

Mr PHIL PARSONS, THE TASMANIAN ARBORETUM, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Wing) - Thank you very much for coming along.

Mr PARSONS - I am the president, and therefore the de facto director, of the Tasmanian Arboretum Incorporated, which is a not-for-profit organisation. It is one of the few in Australia. As I understand, there is another private botanical institution in Western Australia. We are dependent a lot on our own resources. The Devonport City Council is good enough to give us a grant of \$30 000 a year now, up from \$21 000. In the last paragraph of my evidence I flagged a figure of \$5 000 - about 5 per cent of our budget. I understand the typical amount spent on promotion is in the order of 3 per cent, so we do promote ourselves, even if we are a little bit of a secret and feel a little unloved due to the visitation on some days. We take ourselves seriously, although we were referred to by one person who wanted to assist us as the Tinpot Tree Club, and indeed we may be that, but we do take ourselves seriously and we try to behave in a serious manner. Our plant records are all kept on computer and the plants are measured and checked as the international dendrology standard requires. We are a member of the Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand organisation. Most of the botanic gardens in Australia and New Zealand are either State government or part of a local government, fully-funded operation. We are also a member of Botanic Gardens Conservation International. You might have heard some evidence from people associated with Blooming Tasmania.

I understand that now 224 000 visit gardens in Tasmania. I might just expand on a comment from those who visit the Devonport Visitor Centre and are asked, 'Were we the garden of their choice?'. Multiple garden visits are not uncommon among those with an interest in gardens. As of last night, according to the plant recorder, we had 4 373 living trees.

I understand that a business plan for a new development is an acceptable way of determining the size of a sign for the business. Unless we wish to go into camera I can't name the person who advised me, but he said, 'If you want a bigger sign you should have just lied', which is not really the way I think it should be done. So I reiterate that the policy governing the size of signage allocated be reviewed so that government assists attractions and experiences to grow to their potential rather than classifies them on their existing visitation, which is what happened to us. I told the truth and, bang, zoom, there's your answer; we get a sign as big as a two-bed accommodation.

I did attend one of the Government's community cabinets. The minister at that time was Michelle O'Byrne. She was unable to be present, so there was a young person and a man from the office, and two wiser, more experienced public servants. The young man got very enthusiastic and told me he would have a reply to me within two weeks. I am still waiting and it is probably four years now. But the wiser heads went, 'Mmm, interdepartmental'.

Mr GAFFNEY - Signage has come up before and DIER has pointed out to us that that is not their core function. Their core function is to look after roads. I suppose it is a bit of an add-on. Could you explain to members where the signs are in relation to the arboretum, how many you are allowed, and the size? The Arboretum is how many hectares?

Mr PARSONS - Sixty-six hectares at our main site. We own 1.8 hectares at Hogg Creek, which gives us access to another 11 of public reserve. It was crown land then but now it is a public reserve, and if we hadn't acquired that 1.8 hectares there would be no access to the public reserve. It would be land-locked.

Mr GAFFNEY - What is the number of plants, different species, you have.

Mr PARSONS - About 1 000. We have only been going 25 years. Kew has been going 250. You can expect us to go up in numbers though - now you have got me off on my favourite subject. But there has been a change in the way botanical institutions operate so really you are not so much measured on the number of things that you have in your garden, but more about how you function in relation to the environment. The two things that modern institutions are looking at is education - the important function of convincing people that biodiversity is really important and we should keep one or two - and how you conserve your local flora. In relation to conserving the local flora, one seed bank in one botanical institution in Tasmania specialising in the Tasmanian flora is a complete adequacy. In a lot of ways besides the educational aspect, the function of a botanical institution is as a pleasure garden.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay - and the signs. Can you let us know where they are?

Mr PARSONS - Yes, well they said we could have two locations - one on the Sheffield Main Road pointing along C146, Melrose Road, and that brought people off the main access to Cradle Mountain, Sheffield-Cradle Mountain. Both are big tourist drawcards so we are quite happy with the location. We cannot really expect to have a DIER sign on every corner. The second is turning them off onto old Tramway Road, which is a bit of an old track that was put on top of the access to the tramway and on the tramway which leads into the Arboretum.

Unfortunately, old Tramway Road does not appear on some of the mapping systems because it has not been mapped so apparently each company has to go round and map the place and then they will put your new road or your old road on their TomTom or Navman or whatever the system is. So on Google we exist. We can be googled, but perhaps you have heard from people in Sheffield that these machines are making people take a different road not through Sheffield to Cradle Mountain because the machine perceives that as the shortest route. In that case we do not even exist. I am sure that will come to pass. I have probably gone off topic there. The sign on Sheffield Main Road says six kilometres and the sign on the old Tramway Road corner says 500 metres.

Mr GAFFNEY - Really, they would not allow you to put a sign on the Bass Highway there near the Forth Bridge to take you up to the Arboretum that way. There is no signage there, is there?

Mr PARSONS - No. That was what we were offered and that was it.

Mr GAFFNEY - For the members who may not know, on the Forth Bridge, where you go up the hill, there is a nice lookout, Braddon's Lookout above the Forth River, that is the other way off the main route that you would get eventually to the Arboretum. So there is nothing there.

Mr PARSONS - Except that Braddons Lookout has a humungous sign.

Mr GAFFNEY - And that is it though isn't it because the Tramway Road is just a little, narrow road. It would not be as wide as this.

Mr PARSONS - It is a lane and a quarter or a lane and a half. We had to wait some time to get it sealed and then we had to seal our own driveway before the council saw fit.

