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THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON TUESDAY 13 MAY 2025

TASMAN HIGHWAY: DUPLICATION OF MIDWAY POINT CAUSEWAY INCLUDING MCGEES BRIDGE

The committee met at 2.00 p.m.

CHAIR (Ms Rattray) - Welcome, everyone. Before we commence the hearing, I'll introduce the members of the committee. Starting from my right, I have Dean Harriss, Jen Butler, Tania Rattray, Simon Wood and Helen Burnet, and we have secretariat support of Scott Hennessy, Kiah Charles and Alison Morrison. Welcome to all those members here.

We have no apologies today and I would ask the Secretary, Kiah, if she would read out the message from Her Excellency, the Governor in Council, referring the project to the committee for inquiry. Thank you.

SECRETARY -

Pursuant to section 16(2) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*, the Governor refers the undermentioned proposed public work to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works to consider and report thereon. Pursuant to section 16(3) of the act, the estimated cost of such work when completed is \$209.5 million - Tasman Highway: Duplication of Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge, South East Traffic Solution.

CHAIR - Thank you very much and congratulations on your first reading of that message. As it's been indicated, we are in receipt of submissions from the Department of State Growth, Peter McGlone, CEO of Tasmanian Conservation Trust, and Robyn Lewis. Thank you.

Could I ask a member to move a motion that the submissions be received, taken into evidence and published?

Ms BUTLER - I will.

Motion agreed to.

CHAIR - The first witnesses that we have appearing before the committee today are representing the proponent, the Department of State Growth. Could I ask you each to state your name, your position and the organisation that you represent and then make the statutory declaration. Adrian, would you like to go first?

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Mr ADRIAN PAINE, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING AND DELIVERY, AND **Mr SIMON BROWN**, PROJECT MANAGER, STATE ROADS DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF STATE GROWTH, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Before you provide your opening statement, on behalf of the committee, we'd like to thank you very much for facilitating the site visit this morning. It's always very useful for the committee to be able to see any potential site or what the project looks like. Thank you again for facilitating that and we'll ask you to provide your opening address.

Before you do start, I'll just remind you that obviously you're appearing before the committee and the committee is pleased to hear your evidence today. Before you begin giving your evidence, I'd like to inform you of some important aspects of committee proceedings. The committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament and it means that it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. It's an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom, without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of parliament. It applies to ensure the parliament receives the very best of information when conducting its inquiries. It's also important to be aware the protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings. This is a public hearing, so it's open to members of the public, even journalists from time to time may be present, and this means your evidence may be reported. Do you both understand?

Mr BROWN - Yes, I understand that.

Mr PAINE - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you.

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

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

CHAIR - That is a big increase, isn't it?

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

Currently, there are 21,000 vehicles per day on average travelling on the Midway Point Causeway and Bridge, with traffic volumes growing at a rate of 3 per cent per year. Midway Point Causeway and McGees Bridge are exposed to prevailing and stormy weather and swells across Pitt Water that can impact the causeway walls and send sea spray across the highway, occasionally requiring the short-term closure of the highway. The causeway walls are degrading over time and expected to be further impacted by the impacts of climate change coupled with sea level rise, so they will need to be repaired in the future even if this project does not proceed.

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

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

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

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

Project information and contact details are available on our website, and feedback from the community has been received and responded to across multiple channels. In addition, focused public consultation on the project took place over two four-week long activities: one in 2022 and one earlier this year.

The feedback received stressed the importance of futureproofing the causeway to support both business and tourism growth and local access. A considerable amount of feedback talked about recreational activities such as fishing, cycling and pedestrian access, and various comments questioned how environmental impacts were being mitigated.

Overall, the consultation indicated that the community supports the project and is keen to see works commence as soon as possible. Stakeholder and community feedback received

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throughout the project and during the public consultation is being considered to finalise the design. In addition, the construction industry will be consulted for the purposes of finalising the tendering process and explaining the design details.

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

The project team has been working closely with the Department of Natural Resources; Environment Tasmania; the Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; and also the Environment Protection Authority Tasmania to ensure all environmental matters are identified and properly addressed. The project is currently at detailed design stage, which is planned to be completed by the middle of this year.

The Department is targeting construction to start in late 2025, but that is subject to securing environmental approvals. Construction will take 18 months to two years to complete. The estimated cost of the project is \$159.3 million based on the P50 estimate. The cost estimate is considered reasonable for the scale and scope of works proposed.

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

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Simon. Can I just ask you about the consultation process? In our notes, it talks about most people who engaged in the consultation process and you have indicated that you have had two sessions and one more recently -

Mr BROWN - Yes.

CHAIR - but we didn't have any information in our package just around what the concerns were, if at all, being raised by the community through that community consultation. Is there something that you can share with the Committee today that will give us some understanding of what was raised?

Mr BROWN - I think I covered most of the issues in terms of the - it is mostly positive feedback. People are wanting to ensure that they can still use the McGees Bridge for fishing, for example, and also that there's a good facility in terms of a path and that type of thing. Then, there's also the welcoming the opportunity for more lanes for traffic.

In terms of negative responses, I haven't got something at the forefront of my mind, but that's something we could certainly revisit and provide to you if you are happy for us to take that as a question on notice.

