



**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**REPORT OF DEBATES**

**Wednesday 24 June 2020**

**REVISED EDITION**

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

## **QUESTIONS**

### **COVID-19 - Easing of Restrictions**

**Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.03 a.m.]

At the start of the pandemic we called on you to introduce tough restrictions in the hope that if Tasmania was the first to go into lockdown we could be the first to come out of it and get people back into work. Yet, after more than a month of no new cases, Tasmania still has some of the strictest social distancing restrictions in the country. You have been slow to respond to calls from across the community to ease restrictions and get people back into work even after more than 20 000 people have lost their jobs. You have spoken of your anguish at shutting down so many businesses with the stroke of a pen. With the stroke of a pen you can help many of them to get their doors open again so that they can re-employ people.

Why have you not acted before now to ease social distancing rules and, in particular, adopt the Western Australian rule, guided by their Public Health advice, to allow venues to accommodate one person per 2 square metres to help people get back into work?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I begin by saying haven't Tasmanians done well?

**Members** - Hear, hear.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - It is nearly 40 days without a case. Tasmanians have done very well.

The one thing I take from that question the Leader of the Opposition has asked, is her ability to flip-flop on important matters.

Everyone in this House knows we have an older and more vulnerable population. Everyone in this House knows we took steps and introduced difficult measures regarding the movement of people to their shacks and to seaside communities, steps that other states did not take because we knew we needed to protect those older and more vulnerable Tasmanians.

If the Leader of the Opposition had had her way, we would have been in even deeper trouble than we are at the moment because the Leader of the Opposition, at the start, and again she flip-flops on matters as I said, was calling for a full, hard lockdown. That meant that everybody was out of work. She wanted the New Zealand model.

We took the more sensible, measured approach. We dealt with the challenges that were in front of us by, unfortunately, having to close those businesses that were people magnets - businesses that had large congregations of people attending them. The Leader of the Opposition is right: that did

fill me with anguish. It was the most difficult decision I have ever had to make. We did that and Tasmanians took the necessary steps.

We then laid out, based on expert health advice, a three-step plan to walk our way back into this. I make the point, and I know the Leader of the Opposition is aware of this and other members in this place are as well, that the world is burning at the moment. There are more than 9 million cases and 500 000 people have died. When you look at what is occurring around the world, this disease is not over yet. When you look at those democracies and countries that have stepped out of this too soon, and have had a second wave and then have had to go through the very difficult circumstance of having to close down businesses again, I would have thought that the Leader of the Opposition understood why we are stepping ourselves so carefully through this because, up to this point, this country has got it right.

Only a few hundred kilometres north of Tasmania we are faced with a new challenge. We have, potentially, a second wave about to hit Victoria. Steps are being taken. The Premier of Victoria reached out last night to ask for our help. I have kindly agreed to provide some additional testing support for him as he works through this difficult situation. South Australia has sent contact tracers and trackers to assist Victoria.

If you let this disease get away from you, it will kill and it will grow exponentially. In answer to the Leader's question, that is why we have stepped into this, as we did, quickly, and we will step out of it at the pace we have set, guided by Public Health officials. It is so important that we do that because the last thing that the businesses you purport to support want is to come out of this, have to re-stock, recapitalise and then go through the process of being shut down again and, unfortunately, at that point I can almost guarantee that those businesses will never come back.

That is why we are stepping through our sensible three-stage plan. We have been fortunate in that we have been able to bring it forward and to this week, we will move to the lifting of further stage three restrictions, because we are in a good place. I will have more to say about that later today, but we have to be cautious and sensible. If the Leader of the Opposition needed any example as to why that is the case, she only needs to cast her eyes north and look at Victoria.

## **COVID-19 - Easing of Restrictions**

### **Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.09 a.m.]

Western Australia has clear Public Health advice to support the 2 square metre rule, which effectively allows double the number of people in venues that you have allowed here in Tasmania. Western Australia introduced this measure on 6 June with the clear aim of getting people back into jobs. They have managed the health response and the economic response well. Why have you not moved to introduce the 2 square metre rule here in Tasmania to get people back into work and help businesses recover?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. It is interesting the way the Opposition Leader has flip-flopped her way through this. I would never have thought anybody could politicise a pandemic but she has had a fair crack at it. On one hand, the Leader of the Opposition is calling for the release of restrictions internally but at the same time, and in the

next breath, calls for our borders to be wide open. That is a statement of fact, Madam Speaker. All care but no responsibility.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Western Australia has explained that they will not be opening their borders. They were thinking about setting a date sometime in August and they have indicated that they are walking away from that.

We are looking to find a sensible pathway through this. As I have indicated, this week we will be announcing what our Stage 3 restrictions look like. This week I will be announcing the pathway in terms of our borders. I make the point that we will not lower the border protections we have if it means putting Tasmanians at risk. What is occurring in Victoria is very problematic. I urge the Leader of the Opposition, who was once prepared to listen to Public Health advice, who was once prepared to support our efforts and steps as we worked our way through this, to stop playing politics with this.

The advice we have taken to date has put us in a very good position. I thank Dr Veitch and Dr McKeown and the leadership that Darren Hine has provided as the State Controller. Difficult decisions have been taken by those three men on a daily basis. It has been my pleasure and privilege to work with them. I will continue to listen to their advice because that has put us in a very good position. We want to be able to step into this in a way that ensures we can keep our businesses open and not run the risk, as the Leader of the Opposition wants us to, to one day having to shut them down again.

### **Westbury Prison Site - Location**

**Ms O'CONNOR question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.13 a.m.]

Together with the Westbury community and people who live on Birralea Road, we would like to understand why your Government chose a 70-hectare reserve with high conservation values as the new northern prison site. This new site is a haven for multiple native species, including rare endemic birds. When you landed on this site to try to get out of political hot water over the previous site, were you aware that the land was set aside under the Regional Forest Agreement and is part of the National Reserve System? Given strong community opposition to this site as well as evidence of high conservation values, will you again reconsider and put the new northern prison in a repurposed Ashley Youth Centre at Deloraine where there is a skilled workforce and community acceptance of a prison next door?

This would allow your Government to build two new therapeutic youth detention facilities, north and south, that deliver better outcomes for young offenders. As your Resources minister might say, 'It is a win-win-win-win-win-win-win scenario'.

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens for that question and for her interest in this matter. Let me deal with the status of the land and the unfortunate mistruths that surround it.

First, the site was originally purchased from a private landowner because it was believed it contained a specific forest type that had been significantly reduced by agricultural development. It was not world reserve because of that fact. However, subsequent investigation revealed that the site did not contain this forest type but instead a similar but not threatened forest type. The cause of this initial error is not clear. It obviously occurred some time ago, but there is no criticism of those who undertook the initial assessments. The site does not contain pristine forest but shows evidence of a very long history of timber harvesting and, more recently, illegal firewood collection, stock grazing, rubbish dumping and shooting.

The site has not been actively managed by the Crown and is not the responsibility of DPIPWE's private land conservation program. The site does not contain the values for which it was originally purchased. Indeed, for more than a decade consideration has been given to allowing the land to be sold with the intention of allowing a portion of it to be cleared for a residence, which surprises me.

This is a bush block in an ideal location to build a prison. That is exactly what we are going to do.

The member said quite a flowery introduction in terms of our thinking around this. I will explain what occurred in February and how we worked through this process. Obviously, the Attorney-General and I met with the community. It would be fair to say - and I informed Cabinet when I next met with them - that I was surprised at the level of support in Westbury, to be frank, as a result of going to Westbury that day and meeting with those who were for and those against the prison.

I took the opportunity to speak to everybody on the street. The first person I spoke to was a woman with two younger people who were sitting across from the recreation ground, where I am sure some members in this place have played either cricket or football at some stage. Their playing at Westbury probably had the same amount of luck that I had. I crossed the road to speak to her. She said to me, 'Bring it on. I want jobs for these two young people here. They do not have jobs'. Interestingly enough she said that she worked for Ashley and she would feel very comfortable. She said, 'In fact, it doesn't concern me at all'.

I went down the street. I talked to people out the front of the coffee shop. They were similarly positive. I went into the coffee shop and had a chat with a group of older people who were sitting down having a coffee. The very clear message from the eight to 10 people who were in the shop was, 'Just get on and build it'.

I then met with the stakeholders through the course of the day. Obviously, I understood very clearly the position of WRAP and their opposition to that particular site -

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please. It is difficult to hear.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - In terms of the conversation with WRAP, I do not think that I am stretching things too far to suggest that they made the point that they had no problem with a prison being in the municipality; they just did not want it at that particular site. They wanted it moved. I think somebody also suggested that we should move it to Ashley as you have just done, which is interesting. Moving it to Ashley puts it within four kilometres of Deloraine whereas the site that we have selected puts it over four kilometres away from Westbury.

Setting that aside, I also met with representatives, as did the Attorney-General, of the industrial estate. To be frank, they were split. Some were for it; some were against it. But the ones who were against said, 'Our concern is not that it is a prison or whether it is going to be a massive construction site for a period of time. Our concern is that you will be putting 300 beds across the road from an industrial location. We currently operate to a permit where we do not operate 24 hours a day but if we wanted to that concerns us that the location of a prison in that site might fetter the industrial estate'. I have started to give that some thought.

I then went to meet with the resident who is the most affected by the original site and sat with him and his wife one Sunday afternoon and looked out their lounge room window. They pointed to where the prison would be. I indicated to them that I was giving thought to what was possible. I spoke to them about their thoughts about it moving further away from that location. They were not against a prison; the fact that it was being built almost in their front yard provided them with some concern.

We asked for further work to be done. This site, five kilometres down the road, owned by the Crown -

**Ms O'Connor** - A reserve.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Not a reserve. I want to be clear. It is unallocated Crown land and, as I have described it, it has the characteristics of a bush block which unfortunately in recent times has been used for rubbish dumping.

Madam Speaker, we will continue our investigations but the minister has outlined a time frame and we believe that location will satisfy the vast majority of the people who live in the Meander region. We believe that location will satisfy the vast majority of those who are pragmatic in the Westbury community and we will get on and build it.

### **Marinus Link - Funding Agreement**

**Ms OGILVIE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.20 a.m.]

Tasmania has an incredible opportunity to not only secure our commercial and energy future but also to land thousands of jobs. We know that the Marinus project and Battery of the Nation are key to the future of our renewable energy production and our capacity to on-sell this renewable energy to the nation. I am delighted to hear that an additional telecommunications cable is on the table for this project. The time is right to assert Tasmania's dominance of our nation's energy market by ensuring our stake in future use is locked in. However, there is growing frustration about the delay in finalising a funding agreement to build the project.

Is it not time for Tasmania to take the bold and pragmatic step of ensuring we own and operate the Marinus cable? I am sure we also all agree that Tasmanians should not pay more than our fair share of the cost. Will the Government consider establishing a special purpose vehicle into which federal and state funding can be invested so that the Marinus Link can be jointly owned by the people of Tasmania and Australia?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank Ms Ogilvie, the member for Clark, for that question, and welcome her support for what will be a project that will deliver thousands of jobs and billions of dollars' worth of investment in this state. Importantly, I acknowledge the Minister for Energy who, whilst he has to regularly put up with the carping from Labor, has been single-minded in his determination to deliver what would be a fantastic project and long-term future of renewable energy to the State of Tasmania. He should be commended for that.

Regarding the process we have been engaged in, there was a business case which indicated very strongly that this would be a net positive for the state. There are obvious matters to be negotiated of who actually pays for the link and our position has been that the user should pay. This is national infrastructure. Therefore, the link should be paid by those customers who will benefit from it, and that will largely be the eastern seaboard of this country.

The business case is very positive. We are now going through the design and approvals process. From memory, that will take a period of around 18 months to be completed. We are looking at the issues of planning and design and other matters that are related to a project of this scope.

As to the investment vehicle, obviously there are many people suggesting many options for that, but we need to step through the design and approvals process, get to financial close and, importantly, as we work through this, work with the federal government to ensure that we arrive at a model that will deliver the best outcome for this state, both now and into the future, and that is exactly what we are doing.

I commend the member for Clark for raising this. It is an important project for Tasmania. It is important to note that the federal government recently, in its announcement about major projects, listed this as a national priority project with the opportunity to bring forward billions of dollars of investment and thousands of jobs for years to come. We will continue to work closely with the federal government and members of the business and investment community who have a keen eye to the benefits it can bring regarding opportunities in this state and investment and jobs. We are determined to ensure that we can bring this project to fruition.

I make this one last point - the 200 per cent renewable energy target has been a game-changer. As a jurisdiction it places us in such a strong position in terms of both the interest in this opportunity but also in firming up this opportunity. I commend the Minister for Energy for the work he has done in ensuring that not only has Marinus been listed as one of the 15 priority projects for the national government but, importantly, it will put the state in good stead as we move forward in terms of the revenues the state will generate and the jobs it will support.

## **COVID-19 - Independent Review of North-West Tasmania Outbreak**

**Mr TUCKER question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.26 a.m.]

Can you update the House on the Government's commitment to an independent review of the COVID-19 outbreak in north-west Tasmania?

## ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Mr Tucker for that question and the work he continues to do to support local people in his community and the work he does right across Lyons, especially during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 27 April I committed to an independent review into the coronavirus outbreak in the north-west. I said at the time that it was appropriate that we conduct an independent review, undertaken by relevant experts, following the development of an agreed terms of reference to identify the key learnings from that outbreak. It was my expectation that the review would be commenced as soon as was possible, considering that the pandemic would likely still be occurring, but at the time when the key leaders involved would be able to turn their minds from the acute response in order to ensure that they could contribute fully to the review.

I have always been extremely mindful of the priority focus of senior health officials in managing and supporting the response to the outbreak and that any timing of the review would need to take this into account. I also committed to release the terms of reference in draft form to enable public consultation on them.

We moved swiftly in the first instance to undertake a detailed report by Public Health into the north-west COVID outbreak at that time. As outlined when the COVID-19 North West Regional Hospital outbreak interim report was released, the Health minister accepted all those recommendations and we have taken prompt action and begun implementing all the recommendations from the report. I am advised that 14 of 17 recommendations are completed and by the end of August we are expecting all recommendations to have been completed. Further information on this work will be provided to support the independent review.

I am pleased to announce that today I will be releasing the draft terms of reference for the independent review of the COVID-19 outbreak in north-west Tasmania. It will be out for two weeks public consultation and my Department of Premier and Cabinet will coordinate that consultation. It is my expectation that the independent review will commence in mid-July 2020.

I also want to announce who will be heading up the review. Mr Greg Melick AO RDF SC will be appointed as the independent reviewer. He is an eminent member of Australia's legal community. Greg practises as a barrister and mediator in several jurisdictions in both criminal and civil matters and is the chief commissioner and chair of the board of Tasmania's Integrity Commission. He has conducted several significant investigations, including the one into the Beaconsfield mine collapse.

A working group will be established in conjunction with and to advise Mr Melick that will have at least Public Health, hospital administration and public sector administration experience as well. It will be a broad-ranging independent review.

The terms of reference cover every aspect of the outbreak in the north-west, and the actions and effectiveness of those actions taken in response to it. It will consider government agencies, public and private healthcare facilities, and any other relevant authorities. The independent reviewer, Mr Melick, will provide an opportunity to persons with a proper interest in the subject matter of this review to make submissions about that subject matter and if thought necessary, that it be heard personally in relation to those matters. Second, he will ensure that, where necessary, appropriate confidentiality arrangements are made for persons assisting the inquiry; and third, he



will ensure that the lived experiences of north-west coast patients who were diagnosed with COVID-19 and those placed in quarantine, are taken account of as well.

The review will also cover any other matter relevant to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the north-west that Mr Melick identifies in the course of review activities as warranting investigation and discussion.

The date for submissions and/or consultations will be determined by Mr Melick and I expect that the final report, including findings and recommendations, should be delivered by the end of October of this year. That will be subject to the spread of COVID-19 over that time frame and the possible impacts on the availability of personnel, which is a reasonable position to hold.

I will release the report in full when it is provided to enable public scrutiny. It has been and remains my intention to ensure that we have a responsible and transparent approach to our state's actions and response to, as well as the management of, the COVID-19 challenge.

This independent review of the north-west outbreak, led by Mr Greg Melick, is a vital component of that responsible and transparent approach. It clearly demonstrates the commitment I gave that this Liberal Government would be transparent and accountable. I said we would we do this in relation to the review and I am pleased to be delivering on my commitment to the parliament today. The terms of reference will be made public later today.

### **COVID-19 - Review of Small Business Hardship Grants Program**

#### **Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.31 a.m.]

Sadly 20 000 people in Tasmania are out of work due to this pandemic, businesses are struggling and some have already closed their doors.

During the last session, we brought to your attention serious flaws with the Small Business Hardship Grants program. Many businesses, including Huon Valley Retreat, Margate Kennels, Puddleduck Vineyard and Lift Up Coffee Bar in Scottsdale have missed out or received smaller grants than their competitors with little to no explanation. Meanwhile, the exclusive Athenaeum Club, which counts senior Liberal employees as its members, has boasted of receiving support from your Government.

You committed to conducting a review of the program and to follow up individual examples, but to date, none of the businesses we brought to your attention have received a resolution. Every day you delay is another day that these businesses inch closer to closing their doors. Why have you been so slow to act?

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question and her continued interest in this matter.

First, we are acting. That review is underway at the moment and I expect that we will have more to say about the review. The point I make is, that State Growth, through this, did an

enormously positive job in the main. To have out the door more than 18 000 grants to businesses is a huge effort in the time frame they were faced with. It is fair to say that the grants had a finite level of funding. That was announced initially at \$40 million. It was then increased to \$60 million. There were criteria that businesses needed to apply and meet in relation to the \$15 000 grant and then a subsequent lower threshold for the \$4000 grant. The reason it was changed was because we wanted to use the finite resources that were available to ensure that more businesses could receive support.

In terms of the work that State Growth took on, especially in relation to the initial emergency grants, we wanted those emergency grants, the \$2500, out the door as quickly as we possibly could.

I know some businesses have some concerns. I was contacted by one last night, interestingly enough to make the point that they were annoyed that another business had received the grant and then also make the point that they had not bothered to put an application in for it, but were still annoyed.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - What I am talking about, is the fact that we are working through the review that I committed we would undertake. That will be completed shortly. As I have said, I expect the minister will have something to say very soon.

### **Racing Industry - Increase in Stakes**

**Mr O'BYRNE question to MINISTER for RACING, Ms HOWLETT**

[10.35 a.m.]

You recently announced a stakes increase for the racing industry of \$660 000 raised from the point of consumption tax. How was this decision made? Did you make a recommendation to the board of Tasracing? Did you meet with the Premier and his office about this decision?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Franklin for his question. I am sure you would agree that it is good that we are back racing. Seventy-two days without racing: how good is it that we are back?

I was pleased to see the resumption of racing on 14 June 2020 after the shutdown. I thank those industry participants for their forbearance through this period, especially those who availed themselves of the \$2 million a month support package that enabled them to keep their racing animals at work. There is no doubt it was a difficult period for the industry and the participants as it has been for many other sectors throughout Tasmania. I am advised that the recommencement has been very smooth and the number of nominations across all codes indicates the support package has indeed been very well received.

I acknowledge the contribution that the racing industry makes to our economy and employment, particularly in regional Tasmania. While I understand the frustrations felt across the

industry the decision to suspend racing within the state was made taking into full account public health advice and the need to stop travel between regions across the state.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Madam Speaker, point of order. The question is specific. I bring the minister's attention to the nature of the question. It was about the stakes increase. It is not a general speech about the racing industry. I ask you to bring the member to the point of order which is about the stakes.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Madam Speaker, I would like to add to the point of order. I inform the House that the member has, in fact, asked a question on a Treasury and Finance related matter being the point of consumption tax.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Madam Speaker, the member has unfortunately made an error in to whom he has addressed the question but nonetheless the minister is answering the question.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. The minister had the opportunity to pass it to the relevant minister and chose not to do so. She has already substantially gone through her address and I ask her to remain relevant to the question.

**Ms HOWLETT** - Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased that a \$660 000 increase in stakes has been agreed for the next financial year representing a 3 per cent lift over the current year. The increase in stakes is affordable and sustainable in light of the impact across the closure of racing. This is in contrast to the demand by the shadow minister for racing who has called for an uncosted compensation package for the industry seemingly with no regard for the affordability or the sustainability of the industry. Mr O'Byrne can be relied upon to jump on a populist cause and to break from the original agreement made by his Leader on this matter is a really low blow.

Let me tell you one thing: the industry has not forgotten who sold the TOTE.

### **Northern Region Prison - Update**

**Mr TUCKER question to ATTORNEY-GENERAL, Ms ARCHER**

[10.39 a.m.]

I acknowledge that the Premier has already touched on this today. Can the minister update the House on the Government's plan for the northern regional prison?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Lyons, Mr Tucker, for his ongoing interest in this matter.

COVID-19 has had an obvious economic impact on Tasmania and indeed an impact on everyone, particularly those who have lost their jobs. With our plan to rebuild a stronger Tasmania we are kick-starting the state's economic engine once again and in doing so we have a very aggressive construction plan to deliver an economic boost creating thousands of new jobs. The Tasmanian Liberal Government is committed to delivering on our election commitment to build a \$270 million northern regional prison, which is now needed for jobs more than ever before. Not only will this address the challenges facing the state's correctional system which were left by Labor, it will deliver a huge injection of much-needed investment in the region.

This vital project will support more than 1000 jobs and deliver an economic boost of \$500 million to the region, according to the recently completed and independently conducted social and economic impact study. As the Premier has already outlined today, the Government has listened carefully to the Westbury community and local businesses during an extensive community consultation process for the northern regional prison project.

After careful consideration and taking on board the feedback we received, a new site has now been identified for the new northern regional prison. The new site is an unallocated Crown land site at Brushy Rivulet, 5.2 kilometres -

**Dr Woodruff** - It is not unallocated; it has an allocation as a reserve.

**Ms ARCHER** - Dr Woodruff, you think you know better but we have clearly outlined to the House today the correction of that misunderstanding.

It is 5.2 kilometres from the Westbury town centre. Preliminary analysis of this site has been undertaken while further more detailed work on site to complete the due diligence is now progressing.

I thank the residents of Westbury and the broader Meander Valley community for their valuable feedback and participation in the extensive consultation process. This involved one-on-one meetings with myself and the Premier, surveys, the phone survey for the Westbury postcode 7303 area, the mail-out survey, and drop-in sessions. There was extensive consultation. Due to COVID-19 there was a delay in the supply of the social and economic impact study but it also allowed for an extension of time for that mail-out survey for those to complete it should they wish to do so, and indeed request additional surveys.

I also acknowledge and welcome the comments of the Meander Valley Mayor, Wayne Johnston, who recognised that the Government has listened to the local community, and I quote:

It was good to see that the Government listened to Westbury residents and the Meander Valley Council.

To provide further confidence to the local building and construction sector, yesterday I released the expected time frames for stage 1 of the northern regional prison, which will see in July 2020 the Tasmanian Government finalise due diligence on the Crown land site. In August this year we expect to begin development of the masterplan and the particular planning zone, the PPZ assessment, which includes community consultation, as it always does. We expect by December this year to have the planning applications submitted, all going well. From March 2021 the design and tendering for the project will begin. In early 2022 construction works will begin on stage 1 and we expect in 2025 to open stage 1 of the prison.

The Master Builders of Tasmania, the Civil Contractors Federation, the Northern Tasmania Development Corporation and the Property Council have all applauded the Government's announcement. I note the statement made by the TCCI and the clarifying statement prior to that in relation to misquotes of Mr Bailey that were espoused. Following the Government's announcement last week, he said that the Government was listening to the concerns of the community:

A good government is one that puts a plan forward for feedback and then takes that feedback on board.

A northern prison will also be a massive shot in the arm for the region's economy, right at the time it is most needed.

These statements are in addition to the substantial positive feedback we have received from people in the region and Tasmanians more broadly since our announcement last week. At a time when the state needs jobs more than ever before, we are committed to delivering the northern regional prison in an effective and timely manner.

### **Racing Industry - Increase in Stakes and Consumption Tax**

#### **Mr O'BYRNE question to MINISTER for RACING, Ms HOWLETT**

[10.45 a.m.]

At the last election your Government took a policy of a 4 per cent increase in stakes per year for the industry. At the time, the now Premier claimed all election promises were fully funded. Following the 2018 election, successive Racing ministers ruled out the introduction of a point of consumption tax, only to perform a spectacular backflip last year.

In February this year in a joint media statement from you and the Premier, you announced the racing industry would be the big winner out of the consumption tax when you stated:

This will see the single largest revenue boost to the industry in recent history, with an additional \$4 million per annum to be invested across all codes, including stakes ...

This was welcomed by the industry and their support for the new tax was linked to this investment. They were clearly led to believe that the revenue from the point of consumption tax would be in addition to your election promise. Yet, in a letter to industry participants last week, you stated that the point of consumption tax now simply enables your Government to fulfil your election commitment.

Your Government was the only state government to shut down the racing industry, causing untold economic damage on it and the Tasmanian economy, costing jobs and investment, and you are also yet to commit to a support recovery package for the industry. Why are you continuing to treat the racing industry with contempt by using a new tax to fund an old promise?

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, could we have a bit of respect for the Minister for Racing?

## **ANSWER**

Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the financial year the stakes increased a further 1.35 per cent, a lift of \$292 898. Last week I announced a further increase of 3 per cent to take effect in the 2021 financial year, an increase of a further \$660 000. While I appreciate the increase has fallen short of the 4 per cent so far, the Government is committed to a substantial increase in stakes in the 2021-22 financial year, with stakes money to be sourced from the first full year of the point of consumption tax revenue. I acknowledge that a greater increase would have been desirable but this is not possible due to COVID-19, which has resulted in a reduction in race field fees.

As you may be aware, earlier this year the Government committed that the industry will receive 80 per cent of the expected increase in revenue from the point of consumption tax, estimated at \$4 million a year. I am advised that revenues are tracking broadly in line with expectations, despite the interruption to racing. The Government has committed that this return to the industry would be allocated to stakes, infrastructure and animal welfare.

It is important to understand that the point of consumption tax is paid in arrears. No funds will be received by the industry from the point of consumption tax until well into the new financial year. The first funds received will represent the first six months of the tax. Revenues from 1 January to 30 June 2020 are expected to be around \$1.8 million.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Could we please have some respect for the minister?

**Ms HOWLETT** - Thank you, Madam Speaker. Many racing industry leaders told me that they had no expectation of any stakes increase in the new financial year following the interruption to racing. In fact, they were concerned that there would be a stakes reduction. I am pleased to advise that the 3 per cent increase is affordable and sustainable for TasRacing and the industry as a whole. The Government wants to ensure that TasRacing is not again forced to cut prize money in order to sustain the operations of racing in the state of Tasmania.

## **Northern Region Prison - Location**

**Dr WOODRUFF question to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS, Ms ARCHER**

[10.49 a.m.]

The new location for the unnecessary northern prison, the Westbury reserve, did not even make it onto -

**Members** interjecting.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - The Westbury reserve did not even make it on to your Government's list of initial sites. It has no services, no water, gas or sewerage, but, worse, it is a forest that is protected under Tasmania's Reserve Estate, recorded on your list map, which you should have seen. Any due diligence would have shown you. It is a haven for birds and animals, including wedged-tailed eagles, Tasmanian devils, white goshawks, wood swallows, whistlers, silvereyes, and on and on.

Current evidence of natural values shows it is a rich natural biodiversity hotspot. Your obsession with secrecy about this prison means you did not even think to speak to the community about the values of this site who would have told you all about them.

We are meant to believe the preliminary desktop assessment for the site suitability did not raise any red flags. How was that possible? You have said the characteristics of this site are very promising for a prison. How did you get it so wrong?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her statement and question. It is remarkable that the Greens think that if they say something, it is fact. If they say something often enough, remarkably -

**Dr Woodruff** - Sarah Lloyd received the Order of Australia for the work she had done around the Westbury Reserve. How could you have missed that?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Ms ARCHER** - Madam Speaker, I do not doubt anyone's credentials or personal opinions. What I want to do is state, and further state from what the Premier has clarified correctly in parliament today, the facts about this site and what our preliminary investigations have received, how we have arrived at this site and what our plans are from hereon in.

It is troubling that the Greens continually peddle things in this House, and outside the House, that are simply not true.

