



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

TASMAN HIGHWAY: DUPLICATION OF MIDWAY POINT CAUSEWAY AND MCGEES BRIDGE (SOUTH EAST TRAFFIC SOLUTION)

*Presented to Her Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the
Public Works Committee Act 1914.*

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Mr Harriss (Deputy Chair)
Ms Rattray

House of Assembly

Ms Butler (Chair)
Ms Burnet
Mr Shelton

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1 INTRODUCTION

To Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY

The Committee has investigated the following proposal:-

Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution)

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the Public Works Committee Act 1914 (the Act).

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This reference recommended the Committee approve works to duplicate the existing Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge, which form part of the Tasman Highway, to provide improved traffic capacity and travel time reliability.
- 2.2 This section of the Tasman Highway is currently a single carriageway road and is a key access route for commuters, freight and other traffic moving between Sorell and Hobart, carrying approximately 21,000 vehicles per day.
- 2.3 A high proportion of residents in the surrounding area rely on private vehicles for transport, and work outside their local area, resulting in pressure on existing road infrastructure particularly at peak morning and afternoon periods.
- 2.4 Between 2008 and 2023, the population of the Sorell Local Government Area increased at a compound rate of 2.25% per year. From 2023 to 2038, the population is projected to increase by 22%. Both statistics are above the Tasmanian growth rates and contribute to current and expected demand growth.
- 2.5 This reference is part of the broader South East Traffic Solutions (SETS) program funded jointly by the Australia and Tasmanian Governments. The program aims to reduce traffic congestion and improve capacity and reliability.
- 2.6 The Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge works are closely linked to other SETS components. The works will connect to the Hobart Airport to Midway Point Causeway project, currently in development and delivery phase, and the Midway Point Intersection Solution, which has been completed.
- 2.7 The proposed works will include the following:
 - a new dual lane causeway
 - a second McGees Bridge
 - improved carpark facilities next to McGees Bridge
 - adjustments to the existing emergency services boat ramp

- shared walking and cycling pathways
- streetlighting and underground electrical works
- stormwater works
- sewer rising main works.

3 PROJECT COSTS

- 3.1 Pursuant to the Message from Her Excellency the Governor-in-Council, the estimated cost of the work is \$209.5 million.
- 3.2 The Duplication of Sorrell Causeway project was initially included in this reference and the associated cost estimate of \$209.5 million. The P50 and P90 estimates outlined in the table below were calculated based on the project without this element.
- 3.3 The following table details the current P50 and P90 cost estimates for the project:

Item	P50 estimate	P90 estimate	Notes
Base Estimate	\$140,127,401	\$140,127,401	Includes site investigations, design, community engagement, approvals, acquisition (including related compensation), project management and construction.
Contingency	\$11,247,099	\$26,987,699	Contingency 8 % – 19 % of base estimate. Refer below for discussion.
Escalation	\$7,923,425	\$8,785,475	Escalation 5.2% - 5.3% of base estimate. Refer below for discussion.
Total	\$159,298,000	\$175,901,000	

- 3.4 Further information regarding the contingency and escalation estimates was provided in the Department's submission:

8.1 Contingency

The contingency provides for contingent events – that is events which may or may not occur. For this project, key contingent risk items include:

- *construction cost escalates due to saturated market*
- *variations during construction because of circumstances difficult to quantify, such as weaker ground conditions than forecast*
- *delays to construction from circumstances such as:*
 - *adverse weather conditions*
 - *unexpected discovery of unlisted site/object with heritage values*
 - *presence of unanticipated marine wildlife*
- *EPBCA permit conditions impact construction program*

- additional environmental investigations required.

Some construction method details will need to be resolved with environmental regulators before tendering the construction contract. These potential adjustments are included within the contingent costs estimated.

8.2 Escalation

The escalation allowance is a provision in costs for changes in economic and market conditions over time.

Estimates of escalation are not intended to be precise forecasts of future prices; they are approximations intended to represent the average trends for a large group of projects in a broad region.¹

¹ *Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge*, submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Department of State Growth, 30 April 2025, p. 14-15.

4 EVIDENCE

- 4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry on Tuesday, 13 May last with an inspection of the site of the proposed works. The Committee then returned to Committee Room 1, Parliament House, whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

Proponent

- Adrian Paine, Director, Programming and Delivery, State Roads Division, Department of State Growth; and
- Simon Brown, Project Manager, State Roads Division, Department of State Growth.

Members of the Public and Interested Parties

- Robyn Lewis; and
- Peter McGlone, CEO, Tasmanian Conservation Trust.

The following Committee Members were present:

- Ms Rattray (Chair);
- Ms Butler (Deputy Chair);
- Ms Burnet;
- Mr Harriss; and
- Mr Wood.

Overview

- 4.2 Mr Brown provided an overview of the proposed works:

Mr BROWN - Today we're considering the duplication of Midway Point causeway and McGees Bridge on the Tasman Highway. This project lies between the Tasmanian Golf Club near Pitt Water Bluff and Midway Point. The Tasman Highway is the arterial road between Hobart and Sorell and is critical to the road network for commuters, freight and tourists. This project is one of several in the Tasmanian and Australian governments' \$349.5 million South East Traffic Solution package, known as SETS for short. SETS aims to reduce congestion, improve capacity, level of service and travel time reliability between Hobart and Sorell and the southern beaches.

SETS consist of several complementary projects, four of which have been completed, with the benefits of one project maximised by the completion of another. The Sorell local government area population increased at a compound rate of 2.25 per cent per year between 2008 and 2023, more than twice the Tasmanian rate. Population projections point to an increase of 22 per cent for the Sorell local government area for the 15 years from 2023 to 2038, in contrast to 8 per cent projected for all of Tasmania.

...

The population in the region is mostly spread out, low density and is highly reliant on car travel, with almost 64 per cent of workers commuting to workplaces outside of their local area.

Currently, there are 21,000 vehicles per day on average travelling on the Midway Point Causeway and Bridge, with traffic volumes growing at a rate of 3 per cent per year. Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge are exposed to prevailing and stormy weather and swells

across Pitt Water that can impact the causeway walls and send sea spray across the highway, occasionally requiring the short-term closure of the highway. The causeway walls are degrading over time and expected to be further impacted by the impacts of climate change coupled with sea level rise, so they will need to be repaired in the future, even if this project does not proceed.

The project will deliver a total of four lanes, two for each direction. This will improve travel time reliability by providing for the variability in vehicle types and driver needs. Freeing up traffic flow will benefit private motorists, freight operators and bus passengers. With two lanes, buses will be able to travel in traffic moving at a higher and more consistent average speed than that currently possible in peak periods.

The new causeway will be built higher and wider than the existing, with the existing causeway incorporated into the formation where possible. The new alignment has been determined within these constraints, retaining the existing McGees Bridge, avoiding sea star habitat as much as practical, and constructing the second new bridge clear of the previous demolished bridge pylons, which are still present in the estuary bed. Existing alignment of the Tasman Highway to the east and west of the project were also constraints.

Opposing traffic will be separated with a central flexible safety barrier, eliminating or reducing the consequences of head-on crashes. The project will also provide a new 2.5 metre wide path for people walking, wheeling or riding. It will connect to the one planned for the highway between the airport interchange and this project, which is to be upgraded as well, and will connect to an existing path that has already been delivered as part of the airport interchange works.

...

On behalf of the Department of State Growth, I submit that this project is an important project that directly contributes to the Tasmanian and Australian governments' response to the needs of Sorell and the surrounding area's growing population. We recognise the importance of stakeholder contributions and engagement for the success of the project and will continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure key project objectives are delivered. We are seeking other legislative approvals as required. The costs are appropriate. The project is a worthwhile use of taxpayer's money.

4.3 Mr Brown also introduced the environmental context of the proposed works:

Mr BROWN - ... Eliminating or mitigating impacts to the environment is a key project objective. Pitt Water is a Ramsar-listed wetland which provides important habitat for protected species including migratory and resident shore birds, Tasmanian live-bearing sea stars and estuary and marine fish.

The project team has been working closely with the Department of Natural Resources; Environment Tasmania; the Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; and also the Environment Protection Authority Tasmania to ensure all environmental matters are identified and properly addressed...

4.4 Further details were provided about how the overall design of the project has been informed by this context:

Mr BROWN - ... The project involves raising and widening the causeways and providing a second bridge. In terms of choosing what alignment to take along there, we've looked at various constraints, including trying to minimise our impacts both on the Tasmanian Golf Club course and also the environmental values on the Milford property. We've also had to weave our way past sea star habitat on the northern side of the existing causeway. Those sea stars are protected at a national level and they're endemic to Tasmania. They're only found in the south-east of Tasmania, so we're endeavouring to manage our impacts on them by trying to avoid their habitat. That has meant that we're widening the existing causeway to the south.

However, once we get across to the east side of the causeway, we've needed to build a second bridge on the northern side. That has meant that we have to shift our alignment across to the

northern side, which is all quite doable in terms of meeting appropriate curves, radii and that for motorists and that to drive through. Then that will allow us to build the second bridge on the northern side of the existing. The second bridge will be placed to the north of where the previous bridge was located. As there are pylons in the existing estuary bed from that demolished bridge and to reduce risks during construction, we're needing to construct to the north there. They have been the constraints that have been driving the alignment that we've chosen.