CHAIR - Absolutely. I mean if there was something - I mean, we have two submissions, additional to the one from the Department. We have some indication of what has been raised

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there. When I read about the community consultation - and well done on doing that, it doesn't always happen, that is a really positive aspect of the proposal put forward. Thank you.

Ms BURNET - Thank you, Chair. Could you just describe how the footprint of the project has altered, the change from the larger project to the smaller? You know, just the McGees Bridge and Pitt Water Causeway.

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

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

Anything further on that, Helen?

Ms BURNET - Was it always just that particular span or was there the Orielton area as well previously, so the original project?

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

CHAIR - I also note that these proposed works are located within two local government areas, obviously the City of Clarence and the Sorell Council. Has that presented any challenges or is it a matter of working with both councils? I know that they'll have some planning scheme requirements as well.

Mr BROWN - No, it's not presenting challenges. We have an established relationship with both of those councils and their planning officers to work through the planning scheme requirements. I'm seeing that there's a clear way forward in terms of that side of approvals.

Mr PAINE - Both councils have voiced their support for the project in any conversations we have with them, so we've never received any indication that they wouldn't be working with us to try to clear it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIR - Are there any learnings from the building of the new Bridgewater bridge that is likely to be transferable to the building of this bridge, or are they completely different? They look like big concrete structures to me.

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Mr BROWN - Quite a few of those Bridgewater bridge components are prefabricated offsite and then craned and trucked to site. They'll be able to use a similar approach to this. I wouldn't say that there's necessarily any sort of learning or innovation. It's just that there's a well-established method that gives you consistency and that type of thing so you can do a reliable build of the new bridge.

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

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

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

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

Mr WOOD - With the new cycle track or multi-use track that's going over it, I noticed at the moment, the bridge isn't lit. Is there lighting to be incorporated into the new bridge and the cycleway?

Mr BROWN - The shared path will be lit. That will be one of the outcomes of the project. We don't tend to light the highway and are not planning to light this section of the highway. Outside of residential areas we tend to not light that. People's vehicle lights are sufficient for them to navigate the rural highway. That is the approach that we'll be taking. That's consistent with other places around Tasmania.

Ms BURNET - If I could just follow on from that, do you try and reduce any sort of lighting spill when there is -

Mr BROWN - We're investigating and checking that we are not spilling light, particularly up into the air from a bird point of view, that type of thing. If there are birds flying around at night, we don't want to make it hard for them in terms of them navigating the air space above the bridge and the causeway. Also, we'll look at light spill, ensuring light spill doesn't ruin the motorists' view in terms of glare and that type of thing. That's part of the design process.

Ms BURNET - Because there was a recent collision of mutton birds, I believe, on the Tasman Bridge - is that right?

Mr BROWN - I'm not familiar with that event.

Mr PAINE - There was - that was a very unusual event. That was in the middle of the day. I don't think that was related to the light spill.

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Ms BURNET - It wasn't anything to do with lighting?

Mr PAINE - No, it was completely unexplained, as far as I know. It's never happened before.

Ms BURNET - We're talking about an internationally recognised, important wildlife and bird habitat in particular. Is that an important part of your planning for any upgrade to this part of the road network?

Mr BROWN - Yes, it is, and it's certainly a topic that we're working with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, so the Australian Government's Department, through their *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) process. Shorebirds and migratory birds have been considered through that process.

Ms BURNET - Thank you. Can we go on to the EPBC Act and the Department's response to that, please?

CHAIR - I'll just check and see if there are any more general questions before we switch, then we'll get into that one.

Mr HARRISS - I had one regarding the height of the new bridge. Is that going to be much different to the current bridge, and reasoning around that?

Mr BROWN - Both the new causeway and the proposed new, second bridge will be a bit over a metre higher than the existing formation. The reason for that is we are trying to address the impacts of climate change and sea level rise. Also, because we're already getting sea spray events impacting on use of the causeway, we need to raise it up, for those reasons.

Mr WOOD - Just a question on water runoff for the road - that's not going to spill into the causeway?

CHAIR - Stormwater.

Mr BROWN - Stormwater, yes. The runoff from rain that we collect on the highway at the moment runs off down the seawalls or the causeways or the bridge straight into Pitt Water estuary. If there are any pollutants in it from vehicles, whether that's oil dropping from the vehicle, that type of thing, that's ending up in the Pitt Water at the moment. The idea is to collect that water on the new causeway, steer it away, guide it away from where the sea star habitat is on the northern side, then collect that in pipework and take that to the land side, where it's treated and can be released afterwards.

CHAIR - Before we head to the EPBC Act, the existing emergency services boat ramp - there's an adjustment to suit the new works there?

Mr BROWN - That's right. There's a boat ramp that emergency services attach to the airport for the purpose of maintaining a response to an emergency. That boat ramp's available so if there's an on-water incident, they have access close to the airport to get down into Pitt Water and then to wherever the incident has occurred. We want to maintain that facility for airport emergency services. We'll make any adjustments needed to get the levels right that

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will tie in with our works. We'll also be providing that as a designated area just for that purpose. It won't be available to the public. We'll boom gate it off so that it's always available there for that purpose.

CHAIR - I know that Ms Butler will have some questions a little bit later around access for emergency service vehicles when there's been a breakdown. We'll come back to that.

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

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

Ms BUTLER - Would that be well lit? Sorry, subsequent to your question. Will that ramp area be quite well lit?

Mr BROWN - That is a good question that I can't answer right now, Ms Butler.