On the way up there I drove through Elizabeth Town and there is the blue sign pointing out Lake Barrington's rowing course. When you go to Lake Barrington on many days you have it to yourself.

CHAIR - A very good facility though, isn't it?

Mr PARSON - An excellent facility and I am sure when our turn comes round everybody will be looking for it. The right sized sign is essential but, as I pointed out here, we get nearly a quarter of a million people coming to Tasmania to look at gardens.

Dr GOODWIN - It would help if they could find them!

Mr PARSONS - Yes. You could shoot your mouth off for hours and hours. We have got the natural and cultural brown and white signs. That is all right but if you want to drive tourism - and I only just thought of this - maybe you need a green sign to point to gardens, maybe colours could come into our lives.

CHAIR - What discussions have you had with Tourism Tasmania about this?

Mr PARSONS - Besides being a volunteer, the Arboretum employs me to make it work so we have something in the order of 0.6 of an employee to operate our little institution. So, really it's just opportunistic, in a way. When the community Cabinet came to Devonport, I saw the opportunity there to raise this and you know the result; now I see another opportunity to raise it. Talking with the bureaucracy - yes, well, it doesn't happen. I don't have the time.

CHAIR - Has anybody spoken with Tourism Tasmania trying to get their support?

Mr PARSONS - For a change in their policy?

CHAIR - With signs and trying to encourage more people to visit.

Mr PARSONS - Not that I know about. We're not unhappy with the way that Tourism promotes us or the region necessarily. There were three regions once and now there are five zones. There used to be five zones. I consulted my partner, the Tasmanian historian, who has been here long enough to know that there were five zones and then there were three regions and now we've gone back to five zones. I'm not qualified to say which is the right process.

We had touring routes for a while in the Cradle Coast region when we had three regions. The signs are still there but I don't know if there's much promotion of those. Cradle

Coast has DiscoverTasmania'snorthwest.com - I think that is the right address - to promote the region. We appear in that under the things to see and do in Devonport. We don't feel inadequately promoted. From time to time when the Government takes the bus around to promote activities, they come to us. We are known. We have visitors come occasionally who wonder what an arboretum is, but we think that the sign is just too small really to make it -

CHAIR - Obvious.

Mr PARSONS - Obvious about it's potential.

Mr FINCH - About signage, I have just gone to a map now that's come up on our iPad - the Tasmanian Arboretum. The request that I put in was for Arboretum Eugenana, so it actually changed it to the Tasmanian Arboretum. So you might be interested in that. It has given me a little map from Devonport around to Eugenana; it takes 19 minutes. So, you're on the map, okay?

Mr PARSONS - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Talking about signage in the route that's here - the Bass Highway, is that where you've got -

Mr PARSONS - No, it's on Sheffield Main Road, which comes through Spreyton to the old Bass Highway that connected Latrobe to Devonport through Spreyton and went out -

Mr GAFFNEY - It's Mersey Main Road now.

Mr PARSONS - Mersey Main Road, yes.

Mr FINCH - So you wouldn't consider that -

Mr PARSONS - We're not promoted off the Bass Highway, no. So if we were expecting that sort of promotion, people have to come off the Bass Highway and go through the visitor information process - go into Devonport, go into the Devonport business centre, go into Latrobe, go into the Axeman's Hall of Fame now and find their way through the process and go up the counter and -

We got this story from Kaydale Lodge just the other day. A visitor said, 'I am interested in gardens; are there any gardens around here?' And what did the volunteer say? 'No'. That is a problem inside the visitor system.

Mr FINCH - You have some education work to do.

Mr PARSONS - Yes, they have.

Mr FINCH - You mentioned before that 224 000 visit gardens in Tasmania - in a 12-month period?

Mr PARSONS - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Were you part of any survey that showed how many have actually decided to come to the Tasmanian Arboretum?

Mr PARSONS - No. We don't have any figures. As I said we have 0.6 of a staff member who is busy running a 66-hectare arboretum. I am not having a go at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens here; they have a completely different function but there are 47 people down there on 13 hectares. Albury, which has a whole four hectares, has four staff and a superintendent.

Mr FINCH - So how many visitors do you have?

Mr PARSONS - We feel it is over 15 000 and under 20 000 now.

Mr FINCH - So what sort of a figure would you like to have with the presentation you have?

Mr PARSONS - Were our visitations by locals equal to that of a capital city botanic garden - an average of 41 per cent of the population, so botanical gardens do a little bit better than museums or something - the percentage of Braddon would convert to about 36 000 persons. That does not include our reaching out to the Launceston region. Were our visitation equal to 21 per cent of the regional tourist visitors to the south who also visit the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens then that would be another 45 000 of the 250 000 who visit the north-west specifically. So about 70 000 people is what we could expect. So we are well under potential.

Mr FINCH - I would like to ask about marketing. The strategies that you use to attract people are a little bit beyond your resources?

Mr PARSONS - I can't put the figures on it but when we started the idea of moving perhaps from the warm inner glow feeling of our founders to being a little more modern we approached Cradle Coast Tourism. Ian Waller is still there and he said, 'I've got \$5 000. Have you got \$5 000?'. We said we might be able to scrape that together. So he went around and talked with the Devonport City Council and they found another \$5 000. We were going to do a business plan, but we are not a business so we came out with a business framework. We moved on from there step by step in trying to build the business. We extended the kiosk building we had before and put a deck on. It is only a tea urn and a microwave and lovely homemade ice cream. Visitors come for our ice cream. Having that as a vehicle to promote us so we can bring in income has caused us now to advertise. We started in 'Island of Contrast', the *Advocate's* tourism brochure, and we have now extended out. Now the City Council is supporting us and we have extended into *Explore* so we reach right across the State in the paper media. We thought about television -

Mr FINCH - Pretty expensive.