- 4.5 It was noted that these proposed works are being considered separately to further works to occur as part of the broader SETS project:

Ms BURNET - *Was it always just that particular span or was there the Orielson area as well previously...?*

Mr BROWN - *The project still involves the Sorell Causeway, but we are not addressing that work here today. There's further work, investigations, environmental and suchlike to do to help develop that design before we can present that to the Committee.*

Addressing traffic delays

- 4.6 The proponents' submission to the EPBC Act process provided further information about the travel time reliability issues which will be addressed by the proposed works:

With Sorell experiencing the fastest population growth in southern Tasmania—nearly triple the state average—the demand on road infrastructure is intensifying, causing congestion and delays, especially during peak hours. Additionally, Sorell's location at the junction of major tourist routes further strains the local network.²

- 4.7 A public witness, Ms Lewis, expressed concerns about the ability of additional road infrastructure to address demand in the long term:

Ms LEWIS - *... we're looking at a transport problem. It's not just a roads problem, it's not just a traffic problem, it's a transport problem. I'm very gratified to hear that park-and-ride is being considered, but I think we need to be looking at this in a far more holistic manner.*

I understand that that's a government issue, but the whole issue of how to move people and goods - it's freight as well - particularly, you build a road and they will come. It's well proven around the world that more roads increase traffic. We're going to exceed the carrying capacity of this road at some point. We've got to start looking beyond a sort of short-term time horizon, I believe.

...

Ms LEWIS - *... are the proposed works the best solution to meet an identifiable need? It depends how you define the need, is the need for moving people or is it the need for just faster traffic and more commuting? That's something that - it's your job to satisfy yourself that these alternatives have been properly examined.*

- 4.8 The Committee inquired into the possibility of alternative methods of addressing this issue:

² *Duplication of Midway Point and Sorell Causeways*, submission to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water: EPBC ACT Public Portal, Department of State Growth, <https://epbcpublicportal.environment.gov.au/all-referrals/project-referral-summary/?id=c86bd913-8ba7-ef11-b8e8-00224898256b>.

Ms BURNET - Chair, do you mind if I go back to just a really fundamental question? Mr Brown, you talked about ... that the increase in traffic volumes on the Tasman Highway has gone up over 3 per cent per annum.

Mr BROWN - Yes, that is right.

Ms BURNET - Over recent years, and you're saying that the report - or your submission suggests that there are approximately 21,000 vehicles per day.

Mr BROWN - Yes.

Ms BURNET - My interest in transport and traffic management is looking at alternatives. Do we know what sort of alternative methods or ways of reducing the amount of need have been considered by the department?

Mr BROWN - That's beyond the scope of my project, shall we say, if you know what I mean. I've been tasked with delivering a project that government policy, shall we say, has decided upon.

In terms of what's driving the demand and making that demand for the road use and vehicles, that is a bigger question than what I can answer here today and beyond my role.

Ms BURNET - I suppose it's a bigger question as to why we're looking at this component of the overall project of the South East Traffic Solution, and this is one area, one part of the road system. We have the Tasman Bridge, which is another component, which clearly has its limitations, and if you're travelling into the city each morning, it's very congested between Sorell, say, and the bridge.

Is this going to be the solution to addressing some of these issues or are we going to get this ongoing increase in traffic and demands?

Mr PAINE - Perhaps I can address some of those issues. Certainly, when this - the SETS project - South East Traffic Solution, the key objective of that was to duplicate the highway. That was the direction we were given from the government. That's the work we've been doing on all parts of that, developing the design that achieves that outcome. Alongside that, you'd be aware that we're doing work for the government's initiative in park-and-ride facilities that are being expanded... There is also a park-and-ride facility under design and about to be delivered at Rokeby, so both those projects are obviously targeted at trying to get more people into public transport and therefore take the pressure off the bridge and the rest of the Tasman Highway network as you get closer to Hobart.

We've also obviously got the Mornington Area Road network upgrade project that's just commenced at the moment, that we're doing the design work on improvements we can do in that area of it. So, yes, there's a lot happening in terms of addressing that congestion in that area, but principally around this project, the direction that we were given by government was to duplicate this highway and that's the focus of this work.

Ms BURNET - And possibly it could fill up. We don't know how long. This might be an answer for some of those congestion issues and it's out of your scope though, I hear you.

Mr PAINE - We do 10 to 20 year normally - I'm not sure whether you've got those figures available for the traffic study expected growth in this area - and therefore to determine that the network we're delivering now will at least last more than five years, typically at least 20 years, before we start to need to look at addressing other traffic volume issues in this network. At 21,000 vehicles a day, that's well within the capability of a duplicated highway. Although, typically, we would look at duplicating a road when there's 12,000 to 13,000 vehicles a day - is normally when we start to see some congestion issues on a single-lane road.

4.9 At the hearing, Ms Lewis questioned whether this demand has resulted in significant impact on road users:

Ms LEWIS -... I assert that there is no data being provided through this process, through the EPBC, nor through any document I could find on the website, that gives any basis to those

claims of queuing delays. No data whatsoever. I'm glad that the Commonwealth has picked up this problem as well, and the Commonwealth has said that the part of the assessment is now that they need to clearly define the problem the proposed action is trying to address, and that will include quantifying the severity and regularity of the queuing and delays.

That is really good that they're doing that and that, I assume, should then mean that State Growth will have to provide that sort of data to substantiate claims of queuing and delays. Just how severe that is, how regular it is, how many people does it affect, and we'll see what goes into the process. Equally, I'm surprised - I don't know how many years we are down the track now, many years, aren't we, since this was first proposed - no-one can come to this table from State Growth and give you any data that substantiates there being a problem related to queuing and delays. It takes our federal government to actually prompt them to say, you actually have to tell us what the delays are, you actually have to quantify it...

- 4.10 Mr McGlone noted his anecdotal experience with travel time reliability along this route:

Mr MCGLONE - ... I travel hundreds of days a year in peak time, and almost always on the bus, and the amount of delays that I experience - and I know this is ad hoc, it's just me - the only delay that is ever noticeable, except for perhaps a couple of days a year, is you slow down for a few minutes on the Sorell Causeway before you get to Midway Point. Hardly noticeable, hardly noticeable at all, and then you very occasionally get a bottleneck beyond that. That's like a couple days a year that you look at your watch and think, I'm going to be late. That's my personal experience of it.

- 4.11 The Committee asked the Department to clarify the perceived lack of traffic data behind these works:

CHAIR - It was also suggested that the Department would need to provide some more data and evidence about why the project's needed around how long traffic's banked up and for how often that's banked up. Is that something that the Department will be looking at because of the federal request?

Mr PAINE - Yes, certainly. We do have that information. We typically don't - I suppose the level of detail in terms of justifying the project for an environmental assessment might be different to a financial commitment. We've done a significant level of detail in terms of traffic impact assessments, cost-benefit ratio, and financial returns and the like and cost variability in our submission to the infrastructure department of the Commonwealth who supply our funding. They require all that information to justify what we're doing. As you'll note in the report, the cost-benefit ratio is 2.2 for this particular project. It's got significant benefits to the cost ratio. We'll prepare that information and provide that. That's just part of this further detailed information that the Commonwealth environmental regulator has asked in this case, which previously hasn't been requested.

Road safety

- 4.12 The Committee sought confirmation of the planned speed limits for the road:

Ms BUTLER - Just to clarify, the speed limit on the causeway will be?

Mr BROWN - The current speed limit on the causeway and the McGees Bridge is 80 kilometres an hour and that will be maintained. We are designing for that in terms of our lane width, shoulder widths, that type of thing.

Ms BUTLER - That will go into a 60 zone through that Midway Point area?

Mr BROWN - That's correct. In the residential Midway Point area, we have pedestrians and a lot more side movement from the side roads and the signals. It will maintain that 60 kilometres per hour through there.

CHAIR - What about back the other end?...

Mr BROWN - That is currently 80 kilometres an hour and will be maintained as such.

- 4.13 The Department outlined the history of crashes on the road and noted the connection to the congestion issues the proposed works seek to address:

Mr HARRISS - ... Do we have any road crash data for that section?

Mr BROWN - Yes. We have what's collected and reported to the police. If you just bear with me, I made a note of that to assist us. In the 10 years 2015 to 2024, so 10 inclusive years, we had 48 crashes reported to police. Twenty-nine of those resulted in just property damage, so damage to the vehicles. No-one got hurt. In four incidents, the participants in the crashes had to receive first aid. Ten of those 48 crashes resulted in minor injuries, which meant they needed ambulance care, maybe off to emergency department, but all treated within a day, that means. Then, four of them were serious crashes where people would end up in hospital overnight and being treated, maybe having surgery, that type of thing. Fortunately, there have been no fatalities in that 10-year period in this section of the highway.