As the Premier already stated this morning, issues have been raised in correspondence received by the Government on the status of this land for some time and certainly in recent days. It is based on the same misunderstandings. As the Premier has said, the site was originally purchased from a private landholder because it was believed to contain a specific forest type that had been significantly reduced by agricultural development and was not well reserved. However, subsequent investigation revealed that the site did not contain its forest type, but instead a similar but not threatened -

**Ms O'Connor** - Say that to Sarah Lloyd - the Order of Australia for contribution to conservation.

**Ms ARCHER** - The cause of this initial error is not clear, as we have said, and there is no criticism of how that assessment was undertaken but the site does not contain a pristine forest -

**Dr Woodruff** - Not true, not true. That was corrected.

**Ms ARCHER** - but shows evidence of a very long history of timber harvesting and, more recently, illegal firewood collections, stock raising, rubbish dumping and shooting. The locals are well aware of this. The Government did not put the sign that has been placed on the fence alleging it is a nature conservation site -

**Ms O'Connor** - DPIPWE put the sign there.

**Ms ARCHER** - The Government did not put the sign on the fence; we have stated that publicly.

Publicly, the site has not been actively managed by the Crown. It is not the responsibility of DPIPWE's private land conservation program. The site does not contain the values for which it was originally purchased and, for more than decade, consideration has been given to the land being sold, as the Premier has outlined.

I want to clarify one thing about the preliminary assessment. Our proposal is that the design will occupy less than one quarter, which is approximately 15 hectares of the 70-hectare site, with the remaining vegetation to be retained on site. That would provide an opportunity for the remaining area to be formally reserved and given the protection it currently does not enjoy.

Madam Speaker, I also want to clarify the consultation on this particular site. As the Premier outlined, as the result of our consultation, and I have outlined the consultation that occurred, we have looked up the road -

**Ms O'Connor** - Walking down the main street and chatting to people is not consultation.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Ms ARCHER** - I have outlined the consultation that occurred. We have looked up the road. Many people wanted us to move the site further away from the Westbury town centre and 5.2 kilometres is a significant distance. It is more than Lindisfarne is from Risdon. It is more than Ashley Youth Detention Centre is from Deloraine.

To clarify, as I have said, assessment of the site is currently underway to determine its exact characteristics and how they will be accommodated in the use of the site for the construction of the prison. Preliminary investigation is being conducted by DPIPWE. It is understood there are no eagle nests on the site. In addition, there are no covenants on the block; nor are there any records of threatened wildlife on the block.

**Dr Woodruff** - There is an eagle nest right next to the site. You know that affects it. You were the previous environment minister. You should know.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Dr Woodruff.

**Ms ARCHER** - I call on the Greens to stop saying these things in public.

**Dr Woodruff** - Somebody has to do it.

**Ms ARCHER** - But do not make things up. Stop saying things about a site that are simply not true.

### **COVID-19 - Power Bill Relief for Businesses**

**Mr O'BYRNE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.56 a.m.]

In May we asked you to consider extending power bill relief to hospitality businesses, like the Shoreline Hotel and Tall Timbers, which did not qualify for support from your Government because they were high energy users. You responded by saying that they would not need support because



they would not be using much power while they were shut down. This displayed a little ignorance and disregard for the situation that these businesses find themselves in as they continued to run freezers, coolrooms and other equipment, in the hope that they could bounce back once restrictions were lifted.

You also promised to personally follow up with these businesses, but they have received no support from the Government. These businesses are attempting to trade under the strictest social-distancing rules in the country and the battle to keep their heads above water has only become harder. Will you reconsider your opposition to providing power relief to these larger customers?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for that question and for his interest in this matter. In relation to the support that the Government has provided, as I have indicated, we have provided many businesses up to \$25 million-worth of electricity bill relief for the last quarter. In relation to water and sewerage, again around \$25 million-worth of bill relief has been provided for many businesses.

Regarding electricity prices going forward, we put a cap in to ensure that they would see no increase in the regulated space over the coming 12 months. In fact, power prices have gone down. Under us, prices are going down; under you they went up 65 per cent.

In relation to other support that we are providing, tourism and hospitality businesses that were of a scale to pay payroll tax have received a full refund of the payroll tax they previously paid for the current financial year.

Many businesses were able to receive the \$2500 grant and the \$15 000 grant. We are trying to get these businesses operating again. Regarding the restrictions that these businesses are operating under, again relating to the 4 square metre rule, you made the point and I am sure you said it, but you probably did not mean it, because it is not true that our businesses are operating under the harshest of restrictions. They are not. That is not true and you know that.

Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland are all operating with the 4 square metre rule. South Australia, I understand, is operating with a 4 square metre rule -

**Ms White** - No, they are not; they are 2 metre squared.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Have they moved?

**Ms White** - They will be moving to that on 29 June.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Hang on a moment. From when is South Australia at 2 metres? From 29 June 2020? Again, South Australia is operating under 4 square metres.

**Ms White** - They have just announced it.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I made the point the other day that I had stopped speaking to you because I could not trust you. You have just demonstrated again why I cannot trust you.

**Ms WHITE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, I ask the Premier to retract that statement. He has taken me out of context because he knows restrictions are not just about social distancing. It is the caps on gatherings and a number of other restrictions that are putting businesses in perilous situations. He should be honest.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Madam Speaker, again I make the point that that is exactly why I said you cannot trust the Leader of the Opposition. You simply cannot trust her.

We have one of the highest caps at 80 in the country. South Australia is operating under 4 square metres at the moment. You should correct the House because you misled it a moment ago.

**Ms WHITE** - Point of order, I did not mislead the House, Madam Speaker. I again seek for the Premier to withdraw that comment. I take personal offence to that remark and he should withdraw it. I did not mislead the House.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Madam Speaker, I think when we check *Hansard* the context which she used would indicate very clearly that she misled the House in terms of that statement. Until we have the *Hansard* it is difficult for me to make a decision on that. I suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that we will have a look at *Hansard* when it is available.

Quite clearly, I understood that she was suggesting that South Australia was operating under a 2 square metre rule, which they are not.

**Ms White** - I did not say that.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. I do think we have so much heated debate on this incredibly important issue so we will wait until we get the *Hansard*. We will check it and if the Premier is wrong I am sure he will graciously apologise. I cannot give a ruling for you at the moment because there was so much noise it was very difficult for me to pick it up. I recognise you corrected it, or not corrected it but made your point clear, very quickly.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Madam Speaker, of course I will always graciously apologise if I have misunderstood the Leader of the Opposition's intent in respect of what she said, but as you correctly pointed out we need to read the *Hansard*. I hope that if my interpretation of what she said is borne out that she will correct the *Hansard* record for misleading the House.

Setting that aside, in terms of the businesses, I have said that this week we will be removing some of the restrictions as we step into stage 3. I hope that again, based on Public Health advice, we can get the balance right in enabling our businesses to operate more freely as they step back towards existence in a COVID-19 environment. We will take Public Health advice on this. Any reading of what has been occurring around the country would demonstrate that even though we have been cautious, sensible and responsible, and guided by Public Health, that we have taken appropriate steps in the Tasmanian context to ensure that we can get to a point where these businesses can operate without the risk of being shut down, which is exactly what the other side has been arguing for.

**Ms WHITE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, to clarify, did the Premier try to accuse us of trying to shut those businesses down?

**Mr Gutwein** - That is what you have been arguing for in your questions here.

**Ms White** - To shut them down? I take offence at that too. That is outrageous. You have lost the plot.

### **COVID-19 - Power Bill Relief for Businesses**

#### **Mr O'BYRNE question to MINISTER for ENERGY, Mr BARNETT**

[11.04 a.m.]

It is just not hospitality businesses that are missing out on power bill relief. On 29 April 2020, a hair salon in Hobart wrote to you expressing concern that as a tenant of a multi-tenanted property they were ineligible for support through Aurora. That is despite having to shut down due to social distancing restrictions and suffering substantially reduced revenue. In the letter, and I quote:

Our electricity supply is not directly with Aurora as the building in which we are tenanted has only one Aurora electrical connection. The Aurora connection is with the building owner. Our electricity is metered internally and the building owner invoices us our share of energy. As a result, we do not receive the Government waiver nor does the building owner on our behalf.

Without the energy cost waiver or similar assistance our business debt may increase to a situation where we may not be able to recommence operations when conditions improve. Our landlord has already provided the business with much needed rent relief but to ask the building owner to also waive the electrical cost is too much to ask, particularly when there are many other tenants around like us. We ask that you consider our application for energy assistance at your earliest convenience please.

That was nearly eight weeks ago. The only response they have received from you, to date, is an acknowledgement of the receipt of the email.

Why have you not even bothered responding to this business when they have clearly been impacted by the COVID-19 related shutdowns and are desperate for assistance?

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Of course, under his government we recall, as the Premier has just indicated, electricity prices went up 65 per cent.

**Ms O'Connor** - Except for the 9000 households we helped with energy efficiency rollouts that were free.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, Ms O'Connor.

**Mr BARNETT** - Under our Government, as I had the pleasure of welcoming yesterday, they are going down 1.38 per cent from 1 July for residential customers and small business customers.

The member and the shadow minister has raised a range of questions and a range of issues and is specifically focused on one particular matter. I will follow up with Aurora Energy on that matter with respect to the hairdresser's concerns.

Regarding the concerns of small business and residential customers, let us make it very clear. The cost of living and the cost of doing business is a top priority for our Government. Electricity is a very important service, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. People have been working at home; they have been living at home, schooling at home so, of course, power prices are very important. That is why I was able to welcome the reduction announced yesterday of 1.38 per cent from 1 July.

We have done so much more. You have asked about small business, you have referred to small business, you have asked me the question. With respect to small business we have delivered a quarterly bill waiver; 34 000 eligible small businesses under this Government have received a waiver for one quarter. That is a quarter of the year. They have received that waiver and that cost is an estimated \$22 million in the investment that the taxpayers delivered in supporting small business to keep the economy running. They are the backbone of our community across this great state of Tasmania. In addition to that, Aurora Energy has delivered a \$5 million support package to help those doing it tough during COVID-19. I say thank you to Aurora Energy for that effort.

In addition to that we have the \$45 million concessions to those vulnerable Tasmanians -

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, could I please hear the minister.

**Mr BARNETT** - Madam Speaker, they are not interested in the answer and all the initiatives we have on the table proving the fact that our Tasmania energy policy is working. It is working, it is keeping power prices down wherever possible, and making it easier in terms of cost of living and the cost of doing business.

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr BARNETT** - You have asked about small business. I am responding. You have that \$45 million concession for vulnerable Tasmanians. It is amongst the most generous in all of Australia. Do you not care about the vulnerable Tasmanians? You should. That is a very important initiative and I am proud of it.

Under our Tasmania First energy policy we are supporting those vulnerable Tasmanians. We have capped the power price over the last few years and now we are reducing it. Let us have a look at it in small business in real terms. Since we came to Government there has been a reduction of 19 per cent in real terms since 2013, since Labor and the Greens were in power. For a residential customer there is a 13 per cent reduction in real terms and a 2.2 per cent reduction in nominal terms. Of course, it was a 65 per cent increase under Labor, under those seven long inglorious years.

In addition, I mention the initiative with the No Interest Loans Scheme - NILS - program, \$1 million from our Government to support those doing it tough with the purchase of energy efficient appliances. I am proud of that initiative. I met with the NILS general manager just last week and we had an excellent conversation. We have a good relationship and we are proud of that effort. We will continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on residential customers and small business and I more than happy to follow up on that particular reference to that hairdresser the member has referred to.

## **COVID-19 - Supporting Jobs through Investments and Skills**

**Mr TUCKER question to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING, Mr ROCKLIFF**

[11.10 a.m.]

Can you update the House on how the Tasmanian Liberal majority Government is supporting jobs through investments and skills during the COVID-19 recovery, and is the minister aware of any alternatives?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question and interest in this matter. As Mr Tucker knows, a strong economy and job creation remains our number-one priority and the best way to get our budget back on track, grow business confidence and support jobs is to grow the economy.

Our fully costed COVID-19 recovery plan encourages small and large businesses to reinvest in apprentices and trainees. We have a plan for Tasmania's vocational education and training system, a strategy for workforce development and a proven track record of delivering nation-leading results.

Next Wednesday we continue our strong collaboration with industry on the skills needed to reboot our economy as we recover from COVID-19. The Premier and I are jointly hosting a skills roundtable which will focus on the skills needed to deliver our over \$3 billion rebuilding Tasmanian infrastructure investment plan. This building and infrastructure blitz is expected to underpin around 15 000 jobs so it is absolutely vital that we have the skilled workforce required. The roundtable will include relevant industry leaders such as the Master Builders Association, the Housing Industry Association, the Tasmanian Building and Construction Industry Training Board and the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as TasTAFE and the union movement to map our skills plan and to ensure we are doing everything we can to deliver on our infrastructure investment.

The initial roundtable next week will be followed up with a second skills meeting which will enable a broader range of industry stakeholders and regional skills and the workforce development bodies to also provide input.

We are starting from a position of strength with our training system. It is a fact that we have the highest completion rates in the nation. Thanks to TasTAFE, Tasmanian apprentices and trainees are more likely to complete their training here than anywhere else in the country. That will help us through this recovery period, and despite a national five-year decline in apprentice and trainee activity, we perform better than the Australian average on most key training indicators.

As the Prime Minister recently highlighted, VET funding across all jurisdictions except Tasmania has fallen by 25 per cent on average over the last decade in real terms as referenced by the ABS and the NCDR data. Tasmania is the only jurisdiction in Australia which has maintained its level of VET funding and that investment continues through our COVID-19 recovery. For example, after working closely with industry and listening to their needs, we are investing an additional \$7 million to the Trades and Water Centre of Excellence at Clarence. This will bring new training to the site and include nation-leading hydrogen qualifications.

As Angela Bennett from the Master Plumbers Association said:

The State Government is to be commended for its futuristic vision for trade education and for investing in young Tasmanians.

...

Tasmania is renowned throughout Australia for its high-quality tradespeople. The new Centre will allow us to explore even more opportunities in skilling our people, future proofing our industry and leading Australia in trade education.

The plumbing industry in Tasmania, including our suppliers and manufacturers are extremely supportive of the new Centre and the initiatives that will come from it. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to better our trade education in Tasmania and we are going to take full advantage of it.

This is a responsive and coordinated workforce planning example of the state Government. It goes to the heart of our strategic long-term plan for TasTAFE and VET in Tasmania.

As for an alternative, all those opposite have is an unfunded cut-and-paste from the Victorian state government. They have no plan to invest in TAFE infrastructure and no plan to employ additional teaching staff. While we are delivering on our commitment for a schools roundtable, what is Labor delivering? Absolutely nothing, and they are sensitive about it. Only this side of the House can be relied upon to invest in vocational education and training and deliver the skilled workforce that Tasmania needs.

### **COVID-19 - Stimulus Response for National Parks and Reserves**

#### **Mr TUCKER question to MINISTER for ENVIRONMENT and PARKS, Mr JAENSCH**

[11.15 a.m.]

Can you update the House on how the Tasmanian Liberal Government has invested in our national parks and reserves as part of the Government's COVID-19 support and stimulus response?

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member, Mr Tucker, for his question and interest in our parks and reserves and in the economic recovery of regional Tasmania in particular. Every year our national parks and reserves make a huge contribution to the Tasmanian economy, particularly in regional areas, supporting more than 200 regional tourism operators. The Government recognised that regional areas would be amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic and we acted.

As part of the Government's \$50 million stimulus for the maintenance of public assets, funding was provided to the Parks and Wildlife Service to undertake priority building maintenance projects in our national parks and reserves, creating jobs and helping to underpin small construction businesses across the state. These projects are of importance not only because of the tangible benefits to the visitor experience but also in delivering government financial stimulus to the building and construction sector, especially in our regional areas. The vast majority of this funding was allocated to, to quote the Premier 'screwdriver and paintbrush-ready projects', projects that do not require lead-in planning works.

Building maintenance projects include renovation works at Cradle Mountain National Park, where we provided \$250 000 to facilitate general maintenance and renovation of the ranger station and field centre. I am advised that all the required materials have been purchased through local construction suppliers and renovations are well progressed, with local tradies utilised.

For heritage, for maintenance works at the Shot Tower at Taroona, \$150 000 has been allocated. Paradigm Construction, a Kingborough-based firm, has been engaged to complete that work. There has been \$100 000 allocated to track works on a second Wineglass Bay lookout at Freycinet. Well-known track construction guru John 'Snapper' Hughes is completing that contract. There is also a \$450 000 investment in priority road maintenance to improve visitor safety and stimulate civil construction sector, including a significant investment at the Lavinia State Reserve on King Island, which I know islanders have been looking forward to for some time.

Every dollar of these investments translates to employment, building contracts and the purchase of goods and materials and ultimately benefits the economies of regional Tasmania, as you can see, in every corner of our great state. Our procurement policies actively support local businesses, meaning that work stays in Tasmania, helping to support the growth of local products and services. These local screwdriver- and paintbrush-ready projects are in addition to significant upgrades to facilities across Tasmania, which demonstrate the Government's ongoing commitment to invest in our parks and reserves and through them, our regional economies and jobs, since taking office in 2014.

In 2018 our Government outlined a suite of commitments that sees the largest ever investment in our national parks and reserves with a combined investment of over \$80 million over four years. These include a commitment to fund the \$20 million next iconic walk planned for the Tyndall Range on Tasmania's rugged west coast, subject to its feasibility studies and approvals processes; \$3 million towards the renovation of huts on the world-famous Overland Track; improvements to parking, visitor amenities and camping facilities at Cockle Creek to supporting its growing popularity as a southern gateway to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area to the tune of \$800 000; \$1 million towards it improving viewing platforms, tracks, toilet facilities and car parks at Devils Kitchen and Tasman Arch, a new Tasman national park gateway, and \$1.5 million to upgrade popular camping sites on Tasmania's east coast, and the Government's vast investment in the jewel in Tasmania's crown, the Cradle Mountain Lake St National Park, including the recently commenced Dove Lake viewing shelter, under construction by Tasmania's own Vos Constructions.

The Government has instructed that wherever possible, these investments should be brought forward to act as an additional stimulus for the economy at a time when Tasmania needs it most. Investment in infrastructure will be crucial in driving our post-pandemic recovery and presenting and protecting our natural areas and the values that they contain.

As minister for our magnificent parks I encourage all Tasmanians to get out and get to know these amazing places themselves. There is one near you wherever you live in Tasmania. As our new campaign says, make yourself at home in Tasmania and support our local businesses, our regional economies and get out and enjoy your parks.

**Time expired.**

## **TABLED PAPERS**

### **Subordinate Legislation Committee - Reports**

**Mr TUCKER** (Lyons) - Madam Speaker, I table the following reports from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation -

- Addendums to Reports 2, 3 and 4 of the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation in relation to the Scrutiny of Notices issued under the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020*.
- Report in relation to the Scrutiny of Notices issued under the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020* - Report 5.
- Report in relation to the Scrutiny of Notices issued under the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993)* - Report 6.
- Report in relation to the Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 23 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Waive Taxi Administration Fees)*; Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 19 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Water Management Act 1999)*; Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 19 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993)*; Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 13 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993)*; and Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 16 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (State Service Act 2000)* - Report 7.
- Report in relation to the Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 22 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Residential Tenancies)*; Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 16 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Poisons Act 1971)*; and Scrutiny of Notice issued under section 16 of the *COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Food Act 1993 and Public Health Act 1997)* - Report 8.

**Reports received.**

**HOMEBUILDER GRANTS BILL 2020 (No. 23)**

**LAND TAX AMENDMENT BILL 2020 (No. 22)**

### **First Reading**

Bills presented by **Mr Ferguson** and read the first time.



## **MOTIONS**

### **Bills pass All Stages**

[11.26 a.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) (by leave) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That so much of Standing and Sessional Orders be suspended as would prevent the Homebuilder Grants Bill and the Land Tax Amendment Bill from proceeding through all stages at this day's sitting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Sitting Time**

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader for Government Business) (by leave) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That for this day's sitting the House should not stand adjourned at 2.30 p.m. and that the House may sit past such time.

Madam Speaker, we will give it our best effort to work through these bills today. Also, I can indicate that I have placed on the Notice Paper a foreshadowed motion so that on the resumption of the House on 18 August 2020 that we would return to our usual Standing and Sessional Orders, setting aside the resolution of the House that has been previously agreed to.

I want to let members know that is on the Notice. The Clerk has advised me that it does require a certain period of time for it to mature. We cannot deal with it this week but it will be dealt with during other formal business on our first day back, allowing for the usual MPI and the usual private members times and the usual sitting times of the House.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Kate Warner AC - Extension of Term of Office**

[11.28 a.m.]

**Mr GUTWEIN** (Bass - Premier) Madam Speaker, as members would be aware, the Governor, Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Kate Warner AC, has served this state with distinction since 2014. My predecessor, the Hon Will Hodgman, saw fit to extend the Governor's term until December 2020.

It would normally be my role now to select and appoint a new governor. However, given the challenges the state has faced in responding to COVID-19, Her Majesty the Queen has approved

my request to extend the term of office of Her Excellency for a further period of six months, concluding on 9 June 2021.

As members may know, the Governor is appointed 'at the Queen's pleasure', meaning there is not a fixed term of appointment. However, the practice is for the premier of the day to reach an agreement with an incoming Governor that she or he will serve for a specified period, usually five years. This extension will mean that her Excellency will have represented the Queen in the state of Tasmania for over six years.

Previously, Her Excellency was a professor, Faculty of Law, at the University of Tasmania and Director of the Tasmania Law Reform Institute. She had also held the positions of Dean, Faculty of Law, and Head of School. Following her appointment as Governor, she was made a professor emeritus.

Already having been appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2014, Her Excellency was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in January 2017, for her eminent service to the people of Tasmania; through leading contributions to the legal community, to law reform, to higher education as an academic, researcher and publisher and as a supporter of the arts and environmental and social justice initiatives.

Her Excellency has had a highly distinguished career and is a nationally and internationally recognised expert in sentencing in Australia. Her legal work has included providing advice and submissions on rape law reform, drug diversion and mental health diversion programs and abortion law reform. She has also assisted other law reform bodies nationally, including the New South Wales Law Reform Commission and the Australian Law Reform Commission. Her Excellency has received numerous awards and fellowships, the most recent being in December 2016 when she was made a Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology.

Her Excellency has strongly supported social and cultural advancement in the community, particularly as the former President of the Alcorso Foundation, through its programs in the Arts, Environment and Social Justice. Together with Mr Warner, Her Excellency has provided outstanding service to the Tasmanian community since she first became governor in December 2014.

As with all Tasmanians, COVID-19 has affected the work of Her Excellency and the operation of Government House by limiting ceremonial and community duties. However, Her Excellency and her team have continued to look after the people of Tasmania by: delivering ready-made meals to community organisations using produce from Government House's garden; baking over 5000 shortbread (295 bags, I am told) for community members, aged care facilities and the AUSMAT team; providing a total of 57 aged care facilities across Tasmania with flowers and arrangements. This has included arranging 188 boxed arrangements and 121 posies of flowers, with flowers from the garden of Government House; and Her Excellency has taken part in online events and engagements, such as speaking against elder abuse on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

I understand also that Her Excellency has recently started a project on the history of Government House, which will be an invaluable resource for the Tasmanian people.

I sincerely thank Her Excellency for her continued services during COVID-19 and her dedication to the people of Tasmania.

The additional six-month extension will provide stability to this important role and enable me to undertake the detailed and important work of making a recommendation to the Queen on the next Governor of Tasmania.

Her Excellency continues to fulfil her constitutional, ceremonial and community roles with great distinction, and both Her Excellency and Mr Warner are held in the highest regard by the people of Tasmania.

I am very pleased Her Majesty has approved the extension of the term of Professor, the Honourable Kate Warner AC, as Governor of Tasmania, and on behalf of the people of Tasmania extend our best wishes and thanks to Her Excellency and Mr Warner.

[11.33 a.m.]

**Ms WHITE** (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Madam Speaker, the Labor Party holds the Governor, Professor the Honourable Kate Warner, in the highest of esteem. She is a remarkable woman and has made an enormous contribution to our state. We welcome the announcement by the Premier today and it is an excellent decision.

The Honourable Kate Warner has contributed enormously to Tasmania, both through her contribution in her private life, but also as Governor of this state. I recall the very sad phone conversation I had in January 2019 when then premier, Will Hodgman, rang me and I distinctly remember the conversation about the diagnosis of the Governor with cancer at that time. I remember I was in the north-west of the state on Robbins Island and took a phone call from the then premier Will Hodgman who informed me that the Governor had cancer and he wanted to let me know that before there was any media about that. I was very grateful to receive that information but also very saddened by it.

It has been a remarkable thing for the Governor to successfully beat cancer and to do that in a way that has been in full view of the public. She has demonstrated an extraordinary strength of character and at the same time, continued to maintain the generosity of spirit and heart we have all seen her demonstrate by supporting charitable organisations, continuing to travel around the state - when it was pre-COVID-19 times and was safe to do so - and lending her support to various causes. Personally, I think she is one of the most remarkable people I have ever met.

I was also reminded that the then premier Will Hodgman also rang me to inform me of his decision to extend her tenure as Governor when her contract was originally due to expire and again, I wholeheartedly and warmly supported that decision. As I have said, she is an extraordinary person and we are very fortunate to have her as Governor of Tasmania.

On both of those occasions, I remark the then premier called me before making those decisions which obviously is the typical precedent for such an announcement. I note that the Premier in this case has decided instead to make a ministerial statement to the parliament and I hope that his personal feelings towards me will not cloud his judgment about the proper process in managing these things in the future. I think we can be better than that.

[11.35 a.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, the Greens are very happy that the Governor of Tasmania, Professor the Honourable Kate Warner, has agreed to continue in that role until 9 June next year. She truly is one of the great governors we have ever had here in Tasmania and we are very blessed to have a person with such warmth, humanity, compassion and

openness in that role, alongside her beautiful husband, Dick Warner. Our Governor is much loved, highly respected across the Tasmanian community and despite her illness, she continued to work with great grace. Her connection to people even during her illness was so strong. I remember being at the Moonah Arts Centre for Her Excellency's first public appearance after taking some leave in order to recover and she was there in an immaculate white suit with the most beautiful hot pink turban which she pulled off with the usual grace and style.

During Her Excellency, Professor the Honourable Kate Warner's tenure as Governor, along with the rigours of the role which is extremely demanding from a public point of view, she has continued to champion action on domestic and family violence. She has continued to speak for an inclusive and compassionate Tasmania. In fact, she got herself in a spot of trouble after a Walk With Us rally here about 18 months ago where Ms Warner, Her Excellency said in quite kind language - as is typical of her - things about a certain red-haired senator at a national level and how damaging it was to have racism spouted by people of highest office. Of course, it got a huge cheer from the crowd but for Her Excellency it caused some problems. Again, there is the historic move and it is symbolic, of course, but Her Excellency worked with the Aboriginal community to make sure that there is an Aboriginal flag flying permanently at Government House here in Hobart. It is a striking and moving sight to see that flag there in the grounds of Government House.

I also note that Her Excellency was one of the foundation members of the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute (TLRI), a critical institute at the University of Tasmania which has provided very important research, assessment of legislation and made the case for reform in certain areas. Following Professor Kate Warner's departure from the TLRI, although I know she continues to be connected to it, we had Terese Henning who again did an outstanding job at the TLRI and now we have Professor Brendan Gogarty.

Only this week, the TLRI published its findings on the Births, Deaths and Marriages changes that this parliament made last year which found that there were no significant unintended consequences as a result of that legislation. So, the work that the TLRI does, which Professor Kate Warner has been foundational to, continues to be relevant and important. While there may be members in this House who do not always like the reports that are put out by the TLRI it is important that we have body there that is able to rigorously and independently examine Tasmanian law and make the case for reform.

I also note that Professor the Honourable Kate Warner, has provided critical research to ensure that our firearm laws remain strong and that we are consistent with the National Firearms Agreement and that is very important work. It is a tough task that the Premier has set himself to find a replacement for Professor Warner because they are massive shoes to fill. Do not let her petite bearing fool you. It is a very hard act to follow.

On behalf of Dr Woodruff and myself, we thank Her Excellency and Mr Warner for their service to the people of Tasmania and for agreeing to continue to serve in the role until 9 June 2021, and also to wish the Premier all the very best with what will be a quite difficult decision.

[11.40 a.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the superb work of the Governor over past years and make a couple of reflections about very happy personal interactions with the now Governor when she was a lecturer in law at university. She had the unenviable task of teaching criminal law to a motley crew of young law students. She handled this deftly and with great charisma and was known for making fantastic and very witty jokes. One thing that I remember

very clearly from law school is her steerage of that class. To be honest, I was no good at criminal law. I was much better at the commercial side of things so I had to listen carefully, but she was very articulate and very sage in her lecturing. She was always available to students and I had some friends - not to name them personally - who had to do that subject twice so had the benefit of her tutelage for two semesters.