Mr PARSONS - Yes, it is just beyond our means. You asked us to come up with figures like how many actual visitors we get, but it is just beyond our means. We asked to borrow a road counter from the Devonport City Council when they were not using it. We found they had about eight they had never used and they lent it out to us for six weeks. It gave us the answer of 13 000 some four years ago.

Mr FINCH - Phil, tell me about the opportunities that are available that you might or might not take up in respect of these 224 000 people who come to visit gardens, like the mainland bus trips. Surely there are bus trips that come to look at gardens and do that sort of tour. Are you on that circuit?

Mr PARSONS - What do you need for a bus trip? Toilets. We have bus trips coming to us and some of the tour companies are coming to us now because we stayed the course, have held on for 26 years and tried to grow the arboretum and now we are promoting it and we are seeing people coming to us. We even get catering opportunities, so it is not that it cannot happen but would you like to lend me \$1.5 million and I will build a visitor centre? The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden managed to convince the Federal Government to support them with a visitor centre. They got one but really they should have asked for more and maybe they would have got it because they have had to put a lot more of their money into it to make it operational. They made a few mistakes, like not enough storage and the kitchen was not right and they had to address that. It takes 120 people and they get weddings and so on.

Mr FINCH - Have you considered going down that path yourself?

Mr PARSONS - They still have their hand out now for \$85 000 from the State Government. I hope that they get it because I will be right after them.

Mr FINCH - Do you think there might be some opportunities there, given their lead, that people are going to come to the rhododendron garden -

Mr PARSONS - Kerry, it really needs a partnership. At the moment our volunteer workforce is right up there and has expanded. My partner also manages the kiosk. She is a well-known Devonport identity; she has a circle of friends and they have all joined in and they help us in the kiosk and that works well. But what happens when she is not there? I have a certificate in horticulture so I know a little bit about plants, but besides my partner I am almost the only one. The arboretum will not go away but whether it will function well as a tourist attraction without some further funding and whether it should be running a food and beverage outlet are things for a private investor to come in as a partner for us. No private investor is going to build a centre on our land. They might get a feeling five minutes after they open that they do not want to do this anymore and we cannot give them their money back.

Dr GOODWIN - I went to the opening last night of the Inverawe Native Gardens in Margate. I had not been there before and I was very impressed with it. A lot of people just drive past the sign and never go in there so I take your point about signage and being able to recognise that it is a garden. So what do people do? When they come to Tasmania and they are looking for gardens, how do they find out where all the gardens are? Is there one brochure that covers the whole of the State?

Mr PARSONS - Blooming Tasmania. If you are a member of Blooming Tasmania you appear in the Blooming Tasmania brochure. Blooming Tasmania has just been saved from a fate worse than death. Those things in front of you on the table were going to be sent electronically and the piece of paper, the 32-page brochure, was not going out with the Open Garden Scheme brochures in the spring. The compromise has been that Queensland and the Northern Territory have been cut out. Yesterday Murray's Day Out,

which is a sort of personalised guided tour, had six people from Gladstone at the Arboretum. I did not interview them about whether they read Blooming Tasmania - but they are not going to get it, so they are not coming to see our gardens through that process of information. They are expected to find out about gardens through the web.

That is the engine that promotes garden tourism in Tasmania. I was at the inaugural meeting at The Grange when Steve Corbett was director of the Botanical Gardens and that was a really good initiative. Tourism - all fashionable bureaucrats coming from somewhere or other - are trying to keep up with the pace and look at the global picture, so they go to the Internet. That is fine, but people who come to gardens tend to be older and the sound out of the machine just is not quite the same.

Dr GOODWIN - Right. So primarily it is through the booklet?

Mr PARSONS - The booklet and the other paper outlets, I think, that are the garden promotion tools.

Mr FINCH - Where are they distributed, the Blooming Tasmania publications?

Mr PARSONS - Blooming Tasmania goes in I think it is the September issue insert of the *Gardening Australia* magazine. All the participating gardens have them and I think you can get them at some other places, but do not ask me, I cannot answer that one. This year we are trying to build some information out of it because we came very close to death by computer and we have a raffle. You can win quite a substantial prize as long as you are not a member of the organisation and we hope that people will enter into that, and we will be able to build some database information, which might help Blooming Tasmania promote itself to those who decide how tourism funding is going to work.

Mr FINCH - About *Gardening Australia*, will that still go ahead?

Mr PARSONS - That is an ABC publication and as we understand the ABC is still running with *Gardening Australia*. It has its State-based presenters and it is a popular program. You would be more familiar with the workings of the ABC than I am.

Mr FINCH - Some would say I was not familiar enough. There is a publication *Gardening Australia*?

Mr PARSONS - Yes, *Gardening Australia* is a monthly magazine.

Mr FINCH - Will you still do that September edition with Blooming Tasmania information?

Mr PARSONS - Inserted, yes, but not in Queensland or the Northern Territory. That has been the compromise on funding. Tourism Tasmania supports Blooming Tasmania in its distribution, otherwise we would only have a few thousand booklets.

Mr FINCH - And you were saying before just to underline it, the Tasmanian Arboretum is in that?

Mr PARSONS - In the Blooming Tasmania organisation, yes.

Mr FINCH - In that publication?

Mr PARSONS - Yes, just like In View.