CHAIR - Is that something that the Committee can be apprised of at a later time?

Mr BROWN - Yes, most certainly.

Ms BURNET - Thank you. There are obviously some significant environmental factors relating to this project and the vicinity. Could you describe what steps you're taking in relation to the Tasmanian live-bearing sea star and any other things that you've had to address through the process so far?

Mr BROWN - We've conducted multiple scientific investigations, which have included investigating the marine environment of Pitt Water, also the land environment of some of the coastal areas around Pitt Water and the sea star habitat in intertidal areas on the causeway. We've involved experts in various fields, like we've had a specialist who's local to Tasmania investigate and give us advice about the bird life. We've had a scientific expert work quite closely on the sea star habitat, and in regard to the sea stars we've identified that during construction we may need to relocate some of the sea stars to locations away from the causeways which we've established. At these locations we've established temporary homes for sea stars using a mosaic of rocks which we've proved through trials will support sea stars in the areas that we've identified as being appropriate for them to sustain their lives. Also as part of that trial, we obtained permission and did aquaria trials and found that that was a more difficult and expensive exercise compared to keeping them in field sites in the real world.

There's been quite a great deal of work done on even just how to transport the sea stars from one site to another, when is the best time of year to do that, which is mostly around low tides, when are they readily available so you can get access to the sea stars. In terms of other investigations, we've looked at what life is in the actual sediment, at a microscopic level, so that we have a base level of what's present there in terms of those basic building blocks of the marine life. We've taken into account that there is vegetation on the land, whether it's eucalypt trees and suchlike so that we know whether they're important species, I suppose, in terms of their value.

Ms BURNET - Where are those sites that you're taking the sea stars?

Mr BROWN - They're located - two sites in Pitt Water and one site in Pipe Clay Lagoon provide us with a capacity that if we had to shift all the sea stars during construction, we could. However, we're working to see if we can avoid and minimise the amount that we have to relocate during construction because even though we've proven that we can do it, there are still risks so it's better if we can maintain them at their existing location during construction.

Ms BURNET - Has that kind of thing being done before, relocation of a species like this?

Mr BROWN - You mean in terms of any species, or marine -

Ms BURNET - Not any species.

Mr BROWN - You mean specifically the sea star?

Ms BURNET - Yes.

Mr BROWN - They tried to do it for the previous works at McGees Bridge and the causeway that was built around the turn of the century. However, that was initially unsuccessful and we've done a lot more work to work out how to make it successful. However, despite that being initially unsuccessful, in the long-term it was successful because the sea stars did naturally re-establish themselves on the causeways.

Mr PAINE - Sorry, just to add to that, that was part of our consideration in prioritising this section and then scheduling the Sorell Causeway as a secondary thing, because there's also - the sea stars are also supported in habitat at the Sorell Causeway. We're trying to minimise our total disruption and we don't necessarily have enough capacity to relocate both Midway Point causeway sea star habitat and Sorell Causeway simultaneously. That is one of the considerations in sequencing the delivery of this project.

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

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

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

Also, there are some trees that do provide hollows which could be nested in by, say, the Tasmanian masked owl and there have been reports on the Milford property of such owls being present. However, when our ecologists surveyed the area, there wasn't any evidence in these

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particular trees. However, we are going to have to look at that again before we construct to ensure that we haven't got any nesting going on.

Ms BURNET - What about sandpipers or curlews?

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

Ms BURNET - Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR - Any other questions up this end in regard to the sea star and matters surrounding that?

Ms BUTLER - In relation to the sea star, subsequent to Ms Burnet's questions, what's the process for reintegrating the sea stars back to that causeway area post-completion of this particular project?

Mr BROWN - In a simple way, it is transporting them - they are very, very small, they are as big as your fingernail-type size thing. They can be easily picked off rocks and placed in containers with water and transported back to the site and it is all by hand. It is actually a laborious exercise. Then, they are placed back in these areas that we have maintained for the sea stars back on the causeway.

Ms BUTLER - Because this is different, this will be a different project to the Sorell Causeway project, you can potentially take learnings from this project and that will help inform for Sorell, is that what you are hoping?

Mr BROWN - Correct. Yes, definitely. The trials that we did with how we are going to keep sea stars alive during construction, we learnt a lot from that experience and the same will happen again, certainly, if the construction of this Midway Point causeway goes ahead. Yes. That we can then turn into learnings for Sorell Causeway management of the sea stars. Yes.

Ms BUTLER - Would that data on those trials be made available for people who have concerns about that?

Mr BROWN - Information has been made available through the Australian Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* process. We actually publicise our submission that we made late last year. A lot of data is there available for people if they have a particular interest in what we found and what we are planning to do.

Ms BUTLER - And potentially for other scientists or other groups wanting to draw from that for their own research?

Mr BROWN - That is right, yes.

CHAIR - Can you give us some idea of - or if you have any understanding of - where the process is with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water - the federal process that, ultimately - there needs to be an approval to be able to proceed. Do

you have - because they'll be looking for, I expect, a lot of information. Has that all been provided or is that still ongoing?