She was a very dear and close friend of my stepfather, Peter Underwood, and it was only this week I was reflecting on what a whirlwind the last few years have been. In fact, since I arrived in this place in my first or second week here my stepfather died and that was a very sad and difficult event. Our family, which is broad and deep and extended across a multitude of political elements, were very supportive of the appointment that was made. It was a superb appointment. I know that Peter and the Governor had been friends for perhaps over 40 years or so, and so it was a long-time genuine true and deep friendship.

When we have families of such strong 'Tasmanian-ness' such as the Warners it is good that they are able to take and manage these leadership roles with such calm, reasoned and seasoned leadership because these sorts of roles, not only do they impact the person who holds them but the entire family supports that role. In this case Mr Warner is a fabulous human being who is very witty and we all love him, but there are also the children and the grandchildren, so these sorts of jobs touch everybody in families. They touch all of us as Tasmanians. We look for people of great credibility and capacity who are able, in the hardest of circumstances, personal, political, social and health crises, to manage through that. In the current Governor we see somebody who has managed that ship of state in an incredibly sensible, calm and strong manner.

The Queen has made a good choice, Premier. I am sure you have some role by way of recommending to her the person we should choose to continue in that role. I am certain that in our great state we have others who will come forward in future who may be appropriate to take on this sort of leadership position, but at the moment I believe we are very well served by the Governor and her entire family. I wanted to say on a personal level and from my family as well, we have a deep respect for the work she has done and is doing and long may it continue.

**Statement noted.**

## **HOMEBUILDER GRANTS BILL 2020 (No. 23)**

### **Second Reading**

[11.45 a.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Minister for Finance - 2R) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

COVID-19 has been the biggest health, economic and societal shock to hit our state in a century. It has challenged all of us in ways previously unimagined and forced action which has curbed our freedoms and driven thousands of Tasmanians into unemployment.

Tasmania's coronavirus challenge came at the same time our economy was leading the nation across a raft of key economic performance indicators. This means Tasmania's core economic foundations, including our balance sheet, at the time our borders went up and our jobs went down,

was in a solid position. We now face the second and arguably tougher phase of this fight to reboot our economy, while avoiding a deadly second wave of the virus.

The way that our broader economy operates and how our society interacts with it will be considerably different from the recent past, and there will be challenges ahead. Measures to manage the virus will mean business will need to find new ways to do old things, to stay profitable and employ their fellow Tasmanians in a COVID-safe environment, and we will work closely with them to achieve that. It is no longer about shutting down and saving lives. It is about opening up our economy and rebuilding livelihoods.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government is set to reboot the economy with a record construction blitz over two years, underpinning around 15 000 jobs. The package will build on the Government's current infrastructure package of \$1.8 billion over the next two years and in total will support an estimated construction value of \$3.1 billion across the next two years. It brings forward government expenditure, it will stimulate investment in the private sector, it will strengthen and underpin the economy and it will create thousands of jobs.

The best way to get our budget back on track and grow business confidence and create jobs is to grow the economy, and that is what we are doing. The program of works will build next-generation infrastructure, improve the opportunity for more Tasmanians to become a home owner and provide houses for more Tasmanians. It will get our economy back on track, fuel the supply chain across the state and create jobs.

The centrepiece of the package delivers 2300 new dwellings, including social and affordable houses across the state. With this package there is no better place in the country right now to build a house, with our state funding of \$20 000 for any owner-occupier to build a house. Combined with the federal government's injection of \$25 000, it means there is a massive \$45 000 available. Together, these grants will assist the residential construction market in Tasmania by encouraging the commencement of new home builds and renovations this year, stimulating investment in the private sector, strengthening the economy and creating jobs.

The Australian Government's \$25 000 Homebuilder Grant is to be administered by the states and territories under a national partnership agreement and the Homebuilder Grants Bill 2020 provides legislative authority for both of these grants to be provided in Tasmania. The Australian Government's Homebuilder Grant will provide \$25 000 to eligible persons to build a new home or substantially renovate an existing home where the relevant contract is signed between 4 June 2020 and 31 December 2020.

To be eligible for the Australian Government's Homebuilder Grant, owner-occupiers must be a natural person aged 18 years or older and be an Australian citizen. Applicants must also meet one of two income caps and enter into the eligible contract for a new home as a principal place of residence where the property value does not exceed \$750 000, or substantially renovate their existing home as a principal place of residence where the renovation contract is between \$150 000 and \$750 000, and where the value of the existing property does not exceed \$1.5 million.

Naturally, any new homes commenced prior to 4 June 2020 will not meet the criteria for the grant. However, if a builder had commenced a new home without a contract for purchase (also known as a 'spec home') on or after 4 June 2020, it will be covered provided a contract for sale has been entered into during the same date range of 4 June to 31 December 2020. Owner-builders and

those persons seeking to build a new home or renovate an existing home as an investment property will be ineligible for the Homebuilder Grant.

Applications for the Homebuilder Grant will be backdated to 4 June 2020 and construction must commence no later than three months after the contract is entered into. The Commissioner of State Revenue will have discretion to extend the three-month commencement deadline by up to a further three months where commencement is delayed due to unforeseen factors.

Building works must be undertaken by registered builders and the building contract must be negotiated at arm's length. If undertaking renovations, the works must be to improve the accessibility, safety and liveability of the dwelling. It cannot be for additions to the property such as swimming pools, tennis courts, outdoor spas and saunas, sheds or garages unconnected to the dwelling.

The Tasmanian Homebuilder Grant will provide an additional \$20 000 to eligible persons that build a new home. The eligibility criteria for the Tasmanian Homebuilder Grant closely mirrors the eligibility criteria for the Homebuilder Grant to make it seamless for applicants to be eligible for both grants. However, the Tasmanian grant will not apply to home renovations and construction is required to be completed within 18 months of commencing building. While applicants may be eligible for both grants, applicants can only receive each grant once and each grant will only be available once per eligible transaction. Both grants are subject to standard administrative provisions that closely align with the administrative provisions of the First Home Owner Grant.

The grants provided for in this bill alongside the Tasmanian Government's longstanding \$20 000 First Home Owner Grant will play an important role in stimulating activity in the residential construction industry as the state recovers from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we have long said, the best way to get our budget back on track, grow business confidence and create jobs is to grow the economy, and that is exactly what we are doing. With both Commonwealth and state grant programs, it means Tasmanians can potentially access up to \$45 000 for their new build, making it one of the best places in Australia to build a home.

These grants will assist the residential construction market by encouraging the commencement of new home builds and renovations this year. Aside from additional housing outcomes, this policy is protecting and creating jobs as we rebuild Tasmania's economy. In the short time since this scheme was announced, almost 500 Tasmanians have already expressed interest in the state's Homebuilder Grant and we are keen to see these people get on with their build, create employment, support Tasmanian families and move into their new homes.

I commend this bill to the House.

[11.52 a.m.]

**Ms BUTLER** (Lyons) - Madam Speaker, Labor recognises that this bill is intended to limit the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Homebuilder Grants Bill 2020 establishes the Australian Government's \$25 000 HomeBuilder grants and the Tasmanian Government's \$20 000 Homebuilder Grants. It is anticipated these complementary grants will assist the residential construction, mark it by encouraging the commencement of new home builds and renovations. The HomeBuilder scheme will provide eligible owner/occupiers, not only first home buyers, with a grant of \$25 000 to build a new home or substantially renovate an existing home.

The HomeBuilder stimulus package is an extension of the Homebuilder Grants Bill, making the \$20 000 grant available to all owner/occupier new home builds for contracts entered into from 4 July 2020 until 31 December 2020. This is an economic stimulus package, a measure to provide a boost to the economy and to drive confidence as we head into the social and economic consequences of COVID-19. The latest Labor force data shows that 22 000 Tasmanian jobs have been lost since February 2020, and 19 200 of those jobs have disappeared since March 2020.

The Tasmanian economy grew by just 0.6 per cent in the March quarter, following a decline of 1.0 per cent in the December quarter. A total of 1000 jobs have been lost in the building construction sector since the start of COVID-19. A recent report by Master Builders Australia shows almost 20 000 workers were employed in the Tasmanian construction industry at the start of 2020 with around 1140 of these jobs lost since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

Building and construction is an essential industry. The building and construction sector is a savvy industry. They took matters into their own hands at the onset of COVID-19 to protect their workers and associated industries. Miraculous alliances that some of us thought we would never see between old rivals and sparring partners, such as the CFMEU, HIA and Master Builders, were formed. The best brains, professionals, negotiators, communicators joined forces to ensure that the wheels of the Australian building and construction industry kept turning.

Guidelines around safe work spaces, negotiations on maximum numbers on site, sequential work practices and strategies were established. Compliance monitoring from unions and site managers to ensure workers were protected and that a pipeline of work could continue. In Tasmania not one worker in the industry has contracted the coronavirus.

Throughout the pandemic period Labor, both nationally and state, have been calling for greater government action to support the building and construction industry. The building and construction industry relies on a continuous pipeline of work to keep workers in work, a pipeline that is sadly in decline at the moment.

Labor understands the importance of stimulus funding for the building and construction sector because it is what we did when the global financial crisis hit, the last time that the building and construction sector were heavily impacted like it is being impacted right now. Labor delivered a scheme that provided grants to first home owners to build new homes. We also funded the construction of new social housing and the repair and maintenance to 80 000 homes across Australia. We built an estimated 20 000 new homes.

That strategy and foresight kept Australia out of a recession. The current Liberal federal government HomeBuilder package is less than one-tenth of the rescue package that Kevin Rudd's Labor government delivered for the building and construction industry during the global financial crisis. We know that this crisis is far worse than the global financial crisis.

Labor has always supported the building and construction sector. Therefore Labor supports the Homebuilder Grants Bill 2020. We do have concerns, which I will raise during this debate. We understand that the Homebuilder Grants may be a key to providing confidence to the market and ensure this key industry can withstand the current economic climate. We also know that 1000 Tasmanians have registered their interest in the grants program. If those 1000 households are successful in their applications, that is an estimated \$45 million stimulus to Tasmanian households and workers. That is good. However, there are aspects of this bill that may inhibit and restrict its



intent, which may not propagate the crucial pipeline of work required to keep the wheels turning for the building and construction industry and the Tasmanian economy as a whole.

The bill requires flexibility and sensibility. Some aspects of the bill, such as the commencement of building, could be an inhibitor instead of an incentive. We know that the federal government have provided states and territories with discretion to roll out the HomeBuilder grants in a form which meets the challenges, strengths and weaknesses of each state.

In short there is wriggle room for the state Government to allow this scheme to be more robust and non-restrictive. To access the Homebuilder Grants owner/occupiers must meet the following eligibility criteria: you are a natural person, not a company or a trust; you are aged 18 years or older; you are an Australian citizen; you meet one of the following two income caps - \$125 000 per annum for an individual applicant based on your 2018-19 tax return or later, or \$200 000 per annum for a couple based on both 2018-19 tax returns or later; you enter into a building contract between 4 June 2020 and 31 December 2022 to either build a new home as a principal place of residence, where the property value of house and land does not exceed \$750 000, renovate, substantially renovate your existing home as a principal place of residence where the renovation contract is between \$150 000 and \$750 000 and where the value of your existing property house and land does not exceed \$1.5 million. Construction must commence within three months of the contract date.

The Homebuilder Grants Bill is an extension of the \$20 000 first home owners' grant for owner/occupiers who enter into contracts for new homebuilding between 4 June 2020 and 31 December 2020. The grant complements the federal government's HomeBuilder incentive of \$25 000 for owner occupiers who build new homes or carry out a substantial renovation project. This effectively provides \$45 000 for the construction of a new home in Tasmania.

HomeBuilder is an uncapped and demand driven program. Minister, I would appreciate your assurances, for the record, that the complementary state scheme will not be capped. I also draw your attention to Part 2, section 14, of the bill, Amendment of Tasmanian HomeBuilder grant, which states:

- (1) The Minister, by order and on one or more occasion, may amend the Act to do one or more of the following:

- (a) omit the amount specified in section 10 -

which reads 'The amount of a Tasmanian HomeBuilder grant is \$20 000.'

and substitute another amount;

- (b) omit the date on which the period ends as specified in section 13(1)(a)(i) -

which reads 'made on or after 4 June 2020 but before 1 January 2021 ...' -

and substitute a later date;

- (c) alter the date by which an application for the Tasmanian HomeBuilder grant may be made, as specified in section 20(2)(c)(ii) -

which reads 'before 1 January 2021 ...' -

by specifying a later date for that grant.

My question pertains to the powers of the minister to amend the Tasmanian HomeBuilder grant amount and period. There have been hints by the Government that the grant may be raised. There may also be the possibility that the minister could and has the ability to do the opposite and lower the amount. I am seeking assurances from you today that the Government will not pull the plug on the HomeBuilder grant program prematurely or reduce the amount available to Tasmanians.

Spec houses built prior to 4 June 2020 will not meet the criteria for the grant. However, if a spec home build commences on or after 4 June 2020 it will be covered but the contract of sale needs to be entered into before 31 December 2020. This was a positive inclusion and I believe it was a change that was made by the Government at the last minute in light of communication from the industry.

Owner builders and those seeking to build a new home or renovate an existing home as an investment property are ineligible for the HomeBuilder grant. Commencement and what qualifies and defines commencement of building is the main issue, I believe, with this bill. The bill defines commencement, in relation to building, as:

- (a) the date of completion of the laying of the foundations for the building; or
- (b) if no foundations are to be laid, a date determined by the Commissioner in respect of the building;

I would like to triage this passage of the bill as we have concerns that the brief commencement criteria could disadvantage eligible HomeBuilder grant applicants. The Government is aware of the concerns. Apparently, industry leaders from all sides have implored it to reconsider the aspect of this bill. It seems that the Government has chosen to ignore the advice from those experts and some of them are leaders in their field.

As I said previously, the definition of 'commencement' is an issue. If the intent of the bill is to provide stimulus for the Tasmanian economy and to safeguard the 20 000 jobs and 6000 businesses that make up the industry in Tasmania then I implore you to listen to all those stakeholder groups and reconsider that aspect of the legislation.

We understand the economic policy around controlling the price of property in Australia. It is the main driver around the short commencement time frames of this grant. We also understand that an injection of stimulus into households and the sector is a priority. Policy designer and Assistant Treasurer, Michael Sukkar, stated in an article in the *Financial Review* dated 3 June that the scheme was designed so as not to cause a blowout in house renovation costs, which has happened in previous assistance schemes -

He said industry consultation had satisfied the government that with the current pipeline of investment due to dry up in September, 'pricing is very competitive due to the forecast downturn in commencement, coupled with the forecast lack of demand'.

'This is a short-term, targeted program so developers won't be able to capitalise the grant into their price ... as HomeBuilder can only be used to construct new or substantially renovated properties, its eligibility criteria manages the risk of longer-term affordability challenges by increasing supply.'

There is an opportunity to create a grants scheme that works best for Tasmania. I note other states, such as Western Australia, have provided measurably more flexibility in their home builders grant scheme, with Victoria extending the scheme to homes built in the last five years.

Minister, may I ask what consideration has been given to extending the time frame of the commencement date? The federal obligations of the scheme provide all states commencement criteria to be up to each state's discretion. HIA has reported that members in all states and territories have raised concern about the ability to commence work on site within three months of signing a building contract due to the steps that require completion before work can commence, including obtaining finance approval and building approval.

The Master Builders Association supports the stimulus but is also concerned that the three-month commencement time frame is an impediment to the grant's successful roll out. Land supply is a major issue and with 1000 people registered, there is simply not enough ready sites for people to purchase and meet that commencement time frame. Unless a site is already titled, it is nearly impossible for commencement of work to begin within three months. Even the additional three-month exemption granted by the State Revenue Commissioner, the bottleneck will still eventuate.

The short commencement is unnecessary and creates angst instead of flexibility and progress. There is an opportunity to spread the load. The key to this stimulus rolling out to benefit households in the Tasmanian economy, is creating a realistic pipeline of work for the sector. Minimising impediments to accessing the grant for households and the industry is the key. You have been granted discretionary power from the federal government in relation to how you set the terms of this bill.

I would like to have a discussion about the actual definition of 'commencement' and what that looks like from an industry perspective. The common understanding in the industry is that commencement is - and I have learned quite a lot about of this in very recent times - cutting the site. This term broadly refers to the practice of a qualified excavation specialist preparing the site for a building by clearing all major rocks and debris, leaving the site level and ready for foundations for a concrete slab.

It is a more realistic alternative if 'cutting the site' is acknowledged as the indicator of commencement. Base stage is defined as the stage when footings, base brick work, base walls, stumps, piers, columns, formwork and reinforcing for a suspended concrete slab, bearers, joist or flooring as the case requires, have been completed ready for the erection of the walls.

The already existing First Home Owner's grant for finishing could be amended to acknowledge cutting the site as commencement of work instead of base stage. Builders will be racing to build foundations. It may be a much better alternative and more realistic for the industry to meet those deadlines.

The process of granting of exemptions by the State Revenue Commissioner around commencement is not set out in this act. There will not be regulations to the finer process and the criteria for how an assessment is made is not available. In briefings it was indicated that the granting of exemptions will be broad but I am concerned. These are huge financial commitments Tasmanians are entering into: contractual obligations by both parties that require certainty and governance. We know there are time frames and land supply impediments already.

Can the minister provide details of the process for a HomeBuilder grant applicant to apply for discretion to the Commissioner of State Revenue to extend the construction commencement deadline? The Commissioner of State Revenue will have the discretion to extend the construction deadline by up to three months where commencement is delayed due to unforeseen factors.

Could the minister explain the process for appeal and further extensions and the criteria to assess unforeseen factors? Will there be compliance monitoring and oversight of the appeals for extension to ensure consistency? Is there an avenue for the Commissioner of State Revenue to extend the three months if unforeseen factors cannot be resolved within that time? Just to reaffirm my argument, assurances that the commissioner will be broad is one thing. However, these are massive financial obligations that applicants are undertaking and overtures of assurances that there might be exemptions granted for another three months simply does not quite cut the mustard.

I would like to now move to residency requirements around the eligibility criteria and the applicant's principal place of residence, first for a continuous period of at least six months and second, commencing within their 12-month period immediately after the completion of the relevant eligible transaction. Fly-in fly-out workers in Western Australia are recognised; in fact, there has been a push from the Western Australian government to encourage fly-in fly-out workers to permanently reside in that state. Can the minister inform the House of considerations that might be granted to fly-in fly-out workers as well as workers such as Tasmanians serving in the armed forces in relation to that criteria?

I am also seeking information as to the process of administration of the Homebuilder Grants scheme. At which point is the successful applicant provided the grant? Is the timing of the grant the same as the pre-existing First Home Builder Grant Scheme? Can the minister run through the step-by-step process of when the actual grant is provided to the applicant? The process is crucial to applicants who are negotiating finance; \$45 000 is a significant deposit for a home builder/purchaser to provide a banking institution with confidence when assessing the application. Can the grant be used as a deposit in negotiations with lending authorities?

An issue which has been raised from the banking sector with me is the discretionary power of the Commissioner of State Revenue. Minister, does the commissioner have the discretion to pay the grants in instalments for up to six months after the completion of the home? We understand that there is flexibility in the commissioner's discretionary power to protect against fraudulent activity. That is one thing. However, the large issue with funds for both grants not being available on base stage is that it will possibly exclude some Tasmanians from building at all, as with the grants or grants factored in they cannot afford to build from a financial perspective. It may also push grant applicants into a higher lender's mortgage insurance category, costing the client significant lender's mortgage insurance premiums, or push the grant applicant into a higher interest rate category due to their loan valuation ratio being higher with the homebuilder grant or grants not factored in.

Minister, as we know, the banking industry is risk-averse, especially so in the current COVID-19 climate. Will an applicant purchasing a house and land package or a property off the plan who wants to put the grant towards their purchase price receive the \$25 000 and the \$20 000 in time for settlement? Can the minister provide information as to the discretionary power of the Commissioner of State Revenue in relation to those time frames? Can the Commissioner of State Revenue hold back funds until after base-stage construction? If this is the case, are there any avenues to protect the successful home builder grant applicant from increased lender's mortgage insurance, or having to pay higher interest rates due to their loan valuation ratio being impacted?

The ABC recently reported on a Tasmanian couple wanting to access the homebuilder grant but they are not eligible for finance due to banking institutions not recognising JobKeeper. The article reads:

Ella Ross and her partner want to build their first home in the Hobart suburb of Kingston.

Ms Ross was excited when she heard about the new incentives for homebuilders, but got bad news when she spoke to her bank.

'Unfortunately, the bank said to us that as long as I'm on JobKeeper, we can't service a loan on that', she said.

'So that sort of put a dampener on the whole experience.'

Miss Ross said she expected many other people would end up excluded from the initiative for the same reason.

'It was really hard because that kind of initiative seems to be targeted towards people like myself who are in this position where they want to build a home but they need a bit of an incentive to do so.'

Minister, have you entered into any discussions with lending authorities around this issue? With 1000 registered interested Tasmanians, it would be prudent to provide avenues for consideration of issues as expressed in the ABC article.

It is difficult to finish my address to the House without putting on record my surmising of the federal Liberal Government's renovation scheme. To qualify for this scheme the applicant has to spend \$150 000 to \$750 000 on a renovation and they must earn less than \$125 000 a year. I think Labor Leader Anthony Albanese sums up the out-of-touch and ludicrous criteria with the quote, 'gold taps and marble baths'. I hope the powers that this bill provides your Government is more in keeping with the general public need and not so out of touch.

Industries and countless builders, tradies and suppliers have implored you to reconsider the commencement time frame. There will be bottlenecks and applicants who miss out on taking up the homebuilder grants, because it will be impossible for them to reach the level of commencement that your Government naively believes will be possible.

There is an opportunity for you to consider scrapping the three-month commencement of building. An exemption granted by the commissioner is not the solution and certainly not a compromise. A better solution, which Master Builders have suggested, is to proceed with the signing of a building contract before 31 December and completion of the build within two years as the defining criteria. This would provide the pipeline of work which the industry relies on and would also allow Tasmanian households to have greater access to the grants and provide less strain and uncertainty. This is the precedent set in the existing scheme criteria which has worked successfully. It was tweaked to suit Tasmania. It worked, so why not consider what we have done before as an alternative?

You have the opportunity to use the discretion of your Liberal counterparts in Canberra and they have bestowed that upon all states and territories. Why inhibit stimulus grants designed to support the building and construction sector with limitation which your Government knows are impediments to growth?

[12.18 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Deputy Speaker, the Greens will be supporting the HomeBuilder Grants Bill 2020 although, up front I do say that we have some serious issues with the eligibility and the framework around the Commonwealth HomeBuilder Grant which we believe is poorly targeted and, yes, brass tape and marble benchtops is what it potentially will lead to and in Tasmania, where we have lower incomes than many other mainland states, I cannot see too many people building a property of up to \$1.5 million in value. Certainly the average income of the average Tasmanian who is working does not reach \$125 000, which is the individual income limit for eligibility for the Commonwealth HomeBuilder Grant.

We believe that the Commonwealth stimulus funds should have gone to low-income households. They should have been allocated towards renovating and upgrading social and community housing where the stock desperately needs maintenance and where the effect on employment, making sure that we keep those skilled residential building and construction workers in Tasmania, would have been the same. Because you have to be agnostic about where the money is being spent, investing it in low-income households and people who live in social and community housing provides the same job stimulus as investing it into renovations or house builds for people who are on much higher incomes, in fact, couples with up to \$200 000. So, we maintain that it is poorly targeted. When I first saw the legislation on Monday afternoon my instinct was to try to block those aspects that are poorly targeted Commonwealth HomeBuilder grants but, of course, many Tasmanians will benefit from this Commonwealth grant when you sit it alongside the state contribution for first home builders of \$20 000. So, I restrained my desire to see social justice reflected in legislation. We will not be opposing those aspects of this legislation.

We too wonder whether it is realistic; some of the provisions in this bill about commencement of works after a contract has been signed. When you look at the definitions in the legislation 'the commencement' is defined basically when the slab has been laid. I was interested to hear what Ms Butler said in her very well-researched contribution about cutting the site as being what the building and construction industry regards as substantial commencement. That was the excuse that Gunns Limited used when it was trying to build its pulp mill on the River Tamar; arguments over what 'substantial commencement' actually meant.

There are issues here with the capacity for the building and construction sector to be able to commence works within three months. I accept that the legislation provides that the Commissioner for State Revenue can extend for up to another six months. Again that may not be realistic, particularly if the commencement definition remains what it is in the legislation at the moment.

We still maintain that the best stimulus spend is in housing. The best social and economic return is to spend stimulus money in housing. Wayne Swan was Treasurer when the global financial crisis struck in 2008-09. It is a fact that the decisions that were made at that point by the federal government staved off the worst effects of the recession in Australia. They also led to some outstanding new infrastructure in our schools and a very substantial increase in the stock of affordable housing. In Tasmania, for example during the Labor-Greens government under a Greens housing minister, which Labor consistently tries to erase the truth of, we built with assistance from the federal government, as well as the spare change that was in the housing fund, 2200 new affordable energy-efficient homes. If you want to kickstart your economy while you are tackling social inequality, investing in new affordable homes is the best 'bang for buck' so we were delighted when the Premier announced two weeks ago that Tasmania would embark on a housing-led recovery.

According to evidence that was put to the parliamentary inquiry into housing affordability, research undertaken by UTAS, drawing on Ahuri research, shows that the shortage of affordable housing in Tasmania right now is about 11 000 homes. While as a consequence of all the economic breakdown following the pandemic, we have seen more residential rentals enter the market, it is not sustainable. People who are now successfully applying for former short-stay properties are being offered leases of six to 12 months. The concern, one which is held by local government as well as TasCOSS and Shelter Tasmania, is that as soon as the economy starts to recover, and the visitor economy recovers whenever that may be, those tenants will quickly be turfed from their new-found properties.

This is an excellent opportunity for us as a parliament to get on top of short-stay accommodation. We passed legislation here late last year, which is the short stay accommodation act. It provided the framework for gathering data on the impact of short stay but it had nothing in there about compliance, giving local government, for example, a capacity to adjust the settings depending on the pressures that are in place or any demographic change. The short stay accommodation act needs amending. Now is the time to get those policy settings right so that when we come out of these dark months, potentially some years, we are not in the same situation where the short-stay accommodation market is sucking homes out of the residential market, putting more pressure on the housing system, on homelessness services and potentially leads to more families trying to find a bed at a place like the showground in Hobart.

We hope that while Government is looking at the housing picture through the pandemic, it takes this opportunity to make these minor adjustments to the short stay accommodation act that ensure once we come out of this, we have a better regulated framework in place where our priority is homes for Tasmanians.

I was interested to hear this morning the Minister for Education and Training talk about a skills summit that is coming up. In Tasmania, we have an extraordinarily skilled residential building and construction sector. What we need to do is make sure that we are at the cutting edge of green skills development, so we are the best in the country at installing distributed generation, solar panels, energy efficiency, not only into existing homes but when we design and construct homes. We have a capacity here given the skills that we have on this island in residential construction to further improve those skills to make sure that we have the best green builders in the country. We should be building, every single time, seven star energy efficient homes.

While there is some fantastic work happening on that front, it is not necessarily consistent. It has not necessarily been taken on as a primary objective in building design and construction. When you do that, you keep people healthier by having more thermally efficient homes and you are also bringing down the cost of living, as we did when we were in government under a Greens minister. We rolled out around 9000 energy efficiency upgrades for free to low income households, small businesses and community organisations, bringing their power prices down by on average about \$500 every year which when you are a single mum living in Bridgewater is a huge amount of money.

We would like to see the Government continue to evolve its approach to housing policy. We believe that there is a gap in the market for low income working families and individuals to be able to rent to buy their homes. We have a great program going through Housing Tasmania, which is Homeshare, but that is for existing homes.

What we need to have in Tasmania is a housing policy setting that enables government effectively to be the bank for low income households to be able to rent, then buy their homes. In contemporary Australia, one of the most significant ways that a person can generate wealth and security is to own their own home. As someone who did not own my own home until I was elected I know how it can make you feel insecure when you are in a rental property, particularly with four children fanging about and putting holes in walls and the like.

Many everyday Tasmanians can only dream of owning their own home. As a society, which through this pandemic period has made a decision to leave no-one behind, we should be able to look at the approach we have to housing in a way that does not exclude low-income people from owning their own home. The only realistic way to do that is for government to initiate a rent-to-buy scheme for new homes that low-income Tasmanians can apply for, because the biggest issue for many people will be securing the deposit. There is certainly a capacity for people who are already paying high rents to cover off on a mortgage with some careful budgeting and the support of the Government behind them.

