We've responded to that and we will now need to go through due process, which is the normal process to respond to the National Water Grid Authority, and we will do that in the usual way. If you want -

CHAIR - Have you had a response from that request for -

Mr BARNETT - Yes, of course. And it's ongoing. I'm more than happy for Deidre Wilson to comment on behalf of the department. But the bottom line is, we're going through due process. This is the way it always happens with irrigation projects. If opposition members around this table, or my shadow, would like a briefing on how these procedures work, or indeed Julie Collins, who has said very little about agriculture since she's been appointed, if she'd like a briefing, we can organise that. But to be making misleading claims in either the federal parliament or the state parliament, it's not appropriate and I caution further misleading claims in that regard.

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Mr WILLIE - It's not misleading claims. We're asking questions, which is what our job is on the committee.

Mr BARNETT - Happy to answer.

CHAIR - Any further questions, Mr Willie?

Mr WILLIE - No.

CHAIR - Thank you. I have a question. Normally we have in our performance information the number of dam applications that have been approved, but we don't seem to have it this year.

Mr BARNETT - The number of dam applications that have been approved -

CHAIR - I've got a turnaround time of how long it took, but it doesn't actually tell me how many have been applied for.

Mr BARNETT - Let's see if we can assist you, Chair.

CHAIR - If that's not readily available, I'm happy to take it on notice.

Mr BARNETT - We'll just check with the department on that, if that's okay? I'll check with the secretary or the deputy secretary. They're doing some searching.

Ms CRISP - Chair, through you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Jo Crisp.

Ms CRISP - During 2021, 99 dam permits were issued with a total capacity of 7034 megalitres.

CHAIR - Is there any reason why it's not in our budget papers this year?

Ms WILSON - I can probably answer this one.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, deputy secretary, Deidre Wilson.

Ms WILSON - Thank you, minister. I'd have to go back and check my records and my recollection. But my understanding is I believe we changed the performance measure to make it more around processing time, which we thought was a measure that was more readily controllable than people. We were reporting the number of dam applications, but we weren't able to control the number of dam applications that came in. That was a matter for individuals, et cetera. I believe a year or a couple of budgets ago we changed this performance measure to make it more meaningful in our operations with the agency. If you like, we can take that on notice and I can confirm my recollection, but we always do try to have this information available at these Estimates hearings if the question is asked.

CHAIR - Just useful information.

Ms WILSON - Yes.

CHAIR - It gives the reader some idea of how much on-farm water storage is being applied for given the red tape reduction process and the time frame turnaround that's been espoused by your Government.

Mr BARNETT - Chair, I take on board your observations for future budget Estimates. I really appreciate your interest, because you've made a good point, and the fact is I think the department's underselling themselves. If you don't mind me saying we've improved in terms of red tape reduction. Can I give you an example? As at 30 June 2021, the average time for processing Division 3 dam works permits approvals was 43 days, which is well below the statutory 84 days or 12 weeks. Additionally, it's noted that the average time for issuing of Division 4 dam work permits is well below the 2021 target of 14 days at nine days.

CHAIR - Nine days. All information in -

Mr BARNETT - They're doing well.

CHAIR - Absolutely. It's quite good information.

Mr BARNETT - It is.

CHAIR - But it didn't tell me how many applications there were.

Mr BARNETT - And we've noted your points. Thank you.

CHAIR - So 99 dams.

Mr BARNETT - Sorry, the secretary might wish to add.

Mr BAKER - Just to confirm, I've just had it confirmed that Deidre is correct. It was taken out.

CHAIR - So it will be back -

Mr BAKER - So we don't need to go away and find out. She was correct.

CHAIR - So it will be back -

Mr BAKER - She has a better memory than me, Chair.

CHAIR - It will be back in next year. That's what I'm considering; that it will be back in next year.

Ms WILSON - Maybe it's something we report in our annual report. I'll check.

Mr BARNETT - We'll consider that very carefully.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - As to whether it's in the annual report or - okay, thank you, Deidre.

CHAIR - We'll get biosecurity done and dusted and we'll be having a cup of tea. So the longer it takes to do biosecurity, the longer it will be before you have a cup of tea. So 6.1.

Output group 6
Biosecurity Tasmania

6.1 Biosecurity

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Siejka. Do we need a change at the table?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. A short change, but please go ahead. We're ready for action on biosecurity because there is a lot to be said and I'm very pleased and proud of what they've done, particularly during COVID-19.

CHAIR - We've already had the thanks, so thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms SIEJKA - Minister, how would you describe the current wellbeing of the biosecurity team, given the massive pressures they must have faced with COVID-19, and ongoing? How many full-time equivalents are in the department and how many are currently on some sort of leave, because I just can't imagine some of the stress, particularly in the beginning of the period that they would have faced in uncertainty.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you very much for the question. I would like to welcome to the table Rae Burrows, acting director of Biosecurity Tasmania. It's wonderful to have Rae here and to thank Rae again personally for her efforts with her team during this difficult time. I will pass initially to the Secretary to answer that question, and then perhaps to Rae Burrows.

Ms BURROWS - Thank you.

Mr BAKER - Through you, minister, the first thing I want to say is again a thank you to that team. As the secretary -

CHAIR - We've acknowledged the thank you's.

Mr BAKER - Thank you, Chair, but with a lot of those staff watching, I do think it is important as the secretary for me to pass on the thanks to that team, particularly given the tough 18 months to two years COVID-19 has put and the pressures that it's put on them. I'll ask Rae to speak about the how the team is going. Deidre and I are in constant contact with the team. We've made visits out to the airport to talk to the team, as has the minister. The general feedback I'm getting is that yes, there is a lot of pressure on the team, but they are handling that pressure well. I do think it's an opportunity for Ms Burrows to talk to that, so through you, minister, if that's okay.

Mr BARNETT - Pleasure.

Ms BURROWS - Through you, minister. Thank you for the question and thanks for your concern about our staff. It's very much appreciated. Like you, we are particularly concerned about the mental wellbeing, and physical wellbeing of course, but our mental wellbeing of our staff, particularly at the borders at this critical time. I will say right from the start that those staff are chosen very carefully, the recruitment process is very careful. They are trained. They are provided a great deal of training to make sure that they are able both to respond to the normal questions but also deal with the escalation if there happens to be a physical confrontation or mental confrontation of a passenger, which has happened.

They are also provided with standard operating procedures and work instructions which are changed almost daily, according to what changes - according to the directions. There's always a briefing before each arrival of either the ferry or the aircraft coming in. We try to, and we do, get them as ready as we possibly can.

Of course, they are faced with some issues. They particularly were confronted by verbal abuse when people were getting impatient about having to stand in queues, particularly at Hobart, which is such a small airport, as I'm sure you all know. The queues have been quite long in the past and as you are also aware the weather hasn't been particularly clement through this whole process either. So there have been people out there that have been standing in the cold, maybe not the rain but certainly in the cold, and when they get to our staff they're not on their best behaviour.

CHAIR - They're tired and cranky.

Ms BURROWS - They are tired and cranky, yes, and our staff are aware of that and as I say, they have been trained to deal with it. It is an ongoing issue. It's one that I'm particularly concerned about. During this whole process I provided them with a lot of support from our EAPs and also from the visits from our minister and our executive and myself. We've also had a virtual expo, mental wellbeing expo, during this time where people were encouraged to join a virtual wellbeing expo, where we had a range of topics, of presentations, of things like how to deal with stress and so forth. We have been very much aware of their mental wellbeing throughout this whole process.

Ms SIEJKA - Minister, part of my question was whether there had been any workers compensation claims or were any staff on workers comp or had to take some sort of leave. I imagine it would be stressful and it would be difficult most days. As you said, things are changing every day.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. It's really an operational question so I'll pass to either the secretary or Rae Burrows.

Mr BAKER - I'll have a go first, Rae, if that's all right.

Ms BURROWS - Sure.

Mr BAKER - According to our stats for 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, there were two mental health stress claims within Biosecurity Tasmania, but Biosecurity is a larger branch. So what I'd like to do with the committee's permission, unless Rae's got the answer, is just take it on notice to breakdown whether or not they were in the actual team who were at the work front.

Ms SIEJKA - Thank you. I guess where I'm heading is given all of this, it'd be difficult not to argue that perhaps biosecurity might need greater resources because this isn't going away. Minister, do you think there needs to be additional resources in this space?

Mr BARNETT - The answer is yes and we've delivered. In fact, we've delivered in the budget - at the election and then in the budget. The number of frontline operational staff has increased significantly, both pre-border, at the border and in Tasmania. We have delivered on the islands; Flinders Island, King Island as well, which I know the Chair's particularly interested in Flinders Island.

Ms SIEJKA - Is there scope or a process if that escalates again, with Delta for example?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I will pass to the secretary in a moment but we have been very cognisant of the challenges of COVID-19, particularly at the border and particularly at the airports, and specifically at Hobart Airport, Hence the funding support to upgrade the Hobart Airport to meet the increased demand of visiting passengers. We've definitely done a lot to support Biosecurity Tasmania to meet those increased demands and challenges. I'll pass to the secretary.

Mr BAKER - This is one area where the government has responded, to be blunt, and they have provided significant resource increases. It's about 150 additional staff at the border over and above the increases that the minister has talked about, which is the border biosecurity numbers have gone up through a range of other initiatives. Just at the border we've had 150 additional staff come in place. We have changed - over the past 12 months we've changed operating procedures at the border. Every time we've changed that, the Government has funded additional increases in staff at the border. I can say with absolute confidence to this committee that when Biosecurity Tasmania has asked for resources, it's been delivered in spades. There is absolutely no concern about the resourcing at the border. The Government has been very strong and the Premier directly to me, and to Rae, has been very strong that if we need more staff at the border, we can get more staff.

The other point that I would make and probably Rae might want to comment on this too is we have been working with the State Control Centre on better communication for passengers, a bit like what's been going on in the retail industry about 'be kind to the person at the counter'. We did a push about three or four months ago on that. We changed the collateral, we put up signs and we made it really clear that Biosecurity staff are just doing their job. I can also say the staff were very - from feedback directly to me were - positive about the Premier and the minister continuing to make comments about the great work that Biosecurity is doing.

I know the thank you and I don't want to keep repeating the thank you but it is really important that we get that out into the community, that these Biosecurity staff are doing an outstanding job. They're just doing their job. I have to say I came through the airport about three months ago and I was really encouraged to see people stopping and thanking the Biosecurity staff when they went through, and we're getting -

Ms SIEJKA - I do think it's that lead-up before they get to Biosecurity that's issue. Having flown numerous times with a toddler since COVID-19, it's that wait time which would add that pressure which is hard and you need enough people to make it faster.

Mr BAKER - Through you, minister. There is a trade-off going on here. I've heard the State Controller talk about this, about we want to make sure we're checking everyone and doing it right, but we also want to minimise the impact on travellers coming through. We will always prioritise getting it right at the border, quite frankly, over making it a little bit more uncomfortable for passengers who come through. The other point -

Ms SIEJKA - Certainly - yes.

Mr BAKER - Sorry, through you minister, sorry to talk over you, Ms Siejka, is that we are doing that work by having someone at the point when they leave the airport. We're the only jurisdiction in Australia doing that, and that's having some effect. Handing out pamphlets as people get on the plane in Melbourne and Sydney, telling them this is what you're going to expect when you get to the airport in Hobart is helping and -

Mr BARNETT - Or Launceston.

Mr BAKER - Or Launceston, yes, or on the *Spirit*. We're doing a lot of work on the *Spirit* too. We're doing our best but to reinforce that point, I can't be stronger as the secretary of this department that the Government has provided us with the resources we need at the border when we ask.

Ms SIEJKA - Certainly gives you enough time to consider whether you've got fruit in your bag while you're waiting.

CHAIR - Supplementary, Ms Armstrong, and then I'll come back to Ms Siejka.

Ms ARMITAGE - Armitage.

CHAIR - What did I say?

Ms ARMITAGE - Armstrong.

CHAIR - Apologies.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's all right. I would also like to thank very much the Biosecurity staff because they have helped many times when I've had phone calls for constituents, so absolutely excellent the staff and very helpful.

Ms BURROWS - Thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - Talking about the airport - and is not being parochial, member for Hobart. I think it's probably the size of the planes, having flown into both Launceston and Hobart. I notice a lot more irate passengers. I think it's the waiting, the standing, getting off a large plane and wanting to go to the toilet. I think one of the issues, and there's probably nothing you can actually do about it, it's probably from the other end realistically is that I'm told people are getting to your officers and they don't have all the information they're supposed to have.

I know I stood in a queue coming from WA a few weeks ago, and people were very angry. We had been 45 minutes in the queue at Hobart Airport. It was cold, it was evening,

they wanted to go to the toilet, some had little children. Nowhere to sit. Even a few simple things like that, and there were elderly people saying why isn't there somewhere for them to sit. So even something like that. The hard part was they were then getting argumentative with the staff and it was nothing the staff had done. It wasn't their fault. It was the passengers before them who hadn't had all the right information that held everybody up. I know when I got there it took 10 seconds to show your licence, show your right form, answer your questions and you're on your way. I am not sure what you can actually do about that from the other end.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I will let the secretary respond, but we have, unlike any other jurisdiction now, funding support at the departing end, the embarkation, whether it's Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, and secondly, there's definitely quite a bit of work that's been done at Hobart. I'll pass to the secretary.

Mr BAKER - I know that Ms Burrows has been working closely with the airports too. I guess the first point I would make, Ms Armitage, is that the reality is both airports were not set up for this. I don't think any of the airports could have predicted where we would be now 18 months ago or two years ago, to be honest. The airports working with Biosecurity and Ms Burrows, who is the department's key contact in the airports, are looking at different strategies, particularly in Hobart, about how we could make that work, what changes we could make.

We've taken on a lot of feedback. Originally, we didn't even have - and you'd have seen the marque when you come in, so you were sort of very exposed. We're putting up further signage but again, we are erring on the side of protection over inconvenience. I want to be very honest about that. It is much better that we check every person, we go through the process, and if that means the wait is going to be 45 minutes instead of 15 or 20 minutes, we ask all Tasmanians and travellers coming into the state to accept that what's most important is getting the checks right, Ms Burrows, isn't it?

Ms ARMITAGE - Maybe a few chairs or something, particularly at Hobart Airport -

Mr BAKER - I'm happy to take that feedback onboard.

Ms ARMITAGE - For the elderly people there, and of course they had more than one plane. They were saying that often they have more than one plane. I acknowledge that in Launceston we had probably a five-minute wait. Of course, the planes aren't as big and they don't hold as many people so I do accept that.

Mr BAKER - Launceston has the downstairs which works well, which we don't have in Hobart.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Can we make the point that we are representing Biosecurity Tasmania. I had raised this with the Hobart International Airport Corporation CEO, and clearly that's the entity that obviously the questioning should be going to -

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, I realise that.

Mr BARNETT - But we're responding to the best of our ability as Biosecurity Tasmania. I will pass to Rae Burrows who might want to add -

Ms ARMITAGE - Your people were absolutely brilliant, I have to say.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you very much.

Ms BURROWS - Thank you very much for that. I'll just point out that right from the beginning, in March 2020, we actually met with the Hobart Airport and all the airports, as well as the Department of Communities, police and so forth, and at the ferry as well. We spent a lot of time designing the areas that were available to us to try to ameliorate -

Ms ARMITAGE - You can only work with what's there.

Ms BURROWS - Correct. It's an ongoing matter, as you probably are aware.

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Ms BURROWS - We're currently considering another option for the Hobart Airport because the physical size of that existing arrivals area is just so small. We're currently looking at maybe opening Gate 6 periodically when there's a surge. As you mentioned, there are a number of planes that will come in at the same time. Perhaps setting up a marque at that area, at Gate 6 so that people can have more room to sit down and so forth. Coming in, the current arrivals area there's just no room, as you know, if we're going to reflect social distancing as well.

Talking on the other side of things, to try to make things much smoother coming through, we have been working hard to ensure that there are signs as well as our contractors at the departure airports, to make people very clear that when they come into Tasmania they must have a valid QR code. If they don't they will now be directed down a certain pathway in Hobart Airport, right now I think it is happening, so that those people who are holding up the queue will be directed to a different area. It doesn't solve the sitting down problem though.

Ms ARMITAGE - But it helps. It's a bit like when you get on the boat then, that if you don't have a valid pass you won't get on the boat. So, will it be a bit like that at the airport? The one thing I've noticed in Victoria, there's no one there - well, last time I flew there's no one there that meets you there which is a bit scary.

Mr BARNETT - We are the leading jurisdiction in Australia when it comes to these measures and it's all because of the top priority of keeping Tasmanians safe and healthy.

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely. But I do reiterate your staff have been fabulous every time I've called them.

Mr BARNETT - That's our priority and that's why we're responding the way we are.

CHAIR - This question will affect how much time we have for morning tea, so thank you, Ms Siejka.

Ms SIEJKA - You're putting me in a difficult spot because I do like morning tea. Similarly, to earlier questions about the forward Estimates, I presume it's the same situation

here and it won't actually be the case in practice. So much of that goes to the new staffing that you talked about.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, yes. I think the secretary summed it up well and I did earlier before that as well. We will respond as and when the need requires, particularly when it comes to Biosecurity Tasmania and keeping Tasmanians safe. The Premier Peter Gutwein has made this a priority. There is a COVID-19 fund available that we can apply to directly, so it's obviously already in the Budget. If we need it we will make that presentation and submission. Obviously, we would work it through with Treasury and the Premier directly. We have not missed out as yet and we have not been knocked back.

Ms SIEJKA - Part of the ongoing thing is the 150 additional staff, are they on short-term contracts or permanent at this stage, or is that to be revised going forward?

Mr BARNETT - For 2021 there's 255. The previous year 2020 was 157. The year before that was 102. So that might have been your 150, but I will pass to Rae Burrows.

Ms BURROWS - Thank you, minister. Those staff that you mentioned, the COVID-19 border staff - and we have Biosecurity border staff as well, as you can appreciate, those staff were initially on a contract that was to finish in December 2021, because we thought that COVID-19 might be finished by then. We have recently extended them to 30 June 2022, because our best prediction at this stage is that we will need them at the border until that time.

Ms SIEJKA - Okay, I appreciate that.

CHAIR - Have any areas in Biosecurity had their attention taken away from their focus given what's been happening with COVID-19?

Mr BARNETT - No, we are very focused on everything else as well. Let me be very clear in terms of keeping out pests and diseases, our biosecurity legislation, the general biosecurity duty, I want to give that a bit of a plug, is now the responsibility for everyone under our law in Tasmania. So that's a big plus and that'll help not just the farmers but our natural environment tourism sector across the board.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. We shall suspend. We'll be back at 11.30 am to continue with Product Integrity.

The Committee suspended from 11.17 a.m.

The Committee recommenced at 11.31 a.m.

CHAIR - I'll ask that we recommence the broadcast, and just indicate to everyone who is here it is my intention to get to Veteran's Affairs by approximately 12.20pm. The rest of those output groups and line items that we have left in primary industries and water will need to be concluded by then. We will not be leaving until Inland Fisheries has their time to shine. Now 6.2 which is Product Integrity and I'll go down to the end of the table Ms Palmer, thank you.

6.2 Product integrity

Ms PALMER - Thank you. What is being done to maintain Tasmania's reputation for producing safe, high quality agricultural products and food for both the domestic and export markets?

Mr BARNETT - Well thank you very much for the question, Ms Palmer, and your interest in this matter. As a government we're passionate supporters of Tassie's businesses, families, agricultural communities and we want them to recover from COVID-19. We've come a long way and agriculture is a cornerstone of our economy and our society, particularly in those rural and regional areas where jobs are so important. We've got a \$10 million target farm gate value by 2050.

That's why the government is introducing and boosting the primary produce traceability systems to help uphold our reputation. So, the Tasmania brand, the Premier's very strong on it, I am, and I think our government highlights the importance of the Tassie brand to be pure, fresh, clean, natural, and thus our traceability funding boost for this program is underneath supporting that. It supports and it helps our farmers and our agricultural producers to stop counterfeiting, which underpins customer and consumer confidence in our agricultural products. It ensures integrity and safety in our farm produce, which of course is premium produce by and large.

In August I released a consultation paper on this matter for the development of a primary producer traceability strategy, so that basically means we know, from the paddock to the plate, our products come from. The traceability system is really important. It will be a five-year strategy we will be developing and is part of that consultation paper distributed out there. I certainly encourage those in agricultural business and those in our community to make comment on that, and it's consistent with the Tasmanian brand as I say.

Feedback from those stakeholders is greatly appreciated. We're investing \$360 000 to support industry to improve livestock traceability and enhance systems for primary produce traceability, the funding is there. To that end we're recruiting a senior policy officer and program officer to assist in the development of that traceability system. We're working closely with Biosecurity Tasmania. The positions are designed to assist with critical projects including the development of Tasmania's primary produce traceability strategy, the enhancement of livestock traceability to protect Tasmanian produce markets and the integrity of Tasmanian produce and the implementation of the requirements of the national traceability framework, to capture all primary produce including plants, plant products, and seafood.

I'm very grateful for the support of Biosecurity Tasmania to help make that happen, and it's certainly a worthwhile investment. It's in our budget and it will give us just confidence and it will help create more jobs in those regional areas across Tasmania. It is supported by the additional \$3 million which we've got in the budget for Biosecurity Tasmania to strengthen our borders and protect Tasmania from pests and disease. We are backing our productive industries, it's a good initiative, and I'm proud of that fact and I appreciate working with Biosecurity Tasmania, and our farmers, and our key stakeholders. It's a team Tasmania approach, and it's consistent with the Tasmania brand.

CHAIR - Ms Palmer.

Ms PALMER - Just continuing on with that, are you able to explain what is being done to ensure food produced in Tasmania's primary production and processing sectors is safe to eat?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, very good question. I think all Tasmanian consumers, and not just Tasmanians, whoever's visiting the state want to be assured that our food is safe to eat, and so that's why we do have a program in place to ensure that our primary production and the processing sector provides our food is safe to eat.

It's consistent with the Tasmanian brand reputation for producing safe, high quality, premium produce from our agricultural sector. We've got a strong food safety management system to protect Tasmania's ongoing access to both national and international markets. Sometimes you have tariff barriers, sometimes there's non-tariff barriers, whatever jurisdiction around the world, and we need to ensure that our food is safe, clean and it's at a high quality. We don't want any non-tariff trade barriers to try and stop Tasmanian exports entering those markets.

That's why this program is in place, it's to ensure that we have clean, fresh, and pure produce, and my department manages food safety issues in primary production and processing, and it maintains these arrangements with also local governments, so we got 29 local governments around Tasmania that are very relevant. Likewise, the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services and of course the federal government's Department of Health and Human Services are involved. We've got the supply chain and we want to make sure it's safe and clean right through that supply chain.

The department supports the control of food safety hazards in primary production phases in the supply chain and governs product safety and integrity across the market. What we are talking about is meat and poultry, eggs, seafood, all really important in terms of getting safety of that food product to the highest order possible. It's consistent with our primary produce safety legislation, or the act. With a booming agricultural sector, I think it's fair to describe it as that, at the moment that supports jobs and growth in the rural and regional communities and it really underpins our entire economy and our community. We are supporting agriculture again with a policy for a \$10 billion farm gate value by 2050. It's all part of the plan, and it's really important to ensure those measures are in place to protect and promote Tasmanian agriculture.

CHAIR - Thank you. Minister, are you aware of any breaches of product integrity? Have there been claims put forward that that product actually meets the standard that it's being identified as?

Mr BARNETT - Well, you mentioned the word meat, and you mentioned product integrity, so don't get me going when it comes to other products that sell themselves as meat, when in fact they are not meat, whether it be lamb or beef. We don't want to have any impersonation of meat products. You know this happened in milk, you know milk products come from cows, or goats, but they don't come from the supermarket shelf, and of course I learnt that at the Hagley Farm Primary School that eggs come from a chook.

CHAIR - The reason I asked that question was so that you could let us know again if you went to Hagley Farm Primary School.

Mr BARNETT - That's right, I'm happy to throw that in, but what's happened with regard to milk, whether it's almond milk or other milks, I mean, milk is milk, but that story has sort of come and gone. When it comes to other food products impersonating meat, I mean certainly as minister of agriculture I'd put a stop to that, I'd say that's not right, it's not fair, it's misleading and I think that's something that we need to stand up for and back our meat producers, whether it be lamb, beef, pork, chicken, obviously our seafood products, this is what Tasmania does really well, we don't produce fake food that's impersonating meat, it's not appropriate.

Output group 90
COVID-19 Response and Recovery
90.2 Seafood industry growth and recovery

CHAIR - Thank you. If there are no further questions, I'll move to 90.2 which is the Seafood Industry Growth and Recovery. I'll invite the member for Launceston, Ms Armitage.

Ms ARMITAGE - We might bring Ian back in, but we'll start.

Mr BARNETT - You can throw the questions and see how we go, but Ian Dutton will be joining us very shortly.

Ms ARMITAGE - Well let's start with the first one, because this will definitely be you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Okay.

Ms ARMITAGE - Can you please provide an overview on how the Tasmanian Seafood COVID-19 Roadmap to Recovery has progressed in the past 12 or so months?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can, and I thank you very much for the question because it's an excellent question, and it's progressed well under very difficult circumstances. COVID-19 has thrown up just about everything that you wouldn't want for an industry sector. We've worked very closely with the seafood industry team in Tasmania, we've had our round tables seafood coordination group, and we've worked very hard with them, and I just want to pay a tribute to the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council. We've worked closely with them and other fishing bodies, in the rock lobster industry and abalone industry and they've done it tough. It's been really difficult and we led Australia in rolling over that quota for our rock lobster industry for example in those first few weeks of COVID-19 when it kicked in. They were very grateful, we were the first jurisdiction to act, because we are proactive.

I remember working over the weekend getting feedback from the rock lobster industry, the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council, and talking to the Premier, and we acted swiftly. After working over the weekend and we made that decision to support our seafood sector, so we will do what's required to get the job done to support our industry, and thanks to the Treasurer and Premier for supporting the industry through this difficult time.