Some of those crashes were head-on crashes, but a great majority of them were, interestingly enough, rear-end crashes, which is - I have not analysed the crashes to the extent where I'd know for certain - but once you start getting congestion and that type of thing, the chances of those rear-ended crashes starts to go up.

- 4.14 The Department's submission listed further road safety benefits:

- lower road crash rates & crash severity by separating opposing traffic
- a higher causeway and second bridge which will reduce the effect of sea spray and inundation over the highway³

Road access for emergency services

- 4.15 The Committee inquired into the ability of emergency services to access the road when required:

Ms BUTLER - Could you talk us through what it would look like on the new bridges and the causeway section of this project in the case of a car accident or an incident, and how emergency vehicles may be able to access the site, especially if there is a build up of traffic congestion on both sides?

Mr BROWN - ... the centre of the new formation will have a barrier down the centre of it that's continuous, so if you have an incident on one side or the other of the highway, it'll be necessary, depending on where the emergency vehicle is coming from, it may be necessary for it to have to turn around and there are facilities at Midway Point at the signals there for them to turn around. There's what we call a P turn near those signals that provides ample space for an emergency vehicle to do a U turn and come back to the incident if that's necessary. There are also signals planned to the west at Pittwater Road where they'll be able to do a similar thing.

That aspect has been considered - and it's considered that the other benefit of the project is that, because we are going from one lane in each direction to two lanes in each direction, is that there will be more space for congestion to be managed and emergency vehicles to get around any bank-up of traffic related to an incident. There are also some small areas that will provide extra width in the shoulder where we have access to where the stormwater's going to be collected and every now and then that infrastructure, the pipework and that down in the pits, needs to be cleaned out every now and then. We have to provide space for that, but that has a benefit of providing a bit more area for emergency vehicles to get around any queues of traffic during an incident.

³ Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge, p. 8.

Water access for emergency services

- 4.16 The Committee noted the presence within the footprint of the project of an emergency services boat ramp:

CHAIR - ... the existing emergency services boat ramp there's an adjustment to suit the new works there?

Mr BROWN - That's right. There's a boat ramp that emergency services attach to the airport for the purpose of maintaining a response to an emergency. That boat ramp's available so if there's an on water incident, they have access close to the airport to get down into Pitt Water and then to wherever the incident has occurred. We want to maintain that facility for airport emergency services. We'll make any adjustments needed to get the levels right that will tie in with our works. We'll also be providing that as a designated area just for that purpose. It won't be available to the public. We'll boom gate it off so that it's always available there for that purpose.

- 4.17 The Committee sought further information about the design of the boat ramp:

Mr HARRISS - Just on the boat ramp - there's enough turning area, as in they swing off the highway reasonable? What's the turning area like on that?

Mr BROWN - We've investigated as part of the design that we are providing enough. We've had to tighten up the banks a bit in terms of making it a bit steeper so that there is enough space for a vehicle towing a boat trailer to turn around efficiently without spending a lot of time.

- 4.18 In answer to a request for additional information regarding the lighting of the boat ramp, the Department outlined that:

The existing emergency access boat ramp is not provided with lighting. The Department will approach Airservices Australia to determine their needs. If lighting the boat ramp, adjusted to match new road works, is required the department will assess options, considering both emergency needs and impacts on birds or other wildlife, as well as residential amenity.⁴

Facilitating ongoing community use

- 4.19 The Committee heard that feedback indicated strong community interest in the bridge and causeway being accessible for recreational use, particularly fishing. The Department stated that was being addressed:

Mr BROWN - At existing McGees Bridge, the path will continue to be available as a fishing platform and for sightseeing. The nearby car park will be refurbished and formalised to support these activities. Engagement with the public and key stakeholders on department projects is ongoing throughout the project, and this project has been no exception.

...

The feedback received stressed the importance of futureproofing the causeway to support both business and tourism growth and local access. A considerable amount of feedback talked about recreational activities such as fishing, cycling and pedestrian access...

⁴ Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution) - Matters taken on Notice, Department of State Growth response to PWC request for additional information, 29 May 2025, p. 3.

- 4.20 In further information provided by the Department regarding public feedback, it was confirmed that this issue had been a key concern. The Department noted how this had been considered and implemented in the design:

Whilst fishing from the existing McGees Bridge will be encouraged, we prefer not to restrict people from fishing off the new (second) McGees Bridge.

The design will include a 2.5m wide shared use path to improve safety for fishers and those passing them on the path.⁵

Beach access

- 4.21 Ms Lewis expressed concern about the impact of the project on a valued part of her property:

Ms LEWIS - I'm losing the only swimmable beach on my land. It's a private beach...

...

Ms LEWIS - ... it's a sandy beach, nice little sort of sandy bay and stuff where we used to take my child swimming and things like so - because the other beach, I mean, I have a long beach area, but it's not swimmable because it's incredibly flat.

- 4.22 Ms Lewis further explained broader community interest in the beach:

Ms LEWIS - The junction of the causeway and there's a set of stairs going down to it that were put in there... What was happening some years ago is that we were getting people trying to get down there with their windsurfers and we negotiated with the council to put in some stairs, so that people didn't kill themselves or other things like that or they'd traipse through the bush, which is worse.

- 4.23 The proponents provided information regarding how the proposed works will impact the beach:

Ms BURNET - ... The swimmable beach ... is that going to be impacted from your perspective in relation to that side of the causeway, the extension of the causeway to Milford Beach?

Mr BROWN - The acquisition of a small portion of the Milford property will mean that access to that beach will be changed. However, from what I can ascertain, they'll still be able to make access either along the foreshore or there may be an inland way that the property owner can make access to that beach if they wish to continue to use it.

...

Mr HARRISS - Just to go back to the swimming beach. I thought, in Ms Lewis's presentation, she was under the impression that the whole beach would go. Is that not the case?

Mr BROWN - There's a small section of the beach that will still be available. In terms of direct access, it depends. It might be bushland there that prevents someone walking through there, but there's still some frontage there onto that beach of the existing Milford property title.

Mr HARRISS - In terms of the actual beach, though, and construction, the beach remains, is that what you are saying?

Mr PAINE - Correct, there'll be no road construction on the beach itself. It is just the adjoining land that we are acquiring that will have some road construction on it.

⁵ Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution) - Matters taken on Notice, p. 2.

4.24 The Committee asked whether continued community access will be facilitated as part of the proposed work:

CHAIR - ... Ms Lewis told us that there were some steps that she'd negotiated or that had been negotiated with council. Will that still be available...?

Mr BROWN - Currently, that's correct, there are some steps that go from a path next to the highway down to the beach and that's served somewhat by a small parking area, a layoff area that came about from an old highway alignment. That area will get changed with the new road. Essentially, there'll be lanes there ... There'll be nowhere to park. People will have to, if they want to use that area, walk from somewhere else. I imagine that the interest in trying to get there would probably diminish given there'll be nowhere to park nearby. Hence, we don't see a need to provide the steps again. Through our consultation activities, we haven't heard an interest in the community for a facility there or maintaining a facility that we're aware of.

CHAIR - Is there somewhere else that can be facilitated or is there no opportunity somewhere else to access any beach, a little beach?

Mr BROWN - ... if we were to provide more hard stand area for a car park and that, we're obviously going to have an impact on probably the bushland on that side and then you'd have to build a path to go there because the path that we are building is on the other side of the highway. Domino effect of what sort of impact are you having.

Managing impact on wildlife

4.25 The Committee inquired into the provision of measures to assist animals moving across the proposed works:

Ms BURNET - ... what sort of mitigation is there for animals crossing, particularly terrestrial animals?

Mr BROWN - We've considered if it's possible to provide a means to help wildlife to cross the road. Unfortunately it's not possible to put in. Ideally, you'd have some sort of tunnel or something underneath the highway - or multiple tunnels - that they could use to get under the highway so they weren't exposed to traffic. Unfortunately, we're on reasonably flat, low-lying land in this area, and for us to provide such facilities would mean that we'd have to actually raise the highway on that terrestrial - on the land - quite a lot higher than it is, and then that would have the effect of - the embankments from that would then proceed to go farther into the properties on each side and have more impact on the environment - the vegetation and such - that's on those properties to either side of the highway, and also the cost would greatly increase.

The other thing is, it can be challenging to provide crossings that you can be confident the animals are going to use, because if they're too long they are going to balk at it, they're not going to go through them. It's something we've considered, but unfortunately there doesn't appear to be a practical solution to addressing that issue.

...

Mr PAINE - There are no treatments that we've identified that are going to work in that particular location. We do have a roadkill strategy and we're actually going through a process at the moment of reviewing it and taking on board other jurisdictional treatments. Typically the most effective approach is where you target a particular species - and species will have different things that will work for them. Some koalas and wallabies typically would want some sort of bridge over the top, because they don't like to go underneath so much.

We did a lot of work, you might recall, down on Bruny Island with the penguins and we created a little tunnel underneath for them to get across the road down there, and had significant impact. Where we know there's a particular species and a particular approach that will address that and that species will adopt, then we will seek to apply that in this location. There hasn't been any identified common species or common approach that we believe has

guaranteed any level of success at a reasonable cost and impact to the wildlife and environment either side as well, as we've indicated.