I am interested in the minister's answers to the questions Ms Butler asked. I have no specific questions beyond a few of those that I am particularly interested in. I understand this is a national partnership agreement arrangement, but I went to look for the Commonwealth home builders grant legislation and there was no Commonwealth legislation that established the Commonwealth's temporary home builders' scheme. It would be good to understand the arrangements through that partnership agreement that allow the state to legislate, manage and disperse the money.

With those few short comments, we will be supporting the legislation. It is half-solid.

[12.32 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I will support the bill. Who would not want us to be handing out money to people to get them into houses? It is a very important thing to do.

I will make a quick comment that to be able to afford to build a house and to do that quickly, you need to be already in a strong economic position. I wonder whether many of our Tasmanians are actually in that strong a position as it stands. I am very concerned about the huge number of job losses that have occurred and people on JobKeeper who may not be able to access funding through their bank to secure loans. Nobody would have a lazy \$150 000 sitting in their bank account ready to kick-start building a house. I am worried about that.

It has led me to think that maybe we ought to do a piece of work that sits alongside this grant process that looks at the people we are trying to help to work out how we can help them economically across a range of issues, not only with housing. For example, going forward, students who are going to enrol in certain degrees will now be charged more. It sounds like a good idea to push people into STEM and I am a great supporter of science, engineering and technology, but I am a humanities and arts graduate first and foremost. I was lucky to go through that before HECS came on board because I am old enough to experience the days of free education, which were superb, although I ended up paying for my law degree as it transpired.

I am worried that as our kids graduate from matriculation or get their TCE and move off into the world, whether they start a job immediately, do some skills training or perhaps go to university, we are not setting them on a really strong foundation economically speaking. The cost of all this work we are doing with COVID-19 recovery and grant making and looking after businesses and



jobs and people whilst we have been in what we have been calling the hibernation period will ultimately have to be paid back. There is only so much money to go around.

We have a generational issue that I am quite concerned about. I have three kids in my house who will be moving through the system shortly and the economics of this are very real for us. Will they ever be able to afford to own a home? Let us be blunt, can that happen for many people and a lot of kids? Will they be able to afford to go to university to do subjects in particular that are not offered here, such as dentistry, physiotherapy, veterinary; all those skills we need here?

What does it mean for people who go to TAFE and perhaps are not going to work on shovel-ready and paint brush-ready projects? What about industries that are dominated perhaps by women, the sectors that have a preponderance of young women working in them? Then of course women take time out of the workforce whether we want to or not, or we juggle it - I have tried to juggle it - raising children as well.

I wanted to put that on the record, to zoom up from this small grant-making exercise discussion we are having today to say I think there is a piece of work we need to do to look at the economic circumstances of the next generation post-COVID. Are we setting our kids up to succeed and win and be able to open businesses, get good jobs, meaningful work and to be able to stay in Tasmania on island?

When I graduated from university back in the early 1990s, and in fact before then as well, there were bad times and an entire generation of young people left the state to find work elsewhere. Many people went to Western Australia where they found work in the minerals industry and other places. They were very difficult times. If you took a poll of parents at the moment, at least the ones I speak with and I am out and about, we are concerned about that. We are concerned about long-range opportunity for the next generation here in Tasmania.

I applaud building houses and roadworks projects. Get all of that going, but alongside that let us also zoom up and turn our minds to a strategic approach to building industry investing in areas that are going to help our kids come up and through so they can enjoy the benefits and the great bounty of Tasmania as we have for generations.

We know it is always swings and roundabouts and things can go up and down with the economics of things. I am very supportive of this legislation and the grants, but it is a point in time program so I would really like us to be thinking about that big-picture work that we need to do, particularly for young people and women and our migrant workforce as well and how we take care of them too.

These are just some comments - no questions for you, minister. I will be supporting the bill.

[12.38 p.m.]

**Mr TUCKER** (Lyons) - Madam Speaker, it is interesting listening to the comments around the Chamber today. This is all about a balancing act from what I can see and this is new territory for the Government in this area.

This is a very good bill. On 4 June 2020 the Australian Government announced the \$25 000 Homebuilder Grant to be administered by the states and the territories under the national partnership agreement. On the same day, the Tasmanian Government also announced as part of its

infrastructure package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that it would establish the \$20 000 Tasmanian Homebuilder Grant for Tasmanians who build a new home.

Together these grants will assist the residential construction market in Tasmania by encouraging the commencement of new home builds and renovations this year, stimulating investments in the private sector, strengthening the economy, creating jobs and creating a recovery plan. The Homebuilder Grants Bill 2020 provides legislative authority for both of these grants to be provided in Tasmania. The Australian Government's Homebuilder Grant will provide \$25 000 to eligible persons to build a new home or substantially renovate an existing home where the relevant contract is signed between 4 June and 31 December 2020.

To access HomeBuilder, owner-occupiers must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- be a natural person aged 18 years or older, and an Australian citizen;
- meet one of the following two income caps:
  - \$125 000 per annum for an individual applicant based on your 2018-19 taxable income or later; or
  - \$200 000 per annum for a couple based on both 2018-19 taxable income or later.
- enter into a building contract between 4 June 2020 and 31 December 2020 to either build a new home as a principal place of residence, where the property value does not exceed \$750 000; or substantially renovate your existing home as a principal place of residence, where the renovation contract is between \$150 000 and \$750 000, and where the value of your existing property does not exceed \$1.5 million;
- construction must commence on or after 4 June and within three months of the contract date; and
- owner occupiers who live in the home for at least six consecutive months within the first 12 months of their home being built, unless a lesser period of residency is approved by the commissioner if there is a good reason why the applicant cannot comply with the residential requirement.

'Spec' homes built prior to 4 June 2020 will not meet the criteria for the grant. However, if the 'spec' home build commences on or after 4 June 2020, it will be covered, but the contract needs to be entered into before 31 December 2020. With these 'spec' homes, they also have to meet the criteria that I have mentioned before - the \$1.5 million and the income caps.

Applications for the HomeBuilder grant will be back dated to 4 June 2020 and must be submitted to the State Revenue Office by 31 December 2020.

Owner builders and those seeking to build a new home or renovate an existing home as an investment property are ineligible for the HomeBuilder grant.

Building works must be undertaken by a registered builder, that is registered as at 4 June 2020, and the building contract must be negotiated at arms-length.

The renovation works must be deemed to improve the accessibility, safety and liveability of the dwelling. It cannot be for additions to the property, such as swimming pools, tennis courts, outdoor spas and saunas, sheds or garages unconnected to the dwelling.

Applicants can only receive this grant once and only one grant is available per eligible transaction.

The Tasmanian Government's HomeBuilder grant will provide an additional \$20 000 to eligible persons who build a new home. The eligible criteria for the Tasmanian HomeBuilder grant closely mirrors the eligibility criteria for the Australian Government's HomeBuilder grant to make it seamless for applicants to be eligible for both grants. However, the Tasmanian grant will not apply to home renovations and construction. It is required to be completed within 18 months of commencing building.

Like the Australian Government's HomeBuilder grant 2020, applicants can only receive this grant once. Applicants will not be eligible for both a First Home Owner grant and the Tasmanian Home Owner Builder grant.

Both grants are subject to standard administrative provisions that closely align with the administrative provisions of the First Home Owner grant.

The grants provided for in this bill, alongside the Tasmanian Government's longstanding \$20 000 First Home Owner grant, will play an important role in stimulating activity for the residential construction industry as the state recovers from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I support this bill.

[12.44 p.m.]

**Dr BROAD** (Braddon) - Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt that the building industry needs stimulus and that without a stimulus of some kind, there will be a big reduction in building activity and the impact on jobs will be horrendous. This funding and this bill are very welcome to us. I also echo some of the comments from my colleague, the member for Lyons, Ms Butler, on the questions she has asked, and I ask for those to be answered.

As someone who is actually going through the building process right now, I want to give a bit of a perspective about how difficult it actually is to build a house in Tasmania, and how things have changed. This is the second time that we are building a house, and there is a distinct difference between the previous time, which was in 2009, compared to the building activity that is underway as we speak.

We started the planning process last October. In 2018, we purchased a block that is in town in a residential area and then we proceeded to try to sell our house and that process took a long time, including extended settlement. As we know, the banking royal commission has put a whole bunch of requirements on to the banks and they are basically putting lenders through the mill to get them to dot the i's and cross the t's in order to settle. Our settlement was extended a number of times. It took something like eight weeks just for the finance clause to be fulfilled because of the banks and that was last year.

We started the process. We started designing the house and then started with the council through the planning process in October 2019. That planning process was delayed. More information was required and so on.

In January we were continuing with the planning process that we started. We were very keen to expedite the process to get this building underway as quickly as possible because at the moment we are staying in a property that is small. We have three kids and we are all on top of each other and we want to get into a new house as soon as possible. We sold our house, moved into this rental and then we want to get into the new house as soon as possible. All the way through this process we have been attempting to look for shortcuts to speed it up as much as possible.

In January we started talking with builders. We talked to three local builders and then it was on 24 January 2020 that we received our planning approval. There were numerous delays during this planning approval process and I know that planning is a bit of a vexed issue but one of the issues is about discretions and one of the issues is about the stop clock that is used. It is very difficult to build a house of any size on a block that does not trigger a discretion of some description which means that it has to be advertised and then there are representations potentially being put in, which delay the process. Our block is hard to build on: it is about 700 square metres.

Our house was advertised just before Christmas and we did not receive any representations so that part of the process could have been even longer but it was not. However, it still took us about three months to get our planning approval and I think if we added up the bills all the reports that were required, the design changes that were required, it probably cost us around \$20 000 before we scratched the ground.

That is relevant, because this builders grant could potentially take away that burden of the costs that are associated just with getting all the paperwork that you need in place to actually build.

I have some fundamental issues with the way that this process actually works because you could spend \$20 000 and not get through the planning process. In effect you could lose all that money because you have a property that does not meet the planning scheme or you may have pushed the boundaries a little bit too hard and it is not approved. This gets to my point about 2009 when we first built. Our plans were about nine pages of A3 that we submitted for our planning application. This time around it was something like 20 and so in the space of a bit over 10 years literally double the amount of paper was required for the same process.

There are things now required as part of the planning approvals process which take up time and again costs that are sunk because if you do not get through your planning approval process, then that money is gone. You now need to put in a lighting plan in your planning application stage. That was not the case 10 years ago. I do not understand why that is the case. We tried very hard not to trigger a discretion but there is a local overlay where we were building which has a 5.5 metre height limit but you can go to 7.5 metres with a discretion. Everywhere else it is 8.5 metres and then you can go to, I think, 12 metres with a discretion. So we triggered a discretion there.

One of the discretions we triggered, which I found was completely ridiculous, was our garage was set 1 metre in front of the building frontage. Why that is the case I have absolutely no idea. The planning scheme says that the front of your building should be 4.5 metres from the boundary and your garage needs to be set 1 metre back behind that. If you do not do that, it triggers a discretion. We need to go through the planning scheme and get rid of little speed humps like this. It seemed ridiculous.

We are trying to speed up this process all the way through, trying to meet the planning needs, arguing why the discretions were needed. Luckily I have quite a bit of experience from dealing with grumpy constituents when I was a councillor and now as a member, and I know some of the ways we can try to speed this up.

Some building quotes came in March. We started preliminary talks with builders in January and even some of them in December, and then we got more information to them. Builders take time off in January so you would expect things to slow down a little, but we started getting our quotes back at the end of March. We actually had our quotes before we had the building application, which is a bit risky. If something comes through the engineering; it is going to be costlier, but we took that risk because we wanted to expedite the process. We did not want to wait to have a building approval before we got quotes from the builders. So we took a risk there, trying to short cut it, trying to get this house built.

We had planning approval in January and building approval on 27 March. Then on 1 May we signed our building contract. That whole process took five months, from talking with builders to getting a building contract. We tried as hard as we could to make that as fast as possible.

During this time, we were also trying to get our finance sorted. Again, trying to save time, when we sold our house, we paid down the loan for the building block - zero dollars. The idea was that when we went to build, we would re-extend that loan, so that we would have the same loan, re-extended. That would speed things up because we would not have to go through a new application. We had zero dollars on the mortgage and would then re-extend it with a building loan, again trying to speed things up.

It did not speed things up. All the way through this process, once we got an estimate of costs, we started working with the bank to get that sorted. That took forever. It was mirrored by our experience when we sold our property a year or so earlier with the purchasers getting dragged through the coals and settlement being extended and extended. In the end, we cracked it and went with another bank and that was a bit faster.

Finance should have been simple, but nowadays you almost have to account for every single squeeze of a toothpaste tube in your documents, which I found quite extreme, compared to when my wife and I went to the bank in 2005 when we first bought a property. They asked, 'How much do you want?' Now everything is so much more complicated and intricate. So much more paperwork is required. That process, even though we tried as hard as we could to make it as fast as possible, still took many months to get there. It was not until 18 May that the block was levelled.

This comes to Ms Butler's point: when is actual substantial commencement? If it is levelling the block, then our build has been substantially commenced. If it is when the slab is laid, then it is not. Our slab is probably still another two to three weeks away. Is it the footings? If it is the footings, then we are substantially commenced, but if not, there would be more delays. That is a crucial point. Quite often the site levelling is relatively quick, getting the footings in place is a bit quicker but if laying the slab is substantial commencement that means people could miss out as they could miss out on the time delays.

I am highlighting this for a couple of reasons. It is much harder to build a house now than it was 10 years ago because of energy efficiency ratings and so on. All these things meant that we have had to make a hell of a lot of decisions right up front. For example, to get your energy efficiency rating done, you have to work out all of your external colours, the colour of your roof,

all that sort of stuff. It is not just windows and things. These models are changing and making it even harder from all accounts. We had to make decisions on the external paint colours and the cladding and the cladding types, and who the window designer was. When we were going through the energy efficiency process we still had not chosen a builder but the energy rater needed to know who the window manufacturer was going to be before they could do an energy rating, which makes things very difficult.

We had to go with our gut feel before prices came back in to determine who we thought was going to be the best builder so we could tell who the window manufacturer was so we could get our energy efficiency done. And we had to tell them the colour of the roof. And we had to tell them the colour that we were going to use externally so we could get our energy rating. All these decisions make the whole process very frustrating. You could be up for a lot of money and then if you do not get through planning you could lose it.

What it highlights to me is that the federal government scheme with a three-month time frame is ridiculous. You cannot honestly say that most people will get through this process in three months because it does not take three months. Settlement on a block, at best with a cash deal, is still going to take four weeks. If you do not have a block already, there is no way you would meet the federal government commitment for three months. It is just not going to happen.

Building contracts: how are you going to get a building contract in three months? I do not see how that is possible. Six months is a stretch, but three months is nigh on impossible.

Going through this process, I have still been talking to the builders. Some of our slowdowns were due to COVID-19 restrictions, in terms of meeting with the bank and things like that. The builders did not slow down at all. The energy raters and people who typically work from home did not slow down at all either. Nor did the engineers. They really helped out and I am very glad. I am very grateful.

The three-month time line is a problem because if you hit one road bump, you are gone. When we spoke to the builders before Christmas and then into January, I got the impression they were all very busy. Part of the conversation with them was, 'When can we build the house? We are really keen. We want to get going as soon as we can. What is your time frame?' We got quotes from three builders. One was a builder who probably does 50-plus houses a year, so a reasonably big operation. There was another operator who probably builds 15 to 20 a year, and then pretty much a sole trader who just builds maybe two. We had the spectrum. The biggest builder was very, very busy. The second one was very busy as well. The sole trader was willing to start. We would have been the job that he would have started straight away. Throughout COVID-19, work did slow down, especially spec homes that people were going to get them to build basically dropped off.

For the spec home part of the market, somebody comes to a builder and says that they want to build a spec home. Those people dropped off. Then all of a sudden the time line for starting our build decreased massively because a building at the other end had dropped off. They are quite busy now. They have lots of builds on the go but there is a cliff that they will fall off in probably about six months' time. That is why we welcome this stimulus.

However, the time lines are the big problem. I do not think that six months is going to work and the Government should really seriously be considering extending that. If we call this a stimulus more than likely the houses that are going to be built are ones where everything was in place or a long way down the road and then they decided to stop because of job insecurity or whatever the

reason they have decided to stop. These are some of the builds that the builders were losing at the other end.

This stimulus package will bring them on but it is not really a stimulus because it is what was going to happen. You have brought back on line houses that were not going to be built for some time because of uncertainty. It will bring them back in and it will keep builders in work which is a really good thing.

**Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.**

## **HOMEBUILDER GRANTS BILL 2020 (No. 23)**

### **Second Reading**

**Resumed from above.**

**Dr BROAD** (Braddon) - Madam Speaker, before the break I was talking about who is most likely to take up these grants and pointing out that conversations with builders over the last three or four months have given me the indication that a lot of work was dropping off further down the track, so what these grants will do is more than likely bring jobs that were going to be cancelled back on line.

If the goal is about creating new work rather than reinstating the contracts that the builders already had that were delayed, if there are any delays in the process - and often there are delays in a process, for example, if you have not purchased a block yet - then settlement will push the time lines out and make it very difficult for you to complete, certainly within the federal government's time line of three months but also the six-month time frame, so probably the uptake will not be as good as we would hope.

Another issue is with supplier blocks. Listening to our industry advisory council, there have been delays in the rollout of stages in subdivisions. The developers have been holding off for the last 12 months or so with the developments of subsequent stages due to whatever reason. The feedback from industry was that there are subdivisions that could be developed and rolled out but they have been delayed. If the subdivision is not titled, or if it has not even begun, there is no way you will fit within the six-month time frame because of everything that is required before titles are issued, let alone before blocks are purchased.

These grants are going to more or less apply to people who are already into the building process, ones who have got to the stage where they will be more than likely able to sign a building contract in a month or so to be able to get substantial commencement before the end of the year.

Having those jobs that were delayed brought online is good and will give builders some certainty over the next six months. The big question is, what happens after that? The last thing we want is for there to be a cliff that their building works drop off. We need more development, more subdivisions brought online, but also consideration of the limits here, particularly on the renovation side. An amount of \$150 000 for a renovation is quite substantial. Maybe if that limit was brought back you would get a lot more work. That would certainly apply if the limit was brought back to, say, \$50 000 per renovation because that would bring more people in and create work for the smaller

builders. A builder with an apprentice-type operation would be more likely to take up those sorts of jobs and people can probably find \$50 000 to do some work, especially if there is a generous grant attached.

We may have to tinker with the limits but if you really want stimulus, a \$150 000 renovation in the Tasmanian context is a big renovation. In somewhere like Sydney, that probably is not such a big renovation, but here in Tasmania you can build a reasonable house for \$300 000 to \$400 000 or indeed less, so \$150 000 for a renovation is a big renovation in that context and I am not sure how many people will be taking that up.

I believe the main issue here is the time frames. We have inertia in the building industry because of the delays and the time taken and it is not just one thing, it is a series of things. As I have highlighted stepping through the time lines that we have gone through, there are banks, councils and the builders themselves, and if you throw anything else in there like the Titles Office having to issue titles for a subdivision there are constant delays.

The discussions about removing red tape have been thrown about this place for a number of years. I have found building the second time around has been far more difficult than the first time 10 years ago, when it seemed like it was relatively easier; there was less required. We certainly did not have to do energy efficiency and things like that. I know it is a goal to have energy efficient houses but these sorts of things create delays. If you are on a rural block you have to get fire reports done and so on. There are delays in the system which mean that while we have a lofty goal of increasing building works, increasing investment and creating jobs, we should also be working on how to iron out those delays because the red tape has not been reduced. In fact, I have twice the pages on my plans than I had 10 years ago, so it could be argued that that is twice as much required to build a house and it can be very frustrating.

I found it very frustrating and I am somebody who is familiar with it. I have dealt with councils as a councillor and as somebody looking to build. I have helped people through the process as well. Even so, this time around I have found it incredibly frustrating. Those delays could mean that people go into this applying for the grants thinking they are going to get them and then miss out because of things that are out of their control delaying the project and then having to repay, which is the last thing we want. We probably need a bit more flexibility around the end dates and the ability to extend and so on.

Having said that, I believe it is a worthwhile goal and that is definitely why we are supporting the bill.

[2.37 p.m.]

**Ms ARCHER** (Clark - Minister for Building and Construction) - Madam Speaker, I strongly support the HomeBuilder Grants Bill 2020 introduced to the House today. As members have identified already, the bill provides for the implementation and administration of the Tasmanian Government's \$20 000 grant and the Australian Government's \$25 000 grant. Both grants schemes apply to new builds up to \$750 000 inclusive of the land value and the build cost. The federal government's homebuilder grant can also be used for renovations up to a cost of \$750 000.

These grants will assist with the post-COVID-19 recovery of this vital sector by attracting private funding across the Tasmanian economy and encouraging the commencement of new home builds and substantial renovations. Tasmanians can access up to \$45 000 for a new home build



utilising both these grants. This is particularly important as we head into post-COVID recovery, with investment and job creation now more important than ever before.

The unprecedented challenges of the coronavirus pandemic have presented uncertainty across many industries including the building and construction sector, but it is pleasing that we were strongly intent on them continuing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period, albeit taking precautions and significant social distancing and hygiene measures.

As we emerge from the impacts of the pandemic it is also an opportunity not to lose sight of the positive outlooks for Tasmania, with the state's building and construction sector a vital part of our ongoing growth. What we are seeing now is some of those positive stories re-emerging and I believe it is worth looking at what our performance was like just before COVID-19 hit our shores.

It is evident from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that Tasmania is leading the way on many key indicators across the sector. Building work in the year to March 2020 was 1.4 per cent higher than the previous year and the only jurisdiction to see annual growth in annual original terms. This shows that we entered the pandemic with a very strong sector.

Throughout 2019 there were 3093 housing approvals in Tasmania which was an increase on 2018 figures. Tasmania was the only jurisdiction to see growth compared to the year before, leading the way nationally with all other jurisdictions recording a decline.

In addition, building work done in Tasmania in 2019 was 5.7 per cent higher than in 2018, again the highest growth rate in the country but it is important to note that our Government has never taken this growth for granted. That is why the stimulation of our economy is now more important than ever for our Government. We need to ensure that the building and construction sectors are supported and continuing to be a driving force behind the Government's focus on delivering a strong economy and supporting the creation of jobs for Tasmania and indeed, thousands of jobs for Tasmanians.

While many industry representatives have indicated work is continuing across the building and construction sectors, there has been a general observation that a number of medium-term private sector projects have been delayed or even cancelled. We are confident that this bill will assist to accelerate the economy, to create jobs and grow business confidence, which is what we need to assist in the recovery of our building and construction sector in Tasmania. We want to see it back to where it was before and performing even better.

The minister for Infrastructure, Mr Ferguson, and I have undertaken very close engagement with Tasmania's building and construction and civil sector during these very challenging times. The feedback we received from industry overall confirmed a particular emphasis is required on ensuring private investment projects proceed, particularly within the next three to six-month window.

We have been able to do a lot in the way of our public infrastructure and our maintenance program as well. We have continued to work with industry on ways that we can assist and provide medium to longer-term certainty of upcoming public sector projects while also putting in place measures to stimulate private investment. This balance is vitally important.

We are confident that the recent construction blitz package announcement including the HomeBuilder grant will do that. It is encouraging to hear that more than 900 Tasmanians have already expressed interest in the state's HomeBuilder grant. It could even be higher from when I

last looked at that statistic which was last Sunday. It was Matthew Pollock, Executive Director from Master Builders Tasmania, who said:

We were staring at a shortfall, potentially, over the next 12 months of 800 houses as a result of the impact of COVID-19.

What the registrations demonstrate, I think, is that this scheme will go a long way to bringing those projects back into the market.

My colleague, the Minister for Finance, has worked very closely with the Australian Government to ensure both HomeBuilder grant programs are complementary and simple for application. This is one component of our Government's \$1.8 billion infrastructure package which will underpin and support an estimated construction value of \$3.1 billion across the next two years, stimulating investment in the private sector, strengthening the economy and creating thousands of jobs.

Both schemes require a contract to be entered on or after 4 June 2020 and before 31 December 2020 and building must commence within three months of the contract being signed unless the Commissioner of State Revenue approves a longer period up to a further three months.

As has been identified in the second reading speech already, I am sure that I probably do not need to run through all the grant details as I have here in my notes but I will say a few things about the stakeholder feedback that we have received so far. We certainly have had some significant and welcoming feedback from industry following the announcement of the construction blitz in this package this month which included this HomeBuilder grant.

I would like to share some of the supportive comments with the House to highlight the importance of the measures we have taken to date and how important it is that we keep the momentum going. From the TCCI Chief Operating Officer, Ms Colleen Reardon:

We congratulate the Premier for acting so swiftly to kickstart our economy now that the coronavirus appears to be under control. Taken together these projects will provide a real shot in the arm to our economy.

The Executive Director of Master Builders Tasmania, Matthew Pollock, said the package would, and I quote:

... safeguard the 20 000 jobs and 6000 businesses that make up the industry in Tasmania.

This will turbocharge the economic recovery and unlock the spending power of the private sector, and take advantage of the significant multiplier in jobs and activity that construction work provides to the economy.

Before we were standing at a cliff in construction, and this stimulus package will bring that potential in the pipeline back on line.

The phones are ringing off the hook in terms of inquiries.

Turning to Stuart Collins, the CEO of the Housing Industry Association of Tasmania - and I am shortening this quote:

The Government has ... recognised our concerns about the likely decline in housing activity as the reason for making today's announcement. Significantly, it is also recognition of the role the housing industry has to play in leading the economic recovery.

To quote Brian Hauser, State Director of Victoria and Tasmania, Cement, Concrete & Aggregates Australia, an important supplier to the building industry:

Some very welcome news indeed for our industry but more importantly for the Tasmanian economy.

I acknowledge the Tasmanian building and construction sector and its many hardworking employees who have maintained their work throughout this very challenging period. We are not, of course, through this period entirely but we can certainly see the great opportunities that exist through measures like this bill delivers.

From my perspective as Minister for Building and Construction and, in particular, from Mr Ferguson's perspective, the continued communication and engagement with the sector during these unprecedented times was very much appreciated. I know Mr Jaensch has been involved in some of our meetings as well and the Premier has had his own meetings.

I thank the sector as a whole and the many people who make up the sector, the subcontractors through to the industry organisations, and corporations for their assistance and their input. It is not an easy time. It is not always possible to please everyone but overall the building and construction sector has been wonderful to deal with.

I commend the bill to the House.

[2.48 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Minister for Finance) - Madam Speaker, I seek to draw the debate to a close and thank everybody for their contributions. I take this opportunity to address the questions that were asked and the policy issues and ideas and different ways of doing things that have been discussed in the debate.

I thank Ms Butler, Dr Broad, Ms O'Connor, Mr Tucker, Ms Ogilvie, and my colleague, Ms Archer for their contributions. It is a very clear demonstration that while there might be - and there are - different points of view on some of the individual elements of the package, there is great support.

I believe the Tasmanian community will appreciate that and get a sense that the stability around policy settings is still in place and it is great. It is heartening to listen to Ms Archer's earlier contribution particularly summarising feedback from key stakeholder peak bodies which has been vital. Without going into too much detail we have been engaging with those key organisations for an extended period of time, particularly during this pandemic. Those discussions have been extremely - forgive the pun – constructive, so thank you to them.

I also acknowledge our Department of Treasury and Finance officials who have done the legwork, particularly in engaging with the Australian Government, which has been the principal focus in recent weeks. Since HomeBuilder was announced by the Prime Minister it has been necessary for each state and territory to find a common ground through the national partnership agreement to ensure that our state can get delivery of that package. I can inform the House that as of an hour ago we were the only state that had signed up. Is it still the case? Is anybody prepared to deny it or shake their head? Then, I will put it that we are still the only state has signed up and other states, no doubt, are finding their way on this. We have moved very quickly.

Equally, not only has the Tasmanian Government moved so quickly to ensure that the package is delivered in our state with the shortest possible delay - 20 days, as it would have it, to bring us to the 24th today - we have matched the grant: not fully dollar for dollar but an additional \$20 000 is a substantial near doubling of the value of that grant. It provides a further sense of impetus in putting some real support behind the Tasmanian building sector. The industry benefits not just builders, it benefits a whole range of trade groups that are involved in building a property - a new home - but it also supports the civil construction sector. They are a key player as an employer in our state, building the subdivisions upon which houses are built. That has been a great approach by us. I have no doubt that other states will join in as well in the fullness of time, but that it is our position as at earlier today.

I will now address the questions directly, one by one.

The definition of 'commencement' is clearly outlined in the interpretation part of the bill. The Government is not attracted to changing the definitions because we do not want to see banking processes taking place where people might be of the view that something has commenced but you may, in fact, have large swathes of property around the state where people are not being employed to build the houses. We need to see the buildings being built. That is an objective both of the Australian Government and the Tasmanian Government.