We've provided funding support during COVID-19, and there's a range of measures that we've put in place. As you know, I mentioned in my introductory remarks the China market effect on the seafood industry which has been hit hard especially abalone, rock lobster, products getting access to those markets.

CHAIR - The wine industry.

Mr BARNETT - Wine, yes, tariffs increased about 200 per cent.

Ms ARMITAGE - But we are on seafood.

Mr BARNETT - We are on seafood, but I'll just take the interjection from the Chair, I will take the interjection from the Chair because I wouldn't want anyone to think that the wine industry is doing it tough because of China. The fact is most of their exports go to the mainland Australia, and there is a very small percentage that go to China. There are exports to other parts of the world, and of course they've got double digit growth in terms of vineyards being grown, wines being grown, grapes being grown, it's a really good story, but they've done it tough as well because of COVID-19 impacting on the Melbourne and Sydney market access of getting their product to market, so let's make it clear they've got their challenges as well. We are working shoulder to shoulder with them and I meet with wine Tasmania on a regular basis.

CHAIR - Back to seafood, yes. One of the objectives was to support, as we know, the Tasmanian seafood community, to better future proof itself.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

CHAIR - Diversification of markets was listed as one of the ways in which this could be achieved, so what plans, or outcomes of the Tasmanian seafood market diversification have been made?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. It does flow over to my trade portfolio, and hence I just want to do a shout out for our high commissioner to Singapore, Will Hodgman, who I had contact with in the last few weeks, and he has definitely helped us open up a market into southeast Asia about \$700 million in total. Some of our seafood, for example, is now being able to go into that market rather than China - well it's still going to China, but it's just the challenges are there. I would like to pass to Ian Dutton, if that's okay, who's a bit of an expert in this space and does a great job for the seafood sector.

Mr DUTTON - Thank you, minister. I did actually have dark hair before COVID-19 began, it's been a pretty intense year and a half, I have to say, because the whole COVID-19 pandemic has kept changing, so our responses have had to keep changing. I want to just endorse what the minister said there in three respects, we've had an eye on the short term, say for example the rock lobster fishery, which is the hardest hit by COVID-19 in our export fisheries, which at one stage was engaging in some opportunities in the China market which are no longer available at all. In the process of that they've actually begun to establish a market in Vietnam, which is a proxy market, so that's become one of the short-term avenues for trade growth.

The second has been working with the seafood industry at large throughout the pandemic. We actually convened a seafood industry coordination recovery group every month during last year to meet with all the industries to hear about their ideas and from that we've developed a number of proposals. One of those specifically has just been rolled out, it's called the seafood processor grant scheme, which we've just put out there. We're asking seafood processors to look at new ways of making product available. So, as an example of that, one of the opportunities which has not been looked at by Tasmanian rock lobster producers has been

freezing lobsters. We discovered the huge demand last Christmas for them in the domestic market, so to take advantage of that, to give them a longer shelf life, you would appreciate the advantages of freezing the product. That's a big focus of that grant program.

The final thing I would point to, through the minister again, is an initiative we began with the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council called TOBI, the Tasmanian Ocean Business Incubator; exactly as per your point about long-term diversification. The country in the world that came out of the global financial crisis faster than any other country in Europe was Iceland. They did that on the back of three strategies: tourism, cheap energy, and seafood diversification. They formed a thing called the Iceland Ocean Cluster.

We're looking at the feasibility of establishing that, because there's a lot of parts of the Tasmanian seafood industry which aren't fully working together yet. We think longer term, that would position Tasmania to be a more successful global player. So TOBI will provide us that platform to do that with.

Ms ARMITAGE - Will we need more funding? I noticed that after 2022-23, there's nothing in the forward Estimates.

CHAIR - And very little mixed -

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, there's very little compared. It's gone from \$5702 down to \$165. Are the funds allocated in the Budget sufficient, do you think, to meaningfully assist the recovery?

Mr BARNETT - One thing we've learnt about COVID-19 is being able to be agile, and responding to the challenges as and when they arise. That's exactly what we've done during COVID-19. That's why we're so grateful to the Premier and the Treasurer for establishing a COVID-19 fund to apply to as and when required, to meet the needs of and support our various sectors, in particular the seafood sector. If you talk to the Seafood Industry Council, you will hear from them that they are very thankful for the support which we've provided, and the ongoing supports that will -

Ms ARMITAGE - And they may be applying for more.

Mr BARNETT - They may well do, but we will address those needs as and when required. I have every confidence that we will work shoulder to shoulder with those sectors, because we have our round tables, because we have good relationships with those stakeholders, through the department, through my office, and those direct meetings with those key stakeholders on a regular basis. We will do what's required to provide support. We're not going to solve all their problems, but we will work with them through the difficult times.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - You'll probably have to work another weekend again.

Mr BARNETT - Well, it does happen from time to time.

90.6 Agricultural Workforce Resilience -

CHAIR - It does, we know. Thank you. I'll move to 90.6, which is the Agricultural Workforce Resilience. I'll take you, minister, to the line item on page 311. There's an increase from last year of \$224 000. I'm assuming that the part of that is the Pacific Workers initiative. Is there anything else in there? What relationship does that particular area have with the community farming partnership program? Obviously, that's where you work out what, other than that opportunity that we already spoke about, workers are required, because we know the dairy industry, for instance, has quite a lot of foreign workers.

Certainly, where I come from, my home base, around the north-east, there is quite a lot. We have enough for a cricket team when it gets close to Christmas, so they come together and they have a cricket match - Sri Lankans, Pakistanis - and they really enjoy themselves. I'm interested in the relationship between that program and this particular initiative under the response and recovery of COVID-19.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. We've got some very important responses to share with you and the committee, and I'll pass to Deidre in a moment. We have initiated, thanks to the feedback from the industry, a \$1.9 million agricultural resilience workforce program. This is a program which was launched with the industry in front of Parliament House last year.

The key parts of that were the Tas Harvest Trail, and the jobs in the Pacific labour that you've referred to. We've had ongoing funding support, thanks to the Treasurer/Premier, for that. They've come in, we've paid their quarantine, and then they get out to the farms and the fruit growing areas, to pick the fruit to harvest the vegetables and get it off to market. In addition to that, we provided funding support over two years for safe farming.

This is not just safe farming - some of you will know Phil John, who runs that program, does a great job with Stuart, his offsider now. It's also to protect and promote a COVID-19 safe environment on our farms. So that's another one. FarmPoint hotline is a hotline that we've made available to ensure that those farmers and those in agriculture have a one-stop shop. They know where to go, what to do, and can answer those questions.

Then we've co-invested with the key peak bodies. For example, Fruit Growers Tasmania, Wine Tasmania, the TFGA, Sprout Tasmania, Livestock Transport Association, Tasmanian Hemp Association, to support them in building up their resilience from COVID-19 and to build the measures necessary to respond. I ask the secretary, or the deputy secretary, to add to that answer, if they can possibly do so.

Ms WILSON - What you're suggesting is the Seasonal Workers Program. My understanding is that the budget allocation here is for our initiatives, which is about agricultural skills and local workforce. Under the Seasonal Workers Program the approved employers fund the majority of their costs. They fund the flights, they fund bringing people in. There has been a subsidy in terms of the hotel quarantine, but I don't believe that sits in our budget allocation.

CHAIR - So where does that sit? With the health department?

Ms WILSON - I'd have to check. It could be in the COVID-19 general.

Mr BARNETT - It's COVID-19 general. The funding is \$2800 for those two weeks, which covers the quarantine. Now, that has been the case in the last 12 months. Going forward

through to 31 December, that will be the case. Then it'll be dollar for dollar with industry. So it'll be half of that \$2800 from 1 January. Now, we've advised industry of that, and they are very thankful for the support that we've provided. That will help them get the people they need. Of course, with the announcement this morning, with the Victorian Government, the 1500 seasonal workers coming through Tasmania, through to Victoria, that will also provide support.

CHAIR - How many of those 1500 workers do you expect will remain in Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - It'll depend on the need of the Tasmanian fruit growing and agricultural sector. So that'll be responded to and negotiated with the Victorian Government as and when required, and through my department -

CHAIR - What if they decide they want them all, minister?

Mr BARNETT - The secretary outlined the numbers this morning, and they -

CHAIR - Yes, I heard those.

Mr BARNETT - They won't want them all, but they will want some of them. Fortunately, the way this agreement is consummated, based on last year, very positive cooperative approach; we've been able to get those thousands of jobs to meet the needs of the Tasmanian community, and then the rest went through to Victoria. Of course, they kindly covered our repatriation flights coming through to Victoria and then back to Tasmania. So we're very grateful for the arrangement. It's a good working relationship with Victoria and Tasmania. It's, again, how we get the job done. We're looking at a big picture here, to satisfy the needs of agriculture in Victoria and Tasmania. Deidre Wilson.

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister, I would certainly support that this arrangement has been of benefit to Tasmania, particularly in the more off seasons, when it's more difficult for our approved employers to bring in whole plane-fuls of people. It's not cost-effective. So our industry has been able to what I call piggyback off those Victorian flights. As we come into our peak season, the agreement with Victoria is that our workers get primacy. In other words, Tasmania is first; Tasmanian approved employers are first.

However, once again, there is an opportunity, if there's an approved employer that doesn't fill a complete flight, that we can bring in both Tasmanian and Victorian workers. So it's very beneficial, and it also helps keep Tasmania safe, because we're bringing in these workers, and Victoria is doing its share with the repatriation flights. Last year, we brought in 903 workers into Tasmania. So it's a very good approach.

Mr BAKER - Can I, through you, minister, also just make the point that we're working very closely with communities that have a very difficult challenge in the hotel quarantine. I know my colleague Michael and his team are doing an outstanding job, but part of this work is to try to give them a much better forward plan, of the amount of hotel rooms which are required. They are doing an outstanding job, and they should be thanked on the public record, minister.

CHAIR - Thank you. So this has no, I guess, partnership, if you like, with that community farming partnership program? That's a completely separate initiative? It's \$5.6m for a new community farming partnership program.

Mr BAKER - We'll just have to take that on notice.

CHAIR - All right, thank you.

Ms WILSON - I mean, it's in my paperwork, but -

CHAIR - I just thought, if it had any sort of crossover -

Ms WILSON - It may. I just need to go and check - yes.

CHAIR - All right. And a supplementary from Ms Siejka, and then we'll head to grants and subsidies.

Ms SIEJKA - I apologise if this was covered in some of those data numbers, but I wanted to check. I feel like I've missed it. Obviously there was that recruitment drive, trying to get more Tasmanians into that seasonal workforce. Can you tell me how many people actually took up that offer?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. We don't have Jo Crisp with us; Deidre Wilson might be able to help. But that worked really well. It was an education, advertising and marketing effort to back in the Government's plans that Tasmanians come first. We want Tasmanians in those jobs wherever possible, and that's exactly what happened in the last season. We got a really good response and feedback, and I think Jo Crisp mentioned the numbers on the Harvest Trail website, but I'll pass to Deidre Wilson.

Ms WILSON - Yes. Through you, minister, we did indicate that 2074 have been filled by local Jobactive participants in Tasmania since 1 July 2020; the highest percentage of total horticultural placements in the period across all states. But there were other placements that we have anecdotal evidence around through the Harvest Travel, recruitment agencies, and employers directly recruiting people. That's where we talked about things like our Harvest Jobs website, where there were 94 981 visits, which were unique page visits to the Harvest Jobs webpage, and 403 Tasmanian jobs advertised on the Harvest Trail website. As of now, I believe Jo mentioned that we got up to about -

CHAIR - We have enough information. Thank you.

Mr BAKER - For absolute clarity, through you, minister, there'll be about 5800 Tasmanian fruit pickers this season.

Mr BARNETT - Chair, can I just answer your question about the community farming partnerships? I think you're referring to the budget papers, the community farming partnership program, \$5.6 million.

CHAIR - That's exactly right.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, \$2.6 million of that is for the Rural Business Resilience package. That supports the farmers and secures matching funding with the Australian Government. The \$2.3 million over three years to manage the impact of drought on farming communities, and to deliver our programs under the national Future Drought Fund initiative. As you would know, Rural Business Tasmania has a key role to play there; Elizabeth Skirving, who does a great job,

and her organisation; and there's the Farm Business Resilience Program and the Regional Drought Resilience Planning program, and \$400 000 over three years to support the Rural Financial Counselling Service.

CHAIR - Right. So, no relationship with this particular output group.

Mr BARNETT - Not with the Seasonal Workers. It's a different program.

Grants and Subsidies

CHAIR - Thank you. I'll now move to grants and subsidies. Any questions, members, in regard to this area?

Ms PALMER - Thank you, Chair. Minister, can you provide further information on the Government's agreement with the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, and how this supports agricultural research, development, extension and education?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's a very good question, because it's -

CHAIR - You did cover -

Mr BARNETT - I covered it in parts, with the MOU that we've signed with the University of Tasmania, with the Tas Institute of Agriculture. One of those key ingredients to success in agriculture, is research, development and extension. So, we've got, in addition to what I said earlier, there's some - what we're doing is, through the Tasmanian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub, we're supporting TIA, and are very grateful for the Australian Government's \$8m funding support. So the Australian Government are providing that support. We are backing the TIA, and have secured that cash, and, in kind, support for the Hub.

That's going to deliver lots of benefits to agriculture. On top of that, it backs in the \$28 million that we've provided in our budget over the forward Estimates for five years through to 2023. That's a lot of money, but it's also saying we've got one of the highest levels of confidence ever in agriculture at the moment. That is probably no surprise, but the Rabobank confidence indicator indicates very high levels of confidence across agriculture. We've got the \$7 million for the different TIA research farms, including at Forthside and at Elliott which I'd touched on earlier, and we've got a lot of investment in this with TIA, and Mike Rose, who's the acting director for TIA.

I've just appointed some new members of the TIA advisory board with Elizabeth Skirving, Peter Skillern and Angelique Korpershoek who's the former president of - or the current president of Dairy Tasmania, so I'm delighted with that. My secretary sits on - well, chairs the board, the TIA advisory board. So, they do a lot of good work and I'm keen for that research to provide practical outcomes for farmers and people in agriculture. It's no good just having, you know, research up here that's got no relevance or meaning to farmers and agriculture in general. So, that's the gist of it, and we've got a long-term plan to deliver on research development and extension, and it's working well and there's big funding support over coming years.

CHAIR - Thank you. Any questions on capital investment, members? If not -

Mr BARNETT - Through you, Chair. Just to Ms Armitage, the question on the seafood grants because this is in the grants area, and the funding support. I wanted to indicate the three areas. Altogether it's \$6.283 million: \$5.5 million was direct financial support and the two stimulus packages, so licence fees for rock lobster, giant crab, fin fish fishers, abalone divers, and levies for shellfish growers, including oysters; \$663 000 for the rock lobster biotoxin and translocation levies - I think Mr Valentine was asking about the translocation of rock lobsters to the east coast earlier; and then funding the Tasmanian seafood industry council, \$120 000 to support the Rural Alive and Well. I know a lot of members around this table support Rural Alive and Well. So, I thought I'd give you an update on that to be more specific to Ms Armitage.

CHAIR - We certainly acknowledge John Jones and previous occasions, minister, in his work in establish Rural Alive and Well, and very much appreciated, I know, in the rural industry across all communities, really. They've certainly spread far and wide. It's -

Mr BARNETT - And their base is at Oatlands.

CHAIR - Absolutely. God's country.

Mr BARNETT - With a new office in Perth now.

Inland Fisheries

CHAIR - Yes. Minister, we have the pleasure of inviting the representative from Inland Fisheries, John Diggle, to come forward. Welcome, John. We know how much you enjoy this process.

Mr BARNETT - Let me welcome John Diggle, director of Inland Fisheries, to the table with great honour and pleasure.

CHAIR - You have a brief overview?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I do. We are very pleased and proud of the Inland Fisheries service. They do a fantastic job. Of course, trout first introduced in 1864, more than 150 years ago, and the wild brown trout are amongst the world's purest strains of species in Tasmania. Tasmania is a world-class trout fishery thanks to the Inland Fisheries service and thanks to those decades and decades of contribution and investment over many years. As a government we recognise that. We have the world fly fishing championships at the end of 2019. Great success. Well done to Malcolm Cross and all his team for making that happen.

As a government we've frozen trout licences with a commitment to freeze fishing licences at 2017-18 prices with backing in Anglers Alliance Tasmania, the peak group representing over 24 000 trout anglers across Tasmania. We've also got a total of 24 835 licences were issued, and that was up more than 1000 on the 2019-20. Don't put it all down to the tag trout competition, but I think we can put some of it down to that. It's been a very successful campaign. So, IFS deliver important regulatory and management functions and John can speak more to that, and of course, I'm one of those keen anglers. I'm a little bit biased in that regard. We want to ensure that we protect our lakes and our rivers, and we have plans that are ongoing to support that.

I thank John Diggle and his team. I thank the Inland Fisheries Advisory Council which advise me and the Government from time to time. We have measures in place to increase the number of entrants into the Inland Fisheries sector, and specifically that has been working. We've got funding in our budget for that, and we now will be releasing a strategy in the not-too-distant future to increase the number of entrants to the fishery, and with a special focus on women and young people, children. We were already doing that in many respects with improving amenities at the 10 most popular fishing locations around Tasmania, making it easier, more accessible and enjoyable to fish. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'll invite Ms Armitage to open the line of questioning.

Ms ARMITAGE - Can I have an update on the management of the pest issue of the eastern - is it gambusia? And kanamaluka/Tamar Estuary within Queechy Lake Relbia and, of course, Corolea.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. More than happy to pass to John Diggle. I thought you were going to ask me about the carp eradication program. We could always come back to that because that's been an outstanding success.

Ms ARMITAGE - It is on my list.

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to John.

Mr DIGGLE - Yes. Thank you. So gambusia is a problem that we've been keeping an eye on for a number of years. They're restricted to the Tamar catchment and particularly the lower part of the catchment, around the Tamar Island wetlands. Plus a little population up in Queechy Lake. The university over time has been focusing on that pest species, trying to look at developing genetic control techniques, and we've supported them over the years.

That's still in the process of trying to secure additional funding, to take that research further going forward. That's something we're still keen to support and we think it is a possible method that we could use to hopefully eradicate gambusia out of those small populations -

Ms ARMITAGE - Any idea how much additional funding you need with the minister sitting here?

Mr DIGGLE - At the moment it's going through ARC linkage grants through the university, so there's applications going out in that direction.

Ms ARMITAGE - So there's outside funding available?

Mr DIGGLE - Yes. It's being sought and hopefully it's successful.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. The carp eradication program, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. I'm pleased and proud of the work that's been done by the Inland Fisheries service. This is a world-leading effort to eradicate carp from both Lake Crescent and Lake Sorell. It's a 25-year plus campaign. It's funded, I think, more than \$400 000 in the last 12 months and ongoing to ensure that carp are eradicated from both Lake Crescent and Lake Sorell.

Just in the last year they found three, netted three and successfully eradicated three. We want to be really sure that they are fully eradicated, so more work is ongoing. But I make it very clear: this is world leading. This is incredibly unusual to have a species of fish, as in the carp, to be eradicated from a waterway anywhere in the world. So, there's a great credit to John. I remember hosting a thank you event for the Inland Fisheries service, and not just them, but others in the community that are involved in eradicating the carp. We had an excellent event in New Norfolk at the Inland Fisheries service there. I was at the local football club because quite good numbers were there to say thank you. The local mayors and so on. So as a community and on behalf of the Government, I say thank you for their efforts to do so.

I know you've probably got more to say, John, in terms of the success, including the 40 000-odd carp that you've eradicated over the 25 years.

Mr DIGGLE - Yes. Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - It's a long-dedicated descent, isn't it?

Mr DIGGLE - Yes, it's a long haul. We have been successful in Lake Crescent. We've eradicated carp out of Lake Crescent and as the minister was indicating, we caught three carp last season, and that was with hundreds of thousands of net hours in Lake Sorell targeting carp. Three is a very small number for the amount of effort that went in over about four months. In that process we caught some females and some unviable males, so we're thinking the population is male limited. We think there's no fertile males left in the population. Hopefully the job is nearly done. We're just going to have another look this season. We'll focus around lake-level rises and warm weather events in the next three months, and that will tell all. Hopefully we don't see any viable male carp and hopefully we just pick up a few stragglers that are about in the lake. We're quite optimistic at this point.

Mr VALENTINE - Ones that are long in the tooth.

Mr DIGGLE - Yes, they must be getting on a bit. We think most of the carp were coming from spawning back in 2009, so they are getting older. They should all be mature now, so they're all available for our targeting efforts.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's good. Thank you. Onto another area, it was projected the transfer of land at Four Springs Lake between the IFS and Forico was to be completed by 2021. Has this occurred?

Mr BARNETT - I will pass to John Diggle. I was at Four Springs on opening day. It was a wonderful day and we inducted Malcolm Cross into the hall of fame on opening day at Four Springs. I thought I'd just share that with you on the way through. John Diggle.

Mr DIGGLE - That process is still ongoing and nearing completion. It has been very slow, but the signs are we are going to get there, so -

Ms ARMITAGE - What have the hold ups been? Weather or -

Mr DIGGLE - It's just legal process, I guess. Just going through -

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Ms ARMITAGE - Legal takes a long time?

Mr DIGGLE - Yes, it does. So we're hopeful that will be completed by the end of the year still. Yes, so it's nearly finished. Then we'll move on to the next phase of how we look at improving access and developments around Four Springs Lake, which is a very popular fishery, as the minister was indicating.

Ms ARMITAGE - So contamination of fish - is that your area as well?

Mr DIGGLE - It's probably more of an issue for the EPA, I'd suggest. But minister.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I'm happy to try to answer any queries, but if it's EPA, then that's probably Environment. Well, give it a go and see how we go.

CHAIR - Wes is a seasoned campaigner.

Mr BARNETT - I am not the minister for environment, but I am the minister for fishing.

Ms ARMITAGE - Some of the issues that have been brought to me have been about PFAS going into some of our lakes, particularly Kelly's Lake and some of the others, the run off and how it affects the fish. I noticed that in the past fish caught in the north east river, that's all for PFAS concentrations, and I wondered what we were actually doing about that, whether we were doing anything about that. I know it's an issue. Hobart and Launceston airports and the run off into our rivers, and I wondered whether it affects our inland fisheries, our fish. Or whether Mr Ford's doing anything about it.

CHAIR - Is it in your radar, minister?

Mr BARNETT - Well, it's on the radar, but it's specifically on the radar for the minister for the Environment because it's an EPA responsibility. I am not -

CHAIR - I was thinking how it affected the fish and I wasn't sure whether the fish were -

Mr BARNETT - Maybe the secretary could speak to that. Well, I'm happy for - if you're happy -

CHAIR - I don't like to eat into Inland Fisheries time, that's all.

Mr BARNETT - It's an EPA thing, but I'm more than happy to -

CHAIR - While we're all deciding whether Wes can come to the table, he's here. Thank you. Wes Ford has just joined us.

Mr BARNETT - Welcome, Wes Ford.

Ms ARMITAGE - I know that it is leaching into a lot of the rivers and in Hobart Airport and also with Launceston, the Kelly's Creek.

Mr FORD - Let's start with PFAS as a national problem and it's -

Ms ARMITAGE - Absolutely. But it's in Tasmania.

Mr FORD - We have a number of sites in Tasmania where PFAS is identified at low levels, where it's moved into the environment, particularly in terms of Launceston Airport, as you've identified, and Hobart Airport.

In relation to Launceston Airport specifically, some fish samples were taken about two or three years ago now, and those samples detected levels of PFAS in the fish. As a precautionary process under the national health warning system, the Director of Public Health determined it was appropriate to issue warnings about 'do not eat'.

Ms ARMITAGE - Do not eat.

Mr FORD - The reality is you have to consume a significant amount of fish to accumulate PFAS but it's still a warning level process. So as part of what we're doing more generally with PFAS, we're looking opportunistically at other rivers and other places in the state and doing some testing where we can to really try and get a baseline picture in the state as to what the PFAS impacts actually are.

Ms ARMITAGE - Are we actually doing anything to try to get Air Services Australia to clean it up so that it's not going into our rivers and infecting our fish?

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

Mr FORD - Yes -

CHAIR - I think COVID-19's fixed that.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, it hasn't.

Mr FORD - Launceston Airport is Commonwealth land controlled by the Commonwealth, the role of Tasmanian legislators is actually quite limited. We're working cooperatively with Air Services and the owners of the airport, firstly to map where the impacts are and the next phase of this will be to what extent there can or should be a level of remediation. It's an ongoing piece of work which the Australian government over the last couple of years has thrown quite a few millions, hundreds of millions of dollars at nationally.

Mr BARNETT - Could I just jump in there -

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - and indicate the Australian government -

Ms ARMITAGE - Because it is our land. Kellys Creek isn't Commonwealth land is it? Isn't that - is that Crown land, the creek and that area belongs to the Crown. Sorry, minister.

Mr BARNETT - No, I was just going to say, it's in the federal budget, \$130 million over three years to investigate PFAS and its impact on our airports around Australia. That's the advice I have. Then the development of corresponding management plans for identifying that

PFAS contamination. We say thank you for the federal government's efforts there and there's early planning effort in terms of developing those programs and completing the consultation that I understand has taken place with the EPA Tasmania.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have a supplementary from Ms Siejka on this particular issue.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms SIEJKA - I know there was a spill into the Plenty River which has some effect on the salmon ponds. There is a report being done into that. Has that been released or will it be released and will there be sanctions imposed?

Mr BARNETT - Can I just indicate, they were all very understandable and important questions. I am more than happy to pass to the director of the EPA but to be very clear, what you've referred to is an important matter, it is a matter for the EPA, it is under investigation so of course as minister I can't comment with respect to matters under investigation. There were fish deaths in September 2020 in and around the salmon ponds, and they are under investigation. I might stop there and pass to the EPA director but just bear in mind it's under investigation.