4.26 Ms Lewis raised the potential for use of virtual fencing, following its implementation nearby at the Hobart Airport:

Ms LEWIS - ...Hobart Airport have done a probably seven or eight-year trial down Grueber Avenue of virtual fencing. At 80 kilometres per hour, it has reduced accidents mortality by 65 per cent. It works - you have probably seen it, I don't know - but I think very serious consideration should be given to that. It gives an alert to the animals that there is traffic coming, so that - have you seen it, the virtual fencing? I think we need to consider that. At 100 kilometres per hour it doesn't work, because the animals don't have time to get out of the way or see, but certainly at 80 kilometres per hour.

Their studies have been published and I think should be referred to, but absolute minimum: virtual fencing should be considered, plus making the central barrier permeable to animals so that those who - I mean they will try and cross the road, it is part of a migration path - movement from one habitat to the other, not migration, it's the wrong word, but -

Ms BUTLER - Can I quickly ask you, when you say it's part of a migration pass, which area are you talking, referring to?

Ms LEWIS - We are talking the whole stretch along Milford, but there's another section at the Midway Point end where animals cross as well, but the section between the golf club and Milford... They come up from down the spit and crossover and go around Barilla Bay. There are crossing points there and it's well documented. You can just go and see all the dead animals all along the road, and it's there, and they'll be on the bicycle track for everyone to see. For every 95 per cent of tourists who go along that road, that's the first thing they see when they go out of Hobart Airport, will be dead animals.

4.27 The Committee sought comment from the Department regarding virtual fencing:

Ms BURNET - The idea of the virtual fencing that's been trialled or used at Grueber Avenue, is that a consideration along that area between Milford and the Tasmanian Golf Club?

Mr PAINE - No, it's not part of our design at the moment. We've been monitoring that. I'm not across the specifics on the Grueber Avenue assessment, but there's been at least three other trials that I'm aware of. There was one at Bruny Island; there's been one in Victoria, and there was a more recent one that, sorry, escapes my memory at the moment - with the virtual fencing technology. They've been done by different - appropriate scientific methods have been used to assess their effectiveness and in all those cases they haven't been found to be highly effective. In fact, in some cases they've had a reverse outcome for unknown reasons...

4.28 Following the hearing, the Department provided further information:

Four rigorous, long-term trials in Australia have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of a 'virtual fence' in reducing roadkill. These studies have concluded, with a high degree of certainty, that this technology, at least in its current form, does not reduce native animal-vehicle collisions.

The department was not aware of a 'virtual fence' installed on Grueber Avenue at Hobart Airport but given the disappointing results of other trials it would be a poor use of public funds to install this technology on the Tasman Highway, as part of this project.

The department is currently reviewing the State Roads Roadkill Strategy. It is expected that driver awareness and behaviour will remain a key factor in reducing vehicle collisions with native animals on Tasmanian roads. To protect our wildlife, the department will continue to encourage drivers to reduce their speed, particularly between dusk and dawn.⁶

⁶ Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution) - Matters taken on Notice, p. 4.

Protecting migratory and resident birds

4.29 In introducing the project, the Department had explained the wide-ranging protections associated with the wetlands' Ramsar listing, including for both migratory and resident shore birds.

4.30 The Committee sought confirmation that the impacts for these bird populations had been considered in planning for the proposed works:

Ms BURNET - As far as the impact on other wildlife, so birds, again it is an internationally significant area, has there been any consideration of that? ...

Mr BROWN - Certainly I have considered both bird life and vegetation. In terms of the bird life, a lot of that bird life activity happens away from the causeways and the bridge. It doesn't appear to be their primary foraging or nesting area. Fortunately, most of our activity is remote from that.

In terms of vegetation, we have mapped the vegetation alongside the existing road so that we know what species we are impacting. We have found that the types of eucalyptus that are there aren't conducive to the swift parrot, for example, residing there.

Also, there are some trees that do provide hollows which could be nested in by, say, the Tasmanian masked owl and there have been reports on the Milford property of such owls being present. However, when our ecologists surveyed the area, there wasn't any evidence in these particular trees. However, we are going to have to look at that again before we construct to ensure that we haven't got any nesting going on.

Ms BURNET - What about sandpipers or curlews?

Mr BROWN - They are certainly in the area. We have to take into account any of their activity, but my understanding is that we're not having a significant impact on their existing habitat that they use.

4.31 The Department described the progress and nature of their investigations:

Mr BROWN - ... We'll be doing more work on shorebirds and migratory birds to ensure that we're not impacting them, and if we are, what we can do about it before anything can proceed.

CHAIR - Is the work that the Department undertakes peer-reviewed at all or is that purely from your department?

Mr BROWN - ... we're ensuring that we're using appropriate qualified and experienced specialists in the field, whether it's local consultants like North Barker or Eric Woehler, who is an expert in bird life. We're utilising people who have a reputation and a credibility that will support what we're doing.

4.32 The Committee heard evidence that the impact of lighting on birds had been considered in the planning process:

Mr BROWN - We're investigating and checking that we are not spilling light, particularly up into the air from a bird point of view, that type of thing. If there are birds flying around at night, we don't want to make it hard for them in terms of them navigating the air space above the bridge and the causeway.

Endangered Sea Stars

4.33 Mr McGlone provided a description of a unique sea star species present in the area of the proposed works:

Mr McGLONE - ... let's introduce the character we're talking about here. You can get this document easily from NRE on their website... It's called - I don't think that they are 'he's' and

'she's.' I think they're one sex; they're *Parvulastra vivipara*, and understandably, everyone in the business calls it *vivipara*. One of the reasons it's really unique, I'm sure you've heard, is that it's one of only a couple of species of sea star globally that gives birth to live young. Most of them give birth to eggs that later hatch. This gives birth to live young. That's about the biggest they ever get. When they're mature, sexually mature, they can be as small in diameter as 5 millimetres. When they're born, they can be as small as 1.5 millimetres across, so they're specks on the rock. Most of them are probably the size of a piece of confetti and the scientists are looking for something that's almost identical colour to the sandstone.

The other thing that I think is useful to acknowledge is that it's endangered in Tasmania, under the Tasmanian act, vulnerable on the federal act. There are moves to recommend it for uplisting on the federal act because primarily a very substantial decline in Pitt Water, and in Pitt Water there are about 12 populations that are known. Pitt Water is by far and away historically the biggest population, and the populations probably never have the capacity to move one to the other, so if you lose a population, there's very little chance of it re-establishing. That's a bit to introduce the character moment to you. The other thing I want to acknowledge about the species and what the department's doing is that the species lives obviously in natural habitat and through some fluke of how the original structure was built, the causeway has become quite attractive habitat to them. That's the problem, but also the asset that they're trying to manage.

- 4.34 Mr McGlone praised the work of the Department so far, but raised concerns about how this will translate to implemented measures to protect the sea star and its habitat:

Mr MCGLONE - ... I'll just start by saying that the - I'm going to go into some critical comments on how the sea star has been managed - but off the bat I'll just say that often - probably most of the time in submissions - you don't tell government agencies what they've done right, but they have done a lot of really good work and I want to acknowledge that to begin with.

...

Mr MCGLONE - ... First of all, if you go through the documents that were submitted to the Commonwealth, the very good work that was done by the scientific consultants is not well reflected in the actual end point of the process, meaning what they're actually committing to. Repeatedly the Department of State Growth makes unclear and inconclusive statements about what those commitments are. The classic problem that they have is they constantly use the same language that the consultant uses. The consultant recommends to you what should be done, and then you should say yes, that will be done. The language ends up being very much a passive statement rather than a clear statement of commitment. There's a failure constantly to refer to the habitat that will actually be retained. The language is generally about what will change in terms of the bridge structure. There's just this lack of finally nailing the carpet down at the end of the process. You've done all these years of work and the actual commitments to the Commonwealth are really quite passive and inconclusive.

There's even a point where one of the statements is potentially contradictory because there's talk about removal of existing causeways without there being qualification that, on the other hand, they're recommending keeping parts of the causeway, because it's vital habitat. There's another statement about possible translocations. It's possible, meaning that it may or may not be necessary, but equally there's then no commitment that says if it is necessary it will happen. There's again just that lack of statement of commitment.

- 4.35 Mr McGlone raised concerns about factors external to the proposed works which could impact the sea star populations and the efforts being made to preserve them:

Mr MCGLONE - ... The most important thing that's wrong with the commitments to the Commonwealth process is that there was a recommendation from the consultant, Echo Marine, that wasn't carried through to the final report to the Commonwealth. The consultant recommended this recommendation, this action, and it wasn't committed to by Department of State Growth. The commitment - it's only very short - says 'Consultation with land and waste

managers in Pitt Water should be conducted to communicate the impacts of current anthropogenic' - that's us - 'inputs on vivipara habitat and the urgent need to improve management practices.'

What that's pointing to is the fact that, although the bridge works; causeway works have the potential to have some impact, what the consultant's referring to is that there has been a massive decline in the population of vivipara in Pitt Water in about the last 20 years. Another consultant's report to the proponent says that that's a 96 per cent reduction in numbers. The consultant, in making this recommendation about dealing with anthropogenic inputs, which is pollution or sediments, that sort of thing, nutrients, is that we're actually watching this species disappear.