Mr BROWN - It's still ongoing. We're in the midst of that process. We've provided our initial assessment, which was quite a body of work. It was several years effort of work that was submitted. However, it's like a dialogue, where they take that information in and come back and say, 'Look, we think you need to do a little bit more work in this area of your submission to make sure we're being thorough and covering all the significant matters that we've identified in this area.' We have that guidance as to what they're looking for next, so our project team is now organising itself to then do that next step of the science and assessment that we present. That gets presented to the community and is made public through that department's process. Forecasting how long that's all going to take is quite difficult because it is complicated and it is an ongoing dialogue, where you need to ensure that you understand what their expectations are to make sure you're hitting the targets that they're looking for.

CHAIR - At this point in time, the Department has a clear understanding of where the sea stars are in that area -

Mr BROWN - Yes.

CHAIR - and how many, if you like -

Mr BROWN - That's right.

CHAIR - and how big of an area will be potentially affected?

Mr BROWN - Correct. We have excellent information on that from the field surveys that have been done. We'll be doing more work on shorebirds and migratory birds to ensure that we're not impacting them, and if we are, what we can do about it before anything can proceed.

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

Mr BROWN - The science work we've done with sea stars has had a scientific committee overseeing it to make sure that the science is solid. We've had a local specialist in it. We've also had someone on the committee from UTAS and someone from New South Wales to ensure that our sea star work is done appropriately.

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

Ms BURNET - I'm curious about the embankments and the work on the side of the highway, particularly at the city end, whatever direction that is. Can you just describe what kind of work is supposedly necessary for that alignment of the road? It's on Milford and the Tasmanian golf course side.

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Mr BROWN - Because of the constraint around minimising impact on the sea stars on the northern side of the causeway, that has meant that we need to align ourselves to that southern side of the existing causeway, which has meant that a very small portion of land of the Milford property will need to be used as part of the project. We need to acquire a small part of that land, some 0.06 per cent of the existing title. The main constraint there was the sea star habitat. We must remember that that sea star habitat and sea stars are part of this whole Ramsar listing. The Ramsar listing covers everything there. It's the whole ecology, all of the species, everything that is contributing to that. It is quite important in that respect. In the meantime, we are endeavouring to utilise as much to the west of the existing formation as we can, but because we are widening from two lanes to four, that is a much larger footprint than what is currently there. Unfortunately, that does mean some removal of vegetation and suchlike along there to get that alignment to work.

Ms BURNET - You're doing that on the golf course side of the road closer to Hobart?

Mr BROWN - There's no acquisition required from the Tasmanian Golf Club. We do have to have an agreement with them about a small area where we need to do a bit of landscaping to make sure we catch stormwater appropriately before it hits our new highway and they're open to having that agreement rather than us acquiring some of that land from them.

CHAIR - And the other side, the Milford?

Mr BROWN - The Milford side, generally the property is already owned by the Crown through - the Department of State Growth owns that for the road. It's just a small area near the existing causeway that will need to be acquired from Milford.

CHAIR - Are those discussions progressing, or have they been finalised?

Mr BROWN - We've finalised the area that we need. We've identified that through our design work and my understanding is we've communicated that to the landowners. Is that correct, Adrian?

Mr PAINE - Yes.

Mr BROWN - They're aware and it's been pegged on the ground where the new boundary will be, so they have a clear idea of the change there.

Ms BUTLER - One general question. If there are problems with that approval process, is there flexibility within the Department to potentially endeavour on a new design or a new alignment of sorts?

Mr BROWN - There's always a way to respond if it is a -

Ms BUTLER - A plan B or C or D.

Mr BROWN - Yes, that's right. We are confident about this current plan in terms of that environmental impact and how we're going to manage that. We feel confident that, in due course, and working through the process that is there and working thoroughly through these environmental issues that we ultimately will get approval. It's not like in the meantime we're

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working on a plan B. We can't afford that at this time. It's like, let's do our best with plan A, but we can also, if we have to, arrange our resources to swing in to develop a plan B.

Ms BUTLER - As a Committee, we have had projects put in front of us that we've ticked off on previously and then there's been a redesign of the project, so I asked that question.

Mr BROWN - You mean it might be even just minor changes, is that right?

Ms BUTLER - Could be.

Mr BROWN - Yes, okay.

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

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

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

Ms BUTLER - How wide is the shoulder, I suppose, generally?

Mr BROWN - I am just going to have to remind myself, but it is generally two metres wide and then three metres at these gross pollutant traps where we're capturing any of the major pollutants that come through the stormwater off the road.

Ms BUTLER - You have quite high cement barriers on either side of the bridge, is that correct?

Mr BROWN - Yes.

Ms BUTLER - How high is that? I am just thinking of what it would look like in a traffic congestion or what it would look like in an accident.

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Mr BROWN - It is proposed that there'll be concrete barriers along both sides of the highway all the way because that will provide a very durable barrier in that salty environment. In terms of the actual height, they are going to be similar to what you might see on the Brooker Highway, around the northern extent of the domain. There is what we call concrete jersey barriers there. Off the top of my head, I do not know the exact height of those, but it'll be similar to that.

CHAIR - Supplementary questions? Anything relating to emergency vehicles, et cetera?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAIR - What about back the other end?

Ms BUTLER - Around the golf course area?

CHAIR - Yes.

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

CHAIR - I don't spend much time out that way.

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

Mr BROWN - Yes, that is right.