Ms SIEJKA - I understand. No, that's fine.

Mr FORD - Thanks, minister. Yes, it is still under investigation. It's a complex investigation that is nearing completion. There are thousands of pages of evidence that have had to be taken and more than 25 witnesses involved, so this is a very significant investigation and it would be inappropriate to say more than that at this point in time. From an impact point of view, it might be appropriate for Mr Diggle to make any comment about the impacts on the hatchery itself in the salmon ponds.

Ms SIEJKA - Appreciate that, thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - I'll just see if John Diggle would like to comment.

Mr DIGGLE - Yes, I'm happy to talk on that. There was an immediate impact, obviously, with that incident where we lost some of our fry last year, and that was a percentage of our fry, so that doesn't underpin our whole stocking program. It didn't have a large impact on our business and in any year we produce more fish than we need so we still had sufficient fry left to undertake our planned stocking program for fry. So limited impact and there's been no ongoing issues that I'm aware of there.

Ms SIEJKA - For that report - no timeline on the investigation at this point or -

Mr FORD - I'll take it. In terms of a process, once the investigation is completed it needs to be provided to the Director of Public Prosecutions, all prosecutions in the state are managed by the Director of Public Prosecutions. It'll be a matter for the DPP to then deal with the next step of it.

Ms SIEJKA - Thank you. It's a beautiful spot -

CHAIR - One last question and then we're on to Veterans Affairs, so thanks, Wes.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks, Wes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you for that. Following the completion of the database of Anglers Access Infrastructure throughout the state in 2019-20, can you advise how the information has been put to use in driving the IFS management?

Mr BARNETT - For the access centres are you talking about?

Ms ARMITAGE - Yes, yes. The Anglers Access Infrastructure.

Mr BARNETT - The Anglers Access program is a ripper. It's one of the best programs that we've got. We work with Anglers Alliance Tasmania, which is the peak body, which we also fund and provide support. We provide specific funding for the Anglers Access Program. It's one of the most successful because it helps people with disabilities, people - kids, families get to those good fishing spots. We all want to know where are the good fishing spots, so that's why we have the Anglers Access Program -

Ms ARMITAGE - And the database, yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. In terms of the database I will pass to John Diggle, but we've got \$200 000 towards the Anglers Access Program in 2019-20 to 2021-22 and we've got ongoing support for the program, \$1 million - excuse me. We've got \$1 million. I'll pass to John and then I'll come back to you.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

Mr DIGGLE - Your question relates to our licence database, that's our opportunity to track metrics in the fishery about participation by juniors, female participation and those sorts of figures. Anglers Access is one of our programs where we're trying to improve the accessibility of the fishery to all anglers, so that's why it's of critical importance in building our participation in the inland recreational fisheries.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question.

DIVISION 2
(Department of Communities Tasmania)

Output group 4
Disability services and community development

4.6 Veterans' affairs -

CHAIR - Minister, we'd like again to thank John and we'd now like to move to the minister - your responsibility as a minister for Veterans Affairs. Thank you very much.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - For those who are leaving us we'd like to acknowledge your work and thank you very much, and don't forget your very important pencil case. It's become very famous, your 6 year-old can certainly be assured of that. Thanks, John.

Mr DIGGLE - Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr BARNETT Can I, as they're walking out, Madam Chair, can I just specifically thank members of the department for their wonderful support during the year and in advance of Estimates and today, I appreciate it.

CHAIR - Welcome back. The only person you have is Kate?

Mr BARNETT - Just you today, Kate? Yes, So Kate Kent from Communities Tasmania, I think you probably know.

CHAIR - Kate was with us a couple of times yesterday, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Very good. We're very pleased to have a Kate at the table, I'm married to one of those.

CHAIR - A delightful Kate.

Mr BARNETT - My delightful Kate and also Jen Heffernan is here as well if needed and that's wonderful to have Jen, Acting Manager Policy and Programs, Community Sport and Recreation. I appreciate Jen's support as well and I know Alex Schouten is not here but she has provided support over the last 12 months and I acknowledge Alex's support as well.

CHAIR - Thank you. We're getting straight into questions, minister, or do you have a -

Mr BARNETT - Opportunity for an opening remark, with respect to veterans?

CHAIR - Do you have a couple of opening -

Mr BARNETT - I would like to acknowledge our veterans and pay my respects to them. We have a long and distinguished career and military history in Tasmania, 15 of the 101 Victoria Cross recipients of course, and I'm wearing my ANZAC badge today in honour of our veterans.

CHAIR - I did notice that, minister.

Mr BARNETT - 10 500 veterans around Tasmania and their families. We want to provide support, so we've delivered record funding support, \$1.4 million over the forward Estimates, so peak body status for RSL Tasmania, an extra \$50 000 for special projects for RSL Tasmania, the Teddy Sheean VC Memorial Grants of course.

CHAIR - Congratulations, minister, for your efforts.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. An acknowledgement to Garry Ivory, nephew of Teddy Sheean, and of course a special acknowledgement to Ray Leonard who's just passed away, the last remaining survivor of the Armidale and I think of his wife Beryl who has just received the gold card and she rang me. She was so thankful, almost in tears on the phone. She got the gold card. I followed up with the minister.

Mr VALENTINE - It's a big thing.

Mr BARNETT - It's a big thing, it's a big thing. She didn't have it for some time and I followed up with the federal minister's office, thanks to Anne Hockman in my office and we were able to secure the gold card for Beryl.

CHAIR - Well done.

Mr BARNETT - They were married for 76 years. A wonderful couple. But of course, tribute to Teddy Sheean VC. We've got \$200 000 in the budget for health and wellbeing vouchers available for veterans, for gym and sporting club memberships, \$100 000 for the veterans retreat at Lake Sorell, Dago Point, and of course we've got a veteran's employment strategy with targets for the public sector. Legacy, north and south, and I know the former shadow minister for veterans affairs, very good supporter of Legacy. We've got \$10 000 each, both north and south. That's now, thanks to the parliament passing the ANZAC Day Trust Winding Up Bill. That's funding now locked into the budget, and it was unanimously supported by the parliament. I want to say thank you for that.

I want to acknowledge the \$5 million from the Australian government targeted for veterans' wellbeing at health and wellbeing centres and services around Tasmania, happy to answer questions on that. We provided \$60 000 to the feasibility study because the health and wellbeing of our veterans is so important.

I specifically want to acknowledge the 39 000 Australians who fought in Afghanistan over the last 20 years. I acknowledge the pain and hurt and challenges that they would be facing right now, and I want to say thank you for your service to those 39 000, many of whom are Tasmanians of course. I acknowledge that.

To conclude, I put on record my thanks to Darren Chester. I had a very good relationship with him. He did a great job as the federal minister for Veterans Affairs. We worked really well together and I acknowledge his service and support for Tasmanian veterans, and of course I acknowledge Minister Andrew Gee who is the new Minister for Veterans Affairs. I thank the committee.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister, and I'll invite Ms Siejka to commence the questioning in this very important area.

Ms SIEJKA - Thank you. Yes. One of my questions to start with was looking at output 4.6 and the forward Estimates shows a reduction. I just wanted some clarification on why that is and -

CHAIR - A significant reduction.

Ms SIEJKA - A significant reduction, yes, going outward to use there.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question and I'm happy to pass to Kate Kent, but it's probably similar to the answers I provided earlier in the day that various programs continue and then conclude and then we respond to the needs of our veterans and talk to the Treasurer Premier and allocate funding as and when required. For example, COVID-19, we specifically provided half a million dollars to support our veteran's community through COVID-19, because their fundraising efforts were totally curtailed.

Those of you who know the 50-odd sub-branches of the RSLs around Tasmania knew how difficult it was for them, and so that funding, I can assure you is greatly appreciated. More than 40 sub-branches were able to avail themselves of that and significant funding support during COVID-19. That was just for a period of time and then drops back.

Now, we will respond as and when required to the COVID-19 fund that the Premier has established, depending on where COVID-19 goes over the next 12 months. In addition, we've delivered the \$1.4 million, which is record funding over forward Estimates in the areas that I outlined in my opening remarks. We'll be monitoring those areas as and when required into the future.

Ms SIEJKA - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Did you want to add to that, Kate Kent? I'll just check if Kate Kent would like to.

Ms KENT - Through you, minister. Yes, the reduction just relates to probably three items in there. They were all one-off funding. There's a couple of RSL upgrades, a capital program for Bridport and Scottsdale. There were at least five support upgrades provided through the local communities facility fund, which is also just one-off payments for facilities, and the other one relates to the additional \$100 000 for the Dago Point veterans retreat training facility component. The rest are all ongoing.

Ms SIEJKA - It's just good to check these things.

Ms KENT - Yes, I think that makes the difference between -

Mr BARNETT - No, that's all right.

Ms SIEJKA - I'm still going. All right, Josh.

Mr WILLIE - No, no, you go.

Ms SIEJKA - Internal party dispute here.

Mr BARNETT - That's okay, we're sort of used to it.

Ms SIEJKA - Minister, my other question was a feasibility study into veterans' health. We've discussed that last year and you've just mentioned it. Can you give me an idea of what the recommendations are that have come out of that and what's going to be happening going forward.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you very much for the question, and I'll ask Kate Kent to respond as well because the departments been very involved with the federal department when it comes to the report. \$120 000 in total was provided for that feasibility study. It's all about veteran's health and wellbeing, and the services that will be provided from that. I was with Darren Chester when he was down here, met with RSL Launceston and other RSL organisations including Burnie on the northwest coast. Hobart will be an area that will require special attention. Thanks to the lobbying and advocacy of this Government over a long period of time we have received \$5 million of allocation from the federal budget. This is consistent with other states as well, and so I'm absolutely rapt with that outcome, that's taken a few years, but we got there, and again thanks to Darren Chester.

That feasibility study was done, and I'll pass to Kate Kent to speak to that study. I viewed the final report and provided a copy to the Premier, the Minister for Health, and the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management. It's not just for our veterans. It's the first responders as well, so police and emergency services, so I'll just note that, and that's something that we're looking through and considering the merit of at the moment. I'll pass to Kate Kent.

Ms KENT - Through you, minister, again, so the study is still to be released formally. However, the main focus is on ensuring that there's access to services for veterans and their families. It was looking at how and what models would best work in a state like Tasmania. All of the models in other jurisdictions are all quite different. I guess the message there was no one size fits all approach, and the study certainly talked about the need for a distributed network of services rather than just suggest a one place would work policy. It also talks about the need to integrate that with web and other services, and certainly a focus on case management. It is what we would have expected to see and what would best work for a fairly dispersed veterans' population in Tasmania.

Ms SIEJKA - Minister, is there a time frame for that report being made public, or further opportunities.

Mr BARNETT - I think it's fair to say I've written to the federal minister and indicated that I am quite happy for that report to be made public, to the RSLs and anybody else who would like to view that report. I haven't had a feedback or response yet from the federal minister, although I am meeting with the federal minister next week, is it this week or next week, I think its next week via phone meeting, so I'll be able to follow up on that matter.

Ms SIEJKA - Before I hand over, what, is the employment initiatives for returned service men and women and their families. Will some of that be captured in that work, but whether or not there's other similar areas of work which you're undertaking?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question, because that's part of the Government's policy. I put on record thanks to the veteran's reference group. John Withers is the chair of that group. He does a great job. I have representatives from around Tasmania who provided feedback with respect to employment. This transition of veterans from the armed services back into civilian life is a very challenging space, and it's primarily a federal responsibility. The reference group has provided input and a contribution in that regard.

CHAIR - They are Tasmanians, minister.

Mr BARNETT - They are Tasmanians, and that's why as a government we are very interested in these wonderful Tasmanians, particularly those younger veterans who are coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq in more recent years. We want to provide for their support. So that's why we've wanted to work with the federal government for these health and wellbeing services and as Kate Kent's indicated we are one of the most decentralised states in Australia, so it's no good enough having a hub based in Launceston. We need to have the services in the north, Launceston, north-west coast, and other parts of Tasmania so that they can be accessed by our veterans. I'll just check if Kate Kent can add to that.

Ms KENT - As the minister said in the feasibility study it recognised that employment is one of those factors which does improve people's health and wellbeing, including that of their families. Learnings from some of the other centres and hub models in the other jurisdictions they that link them with employment services as well. The minister said we are having those discussions and that consultation with the Employment Services and the RSLs to see how that might best work to link up with existing services in that area now, and are here in the state as well.

Ms SIEJKA - I anticipate the report.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Willie.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks Chair. The Frank MacDonald program's a great program for students in Tasmania, and I'm just interested in what's happening in the current environment, whether students are still able to participate in that, and whether it's done remotely, obviously they can't go on the trip, so it is limited in what they can do.

Mr BARNETT - For sure, and I could pass the question through to Rosemary Armitage, the member who participated earlier in the year.

Ms ARMITAGE - I did have some questions, but I thought it was Communities, so I wasn't sure whether to say something.

Mr BARNETT - No, you're quite right. There's no issues and I really appreciate the question, I'm just acknowledging that Rosemary Armitage participated in a Frank MacDonald prize tour this year, in my stead. I've had a few years attempting to be part of this wonderful tour.

CHAIR - We keep on putting an election in the way.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, there's been other things in the way, like COVID-19.

Mr VALENTINE - I haven't had an opportunity yet, either. I might say I'm not likely to get one.

Mr BARNETT - Anyway, it's one way to acknowledge the Belgium trip in April 2020, a bomb went off and so security reasons that couldn't go ahead, so there are a range of things that have got in our way, but I might pass to Kate Kent.

This year there was a tour to Albany, Western Australia, and then to Darwin, and then back. The honourable member can speak more to that. We've had the essay competition, so it

wasn't held in 2020, but 2021, yes, and the essay competition has been open to students in years 9 and 10, and entries closed on 20 August, just last month. Winners will be announced in late October 2021. Those winners will then travel in 2022. The question is where, but we don't know because of COVID-19. It could be France and Belgium, or potentially, more likely, Albany and Darwin.

CHAIR - Or New Zealand?

Mr BARNETT - But there may be other options, the department will consider those options and put that advice to the minister in due course and of course in liaison with the Premier will work out the best way to go, subject to safety and security arrangements. Maybe Kate can add to that?

CHAIR - Is there anything else to add?

Ms KENT - I think you've covered it.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WILLIE - Another question, in terms of the funding under this line item, obviously the trips wouldn't be as expensive and resource intensive this time around, has that been factored into the budget, or it's just been expended in the program anyway?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question, I'll pass to Kate Kent.

Ms KENT - Yes, through the minister, we're conscious about the overall costs that the normal overseas trips take to administer. Last year we planned earlier this year for the domestic ones, so we're looking at all of those options. It still is a reasonably small amount of funding. In the previous year we also had to cover the costs of when the trip was cancelled in 2020 as well.

Mr WILLIE - What were those costs for the cancelled trip?

Ms KENT - They recovered most through insurance, but the planning that has to go into that.

CHAIR - So we are asking for the cost of the cancelled Frank MacDonald in 2020, is that correct?

Ms KENT - Yes, I'll take that on notice.

Mr BARNETT - We can get back to Your Honour if you'd like.

Mr WILLIE - I mean it's unfortunate with the circumstances out of your control.

Mr BARNETT - There was some insurance so we got some claims back. We can get back to you with more detail.

CHAIR - Okay, thank you. Mr Valentine.

Ms ARMITAGE - Can I make just a comment if I could.

CHAIR - We normally do questions.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'll make it a question.

Mr VALENTINE - Question time, not comment time.

Ms ARMITAGE - It is a question as well regarding the Frank MacDonald prize trip. I specifically would like to mention how fabulous Christie Brimhall was as our tour leader. I'm sure you would agree, minister, that a domestic trip to Albany, Perth, and Darwin was good, and being the first trip. It would be sad not to do a second domestic one now that we've had that understanding of where to go, what to see. It was almost like a being a ground breaker going up there first and finding out the areas to go, particularly the Adelaide River. I'm sure you'd agree that it's worthwhile going back to the domestic market when things are as questionable as they are with COVID-19 around the world.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I appreciate the input and your contribution and views on that. We have to consider all the safety and security arrangements as to whether we can go back to Europe or whether we do that, or maybe there's something else. I appreciate that, and the fact that you think it was such a positive experience for you and the students.

Ms ARMITAGE - It was an amazing trip and very well run. Going to Darwin, the Adelaide River, and some of the other areas that normally some of students - and the students were fantastic too - wouldn't normally go. It's all very well to go overseas, but to stay within your own country and see areas, particularly up in Darwin, that was very moving. My question would be, would you consider looking at the domestic market again?

Mr BARNETT - The answer is yes, we will consider it. We'll consider the best options for our students in Tasmania and what's in their best interest including safety and security.

CHAIR - Excellent question, honourable member. Can I go to Mr Valentine, thank you?

Mr VALENTINE - I might be stealing this one from Jo Siejka.

Ms SIEJKA - That's all right.

Mr VALENTINE - She did give me permission. With respect to the viability of the RSL clubs, do you have any further information on how things are tracking, are there any struggling, and what assistance are they getting for those that are struggling?

Mr BARNETT - So, thank you for the question.

Mr VALENTINE - I know some time ago there was some work done in this space.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, there has been work, and we work very closely with RSL Tasmania through my department. They have ongoing regular discussions, because they are now a peak body, thanks to our government identifying them as a peak body and are funded accordingly. They have the extra \$50 0000 grant for special projects, and that's in the budget.

There's more than 50 subbranches around Tasmania, and we've provided support during COVID-19 when there was a lot of challenges.

Mr VALENTINE - 40 of them.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, for their sustainability, half a million dollars, so there's a lot. I put on record thanks to Robert Dick, the former president of RSL Tasmania, and thank him for his extensive service and commitment, including in the National RSL Tasmania. I acknowledge Greg Milak as well, the national president at Tasmania, based here in southern Tasmania in the Coal River Valley. I should of course acknowledge Barry Quinn, the acting president, whom I met with just a few weeks ago. He's filling in at the moment. I might pass to Kate Kent to just flesh out the answer if that's okay.

Mr VALENTINE - I don't expect names of clubs, obviously.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Ms KENT - Thank you, minister, through you. As the minister said the funding goes to RSL as the peak body to provide support and governance for clubs that might be needing to address their sustainability, or to look at the issues that they're facing. We recognise that clubs go through peaks and troughs of membership and other matters. Last year the Government provided funding through the COVID-19 support program. That was specifically for clubs that employed people, to ensure that there was that support during the time when business had to be a bit more limited because of COVID-19 restriction.

Mr VALENTINE - That was the 40 was it, the 40 clubs?

Ms KENT - That was available to clubs that employ, yes.

Mr BARNETT - A little bit more than 40.

Mr VALENTINE - Okay.

Ms KENT - So that was close to \$500 000 in funding for that support. Then if there's other particular issues that individual clubs might be facing, then either we, through the agency, or through RSL Tasmania will work with them, through the different grant programs to help them. There's a number of ways in which clubs can access funding for particular things for their club, whether that's facilities or other support. I mentioned earlier there was a number of clubs which received support through election commitments through the local community's facilities fund.

Mr BARNETT - There are probably two other things to say, so you got the Teddy Sheehan VC memorial grants that the various clubs can apply to and get that funding support, so they have two rounds of that every year, \$100 000 a year. Then on top of that, there was a governance review. We did a review and a report and recommendations which the department worked with the RSL on. There were some challenges for RSL Tasmania. That goes to your point, that governance review and report came through, those recommendations are now being implemented.

They also did their own research using our funding support, in terms of an analysis of RSLs and the average age - for example, the average age of an RSL member is 72 years of age. You can understand, you know, challenging situation for many of them.

It's fair to say, in terms of that report - it also said 40 per cent of survey respondents experienced an adverse or traumatic event. For example, a serious injury or accident, physical or sexual assault, trauma from bullying during their service. 34 per cent of respondents had someone to talk to if they were upset or had a problem. 48 per cent of respondents had no one to assist with food, accommodation or money in the case of an emergency; and 57 per cent rated their health as either average or poor. It goes on. There were different parts to that report.

Mr VALENTINE - I suppose my question really is just in relation to how many of them might be on the edge, in terms of viability. That's all it was about.

Mr BARNETT - Of the actual sub-branches?

Mr VALENTINE - The numbers - yes. I don't want you to name them, for obvious reasons.

Mr BARNETT - It goes up and down. You could say that there are a number of sub-branches that are on the borderline of being viable.

Mr VALENTINE - Are we talking 10, 20? Four? Do we have any real understanding? If we don't, then don't -

Mr BARNETT - Well, that's a matter for RSL Tasmania. We get advice on a number of those. The ones that I'm aware of, it'll be under 10. But I think we -

Mr VALENTINE - It's all right. It gives me an idea.

Mr BARNETT - They reach out to me and my department. We try to help and support, and provide strategies for sustainability. That takes time.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you.

CHAIR - Ms Armitage, I need one more line item before 1 o'clock.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. Minister, looking at the \$100 000 for the training centre and additional facilities at Dago Point Veterans Retreat, could you advise me of what those additional facilities were at Dago Point? What the additional facilities are, what's happening there. I'm a little confused because it says, 'Provide \$100 000 for a training centre and additional facilities at Dago Point Veterans Retreat and make health and wellbeing vouchers available to veterans for gym and sporting'. Down further it actually put another \$200 000 in. Is it \$300 000 in total, or is it only \$100 000? Up there it says \$100 000. Then, further down, there's \$100 000, plus another \$200 000.

Mr BARNETT - Let's clarify that: \$100 000 for Lake Sorell, Dago Point. Then for the health and wellbeing -

Ms ARMITAGE - Another \$200 000.

Mr BARNETT - An extra \$200 000.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, that's great. The additional facilities at Dago Point.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Can I say -

Ms ARMITAGE - I hear very good things from the Vietnam veterans particularly about how wonderful it is.

Mr BARNETT - I encourage you to visit if you get the time. They have done an outstanding job.

Ms ARMITAGE - I've been given the number and told to book.

Mr BARNETT - Over the last 12 months - yes. Please go ahead. But a special tribute to Terry Roe. He's the president of Vietnam Veterans' Association in Tasmania. All around the table we want to acknowledge his work and his service. Together with so many others and younger veterans, they've done a fantastic job in upgrading that facility. A big thank you to all the sponsors and supporters in the building and construction sector who've given their time or product or service to help turn that into a reality. As a government, we've provided up to \$100 000, but I can assure you there's so much more support that's been given to build that facility.

Ms ARMITAGE - What are the additional facilities that it has? I know it sleeps quite a lot of people - they told me - and with quite a few rooms.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. I was given the photos to have a look at a week or so ago, thanks to Terry. There are accommodation facilities, there's educational facilities, there's recreational facilities. It's the full kit and caboodle. Then they have plans for another development stage as well. It's ideally targeting our younger veterans. We're thinking of Afghanistan, Iraq, Timor.

Ms ARMITAGE - Take their families up.

Mr BARNETT - They can take their families up. It's adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Retreat, which is literally metres away - or 50 metres, maybe 100 metres, less than that away. Lake Sorell, of course, with the carp being eradicated provides a great fishing opportunity. A great place to enjoy a weekend.

Ms ARMITAGE - It is a great area. The \$200 000 for the health and wellbeing vouchers for the veterans - how exactly do they do that? You've got your veterans, particularly your younger veterans - I'm assuming they would like to invest in sporting clubs and gym memberships. It says 'vouchers'. Does that provide for them to join or does it give them a voucher to pay a couple of sessions? How does that work?

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question. The department's working through the detail as we speak. That was an election commitment, which we're very proud of, and it's designed to be a partial reimbursement for health and wellbeing. Access to a gym or some sport club membership. So recreational -

Ms ARMITAGE - Some of those are quite expensive.

Mr BARNETT - Some of them are. Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - So they would go through the RSL or they would go through the department? If I get a returned serviceman from Afghanistan who's young, who wants to go, how do they do it? Do they come to you? Do they go to the gym? Do they go to RSL? Where would they apply?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, a very good question. The department's doing work on this. I'm not sure that we've got all the answers as yet, but I'll pass to Kate Kent.

Ms ARMITAGE - If you give me somewhere at least to direct them, that would be good, in case they do - they may be listening.

Ms KENT - Yes, perhaps direct the questions to us. We're still scoping out the project and how it will work. We're looking at some similar programs that we've run in the sport sector. For example, in my own division, to the Ticket to Play. And we'll need to work closely with gyms.

Ms ARMITAGE - When it's worked out we'll be able to get a fact sheet from you?

Ms KENT - Yes. We'll develop a -

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Yes.

Ms KENT - Definitely.

Ms ARMITAGE - And to direct people.

Mr BARNETT - We'll direct you. Once that's available -

Ms ARMITAGE - Put it up on our website and advise people.

Ms KENT - Yes.

Mr BARNETT - That would be excellent. Yes. But just to make it clear, it's \$200 000 over the four years. So \$50 000 per year. It's not going to solve everybody's problem.

Ms ARMITAGE - It's still a lot of money, though.

Mr BARNETT - It's a lot of money, but it's not going to solve everybody's -

Ms ARMITAGE - No. But it will assist.

Mr BARNETT - It'll send a message that we care for their health and wellbeing.

Ms ARMITAGE - Of returned servicemen. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - That's right.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ms Palmer, we're going to 90.9, which is Returned Service League support.

**Output group 90 -
COVID-19 response and recovery**

90.9 Returned services league support -

Ms PALMER - Yes.

CHAIR - It's \$22 000, line item.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, Tasmania has more than 10 500 veterans and ex-serving personnel. What support is the Government providing to this very important cohort?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. Well, we've, all in, up - \$1.4 million over the forward Estimates, and we're delighted to be supporting that group. The RSL Tasmania's \$110 000, and that's identifying them as a peak body, and then CPI index, going forward. Then an extra \$50 000 for RSL Tasmania for special projects, to improve service delivery. We're doing a great deal to support them, and more than 50 RSL sub-branches, as I've mentioned earlier.