My concern is that I think the proponent has deliberately looked at that and thought we won't put that in our final statement of commitment to the Commonwealth because it's not our job to fix water quality in Pitt Water. My statement to that is: why would you bother doing what you are proposing to do to benefit the sea star, which is undoubtedly costing a lot of money - that is where the punchline is for you, in this Committee - why would you do that if the species is probably not going to continue to exist?

A 96 per cent reduction in 20 years, it should make everyone really worried. If you're just worried about the dollars, which is one of your main concerns, be really worried that this species is just going to not be there after all this effort and money and expense gone into trying to save it. That's my comments about the sea star. I think that's a really worrying concern.

CHAIR - You're not confident that relocating the species will have the desired effect?

Mr McGLONE - No, the main actions that State Growth are recommending are to keep in place the habitat, the sandstone that formed part of the buttresses of the causeway. Keep that in place. That's their main commitment. That's good, but what I'm saying is, if the water quality continues to degrade as it has, you might have the habitat - unlike the other problem we talked about - you might have the habitat, but you won't have the species because the water quality decline is ongoing.

That action was not a very dramatic commitment for State Growth to basically consult with land managers and waste managers to try and address that problem. I could probably go much further, but that's coming from the expert and it's odd in the extreme that it was omitted from the final list of actions; commitments, when they should be relying on the expert advice.

...

Ms BUTLER - In relation to the starfish, it was interesting the point that you raised about what is the point in going to all this effort to try to protect them when 96 per cent of them have already declined.

Mr McGLONE - Ninety-six per cent decline, yeah. I would say we need to do that other recommendation as well, address the water quality issue as well, as if you are doing works on the causeway, the sort of actions they're recommending are really excellent, but you need to look at doing both, and the water quality issue seems to be the main driver of decline, so doing one without the other is arguably futile. Maybe it's futile. Maybe it's a waste of money... On that issue of the two actions: the action that was recommended but not adopted by State Growth, I would argue - and we're probably too late now because there's been a lot of expense on detailed work looking at how to keep parts of the causeway, and how many sea stars are there, and whether we need to translocate - the cost-benefit analysis of - it might just end up being that some better educational work and communications with those users of Pitt Water could deliver a far greater outcome. Anyway, both things need to happen.

The cost of doing that sort of work, you don't get a result so quickly, but it's pretty low cost, and to this day, I don't know whether anything is happening, and I didn't really try that hard to find out, but I don't know whether anything's actually happening to try to deal with that problem.

We've all been talking about it. We've all been talking about changes in Pitt Water. Basically since the causeway problem was fixed we realised, 'Well, wait on, the smell's gone, but what was causing all the stuff that caused the smell?' Well, there's a whole lot of changes to flow down the whole catchment. There's a whole lot of changes to use of the lagoon and the fish farms are one of the more recent changes.

That issue is not easy to fix, but something's changed in the last 20 years, perhaps, that's been critical and maybe it's only a few discrete actions that need to be followed up to actually have a big impact on it.

4.36 The Department expanded on their research and planning regarding water quality in the Pitt Water area:

Mr BROWN - In regard to water quality, we've collected data in terms of giving us a baseline in terms of what the current conditions are like in the Pitt Water area next to the project. We'll be using them to make sure that during construction that we're not having any undue impacts.

In addition to that, we're doing modelling of the hydrodynamics in terms of is the McGees Bridge span and that area enough of an opening to allow tides to come to and fro from the lower area of Pitt Water and up into the upper Pitt Water area in terms of maintaining a healthy estuary there? That is part of the work we're doing, and that will be of interest to the Commonwealth as part of our environmental approval process with them...

CHAIR - Anything to do with the recommendation that was submitted to the Commonwealth?

Mr BROWN - In terms of engaging on the water quality side of things with the land users and other, in this case, utility providers in terms of TasWater and treatment of wastewater, we're providing space for a sewer rising main to go into the new causeway. My understanding is, at times, there have been issues with the sewage treatment plant on the Cambridge side. Unfortunately we've had the occasional overflow from that treatment plant and that's had, obviously, a negative impact on life in the estuary.

My understanding is TasWater's working towards eliminating the need for that treatment plant and treating the water over to the north of Midway Point at another treatment plant that has greater capacity. We're facilitating a practical solution in terms of addressing water quality in that space.

...

Ms BUTLER - The penetration of the causeway, so having some sort of drainage points to reduce the eutrophication, has that been considered in the project? I know there's the issue of the sea star.

Mr BROWN - Are you talking about the mixing of water in the actual estuary? Is that what you mean?

Ms BUTLER - Yes, and it was suggested that there could be increased drainage through the causeway.

Mr BROWN - Right, yes. We are modelling what happens in the estuary as part of our design works to demonstrate to the Australian government, in terms of their environmental regulator, that the opening there, where the second McGees bridge will go, that that is sufficient to allow that tidal, shall we say, flushing and movement of water is adequate for life to be sustained in the estuary, in terms of marine life...

Ms BURNET - ... has that been considered, any sort of drainage through the causeway?

Mr BROWN - Not as yet, but we are doing this modelling to check whether we need to do that or not. My understanding is it is unlikely.

Ms BURNET - Okay, so you are looking at that now?

Mr BROWN - My understanding is the water quality, most of the time, is adequate.

Managing impacts on endangered orchids

- 4.37 Ms Lewis, owner of the Milford property, outlined the presence of protected orchid species at Milford, parts of which are undergoing land acquisition processes to enable the proposed works:

Ms LEWIS - ... The orchids on my property are 'critically endangered.' They're found nowhere else in the world, and you have to protect their habitat. It's not like, 'Oh, there's a flower over there, protect that, and there's a flower over there.' You have to protect the habitat to ensure the survival of the species. The next level down is 'endangered.' There's one endangered so there's two critically endangered, one endangered. 'Threatened' is the next level down, which are the sea stars. I understand from recent scientific work that they say they might elevate the status, but the current status of the sea stars is threatened. The sea stars have had approximately, I'm informed, \$3 million spent on them. The orchids have had zero. We're doing a trade off here between a species that is found in other locations and species that aren't found in any other locations.

The reason this is relevant to the causeways is that part of the land I was only told in January or it might've been December I've always been told for the last two years that the causeway expansion is going to be on the northern side. Lo and behold, suddenly it's on the southern side. That requires taking some more of Milford, and what that includes is potential habitat for the orchids. Six years later after the first putting forward of this project, that habitat has still not been mapped by the proponents unbelievably as it may be. It would have cost about \$20,000 to do it back then, now it would cost maybe \$25,000. A very, very critical step of mapping the habitat it's called 'habitat critical to the survival of the species' - has not been done. To say that there's no impact on the terrestrial side cannot be stated as true, because the habitat has still not been mapped. I believe it's absolutely - that also includes - there's habitat in the road reserve, there's habitat on the Hobart airport, there's habitat on the golf club side. None of it has ever been mapped.

You can't avoid something. The first principle of the EPBC Act is avoidance. You can't avoid something if you don't know where it is. It's very, very basically obvious, so you've got that situation. Here we've got this second highway, the causeway duplication, which is taking a section of my land. It has not yet been environmentally assessed, so to hear that there are no impacts of that cannot be stated, because there's been no assessment of it. Not only it hasn't been mapped, but that area has not been assessed. I think that has to be something that your committee insists on that this, long overdue, has to be done.

Because both are controlled actions, work can't start on any sections until it's completed. That's the nature of a controlled action. No work until it's signed off by the feds. For the causeway, that's at least a year away - until they get it, then they have to assess it and make sure it's complete. They've been much more rigorous. They've provided a framework this time around, so let's hope it is more rigorous, but until they get that, you won't know.

- 4.38 The Committee sought further information about the specific part of Milford proposed for use in the project:

Ms BUTLER - Are there orchids on that land?

Ms LEWIS - No-one knows. It's never been assessed... It hasn't been mapped for habitat, it hasn't been assessed for orchids, never been looked at by anybody.

- 4.39 The Committee requested the Department clarify the status of assessment of Milford's orchid habitat:

Ms BUTLER - ... Just about whether an assessment has been done on the site in relation to the endangered orchids - the department has undertaken that assessment of the habitat?

Mr BROWN - Yes. The area that we've identified for acquisition on the Milford property - it's correct that we haven't assessed that in detail as yet. However, we are scheduled to have appropriately qualified and experienced ecologists go on to that site both to map if there's any

potential habitat for the particular orchids of interest and also to see if any are flowering in the coming flowering season, which is, depending on the species, it's September or November. That is all scheduled to certainly look at whether there is the presence of potential habitat that would support orchids or whether they're actually definitely present. Then, we may need to revisit the design if that's the case or find some other way to mitigate any impact on that habitat or orchids themselves.

Land acquisition process

- 4.40 The Committee heard evidence about how decisions regarding the need to acquire land were made:

CHAIR - ... I recall some discussion at the site visit this morning about using the northern side rather than the southern side to progress this project. Do you want to provide the answer that you gave this morning onsite around that because there was a query that there seems to be perhaps more of a focus on using Milford rather than using the golf club, if you like?