Dr GOODWIN - What happens if someone comes to Tasmania and they have not got the magazine and they still want to look at gardens, and somehow they stumble across your facility?

Mr PARSONS - And they have a car and they get to us?

Dr GOODWIN - Yes, they have a GPS and it has that road plugged in there. If they say, 'We'll be travelling around Tasmania and we really want to look at other gardens -'

Mr PARSONS - Regionally we have a tear-off map system, which currently has six gardens on it but one is closed so we have to actually stamp on it. The other one is perhaps not playing its full part and may have to fall by the wayside - that is Allendale at Smithton. It might fall to four gardens and we will reformat it, but we do promote regionally and we also carry the Blooming Tasmania booklet while we still have some available because they are taken up like hot cakes. Every visitor who comes takes a booklet because visitors just seem to want to amass paper. We can do that cross-promotion.

Mr GAFFNEY - The Arboretum is very well known through its work with the jazz circle. They have a number of little jazz concerts there - is it just the one early in -

Mr PARSONS - In January.

Mr GAFFNEY - But through that it gets a lot of publicity.

Mr PARSONS - That is a Devonport City Council initiative. The city council is using our site. We have the capacity to absorb a few cars and a couple of visitors so 2 000 or 3 000 people come to the event. Devonport has taken a focus in jazz and we are benefiting from that. The Launceston Jazz Club came in a bus and I got the city council to have a bus as well to come out from Devonport a couple of times and have public transport - what a novel idea! The city council bus turned up and I was a bit flummoxed because I expected a smaller bus but we managed to park two buses and they all poured off. That means that that event is reaching out in its popularity and anecdotally we find that we are getting more visitors from Launceston.

Dr GOODWIN - Do you feature in the Zone marketing publication?

Mr PARSONS - We should do.

Dr GOODWIN - You do?

Mr PARSONS - Don Monks assures us that he is looking after us. Interestingly, I do not follow it. I really am a plant person and my interest is in plants. I do not know whether I said but we ask for a donation of \$5 for entry and a \$5 donation for a family and if a family wants to think that they have 15 individuals in it and give us \$5 by 15 or think they just have five, that is fine by us. We do not mind at all. Our real function is the educational role and that is done through Arbour Week, formally through the schools but

how can you tell about informal education. We are even educating our volunteers who are a bit surprised about how a little bit of untidiness there can be an important piece of biodiversity.

CHAIR - Time is nearly up unless anybody has any more questions. Mr Parsons, would you like to make any closing remarks?

Mr PARSONS - I certainly hope that when you make your report they pay some attention to the signage question and review the policy, but thank you very much for your time.

Mr FINCH - So you would like more opportunity for signage, not just bigger signs? We have two signs, would like half a dozen in other locations or would you like another eight or more?

Mr PARSONS - I would like to bring the tourists off the main tourist routes to us.

Mr FINCH - The Bass Highway?

Mr PARSONS - Yes, but I do not want to have the Arboretum on every corner along the Bass Highway, I would be happy being on the Bass Highway once.

Mr GAFFNEY - Do you have one on the Mersey Main Road at Spreyton - there is a brown one there, isn't there?

Mr PARSONS - No.

Mr GAFFNEY - That would probably be a good one to have because I know you have one at the Sheffield one.

Mr PARSONS - I did not put it in here, it is not really your ambit but the signage in Tasmania, there are signs everywhere. So for those signs that we have, little blue ones, put up by the Devonport City Council that say, 'Arboretum' or 'Parking' - they do not say parking for us - but that sort of information sign. There are also ones that say 'Melrose Road' at the corner of Melrose Road and Bellamy Road and just next to it there is this huge thing provided by the State Government with all sorts of data and information on it. Why aren't they combined? Is it going to change Melrose Road? Are we expecting the Germans to arrive and we will have to put all the signs away so they cannot find anything? What drives this idea when they talk about decluttering the landscape that we should have all these extra signs up all the time? I know information is important but surely there should be someone coordinating it.

CHAIR - Thank you very much indeed.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

Mr ALF GUDE, TAMAR RIVER CRUISES, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Wing) - Thank you. We look forward to hearing from you about your operation and about your views on tourism in Tasmania.

Mr GUDE - We have two operations. We have the 50-minute Cataract Gorge cruise, which goes every hour on the half hour, 9.30 to 4.30, every day except Christmas Day. Then there is the river cruise - being the larger vessel, she goes off at 10 a.m. and comes back at 2 p.m. and again at 3 p.m. and then comes back at 5.30 p.m. So we have a four-hour and a two-and-a-half-hour there. We have a product there that has time and dollar for everybody. Through training and hard work we go to the nth degree to make sure that tourists coming to the State are looked after well and professionally, so they go back to the hoteliers with a positive strong mind, having had a super time down the valley seeing sea eagles and the occasional seal and all the wildlife and the historical properties through there. They have had a lovely lunch on board and some Tamar Valley wine. They go back to the hoteliers satisfied with the product and it bodes well for Tasmania, particularly the north here where we are showcasing the Tamar Valley and the Cataract Gorge to them. So that is where our product is and where our strengths are in portraying that through to the people. As a company, our strengths are we do not close the door in the winter. We are there all the year round.

CHAIR - How long have you been operating?

Mr GUDE - This is our fourth season.

CHAIR - How have the numbers been this season compared with the previous three years?

Mr GUDE - Last year we had a 3 per cent growth and this winter there has been a dip, so I feel this year might be not such a good year perhaps.

CHAIR - To what do you attribute that?