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

Mr BROWN - Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

Mr PAINE - Perhaps I can address some of those issues. Certainly, when this - the SETS project - South East Traffic Solution, the key objective of that was to duplicate the highway. That was the direction we were given from the government. That's the work we've been doing on all parts of that, developing the design that achieves that outcome. Alongside that, you'd be aware that we're doing work for the government's initiative in park-and-ride facilities that are being expanded. Both, I believe - the Midway Point one is about to commence construction today or yesterday.

CHAIR - About time - you did that a long time ago.

Mr PAINE - There is also a park-and-ride facility under design and about to be delivered at Rokeby, so both those projects are obviously targeted at trying to get more people into public transport and therefore take the pressure off the bridge and the rest of the Tasman Highway network as you get closer to Hobart.

We've also obviously got the Mornington Area Road network upgrade project that's just commenced at the moment, that we're doing the design work on improvements we can do in that area of it. So, yes, there's a lot happening in terms of addressing that congestion in that

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area, but principally around this project, the direction that we were given by government was to duplicate this highway and that's the focus of this work.

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

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

Ms BURNET - I think there was some reference to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by stopping the braking and so forth. That seems to be a minor way of approaching our transport emissions, which is one of the highest community emissions that the state has.

Mr PAINE - Correct. It's not a significant contribution to that objective. But there are some benefits when you've got free-flowing traffic, you have reduced emissions from the vehicles.

CHAIR - I think this morning we heard, and just correct me if I'm wrong, that of those 21,000 vehicles per day it's currently only about 7 per cent heavy vehicles. Is that correct?

Mr BROWN - Yes, 7 per cent heavy vehicles, so trucks, but that does equate to about 1400 vehicles per day. I mean, there's light industry and other businesses in the Sorell area that would be served by that trucking activity.

Ms BUTLER - Subsequent to your question, Chair: the use of wide vehicles or larger vehicles, what would that look like insofar as - was that considered in the design or are there alternative routes that those wide vehicles would be able to use?

CHAIR - Like over-width, you mean?

Ms BUTLER - Yes.

Mr BROWN - Yes. So sometimes there's freight, or whatever, that is wider than the standard, and we'd have an operational team set up to manage that where we can. There are parts of the network where they can go and some parts they can't. Obviously, with a wider facility it's going to be much easier for us to accommodate those over-width vehicles -

CHAIR - You've got a barrier up the middle.

Ms BUTLER - And the wire in the middle as well.

Mr BROWN - However, we've got the two lanes plus the shoulder, plus part of the median where the barrier is. It will be sufficient space for that. Also, it would be easier to manage, given you haven't got the opposing traffic.

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Mr PAINE - If you have an exceptionally wide load, you can usually chop it up a bit so that's above the height of the barriers if you need to go beyond that, but that would be a pretty rare circumstance I'd suggest.

CHAIR - I can't see too many wind farm components needing to be going across that bridge right now.

I try to stay on pages but it hasn't worked very much lately, so I've given up on pages and am just going for it. In regard to the funding and cost, you've already indicated the P50 cost estimate of \$159,298,000. Given the contingency is around 11, and it's got an estimate of between 8 per cent and 19 per cent, so 8 per cent is the P50 estimate and the P90 estimate is up to 19 per cent; that's a contingency and then the escalation, 5.2 to 5.3. How firm are you on your numbers there?

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

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

CHAIR - The resourcing component for the concrete and the concrete structures will be made in Tasmania?

Mr PAINE - Yes, and I think that's one of the big benefits of the recently completed Bridgewater bridge. We obviously have a new precast facility out there at Brighton that is much bigger scale than we need for this project, but we would imagine that that would be a very valuable resource for construction of this project.

CHAIR - Right, and the specifications are still based on Victorian transport?

Mr PAINE - Correct. We still use Transport Victoria specifications.

CHAIR - Right. Has that been recently reviewed?

Mr PAINE - It's consistently reviewed. There is a process to harmonise across Australia that's being driven by Austroads -

CHAIR - Oh Lord, that'll never happen.

Mr PAINE - No; substantially a number of them have already been agreed.

CHAIR - Even WA? Come on.

Mr PAINE - I can't tell you which states signed up or not, but I can tell you that Victoria has signed up to a number of these new harmonised specifications that have been developed by Austroads, and they'll be coming online as new Transport Victoria specifications that Tasmania will be adopting over the coming years.

Ms BUTLER - Will the bridge be built from either side to meet in the middle, is that the idea, like you've done with Bridgewater?

Mr BROWN - It'll come down to the contractor's preference, but there are lots of segments that are joined together, typically from one side working to the other, and it will come down to the contractor's preferences to which side they want to start on. The type of bridge lends itself to a fairly efficient type of construction approach, so the segments are built offsite, and then transported, and can be craned straight into place. Then a certain span of them will be drawn together with cables tensioned up, and then you can proceed and then use that as your next sort of platform for the next segment, and so on across the water.

Ms BUTLER - One last question, Chair, about the expected time of the project once it's started, once you've turned the first sod on the project, how long that will take, expected?

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

CHAIR - Do you see any issue in getting the prefab concrete, if it is built at Brighton, across and to there?

Mr BROWN - I think the road network that we have will be appropriate and lend itself to getting - the segments aren't ridiculously large or anything like that. Our standard trucks will be able to transport them through on our existing road network without any trouble.

CHAIR - We'll probably do that during not a busy time of the day, I expect, if that's the case.

Mr BROWN - Yes.