Mr BROWN - If we could, we'd avoid any acquisition. The reason why we need this very, very small percentage of the Milford property is to preserve the sea star habitat on the northern side of the Midway Point causeway. In order to do that, to preserve that, we need to come to the southern side of the existing causeway to do our widening and to line up - the section of highway that's on the land - to line that up with the new causeway, it needs to come somewhat to the south as it's on the approach and that results in this small portion of land that needs to be acquired...

...

Mr BROWN - ... What we wanted is a good outcome for the public monies that we're spending in terms of the road asset we wanted to deliver and the way that we manage our impact on the environment. Those are the objectives. It's not about having preference for any one landowner or the other.

- 4.41 Ms Lewis raised concerns about the handling of land acquisition processes in other sections of the SETS program:

Ms LEWIS - ... There's another section of SETS in Sorell - and, again, this might come up in the Midway Point section. He had some land taken from him. Three years later, he's yet to receive compensation. That section's actually been finished and three years on, this guy hasn't been paid and he's not young, he and his wife. I think this is totally unacceptable and another indication of the failure of the proponents to follow due process. It's just totally unreasonable and shows a total lack of respect in the way that people are treated in this process. It's difficult enough as it is without making it worse, I think, and that money continues to attract interest. This particular person hasn't even had his legal fees reimbursed three and a half years later, so that's all accumulating. He has to pay monthly legal fees, still not paid. I don't know whether that money coming from? If that project section has been finished, is that supposed to be coming out of the causeway money? Where are you going to find the money to pay people who are owed money who haven't been paid yet? These are outstanding liabilities of the government. These are things that you need to be looking at and I don't believe you should be approving funding at this stage of the SETS until these outstanding liabilities are acquitted and any other compensation that might be due to these other people - I'm not talking about myself in this regard - until they're rightfully and properly acquitted.

- 4.42 In answer to a request for further information, the Department provided a broad outline regarding land acquisitions, which are undertaken by the Office of the Valuer-General on behalf of acquiring authorities, such as the Department of State Growth:

... The department has obtained information from the Office of the Valuer-General (OVG).

From 2020 to 2024 inclusive the average time to complete an acquisition under the Land Acquisition Act 1993, from issuing a Notice to Treat until Settlement, including the compensation settlement, was 802 days (2 years, 2 months & 11 days). This includes all acquisitions, not just the ones required for State Growth road projects. The OVG is engaged in continuous improvement and has steadily reduced the average time in the last five years.

There are many factors that can prolong the time till compensation settlement, including:

- The characteristics, use, value to the previous owner and amount of land acquired.
- The number of owners/estates/interests on the title (mortgagee, leaseholder, easement, caveator etc). For example, the process can't proceed until all parties to the title lodge a claim for compensation or waives their right to compensation within 6 months after receiving the Notice of Acquisition.
- Whether the owner understands the compensation process (often the owner only gets motivated to lodge a claim when they receive an offer from the Crown or an OVG reminder about their statutory timeframe running out under the Land Acquisition Act 1993).
- If the owner engages a lawyer, independent valuer or other expert to assist them with the claim for compensation.
- Whether the owner wants to wait for the practical completion of the roadworks to determine the impact on their property.
- In the case of road works the Department of State Growth typically replaces fencing, vegetation and accesses at the new title boundary, to match in with the road works. Sometimes the owner is not satisfied with these accommodation works undertaken by State Growth.
- If negotiations need to be undertaken between the OVG and the owner due to a difference in compensation assessments or opinions.⁷

Addressing site specific conditions

4.43 The Committee inquired into the condition and longevity of the current causeway and bridge, with the Department outlining how the environmental conditions impacting both existing and new infrastructure have been addressed:

Ms BUTLER - For the record, could you provide our committee with some insight into the causeway and what kind of nick and condition the current causeway is in?

Mr BROWN - As far as I'm aware, the central part of the causeway is in reasonable condition. It's more that the - we call them revetments - the sea wall side of the embankments of each side of the causeway, particularly the northern side, which is subject to the prevailing winds and that - over time the rocks get moved that are armouring that wall and slowly sort of getting an erosion effect and they're moving around. Then parts of that wall get exposed more and more, and more erosion keeps happening. That's where we're getting the worst of the degradation of the wall over time. The idea is that the designer has done some ocean engineering type things, so coastal engineering, to choose and identify the best slope for a new embankment there. That will help with that wave run-up that you get during those stormy events and try and dissipate the energy so that doesn't go into moving the rocks around.

Ms BUTLER - Also, just for the record, if you can run us through the current condition of the existing McGees Bridge and the expected lifespan of the current bridge and also the expected lifespan - I believe they're built to a 100-year guarantee these days. If you can talk through that, we might have a situation in the future where one bridge is in worse nick than the other bridge.

⁷ Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution) - Matters taken on Notice, p. 4.

Mr BROWN - The existing McGees Bridge is about 24 to 25 years old. It would have been built to be serviceable for 100 years. That's been a long-standing standard that we design our bridges for. It is in good condition other than a little bit of superficial change there that we'll be able to address in due course. Particularly that it's in a very salty environment it's not surprising that you get a little bit of degradation over time. It's on the surface and you need to recover that wearing away, and that's to ensure that you're not getting seawater ingressing into the concrete and that, so that's not a surprise. We monitor our bridges on a routine regular basis depending on how important they are and McGees Bridge would be very important, so it would be a very frequent monitoring regimen. It's expected to last another 75 years at least. In terms of the new bridge, that's been designed for a 100-year lifespan.

Ms BUTLER - When we were on site this morning, you mentioned information about the durability of McGees Bridge. I thought that might be really interesting for you to provide that to the committee, regarding that design work that was done on that bridge.

Mr BROWN - McGees Bridge is a fairly unique structure in terms of the type of structure. It's a very corrosive environment because of the salty water and suchlike, and the spray that you get off the estuary during high wind events, the amount of cover, the type of concrete, the steel reinforcement chosen was stainless steel, which isn't usual, so a lot of work went into ensuring that it was going to be a durable structure well into the future.

A similar approach is being taken for the proposed new, second McGees Bridge. Fortunately, we have better types of mixes. The technology in terms of concrete mixes has improved and advanced since that time, so we won't need to use stainless steel reinforcement again, which is a cost saving, which is good. We also have better identified how much cover we need over that reinforcement - that's the distance between the outside edge of our concrete items and how deep inside that concrete the reinforcement is. We have a lot more knowledge over time about what to make that, so we're expecting a good outcome for that as well, that bridge.

...

CHAIR - The pylons that go into the floor of the seabed, will they be similar? I think you quoted 22 metres down for the current McGees Bridge...

Mr BROWN - It's a similar depth that we'll have to drive piles into the estuary floor to find solid bedrock, but we've got better equipment and machinery to drive those poles in, so it should be a more efficient process than it was in the past. We're also able to use single pylons now rather than multiple pylons that branch out in different directions from beneath the bridge structure. That's usually a more efficient process these days compared to when the original McGees Bridge was built.

Mr WOOD - To note the design; the look of the bridge. I think it was mentioned this morning it's going to be similarly designed in terms of look to the current McGees Bridge?

Mr BROWN - We thought it was important for the local community that we would be building something that was aesthetically fitting with what's already there, so we weren't doing something that was heading off in a different direction in terms of the look.

Costs

4.44 The Department outlined the expected cost:

Mr BROWN - ... The estimated cost of the project is \$159.3 million based on the P50 estimate. The cost estimate is considered reasonable for the scale and scope of works proposed.

4.45 The Committee sought clarification regarding the change in project parameters and resulting updated cost:

Mr HARRISS - Coming back to the cost, there was the \$209.5 million committed for the Midway Point causeway and Sorell Causeway. Being that this part of it is at \$159 million, that just leaves somewhere around \$50 million for the Sorell Causeway. Is that going to be enough, I suppose?

Was it always roughly around the what's that, 75 per cent of cost? Was it always envisioned that this section would be about 75 per cent of cost?

Mr BROWN - Unfortunately, as we have learnt more through the design development space, we have identified that the costs are higher than expected, in proportion. Also, just the sheer time it's taking to work through this complex project, the value of money is changing. That means every dollar we had back when it was committed is now not worth a dollar anymore. That's the escalation side of things that's eroding the allocation...

Mr PAINE - Yes, sure. Certainly, no, 75 per cent was not originally identified out of that \$209 million to be applied to this project. I can't remember the numbers, but it was something less than the 75 per cent. At this stage, we haven't completed the final design for the Sorell Causeway and there's even more significant work that needs to be done. There's a reserve the Orierton reserve is part of a conservation area that's designated under the Tasmanian land conservation act that needs to be addressed. There are significant challenges in the environmental with Sorell. We haven't finalised the Sorell Causeway alignment or design to actually know what the cost of that's going to be, but we will. Certainly once we have that closer figure, we'll be having conversations with government about what the available budget is.