Mr GUDE - Probably politics at the time. When nobody is steering the ship people get frightened - the Government, hung parliaments and things. I think that makes people nervous and they do not want to spend money. Also, the international situation is obviously quieter as well, and the strength of the dollar to the pound. For example, it is cheaper than it has ever been to go to England and, indeed, New Zealand and America. I think probably more concerns over where it is all at in the grand scheme of things, financially, until people become settled with a government that is back in again and everything is tickety-boo and on track again.

CHAIR - Business people do not like elections being held in December because it interferes with their Christmas trade quite a lot. So, it may do at any time of the year. Certainly that sounds to be your experience.

Mr GUDE - Yes.

Mr FINCH - What's the make up of your clients - intrastate, national and international?

Mr GUDE - Some 80 per cent tourism. For the precise split on international versus intrastate I would have to check on to be accurate. I am not 100 per cent sure on that but it is less because we monitor the statistics for our export purposes and we ask every client coming through where they're travelling from, where did they leave from. We note it down in the records.

Mr FINCH - So it's 80 per cent tourists who use your business?

Mr GUDE - Yes, 80 per cent tourists; 20 per cent local.

Mr FINCH - What did you say about your internationals? Do you know how many of those you would get?

Mr GUDE - No, I don't know the precise number on that. I don't want to say the wrong number; put it that way. But it is down; I know that.

Mr FINCH - Where would those international ones that you do get come from? Are they Chinese, Japanese or Korean?

CHAIR - Especially if they look Asian.

Laughter.

Mr GUDE -Perhaps more Asian than others. I think generally that's the increasing market.

Mr FINCH - Do you do anything in respect of your own marketing? I suppose if we look at that aspect of the way you do your business, do you do any targeting of international, national or intrastate? Can you give us some idea of your plan?

Mr GUDE - In terms of international, we can't lure them to Tasmania but we're pretty high on the agenda with our electronic marketing, with booking systems and websites, et cetera; linking with as many people as we can and being on board with things that are promoting the north of Tasmania outside of Tasmania.

Mr FINCH - So you put your hand up for those sorts of things.

Mr GUDE - Oh yes.

Mr FINCH - Tell us about the electronic, IT way of presenting your product. Is that a main driver for your marketing? Is that where you do the bulk of it?

Mr GUDE - No, it's not. I think from our point of view, when people come to Tasmania they want a flight, they want somewhere to sleep, they want a car and everything else is further on in line from that. Tamar River Cruises is not the fundamental reason why people come to Tasmania.

Mr FINCH - So they come to Launceston and then look at what's happening there?

Mr GUDE - We're something to do within town, yes.

Mr FINCH - So, to get yourself on the radar there, what do you do? Do you have a close liaison with the council?

Mr GUDE - We liaise and network where we can in town, with hoteliers and people through the region here. We are in every tourist brochure exchange rack in the State and we just raised the profile at the airport. We took a big section of the big light board up there. We've tripled the presence in tourism brochure exchange there as well.

Mr FINCH - Are you able to gauge your results from that?

Mr GUDE - It's difficult. It's awareness time in that; sort of brand imaging rather than the type of marketing where you say, 'Bring this advert in to receive 10 per cent discount.' With that you can track your marketing. Other marketing is very difficult to track. I think that's one of our main gateways now. I'm finding the visitors are coming in and taking short bites now more than coming for long holidays; they fly in and out. They more often seem to be our type of customer now.

Mr FINCH - With your marketing, Alf, do you allocate a percentage of your turnover or is it a gut feel or do you impulse buy as far as your marketing is concerned?

Mr GUDE - Random marketing doesn't work for us. We have to have sustained marketing - go with it, run with it and stay with it. So the other doesn't work for us.

Mr FINCH - Have you gone with what was established by Rob Cassidy or have you tried -

Mr GUDE - We've stuck with that predominantly and we've tried other things.

Mr FINCH - So a partnership with say, Tourism Tasmania; are they a solid partner in your operation?

Mr GUDE - Well, they never come to see me but the marketing we do with them - in their zone marketing.

Mr FINCH - I don't know how they run their zone marketing operation - whether it is expected that they go out to the businesses or you get in touch with them.

Mr GUDE - I think it is probably up to us to find them really. But I think that there have been so many marketing bodies, groups and arms in the past that it became a bit woolly at one point - who was who, who was running the show, and who was really marketing Tasmania. It is difficult to get alongside something that is not a dominant strength.

Mr FINCH - What sort of a sense do you get of Tourism Tasmania's operations? From the point of view of an operator who does not have a real hands-on partnership with them, do you get a sense that they're functioning well and doing the job? What is your feeling talking to fellow operators?

Mr GUDE - I would like to see them stronger and more interactive with us - whoever they are. We do not know who they are actually; who are they?

Mr FINCH - Good question.

CHAIR - They could be people you are dealing with even.

Laughter.

Mr GAFFNEY - Their role is to get people to Tasmania and then it is up to you guys then. I have heard a bit about Tourism Tasmania and their role. I think that we need to make sure that they are not the panacea of all the ills within the industry at the moment. I think that has happened a bit and I am pleased to hear that you have not worried about that because you market it when you get them to here. I was going to ask, because the AFL football comes under Tasmanian tourism, does that help you out on a Sunday - do you get more?

Mr GUDE - Yes, it does, yes. On a winter's day when the AFL is on there are more people in town and they want a little something to do; it stiffens up a bit in the winter. Nothing to write home about but every bit helps, doesn't it.

CHAIR - It might help to have Hawthorn colours or colours of the opposing team or both.