We work shoulder to shoulder with the RSL; I support them and meet with them regularly. I know Kate Kent and her department meets with them regularly. We try to help them provide support to their members. There are 10 500 veterans out there and every time there's an opportunity to say, 'Thank you for your service', like I attended - Vietnam Veterans' Day is a good example. I hosted a lunch here in Parliament House to acknowledge them. They send a representative from the Vietnam Veterans Association to Parliament House and we pay respect to them in that way.

Legacy Week is another thing. We reached out to them and hosted Legacy representatives from the north and the south. I should indicate that the ANZAC Cripps - ANZAC biscuit tins - Cripps have kindly donated funding support from the sale of every Cripps ANZAC biscuit tin in honour of Teddy Sheehan VC goes to Legacy - Legacy Launceston, Legacy Hobart. Isn't that wonderful? Thanks to Cripps, I say. Thank you for that support. Thank you again, to Garry Ivory for helping support that measure to support Legacy. There are so many different things we're doing to support our veterans.

Point Assist is the other one, where we have funding support for recreational activities. The veterans apply, they go through a program - again, this is helping them transition from the Australian Defence Force into civilian life. They do a recreational program, using our national parks and reserves, getting out and about, doing a retreat and building that resilience, which is exactly what they need as they transition from the Defence Force through to civilian life. There's a whole range of measures undertaken, but it's an honour to be Minister for Veterans' Affairs. I appreciate that people around this table, I know you're all likeminded and you want to say, 'Thank you for your service', for those 10 500 veterans.

CHAIR - Thank you. One final question. Ms Armitage.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. It was just a quick question. When we're talking about RSL support, as we know, the Launceston RSL is always looking for support. They are looking for grants at the moment to complete their remaining office and function renovations, to help returned servicemen. Can you give me an update on any government support that we might be able to provide to them with their latest works?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can. I acknowledge Bridget Archer, because where they are focusing in particular is the federal government, and the funding support that's available through the \$5 million for the health and -

Ms ARMITAGE - I think they were hoping for both federal and state, but -

Mr BARNETT - Of course, but I'm working with them. Peter Williams and my namesake, Graeme Barnett, at Launceston RSL do a great job.

Ms ARMITAGE - They do.

Mr BARNETT - I commend them both and their committee and their volunteers. They have some big plans. It's congratulations and thanks to Bridget Archer for standing up and ensuring funding support for her community. Likewise, Gavin Pearce, who's a veteran himself of some many years in the army. He's been a strong advocate for that \$5 million to be spent wisely in Tasmania. I think you'll see that funding roll out in the months and years ahead and resulting benefits for our veterans.

I have every expectation the Launceston RSL will be part of that. As the state Government, we'll work shoulder to shoulder with them to ensure that they get a really good outcome which will support their veterans. They're not just supporting the Launceston veterans. They are supporting across the north, even to the east coast. I know they were down there not so long ago. They do a terrific job, and they've got a big vision and I congratulate them on it.

Ms ARMITAGE - I probably should declare a vested interest here. I am the patron of the National Servicemen's -

CHAIR - There you are.

Mr BARNETT - Well, that's fair enough. We were together at the Vietnam Veterans' Day service in Launceston with you, member, with many other members of parliament local, state and federal.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. On behalf of the committee, I'd like to endorse your thanks and acknowledgement of the service of those serving members and those who have returned. It's never unacknowledged, I believe, certainly by members here and the wider public. Thank you for your advocacy for the veterans' community. It's certainly acknowledged.

We shall conclude and suspend. Minister, we'll see you back here at approximately 2 pm, with your Energy and Emissions hat on.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you to Kate Kent and the department for their support.

The Committee suspended from 12.57 p.m.

The Committee resumed at 2.00 p.m.

DIVISION 11

(Department of State Growth)

Output group 3

Energy and emissions reduction policy and advice

3.1 Energy and emissions reduction policy and advice -

CHAIR - The time being 2 pm, I'd like to recommence the broadcast, thank you Shae.

As I said prior to the lunch break, you are here with your responsibility as the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, and you have Sean Terry with you at the table.

Mr BARNETT - I do, and I'm very pleased to welcome and introduce Sean Terry, Director of Energy Policy.

CHAIR - I feel sure you will have an overview, and we'd like you to take it away, thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you so much, Chair, and members of the Legislative Council.

I am very pleased and proud to be presenting an overview with respect to energy and emissions reduction. Tasmania is a world leader when it comes to renewable energy and climate action. We're uniquely placed to embrace the exciting opportunities by our island location, our skills, our natural advantages, and we want to secure that for the future. We have natural advantages in wind and water, and as minister of energy, and now also emissions reduction, I'm focused on seeing us leverage off these competitive and natural advantages.

Of course, we all know that Tasmania is now 100 per cent fully self-sufficient in renewable electricity as of November last year. We have legislated to take a nation-leading approach, in fact a world-leading approach, to 200 per cent by 2040, 150 per cent by 2030. I thank the parliament for its support for that legislation. We're investing in generational projects that will support our renewable energy future. Renewable hydrogen has the potential to be Tasmania's superpower, creating thousands of new jobs and billions of dollars of investments into our economy.

We are progressing Project Marinus, Battery of the Nation, and of course hydrogen as I've indicated. In terms of Project Marinus, we welcome the Australian Energy Market Organisation's announcement last year that Project Marinus is an essential part of the national electricity market, and it is part of their integrated system plan.

We're working with the Australian Government to invest more than \$700 million to build a Tarraleah power station redoubled. So, to double in size from 110 megawatts to 220 megawatts, a very exciting prospect of up to 24 hours of energy storage. In terms of cost of living, this is really important. Cost of living and cost of doing business, and we have a number

of measures in place, and we have some of the lowest electricity prices in Australia for both regulated residential customers and regulated business customers.

I'm pleased to advise that as of 1 July there's a 7 per cent reduction in residential, and more than 11 per cent reduction for small business tariffs. In addition to that we have the winter bill energy supplement for \$125 to those customers, including those in an embedded network. We've got the NILS, which is the No Interest Loan Scheme, a million dollars, and then we've got the \$3 million for the TEELS, which is the Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme.

In addition to that, as the Premier announced at the state Budget, and of course I am happy for further questions on this, but we are at a defining moment in our future, and we are going to grasp these opportunities with both hands.

There has been a new structure established with Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania operating under the Treasury, but as an agency reporting to the Treasurer, Minister for Climate Change, and me as Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction. This new entity is a game changer for our state. It will ensure that in terms of energy, policy, climate change, and all of those competitive advantages that I've referred to, are all seen through that lens.

It will specifically refer to, and I would like to identify those areas:

- providing strategic policy advice to the government on energy, climate change, mitigation, and emissions reduction;
- supporting major innovative energy projects like Marinus Link, Battery of the Nation, and emerging economic opportunity of Tasmania's renewable hydrogen production;
- developing strategies so Tasmania can capitalise on opportunities from a changing climate; and
- the development of a low carbon economy, and providing advice to government in relation to electricity pricing issues.

Transition to the new entity is expected to begin in September, and operations are due to commence in mid-October of this year. Anton Voss, a very competent and capable person, will be heading up this new agency.

In conclusion I would say that energy has never been more important to both our economy and our community and Tasmania's future. We have immense potential to build a truly sustainable, prosperous 21st century economy based on competitive, reliable, clean energy. We're seizing that opportunity with both hands, attracting that investment, creating jobs, and playing a major role in reducing our own and the nation's carbon emissions.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. A very comprehensive overview there. I will head straight down the table to the member for Hobart, Mr Valentine, who's going to commence the questioning.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you very much, Chair. You are right, minister, absolutely important time for Tasmania with all those different projects that you outlined, but your main adviser just walked out the door, Mr Albertini. Not your main adviser, the organisation you go to for advice I'm sure. Can you just give us an understanding as to what's happened there?

Mr BARNETT - You're talking about the CEO of Hydro Tasmania?

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, I am.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you very much for the question.

Ms ARMITAGE - Or was he pushed out the door?

Mr BARNETT - I thank the member for his question. As made clear by Hydro Tasmania yesterday, that the CO of Hydro Tasmania has resigned for personal reasons. I want to put on record my thanks to Evangelista Albertini. In the time that I've known him and have worked with him, together with management and others within Hydro Tasmania, I really appreciated his support and acumen. He's had decades in this space and was chief operating officer, asset manager for Hydro Tasmania over all those years, and he should be thanked for his service, and I do thank him for his service.

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, it appears that his thinking on Marinus Link and those sorts of projects - sorry, hydrogen generation in particular, that his thinking wasn't in sync with what the Government's intentions are in this area. Can you comment on that? The availability of enough electricity to allow hydrogen to be produced here in this state?

Mr BARNETT - That's a separate question. The CO has resigned for personal reasons. What I can say is that in terms of available capacity, which I think was part of your question, I can read to you Hydro Tasmania's statement which was released yesterday. It goes as follows:

'As Australia's largest producer of renewable energy, we stand ready to help businesses capitalise on the opportunities provided by our clean energy. We continue to work with current and potential new major industrial customers on commercial arrangements for their projects. Details of contracts and negotiations with major industrial customers are commercial in confidence'.

I have every expectation that Hydro Tasmania will respond to those needs and challenges exactly as they've set out there, as they've done in the past, and as they will in the future. The Premier's made it very clear, as have I, that we have a policy position which is very clear, and that's the renewable energy action plan. Second, it's the renewable hydrogen action plan. Our policy, our position, our vision is set out in those documents, it's very clear, and we expect all parts of government in a team Tasmania approach to follow that vision and that policy.

Mr VALENTINE - What is your understanding as to how much electricity would be required for the generation of hydro according to the plan that you're aiming for?

Mr BARNETT - In terms of the generation at the moment, it's 10 500 gigawatt hours. I can ask Sean Terry to fill you in on the details, but in meeting any demand into the future, we have every expectation that Hydro Tasmania is part of the solution. I want to make it clear on

two further points. The first is that we have legislated to increase the production of renewable electricity in Tasmania to double that by 2040 to make it 150 per cent by 2030. That was legislation debated, discussed in the community, and passed through this parliament. I'm very pleased and thankful for the parliamentary support for that legislation. That means that we will be doubling production between now and 2040.

Second, with respect to your question and meeting the needs of future proponents and others, Hydro Tasmania is not the only game in town. Let's make it very clear: wind. We have a world class wind asset, and we have opportunities to grow our wind capacity here in Tasmania. That's already well under way. I'm very pleased to advise that that is ongoing. The opportunities there are significant. Hundreds of megawatts are already planned and being built, and going forward in the years to come, another 14 000 megawatts of electricity in the years following that. With our three renewable energy zones in the north-west, and the west coast, north-east, and then the central highlands through to central Tasmania, we have fantastic opportunities to grow our wind energy potential there opportunities galore.

That's why we've legislated, that's why we've set the vision, and that's why we have every expectation that in a team Tasmania approach we will meet that vision and provide those job opportunities, development opportunities, and reduce our greenhouse emissions at the same time.

Mr VALENTINE - But isn't it true that Mr Albertini said that there wouldn't be any capacity to be able to put towards this project, and given the fact that you would think it would need baseload power to make it happen, what's your comment on that?

Mr BARNETT - I don't want to put words into Mr Albertini's mouth. He's been thanked for his support. He has delivered for Hydro Tasmania, and he's now resigned for personal reasons. What I do know is that the Government has a vision and a plan, and we have every expectation of that plan being met. I'm very pleased to have an ongoing relationship and meetings with the Hydro Tasmania, as well as proponents from time to time. Those discussions are commercial-in-confidence, but Hydro Tasmania's position is very clear. They stand ready to help business capitalise on the opportunities provided by our clean energy. That's their plan, that's their vision, and it fits with our vision, and that's what we expect.

Mr VALENTINE - My question off the back of what you're saying there is about Marinus Link. Inadvertently you went there first, but Marinus Link, it's viability. If we're entertaining 10 500 gigawatt hours for the production of hydrogen in this state, doesn't that really cause an issue for Marinus Link in terms of its viability if we're not exporting a lot of that energy?

Mr BARNETT - No. Because we can have our cake and eat it to. With respect to Marinus Link and hydrogen, let's make it very clear. We've legislated to double our renewable energy production from where we are at the moment, as you've indicated, 10 500 gigawatt hours, and we're going to double that to 21 000 by 2040. As I say 150 percent by 2030, so we're on that track. In terms of Marinus Link, let's be very clear. It is essential. It's not my say so. The independent Australian Energy Market operator has said it's essential to Australia's national electricity market. It's been identified as what's called an actionable project in the integrated system plan. The Marinus Link is national infrastructure, and is fully supported by the federal government for which we are very grateful, with the design and approval phase progressing through to 2023-24, and it's on track.

More recently an independent report has identified that not only is it technically feasible, commercially viable, but it will put downward pressure on the electricity prices, not just in Tasmania, but across the national electricity market. So the Marinus Link will deliver benefits for Tasmanians.

We've got to ensure that Tasmanians pay no more than their fair share, and that's an important ingredient. There needs to be a fair cost allocation. That's always been essential to the Tasmanian Government's position: keeping that downward pressure on electricity prices. Of course, all that will open up further opportunities, renewable energy developments, so thousands of jobs, billions of investment, and absolutely a reduction in carbon emissions.

Mr VALENTINE - Has the go button been pressed on Marinus Link? Or are we still waiting on other reports and studies?

Mr BARNETT - We're all go. We're all go in terms of -

Mr VALENTINE - No other business cases to come forward?

Mr BARNETT - There will no doubt be further business cases and more work to do, but we are progressing at speed in accordance with the plan to design an approval phase to what's called financial investment decision in 2023-24. All the advice is that it is commercially viable, it is technically feasible. The independent report from the independent national regulator saying it's an essential, part of the national electricity market. It has the backing of the federal government and backing of the Tasmanian Government. We're progressing.

CHAIR - Is it funded? That's the key.

Mr BARNETT - It's absolutely funded through to the design -

CHAIR - Fully funded?

Mr BARNETT - through to the design and approval phase. Then there's what's called financial investment decision, and as it is being a commercially viable project. Obviously that decision will be made in and around that time or before, and we are very confident of progress in light of the fact that it's not just our say so. Backing of the federal government, backing of the independent regulator, and on the basis of fair cost allocation being provided for a regulated asset where you get a sort of a guaranteed rate of return over the life of the asset. That's what's important. That will be delivered, and it's very encouraging.

There's still a long way to go and we're working very hard with the federal government, and of course TasNetworks is leading that work here in Tasmania and in Victoria as well.

Mr VALENTINE - With regard to the hydrogen generation, have you spoken with Twiggy Forrest in terms of his perceived needs in that space? Is the state Government looking at funding anything towards what he's doing, or providing resources in any way, shape, or form?

CHAIR - Or Origin Energy, or, and -

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you for the question, and it's a fair question. As minister, I meet with a range of proponents from time to time, including Fortescue Metals, and I wanted to take your interjection, Chair, Origin Energy.

We had Australia's largest support package to establish a renewable hydrogen industry in Tasmania, \$50 million support package, backed in by the Premier and our Government. That's attracted a lot of interest and we've had an expression of interest process with successful applicants being Origin Energy, Grange Resources, Able Energy, and in addition to that, we have proponents like Fortescue Future Industries, part of the Fortescue Metals Group. As you indicated, Andrew Forrest. Woodside Energy is another one.

We have a lot of special interest in Tasmania. Why is that? Because we've got the trifecta: low cost, reliable, clean electricity. We've got what the rest of the nation, what the rest of the world, really wants and needs and we're going to work very hard in the months and years ahead to secure these opportunities to deliver jobs, development, opportunity, and a cleaner world.

CHAIR - Why is Hydro so negative then? Andrew Forrest would not have come out publicly and said he'd been told that his 250 megawatts of power is not available now or into the future, let alone the 600 megawatts that Origin Energy need. Why would they do that?

Mr BARNETT - Mr Forrest and Fortescue Future Industries are tough negotiators, and I know on behalf -

CHAIR - That's probably why he's where he is.

Mr BARNETT - of the Premier and the state Government, we will do what's best for Tasmania. We will make sure that is driving our focus at all times and we will negotiate the best possible outcome at the end of the day for Tasmanians. We appreciate the interest of Fortescue Metals, we appreciate the interest of Origin Energy. We are working with them very carefully and closely to ensure that we get a good deal and the best possible outcome for Tasmania.

Mr VALENTINE - We're not the only state that's in this place, are we?

Mr BARNETT - Correct.

Mr VALENTINE - I think it's Queensland that's looking at something, isn't it? Is it Queensland? Correct me if I'm wrong, but they're looking at hydrogen generation. We know that it's happening elsewhere across the world.

Mr BARNETT - That's correct. What we're doing is consistent with the National Hydrogen Strategy. There are other states. That's why we've taken a front foot approach and a \$50 million package of support to attract the hydrogen industry to Tasmania. We've got the best of the best, and that's green hydrogen. Not blue hydrogen, not brown hydrogen. We've got hydrogen made from 100 per cent clean electricity and that's why we are very hopeful and positive about our plans for the future. That's why we're working so closely with the proponents in a positive, collaborative way, and with all our government business enterprises.

Mr VALENTINE - One last question, if I might, and I'm not saying hydrogen's not a great idea or initiative. Obviously you have to be able to power heavy industry in some way, shape, or form if you're not going to be using coal and other generation mediums. It's decarbonising Tasmania's gas sector that is spoken in the budget papers. Is it being suggested that you're going to do a deal and take over the pipeline and run hydrogen through it? Is that what you're going to do? There's a heck of a lot of pipeline in the state.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. It's a good question. I'll just finish my previous answer to say that we have every effort being put into Bell Bay becoming a hydrogen hub for Tasmania, for Australia. Part of the federal government's \$275 million to establish hydrogen hubs around Australia. We are focusing on Bell Bay being that hub and we are working very positively with the federal government in that regard. Sean Terry can comment further in that regard. With regard to your second question, I'm happy -

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, to do with decarbonising Tasmania's gas sector.

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Mr VALENTINE - I was very interested in that and wondering whether the idea was that indeed hydrogen might be transported round the state with that facility that's already in the ground, or what's happening? Is it going to be viable the way it is at the moment, without they hydrogen consideration, or not?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question, and the answer is yes, we are working with the gas sector in Tasmania. We're working on a strategy which will be released before the end of the year for the gas sector going forward, and there will be a discussion paper for public comment. It will be called the Future Gas Strategy and that will be published before the end of this year.

In terms of the use our gas pipelines, the answer is yes. Thanks to Tas Gas and their good work and the nature of the gas pipeline, it can actually take renewable hydrogen. That's unlike other states and territories where the pipeline is unable to take renewable hydrogen. Ours can. Congratulations and thanks to Tas Gas. We're working very closely with them. As you know, there are key infrastructure arrangements, particularly in the north of the state, but across the state where that gas pipeline can be used for the transportation of hydrogen.

That's all part of our plan that's set out in the Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan, being able to use the infrastructure that we already have. As I say, we've already had a close working relationship with Phaedra from Tas Gas and the department and other parts of government are working with Tas Gas in that regard.

Mr VALENTINE - Can you do both over the -

Mr BARNETT - Yes.

Mr VALENTINE - Is that the intention?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's right. They use hydrogen - well, Sean can speak to this in terms of the detail, but yes is the answer. Hydrogen can be included with gas through that pipeline.

Mr TERRY - As the minister said, we've been working with the gas industry on gas blending opportunities. So it's a mixture of gas and hydrogen. I can't speak to the technical -

Mr VALENTINE - No, it's an interesting concept though, isn't it?

Mr TERRY - That's right, exactly. But yes, part of our gas strategy that we're - we'll be looking to release later this year is looking at those opportunities for gas blending. Now, we do have a modern pipeline, so it's what's called HDPE as opposed to the old steel pipelines. The old steel pipelines suffer from embrittlement issues. We are much better placed to look at some of those gas blending opportunities. But it's going to be dependent on the technology also, and there are some challenges at the end use and conversion requirements that you would have to make to allow hydrogen to be blended into the gas network.

The only other thing I'll say is the gas industry is looking at these opportunities, so it's not just governments. Through our policy, the gas industry also realises they're going to have to look at opportunities to decarbonise their networks.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you, Chair. I've taken up enough time.

CHAIR - Minister, can I just take you back to the issue around Hydro Tasmania and the fact that they've appeared originally not to be supportive of the likes of Andrew Forrest and Origin Energy. Has there been a change in focus by Hydro Tasmania? Should they have said, not now, but certainly into the future, rather than never into the future to these potential customers?

Mr BARNETT - I can only respond in three parts. First, to Hydro's statement as to how they want to operate, and that's they want to help business capitalise on their opportunities provided by our clean energy future. They want to work with them and the current and potential new major industrial customers on commercial arrangements for their projects. So that's Hydro's statement. That's the public statement, and we appreciate that. That's very important. They are part of the solution.

The other parts of the solution are the fact that we are going to double our renewable energy production in Tasmania over the next just less than 20 years. In addition, Hydro's not the only game in town. Wind is a key part of that. We've already got 263 megawatts of wind approved and they are reaching financial investment decision in coming years. In addition to that, we have another 1500 megawatts plus of wind in planning and environmental assessment, and there's more to come.

CHAIR - How far away is that?

Mr BARNETT - We're talking in the three- to five- to eight-year timeframe. In terms of the proponent for renewable hydrogen, back to the Rob Valentine's questions, we're talking two to three years before that. You need a couple of years to actually build the facility and then to kick in, so you're talking two, two and half, years maybe somewhere there. Years, and so that's when we have to be ready and available to respond. As a government we have every intention of a team Tasmania approach and being available to meet the needs of our proponents, whether it be Fortescue, Origin Energy, Able Energy, Grange Resources, Woodside Energy, and there are many others that we are communicating with on an ongoing basis. It's fantastic

for Tasmania to be in a position where we have such interest from such credible organisations, and I thank them for their interest.

CHAIR - Would it be fair to say that Hydro Tasmania's language was unfortunate prior to this recent change of heart, if you like?

Mr BARNETT - That's a matter for Hydro Tasmania. We've got scrutiny hearings at the end of the year and I'm sure there will be a number of questions put to Hydro at the time. The Premier and I have an ongoing working relationship with Hydro Tasmania, both the board, the CEO, and we appreciate their work.

CHAIR - They don't have a CEO. They only have an acting, I expect, at the moment.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, well, the acting CEO is Ian Brooksbank, so thank you for mentioning that - and I've already had contact with Ian. We look forward to working with Ian into the future. Again, thanks on the record to Ange Albertini for his service to Hydro Tasmania and to Tasmania as a renewable energy state.

CHAIR - I'm sure this won't be the last that you will be asked around this, because it is an important issue, and when it makes significant media, then it is up to us to ask those questions. We acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. Certainly, the driving force, if you like, is the hydrogen project and the Marinus link. It is important that we have a full understanding and I appreciate the member for Hobart's questions.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - I'm going to go to this end of the table, Mr Willie, and then back to the other end to Ms Palmer.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. Minister, you'd be seeking advice from Hydro Tasmania regularly. What's their position today on the ability to provide the 250 megawatts of power for hydrogen projects?

Mr BARNETT - Their position is, as I've read to the committee just a few moments ago, that they will be working with the proponents to meet the needs of the proponents, and that's what this statement makes clear and they look forward to working through those statements.

Mr WILLIE - That's a broad statement. It's not specifically about the 250 megawatts for hydrogen projects. So what's their position on that?

Mr BARNETT - In terms of their position, this is their position. That's the statement they put out in response to those queries. Those discussions are commercial-in-confidence and that's not something I can talk about. But we are very confident, the Premier and myself and the Government, that we will secure support from the relevant agencies, government business enterprises, to ensure that we have a renewable hydrogen industry established in Tasmania. We are very confident of Bell Bay becoming a hub.

We still have to go through a process with the federal government, ongoing discussions with the federal minister, my department with the federal department to secure Bell Bay as a

hub. So we're confident of that, but we still have to go through that process. It's very important to secure that funding so that we can deliver a renewable hydrogen industry to Tasmania.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, in Estimates yesterday, the Premier described his intervention into your team Tasmania energy portfolio saying, 'Hydro will always deal with the commercial aspects of new developments. As shareholder ministers, we can influence those outcomes.' Regarding where I want to see the state go with hydrogen, I don't agree with Hydro's statement a couple of weeks ago that there was no energy available'. Have you also been personally involved in efforts to influence the outcome of the commercial negotiations between Hydro Tasmania and Andrew Forrest's company?

Mr BARNETT - I think it's fair to say that the Premier, and myself, and the Government are on a unity ticket in terms of our absolute energy. Energy enough to ensure that we have a renewable hydro industry in Tasmania, and that's what I've said on a number of occasions. That we have a team Tasmania approach, so all of our government business enterprises, government departments, various agencies, and now with the new RCFIT, which is the Renewable Climate Future Industries Tasmania Agency, headed by Anton Voss, we are very determined to ensure that we have a new industry in Tasmania, and Hydro Tasmania's part of that future, they are part of the solution, they are not the sole solution, because as I say, wind is a key part of that.

If I can help you understand, as well, in terms of energy and just to make it very clear, the beautiful thing about a hydrogen industry in Tasmania is that we've got this complimentary nature of hydro and wind. When the wind is blowing, and blowing hard, and strong, and consistently, electricity price are low, low, low, and when the wind is not blowing it can be backed in with hydro. It's called firming. This puts us in a very competitive position. An independent report delivered last year showed that it would be between 10 per cent and 15 per cent more cost competitive to manufacture hydrogen in Tasmania than other mainland jurisdictions. That's because of our wind and hydro and how they complement one another.

I'm trying to say it's not just to put all your eggs in one basket. There's a balancing act here with wind, hydro, working together. It's beautiful because we've got a world class wind asset, a world class water asset, and we're using both to make jobs, development opportunity, and a cleaner world.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, I'll be very specific, have you directed or attempted to influence Hydro Tasmania to make power available to FFI?