Ms BURNET - I just had one more question. It's an environmental question. On the way to the site and home there was quite a lot of roadkill which - it was a fairly full moon last night and it was very, very bright, but given we're building new pieces of road and bridge, what sort of mitigation is there for animals crossing, particularly terrestrial animals?

Mr BROWN - We've considered if it's possible to provide a means to help wildlife to cross the road. Unfortunately it's not possible to put in. Ideally, you'd have some sort of tunnel or something underneath the highway - or multiple tunnels - that they could use to get under the highway so they weren't exposed to traffic. Unfortunately, we're on reasonably flat, low-lying land in this area, and for us to provide such facilities would mean that we'd have to

actually raise the highway on that terrestrial - on the land - quite a lot higher than it is, and then that would have the effect of - the embankments from that would then proceed to go farther into the properties on each side and have more impact on the environment - the vegetation and such - that's on those properties to either side of the highway, and also the cost would greatly increase.

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

Ms BURNET - On either side of the bridge and causeway, clearly we're doubling the width of the road at least, how best you mitigate that. You've talked about it, but are there any other ways of doing that, and crossing through like a central barrier for marsupials?

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

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

Mr HARRISS - Coming back to the cost, there was the \$209.5 million committed for the Midway Point causeway and Sorell Causeway. Being that this part of it is at \$159 million, that just leaves somewhere around \$50 million for the Sorell Causeway. Is that going to be enough, I suppose? Was it always roughly around the - what's that, 75 per cent of cost? Was it always envisioned that this section would be about 75 per cent of cost?

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

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

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to actually know what the cost of that's going to be, but we will. Certainly once we have that closer figure, we'll be having conversations with government about what the available budget is.

CHAIR - You might have to go on top of what you already have for the Sorell Causeway - one up and one down.

Mr PAINE - Yes. Well, that would be a very expensive option, but yes, we might.

CHAIR - That's always food for thought. Any follow-up question with that, honourable member?

Mr HARRISS - No, thank you.

CHAIR - Then, thank you, for now. As was already indicated, we have two other people who are going to present. Thank you, and we will invite you back.

Mr BROWN - Thank you, Chair.

The witnesses withdrew.

The Committee suspended at 3.13 p.m.

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The Committee resumed at 3.14 p.m.

CHAIR - Welcome to Robyn Lewis. Thank you very much, Robyn, for coming along.

Ms LEWIS - Thanks for having me.

CHAIR - Ms Lewis, can you please introduce yourself and make the statutory declaration?

Ms LEWIS - My name is Robyn Lewis. I'm the current custodian of Milford, which is the property adjacent to the Tasman Highway and is impacted by this project and the other project, which is part of the South East Traffic Solution (SETS). Both projects impact on my property.

Ms ROBYN LEWIS WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Before I ask you to make your presentation, I'll thank you for appearing before the Committee. The Committee is certainly pleased to hear evidence today, thank you for your submission. Just before beginning to give your evidence, I'd like to inform you of some of the important aspects of the committee proceedings.

It's a hearing proceeding in parliament. This means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege, an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place outside of parliament. It applies to ensure that parliament receives the very best information when conducting its inquiries. It's also important to be aware the protection is not accorded to you if the statements that you make may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings. As this is a public hearing, there are members of the public here. Journalists may also be present or listening, and this means the evidence may be reported. Do you understand?

Ms LEWIS - Yes, I do.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Please make your opening statement.

Ms LEWIS - Thank you very much for having me. As you know, I've put in a submission.

CHAIR - We all have a copy of your submission.

Ms LEWIS - You all have a copy. I'm sorry I couldn't come this morning when you did your tour, but perhaps to refresh your memories on what I've talked about - you might be surprised that I'm not going to talk totally about the environmental angle. I'd like to consider that the Committee considers that the proponents of this project and yourselves need to follow due process in order to avoid the situation that has occurred with the adjacent section of SETS which, as you know, has been going on six years next month - since 2019. It's had enormous delays, significant cost overruns, costs to commuters, and loss of public confidence. I think you, as a Committee, in my opinion, need to satisfy yourselves now, prior to approval of the

expenditure on the causeway as is needed now and meets your criteria, given that delays are inevitable. I'll talk about that a little bit more.

I believe that the Committee needs to request further information from the proponents and independent sources before a decision can be made. I'll elaborate on that.

I don't believe there's any urgency in making a decision on this; the federal DCCEEW - which is about to be renamed - have given this project a high level of scrutiny. It's the second highest available - it's called public environment report. They have informed the proponents and myself that will take at least a year, and that's before the assessment can start. A year's more information has to be supplied, and it's fairly stringent. I've provided a framework for that, which you might have - I think I sent that as part of my submission, and it's quite onerous.

To meet your legislated requirement, I believe you also need to recommend provisions for rigorous oversight, accountability and transparency related to this project on the expenditure and performance, should this be approved. That has been, in my opinion, lacking on this other section of SETS, and it has caused considerable cost overruns. If you don't want to see another blowout of costs, then I think it's fairly important that some rigour is introduced into this process.

I don't know how much you want me to read of this if you read it, but I'll just try to talk through my highlighted sections, perhaps. It's very clear to me that due process hasn't been followed up until this point by the proponents on the section immediately to the west. This has relevance to this project, not just because of the fact that they're joining each other, but now we've seen a section of one project move to take in another one. I'll get onto that. I don't think you should be permitting this situation to occur again.