4.46 Ms Lewis raised concerns about the shift in the project boundary on the Cambridge side, which she believed was not being reflected in the costings for this project:

Ms LEWIS - ... I was told up until December or January, whenever it was, that the boundary of this project was at the causeway. Suddenly, lo and behold, it's now 300 metres to the west. I'm told that's for technical reasons because projects can't merge; it has to be on a straight line and so on. But there's 300 that section has already been funded. Are you funding that project section again, twice?

Ms BURNET - You're saying that that was funded from the previous project?

Ms LEWIS - The project boundary was up until December January on the sort of actual boundary of the land and the water, as far as I'm aware, or very close to it. Now, I've been told it's been moved 300 metres, which is another \$3 million of overlap. So I think that's something that the committee needs to find out where that's going and provide some rigorous oversight and accountability and transparency on expenditure and performance should the federal government actually approve this.

4.47 The Department provided clarification about how funding for the overall SETS project is distributed between the individual component projects:

CHAIR - ... Do you want to make a comment about ... that it's only just been advised that they'll need this extra 300 metres?

Mr PAINE - ... we have progressed the design for the airport to causeway project initially and now as we've done the causeway project, we've identified that sort of line in the sand, if you mean, between the two projects needed to be moved by 300 metres. That takes a section of the road out of one project and puts it into the other one, and if there's any money associated with that, that gets put across into that other project as well. As I said, it's not double counted.

...

Mr PAINE - ... I think it was the Sorell bypass and also the Midway Point interchange have both been delivered under original funding commitment and those savings have been put back into the budget for these continuing projects, for the SETS projects. So no, the money is to be allocated for the SETS projects and that's it, and if there's any savings, then they get reallocated to the next project because I think there was a suggestion that by reducing the size of one project we might be double counting some money that we've -

CHAIR - We'd have some money left over.

Mr PAINE - Well, that doesn't happen. It's the one \$349.45 million ... and that'll deliver all those projects and, as they're progressively delivered, any savings get held over to be used on the future project. If we get savings at the end of the day, we would be returning that to the Commonwealth government and the state.

Contingency and escalation costs

- 4.48 The Committee asked for confirmation regarding the Department's confidence in the estimated contingency and escalation numbers:

CHAIR - ... In regard to the funding and cost, you've already indicated the P50 cost estimate of \$159,298,000. Given the contingency is around 11, and it's got an estimate of between 8 per cent and 19 per cent, so 8 per cent is the P50 estimate and the P90 estimate is up to 19 per cent; that's a contingency and then the escalation, 5.2 to 5.3. How firm are you on your numbers there?

Mr BROWN - We're drawing information from what we're experiencing in the current industry in terms of the works that we've already got live out there now. We take that information into account: 'Well, what's the marketplace doing?' That does give us a level of confidence in the figures we've got here.

- 4.49 Further information was provided regarding the nature of the project and how its funding arrangements guide the calculation of these figures:

Mr PAINE - The contingency is calculated based on the level of risk for the project, and typically you would have a higher contingency where you're building a bridge, because of the piles. You can't be absolutely sure of the depth or the size, so that might need to amend, so that'll be considered and be a component in our contingency. The escalation figures are a body of work that the Commonwealth does and provides states with. Where it's a Commonwealth-funded project, we have to use their escalation figures that they advise us, based on their economic analysis they do for the whole nation, and then localise it for the individual states, because obviously the Commonwealth has had experience in the past where states have either underestimated or overestimated escalation, so they've taken authority for actually dictating that to us.

Timeframe for completion

- 4.50 Mr Brown established the status of the proposed works and the timeline for their completion:

Mr BROWN - ... The project is currently at detailed design stage, which is planned to be completed by the middle of this year.

The department is targeting construction to start in late 2025, but that is subject to securing environmental approvals. Construction will take 18 months to two years to complete.

...

Mr BROWN - We're forecasting that once we have all the environmental approvals, gone through our construction contract tendering process and awarded a contract, it is some 18 months to two years we expect the construction phase to take. It's going to sometimes be dependent on the weather, and that will affect our progress at times, so it could be a seasonal thing depending on how productive that is and how it goes.

Does the Project Meet the Requirements of the Public Works Committee Act?

- 4.51 In assessing any proposed public work, the Committee seeks an assurance that each project meets the criteria detailed in Clause 15(2) of the Public Works

Committee Act 1914. Broadly, and in simple terms, these relate to the purpose of the works, the need for and advisability of undertaking the works, and whether the works are a good use of public funds and provide value for money to the community. The Committee questioned the witnesses who provided the following confirmation:

CHAIR ... *Do the proposed works meet an identified need or needs or solve a recognised problem?*

Mr BROWN - Yes, they do.

CHAIR - *Are the proposed works the best solution to meet identified needs or solve a recognised problem within the allocated budget?*

Mr BROWN - Yes, they are.

CHAIR - *Are the proposed works fit for purpose?*

Mr BROWN - Yes.

CHAIR - *Do the proposed works provide value for money?*

Mr BROWN - Yes.

CHAIR - *Are the proposed works good use of public funds?*

Mr BROWN - They are.

5 DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

5.1 The following documents were taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- *Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge*, submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Department of State Growth, 30 April 2025;
- Submission from Peter McGlone, CEO, Tasmanian Conservation Trust;
- Submission from Robyn Lewis; and
- *Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution) - Matters taken on Notice*, Department of State Growth response to PWC request for additional information, 29 May 2025.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 The Committee is satisfied that the need for the proposed works has been established. Once completed, the works will improve the capacity and safety of the Midway Point Causeway and McGee's Bridge section of the Tasman Highway.
- 6.2 The proposed works are integrated with a broader program of works which, in combination, are designed to reduce congestion and improve highway quality in southern Tasmania.
- 6.3 The works will provide increased road capacity on a key link route located in an area experiencing a growth in traffic.
- 6.4 The higher causeway and bridge will provide for sea level rise, reducing the impact of current and future incidents of inundation and sea spray on road users and infrastructure.
- 6.5 The design of the works has considered and – in conjunction with other supporting measures during construction – will accommodate the threatened live-bearing sea star population on the existing infrastructure. Impacts on other flora and fauna have also been considered and addressed.
- 6.6 Accordingly, the Committee recommends Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution), at an estimated cost of \$159.298 million, in accordance with the documentation submitted.



**Parliament House
Hobart
7 October 2025**

**Ms Jen Butler MP
Chair**

7 Divisions

7.1 In accordance with section 8(2) of the Act, the following Division was recorded:-

7.2 On the Question being proposed – That the Committee approves the Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees in accordance with the plans and specification submitted;

The Committee divided.

AYES (4)

NOES (1)

Ms Butler
Mr Harriss
Ms Rattray
Mr Wood

Ms Burnet

7.3 On the Question being proposed – That Chapter 6, “Conclusion and Recommendation, stand part of the Report;

The Committee divided.

AYES (3)

NOES (1)

Ms Butler
Mr Harriss
Ms Rattray

Ms Burnet

8. DISSENTING STATEMENTS

- 8.1 The Honourable Member for Hobart, Ms *Burnet*, voted against the inclusion of the “Conclusion and Recommendation” in the Committee’s report.
- 8.2 Ms *Burnet* provided the following Dissenting Statement:-

Dissenting Report on the Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution) Project

This response to the Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge (South East Traffic Solution), is considered against the criteria within the following section of the Public Works Committee Act (1914) (specifically referring to points not shaded):

The Public Works Committee ... functions of the committee are prescribed by section 15 of the Public Works Committee Act (No. 32 of 1914) as follows:-

15. Functions of Committee

(1) The Committee shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, consider and report upon every public work that is proposed to be undertaken by a general government sector body, except any public work which hereafter may be withdrawn from the operation of this Act by a resolution withdrawing same adopted by each House of Parliament (and whether such work is a continuation, completion, repair, reconstruction, extension, or new work), in all cases where the estimated cost of completing the work exceeds the relevant monetary threshold in relation to the work.

(2) In considering and reporting on any work, the Committee shall have regard to –

(a) the stated purpose thereof;

(b) the necessity or advisability of carrying it out; and where the work purports to be of a reproductive or revenue producing character, the amount of revenue which it may reasonably be expected to produce; and

(c) the present and prospective public value of the work – and generally the Committee shall in all cases take such measures and procure such information as may enable them to inform or satisfy Parliament as to the expedience of carrying out the work

Preamble

According to the background information, the project's aims are to:

“...reduce traffic congestion and improve capacity and reliability.

The proposed works will include the following:

- a new dual lane causeway
- a second McGees Bridge
- improved carpark facilities next to McGees Bridge
- adjustments to the existing emergency services boat ramp
- shared walking and cycling pathways
- streetlighting and underground electrical works
- stormwater works
- sewer rising main works.”

In considering the background information on the project, various reports, representations from proponents and other representors at the hearing, there are questions to be considered whether this project at this time is the highest priority to “improve capacity and reliability”, as intended.

It is acknowledged that there would be upgrades to various parts of the road network at this location. However, the justification is questioned against the following paragraphs 1-7:

1. Cost, necessity and priority

The project’s budget is between \$159,298m and \$175,901m. There are escalation costs associated with the project’s budget. This is a considerable amount of money.