Mr BARNETT - In terms of the question, we, as a government, have not directed Hydro. We have ongoing discussions, we work with Hydro with respect to these matters. They are aware of our plans for starting up a renewable hydrogen industry, and we have every intention of securing that industry for Tasmania. So we'll have ongoing discussion with Hydro, with TasNetworks, with TasWater, with Tas Irrigation, because the three things you need for hydrogen are as follows. You can guess, it: electricity, water, and infrastructure - road, rail, and port. We've got them in spades in Tasmania, and that's why Bell Bay is so strategically and brilliantly placed to be a hydrogen hub.

Mr VALENTINE - While it continues to rain.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, your hydrogen action plan aims to have Tasmania commencing production of renewable hydrogen by as early as 2022, are you conceding that that's not going to happen in 2022?

Mr BARNETT - No, I'm not. I'm actually advising you today that I have every confidence that it will happen. In fact, in 2022, the hydrogen action plan will be producing renewable hydrogen by 2022 to 2024. My expectation is that that will commence in 2022, watch this space. The hydrogen action plan makes it clear that we will be exporting by 2026, watch this space, very confident that'll be occurring, and that we'll be a global exporter by 2030. All this is consistent with a lot of hard work, a lot of feedback from key stakeholders in the community around Australia, around the world, and we've put Tasmania in the right place to secure a renewable hydrogen future.

CHAIR - Have you picked up the phone to Andrew Forrest, and said that Hydro got it wrong?

Mr BARNETT - We have ongoing discussions with Fortescue, Origin Energy, and other proponents, those discussions will continue.

CHAIR - Able Energy.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, Able, Grange, Woodside Energy, and those discussions will continue, and a lot of that continues as it happens in my department as well. Sean Terry can comment or add to any of those things if you have any further questions.

Mr VALENTINE - Well I do on hydrogen.

CHAIR - Thank you, I'm going to go to Ms Palmer first and then I'll come back to you, honourable member.

Mr VALENTINE - No, you're all right.

Ms PALMER - My question's not on hydrogen.

CHAIR - We need to finish this first. We'll finish this area first before we go to another one.

Mr VALENTINE - It's just the opportunities for manufacturing and the like using hydrogen. Are you looking at any opportunities in that space? You know, get in on the ground floor, so to speak.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, we absolutely are, and I thank you very much for the question. We've funded a study, and I'll ask Sean Terry to speak to this. It's not complete as yet. The hydrogen activation study is looking at where hydrogen could be used in Tasmania in manufacturing, transport, roads, trucks, mining vehicles, the mining industry itself, mineral mining and mineral processing. Ferries are another one that has been given some consideration, and transport in a range of areas including buses.

I'm happy for Sean Terry to add to that knowing that the report has not been released as yet the final version.

Mr TERRY- Through you, minister. I think you've pretty much covered them all. So through our industry activation study we are looking at a whole range of domestic applications for hydrogen, I think the minister's covered most of those. The only other one I'd add to that is Antarctica opportunities for remote energy power supply, and also transportation backwards and forwards from Antarctica. It's one of the most pristine environments on the planet but it largely uses diesel and bunker fuel down there at the moment. So there's a whole range of initiatives that we're working on, so we'll look at domestic application of hydrogen.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you, Ms Palmer.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Minister could you provide the committee with an update on the Tasmanian Government's winter supplement.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, some good news there, because that was an initiative that we've had underway for some time, that \$125 for those eligible concession card holders, and at the time we estimated 90 000 Tasmanians who would be eligible to receive that supplement. Now they didn't have to write in, they didn't have to make an application, funding support would come straight through on their bill and reduce their winter bill.

Mr VALENTINE - That's the old heating allowance we're talking about, is it?

Mr BARNETT - It's not just heating, it's any electricity.

Mr VALENTINE - No, but it used to be called the heating allowance way back when.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, this is a winter supplement, \$125, so a similar effect in some ways. So I can advise that through Aurora, our major power retailer, that to the end of August \$11 372 750 was provided to 90 982 Tasmanians, and we extended that assistance as well to the embedded network, that means those in caravan parks, aged care facilities, and the like, that don't have a direct relationship with a power retailer. So that one-off \$125 COVID-19 cost of living grant has definitely been a great help.

In regard to embedded networks, as of 2 September there were 338 applications received. I'm really pleased about that. On top of that there's the general concessions that we provide for those on concession cards in Tasmania. That's some \$43 million, so that's amongst the most generous concession system in Australia that we provide for those doing it tough in Tasmania.

Add to that from 1 July the 7.11 per cent reduction in electricity prices for regulated residential customers, and an 11 per cent reduction for business customers who have it on a regulated tariff. All together that represents a saving of \$30 million for Tasmanians, so 243 000 households, \$5.3 million in savings for 29 000 small businesses. It's a terrific result and I'm really pleased and proud to be part of the government delivering this reduction.

CHAIR - Thank you. Minister, there's a decrease in the actual funding of this output group, and given the extensive amount of work, considering what you've just talked about over the last 40 minutes, I'm interested in why there would be a decrease of funding, particularly around \$4 million in the forward Estimates.

Mr BARNETT - I'm pleased you asked the question so we can relieve you of the anxiety and stress. We've actually increased by \$15 million over the forward Estimates, but I'll ask Sean Terry.

CHAIR - You've put it somewhere else?

Mr BARNETT - We've established a new agency. It's called Renewable Climate Future Industries Tasmania Agency, it's underneath Treasury, but Sean Terry might want to speak through the numbers.

Mr TERRY - Yes, through you, minister. Could I just clarify which numbers?

CHAIR - It's on page 361 of the budget papers.

Mr TERRY - Do you have a total number there?

CHAIR - This year the budget is \$12 363 000, a slight increase in the forward, but it goes down to 2024-25 to \$8 313 000.

Mr TERRY - We had quite a lot of costs for Basslink that were in the budget last year, so that would be a reason for the reduction between 2020-21 and 2021-22. In terms of the reduction -

CHAIR - Is that where you put the money into a new area that the minister's spoken about.

Mr TERRY - So there's some other one-off kind of contributions in there. So in 2023, and 2023-24 there's \$1.5 million for each of those years for the administration and the implementation of the TEELS scheme. So that's a once-off payment.

Mr VALENTINE - Just explain TEELS.

Mr TERRY - TEELS is the Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme. That was an initiative of the government which we're getting soon. We're in the process of implementing that, and there's a reconciliation I've got here. So I don't know whether you want me to go through it all item by item -

CHAIR - If it explains the numbers.

Mr TERRY - Yes. The biggest reduction is the Basslink costs, that was \$5 million, that was in the budget for 2021, which is not in the forward Estimates on the current budget. Like I said the TEELS was one-offs of \$1.5 million, there was \$1 million for 2021-22 for the embedded electricity network customers, that was a one-off in 2021-22. Then for the Tasmanian renewable energy powerhouse, that there was \$1.6 million in last year's budget. That reduces over time to zero, but that's been somewhat offset by the additional \$2 million that was put into the renewables Tasmania recurrent allocation. So there's quite a few on and offs there.

Mr VALENTINE - It's actually gone up 74.8 per cent in 2021-22, hasn't it, from last year? And 90.7 per cent the next year, and then 57.9 per cent, so it's actually gone up quite a way.

Mr TERRY - There's been some significant funding, that's right. It's quite lumpy, this expenditure, yes.

CHAIR - Thank you for that explanation. Minister, Basslink and the outage - what's the status of the state trying to recoup some losses there? Where is that at? It took a long time to work out who was actually liable, didn't it?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I thank you for the question, it's an absolutely fair question. I can give you an update on that. So, 2 December 2020 the arbitrator provided his award decision to all parties to the disputes under the terms of the arbitration process, all parties are constrained from disclosing confidential information, however some aspects of the arbitrator's award have been made public. Namely that the arbitrator awarded damages of \$38.5 million to the state. He further found that a force majeure event had not occurred and declared that Basslink's claim for unpaid fees of \$31 million against Hydro Tasmania relating to the period of the outage was non-recoverable.

Then on 8 June 2021 the arbitrator made a decision on the award of costs in favour of the state and Hydro Tasmania, awarding a total of \$7.2 million in costs, and \$1.04 million in interest to the state, and a total of \$26 million in costs to Hydro Tasmania. Parties are currently in negotiations to progress the findings made in the arbitrator's award, and that's where things are at.

CHAIR - So we haven't received any money yet?

Mr BARNETT - I can't comment any further than what I've said, because those negotiations are continuing. I'm happy to pass to Sean Terry if there's anything further he can say. I would add one other thing in terms of the ASX statement of APA, just to round it out, that is in discussions with KIT in relation to a potential acquisition of Basslink. Various media reports note that. So that's all on the public record. Is there anything else?

Mr TERRY - Through you minister. No, I don't think there's much more I can add; we are subject to confidentiality requirements.

CHAIR - I only asked, have we received any of those compensation funds yet. That's just the question.

Mr TERRY - No, we haven't.

CHAIR - Thank you. That's all I asked.

Mr VALENTINE - It just shows, with something like Basslink, and then we're looking at going into the Marinus Link we need to be cautious about going full bore, saying, 'This is going to happen, and it's going to happen by this time,' if we don't have the business cases all lined up.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. It's important to ensure that you've got the business case lined up, and that we do what's best for Tasmania, and a cautious approach is fair comment. We also want to be positive, and ensure the opportunities are there, and that they're grasped with both hands. I think you're right. You need to look at it very carefully, assess it carefully. We've got some conditions on any of the projects going forward, and we're going to make sure that Tasmania's interests are protected.

Mr VALENTINE - A good article in The Conversation today. Worth having a look at.

CHAIR - When you get a chance, minister. When you finish reading briefing notes.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much.

Mr VALENTINE - About major infrastructure.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - Members, any other questions on 3.1, energy and emissions? If not, then we'll move to 90.18, which is the Small Business Energy Support Grant program. Ms Palmer, thank you.

Output group 90

COVID-19 response and recovery

90.18 Small business energy support grant program

Ms PALMER - You've just put me on the spot. I'm sure I can find something.

Ms SIEJKA - Minister, I understand there was \$1 million that was allocated for this program. Were all of those funds exhausted?

Mr BARNETT - Let's just check. I'll just have to take advice on that from my Director of Energy Policy if all of those funds are expended, and check on that matter.

Mr TERRY - Through you, minister. We're just chasing up - I don't think this is a program that Renewables Tasmania has been administering. State Growth may have been administering this program. We're just confirming the details.

CHAIR - I was going to say, it's under your output group, in our paperwork.

Ms SIEJKA - Within the budget papers.

CHAIR - And within the budget papers, exactly. So that's where we -

Mr BARNETT - Can we hold that and come back to you as soon as possible?

Ms SIEJKA - I might add to it now, then, just in case. The other thing I wanted to know was what evaluation was done, or if any evaluation was done into the equity and effectiveness of the program? But happy to take it on notice.

Mr BARNETT - We'll hold those two questions. I appreciate that. We will definitely get back to you with a response.

Ms SIEJKA - Lovely.

CHAIR - Are there any other questions, members, in regard to that small business energy support grant program? No? All right. Well, it's pretty straightforward, isn't it? It doesn't take a lot. Thank you, Ms Siejka. The only thing is, minister, that then we move to trade. I'm just mindful that we'll just have to come back to that before we finish today, and get the responses.

Ms SIEJKA - I'm happy to take it on notice. That's fine, thank you.

Mr BARNETT - If you're happy to take it on notice, we'll absolutely respond to that, and get back to you, Chair, through you.

CHAIR - All right, that's fine. Again, COVID-19 response by the government.

Mr BARNETT - That's another one of those responses.

CHAIR - Another one. So, thank you. We would like to invite whoever you have at the table for Trade. Does that mean we farewell you, Sean?

Mr TERRY - I'm finished with.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. As always, we appreciate the work that goes into preparing for budget estimates.

Mr TERRY - My pleasure. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair. I thank Sean Terry and the team and Stuart Sharples as well. I've got a wonderful team that do a great job, and I appreciate their support.

CHAIR - Sean, you'll let us know how your daughter's relay team went. Thank you.

Mr TERRY - I'll go and check the result. She has already won the 100 -

CHAIR - And the 200, yes. A very proud dad of a 14-year-old. So, well done. Please pass on our congratulations to her. Gosh, what a team. Another Team Tasmania heading out the door.

Mr BARNETT - They're all part of Team Tasmania, heading out the door. Craig, thanks for your support, too, from the Office of Climate Change, and Sarah, thank you for your support, Office of Climate Change.

CHAIR - So has Craig left local government?

Mr BARNETT - No, he's Office of Climate Change, so Deputy Secretary in DPAC.

CHAIR - All right.

Mr BARNETT - So, Mark, welcome to you.

CHAIR - Mark, welcome back.

Mr BARNETT - So Mark has got a few hats.

CHAIR - We'll just let you get yourself organised, Mark, before we start with the barrage of questions.

Mr BARNETT - I'm happy to start with opening remarks if you're all up for it.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, as we welcome Mark Bowles back to the table from yesterday.

Mr BARNETT - We do. We thank Mark Bowles for being here as Deputy Secretary.

CHAIR - Minister for Trade.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair. It's a wonderful honour to be here for the first time as Minister for Trade, and I thank Jeremy Rockliff, my former Minister for Trade. It's a complex portfolio, lots of challenges, including COVID-19, and the uncertainty around a range of trade relationships globally. But trade is jobs; exports means jobs, and it's a key part of our ongoing economic recovery. Encouragingly, we've got some good news to report. The latest ABS export data has revealed that Tasmanian exports have hit a record \$3.98b in the year to July 2021, exceeding the previous 12-month record.

Exports grew 11.3 per cent in the year to July 2021, higher than the national growth of 9.1 per cent, once again confirming Tasmania's plan to work towards those global challenges, including COVID-19, is working. Despite concerns around additional trade restrictions, China remains our biggest export market, with most Tasmanian export sectors largely unaffected. There is some effect, but largely, it's progressing. Sectors feeling the biggest impact, as I've mentioned earlier in the day, is wood, paper products, seafood, wine, and beef. Wine, not so much, although the tariff is quite high.

Beyond those sectors, our goods exports to China continue to grow, and last year was valued at \$1.5 billion. Tasmania continues to maintain a positive outlook on our trade relationship with China, and in particular, our sister state, Fujian Province, which later this year will celebrate a 40-year anniversary. So, positively, we have achieved a travel bubble with New Zealand, reopening those international and direct flights from Hobart to Auckland for the first time in over 20 years. So, New Zealand friends, yes, we'll be back, and we look forward to welcoming you back to our shores, although COVID-19 lockdown is impacting on that at the moment.

We'll support our trade and tourism plan to visit New Zealand. That has been deferred, but we hope that will occur once we are able. In addition, we have established growing our trade exports in other markets, including Japan, US and Singapore, with the establishment of trade advocates, and I can speak more about that in due course. I'm very pleased with those appointments. I put on the record my thanks again to Will Hodgman, the High Commissioner in Singapore, who has supported us in appointing our trade advocate out of Singapore, we are

reaching into the Southeast Asian market. Our advocate is Udai Panicker, who is part of an organisation that will be representing Tasmania's interests in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

There are strategic opportunities there four major ones: premium Tasmanian spirit sector, and agribusiness, renewable energy sector, and seafood in particular. We've got a number of initiatives underway - in fact, 41 initiatives as part of our trade action plan - and we've got \$2.65 million in the budget for the COVID-19 interim trade action plan. There's a lot of work to do to update our latest trade action plan in February 2021, this time with a further 53 clear actions to sustain that momentum going forward. To make this happen, we've made an addition \$6 million available over the next four years to support key initiatives under the trade strategy and both our current and future annual action plans.

This \$3.75 million will focus on initiatives that ensure we are agile and able to quickly respond to changing market conditions and emerging local or global issues. \$2.55 million will be continuing to be put to the Tasmanian trade advocate network through to 2025. As I've outlined, in those areas; Emily Midson in the US, and Joe Gadens in Tokyo. We are very pleased with the results of our trade action plan, and I want to at this stage thank the Department for their terrific support, and the key businesses and exporters in Tasmania that we work with. I've appreciated the opportunity to meet with them in recent times, had round tables, and worked through the opportunities that we can deliver for Tasmanian business.

CHAIR - Thanks, minister. I'll invite Mr Willie to open the questions. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Thanks, Chair. You talked a little bit about some of the work happening in this space. Work under this output includes a range of international engagement functions to promote economic growth, including trade support, economic diplomacy, and business and skilled migration facilitation. What has been done to put Tasmanian businesses and their products in front of key markets, since COVID-19 has made activities such as trade missions impossible?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks very much for the question. There's a lot of work that's been going in that regard. I can just respond briefly, and then I'll pass to Mark Bowles. It's been one of the biggest challenges in recent history, COVID-19; certainly health, operational trade disruption that we've incurred as a state, and our businesses. We've had to work closely with them, shoulder to shoulder, to support them through this difficult time. The trade strategy through to 2025 is an integral response to that, and the COVID-19 restrictions.

My trade team, that's represented by Mark here today, works closely with other agencies to help address the export barriers; support competitiveness; assist businesses to develop strategies and skills for industry and trade growth; open doors to build international relationships, through those trade advocates that I've referred to earlier; and to broaden Tasmania's unique opportunities abroad. We've committed \$1.1 million to deliver the trade strategy, and in terms of COVID-19 pandemic, \$2.65 million in 2020, to accelerate trade under the interim trade action plan.

I've mentioned the \$6 million earlier, but there's a lot of work that has been done and is being done. I'll conclude on this, and then I'll pass to Mark - just a few days ago, at the end of last week, I spent time with my trade officers, looking at the virtual world. So that means, in a COVID-19 environment, where you cannot travel, how do we get Tasmania to show off Tasmania and our products and services to the rest of the world?

CHAIR - You need a very big drone.

Mr BARNETT - Well, I'm sure they've certainly used drones, but they've used the products and services that we have to offer here in Tasmania to the rest of the world, and you can go and see it virtually. It's very clever. It's online, and I was up there with these goggles, looking at the wonderful export products and services that are going to all parts of the world, not just Asia. Our agricultural products, our seafood products, our manufacturing of boats products, our defence facilities. The drone has been through Incat, for example, and you go in and you see where the ferry has been built, and they're showing this off to the rest of the world, as they are in their various jurisdictions, and they can't travel.

CHAIR - I've seen the cave to canyon, exactly that initiative.

Mr BARNETT - Well, you know what I mean.

Mr WILLIE - Has the technology improved? You can feel a little bit ill.

Mr BARNETT - I know I was standing up, and they told me to move around. I was a little wobbly on my feet, but I did stay on two legs, I must say. I'll stop there, and pass to Mark Bowles, to add to that.

Mr BOWLES - Thanks, minister. As the minister mentioned, COVID-19 was an impetus to shift our focus from doing outward trade missions to appointing people on the ground in markets. That was really the only way that we could ensure that we had good contact in those markets, and were presenting Tasmania in a personable way. We grew our advocates from one, being in China, through to four now. That's in addition to the ongoing partnership that we have with DFAT and Austrade. So, through Austrade we have a three-way partnership to deliver trade start services. We have one trade start advisor based in the Department of State Growth out of the Launceston office, there's also a trade start advisor based out of the TCCI. They also provide direct professional advice to exporters in terms of how to get the product into market during the COVID-19 period. We've done a pivot to more digital activities, so assisting businesses with e-commerce. We have launched the Trade with Tasmania website, so that provides exporters with an opportunity to be hosted on a central portal that we host and we've done that in collaboration with Brand Tasmania and the broader digital work that they do.

One of the impacts of COVID-19 has been the impact on international freight and shipping, so the partnership with the Australian Government through the international freight assistance mechanism has underpinned ongoing air freight.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, is there still some movement in terms of trade advocacy? Are we inviting people here and they're getting clearances to come and see products? Or is there just no movement at all?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to Mark Bowles. I think it's fair to say that movement is very limited. There have been a number of ambassadors from Canberra that we have hosted, that have come from Canberra, from Tassie. Some visits have sadly been cancelled.

Mr WILLIE - Crazy times.

Mr BARNETT - The Swedish ambassador, for example, was here just some weeks ago, and I was able to brag about Tasmania, show off all the good things that we have to offer. Unfortunately, the visit of the Danish ambassador was cancelled for obvious reasons. We hope that those visits will resume in due course, but I'll pass to Mark Bowles.

Mr BOWLES - Through the minister we did, in a short window, manage to get some visits from New Zealand. We did have a visit from representatives from the New Zealand Navy just before that border shut, so that was quite fortunate. As the minister mentioned we had a bubble with Canberra for a while, and that enabled diplomats to come down. Once Canberra is open again, we would expect that a strong program of diplomatic visits will recommence.

Mr BARNETT - Can I add one thing about New Zealand, I think there were four excellencies in the room at one time hosted by Her Excellency The Honourable Professor Kate Warner, and of course we had Her Excellency as the High Commissioner from New Zealand to Australia, then we had the High Commissioner from Australia to New Zealand all in Hobart. The High Commissioner's husband was also an excellency - as in, Sir. Let's call him Sir David.

CHAIR - Sir David. It's got a nice ring to it.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and we had a range of New Zealand dignitaries with that visit of course, and they of course welcomed us back to New Zealand when we are able with a tourism and trade mission which the Premier and I announced a few months ago. Of course, the bubble has been popped, but we will certainly undertake that visit in due course subject to COVID-19 arrangements.

CHAIR - Thank you. Now the member for Launceston.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, Chair. Minister, can you advise me with regard to the export of our rock lobster. I know that previously China accounted for about 96 per cent of it. How is that going? Has it come back up? Is it still low? I think they were getting about \$80 a kilo previously and it went down to about \$25 a kilo. So, how are we fairing with our rock lobster?

CHAIR - Which was good for the locals. Not so good for the industry.

Ms ARMITAGE - No, for the industry, no.

Mr BARNETT - It's still tough. I think it was in the order of 80 per cent of their export market into China, so it's been a very tough situation. We've worked very closely with the Rock Lobster Association and acknowledge Mr Hidding and his efforts on behalf of the association. He's doing a sterling job in a professional and challenging environment. I appreciate that opportunity to work with him and the association. Hence, the Singapore trade advocate opening up opportunities. So, opportunities did open up into Vietnam, which is like a proxy market. I can't go into too much detail, but that did provide an opportunity for our rock lobster exports for a time, and that's been a bit bumpy along the way.

Mark might want to add some more to that statement, but it's still difficult times, and hence our support during COVID-19, using the COVID-19 fund that the Premier has

established to provide ongoing support. We will continue to work closely with the rock lobster industry.

Ms ARMITAGE - So has it improved with China? Or it's -

Mr BARNETT - It's still very challenging. There's no distinct improvement that I am aware of in terms of the changes in China to rock lobster from Tasmania. We're looking in other areas to provide a market for our rock lobsters through the department and through the association.

Ms ARMITAGE - Are there abalone, or?

Mr BARNETT - Abalone is in a similar boat. I recognise IFAM, which is the International Freight Assistance program established by the federal government, that has been extended. I thank Dan Tehan and his team, Senator John Duniam, for their good work to lobby for that extension. That's certainly appreciated to get our product to market, and particularly in the seafood area. But I might just pass to Mark Bowles.

CHAIR - Yes please, Mark.

Mr BOWLES - Through you, minister, there has been some redirection internationally of rock lobster, particularly into Vietnam and to some degree into Singapore. A lot of the redirection went into Australian mainland markets, so Melbourne and Sydney in particular. That response was quite positive for the industry.

Ms ARMITAGE - At a cheaper price though? Then when it was going to China, because they're looking at \$80 a kilo.

Mr BOWLES - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Hopefully not as low as 25, but -

Mr BOWLES - It certainly was at a lower price, and of course since the most recent Delta wave in Sydney and Melbourne that's then had a secondary impact on those producers, and a number of the lobster fisherman have benefited from the COVID-19 Border Closure and Grant Program that's been rolled out, so the seafood industry was identified as a target industry in that program.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I should add that we've got a seafood processor grant program, so we want to do more on island processing. You mentioned rock lobster and abalone, so we've got a processors funding support, again out of the COVID-19 fund.

CHAIR - The freezing initiative.

Ms ARMITAGE - Just because it was mentioned earlier about freezing initiative. Yes.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's right. The freezing initiative.

CHAIR - They do lose flavour when they're frozen though.

Mr BARNETT - True, but you're looking for a market -

CHAIR - The meat in the legs go a bit dry.

Mr BARNETT - You have to try to find the market, so we're looking at opportunities. This is industry led that we're supporting, so we've got to look at every which way to get to find a market.

CHAIR - Okay, a supplementary on lobsters.

Mr VALENTINE - On the lobsters, so the local sales, did you mention - I might have missed it because I was concentrating on something else - the local sales, how did they go up? They must have gone up. For lobsters.

Mr BOWLES - Absolutely, the local sales went up, although we don't have hard data on Tasmanian sales, it's inferred. But the better prices were certainly coming from the big Melbourne and Sydney markets.

Mr VALENTINE - I would have thought the local market helped to, shall I say, soften the blow.

CHAIR - Just make ends meet.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it certainly helped. You saw them from our fishing boats here, St Helens, or up in the north as well - the north-west. Yes.

CHAIR - We don't have as many fishing boats as we did in the past, minister, particularly in and around George's Bay as you know.

Mr BARNETT - I do know.

Mr VALENTINE - Catches aren't as big as they used to be years ago. I use to cook them half a tonne at a time.

CHAIR - As an aside, I was recently at St Helens and a constituent said, 'I cannot buy any fresh fish off the wharf anymore'. See that was one of the reasons I moved to St Helens, and whether there's not enough boats coming in with the resource on board, or whether the communities are not prepared to pay the price we need for them to do that. It was an interesting one. I said, 'I'm not sure what I can do, but I take on board', and I've shared it with the minister.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair, of course you can always go to Pedro's, which is on the docks there at St Helens.

CHAIR - I know. He was hoping to get them straight off the boat.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, point taken. I was with Julian Harrington and the fishing industry representatives at St Helens just a few weeks ago where they had a special community event to support RAW, Rural Alive and Well, and the Stay Afloat campaign which is working across the seafood sector in terms of mental health and wellbeing which is really important at the moment because it's very tough for the sector.