Mr FINCH - I think when I took a trip on the Tamar Odyssey I think there was a Geelong crowd and they were staying on to do about a week in Tassie.

CHAIR - It may be commercial-in-confidence and you may not want to mention this, but I am just wondering how many customers you have a year. You may prefer not to give that.

Mr GUDE - We base ourselves on an all-up total around the 40 000 mark.

Mr GAFFNEY - How many staff does that involve for running your operations?

Mr GUDE - A total of 20. There is a core of 10-12 and everything bolts around that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Because it is a specialised area, do you have to bring those people through the organisation training wise?

Mr GUDE - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Do you have any relationship with the Maritime College?

Mr GUDE - Yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - Can you explain that for us?

Mr GUDE - The Maritime College is a fantastic facility right on the doorstep and they have everything we need from fire fighting to elementary shipboard safety, coxswain training, engineer training, master fire training - a great facility.

Mr GAFFNEY - Do they have work experience with you? I know that some colleges have training experiences. Do they have any with you?

Mr GUDE - Occasionally they pop people down on various courses just for a brief look. We are not a huge maritime commercial handling type facility.

Mr FINCH - Do you get involved in 'famils'?

Mr GUDE - Yes, very much so. In September we put nearly 300 people down the river on 'famils' - all local people connected with tourism - just to kick the season off and demonstrate the product. The people in the hotels, the boys and the girls in the house fronts, they are rotating all the time.

Mr GAFFNEY - Have you had experience with the visiting journalists program?

Mr GUDE - We have had that in the past but I have not seen that for a while. But we were active in that.

Dr GOODWIN - Is there a bit of cross referral happening? If your customers are saying, 'We are here only for a day or so and I want to do x, y and z, do your staff advise them what they can do?

Mr GUDE - Yes, very much so. They are all very knowledgeable on the region - they are all local people, with the exception of myself. They will steer people in the direction of what they need to know about, be it the Lavender Farm or the brewery or the car museum or the Gorge or absolutely anything. If their interests are in wine, there is plenty of scope.

Mr FINCH - If my memory serves correctly, you have a big poster display -

Mr GUDE - Yes, we have a wall almost the length of this side full of leaflets and brochures all through there. We exchange those with other people from hotels - things to do, eateries; they are all in there. So we are active in that respect and we are also more active with the linking on the web page, so that is a good way to go.

CHAIR - What effect does the build-up of silt have on your business?

Mr GUDE - On the cataract cruise we have to cancel certain cruises at certain low tides. If that happens to be when the coach comes at 11 - because they will come at set times and we cannot always hinge around them - we either have to cancel it for them or the odd occasion has happened when they have to come off the vessel and go away.

Mr PARKINSON - So this is low tide?

Mr GUDE - Yes. You can have a certain tide in the book, it might say 0.6, but if you have had a south-westerly for a week, a strong one, your tide is pushed out even further, so that might turn into a zero.

Dr GOODWIN - When you say you might have to pull them off, does that mean you load them on and then you find that you cannot get the vessel out -

Mr GUDE - We cannot get through the channel.

Dr GOODWIN - and then you have got to ask them to get off?

Mr GUDE - Yes.

CHAIR - And refund?

Mr GUDE - Refund them, yes.

Dr GOODWIN - Does that happen often?

Mr GUDE - Not too often; we do try to avoid it. We do try to gauge around that one, but different skippers may have a look and think, 'Well, we should be able to get through', and then it is not possible. Occasionally they have got stranded through there. At the shallows across the channel near the last port marker before you enter the Gorge, it is hard to gauge over there.

Mr PARKINSON - So you could be over there and then find out?

Mr GUDE - Yes. We have a tolerance now, a little mark on the stick, and at less than that we do not go.

Mr GAFFNEY - Are there any other boats? Are you the only operation?

Mr GUDE - SeaPort Charters have gone now, so we are the only operators there.

Mr GAFFNEY - On your longest cruise, do you get down to Low Head?

Mr GUDE - No, we go just through the Batman Bridge and turn beyond that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Do you stop and get off at all?

Mr GUDE - No, we keep them on board. It is too time-consuming if people get running off into vineyards and things. They tend not to come back.

Dr GOODWIN - But you serve the local produce on board?

Mr GUDE - All local wine and beer on board, and local produce, local cheeses - everything but the figs. They come from Egypt, I think; everything else is local.

Mr FINCH - Have you been in tourism for many years or is this your first venture into tourism?

Mr GUDE - First venture into tourism, yes.

Mr FINCH - And how have you found it in Tasmania?

Mr GUDE - It is great, I enjoy it.

Mr FINCH - So did you come to Tasmania to take up this opportunity?

Mr GUDE - No, I came here for a quiet way of life. You have some marvellous schools here, particularly in the north, so we could put the children in some good schooling up here. So I sorted all the kids out and everything else and concerned myself with what I was going to do after that.

Mr FINCH - How do you feel as a newcomer to the tourism industry? How do you feel about that decision?

Mr GUDE - It is good and I am pleased with it. I enjoy what I am doing, very much so. It is a positive industry. We are amongst happy people in the main and it is a good, positive industry to be in. I like it. I would not change it.

Mr FINCH - So you get a good sense of your immediate future and long-term future?

Mr GUDE - Yes.

Mr FINCH - What about your infrastructure; do you need to upgrade? Is that on the drawing board?

Mr GUDE - We are frequently scratching around for a replacement vessel for the *Tamar Odyssey*. Realistically, when we are looking at around the \$1.5 million mark, we probably have to consider for better times, to be fair, and also some method of moving the silt as well, some sort of commitment there. But we will need a new vessel down the track - more fuel efficient, bigger carrying capacity.