This project’s cost I do not feel is justified nor could it be considered as one of the highest infrastructure priorities for this state. At a time where the state has no budget it has significant fiscal limitations, wise decisions are required than to sign off on every project. It is better to exercise fiscal restraint and re-prioritise some of the infrastructure projects that must be considered.

For example, the considerable cost of the project involving both state and federal funds could be used in upgrades to other parts of the road network.

This proposed duplication of the Tasman Highway is one of a number of South East Transport Solution (SETS) projects. The committee heard that this project is at a location where there has been increased volume of vehicular traffic, and is one part of the Tasman Highway that is the least needing of upgrades. Other components of the SETS proposed upgrades are arguably more urgent than this component of the network.

2. Improvement to the road network

The upgrades would allow more vehicles to use the road at this point of the Tasman Highway, potentially doubling the number of vehicles on the causeway. However, upgrading this part of the road network does not address the bottlenecks of traffic citybound which clog regularly.

Arguably, as an example of higher priority, either replacement of or upgrades to the Tasman Bridge could be undertaken. The Tasman Bridge is an ageing piece of infrastructure which is coming to the end of its lifespan, and is the busiest piece of infrastructure in Tasmania. The Tasman Bridge as part of the south east transport network has a far greater vehicular catchment from Clarence municipality, East Derwent Highway, and the Mornington roundabout. Often there is congestion at that point and adjacent approaching roads in morning peak hour. It therefore should be regarded as a higher priority.

The proponent also asserts that there had been increased traffic volumes and traffic congestion leading to delays, with no evidence is provided. The Australian Government requested this data in its 'Guidelines for the content of a draft Public Environmental Report' (section 3.3, first dot point). This states “...clearly defining the problem the proposed action is aiming to address, including clarification on whether the intention of the proposed action is to alleviate traffic congestion or to address deteriorating seawalls. In doing so, baseline data on the traffic congestion issue should have been provided (including quantifying the severity and

regularity of the queuing and delays) and the expected improvement to traffic congestion following the proposed action.

Given this is needed for the Australian Government assessment, it is questionable as to whether the committee should approve the expenditure until the information is provided.

3. Travel Time Reliability

The project is intended to improve travel time reliability. It was unclear from evidence presented how this part of the road network was responsible for delays to travel time. Nor does the duplication of a road guarantee that there will be improved reliability of travel time to a destination.

There are many components to the SETS and doubling the amount of road may not improve if there is a bottleneck at another place. The Tasman Highway is still likely to have blockages, again the project is not justified. I agree with representative Ms Robyn Lewis who stated at the public hearing:

... we're looking at a transport problem. It's not just a roads problem, it's not just a traffic problem, it's a transport problem. I'm very gratified to hear that park-and-ride is being considered, but I think we need to be looking at this in a far more holistic manner.

I understand that that's a government issue, but the whole issue of how to move people and goods - it's freight as well - particularly, you build a road and they will come. It's well proven around the world that more roads increase traffic. We're going to exceed the carrying capacity of this road at some point. We've got to start looking beyond a sort of short-term time horizon, I believe.

... are the proposed works the best solution to meet an identifiable need? It depends how you define the need, is the need for moving people or is it the need for just faster traffic and more commuting?

4. Road User Safety

Crash data reported at the hearing suggests a relatively small number of crashes, injury or serious injury given the current demand. This was over the period 2015-2024. Fortunately as the report quotes the proponent, there has been no fatalities in that time.

Again, given the limited safety issues for vehicle users at this point including the road. It is questionable as to the need for straightening roadworks to the south of the project through private land and road reserve.

5. Wildlife safety

- (1) The **live-bearing seastar** (*Parvulastra vivipara*) has habitat on the buttresses on the northern/RAMSAR side of the causeway and was therefore featured in discussion of the project. The live-bearing seastar is regarded as **endangered** under the Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 and **vulnerable** under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999): It is regarded as **critically endangered** by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature

<https://nre.tas.gov.au/Documents/Tasmanian-Live-bearing-Seastar-Listing-Statement.pdf>

With reference to the statement by the proponent's marine scientist Dr Karen Parsons (EPBC referral documents), there has been a 96% decrease in the sea-star population in Pittwater from 2000-2023 due to water quality changes.

The greatest threats to the sea-star's existence is both pollutants and loss of habitat. I acknowledge the work already undertaken to protect the species, with \$millions spent at breeding programs at Clay Pipe Lagoon and at Orielton. Spending on an upgrade to water quality is more likely to be less costly and effective in reducing likely extinction of the live-bearing seastar population that calls the causeway home.

Clearly Infrastructure Tasmania is working with NRE Tasmania to reduce impacts of this. However, the safety and continued existence of the live-bearing seastar was raised by representor Peter McGlone from the Tasmanian Conservation Trust. There has been a lot of work undertaken to keep the habitat in place at the northern part of a section of the causeway. However, Mr McGlone felt that the reduction in water quality because of poor water treatment and discharge made the existence of this threatened species perilous.

Will the works reduce the survival of this endangered species? If there is a risk to this already threatened species, then these works should be really considered in that context.

- (2) The committee heard of concerns that the roadworks would be threatening three federally listed **floral species**, including an endangered species of orchid at the Milford property. Again it was unclear why the works had to take up so much of Ms Lewis' property. There seemed to be work to still be undertaken to determine the impact on these which were of great concern to the property owner.
- (3) The committee heard from representors the concerns about **roadkill** along the area of roadworks proposed on the city side of the causeway. The roadworks occur between a golf course and bushland. Ms Lewis made the point that the road would act as a significant barrier because of at least doubling the width of the road and the significant central barrier.

When asked about wildlife crossings and ways of preventing roadkill at this point, examples that were used along Grueber Avenue – “virtual fencing” to reduce roadkill were not considered for the project. The proponent also felt that because the roadworks are low lying, it would not be possible to have tunnels for animals to use.

My observation is that wildlife crossings are not addressed adequately by the proponent. It is important for road projects to consider animals traversing the sections of road being upgraded. This is both from a road user and animal safety perspective.

Re-alignment of the road – the city end of the causeway's realignment does not seem to be justifiable. Concerns over many years have been raised by landowner of Milford seem to have gone unhindered.

6. EPBC Act sign-off

According to the report of the Federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water report (EPBC 2024/10059) there are a number of consideration relating to this project. According to the report's preamble:

1 PREAMBLE

Department of State Growth Tasmania (DSG) proposes to widen and raise the Midway Point and Sorell Causeways, duplicate the highway from two to four lanes, construct a new bridge north of McGees Bridge and conduct other ancillary activities, approximately 20km east of Hobart, Tasmania.

The proposal was referred under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act) to the Minister for the Environment, with a valid referral received on 3 January 2025. The Minister determined on 3 February 2025 that approval is required as the action has the potential to have a significant impact on the following matters of national environmental significance (MNES) that are protected under Part 3 of the EPBC Act:

- Ramsar wetlands (sections 16 and 17B)
- Listed threatened species and communities (sections 18 and 18A)
- Listed migratory species (sections 20 and 20A)

The project is still awaiting sign-off against the EPBC Act because of these matters. I acknowledge the work undertaken to reduce the impacts on the sea-star in the RAMSAR- listed wetland – work undertaken with *Department of Natural Resources; Environment Tasmania; the Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; and also the Environment Protection Authority Tasmania* to identify and properly address environmental matters. However, this is still to be completed and would really help with decision-making of the Committee

7. Responses to Climate change: the broader context

During the hearing, the Committee was told that traffic modelling indicated that single vehicle traffic volumes are steadily increasing. It raises the concerns from a climate change perspective as to what is being undertaken to reduce transport emissions, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions. How too is the government approaching the issue of traffic congestion – which is a growing frustration of commuters, which also reduces productivity. What can be done to reduce this ever-increasing demand on a road system? Is there any alternative?

It is evident that the increase in traffic is not being addressed by improvements in alternative forms of transport by the state government. Bus movements, prioritisation lanes, carpooling or staggering traffic (eg staggering work and education start and finish times) are all ways that could address the problem. Simple solutions are often the last to be tried, but this would be a better place to start than by building a road duplication.

Finding transport solutions is not seen as a high priority for the state government. It is often the case that if there is a road, then traffic will fill it. When the proponent was asked about looking at transport alternatives, he stated that “it was outside the scope of the project”.

Conclusion

In conclusion, according to s. 15 (1), (2) (a), (b) and (c), on balance there is no justification for these works to be approved.

Too much of the work that is before us is hindered by narrow approaches to finding solutions. In this project as an example, there is significant frustration in being able to consider appropriate solutions that do not cost the state government and consequently the taxpayer.

Whilst there are improvements to the road network, there is no justification for significant spending on this project as a greater priority over other necessary road works and network upgrades.

Significant impacts on biodiversity, the lack of meaningful action to address climate change associated with implementing clever ways to address traffic management are all concerns that have not been adequately addressed.

Having regard to these points, I do not support this proposal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Helen Burnet". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Helen Burnet MP

Member of the Public Works Committee

October 2025