I'd like to talk about the EPBC Act. It's not optional. It is a law; it's a federal law. It's been in place since 1999. It's not up to the proponents to decide whether they might or might not follow it, or the Minister even. It's an actual federal law and it must be followed. The Committee will be failing in its duties if this is not mandated, so I think it's very important that you say that all obligations of the EPBC Act are followed.

To draw the analogy with the western section - which is the one partly between my property and the golf club, which starts at the Hobart Airport interchange - that was approved. It came through this Committee in November 2021, and it was then estimated at \$28.7 million. Work has not started on that project. The reason it hasn't started is that DCCEEW have still not received a full, assessable project, so they can't start assessment. It is an iterative process, as we have heard, and the proponent goes to them and comes back - but there are certain fundamentals missing in that.

You've heard a lot about sea stars. I don't know whether you know much about this, and some of you will, but there's a hierarchy of level of threat to species. The orchids on my property are 'critically endangered.' They're found nowhere else in the world, and you have to protect their habitat. It's not like, 'Oh, there's a flower over there, protect that, and there's a flower over there.' You have to protect the habitat to ensure the survival of the species. The next level down is 'endangered.' There's one endangered - so there's two critically endangered, one endangered. 'Threatened' is the next level down, which are the sea stars. I understand from recent scientific work that they say they might elevate the status, but the current status of the sea stars is threatened. The sea stars have had approximately, I'm informed, \$3 million spent

on them. The orchids have had zero. We're doing a trade-off here between a species that is found in other locations and species that aren't found in any other locations.

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

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

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

I think another important consideration here - we've just heard of 10-year and 20-year forecasts - if this road ever needs widening again, it's going to have to be on the golf club side. The federal government will not allow it to occur on the Milford side. I mean it was a massive, massive red flag that should have been drawn to the attention - well, the proponents knew and chose not to perhaps give it the consideration that it should have been.

With that section of the road, there's no guarantee at the moment - we now have a new minister, but there's no guarantee that the minister will approve it as it stands. You're looking at a causeway joining up with a project that may have to move. It's already been moved once because of the impacts on the habitat, or on the orchids, without the habitat still being mapped. If they decide that, no, they haven't followed the proper processes and looked at avoidance, then there may be residual impacts that have not been sufficiently mitigated. If any of those occurred, then the federal department could turn around and say no. I would say that I don't know what the probability of that is, but there is a probability. It's a risk, and it's a risk that obviously hasn't been taken into consideration yet. What's going to happen if you approve a causeway that joins up with a section of road that is not going to be going exactly where it might seem to be going at the moment? I don't have the latest maps because despite repeated requests to State Growth, I haven't been supplied them. I don't exactly know where the current project is. It is correct that the surveyors have been and mapped it out, but there's been no environmental assessment and I know that -

CHAIR - But you've got pink pegs?

Ms LEWIS - There are pegs on the acquisition section, but I haven't got the recent plans because there's a whole lot of other impacts from drainage from the golf club side.

Ms BUTLER - Just to clarify, the acquisition area, is that the acquisition from the previous project or from this project?

Ms LEWIS - The acquisition area - I'm talking about the current project, which is the one you're considering. That's been pegged out. The acquisition area from the previous project has also been pegged out, but there's been no resolution on that at this stage. That's five years on basically, five years since acquisition. This money accumulates interest to the government, so the longer this goes on, the taxpayer's paying for that.

I'll just go into the cost overrun section of this. I think, as we've heard, that costs have increased significantly. Regarding the section outside Milford, which I understand isn't what you're talking about here immediately, there have been cost overruns with that section. Are they being funded - does the Committee know - are they being funded from the new section? Where's the money coming from for that - because there are significant overruns? I think you need to know, because they directly impact the project currently under consideration.

When I sat here in 2021, the proponents put forward a project that was 700 metres longer than actual on the western end, which is a quarter of the project length. That didn't seem to pose any problem to anybody, and it was approved, but part of it had already been constructed and funded under another project, and that's documented fact. The reason - and that's \$7 million, approximately, of taxpayers' money based on the links. It's \$1 million per 100 metres approximately, and 80 per cent of that was federal money. It appears to me that the same thing is going to happen at the eastern end, that I was told up until December or January, whenever it was, that the boundary of this project was at the causeway. Suddenly, lo and behold, it's now 300 metres to the west. I'm told that's for technical reasons because projects can't merge; it has to be on a straight line and so on. But there's 300 - that section has already been funded. Are you funding that project section again, twice?

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

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

I think it's worth noting, too, on that 2021 meeting, this Committee - or mostly different people, but you made four recommendations, none of which five years later have been resolved, which have been met. It's all very well to say, 'Well, look, we're going to do something,' but there's actually got to be some teeth in this to actually enforce it, in my opinion.

Another cost consideration I'd just like to put to the Committee, and I don't know whether you've got the answers now or what the appropriate way of me getting information on this is, but what amount has been set aside for compulsory property acquisition? I'm losing the only

swimmable beach on my land. It's a private beach, hasn't been valued. I think it's about 0.8 of a hectare of land, which hasn't been environmentally assessed, but it's a private beach as well. Has that been factored into the budget that's been submitted to you and also for the affected land owners in Midway Point? This comes up partly because of the acquisition of the section that is between my property and the golf club, which has still not been resolved, so four and a half years later I haven't received compensation for that because it's been moved and the area is changing and so on. It starts to get quite difficult. I get accusations of, 'Oh, you're only doing it for the money, blah, blah, blah.'