Mr FINCH - With the 40 000 that you are getting now, can you see opportunities if you do get a bigger, better vessel to increase those numbers?

Mr GUDE - We are working hard at marketing and trying to increase numbers. I feel it is an area we have to work a bit harder at, to be fair. Although we had a small growth last year, you can never stop working at that. You have to keep trying and working and keep gnawing at it.

In terms of needing a bigger vessel today, no we do not; this one does suffice in passenger numbers for today but we have to look ahead. You cannot run a lorry forever and it is the same with a boat.

Mr PARKINSON - Looking ahead in that respect, are there vessels with a shallower draught that would suit you?

Mr GUDE - Exactly, yes, twin-hull vessels. They are longer and thinner and more water efficient than the older-type vessels - aluminium, lighter. Vessels now in aluminium, and longer and thinner, are probably around the 10-12 tonnes mark as opposed to 17 tonnes and are more water efficient as well.

Mr PARKINSON - You are making me think of vessels that I have seen on the Brisbane River.

Mr GUDE - Yes, that type of thing.

CHAIR - You would hear various comments that your passengers make about tourism and their experiences in visiting Tasmania. What are the main views that they express, first of all, favourably about coming here to Tasmania as visitors?

Mr GUDE - Most people are overwhelmed with the place. They like it and they think it is fantastic.

CHAIR - Do they give reasons?

Mr GUDE - In the north here they like the greenness, the spaciousness, the open environment, the friendliness of everybody and the ability to move about okay.

CHAIR - The friendliness keeps coming through, year after year.

Mr GUDE - Yes.

CHAIR - Are there any points that often come up that visitors are unhappy about?

Mr GUDE - Yes, I have noted a few constructive ones. These are not just my thoughts; we have bandied this around in the office in the last day or two. One is street signage within the city.

Mr FINCH - To get to where you are?

Mr GUDE - Not necessarily to come to us but for them to find out where they are going. So this is in general. If you do not know the area and you tell them Bathurst Street and Wellington Street, they do not know where that is. So they will be driving along and looking up on the corners of buildings. That is a frequent comment as a constructive criticism. It is not directional signage as much as street signage.

Lack of parking is a pretty high priority as well. This probably relates more to the public complaining of lack of parking rather than generally through the city. Rather than park here and pay, and then go to into the town and pay, and move across the town and pay, people would prefer a day pass or a week pass. That is a suggestion of tourists.

Places being closed has come up a bit, but that is the nature of the beast down here. If you cannot afford to stay open then you would close the doors for the winter.

I think we have talked about siltation enough, but siltation is also on the list. People are wanting to book cruises when the tide is high.

An active tourist friend of mine said, 'Marketing and Tourism Tasmania is all about Hobart; not enough energy is put into the north'. Perhaps it is bigger down there so there has to be more put in down there.

Mr FINCH - He was from Hobart?

Mr GUDE - No, he is from here.

Laughter.

Mr GAFFNEY - There would be some interest about the proposed Gunns site.

Mr GUDE - Yes, that does come up.

Mr GAFFNEY - Is it more of an interest or is it like, 'Oh my God, that would be terrible', or is it more, 'That's where it's going to be' sort of thing?

Mr GUDE - We stay neutral when the conversation pops up on that one and invariably towards the end of the conversation they don't want the thing there, I suppose.

CHAIR - Do you think they realise how high it will be?

Mr GUDE - No, they often ask us to show them on the chart plotter where it's going to go. That's happened two or three times just recently.

Mr PARKINSON - You don't sail past there?

Mr GUDE - No, we turn at Devils Elbow, just before.

Mr PARKINSON - So you don't sail past any of the industrial area there.

Mr GUDE - No, just beyond the bridge - through the bridge. We don't go on to Long Reach.

Mr FINCH - When it's built you'll be able to see it from most of the Tamar River.

CHAIR - From the moorings it will be pretty apparent.

Mr PARKINSON - Depending on what colour they paint it.

Mr GAFFNEY - Does your tour of the wetlands create much interest for tourists?

Mr GUDE - Yes, it does; we always point out the wetlands that are managed by Parks and Wildlife, with a brief indication of what is on there and how they get there and they can walk out on the boardwalk with their binoculars and see all the birds and wildlife.

Mr GAFFNEY - There is a market for bird-watchers.

Mr GUDE - Yes, there is. We keep binoculars onboard the vessel and people are generally quite interested in that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Is the overriding authority for your vehicle MAST?

Mr GUDE - Yes, Marine Safety Tasmania. Another complaint I think I missed out is that people frequently complain there is no parking for campervans and caravans.

Dr GOODWIN - Is that parking overnight or parking when they want to go and do things in town?

Mr GUDE - Both.

Mr FINCH - I am bit curious about whether you get any concern about the damage that the *Odyssey* might do to the riverbanks. I know you probably run your operation to minimise that but do you have any negative feedback?

Mr GUDE - No. If anything, a vessel popping through and stirring up the channel a bit is good to try to keep it open rather than no vessels going through at all. There is very little use really in boating in general on the Tamar.

Mr GAFFNEY - Do you do specific booking, likes for end-of-year functions, or year-10 functions?

Mr GUDE - Yes, at this time of year - coming up November and into December - all the prime nights, the Fridays and Saturdays, have long gone.

Mr GAFFNEY - That would be a good market?

Mr GUDE - Yes, it is an extra bit of turnover for the company.