The commencement of construction as 'the laying of foundations' was determined also because it aligns and provides consistency with the long-standing definition in Tasmanian law of commencement, which has already been provided for. It is well understood by industry and the finance sector around the First Home Owner Grant Act, so consistency is being applied.

The Commissioner of State Revenue is not obliged by this legislation to pay the grant until all the conditions relating to the First Home Owner Grant are satisfied, including the requirement to reside at the home for at least six consecutive months within the first 12 months. That is the strict legal demand. In practice, though the commissioner usually pays the First Home Owner Grant on completion of the foundations of the home where the home is financed, if there is reason to believe that somebody is not fulfilling the longer-lasting conditions of the First Home Owner Grant - for example, not actually residing in the home for those six months - then the money can be retrieved. It can be clawed back. But most people do the right thing. On that basis the commissioner, in practice, pays the First Home Owner Grant on completion of the foundations of the home. We want to maintain that sense of consistency. Industry is certainly familiar with it, both building and finance.

To answer Ms Butler's question, 'Will the scheme be capped?' No. There is no plan or wish to cap the scheme. It is only capped by eligibility. The Tasmanian HomeBuilder Grant is not capped and will not be capped under the scheme. I have no reason to suspect the Commonwealth would take any different view either. I have no reason to believe that. I hope that that is assuring.

Ms Butler was also seeking the reasonable assurance that the minister will not use the ministerial order provisions to decrease the \$20 000 amount of the grant or finalise the grant scheme prior to 31 December 2020. I can make that commitment today. The Government can assure the House that the grant will not be changed in that way. I hope that provides some further reassurance.

I was asked earlier at what stage during the construction process is the Tasmanian HomeBuilder Grant paid? Payment of the Tasmanian HomeBuilder Grant is not required until all conditions are met, including the requirement to reside at the property for six consecutive months, commencing within 12 months of the issue of the occupancy certificate, but the commissioner has the discretion to pay the grant before this time.

If the home is built through a comprehensive home building contract, payment will generally be made following completion of the laying of the foundations if the home is financed, or on completion if the home is not financed. If a spec home or an off-the-plan home is purchased with finance, payment is usually made upon settlement of the property, or upon confirmation of settlement or transfer of title where there is no finance. It is expected that the Australian Government's HomeBuilder grant will be paid in the same manner.

One of the colleagues today asked, 'What is commencement if there is not to be a concrete slab?'. If foundations are not to be laid, like a slab for example, then the commissioner will determine a fair and reasonable outcome as to what commencement would mean. An example of that would be footings in a house that is not going to have a fully concrete slab.

With respect to renovations under the HomeBuilder Grants program, payment will be made when the applicant has reached the required spending amount of \$150 000 of the contract price that has been paid. I acknowledge in passing that we do not expect that particular program to have significant uptake here in Tasmania. I think the context for it is taking a national approach. In some cases, people would buy a rundown home and either demolish it or substantially renovate it. Of course that is the equalising treatment that is being sought by the federal government, but as a party to the NPA, we will administer that scheme for any Tasmanians for whom that scheme is useful and appropriate.

I was also asked if the grant can be used as deposit for a loan. Various financial institutions have been approved to accept and process first home owner grant applications as 'approved agents' so that applications can be submitted directly with the lender, if that makes sense. The lender can be the go-between. Discussions are ongoing in regard to whether a similar arrangement can be put in place for the HomeBuilder Grants. I am very happy to place on the record that I have discussed this with our team in Treasury. This is intended to be an immediate support scheme, not a long-lasting one. I will certainly enter into discussions to try to smooth the way for that kind of approach to also be allowed, particularly for the larger lenders or the ones that are more likely to be putting through significant numbers of applications. We will take that on board and do our best with that and provide support where it is able to be done.

Discussions are ongoing on that. It is understood that banks do take into account eligibility requirements for grants when they are considering loan applications. I do not want to be cute about it but I will have to put in the fine print that we would encourage Tasmanians to have that open conversation not just with their existing bank but other banks or lenders as well. Do your due diligence. Ask them what service they can provide. Ask them whether they are prepared to accept the expectation of the grant amount as a part of their financing arrangements. My advice is that has

been and is the case with a number of banks that they can be satisfied that the grant can be taken into the calculation for the residual loan amount.

The Government makes no commitment on that. We are not in a position to do so. We just encourage applicants to speak to their bank specifically about whether that is something that can be done for them, bearing in mind that the grant is expected to be paid in large part when commencement has been achieved. On that basis, banks are expected to be supportive.

I was asked if funds can be withheld until after the resident's requirement has been met. The answer to that is yes, it is potentially the case. We are not sure how useful that would be to the applicant, though. As I indicated earlier, it certainly is the case that the commissioner is not obliged under this act or the First Home Owner Grant Act to pay until all of the conditions have been met, but nonetheless where there is a reasonable belief that everything is in order, the grant is usually paid at the earlier stage. I would have thought, and probably colleagues here would agree, it would be more useful for a Tasmanian individual or family, if it was paid at the earlier stage, on the commencement stage of the build.

I was also asked by a number of people about the commissioner's discretionary powers to extend the commencement of the building, or at least to extend the time frame allowed for the commencement of the building. I was also asked about what that process will be and how it might work for a person who finds themselves seeking the extra three months because they need the extra time.

Construction must commence within three months of the contract date. I pause here to emphasise this is a requirement of the federal government. They did not give the Tasmanian or any other state government any free rein here. It was a very clear set of guidance given it was their funding program and to deliver it on their behalf, a very key objective is that the construction must commence within three months of the contract date. Tasmania was the government that pushed this point in one respect and we were pleased we were able to find agreement with the Commonwealth for this additional three-month discretionary power that can be held. The commissioner has discretion to extend that period by a further three months due to unforeseen circumstances, so the maths is not difficult - it can provide therefore up to six months from the transaction date of the contract to the commencement of the build. The process to apply for that extension will be developed by the State Revenue Office as soon as this bill passes, alongside the other processes, forms and guidelines to provide for the grant schemes.

The objections and appeals provisions within the bill will provide for applicants to object and appeal against the decision by the commissioner to not extend the period of commencement. To be helpful, in advance of this bill being considered by parliament, we have published guidelines so that Tasmanians can get a sense of what they can expect and the kinds of arrangements that are to be put in place, subject to the parliament's approval. That has been done in advance. There is more work to do and as soon as it passes the department will progress that with haste.

There was a question from Ms Butler from fly-in fly-out workers. In order to meet the residence requirement, an applicant must make a connection to the land and property as their principal residence and maintain that connection for a continuous period of six months commencing within the 12-month period immediately following completion.

To state the obvious, we do not want the Tasmanian taxpayer to be gamed by interstate residents who are not Tasmanian. They may have been born here but if have not lived here for

many years, for example, it would not be right or proper to not apply that test. A principal residence connection however does not preclude FiFo workers from being able to apply at all and we would not discourage it. A principal residence connection is not necessarily severed in circumstances where, for example, a fly-in fly-out worker leaves the property for a defined period for the purpose of work, as long as that person maintains the connection with that property as their principal residence.

The commissioner would look at these incidences on a case-by-case basis. If I can paint a picture, for example, a couple might reside in the beautiful city of Launceston and let us say the wife has fly-in fly-out work as a civil engineer in the Pilbara and lives for that period when she is over there in workers' accommodation. Quite plainly that person is still a Tasmanian resident because they continue to come back to Launceston in the electorate of Bass for their actual residency but are working away. The commissioner would look favourably upon such an application but sceptically where it is apparent that somebody is attempting to claim to be Tasmanian when they do not actually really reside here. I hope that is helpful.

Ms O'Connor asked me about the NPA itself. I think I have begun to address that. The agreement signed by the Premier is available on the Council of Federal Financial Relations website. The agreement outlines how the grant is to be managed, including such matters as roles and responsibilities, financial arrangements, governance arrangements, the program guidelines and the implementation guidelines. When first announced, the Australian Government with states and territories determined that a national partnership agreement was the best vehicle to advance the grant administration, effectively where Canberra provides the cash and the states and territories provide the business process. This is consistent with the arrangements that were introduced at the beginning of the First Home Owner Grant in Tasmania way back in 2000 and this is normal practice for providing funding to state governments. I hope that is helpful.

I was also asked about the process for applicants to seek an extension from the commissioner if they wanted one. To apply for the grant, the State Revenue Office will publish details on its website explaining in detail the application process as a priority once legislation has passed. I have also asked the department to make sure they provide the details to the main lenders - the ones we are most familiar with - and to do our best to push that information so that it is in the hands of the lending and banking community.

In relation to seeking a process for applicants to seek an extension, typically where discretion is sought the applicant would simply write to the commissioner setting out the circumstances of their particular matter. In this instance, evidence of what unforeseen circumstances have occurred would be expected, circumstances which have resulted in the extension being needed. The commissioner will assess the application, potentially seeking further information if it is needed before making a determination. The commissioner's determination will be subject to the objection and the appeals provisions provided in the bill.

I am certainly not going to attempt to bind the commissioner today because we have to accept that there will be case-by-case circumstances where it would be quite appropriate for the commissioner to agree and others where it would be quite inappropriate for the commissioner to agree because it might have been a manufactured circumstance, but the commissioner will be fair-minded about it and reasonable to people in the circumstances. If a person can simply indicate that something has happened that was outside their or the builder's control, the commissioner will make an appropriate assessment of that.

There a couple of other things. I would like to point out that the First Home Owner Grant is not affected by this legislation; it continues to operate. People cannot claim both of the grants. A person cannot claim the \$20 000 First Home Owner Grant as well the Tasmanian HomeBuilder Grant. You could not get yourself to \$65 000 - I am just making that point - but a person who for whatever reason was not ready to proceed with Tasmanian HomeBuilder or Homebuilder and they find themselves wanting to go into their first home at a later time, the First Home Owner Grant will continue at \$20 000 because of the decision of this House back in March that extended that grant of \$20 000 through to 3 June 2022. Of course, it was scheduled to drop to \$10 000 this July so we in this House have agreed to do that. I just want to make that point.

The other point was in relation to the question posed around the income and the asset value limits that have been set out. They are again decisions that have been reached by the Australian Government that we have agreed to follow through with in delivery of the program here, but I would like to clarify that the grant in respect of targeting is simply not available to people who have a personal income of over \$125 000. The point here, is that it is available to everybody below what is considered a high-income level of \$125 000 or \$200 000 for a household. There would not be a high percentage of properties in Tasmania valued at over \$1.5 million. The point I make here is that the vast majority of properties in Tasmania are going to come into the wherewithal of a person or a couple to be able to be considered for this grant.

Industry welcomes this initiative. I believe we will demonstrate that we will need to keep an eye on this as the program is continued to be delivered and rolled out. In the unlikely event that the federal government changes any of the parameters of the grant, we have provided for in this legislation the changes to flow through so that we are not locked in and unable to change it. If the House agrees to this legislation, we have the ability to allow any changes hypothetically that another state might persuade the Commonwealth to agree to and Tasmania would be no worse off. I make that point.

I do appreciate everybody's contributions. The well-researched contributions that have been made and the goodwill around this bill means that we can provide not just meaningful support to the housing sector but also meaningful support to people who are interested in making investment in our state, including people who might have thought it is only for first home builders. I have to say that the commencing principle around the federal government's actions here which are supported by the Tasmanian Liberal Government is about supporting the building and construction sector, which has experienced disruption, in some cases the loss of contracts and a future pipeline of work. It is with those thoughts in mind that I think this House can be very satisfied that we are providing the right kind of support as an immediate stimulus during the calendar year of 2020 so that we can rebuild confidence, rebuild a pipeline of work, generate activity not just in the building sector but also in the civil construction sector, and indeed get the economic value of all of that, which means jobs for Tasmanian families.

With those words I commend the bill to the House and thank members for their contributions.

**Bill read the second time.**

**Bill read the third time.**



## LAND TAX AMENDMENT BILL 2020 (No. 22)

### Second Reading

[3.13 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Minister for Finance - 2R) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Tasmanian Government has been receiving daily advice from health professionals to guide the policies that we needed in place to save lives. Tasmanians have supported the calls to self-isolate, exercise social distancing and practise good hygiene. As a result we recently achieved the important milestone of zero active cases of coronavirus in our state. The necessary actions taken to achieve this milestone have come at a significant cost to our economy, to jobs and to livelihoods.

The Tasmanian Government's social and economic support packages are unprecedented in the history of our state. The two packages total approximately \$1 billion and are of a scale not seen before in this state.

On 26 March 2020, the Premier announced the second Tasmanian Social and Economic Support Package which included support measures across health, business, households and individuals and the community. One of the many support measures aimed at business in that package was the waiving of land tax for 2020-21 for businesses shut down or severely impacted as a result of the pandemic.

The Land Tax Amendment Bill 2020 amends the Land Tax Act 2000 to introduce that support measure by providing a land tax exemption in the 2020-21 financial year for commercial land owners that have suffered significant financial impact due to COVID-19.

Landowners will be eligible for the land tax exemption where the Commissioner of State Revenue is satisfied that the land is commercial land. This may be determined by a commercial land Valuation Property Classification Code, as issued by the Valuer-General under the Valuation of Land Act 2001, or other grounds considered reasonable by the commissioner in the circumstances.

To ensure the land tax exemption is appropriately targeted, commercial landowners will also need to demonstrate that they have been adversely financially impacted by COVID-19 in a manner which is unexpected and significant. In this regard, landowners will need to demonstrate that they have experienced a reduction in the amount of income generated as a result of COVID-19, including a loss of rent or licence fees; or that the land is vacant and available for rent as a result of COVID-19, despite the owner taking reasonable actions to advertise that the land is available. Alternatively, where the landowner operates a business on the land, the landowner will need to demonstrate that the business has been affected by COVID-19.

The commissioner will produce guidelines which will assist landowners in applying for the waiver and to ensure that applications are assessed in a fair and equitable manner. To be clear, the commissioner is not to waive land tax for commercial property owners who have not experienced a significant adverse financial impact due to COVID-19.

This bill provides the commissioner with broad discretion to administer the exemption. This applies in determining whether the landowner has been adversely financially impacted and whether the land is, or is not, commercial land. The measure provided for in this bill will play an important role in mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19 on commercial landowners in Tasmania.

These are unprecedented times and it is vital that this parliament does what it can to provide assistance to our businesses and keep Tasmanians in jobs.

I commend this bill to the House.

[3.17 p.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, we will be supporting this amendment bill. We have seen the COVID-19 restrictions and shutdowns impact so many corners of our community. In the initial Government package, a whole range of proposals and opportunities for assistance were announced and we welcome this second announcement from the Government.

It became very apparent that through the shutdown and the restrictions imposed by the health response to COVID-19 that businesses and the hierarchy of businesses and the ecosystem of businesses in Tasmania would be impacted. It was not just hospitality and tourism. It was not just hairdressing and various retail outlets. We know that there is that cascading impact of a restriction such as this which would cause businesses significant difficulty.

We made the statement very clear at the time, both through the money bills and through the Premier's ministerial statement, that we would provide our support to assisting businesses when they needed it and that we would be ready to stand with the Government. We would pass reasonable measures to ensure that targeted and strategic responses to those businesses and sections of our community that have been impacted to ensure that they would receive the support when needed and appropriately done.

Many members in the House would have been contacted by a range of business owners - particularly those impacted by this bill - who have gone over and above in supporting their tenants. They have gone over and above supporting the businesses that they work with regularly to ensure that not only those businesses can survive but also that there are appropriate working arrangements.

We are hearing every day of arrangements and you rely on the goodwill in 90 per cent of the cases but obviously, there are moments where you do need to have measures to ensure that those who are not able to reach agreements can be assisted in doing so. This land tax waiver assists those businesses that have been asked to do their fair share in spreading the load, or spreading the pain as equally as possible and to get some relief through land tax, to apply to have the land tax waived on their property should they have been impacted by COVID-19.

Through the briefing, which was good - and we thank the minister for the briefing yesterday - we understand the bill. We got the second reading speech this morning and there are a number of questions that we asked during the briefing that I hoped would have been clarified in the second reading speech. I am not sure if all of them are so I will talk about a few of those in a moment.

We understand through the briefing that there are close to about 8000 people in Tasmania who pay land tax on their commercial properties. That is adding up to about \$35 million in annual revenue for the state government. We understand that this policy has not been costed so there is no advice from the Treasury and there is no information around the impact on the budget. We think that when any decision that you make in government, some level or some assessment of the financial

impact on the budget should be ascertained. Essentially, what you are asking to do is getting the parliament to sign a blank cheque up to \$35 million.

We are not opposing in principle the need for this measure. We would like to have some level of understanding about the impact on the budget and what kind of cost this measure will have on the state budget.

We are criticised, as an Opposition, for throwing up ideas without being costed. In fact it happened in question time today where we raised the issue of costing of a support package for our good friends at the racing industry. It is a real question around, if the Government has made a decision that has had an impact on the industry, it is fair and reasonable to consider a support package. The Victorian Government has done it, the New Zealand Government has done it, and other jurisdictions are considering it. In the response the minister's answer is, 'it is un-costed, it is un-costed'. Well, if it is good for the goose, it is good for the gander.

You cannot accuse us for throwing up an idea about even considering a support package and criticise us for not costing a suggestion to government in response to the need of a particular part of our community, and a key part of our economy, yet you come with a bill without any understanding of the costings. It probably will not be the full \$35 million, but we know that many businesses will be impacted and will be able to avail themselves of this support package, so it would be upwards of \$20 million, at least. The fact that there has been no costing of that is disappointing. We thought that would be a reasonable thing to assess, even in these times where you cannot predict even 90 per cent of the people who might seek support and assistance through the measure that this bill enables.

The other questions that we raised were around - and in no way are we questioning the process that the commissioner will go through to make assessments - but there is no advice in the second reading speech to give the commissioner guidance about the intent of the bill beyond some comments that it is not an insignificant impact on the business and that you need to prove the impact the COVID-19 restrictions have had on your business, on that plot of land.

We do not want to constrain the commissioner in putting them in a straightjacket in too tight a definition but there does need to be some guidance. We take people at face value; we take people at trust. Given this is not a non-reviewable decision - the decision of the commissioner will be final - they have been given a lot of latitude, and we know one person's impact and view of how they have been impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions is very different to another person's. There will be significant variations in terms of the impact, and not insignificant to one person may be significant for another person.

We understand that the Revenue Office will issue guidelines, as will the commissioner in terms of the application of approval process, but that is post us approving this bill. That work is done, so if we have a problem with one of those guidelines or if we have an issue with the restrictions or non-restrictions being placed on the commissioner in terms of the scope of their decision, we have no influence over that. That may be a perverse outcome in terms of the intent. The clear intent from the Government and this House will be, once this legislation gets through both our Chambers, to provide the support.

That should be the absolute intent. We should not be splitting hairs on this; we should not be withholding reasonable support to businesses. The Government will say, 'We have the best of

intentions here; shoulder to wheel'. But we have seen a number of projects and grant programs that we think were poorly handled and treated people inequitably. There have been perverse outcomes.

The intent was clear in the Small Business Grants program. But when it was announced we got on our feet in the parliament. 'We just want to make sure that you do this well; that the money goes to the people who need it; that there is a fair and open transparent process and that all businesses are treated equally through this and you provide the department with the kind of resources and support to do the work'. Arguably, I am getting about two or three stories a day about people who applied through a government grant process and their treatment has been nothing short of disappointing and grossly unfair.

For example, some small businesses when inquiring in the first few days of the emergency Small Business Grants Program opening they were told, 'No, it is on merit. There is an opening and a closing. Take your time, do the work. Put in a good application and you will be considered on merit'. The person did that, spent thousands of dollars for an accountant to make sure the documentation was appropriate; got it in before the closing date; did all the right things; did what the business was advised to do by the Government, only to find out that by the time the grant program had been closed, it had already been fully spent and people were already receiving money. The competitive neutrality issues of that plays out in a number of industries and has resulted in a really unfair and inequitable rollout of that grant program.

Businesses are really suffering and they are not getting answers from the Government. They have written to the minister. We have written to the minister's office and the Government on their behalf. They are not getting answers. How that relates to this bill is: 'Yes, the intent is very clear; we will judiciously apply the decisions by the commissioner and the Government will follow through with this. We will do the right thing by people'. When the last example of when that commitment was given to us, a whole range of businesses across Tasmania were treated poorly. So with the grant program at least, we can apply some political pressure to try to argue with the Government about the equitable nature of the grant program.

**Ms O'Connor** - Or not equitable.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - That is right. Exactly. The example that was used by the Premier at question time today was that the person was not eligible. There is not one person whom we have represented and written a letter to the minister who was not absolutely eligible.

For example, Margate Kennels. They applied within virtually 24 to 48 hours of the grant program opening. Nothing, nothing. They responded and tried to find out what was going on. She found out from two other like-businesses that they had already received the \$15 000 before she had even received the 'No, thank you very much', two weeks after the program had closed.

You cannot say, 'Trust us, we will apply this judiciously'. Again, I make it very clear: I am not reflecting on the decisions and the role of the commissioner. What I am saying is that at times if you leave it too open, if you leave it too grey, if you do not provide the kind of advice and intent clearly in the second reading speech, clearly in the contributions on the floor of this House, so the commissioner has some clarity of the kind of expectation of that person's role and how they make their decisions within the framework of the Amendment Bill, we will have perverse outcomes. Because it is non-reviewable, it is not public, it is not transparent, we are potentially going to have a re-run of the grants program but in a way where we cannot raise it appropriately.

The intent of the bill is to help as many people out as possible. We are not calling for the Government to narrowly define what a significant impact has been.

We do not want to give a black and white ruling on this. That will lead to perverse outcomes but we do need to hear clearly from the minister what the absolute intent is. In my view, it has to be a relatively low bar of evidence. There is a whole range of businesses and small businesses who do not have a lot of time for this. They are fighting for their lives at the moment so they do not want to have to go through a rigorous, extensive process spending thousands of dollars of their own money that should be trying to keep their business open and support their activities on a fool's errand.

It is clear from the minister in the second reading speech that the broad intent is that they want to help out. It is clear from the media statements, but we have heard that before. We just want to make sure that the commissioner is given the absolute strongest message from this parliament that the intent is to help people out that have been impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions and that the waiver will go to where it is needed.

Again, the commissioner has a very important role. There will be some people who have not been impacted significantly by COVID-19 who will make an application because they can. They do need to be dealt with. This is not all one sided. This is not just about giving free waivers from the Government. You need to make sure that an appropriate assessment is undertaken. You need to make sure that those people who are needy receive the support and that the commissioner is given the best possible opportunity to make the best decisions.

The last thing that we want to do as a parliament is pass a bill which is pretty blunt and hear story after story of heartache throughout our community. We know it is a domino effect. If the waiver does not come through, the rent and the cash flow for the business triggers again. Does that then in three months' time or in six months' time trigger evictions or trigger perverse outcomes for tenants and for the building owners? We want to avoid that. This is the most extraordinary of times not only socially but economically for a whole range of businesses. Tenants do need to know that the landlords that are looking after them can seek some support through this bill.

Beyond that, it is a very blunt bill; it is for the next financial year. The lack of guidelines from the revenue office and from the commissioner raises our concerns. We want people to fairly access this fund and to ensure that they can support their businesses. As the minister in his second reading speech acknowledged, this bill will play an important role in mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19 on commercial landowners. There is no doubt about that and we know that that will echo through the ecosystem of our economy.

At the outset again it is a rushed bill. We had the briefing late yesterday afternoon. We did not get the second reading speech until a half an hour before question time. It is not necessarily a complex bill, but we have to do better. It is not as if you announced weeks and weeks ago, and it is a seven-or eight-page bill. We implore the Government most respectfully to get stuff to us early so we can consult, so that this House can deal with these matters expeditiously.

[3.34 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, we will be supporting the Land Tax Amendment Bill 2020. We recognise that it amends Division 2 of the Land Tax Act to include an extra exemption for commercial land in next financial year.

We also acknowledge that this amendment bill gives the Commissioner for State Revenue significant discretion in assessing applications for land tax relief. While there are provisions in this amendment that the commissioner has to be satisfied the land is commercial land and that the commercial landowner has been adversely impacted, as Mr O'Byrne pointed out and as the legislation and the second reading speech make clear, there is broad discretion on the part of the Commissioner for State Revenue to administer the exemption. I think it is unlikely that of the 8000 individuals or entities that now pay commercial land tax in Tasmania all of them will apply or be eligible but I believe the parliament should be given an indicative cost of this to the budget bottom line. I listened to Mr O'Byrne's headline figure of \$35 million potentially but is that not if they max out the entire commercial land tax budget?

I wanted to ask a question about the provision in the bill under commencement. Clause 2 - Commencement - says the act commences on the day on which this act receives Royal Assent but, if it does not receive Royal Assent by 1 July 2020 this act is taken to have commenced on 1 July 2020.

I have a clarification question because when you go to the Acts Interpretation Act 1931, section 5(1) says, 'The word Act used in relation to a legislative enactment, shall include all Acts and ordinances which have been duly made and passed by the Parliament of Tasmania or by any council or authority empowered to make and pass laws in Tasmania, and to which assent has been duly given by or on behalf of the Sovereign.'

When you go to section 9(2) of the Acts Interpretation Act it says, 'every Act to which the Royal Assent has been given by the Governor for or on behalf of the Sovereign before the commencement of section 8 of the Acts Interpretation Amendment Act 1981 shall, unless the contrary intention appears in the first-mentioned Act, be deemed to have come into operation on the day on which that Act received the Royal Assent.'

Then in section 9(3A) it says, 'Despite subsection (3), if the provision of an Act provides that the Act or a portion of the Act commences on a day, or a day or days, to be proclaimed, that provision and the provision providing for the short title of the Act come into operation on the day on which the Act receives the Royal Assent unless the Act expressly provides otherwise.'

Can the minister confirm that the Acts Interpretation Act has been applied here and that the commencement date conforms with section 9(3A) of the Acts Interpretation Act? Given that the minister is not listening I hope his advisers are.

**Mr Ferguson** - I am listening.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - What did I just ask you? It is all fine, minister. I am curious about the commencement day which makes it clear that if this amendment bill has not received the Royal Assent by 1 July it is taken to have come into effect by 1 July but it will not have received Royal Assent, so by the usual measure of when an act becomes law this act potentially does not. I just did a shallow dive into the Acts Interpretation Act and would like some clarity on that commencement date.

Over the past three months this parliament has been called on to do things that it has never had to consider, let alone undertake before, and despite some of the politics that sat over this place in more recent days I think this parliament should be quite satisfied with the work we have done collaboratively to try to reach as many Tasmanians who have been hurting as a result of the

pandemic response. I know we are dealing with a conservative government but there has been a distinct overlay of sound socialist principles to the decisions that have been made about policy adjustments and the allocation of public funding in order to minimise or mitigate harm caused by events outside the control of every Tasmanian business, every Tasmanian in the tourism or hospitality sector or small business sector who lost their jobs.

I acknowledge that the Premier has been adaptive to changing circumstances and needs and there have been moves that have the support of this parliament. In fact it was a Greens amendment to the first COVID bill that helped us make sure there was a freeze on rent increases and there was subsequently a freeze placed on evictions. The Premier has made sure there is extra relief funding there for the homelessness sector and a rent relief fund has been established which was advocated for by the Tenants' Union of Tasmania and the Greens. We are seeing that this parliament has been called on to try to identify those areas that are hurting and clearly, businesses and the commercial sector are hurting, and they are the businesses that have had to let people go.

I want to acknowledge at this point that a very significant amount of the harm caused by the pandemic has been felt by young people who are in casual and part-time work and by women. Particularly for young people right now, most of them have lost their part-time employment, many are not eligible for Commonwealth support, most were not working long enough to be eligible for JobKeeper and those who are studying are having to do so online without contact with teachers, lecturers and other students as part of a learning community.

This parliament needs to pause for a moment and think about how hard young Tasmanians are having it right now. I know this is being felt right across the community but I have not spoken to a young person in months who has worked, and while they are sitting at home worrying about their future, they also have their eyes on the Arctic, which hit 38 degrees Celsius this week. For our young people, I hope every member of this parliament every single day we are in here always has them front of mind, because they have quite understandably formed the view that they have been shafted.

This legislation provides emergency relief to businesses. I know there is a set of tests that the Commissioner for State Revenue will apply when assessing an application for land tax relief next financial year, but would, for example, the owners of short-stay accommodation properties potentially be eligible?

**Mr Ferguson** - They're not expected to be, no.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - What about primary producers, particularly potentially foreign companies?

**Mr Ferguson** - I'll come back to you on that, but it will be on the basis of what is commercial land and not residential.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - The Farrell family?

**Mr Ferguson** - I'll come back to you but I won't be going into individual instances; that wouldn't be appropriate.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, well, casino owners?