CHAIR - Absolutely. It's right across the border. We need to offer as much support as what we possible can for those that are doing it tough, and mental health is an important one.

Mr BARNETT - Just to fill in the gap, in terms of the support for our exports, because you asked about seafood, it's \$2.4 million of state government support to facilitate access to our international markets for the time-sensitive air freight through domestic and/or directive international services. Also, the international freight assistance mechanism, IFAM, has supported the export of almost 80 000 tonnes of freight from Tasmania which 83 per cent is seafood and 15 per cent horticultural products. The horticulture is cherries; it would be one of those, in season of course.

Ms ARMITAGE - Cherries have always been huge, particularly in Asia haven't they?

Mr BARNETT - It has.

Ms ARMITAGE - Are they still?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, absolutely. In China and Japan, and Malaysia.

Ms ARMITAGE - Still in China? So, is China still a good market for cherries?

Mr BARNETT - For cherries, yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Who would be our best trade country? Who would we do our most trade with at the moment?

Mr BARNETT - China.

Ms ARMITAGE - So still China, even -

Mr BARNETT - By a fair way.

Ms ARMITAGE - What, a country mile?

Mr BARNETT - A fair way.

Ms ARMITAGE - A country mile we call it, up where I come from.

Mr BARNETT - Country mile is one expression that could be used.

Mr VALENTINE - You were just talking about the rock lobster or crayfish industry, what about the abalone industry in terms of local sales and support? Has much happened in that space or not?

Mr BARNETT - Again in terms of processing, I want to acknowledge that we have the largest wild abalone fishery in the world here in Tasmania.

Mr VALENTINE - Even with New Zealand considered?

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Mr BARNETT - Yes, we've got the largest one in the world, for wild abalone. Island state surrounded by water. I might just pass to Mark, if you want to add to that in terms of the opportunities for abalone.

Mr BOWLES - Through you minister. In terms of the impact of events in the China market, abalone was less impacted last year in 2021 whereas rock lobster fell by 19 million to 7 million for the year.

CHAIR - Do we have any idea why that is?

Mr VALENTINE - It's rock lobster, it'd be the China market.

CHAIR - Yes, but abalone not as affected.

Mr BOWLES - It's to do with the trade restrictions and the actions taken. So, abalone by contrast was still \$51 million in annual sales, down just \$1 million. So, that held up quite well.

Mr VALENTINE - What's the biggest market for them? Japan or China?

Mr BOWLES - For which one?

Mr VALENTINE - Abalone.

Mr BARNETT - It'd be China I'm pretty sure.

Mr BOWLES - I believe it's China. I can bring the data up.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, pretty sure it's China for abalone.

CHAIR - You talked about earlier the opportunities with those - the sea urchins.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, centrostephanus. Long spined sea urchin.

CHAIR - Yes. A new processing opportunity for those. Do you want to expand on that and where you see the market? When I did my taste test, I didn't see myself going back to purchase that product.

Mr VALENTINE - I loved it, I thought it was great.

CHAIR - See, there you go. I didn't at all.

Mr BARNETT - It's called an acquired taste, and Rob Valentine has that taste. I'm a little bit like the Chair, didn't net the vote. I think it was 2019-20 that we produced 1000 tonne of centrostephanus, and then 400 plus -

CHAIR - As in not 2019-20.

Mr VALENTINE - Nineteen slash twenty.

Mr BARNETT - 2019-2020.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, sorry if I've confused you. So, yes, through the abalone reinvestment fund, which is \$5 million, some of that fund was used for incentivising abalone divers, because the lack of work in other areas, to go in to harvest the centrostephanus. They've got more than 400 tonne at the last financial year. I stand to be corrected. Anyway, so the centrostephanus is taken to a processing facility in Margate where I visited last year. What they do is they go in and they take the roe out of the shell.

CHAIR - We saw that.

Mr BARNETT - Then they crush the shell and they use the shell for fertiliser for agricultural and other purposes. Then they use the roe - I think they clean it and assess it and -

CHAIR - That's the delicacy.

Mr BARNETT - That's the delicacy, and they package that up and send it into Asia. I don't know exactly where but I understand -

CHAIR - Japan was the previous market.

Mr BOWLES - Yes, I think it was.

CHAIR - I'm interested to see if that's still the case for the Margate sea urchin.

Mr BARNETT - I'd have to check and come back to you whether it is for the Japanese market or whether it's the Chinese market, or both.

Mr BOWLES - Through the minister, they're strong and the southeast Asian, ASEAN, market as well we see as being quite prospective.

CHAIR - Have we got enough supply? Are we meeting the trade supply?

Mr BARNETT - My understanding it has been a market that is something that's new, it's created out of nothing. Obviously climate change, they've come down, 15 per cent of our marine life has been adversely impacted. The good news is that we're now turning a problem into an asset or an opportunity. The question is, can that become sustainable going forward. We're still in the early days or early years of what you'd call a small industry.

Mr VALENTINE - Are they a wild species in those distant markets? Is that why it's gained acceptancy? Clearly we haven't started from base having to convince people to eat this product. Presumably they're eaten in those locations where they're being exported to.

Mr BOWLES - That's right. There's some awareness among consumers of those markets. I'd have to take advice on the degree -

Mr VALENTINE - No, that's all right. I just wondered.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, but to your point earlier too, the Rob Valentine, the larger rock lobster are a predator of the centrostephanus. So we're pleased about that and that's why getting the balance, based on science and evidence that we want the rock lobster there to kill off and to mitigate against the growing number of centrostephanus.

Mr VALENTINE - So the kelp can grow, minister. The centrostephanus feed off the kelp.

Mr BARNETT - That's right. Yes, they do feed off the kelp.

CHAIR - Look what that might do to the kelp industry, particularly on King Island, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's right. It's a growing industry in that area of interest, kelp and seaweed, with Tasmania having secured the Cooperative Research Centre for Marine Bioproducts. This is a very good news story for Tasmania; island, surrounded by water, so seaweed, kelp in terms of nutritional products for health purposes and climate change. Using that seaweed in the nutrients feed to red meat as in beef cattle, which then reduces the methane from the cattle themselves. This is a whole new ball game and Tasmania's on the cutting edge. We're looking at processing facilities potentially down on the east coast and Triabunna area, and then likewise on the north-west coast. I visited the facility at Triabunna just a few weeks ago, very interesting. It's just getting started up. Watch this space. It's a 10-year investment, thanks to the federal government and our Government along with key stakeholders all working together for marine bioproducts to support a healthier community and to address the climate change issues.

CHAIR - What a win win.

Mr BARNETT - It's a win win.

CHAIR - Members, any other questions in this area? If not -

Mr VALENTINE - No.

CHAIR - No. I propose that we suspend and have a break and we'll come back about 25 minutes to four. Then we'll have our last area which is your ministry for Resources, thank you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - No problem.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mark. You probably won't be back again.

Mr BOWLES - Not today.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. As we said, the information that we gain from the Estimates process is always very valuable. Members do a lot of work on what their interests are, so thank you.

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Mr BARNETT - I thank Mark and the team and the Trade section of the Department of State Growth, Alison and the whole team. They do a great job. They support our interests in our exports and our relationships overseas. It's a really important part of the government and I appreciate their work.

CHAIR - I expect that the High Commissioner, former premier, Will Hodgman, is singing our praises anywhere and everywhere.

Mr BARNETT - When I communicated with him, he was standing in front of a Tasmanian flag and very proudly -

CHAIR - I thought you were going to say wrapped in a Tasmanian flag.

Mr BARNETT - Very proudly so. But he's still very a pro-Tasmanian but of course High Commissioner for Australia in Singapore. He's doing a great job. He will be speaking at the Tasmania/China Business Chamber of Commerce function down here in Hobart in coming weeks. I haven't got the date but I will be there. I was the guest speaker in the north about a month or so ago. He's speaking at the next meeting in Hobart in a few weeks time. I'm not sure of the exact date but if members are interested in attending, he'll be Zooming in. When I say speaking, he'll be Zooming in virtually to speak to the organisation.

CHAIR - I thought he might have been getting home to see his family but no such luck. Thank you. We will suspend and come back around 25 to four. Thank you very much and ready for Resources.

The Committee suspended from 3.21 p.m.

The Committee resumed at 3.36 p.m.

CHAIR - Minister, welcome back.

Mr BARNETT - Chair, it's good to be back.

CHAIR - We are what we might consider the last area of scrutiny for the day. Minister for Resources, and certainly, yes, possibly the home straight.

Mr BARNETT - Could I possibly update the committee?

CHAIR - Thank you, you have something to update from the last - and then introduce your team -

Mr BARNETT - Then I'll introduce my colleagues.

CHAIR - and provide your overview as well. That would be much appreciated. Thank you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. Just in answer to the question from honourable Jo Siejka earlier today; re COVID-19 Small Business Energy Support Grant. One-off payments of \$1000 were available to eligible businesses that were not eligible for the COVID-19 electricity, water, and/or sewerage waiver available from service providers from

1 April 2020. The program supported 129 applicants to a total of \$129 000 over two rounds from 31 August to 26 October 2020, and from 4 November to 21 December 2020.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. Member, are you comfortable with that answer which we received? In light of that, we'll take that question off our list to send.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair. Just to clarify, I mentioned about Legacy Tasmania in the north and the south to indicate its \$20 000 per entity. So \$20 000 to Legacy in the north, \$20 000 to Legacy in the south. I think I mentioned \$10 000, but it was \$20 000 each, all up \$40 000. I just wanted to put that on the record. So strong support for Legacy in Tasmania.

CHAIR - That's fine, thank you. They did take a very strong initiative this year and sent out a \$50 badge. I know a lot of my colleagues, including me, received one, and encouraged us to send our \$50.

Mr BARNETT - To give generously at the side of the road.

Mr VALENTINE - I collected for them.

Mr BARNETT - Did you?

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, I did.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for doing that, Rob Valentine. Much appreciated. They do a great job.

CHAIR - He also does the Tasmanian Sleep Out as well, in the south.

Mr BARNETT - That's good. My grandfather was president of Legacy in Hobart all those years ago, so there's a special connection there. They do a great job for which we are very grateful.

CHAIR - Yes, they do. Now that you've gone out of your area of Veterans' Affairs again, and we would like to invite you put your Resources hat on, and here we go. Thank you.

Minister for Resources

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. First, I'd like to welcome to the table Brett Stewart, who is from the Department of State Growth, deputy secretary Resources, Strategy, and Policy. Likewise, I've got Kevin Robinson, director of Minerals Resources Tasmania. Thank you, Kevin. Alistair Morton who is director of Resources Policy on my right.

If I'm able to make an opening remark with respect to resources. So that covers forestry and mining, and I just wanted to say they are very important sectors in the Tasmanian economy. Mining and mineral processing remains our number one export, more than 60 per cent of our exports, which is fantastic.

COVID-19 did have some movement restrictions but they delivered during that COVID-19 pandemic. It's been ongoing, but they have delivered in terms of jobs and growing our economy and we're very grateful. We kept a very close working relationship with them during the COVID-19 pandemic and were able to certainly provide that support, encouragement, and a COVID-19 safe environment. I'd say congratulations and well done to the mining and mineral processing sector, and the forestry sector for getting through very difficult and challenging time.

I also wanted to acknowledge there have been efforts by a small minority in the community to disrupt both the mining and mineral processing sectors and the forestry sectors from the work, and of course that's disappointing and counterproductive. I'm pleased to say both sectors have weathered the storm and continue on their way.

In terms of mining and mineral processing, over 5000 people in that sector, \$2.8 billion to our economy, 60 per cent of our mercantile exports. Millions in royalties and other payments. I can answer any questions in that regard.

In terms of the budget, we've got \$2 million for Geosciences Initiative, which is fantastic. That's matched with up to \$3 million from the federal government, thanks to Keith Pitt, I put that on that record, for his support as Minister for Resources. I get on well with Keith and he's a very good supporter of the resources sector in Tassie. We've got \$1.5 million for the popular Exploration Development and Drilling Grant Initiative up until 2025, and that will help find our new mines for the future, supporting exploration -

CHAIR - It's \$1 million over those years.

Mr BARNETT - \$1.5 million.

CHAIR - \$1.5 million.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's right, and \$150 000 to establish a diversity action plan in the mining and mineral processing sector. I'm pleased to advise that mineral exploration investment in our state rose \$13.8 million in the 2020-21 financial year, a 25 per cent increase on the previous year. That's a good sign for the future.

In forestry and our wood product sector. First, wood is -

CHAIR - It's good.

Mr BARNETT - Wood is good, Chair. Wood is good. I thank you for assisting in that regard. Wood is -

CHAIR - I think we've heard that before from you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - sustainable. It's in fact renewable. It's the ultimate renewable. It's there to support Tasmania and Tasmanians. It's a \$1.2 billion industry in Tasmania; 5700 Tasmanians in that sector and providing jobs in primary and second processing. \$11.7 million provided in the budget to promote the sector, \$10 million with the on-island processing program, \$450 000 for investment and skills in diversity in forestry to help deliver a modern, skilled, and diverse workforce, and \$1.15 million for the promotion of wood as a reliable,

sustainable, and renewable resource. Remembering Tasmania is the only state with a wood encouragement policy across the state relevant to all government departments and agencies.

I'm pleased to note in a clear and unambiguous decision by the full court of the Federal Court, it backed in our Regional Forest Agreement. That was backed in again by the High Court of Australia based on an appeal by the Bob Brown Foundation. Those claims were thrown out and it backed in our world-class forestry sector and the Regional Forest Agreement.

In terms of forestry, we have a reputation and it needs to be maintained as sustainable and renewable. In terms of regional areas, it's really important, particularly not just your area, Chair, but across Tasmania. We're pleased and proud to be working shoulder to shoulder with the industry. I note that the Tasmanian Timber Awards are on this Saturday night, 10 September -

CHAIR - Friday night.

Mr BARNETT - This Friday night.

Mr BARNETT - 10 September.

CHAIR - I hope you don't turn up on Saturday. You'll have missed it.

Mr BARNETT - I'll be there with bells and whistles on with my wife, Kate.

CHAIR - I'm pretty sure it's Friday night.

Mr BARNETT - We're looking forward - it's the 10th of -

CHAIR - Can somebody just check the date? Otherwise I'll be going on the wrong night.

Mr BARNETT - It's the Tasmanian Timber Gala Awards at the Albert Hall, 6.30 pm.

CHAIR - Friday night?

Mr BARNETT - This Friday night.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - We're looking forward to it.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. Seeing you opened the door for me to ask this question around disruption of both the forest and mining industry. It's been brought to my attention that WorkSafe Tasmania took some action against the Bob Brown Foundation, and the report that was tabled in the parliament last month - welcome, Kim - found no misconduct.

I'm interested, minister, in your view around WorkSafe Tasmania being able to carry out their roles and functions without having to end up in court, if you like, but also, too, I have some questions around the Work Health and Safety Act in Tasmania prohibits a third party from lodging complaints and submitting a report to a reportable incident. Is that of concern to you, minister?

Mr BARNETT - What's of concern to me is a minority in the community trying to disrupt the forest industry, the mining industry, the salmon industry and our productive industries. As a government we back in our productive industries and their right to operate, hence our workplace protection legislation and the importance of it to protect people's right to work and business' right to operate free from impediment, disruption or workplace invasions.

With respect to the part of your question you referred to the Integrity Commission report, if I'm reading you correctly.

CHAIR - That's right.

Mr BARNETT - That report was tabled. It's a public document. It's referred to as Investigation Tindle and, of course, both the Attorney-General Elise Archer and I were absolved 100 per cent. The concerns that I have, like the Attorney-General, is that the Integrity Commission has potentially been, or could potentially be, weaponised for political purposes. That's exactly what it should not be used for. The Integrity Commission operates completely independent of government. It should be completely independent of political interference. The Integrity Commission Act 2009 makes that very clear. So, the report and its findings make it very clear there were no findings of wrongdoing. In its conclusion the Integrity Commission stated there was no evidence that the Government attempted to pressure or influence the regulator, which is WorkPlace Tasmania. That report is on the public record and I draw people's attention to it.

CHAIR - Some of the evidence that was taken towards the outcome of that report was given by a third-party person. I've been informed that they are no longer able - it says here, 'The Work Health and Safety Act of 2012 prohibits a third party from lodging complaints and submitting a report of a reportable incident'. Well, often it is a third party that can provide evidence. I'm just interested. Are you concerned that that may well impede on a third party being able - particularly a supporter of minerals or forest industry - in that regard?

Mr BARNETT - Can I just make it clear, it's a work health and safety matter. Therefore, it is a responsibility for the Attorney-General and minister for Construction and the regulator itself, as in WorkSafe Tasmania. It's best for me not to comment further, but to draw your attention to the Attorney-General's responsibility in that regard.

CHAIR - You don't want to wander into somebody else's area, in other words, so - thank you. It's a good opportunity for me to raise that issue in this forum. I will follow up on Thursday in regard to that. It does impact on the area that you have responsibility for in mining and the forest industry, minister, so thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Can I also introduce to the table our secretary, Kim Evans, and welcome Kim and thank him for his terrific support for me and the Government across the board, and all his team.

CHAIR - I'm sure he'll appreciate those kind words, minister. We welcome him back to the table. He was here yesterday, so he knows this committee well.

Mr BARNETT - He's been in many places yesterday, today and probably for the rest of the week. We appreciate his presence with us today.

CHAIR - Minister, I'll get down to some of the areas which I'd like to progress, if I might. The on-island processing and value-adding initiative, and you did touch on that. I'm interested in that. It talks about in the papers this initiative 'will grow on-island processing and value-adding of forest industry products, and it intends to attract new businesses to Tasmania and will provide existing businesses with incentives to invest and expand'. Has that occurred or is that happening? I'd be interested in some information on that because that's been one of the biggest bug bears, I'd suggest, for many years across our communities that we tend to value add our resource - our precious resource in the forest industry elsewhere, and we don't get the value here in Tasmania necessarily.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. It is really appreciated. The Government has responded to the needs, the desires and the vision of the industry which is for value adding and downstream processing, which is exactly the vision of our Government, hence strong support at the election for not just this policy, but the majority Liberal Government. We know that we can and should deliver for the industry with this type of program, hence a \$10 million initiative, part of our \$11.7 million support package for forestry and the timber processing sector.

CHAIR - Is that matching funds by Sustainable Timber Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - I'm glad you asked. In fact, it's 50/50 or a dollar for dollar. So \$5.85 million from STT together with \$5.85 million from the Government, as in the taxpayers. Of course, it underlines the importance of STT being sustainable and financial and being in the black, which they have been for the last three years which they weren't for 10 years prior to that.

The reforms which we implemented some years ago, now they are operating in the black for which we are very grateful, under difficult circumstances, too, including with COVID-19 and the challenges with bushfires and the like. They have done a sterling job to get to that position where the Government through the Premier, the Treasurer and I, has asked them for that \$5.85 million to match our dollar to get to the \$11.7 million.

So, if we go back to the on-island processing. We've taken advice from industry, consultation in the south and the north. So, this is all about a \$10 million program over five years. It'll help grow the forest industry with more on-island processing value adding more jobs in Tasmania, and more details will be made available. I'm happy to pass to Kim Evans or Al Morton about this shortly if required.

The sorts of things we're looking at is domestic processing initiatives. Some are already underway, but examples of that, for example, is Cusp or Hermal where they are working to establish the world's first cross-laminated timber panel product based on plantation eucalypt hardwood with a new timber processing facility to be established on the north-west coast. That work is going through the OCG. But it's basically adding value to our industry as it is. It's up to the industry to come forward with plans, applications and to respond to that. The feedback so far has been very positive. I'll have more to say about this in coming days.

CHAIR - Does this vision include manufactured timber boards?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it would include manufactured timber boards such as cross-laminated timber which you may have seen out of Launceston or out of Hermal or Cusp on the north-west coast, so that's quite exciting because that's a new way. It's called engineered wood and they do a great job. This is the new way of using our timber and including plantation timber.

Mr VALENTINE - Nitens?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, *Eucalyptus nitens* in particular, but there may be other varieties as well, but certainly that's what's being used. I've been to the factory in Wynyard on the north-west coast. There are 30 to 40 people there. There are plans to grow that subject to the feasibility study and success to date.

CHAIR - Are you expecting that there'll be a decline in the export of sawmill logs in the future?

Mr BARNETT - Of logs themselves?

CHAIR - Of sawmill logs.

Mr BARNETT - Well, I think the last stats showed 5.5 million tonnes of wood export, so that's wood chips and logs. What we want to see as a government is more on-island processing and value adding, hence the \$10 million program.

CHAIR - Well, hence the money into this initiative.

Mr BARNETT - Hence the money into this initiative. So that's where our thinking is. We would like to see more innovation and creativity and on-island processing. That's where we would like the industry to go both in native forestry plantation across the board. It's not just one sector or other, and we want to use our timber more wisely. It's quite exciting because the industry is responding to that. The feedback has been very positive and collaborative. I'll just check if the secretary can add to that.

Mr EVANS - It might be worth adding that we don't actually export any sawmill-quality logs. We only export whole logs that are not of a suitable quality.

Mr BARNETT - That's a good point. Thank you, secretary.

CHAIR - Yes. I think there's some contention, if you like, around whether some of them do get away that possibly could be utilised here. Anyway, that's probably something that we'll take up with Forestry Tasmania or Sustainable Timber Tasmania. Old habits die hard, minister. I'm interested in your view around the pressure that there is at this point in time from the building industry in supplying quality timber for construction.

I'm aware that people are turning to steel because they just can't access the timber in a timely manner to be able to meet contractual deadlines and the like. So I'm interested in your view around that, and if you see some initiatives that might support the timber industry to be able to supply that material.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. I think you've touched on a key point which is present in the industry and in Tasmania. In fact, it's across the board across Australia. The building and construction sector is under demand. You will find building a house, there's pressures, time pressures, to get the available product and timber products to actually build your home or build the property for commercial purposes. So, we as a government hence have got the on-island processing program.

In terms of housing and construction demand, we don't see that disappearing any time soon. In terms of supply and supply chains, they are important and whether that's on island in Tassie or to Melbourne and Sydney market. In terms of timber supply and products, I think it's fair to say we're an enabler. The 2017 future industry growth plan which was to double the timber and timber products industry by value by 2036, that's still part of the plan, and 70 per cent of the wood volumes now come from our private forests, hence our support for Private Forestry Tasmania and our private forests. Our public forester is Sustainable Timber Tasmania, as you've correctly noted, Chair. But, of course, that remains an issue in terms of supply.

In terms of Tasmania's forests, we have our saw logs processed locally; we have the pealabilits which are largely processed up in the north-west with Ta Ann. We have our wood chips which is, as I say, 5.5 million tonnes of wood chips and whole log exports each year. Those numbers have increased markedly since we came to Government seven and a half years ago when the industry was on its knees. We've done everything we can to rebuild the industry and it's been working, but there are still plenty of challenges there and a lot more work to do.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'm interested in whether this initiative incorporates minor species for specialist applications. Always an interesting area and one that I know Tasmanians are very proud of their special species timber. It's always a challenge to access some of that special species.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. This beautiful table we're sitting at, we're surrounded by some lovely specialty timber not only this committee room, but in the parliament, in the Chamber, for which we are very, very grateful. The specialty timber sector is very important and the Government has recognised that over many years. In fact, a key part of the 2017 future growth strategy for the timber industry, specialty timber was a key part of that plan going forward. So it's an iconic part of the Tasmanian history and the forest industry and our economy. Boatbuilders, furniture making, other craftspeople turn Tasmania's specialty timber into iconic Tasmanian products; it's part of the Tasmanian brand, which I touched on earlier today.

Currently, special species timbers are sourced primarily through a public production forest, and this supply has declined over time. Sustainable Timber Tasmania continues to report that customer demand is being met. Outside our production, for our special species, timber harvesting is permitted within conservation areas, regional reserves, as provided in the Nature Conservation Act, and on future potential production forest land, as per the legislation of the Forestry (Rebuilding the Forest Industry) Act 2014. To facilitate special species timber harvesting within these permitted areas, the Government developed and released Tasmania's first Special Species Management Plan in 2017, as I indicated in my opening remarks.

CHAIR - Thank you. Kim, if you want to move that microphone just a bit closer to you, Hansard is having trouble picking up your valuable information. Thank you.

Mr VALENTINE - He hasn't given much yet.

CHAIR - No, he has. He told me that we didn't export any sawlogs, so I'll be following up on that one. Members, questions in regard to forestry?

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, I've got one. Mentioning the war - the future growth strategy you just mentioned with regard to special species timber, you talk about a sustainable use. Can you describe to us what that looks like, going forward? If we're harvesting and it must have a defined life, as a plan, or are you replacing, regrowing? What's happening there?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. To be very clear, as a government, we support sustainable forest industry. That means regrowing. For every tree harvested, a tree is replaced by Sustainable Timber Tasmania on public land.

Mr VALENTINE - No, special species I'm talking about, not just general forestry.

Mr BARNETT - Okay. Well, I'm just making the point that we support sustainable forestry, and best practice wherever possible. When it comes to special species timber, there needs to be a forest practices plan prepared before any tree is harvested. That needs to be independently assessed by the Forest Practices Authority, the FPA, and that needs to be sustainable. So it goes through a process. There is a special species timber harvesting plan - the first of its type was 2017, when that was prepared. Any work that is undertaken must be consistent with our sustainable forestry practices. I will stop there and just see if Al Morton might wish to add to that, with respect to specialty timbers.

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister. So probably the main volumes at the moment are coming off the permanent timber production zone land, which is Sustainable Timber Tasmania's land. There's no legislated volume, so they set their own, basically, annual targets.

Mr VALENTINE - Wasn't it 12 5000 cubic metres or something?

Mr MORTON - That was a few years ago.

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, it's a while ago.

Mr MORTON - Yes. So in the 2019-20 season, they set themselves a performance target of 8400 cubic metres, and they reported that they sold 7941 cubic metres of special species sawlog in that year, but they'd actually met customer demand during that year.