Mr GAFFNEY - Have you any comment to make about the wages and penalty awards, and whether you think the new structure is going to affect you?

Mr GUDE - No, it won't affect us; we've given everyone a pay rise this year and everyone is very happy. They are all paid well above the standard rates anyway.

Mr FINCH - If you go out in the evening and you have to pay penalty rates that comes back to the passengers.

Mr GUDE - It's all built into the cost.

Mr GAFFNEY - You provide food, so do the staff have to be qualified in food handling? I know you have certain regulations -

Mr GUDE - We have a food handling and keeping licence on the vessel - a food and beverage licence. But we call the cook and he brings one or 10 or 60 or whatever he needs. It's outside catering.

Mr GAFFNEY - And because there is alcohol served onboard, is licensing expensive for you?

Mr GUDE - It's not a figure that has ever jumped and said to me we ought not to consider it. I can't remember the precise amount of money but I don't think it's desperately expensive.

Mr FINCH - Regarding the river itself, are you happy with your product in respect of what you've got to show people? Are there any issues up and down the estuary that detract from the experience you're trying to give your visitors?

Mr GUDE - No.

Mr FINCH - Rice grass?

Mr GUDE - I quite like the rice grass; it sits in the riverbed nicely.

Mr GAFFNEY - There's some shabby-looking football club over there.

Laughter.

Mr FINCH - Every town's got one. There's a shocker in blue and red off the coast a bit further inland.

Mr GUDE - No, we've got total contrast; the beautiful Cataract Gorge, a few old dead ships, the Tamar Island, a bit of mudflats, some old historical properties opening out into broader areas down through there, through Windermere. It's good stuff - diverse. Every cruise around Tasmania is different in its own right as well.

Mr PARKINSON - I haven't been along there for a while. Is the old *Lady Gillian* still sitting on the bottom?

Mr GUDE - She is; she's still sat there.

Mr PARKINSON - It's probably becoming a bit of a tourist attraction in itself.

Mr GAFFNEY - Kerry, do you have any more questions?

Mr FINCH - Yes, I have but I don't want to bore everybody else while I'm reeling them off.

Laughter.

CHAIR - Anything you'd like to say to wind up the session?

Mr GUDE - Yes, can I ask you experts how high tourism ranks in the grand scheme of things of Tasmania; fishing, forestry, agriculture, tourism?

CHAIR - I'm not sure - the top third.

Mr FINCH - Actually it all depends where it suits the debate.

Mr GUDE - Right. So in a nutshell it's up there, then; it's in the top somewhere.

Mr GAFFNEY - It comes in third, I think.

Mr FINCH - I think it used to be second; it used to be quite high.

Mr PARKINSON - Above mining and agriculture?

Mr FINCH - Yes. It was really quite high. .

CHAIR - It's agriculture, fisheries, tourism, forestry. They are the main ones.

Mr GUDE - So with all due respect, why does Tasmania have to have a part-time Tourism minister? I can't operate part-time and I don't know anyone else who can. It should be full-on.

Mr FINCH - But if you drive that argument, what I am saying is that all of a sudden tourism will end up about sixth or seventh.

Mr GAFFNEY - I think you're right, Alf; I think that's one of the things that will come out of the increased size of the Houses. Once the numbers increase and they go through everything and say, 'Okay, what are the most important portfolios?', I think you'll find tourism, hospitality and small business are sort of linking together a lot more than they did perhaps in the past so I think there will be a push and then with the numbers and through the recommendations from this group, if it gets to that, there will be something to say that it is one of the more important portfolios advancing our economy. The bigger portfolios are Health and Education but this one is advantageous for the State and that is what we've been finding in our discussions.

Mr PARKINSON - With a small parliament in a small State you've got a maximum of 10 ministers under our constitution so with the Cabinet Secretary that means we've got nine and eight. It used to be 10 and then we reduced it and then it went back up to nine. So we've got a Cabinet Secretary and eight ministers, and there isn't a single portfolio - even Education has Police with it and Health has Tourism with it? I don't think there is a single portfolio.

Mr GAFFNEY - The Greens have five.

CHAIR - There has been criticism that the Minister for Tourism is the Minister for Health as well, which is another major portfolio with a vast expenditure, and that it tends to make Tourism seem less important.

Mr GUDE - Yes. I'm not criticising anyone as much as the situation of maybe overloading one person with too much. I think for us in tourism a specific minister should be designated to the area.

Mr PARKINSON - Tourism and the Arts used to go together and they were fairly complementary because the Arts is very much a tourism-based thing.

CHAIR - And Sports and Recreation and Parks.

Mr PARKINSON - A much better combination than it is now.

Mr FINCH - I was probably being a bit cynical before because I believe that tourism is intrinsically important to Tasmania and it should be given more prominence and regard than it sometimes receives.

Mr PARKINSON - Mind you, if it were a single portfolio there'd be plenty of people putting their hands up.

CHAIR - Anything else?

Mr GUDE - No, we're all good, Don; I'm quite happy bobbing along with my boats and doing all the maintenance and everything shipshape there. It's good, positive industry and I like it.

CHAIR - It is good that it's successful and that you're enjoying it so much.

Mr PARKINSON - Have you got a seafaring background, Alf?

Mr GUDE - I've always had boats in Europe but not commercially. My son is at sea now; he's a master mariner.

Mr PARKINSON - So were you in fishing or transport?

Mr GUDE - Leisure; I just had boats.

CHAIR - Thank you very much indeed for coming and giving us all that information. I declare this session closed.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.