**Mr Ferguson** - I'll come back to you.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, thank you. As we know, Madam Speaker, it is a matter of great regret that the pokies venues will be open again on Friday and that opportunity that too many low-income Tasmanian families had to put the money they received into food, clothing, their children's education will evaporate. I read somewhere that over the course of the three-month period while those pokies dens have been closed, Tasmanians have saved in the vicinity of \$40 million. That is \$40 million that was going back into the community, children's education and recreational opportunities, and on Friday it is all over. That is a social tragedy and an economic tragedy too, because that is \$40 million that will not be going to small businesses or circulating the economy - it will go straight into the Farrell family's Sydney bank account.

With those few words I will park and look forward to other contributions and the minister's reply.

[3.45 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I would like to pick up on the themes on which I was speaking in relation to the last bill, understanding, of course, that these bills have effectively been presented to us as a package. It is in response to the economic tsunami that has hit our businesses. In particular, I think we would all agree, that it has been small business that has been worst hit, although I know nobody from the largest of our organisations in Australia down to the smallest of our micro businesses here in Tasmania, in my electorate of Clark, has escaped.

I was speaking previously about my great concern about intergenerational fairness when it comes to how we are dealing with the money and the grant making and the economic lifelines that we are putting out there for businesses; the people who hire and are able to provide jobs.

It is worth stepping back in time to when the pandemic first hit, and the great shock and surprise of that time. It was unexpected. We had a sense something was happening overseas but we did not understand how quickly it would arrive on our shores and how much impact it would have.

One of the great things that our defence forces do when they do a review of how people performed during an operation or a crisis or a war, is only review it in the context of the decisions that were made within the known facts at the time and this relates to that form of decision-making. It has to be very agile, it has to be based on limited information, it moves with the momentum of the decisions that need to be made, the politics, and what is happening in the economy and the community.

I have had these conversations with the Premier and members of the ministry across their portfolios where people have had to make decisions in a context without all the known information and there is a bit of an art to it, but making a decision is better than not. We would all accept that we knew going into this pandemic and this crisis that there would be need for, not just a health response, but a very deep and serious economic response. That response had to start very quickly and so normal planning processes and the legislative processes would have to be truncated.

Whilst that has happened and we have certainly been able to, I know at least through my office and I am sure it is the same for all other members in this House, save businesses; we have been able to save some jobs but we have not saved them all.

In my own house, a household of five, two jobs have been lost and that is a pretty serious hit. I am concerned about what we are going to leave for the next generation, and the cost base for our kids going forward as we set them up and send them out into the great big world.



The Land Tax Amendment Bill, which defrays the obligation to pay land tax, was one of the levers that the Government was able to use, and one of the economic measures that was wholly within its own control, that it can make a commitment very quickly and early to use that mechanism to help businesses out of some P&L problems.

The difficulty is that everything is connected. Tenants are connected to the lease; the lease is connected to the landlord. Every situation, every scenario is complex and different, every lease is different, the terms are different for people in different stages of their lease. The capacity for people to pay rent is different, and then the deals that have been made during the pandemic to get people through are all different and complex as well. Some have gone through a mechanism that has oversight and mediation; others have just been private deals. I know a particularly large business that has really been running for three months on a handshake, and running well, because both of them are in it together. That is two businesses talking to each other, not a tenant in a much larger organisation. That one is very interesting to me.

I have spent a fair bit of my career in commercial law looking at these particular issues, specifically around licensing and leaseholding. I am quite concerned about larger multi-tenanted spaces and smaller franchisees who commit to leases that may have terms that one might ordinarily think maybe are a bit unfair about the capacity to be open all day on a Sunday when it is a family-owned franchisee business. Certainly, there is a lot of turnover in that regard.

Having said all of that, now the dust is settling somewhat, we have an opportunity to step up how we are managing these processes. I urge and encourage the minister and the Government basically to implement a weather eye across how this is implemented.

The bill itself sets up two limbs to be able to access the relief. I went through a fairly long conversation in the briefing about when a tenant was later able to pay back rent and what effect that would have on this mechanism. Minister, that would be something where, if by way of a question, would be helpful to understand what would happen in a circumstance where rent effectively was paid back later.

If the reason for getting the relief was because rent was not being paid and the terrible impacts, what would happen later on if it was paid? From my recollection, the response was that we are doing this on financial years, so this would be captured in the wash-up of the whole financial year, but some clarity around that would be helpful.

The test in this bill is that it has two limbs to it. The first is that the commissioner must be satisfied that the owner of the land has been adversely financially impacted during the pandemic period in a manner that is unexpected and not insignificant. The second limb is as a result of, and then we run through a number of steps. The amount of income payable to the owner in respect to the land has been reduced as a result of the effects of COVID-19, including loss of rent or licence fees.

There is a series of steps that you need to meet. The criteria of all or any part of the land is available, is being advertised, in the opinion of the commissioner was not able to be leased or licensed due again to the COVID-19 pandemic and that the business operated on the land has been affected as a result of the effect of COVID-19.

The owner has to apply to the commissioner before 1 July 2021 so they have some time to do that and the commissioner must approve the application. The steps are pretty clear, but in my

experience dealing with legislation on the other side, working for people who might want to make a claim or have been denied a claim and want to appeal that decision, there is language in this bill that is novel, that is new and untested. There would be no precedent attached to it.

It would be an interesting exercise to see if we had a slew of businesses - I have had quite a few contact my office about the other grants program and they are very unhappy they have missed out - how the interpretation of these clauses would roll out. If you are asking about whether something is unexpected, how do we define 'insignificant'? We will need to look at that language.

Minister, I understand that we need to be agile. I support the bill and I want people to get access to the money. It is good to do that but let us keep a weather eye across those elements and particularly the decision-making around who, how and when these decisions are made so that it is fair and reasonable.

We have the question of the eligibility period and it runs for one financial year, so eligible period is defined in the back as meaning the financial year commencing 1 July 2020. The pandemic period means the period during which a public health emergency has been declared in respect of the COVID-19 under the Public Health Act. That is a very specific and defined, definite period. I can see a scenario in which we officially declare the end to the emergency under the Public Health Act but the effects and the wash-up of what has happened, particularly around landlord and tenant relationships, continues on well beyond that. The impact on family finances of lost businesses and lost rental income could go on for a long time.

They are really the two questions, minister, to get a little bit of clarity around that pandemic period question. For example, I think we have three weeks left of the emergency period at the moment unless it gets rolled over, but if you could clarify that question for me and the query on whether some sort of audit or compliance or weather eye across the whole process is something we will be able to have some access to about how it is going as it rolls out.

Part of what Mr O'Byrne was saying, with which I agree, is that it has been very difficult as MPs when we have businesses come to us and say, 'I finally prepared all the documents. I've got them all ready to go and put them in but I missed out'. In the rapidity of what we have had to do and being agile, and this parliament has really pushed hard to put things through with as much clear thinking as we have been able to provide in the middle of a pandemic, we do have time now to breathe out a little bit and perhaps step that up a bit more. I am not sure of the best way to do that but that is something I know my constituents would be very interested in.

Finally to wrap up, I know it is not just me but certainly my generation is talking about not loading the kids up and we ought not be too quick to spend all the money if we can. Yes, we want them in jobs, we want to do industry development, but we also must be very careful not to create an economic scenario in which our children are unable to get a strong foundation in life because of this terrible pandemic we are now trying to manage.

It is all about tough choices. There is some intergenerational stuff that really matters and I applaud the Government for what it has been able to do and everybody who has worked so hard to get these processes into place. Nothing is perfect in this life. It is quite remarkable and amazing that this small group of people together with Government has been able to adequately and carefully steer the ship to date. I truly believe and hope that things will get better from here.

[3.58 p.m.]

**Mr STREET** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I rise to make a very brief contribution. I support the Land Tax Amendment Bill 2020. It is a relatively simple amendment to the Land Tax Act 2000 to provide this 12-month waiver of land tax.

Mr O'Byrne said something about this being an uncosted policy. It is not uncosted. There was \$36.8 million-worth of commercial land tax paid last year so the program effectively had a ceiling of \$36.8 million. Whilst I am very happy to support this particular waiver I make the point that there have been a number of programs put in place since the start of this pandemic to support businesses and individuals. These include the small business interest-free loan scheme of \$50 million available for businesses with turnovers of less than \$10 million. We started very early on in our response with the small business emergency support grants of \$2500 and then we moved into the business hardship grants program, which Mr O'Byrne also touched on and we have had two rounds of that.

Notwithstanding some businesses feeling like they have been treated inequitably, I make the point, having been in small business and applied for grants like this and also being an adviser in the small business area of government with some overview of programs like this, there is not a program the Government has run that has not had people who are both favourably and unfavourably disposed to the outcomes.

**Mr O'Byrne** - That's not what I was saying.

**Mr STREET** - I understand that but there will always be businesses unhappy with the outcome of a program and there are eligibility criteria and everybody has been assessed through Business Tasmania against those criteria and decisions have had to be made on eligibility.

**Mr O'Byrne** - It is not about eligibility though. All of them were eligible from the information they got. It was how they were treated and how decisions were made.

**Mr STREET** - Again, I make the point that there are people who are favourably and unfavourably exposed to any particular program and that is just a fact of the matter.

In addition to these grants the Government has waived taxi licence fees for the year 2020. We have provided \$1.5 million to the cultural and creative industries. The roads component of motor tax and vehicle registration has been waived if the business has been significantly impacted by measures taken to manage COVID. We have provided \$5000 grants for businesses that hire an apprentice or trainee in the tourism, hospitality, building and construction and manufacturing industries, and \$3000 to individuals for rapid response skills improvement if they have lost their job during this time period. We have the rapid response skills matching service available.

Regarding business hardship grants round 2, we have had the Digital Ready for Business programs receive an extra \$150 000. The number of businesses that have come to me where this pandemic has accelerated their desire to get online or to upskill themselves in that area in order to be able to continue functioning as a business has been amazing. I am glad that we have been able to provide some form of help with the Digital Ready for Business program.

There is \$2.6 million towards air freight services for time-sensitive freight, including seafood as well as providing access to our Bass Strait islands. We have provided funding to regional chambers of commerce in order to support businesses. We have also provided targeted funding to

a number of organisations like the TCCI to support businesses that have come asking for assistance. We have business support provided through other government departments like the primary health care grants program of \$10 000 available to eligible applicants to support continued delivery of primary health services. There are fisheries fees and licence relief.

One of the issues that came to my attention quickly was the number of people who contacted me in government-owned properties with leases in place. We waived the rent in all government-owned properties for commercial and private tenants for six months. Water and electricity bills will be waived for the first quarterly bill received after 1 April for small business customers on tariff 22, 94, 82 and 75. Electricity prices have been capped and water prices will be frozen until the next financial year and all fees and charges subject to the Government Fees Unit Act 1997 have been frozen.

In addition to that we have payroll tax relief, payroll tax waivers for hospitality, tourism and seafood sectors and additionally the local government loan scheme of \$150 million. I know a lot of local governments across the state have applied for money, my home council, the Kingborough Council, being one of them. I have recently visited the imaginatively named Kingston Park on the old Kingston High School site to have a look at the work that is going on there.

**Mr O'Byrne** - Was it a competition?

**Mr STREET** - Believe it or not that was the competition winner, Kingston Park. The council is currently constructing the state's largest playground and the mayor has assured me that they have only been able to do that through the provision of this no-interest loan. Their cash flow was at such a point that they were going to have to pause activity on that. I hope to be able to visit in the summer time and see that completed project and trust that not just Kingborough residents but people all over the south of the state will be able to enjoy that.

We are not through this. A number of speakers have said today we only have to look a couple of hundred kilometres north to see that we are not through this and what can happen when things go wrong. This is a fast-moving situation. It needs to be dealt with on a daily, almost hourly, basis. I encourage not just Tasmanians but all Australians to lift their gaze above what is going on in their community, their state or their country and see what is going on overseas. Without wanting to stretch a tangent too far, the Black Lives Matter movement in recent times has allowed the media to point to a number of institutions that have endemic racism that needs to be fixed. They are absolutely right about that. I will take this opportunity to hand the media in general a mirror to hold up to themselves because on either Sunday or Monday just gone, the world had its single largest daily tally of new coronavirus cases. Unless you went to the bottom of some of the news pages that I use, you would not know that. I cannot help but think that perhaps the reason is that the increase that is happening now is not coming from the United States or the United Kingdom or from Australia or from Anglo-European countries but is now affecting areas of the world that we do not hear enough about in the media.

Yes, what is going on in Victoria is terrible but let us just pause and reflect on the fact that there are 20 000 new cases occurring in India every day of the week. It is happening in Indonesia; it is happening in South America. It is starting to happen in Africa. It is happening to people who are potentially going to be far more adversely affected than any single community of Australia was.

**Ms O'Connor** - While you are having a swipe at the media, the non-coverage of the Arctic reaching 38 degrees Celsius is also noteworthy. You have to go searching for that information.

**Mr STREET** - It is an admirable skill you have, Ms O'Connor, that no matter what we are talking about you are able to get the point back round to something that you want talk about.

**Ms O'Connor** - Who does not do that in here?

**Mr STREET** - I am happy to acknowledge that what you are talking about is true, but what I am talking about is the blind eye that we seem to be turning to the third world countries and what is occurring in them.

I want to finish by saying we are not through this. We have done a lot of good work in this place together as a number of speakers have said in supporting businesses and individuals.

It is not over. I cannot help but feel that the rush from some to pressure the Premier in to naming a date to open our borders is so that he can be held to a date if something happens in the near future that means that we have to reconsider it. Cynicism is one of the things I have been born with, Mr O'Byrne. You will just have to put up with it.

If we see nothing else, from what is going on around the country, particularly in Victoria, it is that this situation develops quickly and it gets out of hand quickly. We cannot be held to specific dates for border openings simply because we all want to get back to normal. If we get nothing else out of this pandemic, it is that people might appreciate just how lucky we are in general.

Normal was a great thing but we cannot just will it back it normal. It will not just happen because we want to it to. We need to have a structure in place to make sure that when we do open the borders they are open for good. Then we do not have to go back because, as the Premier pointed out this morning, the worst thing that can happen right now is that we ease restrictions, we open the borders and we have to go back. There are businesses that simply will not survive that.

[4.08 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Minister for Finance) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I will close the debate and thank Mr O'Byrne, Ms O'Connor, Ms Ogilvie and Mr Street for their contributions. I have genuinely learnt a lot; it is interesting to listen to people's points of view, including things that are tangentially stretched but nonetheless related to our way of life in Tasmania. It is good to be reminded about what is going on in the northern hemisphere and the other side of our hemisphere as well. Thank you for those remarks.

I will address the questions to the best that I can from previous speakers.

It would not serve the debate particularly well if I spent much time arguing over the time frames involved in this legislation. It has been a very tight time frame that we have been working with, both between government and its own Office of Parliamentary Counsel. Things like the development of the bill, the quite proper Cabinet process that must be followed, and ensuring that members of this House have as much time as possible to be briefed on it are things that we have been very conscious of. Noting that the bill itself is not contentious does not change the fact that we have attempted always to get the bill to people as swiftly as possibly so that you, Ms O'Connor, and you, Mr O'Byrne, and Ms Ogilvie, particularly as non-government members could have a no-surprises approach that we have endeavoured to keep to.

I will not tell you how long I had the bill for before you got it, but I will hint that it was not very long. We have moved things along quickly. That applies from time to time as we try as

faithfully as we can to respect the usual tradition of the House, which is that you should usually expect two days' notice before a bill is brought on for formal debate. We are working to that. Apologies for any ruffled feathers along the way but people would accept that everybody is working really well and doing their best.

I thank the Labor Party, the Greens and Ms Ogilvie for their support.

Before I forget to say it, I want to let people know that we appreciate the work of the OPC. We have been putting a lot of pressure on them now for the best part of this first half of the year and they keep delivering. They tell us from time to time how it is going to be a bit of a stretch, but they have not failed us as a state, as a parliament and as a government.

In relation to the costings, this policy is entirely costed. It will be less than \$36.8 million. That is the outside envelope of this policy. We expect it to be less than that; we would like it to be less than that. Not to make too fine a point about it, if an organisation or an owner is liable for land tax and they can afford to pay it, they should pay it. If they have not suffered an unexpected or significant loss related to COVID-19, they should pay it.

We look to the commissioner as an independent statutory officer to administer the current law and the proposed law, fairly and impartially and at times perhaps, with the compassion that this House is attempting to inject into this bill.

It will be less than \$36.8 million but there is not a clear view at this time on how much of a discount on that the Government might anticipate. Unlike a grant scheme where you are administering a grant fund, this is a way where you are foregoing potential revenue. The outside costing on this is \$36.8 million I am advised. Until we have a determination made in all cases of the 8000 individuals, citizens and/or corporations who are liable to pay, we will not have a definitive lower figure at this time. When one is obtained we will tell the parliament without delay, as the parliament should expect.

I turn to the other questions. 'What is meant by significant?' is a very fair question. If I were not a member of the Government, I would be asking the same question from my seat in this place as well. I appreciate quite sincerely that there is a real interest in this. I have the same interest as the minister bringing the bill through.

This is something where the landowner must be adversely financially impacted to be eligible for the land tax waiver. The impact must be unexpected and not insignificant. Requiring that the adverse impact is unexpected prevents a landowner from claiming an exemption relating to pre-COVID-19 financial losses or losses arising from factors other than from COVID-19 that were foreseeable by that land owner, that tax payer. Requiring that the adverse financial impact is 'not insignificant' prevents immaterial rent reductions. For example, a rent discount of \$10 per week that a commercial landlord had might have been passed on to their commercial tenant. If they had managed to negotiate that, they must be a very good negotiator. That would be an immaterial rent reduction, not a significant loss.

A period of vacancy might be considered a material loss but I am sure members here would agree that a two-day period of time where a property was vacant would not be considered material or significant and certainly not material enough to be sufficient to trigger the exemption, noting that the exemption is a full exemption for the tax liability for the full financial year.

An additional benefit of using this term is that it provides the opportunity to the commissioner, as a fair-minded and independent arbiter of applications, to allow the adverse financial impact to be considered in the context of that landowner's circumstances. For example, a \$1000 financial impact on a major retailer may not meet the threshold, whereas a \$1000 financial impact on a corner store retailer may well be considered significant enough to trigger the exemption.

In drafting this legislation, OPC on behalf of the Department of Treasury and Finance on behalf of Government, has sought to ensure that we have robust legislation that can be administered, knowing that the character and the application of these rules by the commissioner is intended to follow through with the Government's belief that we need to provide support to those who warrant it because they have suffered financial losses. I will conclude this point by acknowledging again that we get it; we understand that members of parliament like to know how this will be applied.

I would like to make a comment on guidelines. The commissioner will be developing guidelines as soon as the legislation is passed into law. The intention clearly is to give as much forward knowledge to potential applicants about what they can expect so they can decide whether or not it would be in their interest to make an application. That will be put out proactively with the intention of giving people as much information as possible so they can know whether they should apply or not because they have not suffered an unexpected or significant loss due to COVID-19.

Land tax liability is triggered on 1 July 2020 but notices for that payment are not made until much later in the year, so it gives people time and it also gives the commissioner time to potentially apply the waiver in advance of the notice going out when people have actually put in their application in advance of the notice. Is that clear?

I was asked about the commencement date, and I have advice for you on my -

**Ms O'Connor** - I haven't seen that in legislation before, which is why I raised it with you.

**Mr FERGUSON** - You are talking about the commencement?

**Ms O'Connor** - We are talking about the commencement and it being clear that should the act not have received Royal Assent it will have been taken to come into effect on 1 July.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Yes. I also took a shallow dive into the Acts Interpretation Act and section 9(3A) of the Acts Interpretation Act says that if an act is to commence on a day to be proclaimed, the short title and the commencement sections of those are taken to commence on Royal Assent unless the act says otherwise - and of course it says otherwise.

**Ms O'Connor** - But you would agree that it shouldn't be a habit that parliament gets into?

**Mr FERGUSON** - I cannot say with any certainty that this has not happened in recent times.

**Ms O'Connor** - Nor can I; I just don't recall seeing it.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I would be surprised. In fact, the bill that we just passed earlier today, while not using the same form, actually makes it clear that the act commences on 1 June, which is 20 days ago, and it has not even been to the other House yet. I am not trying to be cute but I am learning about this as well, and my advice is that section 9 of the Acts Interpretation Act is really

about dealing with commencement dates, including for bills that had commenced before 1 January 1982 - when I was in grade 3 - so it is a modernising section.

**Ms O'Connor** - You're young, aren't you?

**Mr FERGUSON** - You were at your leavers' dinner, I guess, back when leavers' dinners happened in grade 10.

Section 9(3) of the act refers to legislation post-1982. The act and the subsection Ms O'Connor is specifically raising I think deals with making it clear about when acts are taken to commence, unless the act says otherwise. In this case today the bill does say otherwise. None of section 9 other than subsection (5) applies to land tax as it was made after 1982 and it will commence on Royal Assent if that occurs before 1 July, and that could happen, but we do not know for sure. It is taken to have commenced on 1 July if Royal Assent occurs after that 1 July. It was a great question and a great opportunity for me to brush up on my Acts Interpretation Act skills as well. The purpose of section 9 is to cover what happens if an act is made without a commencement provision, but that would never happen except in private members' time perhaps. Thank you, Ms O'Connor, for that.

In relation to short-stay accommodation, foreign-owned primary production or even casinos, let me provide this general answer. In regard to short-stay the answer is the same in any category of property. Properties require a commercial code to be picked up by this legislation. There may well be some short-stay accommodation that is categorised as commercial but it would be accepted that most, particularly those that are residential dwellings that have been added to short-stay platforms, are categorised as residential and not commercial. It is expected that the vast majority of short-stay properties would be zoned residential. The commissioner would make a determination that a property satisfied the commercial zoning requirement only where commercial activities were being undertaken.

In relation to foreign-owned primary production, my answer on this is that regardless of whether it is foreign owned or locally owned, primary production land in Tasmania is rated at zero for land tax.

**Ms O'Connor** - What about another foreign entity that has commercial land or premises, that is a wealthy foreign entity but has been financially impacted during the pandemic here? Are we giving Tasmanian public funds to foreign entities?

**Mr FERGUSON** - We are not giving public funds to anybody. This is a waiver of revenue for businesses -

**Ms O'Connor** - Well, effectively.

**Mr FERGUSON** - It may well be characterised that way but we are saying if a business is able to demonstrate hardship regardless of its ownership the bill does not attempt to enter into that discussion as to ownership. It would be a very interesting legal exercise doing that but the bill does not attempt to pick up ownership. It deals entirely with whether the enterprise would have paid tax and whether it has suffered a significant and unexpected reduction during the pandemic period.

I was also asked about the pandemic period and how it intersects or interrelates with the financial year. I note and ask members to be reminded that it does not refer to the state of emergency under the Emergency Management Act; it is a reference to the Public Health Act. I do not have the



dates in my mind or in my paperwork but as I think members might know, there are in fact two emergency provisions currently in effect in Tasmania. One is for the state of emergency which has the potentially shorter duration than the health emergency which is also in effect, which I think we will agree will have a longer duration. Is that clear?

**Ms Ogilvie** - Yes, but we don't know how long it will be.

**Mr FERGUSON** - No we don't, but the legislation deals with one financial year and of course the liability for that financial year is triggered on 1 July. That is when it is assessed but this legislation provides the opportunity for an application to not pay or have that land tax waived if during the pandemic period these criteria were triggered.

**Ms Ogilvie** - In toto as well, so it is the whole of the event.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Correct. I am now speaking to the question about the late payment of rent or the rent holidays. The exemption applies where the landowner has been adversely financially impacted. In the case where rent has been holidayed or delayed for a period it is reasonable to conclude that the owner will, in fact, have been financially impacted as a result. Whether that impact is significant will depend on the length of time rent is delayed and the cash flow impacts of that delay. These are the sorts of questions that the commissioner would be asking an applicant. Each instance will be assessed by the commissioner on the information provided when an application for the exemption is made.

As minister, I have posed the question myself to my officials to my left and it is something that we are going to take on board. This may be the sort of question that is placed on the application paperwork as a result of you asking me about it.

I thank the House for the debate, for the questions, but more importantly for the demonstration of continued support for Government, for the parliament, to be doing what we can. We cannot do everything. We would like to do everything but the things that we are able to do are targeted. As much as possible they are not structural. They are intended to be interventionist in the immediate future, taking account of the fact that everybody is being asked to lift and they are.

People are being extremely generous. Just thinking for example about a commercial tenancy arrangement, I am now speaking out of my portfolio but I still have not had brought to me a single case in my electorate, that I am aware of, of a commercial tenant that has had to go to mediation. I am sure there will be some but I am not aware of any.

**Ms Ogilvie** - I have had one, but not a slew.

**Mr FERGUSON** - That is saying something, isn't it?

**Ms Ogilvie** - Yes, people have worked together.

**Mr FERGUSON** - That tells me that it bears out the fact that most people are good and most people are trying to survive through this and help each other. Of course, there may well be some self-interest at play because no commercial landowner wants to get through to the end of the pandemic and there is no tenant who wants to occupy their building. That said, I think it bears the fact out that most people are good. Most people are trying not just to look after their own arrangements but the people around them.

I take on board Ms O'Connor's comments about the young people of Tasmania and I share that concern. As a parent of, I cannot say the parent of three teenagers anymore, but the parent of two teenagers, I do see the way that it affects the younger generation. They are entitled to our ongoing concern and an eye to their future as the future politicians of this House and this state and indeed the future taxpayers of this state. We need to make sure we do not burden them with the decisions that we are making today.

What we are doing is having an eye to the health of the state. There are different countries that could have managed this in very different ways. For example, just let the disease wash through and we will all see how it goes and that would have been an eye off the individual, wouldn't it?

We have taken decisions that have specifically had a regard for people who would be more vulnerable to dying from a disease which might have actually had marginal impact on a young and healthy person. We have made that decision. I believe it says a lot about the values of this country and this state and the public health profession itself that we would effectively all be prepared to say, we will pause, we will stop and make sure that we have protected people and taken them out of harm's way. To think that despite the very sad reality of 13 Tasmanian lives lost during the pandemic and I hope no more, despite that sad reality we expected did we not, in this House we expected it to be more. We expected it be a longer lasting pandemic.

I will come back to my portfolio now and conclude and thank everybody for contributing. I thank our Treasury officials and importantly, thank the business community of Tasmania for hanging in there. We are here today to pass this legislation to provide some material cash flow support to your business particularly if you would otherwise have had to pay land tax when you are going through a very difficult time. I commend the bill with those words.

**Bill read the second time.**

**Bill read the third time.**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

[4.30 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I move -

That the House do now adjourn and begin the COVID-19 MPI.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

### **COVID-19 Emergency**

[4.31 p.m.]

**Ms ARCHER** (Clark - Attorney-General) - Madam Speaker, the matter of public importance is usually something the Opposition takes the lead on unless it is allocated to us.

It is my great pleasure to provide a bit of an update in relation to some things in my portfolios, either in response to the COVID-19 pandemic or the recovery and stimulus package so I might cover a few things.

Obviously, there has been an enormous social and economic shock to Tasmania as a result of COVID-19 and its impacts have been spread far and wide through every region, every city and town and through every household and business. To date, 226 cases of coronavirus have been identified in Tasmania while tragically 13 lives have been lost and we must not forget that. In this place it seems that that very real fact some days is being overlooked when we see the gross politicisation of some of these issues.

It has been heartbreaking to see the thousands of Tasmanian jobs lost as a result of this pandemic and many businesses closed. Our Government is committed to supporting Tasmanians not only through the challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic but through immediate measures and long-term strategies where our Government is striving to get Tasmania and Tasmanians back on their feet.

In the area of residential tenancies, in March the Government made legislative changes to residential tenancy arrangements to protect tenants from the major economic impacts of COVID-19. These were not changes that we made lightly as a government and were only undertaken because of the widespread impact of COVID-19 on our community.

The Tasmanian Government was a leader in this area and legislated these protections before any other jurisdiction and before the National Cabinet agreed on residential tenancies. Yesterday, I announced that the Government would extend certain protections for residential tenants to 30 September 2020. This timing will bring Tasmania into line with the expiry of protections in most other states and territories.

It should be noted that most other jurisdictions put measures in place in the weeks following the National Cabinet agreement which provided for a 30 September end date. So, while the expiry dates for the Tasmanian protections were earlier I have always been very clear that we would review arrangements as we moved closer to 30 June. In fact, in response to a question from the Opposition housing spokesperson, Ms Standen, I told the Subordinate Legislation Committee on 22 May - and I quote myself:

In terms of what we might do as a government, and we have been very open about this, we are very willing and prepared to look at extending should we need to do so. We will need to be looking at the Public Health advice at the time, how that is impacting us. All of those things need to be taken into account. We are starting to review all of that and obviously as we get closer to those time periods we will be in a much better position to know whether an extension may or may not be needed.