It's been known for some time that volumes of special species timber on a production forest are declining, as STT transitions. The volumes they create for integrated harvesting and arisings are declining as they transition more into plantations and regrowth. That was a key reason why the Government delivered the Special Species Management Plan in 2017 that the minister talked about, to look at providing the framework to some of the other areas where special species harvest could occur, subject to approval such as the future potential production forest land and regional reserves and conservation areas.

As part of the work done through the Special Species Management Plan, it was found there was a significant resource available on those land tenures I just mentioned. There's also a framework referenced in the plan to harvest on those land tenures. As the minister mentioned, effectively, it's a Forest Practices Plan, and the approval of the public land manager.

Mr VALENTINE - So the Hydrowood, can you comment on that?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can. I've been with the operators of Hydrowood on Lake Pieman; it's fantastic. You jump on a barge, they take you out and they have -

Mr VALENTINE - I know about the process. I know how they do it.

Mr BARNETT - Well, they go underwater, they harvest and take out and put it on the barge, and it's a specialty timber. So it's, again, a timber harvesting plan.

Mr VALENTINE - So that's Huon and myrtle.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, blackwood, Huon -

Mr VALENTINE - And blackwood.

Mr BARNETT - And myrtle. Sassafras, but also eucalypt, interestingly, because there's a special value given to eucalypt because it's Hydrowood and under the water. Then they sell it into Melbourne, Sydney, and some in Tasmania, I understand.

Mr VALENTINE - They've got to dry it out very carefully.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, very carefully. But it's ingenious. So when we had the forestry ministers meeting here a few years ago, I gave a gift of Hydrowood on behalf of the Tasmanian Government to each of the forestry ministers, to show off Tasmania's specialty timber credibility. Yes, it works really well.

Mr VALENTINE - I asked these question - I went to that session that you had the other night in the reception room. There's a lot that was said that I could agree with, in terms of the use of timber and how important it is for housing - and it's got to be. I mean, what else are you going to use?

CHAIR - Steel.

Mr VALENTINE - Well, you can use steel; probably a lot more expensive. If anyone's looking at the greenhouse gas side of it, until we produce hydrogen properly, those sorts of things - that's not sustainable.

I went there as an observer, as a Legislative Councillor. There's this persistent battle over old growth. I know your views on some of that, but do you think that there's a point where the community can come together and fully support forestry through plantation timber only and single-stick selection of special species? Yes, it'll put the price up, but do you see that as a way forward or do you think that you've still got to continue with special species being harvested, possibly in conjunction with other harvesting that happens in contentious forest areas?

Mr BARNETT - Well, let's be very clear. What we don't support is the Greens' policy to close native forest harvesting, because 40 per cent of the jobs in the forestry sector are in that sector. So you're going to see -

Mr VALENTINE - I'm not -

Mr BARNETT - Well, that's, with respect -

Mr VALENTINE - I'm not advocating one thing or another. I'm asking the question.

Mr BARNETT - You did indicate in your question do I support going solely to plantation and then -

Mr VALENTINE - Single-stick.

Mr BARNETT - partially to single-stick specialty timber. My response is, to be very clear, that we do not support the Greens' closure of the native forestry sector, which would put thousands of people out of work. What we do support is a sustainable forest industry, where when you harvest a tree you replant. The Greens, in recent weeks, have been talking about deforestation in Tasmania. Let's be very clear: this does not happen in Tasmania on public land. Sustainable Timber Tasmania replants every single tree at harvest. There is no deforestation in Tasmania. So let's get that on the record, because this is a myth that they are now trying to -

Mr VALENTINE - With respect, minister, I'm not talking about what the Greens are talking about.

Mr BARNETT - get into the community, and it's very, very frustrating.

Mr VALENTINE - I'm not talking about what the Greens' policy is. I'm talking about this sustainability that you mentioned. For it to be sustainable, you need to be able to see it happening well into the future. So I'm wondering where that fine line between having forest wars all the time, which might suit, politically, lots of people - but it's not the way, I think, the rest of the community want to see things go. I think they want to support forestry and they want to support the proper on-island processing, as you are saying.

I'm wondering what your plan is to see things happen sustainably, so that you don't get to the point where you're continually having the war. That's the question I'm putting to you.

Mr BARNETT - Well, I think it's probably fair to say that the Greens and the Bob Brown Foundation are relentless in their attack on the native forestry sector. They will do nothing but continue with their campaign.

We already have 85 per cent of our old-growth forest protected. We already have half of the state protected in some sort of reserve. We already have more than half of our forests protected. We have a plan for sustainable forestry. We have a plan, and support the objectives of best practice wherever possible. We have a plan to support the special species sector; we have a special management plan for the special species sector, which is to your point. We have a plan to support jobs, hence the on-island processing fund of \$10 million to support the industry.

Mr VALENTINE - Do you have a long-term strategy for replacement of special species? You're probably looking at a 300-year plan of - and I know that might sound ridiculous, but if it's going to be sustainable it has to be a plan that looks at the provision of

special species well into the future. Regrowth of special species in certain areas - not clear-felled or copped or whatever you call it, but actually there for the special species.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. So there's two parts to your question, in terms of the answer. The first part is the 2017 Special Species Management Plan. It was a key part of the forestry growth strategy through to 2036. That plan is in place; it applies. Sustainable Timber Tasmania responds to that, and Al Morton touched on that particularly and specifically.

In my opening remarks, I referred to the future potential production forestry land, where there is access to the special species timber sector, if they wish to apply for it, under that plan, under the future potential production forests and under the legislation which we already have. So they can progress and obtain special species in that area, 356 000 hectares across Tasmania, most in the north, north-east and north-west, a little bit in the south. They can progress in accordance with a special species management plan, and in terms of a forest practices plan. They need to have all in accordance with independent assessment, independent approval by the FPA. I'll just check and see if Al Morton would like to add to that.

Mr MORTON - Nothing to add, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you. Thanks for answering my questions.

Mr BARNETT - That's all right.

Ms ARMITAGE - Just a supplementary on the special species, if I could, minister. I think we all know Denman Marine and Andrew Denman with his boats. On his website, he says, 'Our aim is to keep the traditional boat building skills alive and to promote wooden boats as a viable alternative to the modern, highly advertised fibreglass boats'. We know that the timber that Andrew needs is celery top pine. I realise that sustainable timber's mentioned, but I wonder if you have any indication of the availability still of the celery top. I know it's been in very short supply. It's something that Andrew and many other boatbuilders, I'm sure, need.

Mr BARNETT - Andrew is an excellent advocate for the special species sector, it's probably fair to say. He's been a long-time advocate and a determined one.

Ms ARMITAGE - He is and he makes beautiful boats.

Mr BARNETT - He makes beautiful boats. I have visited his boatbuilding enterprise.

CHAIR - You should have let us know. We would have come with you, minister.

Mr BARNETT - There you go. I think you could make contact with Andrew Denman directly, because I think -

CHAIR - Yes. I know my husband's been there. Yes.

Mr BARNETT - I think he may have contact with you from time to time. Please feel free to put the request out; I'm sure he'd be accommodating. He does some very fine work.

CHAIR - I don't wander into the Huon very often, no.

Mr BARNETT - It's a wonderful place to visit. My grandfather was born and raised down there, at Gordon, and lived at Franklin. It's definitely a wonderful opportunity and we would like that to continue. We want to support boatbuilding, we want to support furniture making. We want to support the specialty timbers, such as the table that we're sitting at today -

Ms ARMITAGE - So how are we going with the access to the celery top?

Mr BARNETT - Well in terms of access to celery top, I can't answer that question. But I reckon Sustainable Timber Tasmania could answer that question, and they would be delighted to support you in answering that question at scrutiny hearings later in the year -

Mr VALENTINE - December.

Mr BARNETT - We're at budget estimates, and we're all about budget.

Ms ARMITAGE - I understand that. I thought you might have had an indication with the special species, of the availability.

Mr BARNETT - We would love to answer as many questions as possible, but unfortunately with respect to very specific questions relevant to STT that provide that product to the market what we can tell you that in 2019-20 the STT special species saw log target was 8400 cubic metres. STT reported that they met the demand of all customers providing 7941 cubic metres of special species saw logs in 2019-20. So that's the advice I've received from Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

Ms ARMITAGE - That's a variety of special timbers though, isn't it? It could be black woods and a lot of others, it may not necessarily be the celery top.

Mr BARNETT - No, it's a variety.

Mr VALENTINE - One last question on -

CHAIR - Supplementary.

Mr VALENTINE - Yes. With respect to Hydrowood, what's the cubic meterage that is considered to be available? Do we know what that's - finite, or?

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question.

CHAIR - What's under the water?

Mr BARNETT - It's under the water, and I don't know what's under the water, but Andrew Morgan and SFM that are the private company that operate Hydrowood. I'm sure he could answer that question. But as the Government minister -

CHAIR - I think Brett can.

Mr VALENTINE - He's answering it right now.

Mr BARNETT - We might be able to assist. Let's see if we can. So, let's have a look. You can have a read of that. That might assist in terms of Hydrowood, and I might be able to assist the member a little more on celery top pine.

CHAIR - Okay, so we'll get the Hydrowood first. If you can speak into that microphone, thanks, Brett.

Mr STEWART - Certainly. So, in 2019 University of Tasmania revealed that possibly up to 300 000 cubic metres of wood may lie within Hydro's lakes, or empanelments. That's including Lake Gordon, Lake Pieman, Lake Mackintosh, Lake Burbury, and Lake Murchison. So that's an estimate, but that's a significant quantity.

CHAIR - How did they make that assessment?

Mr STEWART - I think they've done some scanning from the surface.

CHAIR - Okay.

Mr VALENTINE - LIDAR is it? What you call LIDAR?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, so thanks very much for that. Through you Chair, just to answer, I think thanks to the secretary and Al Morton in terms of special species, I am advised in 2019-20 the volume for blackwood was 6771; celery top pine, 426 cubic metres; myrtle, 45; blackheart sassafras, 159; Huon pine, 152; silver wattle, 38 cubic metres; white sassafras, 76 cubic metres; other, 274 cubic metres. All up 7941 cubic metres, which was the number I indicated earlier. Thank you.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you, minister.

CHAIR - In the past, and this may be a question at for a later time, but I'll try it now. We had a wood bank that was available, not only to industry but the general person may be able to go and purchase some timber. Do you have any indication around how much we have in the wood bank at this point in time?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Of course, the wood bank you're referring to is the future potential production forest land, which is some 356 000 hectares. In terms of that land, I'll ask if Al would like to add to that. It's controlled by Crown Lands Tasmania, not me as Minister for Resources, but we may be able to assist a little further.

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister. I can clarify, Chair, were you talking about the wooden boat board bank, or?

CHAIR - That's what I was talking about. I mean obviously the minister thought that my wood bank is different to - yes, so, I'm talking about the -

Mr BARNETT - So which wood bank are you -

Mr MORTON - If the question pertained to the wooden boat board bank, I think, say -

Mr BARNETT - All right, apologies. So, I've answered a slightly different question.

CHAIR - You have.

Mr BARNETT - But that's okay. So, we'll go to Al Morton on the wood bank -

Mr MORTON - So, the wooden boat board bank was timber that was effectively set aside for wooden boat building. Island Specialty Timbers, which is a part of STT, manages that wooden boat board bank which is down at Geeveston.

CHAIR - Do you know if there's much left in it?

Mr MORTON - I saw it a year or two ago, and there was a reasonable supply there, but I'm not across what's there currently.

Mr BARNETT - It's a matter for STT isn't it? Do you want to just clarify that, sorry, through you Chair?

Mr MORTON - A matter for STT, yes.

CHAIR - All right, it's probably mostly blackwood then.

Ms ARMITAGE - I was wondering what type of timber it would be if it's for boat building?

Mr MORTON - It was boat building, so it was celery top and Huon, yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

CHAIR - I hope they're not only taking from it, I hope they're adding to it as well.

Mr VALENTINE - Quite expensive stuff.

CHAIR - Yes, but still that timber is something - it's a prize almost. It's a gift to yourself if you buy something and say, 'This is what I've purchased and it's from Tasmanian Timber'.

Minister, last year in Estimates as we know they were quite late in the year, around November, we talked about \$500 000 to the timber industry through Rural Business Tasmania, and if you extended the application time for forest contractors. I'm interested, it was for counselling and support.

Mr BARNETT - That's right.

CHAIR - I'm interested whether that was fully subscribed?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. You have an excellent memory. So, you're quite right, it was \$500 000 for the Forestry Contractor Resilience Program through to January 2022. Yes, the Government extended that program to support our forestry contractors as they deal with the COVID-19 and the trade impacts following those global tensions, including in China. The forestry, harvest, and haulage contractors are the backbone

of the forestry industry, and the supply chain was disrupted and particularly vulnerable at the time the market we traded in. That's the reason for it, so it was delivered by Rural Business Tasmania as you've correctly noted, Chair.

The resilience program provides contractors and the opportunity to work with specialists on business planning and coaching, and identify future opportunities to diversify and build business stability and resilience. Grants of up to \$15 000 have been made available to eligible businesses to implement identified business opportunities and improvements, and the applications can be made through Rural Business Tasmania.

CHAIR - So it's not fully subscribed at this point in time?

Mr BARNETT - Let's check the details on that. I pass to the secretary and/or Al Morton.

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister. It's still open, and it has assisted 13 contractor business to date.

CHAIR - So there's still quite a bit of money left given that it was a \$15 000 maximum per application. Is that still correct?

Mr MORTON - Yes.

CHAIR - Okay, thank you. I'll keep that in mind if I see anyone looking a bit sad on Friday evening, minister. Also, the equity injection to TasRail, I'm interested in whether that's been able to make a difference in supporting the timber industry, and we talked about that as well as late only as November of last year.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I had the honour of being with the minister for Infrastructure and TasRail, Mr Ferguson, at the launch with the CO of TasRail at Brighton in terms of the establishment of that fund. An injection into TasRail, which of course will support TasRail, but also supports our forest industry. I'm very pleased to advise that the 40-odd log trailers were manufactured down at Triabunna.

CHAIR - At Elphinstone's.

Mr BARNETT - At Elphinstone's. You would have seen them, I'm sure, Chair -

CHAIR - I've seen them as I've driven past.

Mr BARNETT - On your travels, as have I, and when I visited there. Some fantastic work, and employing a lot of younger people in the Triabunna community. So, congratulations to Graeme Elphinstone and his team. I'll just check if Al Morton has some details in and around that, otherwise we can provide more information in due course.

CHAIR - So they've all been built?

Mr MORTON - I believe so. Whether they've been deployed yet I'm not quite sure, but a month or two ago they were basically ready.

CHAIR - Time for a drive to Triabunna then for you, Al. Let's talk about pellets.

Mr VALENTINE - There's a song in that.

CHAIR - Obviously, for me personally, I went to the launch of the Dorset Renewable Industries launch when they looked for public investment into the pellet processing factory at Scottsdale. That hasn't been as successful to date as what Dorset Renewable Industry board of directors would have liked, so what do you see as a future for the pellet industry in Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - The Dorset Renewable Industries, I haven't met with them or been in contact with them for some time. They did have some plans in terms of the pellet industry and the study that I think you're referring to. That hasn't come to fruition as far as I'm aware.

CHAIR - That had a prospectus out?

Mr BARNETT - They did, and as far as I'm aware it hasn't progressed. I draw your attention and their attention to our value-adding on-island processing \$10 million fund to indicate if they're still a possibility in terms of providing more value to the wood products that they may or may not have, and to then turn those into pellets. What we do know is Neville Smith Forest Products do sell their bags of pellets. You might have seen them in Bunnings, and elsewhere, keeping people warm during the winter. Of course, we also have a biofuels replacement program for gas and coal, and as a government this is part of a policy to replace those with biofuels.

So, bio-energy using wood waste, and that's part of our plan. Martin Maroney, a member of our department, is working on that bio-energy strategy for Tasmania. That boiler replacement program is part of our election policy commitment. It's different to the Dorset Renewable Industries initiative, but it is related to that, and I see a lot of upside potential in that space because it's good for the environment, it's good for the timber industry, and it's good for jobs.

CHAIR - What about the black pellet? That was an initiative, yes. It was an initiative in conjunction with Forico.

Mr BARNETT - Correct. You've got an excellent memory.

Mr VALENTINE - Of biochar?

Mr BARNETT - No, it's not biochar, it's more of a black pellet. They did a feasibility study which was supported by our Government. I'm sure I can see Al itching to contribute, but that didn't progress. Let's pass to Al Morton who might wish to add to that.

CHAIR - So what happened, Al?

Mr MORTON - Forico, the company, progressed a trial, but yes, didn't progress. But that's the nature with feasibility studies and trials for new products.

Mr VALENTINE - Can someone tell me what it is?

Mr MORTON - I think they call it a torrefied pellet.

CHAIR - It's more durable than the other wood pellets is my understanding.

Mr VALENTINE - Torrefied wood?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's not biochar. It's a black pellet. The feasibility looked into using *Eucalyptus nitans* is my understanding. Instead of exporting the log or the woodchips they would turn those chips into a wood pellet, a black pellet rather than a white pellet, which would then be exported into Japan. That was their vision. The feasibility didn't progress because of the economics of the case. So, the business case didn't stack up.

CHAIR - So how much funding did Forico receive for that initiative?

Mr BARNETT - I would have to check on that.

Ms ARMITAGE - I think because Neville Smith have done very well with their pellets, and they won an EPA award.

CHAIR - Are we aware that they're trialling any other product?

Mr BARNETT - Is that Forico, or just generally?

CHAIR - Forico.

Mr BARNETT - They do a lot of work with seedlings and with research and development and extension. Forico is a very big organisation in Tasmania. Bryan Hayes, who'll you see no doubt on Friday night at the timber awards, it's probably best that that question be answered by Bryan Hayes in terms of Forico's involvement. They do a lot of research of the type of timber they want to grow, and how they grow it and how they care for their trees. We have funding support for Arbre which is again encouraging increasing capacity for the maintenance and care for our forests. That's Arbre based out of Launceston which supports the timber industry, particularly in the north of the state.

Ms PALMER - Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, can you outline the investments the Government makes to STT so it can perform a range of community service obligations on behalf of the Government?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. It's actually an important question because they are not only into production forest, but they are a land manager. They operate to provide a lot of community support and a lot of community benefit. Not just in fighting fires but in terms of bushfire management: hazard reduction burns; assisting in the prevention of preparation for and detection of bushfires; and ensuring that the permanent timber production's own land continues to be managed, accessible and available for multiple uses. Obviously, not just roads but access all around our production forests. It's not uncommon for requests to go through to STT, whether it be through the minister's office or elsewhere to say, we need the road upgraded to get access to - for our beekeepers, is one example, for recreational activities, for hunting purposes or just for use, general use.

In terms of combating bushfires, the budget allocation for the CSO is \$8 million, so that's the Government supporting the community service obligation. That's been there over past governments, many different governments, over many years but the \$8 million in the last

financial year and \$8 million in this financial year and each year of the forward Estimates is subject to an annual review. That payment relates to bushfires, fuel reduction, fire prevention and the \$4 million, as I say, supporting the total of \$8 million.

There's a lot of work that goes on by STT. Another area where they do that work is working with the mountain biking community in and around Derby. That's a good example where Sustainable Timber Tasmania has worked with the local government, worked with the biking community, including at Blue Derby in the state's north-east, and they are working on a master plan as we speak with the Dorset Council, with the biking community, because some of that bike track as you may or may not know is on production forest land. Thanks to STT, of course, also being a sponsor of the biking competitions from time to time. I was there on opening day and only came off twice, landed on my head once but no stitches or too many bruises.

Mr VALENTINE - That's what helmets are for.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I know. Very important to wear the helmet.

CHAIR - I watched on from a very comfortable position on the ground with a nice glass of wine.

Mr BARNETT - I remember that ride. It was exhilarating. I encourage young and old Tasmanians to give it a go.

Leatherwood Management is the other example where they work with the beekeepers - I think the member referred to the beekeepers. There's a memorandum of understanding with the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council, the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association and it works very well. They are always wanting to do more to support our beekeepers to provide practical access to leatherwood trees on STT managed land.

There have been some questions and concerns about that but having an MOU where they sit down, work together and try to support a mutually agreeable outcome is definitely the way to go. Lindsay Bourke, for example, the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association president, recently publicly reiterated his support for the MOU saying, 'The MOU was working and that more leatherwood than ever has been saved'.

CHAIR - He's moved his operation out of Launceston, minister, so he can be closer to the forest.

Mr BARNETT - He's got an operation in Sheffield, which is a wonderful part of the world, my electorate.

CHAIR - Minister, last year you also had recently met with Australian Forest Products Association CEO Ross Hampton, and you told the committee to 'watch this space'. I'm interested in what we're to be watching following that meeting.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. I'm pleased to advise that the Australian Forest Products Association is very supportive and have a proposal before the federal government for a \$200 million research facility in Launceston, with the University of Tasmania. So \$100 million from the federal government, 100 million from industry, to be

based out of northern Tasmania. It is an exciting opportunity. We support the university in its plans to attract that funding. It would be a brilliant juxtaposition right next to our agricultural precinct, which will be established in Newnham at the University of Tasmania. We've already got \$15 million in our budgets to establish that and to move most of my Agriculture and Water department to Launceston, together with the 150-odd that are already across there, together with TIA, which is the research side of the university, and industry. It has the support of our Government and the support of the efforts that we have undertaken to work with the university in their efforts to attract that money from the federal government.

The federal government, in its recent budget, has budgeted significant funds for a feasibility study to assess the merits of establishing a massive research institution based in Launceston and based on the back of the importance of the forest industry across Australia, and of course in particular to Tasmania.

CHAIR - So the state Government put \$2 million into that. Was that for that initiative?

Mr BARNETT - The state Government has previously put in \$2 million with the federal government's \$2 million for what's called the NIFPI project, so that's the National Forest Industry - help me out -

CHAIR - Research and development.

Mr BARNETT - Research and development initiative, and that funding has been well expended in terms of research and development in the forestry industry, so state and federal working together. This funding is based on -

CHAIR - Is separate.

Mr BARNETT - Separate, so it's looking at \$100 million from the federal government and \$100 million from industry, and with the support of the university it has our support.

CHAIR - I can't leave this area without asking you in regard to the upgrade around Parattah. The former member for Windermere, who has now retired and is probably doing something other than listening to this -

Mr VALENTINE - You don't know, he's probably -

CHAIR - I know he's renovating a kitchen so he hasn't got time. There was some money put into TasRail. I'm just interested in whether that project has been completed.

Mr BARNETT - Can I say the answer is yes and it's absolutely a wonderful initiative. Congratulations to the industry, to TasRail, to STT and to the Government for all working together to get that facility built. That allows timber and the resource to come from the east coast and the southeast to Parattah direct to be then transported north into Bell Bay rather than going to Brighton and then heading north. It makes a lot of sense. It is not a massive investment, I can't remember exactly how much, but a very good investment and you'll see that that initiative is now complete.

Mr VALENTINE - Is that through Whitemore or something?

Mr BARNETT - No, no, from Parattah -

CHAIR - That came out of the Evan Rolley Report.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, that's right. Parattah, straight up to Bell Bay through -

Mr VALENTINE - No, I mean getting the product to Parattah from the east coast.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. Various roads, yes. By truck.

CHAIR - Members, any further questions in the area that I delight in finding out as much information as I possibly can, minister. We very much thank you for your knowledge in this area and your support team as well. We move onto the other really important aspect. I believe that you said 61 per cent of our exports in resources is the mining and mineral industry.

Mr BARNETT - That's right, mining and mineral processing. It's more than 60 per cent of our mercantile exports. At this stage I thank the members of the Department of State Growth and in particular Al Morton for his support today, and other members of the department for supporting us in the forestry area.

CHAIR - Yes, you certainly can and thanks very much, Al.

Mr MORTON - Thank you.

CHAIR - The work you do is always appreciated by this committee,

Mr VALENTINE - Always important we get factual information which is what we get.

CHAIR - Al certainly knows his area of expertise. Do we need anyone else at the table? Only Mr Evans to sit back down.

Mr BARNETT - I think we're all good to go when you are, Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'm pretty sure it's Mr Valentine.

Mr VALENTINE - It is, it is.

CHAIR - Thank you very much Mr Valentine, let's kick it off.

4.3 Mineral Resources

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you. The appropriation for this output group shows an increase in the appropriation when compared to last year's papers and if you've got last year's papers, it's page 326, table 11. It's an increase of around 15.7 per cent over the years 2021-22, through to 2023-24. Can you explain what the increase is about? It's about, I think, \$1.1 million annually. The increase from last year and what was projected for this year and the year after, as opposed to what's actually in this year's budget papers.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, through you Chair. I will pass to the secretary shortly. In terms of the detail, just a recap of our funding support. We've got 2 million for the

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GO Science Initiative, \$1.5 million for the popular Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative, and we've \$1 million over four years for the Mining Sector Innovation Initiative, and \$150 000 for the Diversity Action Plan. They are all in the budget. I'll check to see if the department can provide more details. I'm looking at -

Mr EVANS - Minister, through you, I don't think we can add much more to what you've just said.

Mr VALENTINE - It's \$1.1 million different, so I'm after knowing what's made that difference?

Mr STEWART - Through the minister, the figures in Output group 4 in relation to 4.2 Mineral Resources, they're a combination of ordinary recurrent budget funding for MRT but also the initiatives that the minister mentioned, and those initiatives come on and off over the out years, which is why you see a variation.

Mr VALENTINE - Okay. The question I asked was here's last year, here's the appropriation for last year. We've got the appropriations from this year. The projection for this year and the following year is about \$1.1 million different. The question is, what's caused that?

Mr ROBINSON - I can answer that, minister.

Mr BARNETT - I think the other thing I'd like to refer to is the relocation of the MRT to Burnie and we have upgraded the Mornington Core Library, which I know Kevin is nodding furiously because he's so pleased with the commitment that we've given and that will be finished in late October. I haven't got the figures with me, but I'm sure Kevin or others might have. That was a significant investment in the Mornington Core Library.