That is exactly what we did and that has resulted in my announcement yesterday of extended protection. So it came as some surprise when I was informed by a Labor media release that I have done a backflip when it was no such thing. We have always said that we would extend this period in line with other jurisdictions.

**Ms White** - We did not actually but the day prior *The Examiner* reported the Minister for Housing saying it would not be. Read *The Examiner* from the day earlier.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order, Ms White.

**Ms ARCHER** - I just quoted myself to the Opposition Leader. Go back and read my quote.

**Ms White** - Well, you might like to tell the Housing minister.

**Ms ARCHER** - I am the minister responsible and in relation to the notice and the extension of the notice and the provisions that we have had in place there is absolutely no doubt at all. I gave that evidence to the Subordinate Legislation Committee.

**Ms White** - Why did you say that then? Talk to the Housing minister.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order, Ms White.

**Ms ARCHER** - Mr Deputy Speaker, the Government will do this by extending the emergency period and the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 until 30 September and issuing further notices under the COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020. These notices will prevent rent increases and evictions following a notice to vacate issued by a property owner. However, I stress that this is not an opportunity to avoid paying rent. We strongly advise tenants, as we have been doing all the time, to keep paying their rent if they are able to do so.

Some minor changes to the protections will also be made. A landlord will now be able to issue a notice to vacate for a lease of no fixed period in the event of a sale of a property, major renovations or for the owner or close family member to move into the property. Existing exemptions to the protections which allow for termination for unlawful use of a property or for wilful damage and violence will remain in place.

In March the Government also put in place measures to restrict residential tenancy inspections to emergency reasons only. This was done to reduce the risk of the spreading of COVID-19. The Residential Tenancy Commissioner will shortly issue a notice which will remove the temporary provisions on rental inspections from 30 June 2020. This is because of Public Health advice to the effect that currently there is no evidence of community transmission or active COVID-19 cases in Tasmania. Given the easing of restrictions allowing visitors to residential properties, it is proportionate and reasonable that property inspections recommence under the requirements of the Real Estate COVID-Safe Workplace Guidelines to provide protections to tenants. Those guidelines are very good, as every business and workplace now have firm guidance.

Significant protocols have now been put in place to ensure social distancing and personal hygiene measures are implemented for all residential tenancy inspections. These are outlined in detail in the Real Estate COVID-Safe Workplace Guidelines and that is available on the Worksafe Tasmania website.

I will provide an update on the rent relief fund briefly because there is an additional measure for residential tenants and landlords. We announced the establishment of this fund for private residential tenants still experiencing extreme hardship due to COVID-19. That fund became available from 25 May and offers up to \$2000 to eligible tenants. COVID-19 rent relief payment is a one-off payment paid directly to landlords or their agents who have entered into an approved temporary rent reduction agreement with their tenant to keep them securely housed in their principal place of residence.

I am pleased to report that as at Friday 19 June, Housing Connect received applications for 986 individuals for the rent relief fund across 799 properties. A total of 91 individuals have been approved and paid, while a further 18 individuals have been approved and will be paid as at 24 June, with more being assessed.

I thank Tasmanian tenants, landlords and property agents for their understanding and patience through this very difficult period. We recognise it has not been easy for many. The extension of some things and not others is to provide some balance between landlords and tenants. I know there is some concern with landlords too and we are doing everything possible to ensure that there is that available support.

I was not able to get to some things I wanted to say about our northern regional prison but can do so on another occasion.

### **Time expired.**

[4.38 p.m.]

**Ms WHITE** (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to make a contribution on this matter and to acknowledge the extraordinary work Tasmanians have done to get us to this point in time. We have had five weeks now with no new cases in Tasmania. I thank all our health professionals and others who are dedicated to the hard work of getting on top of the virus in Tasmania for their extraordinary dedication and hard work.

It has been a really difficult time for many people in our community and many sacrifices have been made by individuals and businesses. Sadly, 20 000 Tasmanians have found themselves without work as a result of this pandemic and many businesses have been forced into situations they could never have imagined, with some wondering if they will ever open their doors again.

It is important, more so now than ever before, that we support those individuals and businesses to recover from the economic impact of this crisis. There is no doubt that Tasmania has done an exceptional job in managing the health crisis but the economic impact is having a profound effect on our community and its impacts will be long lasting, unfortunately. There are important steps the Government could be taking now to ease some of the pain. I welcome the announcement today to move to relax social distancing to allow people to congregate in larger numbers together by moving to one person per 2 square metres. That will make a huge difference to helping businesses reopen and helping people get back to work.

The Labor Party has been happy to participate in the process the Government has established through the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council. We launched our submission on Sunday which is primarily focused on creating jobs. We know that 20 000 Tasmanians are out of work. There are real concerns about what happens for them come September when JobKeeper expires, a date set by Scott Morrison. It is his drop-dead date which could sadly be the drop-dead date for many businesses unless he comes to his senses and extends JobKeeper and the protection it affords people beyond the September date.

It is also very important that the federal government looks at the provision of support through JobSeeker. With 20 000 people in receipt of JobSeeker, if in September that returns to the woefully low levels that Newstart was previously at, that will have a devastating impact on those individuals and their families. Come September we could see a further contraction of the economy and our greatest spike in the unemployment rate if both JobKeeper and JobSeeker are not extended.

We made a contribution to the Premier's Social and Economic Recovery Council because we have a number of ideas we have collated in consultation with industry advisory councils that have been established by the Labor Party meeting regularly with unions, business leaders and individual members of our electorates and we have put forward a range of initiatives for the Government to consider through that process. It includes some projects that the Government has already announced because the Government needs to get on and deliver those projects. It is so important now that we create jobs for Tasmanians. It is the number-one priority for us to address as we deal with the economic impacts of this virus.

The submission we made also acknowledges the very important responsibility of looking after people who have been hardest hit by the impacts of coronavirus and making sure that together we can build a better and fairer Tasmania to support people through this recovery and ensure that we provide hope and opportunity for all Tasmanians as we recover from this.

Before this pandemic, one in four Tasmanians were already living in poverty. For them, returning to normal is not a particularly good prospect. They were already living in very difficult circumstances. We need to aspire to something better than normal. That is certainly what the Labor Party believes and that is why our proposal to the Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council contains a number of initiatives that support people not only to get into work but put a roof over people's heads. Our initiatives support better education, better health facilities, support women to re-enter the workforce, particularly focusing on TAFE training in areas of skill need such as aged care, disability care, providing opportunities for apprentices to be engaged on government projects, mandating for 20 per cent of all workers on government projects be apprentices and trainees, providing hope for people with this pathway to employment here in Tasmania.

We have an incredible opportunity out of this crisis to shape a better Tasmania. We are willing and have contributed through this process the Government has established the ideas that we have for how that can be achieved.

There is no doubt that many people are doing it tough right now and we have heard some heartbreaking stories, but it is also very important that we think about the future. The Government has a number of programs it has announced throughout this time. Some have worked well and some have not. The hardship grants for businesses is an example of that and the Government needs to quickly rectify that because whilst they say there is a review under way, it is taking too long and the businesses we have spoken to are very worried about their future.

I urge the Premier to act swiftly to remediate that issue because there are too many businesses potentially about to close that are in desperate need of financial support. They missed out on energy grants, missed out on remissions, missed out on business grants and missed out on other supports but are facing very dire circumstances. We need to get Tasmania working again. We need to provide jobs for Tasmanians. We need to provide hope for Tasmanians that their future will be better.

It is about looking after people who have been most severely impacted, strengthening our regions, building a better Tasmania by investing intergenerational infrastructure that will drive productivity across the state and also providing work opportunities for Tasmanians to take advantage from that public investment.

Spending public money, taxpayer money, should be done in the best interests of all Tasmanians. Providing job opportunities for Tasmanians as we are rolling out the infrastructure

projects the Government has announced for us seems to be a no-brainer. We should be giving every opportunity for Tasmanians to get those jobs, providing a pathway through TAFE, removing the barriers of cost, which are a burden and prevent many people from taking up a VET qualification; it is one way we can provide hope for people that there is a future for them here in Tasmania.

**Time expired.**

[4.46 p.m.]

**Dr WOODRUFF** (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, since we spoke only a fortnight ago in the last COVID-19 MPI in this place, things have changed dramatically across the globe when it comes to this pandemic. We are seeing a rapid uptick day by day in the number of coronavirus cases that are being reported worldwide.

I believe there were 136 000 cases reported yesterday. I read a statistic yesterday which said that in the first three months of the coronavirus epidemic, a pandemic worldwide, it took three months to get to the first 1 million cases worldwide, and that figure has been reached worldwide again in the last week. In other words, in the last week, 1 million cases have been reported worldwide. This should tell us very clearly that this is not a short-lived pandemic.

We are seeing dramatic pressures across the world and it underscores why Australia is right to maintain its international border restrictions. The situation within Australia also demonstrates that things continue to change and it is a virus that we cannot take for granted. We are right to have the border restrictions that we have in Tasmania today. That is the advice of the Public Health experts who have guided us, as a state, the best that they can, through this pandemic so far. Despite the terrible experiences for everyone involved in the north-west outbreak, we have managed to scrape through with far fewer lives lost and overall many fewer sacrifices than countries like Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries are experiencing today.

We cannot underscore the sacrifices that have been made and that people are experiencing in Tasmania, and the conversations Australia wide and in Tasmania make it really clear that we have difficult waters ahead of us. It is not an easy sea to navigate and there are no stars to guide us; we have to be constantly alert to the conditions and they change day by day.

It is a mistake to think that we can set a course today for a site that we want to get to in six months or a year's time. It is a mistake because we are not in control of this virus unless every person in Tasmania stays in their house, and we continue to have Zoom meetings between now and when a vaccine is achieved, and we have pretty much shut down all businesses. We will have to continue to adapt and be very nimble with our public health response, our contact tracing, testing, the support, the continual and unrelenting support for Public Health staff, the continual and unrelenting resourcing of the public health system in order to make sure that we are able to keep an eye on any small outbreaks or case numbers that are reported.

In that context, we have a very fragile community in Tasmania, in Australia, and worldwide. This community in Tasmania has been bounded by trust. We have weathered - and continue to weather - difficult circumstances because of the trust that has been built up around the fact that the Government has listened to the Public Health advice and has taken that.

In that context, the Greens on behalf of many people in the community are truly distressed that the Government is peddling a mistruth that we need to have major projects legislation in order to have a COVID-19 economic recovery. It is a lie. We do not need that legislation. It is unnecessary.

It has no purpose. There are other legislative measures that exist. It is really wrong and destabilising for this premier to seek to threaten the status he has achieved by trying to introduce that noxious and unnecessary bill.

It is a bill which is utterly divisive at its core. It is an election promise that the Liberals made in 2014 to the Property Council. It fulfils their commitments to the richest corporate donors, to the dodgy property developers, to the foreign investors, to the people who would seek to trash our wilderness, to the people who would seek to stomp over communities across this state to make private gain, to make personal gain, to take public land to trash a place like kunanyi for a mate of a previous environment minister, Matthew Groom. Deals done, mates talked to. This bill is nothing other than a fast track for dodgy development because if it was anything other than that it would just go through the process like all other developments do in Tasmania. It would go through council.

This has been written to shut up the community, to keep people quiet and it is really wrong. It is a black stain on this Premier that at this time he allows a minister like Mr Jaensch, the Planning minister for so-called planning, to try to pretend that communities that stand up with concerns about the major projects bill are in some manner going against the state and it is a shame on him.

**Time expired.**

[4.53 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise today to add some comments to how people are faring during this dreadful pandemic. I am coming out of the most acute part of this dreadful phase that poor old Tasmania's been through and I want to specifically talk about the great and dear people of Mount Nelson.

They have had a tsunami and a deluge of water on that mountain, on that hill, tonight and I have been thinking about them. I have been thinking a lot about the locals and how suburbs have been affected by the pandemic, so if we think about Mount Nelson of course whether you come up the Southern Outlet or Proctors Road the first thing you see are the rugby grounds and the sporting fields which have been empty for quite some time. I know all of us have spent many great times and days up there not just with the rugby but with women's football which was amazing and also Gaelic football. My family may even have gone there and practised some hurling with the lads. They love that game.

If you think about local sporting clubs which have found it very difficult to keep things going during these times, and as you move up that road the fire station there, I hear that they are all volunteers at that station. They do an amazing job so these people, these friends of ours get out on the fire truck at Christmas and get Santa on the truck. They know all the kids, they hand out sweets to the kids and all the families tumble out their houses onto the streets. It is a very tight-knit community.

I have heard recent reports though that there have been four-wheel drives entering into the bush behind Hobart College, through the back of the fire station exit and causing some damage to that bush environment. It might be something I need to talk to Mr Shelton about. It is something I will raise with the minister.

We were very grateful for that station. It is in a suburb that does have a higher fire risk and although houses are being built there, which is a good thing, there is still a lot of bushland. Depending on which side of the ridge you live, the risk is higher or lower.



Going up the road is Hobart College. They have been through the wringer with the students not being able to go to school, trying to deliver courses online. Some kids, particularly years 11 and 12 have found it easier than others depending on the courses they are doing. Some courses lend themselves to online learning and some do not. I have a year 11 in my house. We have found it difficult, it has not been easy. As a mum, I just want to say that there are some good things that came out of that experience, but there are some things that we perhaps would not want as the norm. I implore everybody to keep an eye on those year 11 and 12 kids. They have been through a very intense and surreal experience whilst they are trying to do what is a pivotal couple of years in their education and schooling. It has not been easy. Just because they are back at school does not mean things are necessarily going well for everyone, and I include mental health issues in that.

The buses have kept going, and that is good. Everybody knows and loves the Mount Nelson store. Unfortunately I have heard that there are changes there which will be really bad for the suburb if there is no store there, so I hope they are able to sort things out.

One of the issues that is able to be fixed with all this pandemic funding and road funding - you know I love a road. What I have been on about for a while is to get the guttering, kerbing and footpaths fixed up through Mount Nelson. When there is a rainy day, all I can think about is all that mud sloshing down the hill that I used to drive through when I lived there. There is a very good opportunity for a very local, good result there to get some proper lighting up as well so that people can use the amenity of their local suburb, particularly as people are still staying close to home.

The little park has a small building that is used for art classes. It would be great to see some more things happening in there, real local community events, courses and gatherings. The update to the park was beautifully done. I know everybody uses that and loves it very much.

If you head up towards the Signal Station there is great amenity up there as well, but people do get concerned, heading into bushfire season, about safety and security there. I have spoken to the minister, Mr Shelton, around those issues and making sure that the clearing out, picking up is undertaken, keeping the area as safe as possible.

Coming back down the other way, down through Rialannah Road. The end of that road is still a dirt track, depending on what the local residents say, of course, but certainly there is room for improvement there.

When you talk about Mount Nelson everyone thinks about coming down the bends. You get to Mount Nelson Primary School, which is a fabulous little school. That school is smallish; it bats above average when it comes to results so nothing but credit for that school.

Then as you come down the bends, all the way down to Sandy Bay and the top of Hutchins, in that area as well, the road is pretty good, but it certainly could do with a bit more love on the bends as well, and some of this is lighting.

I will wrap it up at that. I wanted to be quite local about things that we could do for people in their local communities in their suburbs, the real issues that are affecting them. I am very keen to be on the record about those issues and think about other things that we can put up at Mount Nelson sitting alongside the school, including environmental and university colleges.

**Time expired.**

[5.00 p.m.]

**Mrs RYLAH** (Braddon) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I stand to speak tonight about our COVID-19 response. In particular, one of the signature elements of our response has been the unprecedented job creation building and construction blitz designed to boost the community and increase economic confidence through significant job creation. It has been done by the Liberal Government.

I also recognise tonight that Tasmanians have all contributed enormously to our success so far and I believe they will continue to do so. I thank everyone for their contribution.

Labor has been all over the place on infrastructure spending and jobs during COVID-19 and its go-to lately has been to play politics, flip-flopping, spend more, spend less, open faster, shut down faster, do this, do that which, I believe, reflects the undisciplined and unplanned jostling going on behind the scenes.

A gigantic external shock to the community like COVID-19 saps confidence, brings fear and a bunkering down of business and community. Money stops flowing, savings rates increase and sadly jobs are lost. As a government we responded swiftly and decisively and continued to actively manage this, taking expert advice to do what is best for Tasmania managing and adjusting the response.

Tasmania was in a very strong position before the COVID-19 shock. NAB in November confirmed we were the envy of the nation with our fourth budget surplus; we had zero net debt and a strong fiscal outlook, despite what Labor tried to portray. Confidence levels were the highest in the nation and we had, over the six years, returned the state to prosperity. We will do that again.

What is required when a shock hits an economy is to restart the flow of money in the community, both in volume of dollars available and in its velocity around and through the community through spending stimulus; rebuild, restore and grow the economy. That is what we are doing, using infrastructure spending; both capital works like roads and bridges and also building huge numbers of social and affordable houses - 2300 dwellings in fact. We are spending on Education, uncapped spending on Health, on mental health and on support services. In fact, both the bills debated today are additional support.

Our spending is wide, massive and occurring right now. We are targeting shovel-ready projects and bringing forward projects and programs right around the state. These will cause major spending and bring real benefits to businesses, to jobs and to families.

The building and construction sector has one of the highest multiplier effects, both up and down stream of its spending and coupled with that is our buy-local policy, like Cradle Mountain which was nearly 100 per cent procurement as the minister said today. Our stimulus gives huge local value.

The infrastructure sector has this massive multiplier, creates local investments and brings local jobs. Interestingly, Labor has provided a pamphlet outlining their plan. It is very clear to me it falls way short in outlining their long-term achievable recovery, with no mention of costings or figures - just a 17-page wish list. As an uncapped grab-bag of unconnected projects, is this document the Trojan horse hiding a secret tax hike Labor is not talking about?

**Ms O'Connor** - For heaven's sake. You were going quite well until then. You were making fair points.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order, Ms O'Connor.

**Mrs RYLAH** - Last time Labor faced a recession, what did they do? They sold every public asset they could get their hands on. They sold the Tote, ripping out the foundation of the Tasmanian racing industry. Do not come to us saying we are not doing enough on racing. Then they raided public sector superannuation. They certainly raided it.

**Dr Woodruff** - You are not doing enough racing.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** - Order, Dr Woodruff.

**Mrs RYLAH** - We can all remember that. I am also unsure why Labor was so intent on Tasmania footing the bill for many of the projects mentioned in this document like Burnie Port and the Bass Highway to Marrawah, which were already funded by the Commonwealth or for us to pay for council-owned roads. Surely, you know the difference? You have mentioned the Golconda Road. It is a council road - or did you just run out of ideas?

**Ms O'Connor** - Your caucus colleague wants taxpayers to pay for the Marinus Link.

This Trojan horse also lists many projects already being undertaken by our GBEs and the government, for that matter. For example, the TT-Line, under the new terminal upgrades, the coastal pathway, the Cradle Mountain development, the next iconic walk in the Tyndall Ranges, Stanley port, Burnie port, TT-Line terminal and the Marrawah to Wynyard Bass Highway, Penguin High School, Montello Primary School, King Island Hospital redevelopment, the development of hydrogen, the new prison complex, the Don Irrigation Scheme - it goes on and on.

I am pleased Labor endorses nearly every project we have under way and the stimulus through our packages and plan. This massive infrastructure spend of \$3.1 billion over two years equates to approximately \$4.2 million a day over the next two years. This spending is targeted, going to projects that will provide the biggest positive impact for Tasmanians now, but especially for job creation and improving the lives and livelihoods over the long term for young people, women, for small businesses, service providers, students, workers and families. These projects touch them all.

As I have previously said, we must increase business confidence. The flow-on from this infrastructure spending benefits tradesmen, designers, engineers, retail stores and material supply chains directly, not to mention the employees and business owners who go out and then spend in their local community. Every nook and cranny of our community will be touched by this. Significant targeted spending on infrastructure is Tasmania's way forward by providing new and upgraded facilities but most importantly by providing jobs.

**Time expired.**

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** - The time for debate on the matter of public importance has concluded. We now move to the Adjournment debate.

### **Planning System - Flaws and Failures**

[5.07 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise tonight to speak about flaws and failures in the planning system that are leading to significant stress and poor

outcomes for people I represent in Clark. I suspect that this is a flow-on consequence of a government that went to the 2014 election saying it was open for business, because that gave the signal to developers that anything goes.

I want to talk first about 36 Oldham Avenue in New Town, where council recently - by delegation, not through full council - approved four three-bedroom houses of three storeys each on a suburban block near Cornelian Bay in New Town. The travesty of this situation is that the local community was very concerned about this development application, which is entirely out of keeping with the local area. There were 10 representors from locals in the community.

The development application was lodged with council on 3 October last year. There was a bit of back and forth but the representors were not told by council that the decision would be delegated. On 20 April this year, the representors were advised by email, without a copy of a report, that the application had been approved with conditions and that their only further avenue of action would be to lodge an appeal with the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal.

The residents have done some costings there and it is going to cost them about \$50 000 to appeal a decision which ignored their representations, where there was no site visit because of the COVID-19 restrictions and a decision was made that was multiple layers of discretion because this development application was well outside the bounds of the planning scheme.

In Oldham Avenue, New Town, there has been a development approved which will be the thin end of the wedge for cheap over-development on inner-city blocks in Hobart. We are talking about four three-bedroom homes of three storeys each on a single suburban block near Cornelian Bay. Those local residents are rightly extremely aggrieved. They have lodged a complaint with council and I attended a meeting with them, the Lord Mayor and Mr Neil Noye yesterday. It is clear they feel deeply aggrieved and rightly so, because their amenity, their sunlight, traffic, all of those issues, have now been severely impacted by a decision to approve a development which under normal circumstances would surely have gone to the full council and been examined in that way.

Another one that must go to the full council of Hobart City Council is a development proposed for Enterprise Road in Sandy Bay, off Churchill Avenue. This area of land is up the back of Sandy Bay in that beautiful skyline which the people of Hobart are so proud of and which sets our city apart. In a suburban area this is a proposal for 20 units as part of a lot 1 unit proposal up the back which you would see from the eastern shore without a doubt, two and three-storey unit developments on steep land in the backyards of local residents. There has been a planner engaged. There were 123 objections to that development. People were concerned about traffic, about density and about safety because this is an area that is subject to extreme bushfire risk potentially, those scenarios that Professor David Bowman describes as pyrocumulus scenarios, and it is one little road which goes to these houses on Enterprise Road, Sandy Bay.

There is a single developer who owns both lots of land with different companies and that is a person who everyone in this room will know who is very influential with local members of parliament and local government, and that is Master Xin-De Wang. This development is totally out of place for that part of Hobart. It is contrary to good planning. It has raised 123 objections. It would profoundly alter life for people who live in that part of Hobart because of its industrial scale of overdevelopment. The locals are horrified at the prospect of three or four years of rock hammering and construction in that quiet part of Sandy Bay to build 20 units as the first stage of a multi-stage proposed development in three large tracts of land that run along the skyline behind Enterprise Road. As the locals I spoke to make clear, this development is totally inappropriate for

the area. The density of it alone should be enough to knock it off. So should the safety concerns around bushfire risk.

Local communities are losing faith that they will be heard, even with developments as obnoxious as this one, and I just gave an example from New Town where the locals were not heard. There is a deep concern within that community about this proposed development, about the influence that the developer has with a number of members of Hobart City Council, and it is no overstatement to say that the local community is alarmed at what is being presented. There will be a new development application lodged with council because the developer was asked to provide more information.

I certainly urge every member of this place to stand with local communities that are being shafted under the planning scheme.

**Time expired.**

### **Births, Deaths and Marriages Act - Amendments to Birth Certificates**

[5.14 p.m.]

**Ms HADDAD** (Clark) - Mr Deputy Speaker, 5 September 2019 was a really important day in Tasmania. You might not know why and many people in here might not know why, but it was. It was a Thursday, parliament was sitting and we were here debating the Uncollected Goods Bill. For most people it was a regular old day. Most people probably found it quite uneventful but for 61 Tasmanians it was a momentous day. For them it marked the day that this parliament's changes to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Act came into force. Sixty-one people, since that date, have made the long-awaited visit to the Office of Births, Deaths and Marriages and had their birth certificate amended to reflect their gender.

Prior to this change, transgender and gender non-binary Tasmanians living sometimes for years or even decades as one gender had legal identification documents which were wrong. That will not sound like much of a problem to people who are unaffected by such a thing but for those who are it created enormous problems every single day. Applying for a job, buying or renting a house, accessing medical treatment, enrolling in education: having your identity documents reflect the wrong name and wrong gender is a big deal.

Under the old laws, the only way that ID documents could have a gender change with Tasmanian birth certificates was if the person was married they needed to be divorced and second, that the person had undergone invasive major surgery.

I put my views on that last part firmly on the record during the debate on those laws last year and there is not time to do it again tonight but in brief, we in this place are not doctors. We are not medical professionals and it is not our place and never should it ever have been the place of parliamentarians to dictate in law that someone must undergo surgery. It is abhorrent to me that anyone would think it is okay for a bunch of politicians to dictate in legislation something like that which should be only a matter for an individual and their doctor.

That is how the laws used to operate but as a result of our simple changes that reflected the will of this parliament, that were thoroughly debated both here and in the Legislative Council and were passed into law, these requirements were removed. You know what? Since then the sky has not

fallen in, the world has not stopped turning. Instead, what has happened is so far 61 people have had their lives improved and more will, in time. Documents updated. As simple as that. Something the rest of us take for granted.

It is no secret that the Government did not support the changes. They fought hard against them and they were displeased that the will of the parliament won out, not just the will of the Government. They said there would be unintended consequences, that they were sloppily drafted and were dangerous so they commissioned the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute to examine the laws and report on whether they did what was intended or if they created any problems. That report has now been released in the last week. I commend the institute on the thorough report and commend everyone who worked on it, every person and organisation who shared their views with the institute, no matter which side of the debate they were on. The result was a very thorough report.

I accept the findings of that report and I hope the Attorney-General does and the Government does too. The institute found, and I quote:

... the changes achieve their objective and are largely consistent with best practice international human rights approaches and approaches being considered in other Australian jurisdictions.

They found that the new laws do not require further amendment in order to operate effectively and that the benefits of the changes have not come at a cost to other Tasmanians. The cruel, misleading, hate-filled campaign waged against these laws and the people they affected has been proved wrong.

I will finish my contribution by sharing the feelings of just handful of those individuals who have benefited from the law change. Here are just four short reflections that have been shared with me personally.

First from a parent of a transgender teenage girl:

I'm struggling to put into words the relief we felt when my daughter's new Birth Certificate arrived. We celebrated. There were tears of joy, it felt surreal that so much effort, pain and love had been expended just to be able to hold this simple piece of paper in our hands.

We are still recovering from the negativity of the campaign to stop people from having the right to have a Birth Certificate that reflects who they are but the arrival of this piece of paper has done much to heal the bruising effects of the negativity that was unleashed upon kids like mine.

In the words of my daughter, 'It's as good as'. Thank you again to those who heard our families and heard our children's stories ...

Second, from a person who used the laws to update their own birth certificate:

After the damaging campaign conducted against these reforms, it is truly gratifying to see the TLRI's report vindicate Parliament's support for trans and gender diverse Tasmanians. For me it is so amazing to have our parliament give

such a clear message to Tasmania that we are all equal on this island, all deserving of equal recognition.

From another parent of a transgender child:

As tears roll down my face I find a weight lifting that I had gotten so used to carrying. My family can breathe again. My family are safe for now. The findings are what we always knew they should be. The wider community is, of course, still safe and now my child can be too.

Finally, from another person who used the laws to update their birth certificate:

I didn't fully realise how much my new birth certificate would mean to me until I was actually holding it in my hands. Other people I know have said the same thing. The validation of knowing that the state recognises and respects your identity is hard to explain.

For me, I'm exactly the same person I was before, living exactly the same way but now I feel safer, happier and more confident to get on with my day to day life. It feels like Tasmania has become a safer, kinder state. I hope it keeps moving in that direction.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope it keeps moving in that direction too, and we should all hope for that.

### **University Places and Fees**

[5.20 p.m.]

**Ms O'BYRNE** (Bass) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take a few moments today to talk about a decision that the federal government has made in relation to university fees and the implications of that. The federal Education minister, Dan Tehan, has announced that there will be an extra 39 000 university places for Australian students funded by 2023 and on the surface that sounded like such a great idea. However, what he did not make clear was how he was going to fund that.