Mr VALENTINE - \$2.365 million. Is that right?

Mr BARNETT - I'll just check. Is that correct?

Mr ROBINSON - That's correct.

Mr BARNETT - The answer's yes.

Mr EVANS - Just to add, minister, part of that has been rolled over into 2021-22.

Mr VALENTINE - That's what's caused a bit of an uplift.

Mr EVANS - Right.

Mr VALENTINE - There you go, I've got the answer. Thank you very much for that.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Mr Valentine.

Mr VALENTINE - So the Core Library expansion, just for the record can you explain how the Core Library operates in terms of who can access it, what they access it for, just so people understand that.

Mr BARNETT - It'd be an honour for me to respond, but it'd be more informative for the committee for the director of MRT, I think. I have visited there a number of occasions and it's outstanding the good work that he's done there and the development is coming to fruition. I think Kevin, if you could respond in your usual manner.

Mr VALENTINE - Just prior to him starting, I'm interested in where the cores originally come from, who actually does the drilling - not the people but why it's drilled - it's then stored; who's accessing that information, et cetera. Just a really good understanding of how it all operates.

CHAIR - Also, Kevin, when you finally complete this project - some of the members of the Legislative Council have visited the site prior to the upgrade - we would appreciate an invitation to come back and look at the upgraded version. So, over to you.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. We would be delighted to have the members of the Legislative Council come to look at the new core library facilities. I think you'll be rather surprised at the change which has occurred over the last 12 months since we met. We will have a new set of laboratories in place, which will enable us to expand our operations and services to not only industry, but to other aspects of State Growth, such as State Roads. In regard to your question, the core itself - and we have more than 750 kilometres of core at the core library -

Mr VALENTINE - That's quite a bit of core.

Mr ROBINSON - There's a requirement for companies taking expiration licences and with mining leases, to provide all of that core that they've drilled over a period of time to MRT to be able to be stored at the core library. We will make an assessment of the core that is available. We generally try to get what we would call tight intersections, so that we can utilise that core not only for future people taking on those particular licence areas - so they don't have to re-drill an area, but they might have some new technology that they're applying which enables them to utilise the core that's already there.

It enables us to teach the new geologists coming through - and one of our largest clients at the Mornington core library is actually the University of Tasmania. They bring their students across, and they bring their research people across, and they access the core that we have there, for teaching purposes.

We obviously can't take all of the core from the various companies, so that's why we take a selection of core which we believe is representative of the types of mineralisation and alteration and rocks in that particular area. It may not necessarily be a mine, either. For example, we also receive core from the hydro from some of their drilling, for pumped hydro test that - we receive core from other groups in regard to infrastructure projects as well. This enables us to develop a very good understanding of the geology of Tasmania. That assists in building our databases for future reference, for exploration. The reasons the drilling occurs could be numerous. I've talked about some of the infrastructure projects. That's undertaken either grassroots or brownfields, which is near mines. That's highly important obviously for the continuity of the mining industry, to be able to continue to build the resources.

We do have a close relationship with the mines, and so therefore, we do work with them, in terms of the amount of core which they ship down. In more recent times, we have also indicated to them that we can have a policy where their core will remain confidential, until such time as they are either happy to release that for public domain, or that they have relinquished the tenements that they were working on.

Mr VALENTINE - So, minister, through you, when you say, 'confidential,' does that debar the government from the actually using it for building up Geotech maps and things?

Mr ROBINSON - That's a very good question. We do have access. The company does provide us with access. We have access to the core not only at our core library, but we can request the companies to provide us access to the core that they store at the sites.

Mr VALENTINE - Thank you. For my benefit, that was really good. I hope other members benefitted from that. The move to Burnie, to be completed later this year; the FTE placement. I believe last year Burnie had 12, Rosny had 26, Mornington had five, and then elsewhere was 9.8. Are they still the figures, or have they changed?

Mr BARNETT - I'll just check if Kevin or Kim want to speak to that, but that's been part of our plan, to relocate MRT to Burnie. Four staged relocations have been rolled out progressively, and my advice is, 12 staff are now located in Burnie, the hub of the state's mining industry, with a further 9.8 FTEs as state-wide positions. But I'll just clarify if Kevin or Brett would like to answer that.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister, we have 25.4 full-time equivalent positions at Rosny and the core library. We have 12.6 full-time equivalent positions at Burnie, and we have a further 9.8 full-time equivalent positions that are state-wide.

Mr VALENTINE - Mornington, is that a separate site to Rosny?

Mr ROBINSON - No, we include that in those numbers, of the 25.4.

Mr EVANS - Physically separate.

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, physically separate, but they're included in the Rosny figures. All right.

Mr BARNETT - Just to be clear, the core library is at Mornington, and then at Rosny we've got some other personnel; correct?

Mr EVANS - That's correct, minister.

Mr STEWART - The reason we've collected those together is because many of the staff work at both a lot of the time.

Mr VALENTINE - Yes, that's why they're so close. Geohazard mapping: can you explain what's going on in that space, in terms of the project?

Mr BARNETT - The geohazard mapping - and I think another word to use is 'landslides'; is that what you're referring to?

Mr VALENTINE - The geoscientific data. Sorry, there's two aspects I read in the last year's *Hansard*. Let's deal with the geoscientific data. I'll clarify the question on that. So, can you explain why the targeted area covered by the modern geoscientific data collection techniques, in subsequent 1 to 25 000 mapping coverage, is just 60 per cent for 2021-22, even though the actual area covered reached 82.1 per cent in 2019-20?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. More operational; if that's all right, I'll pass through to Kevin or Brett.

Mr STEWART - The way that we measure that is, after a period of time, map coverage that we've already produced becomes too old to be classed as current. So that sort of disappears off the current -

Mr VALENTINE - So it's rotational, is it, a bit?

Mr STEWART - Correct. We're constantly updating. The geoscience initiative work that Kevin and the team do under the initiative, constantly update our mapping across the state. But obviously some of that data becomes older, so the figures of our current up-to-date mapping vary over time as we cycle those in and out.

Mr VALENTINE - Geohazard mapping, which is a separate thing to that, I believe: can you tell me where that's all up to? Is there a project associated with that geohazard mapping, and what's its status?

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. The geohazard mapping is quite diverse. We have landslide mapping, and we do map for hazard bands and so forth. We also have other aspects that we look at; for example, debris flow research, coming off, for example, Mount Wellington. We have tsunami research. We're working closely with our SES in regard to that sort of research. It's quite a diverse area for us. We do spend a considerable amount of time especially with regard to councils in dealing with geohazard situations.

Mr VALENTINE - The geotech experts that actually do want to assess something - I don't know; let's say it's out Rosetta way, where there used to be landslip - they can come to you for specific data to be able to do that assessment? Or do they have to do their own drilling to assess a property like that?

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. It's important to realise that MRT is not a regulator of geohazards issues.

Mr VALENTINE - No, I understand that. The data you hold; that's all I'm -

Mr ROBINSON - We provide the information to land managers and owners, to assist in the assessment of geotechnical, geohazard risks and their impacts. If they wish to take that further, then they can bring in the experts from consultancy firms in regard to geotechnical requirements.

Mr VALENTINE - Thanks for that. The other question: 3D geological model of the state. How is that progressing?

Mr BARNETT - We've certainly got the geosciences initiative, the funding support. But did you want to respond, Kevin, to that?

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. The 3D model, we have two areas in particular that we have very, very good information. One is up in the Athina district, and for those that aren't aware, we combine not only our geophysical information, but we combine it with our mapping, and we also combine it with our geology, to create a 3D model, looking down into the earth, which provides us with an indication of areas that could show prospectivity for exploration.

We also have another area that we've been mapping in the greater Rosebery area, and it has attracted the attention of a number of potential explorers looking to invest in the state. It's quite creative, and it is well-recognised, the information we're gathering. We're looking to build up that database. We also work with Geoscience Australia, because they also do some three-dimensional mapping as well.

Mr VALENTINE - The question on royalties, minister. Can we have a comparison of royalties that we charge - and I don't need to know a specific company or anything. I just want a comparison on average royalties, if you've got such a thing, with other jurisdictions, national or international, so that we can get some understanding as to where we sit in recovering value for the resource.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you very much -

CHAIR - Are we charging enough?

Mr VALENTINE - In short.

Mr BARNETT - I'm pleased to advise that there's been an increase in royalties paid in the last 12 months; in fact, double. This is an increase of \$29.1 million from the \$31.6 million. For the 2021 year, it's now \$60.7 million in mineral royalties, and \$1.7 million in rental and other fees.

Mr VALENTINE - That's the quantum, but I'm after -

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I'm about to pass to Brett, because, in terms of the method, which I think you're talking about, it is different. There are different methods in different jurisdictions. It's important for this committee and the parliament to be aware of the great success we've had in the last 12 months. It's an indicator of a very large level of positivity in the sector, especially turnover and in terms of the profitability of the sector.

Mr STEWART - Thanks, minister. I guess the first point to make is that our policy settings in relation to royalties are a balance between ensuring that the community gets a fair return for state-owned resources, and also providing a setting such that Tasmania remains an attractive destination for explorers and mining companies. It's a balanced approach. Our approach is a little different to most other states, because we have a different profile of both mineral deposits and mining companies participating here in Tasmania. We're have smaller, more diverse, more boutique style mines.

Our approach is to use a combination of ad valorem royalty rate, which is like a standard base rate at 1.9 per cent of the value of minerals. Then we have a profits-based component, up to, I think, 4.9 per cent, 5 per cent - sorry, 5.35 per cent. I've just got other states' figures here. If companies are mining metallic minerals - so what that effectively what that means is when companies are doing well the state gets a higher take. When companies are struggling and commodity prices are low, or the industry's in a downturn, the state takes less, and hence companies remain.

We've done some work trying to compare what we take compared to other states. It's a little difficult because they all use different systems effectively. Our royalty take in 2021, the minister mentioned, was around about \$60 million, that equates to about 3.6 per cent to 8 per cent of the sales value of those minerals mined. This equates with, say, Victoria, which for example has a flat rate of 2.75 per cent. The Northern Territory uses a similar system to us, where they have a 2 per cent up to a maximum of 5 per cent. Queensland takes a different view again. They have different rates across different commodities. For example, iron ore has a low rate at 2.5 per cent, other commodities are up to 5 per cent.

Effectively, it's very hard for us to give a definitive answer there. What we're saying is that we believe we've struck a good balance and that our mineral royalty take is similar to other states.

Mr BARNETT - I'd just like to add to that. The reason that the royalties is designed the way it is to attract investment and development in Tasmania. When the mining companies are doing well, we do particularly well. When they're doing it tough it's less. So, it's designed in such a way as to encourage investment in Tasmania to create the jobs and opportunities for families.

Mr VALENTINE - The last question I have is the tailings dam, what's the status of that now?

Mr BARNETT - That's a good question. One thing is very clear. There's no stronger supporter of the mining and mineral processing sector and of MMG and the Rosebery Mines right to continue mining on the west coast as they have for the last 85 years with some 500 regional jobs. We will continue to support a company's right to build a tailing storage dam subject to the appropriate environment and planning approval processes. They have made an application for this development to be referred to the Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act through the federal government. We stand ready to support and assist them in that application.

Not only that, we have done everything possible to support them in that respect, and stand ready to do whatever else is necessary to support a company to achieve their objectives. We have ongoing contact and support with the company, and the mining and minerals processing sector. The west coast community is very strongly supportive of this company's right to continue its mining operation and continue employing 500 people. We will continue to fight for their right to operate. If you think it's just a matter for the west coast and jobs at Rosebery, you're wrong -

CHAIR - Think again.

Mr BARNETT - Think again, because this impacts people of Hobart who work at Nyrstar, as an example. The zinc used at Nyrstar is zinc from the Rosebery mine. So, obviously that's incredibly relevant to the honourable member, and it's incredibly important to TasRail. It's incredibly important to a whole range of businesses on north-west coast, and the jobs and their right to operate. That is another reason why, as a government, we have during the election and recently announced in the parliament the re-prosecution of our workplace protection legislation, to protect people's right to work and earn a living, and to support their families. They are entitled to that without intimidation or intrusion by radical protestors from the Bob Brown Foundation or wherever they come from.

Mr VALENTINE - I did say it was the last, but Bald Hill Bauxite near Campbell Town, what's happening there? Is it going ahead, or it seems to be static? I don't quite know what's happening at Bald Hill.

Mr BARNETT - I'll just see if we can get an update on that, and the department might have an update on that. You've seen some public comments by Mr Leonard who's involved with the company, but -

Mr VALENTINE - I wasn't referring to his comments. It was just a casual observance.

Mr BARNETT - He's made some comments publicly about that.

Mr VALENTINE - I know, about Bell Bay.

Mr BARNETT - But let's see if the MRT director can assist us.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you minister. The company ABX that was mining the bauxite at Bald Hill has successfully rehabilitated the area, and in agreement has now handed back the area that they were mining to Tom Clarke, who was the land holder. I must say they did a very good job with the rehabilitation there. ABX is now looking at a new area called Fingal Rail, which is closer to Conara Junction. They're doing their studies at the moment with a view to assessing that for potential production of bauxite. They've also had some success, the company, not only there, but some other properties with regard to the discovery of rare earth element mineralisation in that area as well.

Mr VALENTINE - Is that at Nile?

Mr ROBINSON - It's very close to Nile.

Mr VALENTINE - I notice when you go down that road you see that rather - well, the colouration of that soil and it looks just like the Campbell Town lot, so I was just wondering. Anyway, you've answered the question. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - Good observation.

Ms ARMITAGE - Minister, can you just give me an update on the mineral sector on their export? It is up, is it down? How is the export sector going?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's going very well. I'll see if we can provide more detail in that regard, and advise the member of the good news in terms of our exports.

Ms ARMITAGE - Where do we export to? Where would be our main export?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, happy to assist as I think you touched on earlier, or the Chair. Now, 61 per cent of Tasmania's mercantile exports generated product to the value of more than \$2.8 billion. So that's a huge amount of money. The mining sector produced 2300 jobs through to May 2021, but of course a lot more than that if you include the mineral processing sector, many thousands more.

I'll just see if we've got any more detail. Our markets are essentially Asia, and I'll just see if Kevin might want to add some more detail. I could speak from my understanding, but you might have some more detail relating to the key markets.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. The main market is China. They take a considerable amount of our material, particularly zinc and the iron ore. We do also have a gold industry. The gold that we produce on the west coast that is not in concentrate is actually sent across to the Perth Mint. They refine it and they on sell the gold from there.

We also have an industry which people forget to an extent which is the Tasmanian Advanced Minerals, which is the silica flour, and they hold I believe around about 15 per cent of the supply into the global market for the silica that goes into high definition screens. That material is sold into both Korea, Japan, and more recently also China. We have a diversity there. Our tin products also are shipped through to Malaysia, and also to China. They are the biggest export earners for our industry.

Mr BARNETT - In the last 12 months, just in terms of the increase, you asked about if there's been an increase. From the 2019-20 year, the values of key export commodity groups in 2021 processed metals \$1.479 million. So, an increase of \$190 million, or 14.7 per cent increase, which is, yes, pretty good. In trade overall our five biggest export markets are China, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. Can I have another question?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. Beaconsfield Gold Mine and Hellyer Gold Mine, and obviously NQ Minerals, and we know the underlying operating companies that are continuing to trade in the normal course, but obviously they have their problems. Is the Government assisting them? Speaking with them? Watching them? Can you give me any feedback at all on what the Government might be doing to help Beaconsfield Gold Mine and Hellyer Gold Mine?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. It is a very important question. The future of NQ Minerals and also Beaconsfield Gold, obviously very relevant to Tasmania. I will pass to Kevin in a moment.

NQ Minerals is the parent company of the Hellyer Gold Mine, operated as the Hellyer Mine Pieman Resources and owner of Beaconsfield Gold. The Hellyer Tailings Project involves the reprocessing of the base precious metals rich tailings produced by the former Hellyer underground mine which closed in 2000. The project demonstrates economic value

can be generated from previously discarded tailings, and should also lead to improved environmental outcomes. I've visited there and they are hard at work. The feedback I get is it's sustainable and profitable, and Kevin might add to that.

Beaconsfield Gold is an icon of Northern Tasmania and the mining sector. NQ Minerals advise that they plan to reopen as soon as practicably possible. On 9 August, just last month, NQ Minerals announced that it had been placed into administration. Importantly, and I think this goes to at least part of your key question, both Hellyer Gold Mines and Beaconsfield Gold Mine remain in business as usual with the Hellyer operation continuing to operate profitably. So, these are matters obviously for the company, not directly for the Government, but through MRT the Government's been closely monitoring the matter. I will pass to Kevin to see if he can add to that answer.

Ms ARMITAGE - That'd be good, because particularly with, I think, NQ Minerals being in administration, even though the other two are making a profit, there's always that concern isn't there.

CHAIR - That one might bring down the others.

Ms ARMITAGE - Well, they are the parent company.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. If we look at Hellyer Gold Mines, that is an entity which is capable of financing in its own right, and hence why it's not in administration, the parent is. The main project financier around Hellyer is the very large global bank ING. And ING has indicated its support for the operation. The company, Hellyer Gold Mines, released some numbers to show that in the second quarter of 2021 they produced revenues of \$19.8 million: \$11 million operating profit, and \$5.7 million worth of net income. So, the company is making very good cashflow, and that is helping them to work through this situation.

The company has indicated that, with ING providing the support that they're doing, the fact that they're making such good cash flow, they've finished their second tailings dam facility which was very important, so that capital expenditure program has now been completed. The operation is going very well. They have 65 staff or thereabouts there, and the company is very confident on their way forward.

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you. I've written the same figures that you've mentioned, but it still remains that NQ Minerals is the parent company. Basically, any money I would have thought that is made Hellyer or Beaconsfield Gold Mine could be accessed by the parent company.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. The bank itself has incredibly tight security over that project. I believe that the payments will first go through the bank, and that's the process. So, with the bank there and being such a strong and solid bank, I think that Hellyer should be fine going through this current situation.

Ms ARMITAGE - So the Government will keep a watching brief, though? As I said, I don't have any doubts there, but I still hear the words that NQ Minerals, who are in administration, are the parent company of the ones that are here making a lot of money. So, at the end of the day, bank or not in the middle, they're still actually basically owned by NQ Minerals. I'm guessing that's right.

Mr BARNETT - The answer is we're monitoring this very carefully. We're very grateful for MRT through Kevin and his team who are in close contact with NQ Minerals and, of course, at Hellyer, and we are noting the report that we've received from MRT which is very positive with respect to Hellyer, in particular. We will continue to monitor the matter very carefully.

Ms ARMITAGE - I'm wondering how much NQ owes. That would be an interesting question, but obviously that's not a question for you, so, thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you.

CHAIR - As long as they've paid their royalties. The answer is yes.

Mr ROBINSON - Yes. The answer is they are up to date on all of their payments.

CHAIR - Good to hear. Minister, the Government has provided an investment to the Mount Lyell mine of \$9.5 million to bring forward the restart. Yet we also heard in November last year around a future buyer for the mine. Do you have an update for us in regard to Mount Lyell?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I do, and I'm happy to share that with you and the committee, and to advise that in terms of the \$9.5 million, that is correct. That was when Mount Lyell went into care and maintenance in 2014. I think there's 30-plus people still there full time plus those contractors in terms of care and maintenance. So Vedanta advised MRT in September 2020 it had commenced a process to divest its 100 per cent ownership interest in Copper Mines of Tasmania, and that progressed and is still progressing. We also have funding support as a government which was announced in November 2015 that \$25 million in assistance package would be available to any future business that took over the mine subject to due diligence, of course.

That would be available once mining operations recommenced to support the reopening of the mine when the copper price improves, for example. That assistance package is through a range of measures, but primarily through the forgoing of royalties and the like. So, the \$9.5 million, we are very pleased with that investment to bring forward that restart to accelerate that decision to restart. We stand behind that. We're looking forward to an official response from Vedanta in due course. We could say, the sooner the better. I'll just see if Kevin would like to add to that. He keeps in close contact with Vedanta, as does the Government.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. First, on the \$9.5 million package, that was divided into four parts: \$4.5 million for refurbishment and preparation of the decline. That has been completed; \$1.5 million for the rehabilitation and repair of the North Lyell tunnel, and that was required to manage water flows. That, too, has been completed; and \$1.5 million was allocated to various restarts and pre-engineering studies that CMT was looking at as a priority to accelerate the restart, and that, too, has been completed.

The remaining funds have been now redirected towards development of an exploration drive into the Western Tharsis ore body which is not where they've been mining, but it is key to the future development of Mount Lyell. That amount of money is still to be spent but will certainly be a benefit to anyone who is coming in and acquires CMT. As far as the process is

concerned, I understand that Vedanta is continuing in discussions with other parties, but I can't elaborate on that at this point.

CHAIR - The other question that I have, minister, is around the delay of the rehabilitation projects. I know that the data in our performance information says that that won't be available until the end of October, but I'm fairly sure that the data is available. I'm just looking to see whether COVID-19 has considerably impacted those rehabilitation projects and the completion of them.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much. I will pass to Kevin.

CHAIR - Only 60 per cent last year.

Mr BARNETT - It's probably fair to say that the best sort of mine is an operating mine. That's good for the economy; good for the environment. I know rehabilitation is very important for TMEC, Tasmanian Minerals and Energy Council -

CHAIR - It's an obligation under the law.

Mr BARNETT - That's right, and that's why they see it as a priority, as does the Government. Rehabilitation of disturbed land resulting from mining or exploration activities to the satisfaction of the director of mines and, in some cases, the EPA. They are key objectives, and so that's met with the security deposits and ensuring there are sufficient funds available for remediation of exploration of mining activities should the holder default. They must be lodged before any mineral tenement is granted, and there's a process that goes to achieving that. I might just check with Kevin if you can add to that answer and be more specific to the Chair's question.

CHAIR - The Rossarden project?

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. Last year we were impacted in several projects because of COVID-19. It was a large factor and it caused us delays. Now, I'm happy to say that this year we've made up for those delays and we anticipate expenditure to the level required.

At the Rossarden project - there's several projects actually at Rossarden. We had a shaft open up which we had to get fixed as quickly as we possibly could. I'm happy to say that that work is proceeding and that should be completed. We have a number of other projects that we're also looking at this year, and we have a very full agenda for the budget, and I'm quite confident that we will be back to the normal expenditure levels that -

CHAIR - All right. What about the -

Mr ROBINSON - Sorry. If I may -

CHAIR - Sorry.

Mr ROBINSON - We also had an issue where one of the members of the staff who was looking after the rehabilitation was on maternity leave, so she was unavailable at that point in time to complete one of the projects.

CHAIR - Okay, that's fine.

Mr ROBINSON - She is back and she's working very hard.

CHAIR - There were a couple of other areas that were touched on as well. That was around the dam safety assessment and water quality monitoring at Balfour. Has that continued?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Chair. I'll pass to Kevin.

Mr ROBINSON - Through you, minister. That project and the research that we're undertaking at Balfour is continuing.

CHAIR - What about the ongoing weed control at Frankfurt and Sister's Hill?

Mr ROBINSON - With those programs we're well advanced in completion of those, and they are going well. If I may add, also with Rossarden, I understand that the shaft that I was talking about has been recapped, and the diversion drain at Rossarden has been recently completed.

CHAIR - Minister, if the ongoing weed control at Frankfurt and Sister's Hill is on track, is there any chance of rolling that out right across the state?

Mr BARNETT - Now that you've asked me that question, you've brought into play the fact that it's the worst time in Tasmanian history to be a weed. We have a \$5 million weed action fund and we are very serious about combatting weeds.

CHAIR - I'm serious about it, too.

Mr BARNETT - You should contact my department of primary industries and water and/or Ian Saw, the chair of my weed action fund committee, and Deidre Wilson, my deputy secretary who does a great job in rolling out the weeds action fund. I met with the Coal River Products Association. There's a range of identified weeds in Tasmania, more than 100, in fact, and we have very focused and dedicated campaigns across landscapes to combat serrated tussock -

CHAIR - Capeweed?

Mr BARNETT - Capeweed, I think, is certainly one of them, Chilean Needle Grass. There's a whole range of weeds that we have a number on their head and we want them taken out.

CHAIR - I saw someone pulling capeweed on Sunday morning on the Bridport Road, minister, on the road verge. Pulling capeweed. He had a wheelbarrow and he was pulling it.

Mr BARNETT - There are very few initiatives that have that sort of money to combat weeds, and that's \$5 million over the forward Estimates. It's a fantastic investment. I thank the farmers. I thank the land managers. I thank local councils. I thank the land care organisations that are involved in combatting weeds to protect Tasmania from pests and diseases and weeds, and it's all part of protecting and promoting the Tasmania brand.

CHAIR - Thank you. On behalf of our committee I'd like to thank you very much for a very informative day. You certainly have quite a few areas of responsibility, but you certainly have a very good handle on your portfolio. We thank you and we thank everybody who supported you. Vanessa, we know what a big job it is, so well done.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I would like to put on the record an answer to Josh Willie earlier, if I could, on Frank MacDonald Memorial Prize to assist you with that question. So, the answer to the question, based on the understanding of the question, was requesting information on the cost for the cancelled Frank MacDonald 2020 overseas tour. Insurance covered the cancellation cost fee from Albatross Tours of \$13 145.40. The amount of \$58 062.60 has been held in credit with Albatross Tours for the 2022 tour pending overseas travel or whichever travel that is to be. In 2022 we'll see a larger size tour more likely. I think I've answered all the other questions. I hope that assists the member and the committee.

CHAIR - I'd like to thank again our secretariat, Hansard, Shae, Kevin, Brett and Kim and you, minister, for what I consider is a pretty useful day. Thank you.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much, Chair. Likewise, I thank all those at the table and those behind the table who supported the full day. Thank you again.

CHAIR - Thank you. We shall finish the broadcast. Thank you, Shae.

The Committee adjourned at 5.28 p.m.