We immediately were dragged into a debate around what is more important, humanities as a study or the sciences and job-ready courses. Despite the fact that the ideas for skills and critical thinking of synthesis, judgment and understanding of ethical construct are things that businesses will need into the future, the view was that these were not things that universities should be focusing on and that we really wanted to encourage people into job-ready courses.

A couple of implications from that and the first is, our year 12 students have had a shocking year. Most people would know that despite the phenomenal efforts of their parents, families and carers and their educators and teachers who have done a phenomenal job, it has been really hard. The pressure those students have been under has been much greater than year 12 students would normally experience, which is a pretty rough year anyway.

After this decision was made, I am familiar with a number of young students who were in tears because their conversations with their families were, 'I will no longer be able to afford to go to university'. This additional cost that the government was placing on the humanities sector would

make it impossible for me to attend that and that is a distressing thing for those students to have gone through.

It actually masks a different problem. While we were busy debating the values of humanities versus the sciences, as the minister Mr Tehan clearly wanted us to and a debate that our own Vice Chancellor Rufus Black does not feel we should be having and I will quote from him. He said:

We are very clear in the University's strategy that as the principal provider of higher education for Tasmania, the humanities and social sciences are intrinsically important and vital for the well-being of Tasmanian society, and indeed the world beyond. In many ways, these values go back to our founding purposes.

It is a false dichotomy to try to separate the sciences, and the humanities, social sciences and law.

If technology and science are to contribute to sustainable human development, it needs to be done in deep conversation about what we value, what it is to be human, what sort of society we want to become and how we embody those values in laws and social structures.

While there was a debate raging about the value of humanities, what tended to get missed, what Mr Tehan deliberately wanted us to miss, was what was actually happening to university funding.

The whole package, the \$400 million over four years for regional universities, a further \$900 million for national priorities and industry linkage fund, the whole package is budget neutral. As we in this House all know, and what the community is now learning, is that it will not cost the government an extra cent to provide this additional pathway that they are saying they will provide. What they are saying is that the extra demand for uni places over the next three years is going to be funded by the first major cost cutting exercise they have undertaken since the blowout in the budget deficit caused by the lockdown of our economy, caused by the processes we have gone through with the pandemic.

The extra and the further funding, does not come from the government. It comes from universities and it comes from students. The university fee changes announced mask a huge overall reduction in Commonwealth funding, a massive reduction in Commonwealth funding. It is not only a war on humanities, it is a war on accessible and affordable education for people.

The place where the Tories go when they are under a bit of a threat, has always been to limit the opportunity for poor kids to get to university. We have seen it time and time again. As a first-generation university student, as someone who is the parent of a child who for many of her friends will be first time university students, I know how hard it is for families. They rarely say no, you cannot go to uni: what they do is they stop talking about it as an option. The reductions in student fees in priority areas are not being made up by increased Commonwealth funding as the announcement would indicate, it appears that universities are going to internally cross-subsidise courses, which they already have to do, and even if this occurs there is still going to be a funding shortfall and surely that cross-subsidisation is going to be harder to implement if demand is skewed by the course fees.



We are seeing per student per year in teaching a loss of over \$1000; nearly \$2000 in nursing; over \$2000 in allied health; over \$3000 in agriculture; over \$2000 in social science and behavioural sciences; over \$3000 in clinical psychology; nearly \$5000 in engineering; nearly \$5000 in science; \$3500 in maths; nearly \$5000 in communications; and nearly \$100 000 in environmental studies.

What we are seeing here is unashamedly an attack on universities but, most horrifically, at a time when we should be embracing our year 12 students, providing them with every opportunity to take the pathways they want, we are seeing something that is going ensure that they do not take those opportunities or pathways because universities will not be able to provide those supports. They will not be able to keep the staffing ratios they currently have, and families who are struggling to make ends meet will not be able to give their children that education pathway they so desperately need. It is a vicious attack on lower-income families. It is a vicious attack on universities. It is a vicious attack on institutions that teach people to think critically and challenge governments.

### **Rental Affordability**

[5.26 p.m.]

**Ms STANDEN** (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to make a contribution this evening on rental affordability and an opportunity I think is slipping through the fingers of this Government, a government that has failed to act to regulate the short-stay accommodation market and take urgent action that is required to make the most of an opportunity to address an imbalance that has been occurring in our housing market for some time.

The crisis in housing affordability and availability existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and that problem is well understood and has not gone away. Roughly 40 000 people are living in the private rental markets. About one in four or five households, at least, are in the private rental markets so it is a very substantial proportion of our community.

Anglicare's report on rental affordability that is released every year has consistently shown us the very limited options - in some cases, no options at all - for people on very low incomes to access private rental properties, where more than 30 per cent for the average rental household is expended on rent, one of the largest proportions of the household budget.

We know that Hobart has been for a couple of years now one of the most unaffordable capital cities in the country, with the regional parts of Tasmania not far behind. In Launceston and parts of the east coast and other parts of regional Tasmania people are really struggling to make ends meet and find an affordable rental property.

We know that in recent times there has been some softening of the rental market but the estimates of around 2 per cent or 3 per cent might amount to something like \$10 extra in a household budget. It will take some time for these market corrections to flow throughout the economy because most people in the private rental market are in lease agreements of 12 months. We recognise that more than 8000 low-income Tasmanian households are experiencing rental stress today and more than 20 000 Tasmanians have lost their job, sadly, throughout this pandemic. Around 3500 Tasmanians are on the social housing wait list, particularly because of the unaffordability of the private rental market, and 120 000 Tasmanian families are living below the poverty line, which is something that is a woeful disgrace in this day and age.

Housing security goes hand in glove and is fundamental to job security, to engagement in education and training and to contributing to society generally. All of these things underpin economic recovery and so housing security and job security go hand in hand.

We know anecdotally that a number of properties have transferred from the short-stay accommodation market to the private rental market in recent months throughout this pandemic and despite that, the returns on rental properties remain high for investors at this time. The first data report on short-stay accommodation for the period October to December 2019 was released in early February and the next quarterly report for the period January to March is now overdue and should be immediately released.

The Government and the community sector have argued that it needs that data series in order to make policy decisions about the short-stay accommodation market. Let us see that data and let us understand what has happened in this last quarter, because I suspect that there has been a significant drop and proof that short-stay accommodation has been a significant disruption in a very tight private rental market.

Furthermore, hotels and B&Bs are experiencing low occupancy due to the low visitation through the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and for the foreseeable future that is likely to be the case. Some action to regulate the short-stay market is also an opportunity to support those small businesses as we begin to recover, as Tasmanians explore new parts of our state and slowly but surely, hopefully interstate and overseas visitation returns. It is not the case now and it may not be the case for some time to come.

We recognise that two recent parliamentary inquiries have recommended further regulation of the short-stay accommodation market. The Legislative Council report into short-stay accommodation and the housing affordability House of Assembly select committee that I chaired, and which reported in February of this year, both had strong recommendations that backed in further regulation of the short-stay accommodation sector.

What has the Premier had to say? He has consistently said in the media that councils are in a position to act to impose further regulation of the short-stay market. That simply is not the case. I am advised that councils under the current planning laws do not have the ability to cap the number of properties used for short-term visitor accommodation and that the pathway to amend that legislation through RMPAT could be two years or longer.

I feel that the Premier in that case is ill-informed or otherwise wilfully ignorant when he makes those comments. He knows that only the Tasmanian Government is in a position to act to ensure both a timely response but also a consistent statewide response that ensures that councils are not left alone to make these policy decisions without the support of the state Government to further regulate the short-stay market.

The Government should act without further delay to amend regulation to place a pause on the number of short-stay accommodation permits that can be issued for entire dwellings in areas of high demand for rental housing until the market eases. We are not talking about existing permits. We are not talking about single rooms. We are not talking about areas where there is adequate rental housing, and it is not forever. It is until market conditions ease. How should they do that? The Government should immediately convene a committee including university researchers who are expert in this space, the Local Government Association, Shelter Tasmania, TasCOSS and Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania in order to inform the Government on a proper considered and sophisticated policy response to this longstanding problem.

**Time expired.**

**University of Tasmania - Inveresk Campus**  
**West Tamar Highway Projects**  
**Graduated Licencing System for Learner and Provisional Drivers**

[5.33 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to say a few things tonight on the adjournment and I will be brief.

I want to say that from the outset that since the parliament last met together, in my role as Minister for State Growth and progressing the Launceston City Deal I was very pleased recently to be joined by the federal member for Bass, Bridget Archer, and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania, Professor Rufus Black, to inspect progress of stage 1 of the campus transformation at Inveresk, together with the bridge across the North Esk River and the new student and services and library building that are being constructed. The contracts were won by BridgePro Engineering and Vos Construction and Joinery. It was fantastic to see that occur.

Also on the day we did that site inspection we were also able to announce that the university has lodged its development applications with the Launceston City Council for the future stages. The plan, I have to say, is really quite stunning. It is beautiful but also so functional in its construct and what it seeks to do for student learning and to transform the university's future as a city university. It is something I encourage people to inspect and have a look at and to speak well of. I certainly encourage the council to give it all of its support as well. I have to mention I was there with Albert van Zetten on behalf of the city.

Listening to an earlier contribution I could not let the opportunity pass without also pointing out it just happened to be the same day that news of the fee changes for higher education were announced. I feel it was unfair that the previous speaker was not able to say that the Vice Chancellor of the University of Tasmania said that these reforms are positive for Tasmania and that the package is very well aligned in areas where we see jobs growth in Tasmania are actually sitting quite well in alignment with what the university is seeking to do for people looking to upskill in higher education.

I understand that people who are doing degrees that are seeing a fee increase would not welcome that. We all understand that. But importantly we need to make sure that we are providing more support for people where we know there is a need. That is very welcome. In the interests of fairness these things should be on the record.

On the West Tamar Highway I was very pleased to be joined by the exceptional mayor of West Tamar Council, Christina Holmdahl, and the also exceptional Liberal candidate for Rosevears, Jo Palmer. We have some very exciting members, and I hope that she could be one. That is up to the voters of Rosevears. I am hopeful about that.

It is terrific to welcome and to announce that as part of four West Tamar Highway priority projects of a \$14 million package of works, the Liberal Government's plan to improve traffic flow and safety and also caters for future development along the West Tamar Highway.

Members will be thrilled to know that Hazell Brothers have won this contract. The four projects will commence construction as soon as the road construction season begins in spring. It will include upgrades: the widening the highway and new footpaths between Rosevears Drive and

Gravelly Beach Road; and further widening between Atkinsons Road and Walton Drive, that wide sweeping highway bend going around Grindelwald. People have been looking for that for some time. It will be absolutely welcomed. The highway is also to be widened between Exeter and the Batman Highway Junction to allow the construction of the new northbound and southbound overtaking lanes. The local community has been asking for that. We are delivering.

Works to improve sight distances are going to be completed at the intersection of the West Tamar Highway and Motor Road so this highway is an artery for not just motorists to get to work but for businesses to get their goods to market. It is a B-double route. It is important that it be supported for freight, primary production and the timber industry and across a range of other industries as well. As a member of this Government, we are thrilled to be delivering not just on productivity improvements but also safety improvements for motorists and pedestrians.

I also want to briefly advise the House that the Government has taken some important actions in improving the graduated licencing system for young learner drivers and provisional drivers in Tasmania. We all know that changes are due to come into effect this coming December. We have had a fresh look at that. We have taken some learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic period. Remember where we said to Learner 1 drivers that you can automatically obtain your L2 without having to have the extra test? It has been successful. We have decided to adopt that long term. We are getting rid of L1 and L2 altogether. It will be just one learner period - 80 hours of course. We are not cutting corners in supervision and we are adding a hazard perception test as an important enabler. This is will be an important enabler to help our young people get to their employment and their study. It has the blessing of the road safety advisers. It is safe. It is appropriate and we are going from 50 mandatory hours to 80 mandatory hours.

Any parents in the Chamber will agree that is already a lot of work for a family. Knowing that, we are making with that change together with if you get through your L period and your P1 and P2 period without demerits, because you are a safe driver, we will give you your adult licence for free. You will save up to \$189 on the cost of getting your licence. What a great policy.

We talked earlier today about the importance of helping our younger generation and we are doing that. We want them to be safe drivers. We want them learn for longer with their mum, dad or their mentor; we want them to drive in more conditions, daylight, night time. We want them to also have the incentive to be safe and a small reward which governments are not often very good at doing, but we are doing it, a reward for their safety. You will get your adult licence for free.

I commend the new information to members. Check it out. Tell your community about it. You will find it will be welcomed, but most importantly, this is all about all road users being safer on the road and remembering the next generation. Let us not put too many barriers in their way to getting their driver's licence safely and affordably.

**Time expired.**

### **St Virgil's College - Expansion to Years 11 and 12**

[5.40 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I will be brief as well. It is a red-letter day and a very exciting thing has happened. We heard the news officially that a school with which my family has been connected with for four generations has restored its matriculation, years 11 and 12. It is

something that the school community has been working on for a very long time. It is St Virgil's College and two others have been extended as well.

It is something that many old boys and families of the school will be very excited about. It has been a little tricky with the two campuses and then having a third move to matric as well. TCE, or even worse, HSC. I have been using that language in my house as I have had my own matric results out, looking at them and seeing which subjects I went through.

It is very good and exciting news. Planning has been well underway for some time. A lot of work went into making sure that the expansion of the St Virgil's/Austins Ferry campus is a good fit with existing schools and existing colleges. I understand they anticipate more kids will come down from the northern side and many more kids from farming areas will come along as well.

I also note that the junior campus, where we have some road and traffic issues, is in the process of implementing their kinder program. They expanded in the early years and also years 11 and 12 which I will now call TCE; I have been reminded not to call it matric.

It is a really good example of a school community that loves their school. The old boys of that school are working in many interesting and varied occupations. There are some who work in this place as well. I was reminded that my uncle, Paul Northam, was very good at music at that school and his school band became MEO 245, which was a big hit in the 1980s in Victoria. His friends who played in that band, Paul Brickhill and co, were amazing musicians and now work as professional musicians across the world.

It made me think about the value of the arts and value of music and humanities. I do not agree with the idea of putting those degrees up in cost. It is a barrier. I was very fortunate to have very much an exercise in humanities and liberal arts prior to doing law. That has given me a huge foundation in philosophy and history and the great subjects that were studied. It is one thing that school does particularly well but also it does very well on the TAFE and technical sides.

I am really looking forward to working with that school with our Glenorchy jobs hub program and project, particularly with the local businesses and engineering businesses such as Incat that are going to be recruiting heavily.

That is a snapshot of a good piece of news that I hope the school community will really enjoy.

### **Cradle Mountain Visitor Information Centre - Opening**

[5.44 p.m.]

**Mrs RYLAH** (Braddon) - Mr Deputy Speaker, tonight I rise to talk about a wonderful event I attended, the opening of the new Cradle Mountain Visitor Information Centre and the gateway precinct on 16 June. I attended with my friend and colleague, Mr Tucker from Lyons, as we were, in fact, in Lyons.

I was going to describe it because I am guessing that not many people in the House have been to the new centre. It is just amazing. Upon arriving I was welcomed by a beautifully placed moss-covered stone which stands to guide you onto the beautifully crafted path - the path leading you towards the entrance to the main building, giving you a feeling of excitement and in fact stepping away from your everyday world. It is the beginning of an adventure.

Cradle Mountain has long been one of Tasmania's most iconic destinations and is at the top of the list when organising a Tasmanian holiday for our visitors. The rugged natural beauty of Cradle Mountain and its surrounding landscapes deserves a gateway fitting for this development and unfortunately, Cradle Mountain has long been missing that.

This new world-class gateway designed by Cumulus Architects in collaboration with the landscape architects, Playstreet, builds on the beautiful surrounds with geometric external shapes and these cave-like interiors. This construction project has been beautifully built by Tasmanian company, Fairbrother, in some of the toughest weather conditions. They battled all the elements that make Tasmania this wild, untamed place we know and love.

Playstreet, the landscape designer, began with the wonderful backdrop for their proposed construction and drew from the natural landscape to construct a patchwork of natural plants, moss and hidden messages.

Cumulus Architects also drew on their surrounds, making their building sit seamlessly into the landscape, as well as adding creature comforts like the hydronic heating on the floors which add an amazing art installation which casts a shadow pattern across the very warm floor. The myrtle leaves suspended from the beautiful timber lined ceiling completed the geometric shapes and perfectly placed windows. Every time I looked I saw another aspect I had missed before. It is amazing.

Moving into the business end of the building, I was taken into the equally beautiful state-of-the-art briefing area for bushwalkers, a first aid space and offices. I would love to be able to look out from my office like these offices into the landscape that they were looking at.

The fact that access for visitors to Dove Lake and beyond is now through shuttle bus only will create more of an experience than just a Sunday drive, an experience that begins when you park your car in the newly-bitumen car park and make your way to this amazing visitor centre. The Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre and Gateway precinct are a design and building feat we as Tasmanians should be proud of. Working closely with the local Aboriginal community and other stakeholders, they have achieved a beautifully finished product befitting the crown jewel of Tasmania.

The Dove Lake shelter is the next phase of the Cradle Mountain master plan to be completed. This project was also designed by Cumulus Architects with construction by Vos, a Devonport-based firm, underway as we speak.

My thanks to everyone involved in this amazing project, from Parks and Wildlife, the Kentish Council, Cumulus Architects, Playstreet Landscape Architects, Fairbrother, the Tourism Council, Cradle Coast Authority and importantly, the Aboriginal community for their tireless work and amazing support for this wonderful project.

### **Community and Neighbourhood Houses - Services during COVID-19 Emergency**

[5.48 p.m.]

**Ms BUTLER** (Lyons) - Mr Deputy Speaker, during the COVID-19 pandemic community houses and neighbourhood houses across Tasmania have been providing amazing services to their communities. I intend to place on the record each community and neighbourhood house that I have

the pleasure to visit. I want to have on the *Hansard* the invaluable contribution that each of these houses is making to its community.

Tonight, I will start with the Dunalley Neighbourhood Community House. I visited the Dunalley Neighbourhood Community House recently and the team has worked through the pandemic continuing to provide professional support to the people of Dunalley and the Tasman Peninsula. The house provides amazing programs and the work they do really matters. The house has developed a program called Crunch Meals and it is run by volunteers out of the Eaglehawk Hall.

As you know, that region boasts some of the best fresh produce Tasmania has to offer. An impact of the pandemic has meant that many growers have been unable to supply restaurants and produce suppliers with their usual yield.

A group of local incredibly talented chefs who have been unable to work due to closures of restaurants, cafes and catering businesses volunteer their time on a rotation basis and they create 60 to 100 plus meals a week which are all sourced locally or the produce is grown locally as well. The meals are delicious, often cutting edge, nutritious and have a meat or vegan option as well.

The meals are free to the community and that is because they established a donation system where other people in the community donate money to the community house and that is then forwarded on to produce these amazing meals at no cost to the community.

The meals are delivered by local Rotary members and volunteers to people's doors and they deliver from Murdunna, Nubeena and all the way down the Tasman Peninsula. The scheme is assisting local Meals on Wheels programs as well.

The program is also about checking in on each other and making sure people are connected with people. Loneliness is an issue for many people and the COVID- 19 restrictions and isolation have left many people in the community feeling just that - lonely and very isolated. The people of Dunalley and the Tasman Peninsula are resilient and community focused.

The community is strong. The team at the Dunalley and Tasman Community Centre are evidence of this. Coordinator Jeddah Barwick, Bec Kelly who is the chair of the Dunalley Tasman Neighbourhood House, and other board members have also established a food box scheme. Locals can produce a food box. The boxes were handmade, also by other locals, which was not quite as easy as we all thought it would be to assemble these boxes but they are fabulous and robust. The boxes are filled to the brim with local produce, recipes as well, dry goods and delivered to people's homes by volunteers. The scheme is about food literacy, nutrition and supports local growers and allows the community to connect with one another.

I congratulate the volunteers and the team at the Dunalley Tasman Neighbourhood House. They have risen to the challenge of COVID-19 and have provided and will continue to provide the community a tremendous support.

## Westbury - Objection to Prison Site

[5.52 p.m.]

**Dr WOODRUFF** (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, the Westbury residents are clear that the Government has caved in to their community's strong backlash about what was the preferred site for the northern prison.

They are also sure that the battle is not over and they are bemused, outraged, perplexed and are simply maddened by the Government continuing to fixate on Westbury as the site for a northern prison. This is a battle that they are intending to continue because the Government has made a decision to choose a site which is manifestly inadequate by every measure. It was not even on the preferred site initial assessment list. It does not have access to gas, water, or sewerage services. The road to the Birrallee Westbury reserve site is in very poor condition. It is very windy, it is very narrow, and it is already of concern to local residents. How it could possibly have a continual stream of prison vehicles and the flow of workers every day, relatives coming to visit people, it staggers the locals that this site could be looked at.

The biggest and strongest reason why it is a total dud of a site was brought home to us by locals who have contacted us, the Leader of the Tasmanian Greens, Cassy O'Connor and myself, in the last few days with their great distress that this beautiful reserve estate piece of land could be chosen for a prison site. The respected field naturalist, Sarah Lloyd, who received an Order of Australia Medal this year because of her contributions to ornithology and to bird literature in Tasmania, amongst many other things, spoke of her distress about this site being chosen. She has documented over 15 years more than 30 species of birds, including endangered and threatened white goshawks, wedge-tailed eagles and masked owls. Despite Ms Archer saying that this is not a pristine piece of land, Ms Lloyd makes the compelling point that it is maybe not be pristine to look at but it is pristine for biodiversity.

That is exactly what Tasmanian dry sclerophyll forests provide. They are richer in biodiversity than wet forest and rainforest. It is the dead branches and the lying logs that are a fantastic home. The so-called degraded and log-strewn ground is where birds nest, where they feed and where the food source is, so this is the stuff of great biodiversity and has been recognised as such by its reserve land status. It is listed as a Tasmanian reserve estate on the Government's own Tasmanian land information system. It is classified reserve class informal reserve on other public land. Its reserve status is informal reserve.

It is 70 hectares of Crown land property identification number 7031141 and it was listed and reserved because of its high conservation value natural forest, purchased by the state of Tasmania in 1997 with the express purpose of meeting the Regional Forest Agreement. It was purchased in November 1997 and it was formerly owned by Westbury veterinary surgeon, the late Dr Harold Laker, who was then of Cal Zeehan in Westbury. That land was purchased as part of the CARR estate - the comprehensive adequate and representative reserve estate - which was designed to protect values on private land.

The parties to the Regional Forest Agreement who signed off on this particular land were agreed on a strategic plan for the private land component of the CARR reserve system in Tasmania. It was an advisory committee that included representatives nominated by DPIPWE by Private Forests Tasmania, the Forest Practices Board, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, and it was DPIPWE who chaired the committee.



That committee chaired by the Government, chaired by the Corrections minister who ought to know this as the previous minister for environment, her own department at the time last year was the one that made the advice on which property should be included within the CARR reserve system. This Birralea Road Westbury reserve property which is considered suitable for a northern prison was chosen to be held in perpetuity by the state of Tasmania on behalf of the Australian Government as part of the National Reserve Estate, and that is the same property that this Government seeks to raze to the ground for a minimum of 15 hectares and put a prison on it.

This is already being used as a home for endangered and threatened birds. It has amazing biodiversity and natural values. It is this type of land of all others in Tasmania that we have diminishing areas of. Ms Lloyd makes the point that she has conducted regular bird surveys elsewhere in northern Tasmania and consulted with colleagues and they know that many of the bird species she sees on this particular property that are regarded generally as common and widespread have been declining alarmingly just in the past decade. The reasons for those declines are many but what they know is that the areas of bush like this so-called bushland, as the Premier said, important bush, are fast disappearing and that all remaining habitat for these and the other species must be protected as a matter of urgency.

**Time expired.**

**Peter Hudson - Donations for Statue**  
**Water Level Alert Notification System - Derwent Valley**  
**Visits to Businesses in Derwent Valley**  
**New Norfolk RSL**

[6.00 p.m.]

**Mr BARNETT** (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased to speak on the adjournment tonight to put out a call of support for the campaign to honour the AFL legend and Derwent Valley local, Peter Hudson. We are doing this with a statue in New Norfolk's Arthur Square and we are \$5000 short. I want to say a huge thank you to Nick Cracknell and Leon Kemp for their efforts on behalf of the local community, with the support of the state Government, the Hawthorn Football Club and many locals to support the efforts to raise \$70 000 for the erecting of this statue.

Peter Hudson, as we all know, is a legend of the AFL. He kicked 5.64 goals on average over a long period of time since he joined the Hawthorn Football Club in 1967. Before that he started at New Norfolk and this is a great tribute to the New Norfolk Football Club and they are proud of him, I am proud of him, and I am advised he averaged 5 goals a game when he was at New Norfolk as well.

I want to say well done and thank you to Nick, Leon and the local community. We just need that \$5000 to seal the deal, to get the job done. The public can buy \$100 bricks to support the cause. I suggest members of the public and members of the community to reach out to Nick and Leon and make contact and pledge that donation to get that statue built and completed. I am very pleased to be part of the local community to make that happen.

I enjoyed my visit to the valley last week and want to give a shout out of congratulations to Hydro Tasmania for providing the support of a new water level alert notification system, now

available in the Derwent Valley on the Derwent River. It is going to support the farmers and other landowners as well and other river users, whether it is recreational fishing or kayaking and other uses of the river.

Thanks to Professor Rob Clark and his son and other landowners who hosted us on their farm, not far from Westerway on the river and catching up with Steve Davey of Hydro Tasmania and many others. This new technology will assist in reducing the costs from flood damage, damage to other infrastructure crops and the like and give kayakers, canoers, anglers, farmers and recreational enthusiasts information in advance of any change in water levels of the river, so it is a fantastic initiative.

I enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with the Karanja Mill with Wayne Booth and his workers, sadly affected by the tree-spiking incident not that long ago. It is a fantastic local family-owned business operating and doing a great job producing floor boards, timber panels and construction timber and the safety of his workers is a top priority. We had a great catch-up. I love dropping into sawmills all around Tasmania, rural and regional areas, but the Derwent Valley is renowned for their support of the timber industry. Norske is there and other people in the sawmilling and timber industry and they should be acknowledged.

As a government we support free speech and the right to peaceful protest, but threats, trespassing and physically endangering workers is completely unacceptable and that is why our workplace protection laws are so important and needed. Malicious action such as tree spiking is totally unacceptable.

It was great to have a conversation with the Derksen, family members who have proposals for Willow Court and a private operation, New Norfolk distillery. That is a really exciting prospect and I am keen to get behind that and other projects to bring alive the Willow Court facility and put on record to Rodney Dunn and the Agrarian Kitchen, what a fantastic facility and attraction for the Derwent Valley. Well done to them and I look forward to working that through.

I met with the mayor, Ben Shaw, when I visited and also the new general manager Dean Briggs. We caught up at a cheeky little place and enjoyed a coffee there, so thanks to Matt and Deb and their team.

I also had the opportunity to drop into the New Norfolk RSL. What a fine institution. We are so proud of the RSL and the work that they do and I was able to provide \$10 000 support to the local RSL as a result of the Government's support for the various RSLs around Tasmania. I caught up with Brian Glover, Geoff Hack, the president, and others.

It was a really great day at the Derwent Valley. They call it the valley of love but there is so much opportunity in the valley. There are productive industries, whether they be in agriculture, fruit and vegetables, and it is growing. We are proud of the work they do and I say thank you to those who hosted me who I was able to catch up with. We are very keen to get behind the various projects that I have advised the House of tonight and I look forward to continuing to work in their best interests.

## **St Helens Mountain Bike Trails**

[6.05 p.m.]

**Mr TUCKER** (Lyons) - Mr Deputy Speaker, on Saturday 20 June the St Helens Mountain Bike Trails celebrated the opening of their three Black Diamond Trails, the Shucka, which the locals named - I prefer to call it the Tucker - the Send Helens and the Icarus. There was a buzz around over the weekend as locals were given the opportunity to test out the three new trails. Each of the three new trails start at the top of Loila Tier along with the other two Blue Tier descents, Old Salty Dog and Seeya Later. Many mountain bike trails close over winter but due to the coastal location and the drier soils, the St Helens Mountain Bike Trails at Flagstaff will be open all year.

The St Helens mountain bike trails are some of the most scenic in the world. The Tasmanian and Australian governments invested over \$4.5 million into the St Helens Mountain Bike Trails network, creating a 66-kilometre stacked-loop network of trails south of St Helens featuring multiple loops, a trail into the town centre, an impressive 44-kilometre wilderness trail from Poimena that starts at the top of the Blue Tier and winds all the way to Swimcart Beach in Binalong Bay.

**The House adjourned at 6.07 p.m.**