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

I'll get onto the environmental side. As you're aware, the causeway duplication is highly significant, highly expensive and located in a very environmentally sensitive area. We've heard about sea stars, and you'll hear a lot more about sea stars as well, and we've talked about the complexity and stringency of the federal oversight of this. Again, it's the same question: why are we approving funding for this now before that is approved by the federal government? Where does the money go? Where does it get parked? What happens to it? I don't know. I would see that it's obviously important to improve a tranche of money to get to the stage of environmental approval, but particularly given the sort of current budgetary situation with the state government, why are you approving the whole lot now? That's something, I think, that should be asked because there will be delays. There will be redesign costs. It's absolutely inevitable and in the section outside Milford, between Milford and the golf club, I think, had the proponents followed due process in the first instance a lot of the delays could have been totally avoided. I actually think it would be completed by now - sorry, I'm losing my voice - if the EPBC Act had been taken into consideration then, or properly taken into consideration.

I think you should ask that: why you are approving this at least a year before DSG can submit a project to the federal government? It's got to go out then - PER is a highly significant process. It's much, much more stringent than preliminary documentation, and as I said, it is iterative, but you've really got to look at the timing of this, I believe.

It's being planned to join up with a project that may or may not get approval. So, what's going to happen then? I don't believe that demonstrates fitness for purpose at all.

It comes back to several other aspects. One is the transport aspect that you put forward, Helen, that in one of the recommendations five years ago was to look at - I mean, we're looking at a transport problem. It's not just a roads problem, it's not just a traffic problem, it's a transport problem. I'm very gratified to hear that park-and-ride is being considered, but I think we need to be looking at this in a far more holistic manner.

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

It sort of raises another question. The assessments or alternatives to this as a road were only done two years ago, which is four years after the section between Milford and the golf club was designed. Yes, it's been moved by 10 metres to help improve and minimise the impact on the orchids, but it's still pretty much set in stone. So, four years after they were already decided, they did an alternative assessment, which cost approximately \$40,000, I'm told, and it failed to look at alternatives in the sense that there was no straight-line solution, which, if you look at the map, would be the most logical way to go.

I understand that we've got a golf club there, but I think looking at alternatives should look at all the alternatives and not just some of the alternatives, because the purpose of this project is to reduce commuting time and increase safety. That section of the road still retains the dangerous bend, unfortunately known as Lewis Corner, which, until the speed limit was reduced, did claim fatalities. The whole section did. Since it was reduced to 80 kilometres per hour there has not been one fatality other than a suicide on that road.

Yes, that's relevant, but commuting time is important and it all comes down to the two minutes saved here and there, and that adds up to a very, very significant number over time. I think it's time to look at the alternative again, because the other thing about the golf course is that, as I've noted in one of these, it's currently using drinking water out of the Sorell water supply for irrigation, substantial quantities of drinking water out of the Sorell supply. It comes out of my property, so I know there are two offtakes that go into Sorell.

In the long term, we've got to look at are these sorts of things sustainable? Is it sustainable to constrain the development of Sorell, deprived of drinking water by putting drinking water onto the Tasmania Golf Club? It's again another question that needs to be looked at.

Just going back for a minute to the speed limit, I disagree with Adrian Paine's assessment that there are no viable solutions to the question of roadkill and wildlife. We do have a wildlife policy in this state. I understand that it costs more and that lifting the road is expensive. Their own engineers, or one of their own engineers prior to Adrian being involved in this project, put forward a solution that would work 90 per cent of the time, and that was rejected last time round for no valid reason that I can see, which was a sort of modified drain. Yes, the drains will flood and they can't use it when it's flooded, but at least it's something, because it's always going to be forest. Whatever is going to be on the other side, who knows? It might be condominiums for all we know, but there's always - forest must be retained because it's critical habitat, so nothing's going to happen. There will be continual wildlife deaths for the next 100 years until everything is destroyed, basically, so I think we do have to give more consideration.

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

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

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

Ms LEWIS - We are talking the whole stretch along Milford, but there's another section at the Midway Point end where animals cross as well, but the section between the golf club and Milford.

Ms BUTLER - Milford? Right.

Ms LEWIS - Yes, through the whole end. Across the whole lot, animals cross over. They come up from down the spit and crossover and go around Barilla Bay. There are crossing points there and it's well documented. You can just go and see all the dead animals all along the road, and it's there, and they'll be on the bicycle track for everyone to see. For every 95 per cent of tourists who go along that road, that's the first thing they see when they go out of Hobart Airport, will be dead animals.

I think that's something that needs to be considered. I think I've talked probably about the transport issue, rather than it just being a traffic solution. Is it the best - Simon has proposed a range of questions. One of them is: are the proposed works the best solution to meet an identifiable need? It depends how you define the need, is the need for moving people or is it the need for just faster traffic and more commuting? That's something that - it's your job to satisfy yourself that these alternatives have been properly examined.

It gets back again, we're talking about the golf club and it being now moved to the southern side. I just wondered, I don't know whether the Committee can explain to me, was there an agreement with the golf club in place to prevent any impact on them? Why has most of it been pushed onto the Milford site? Is that something that the Committee can answer, or -

Ms BUTLER - I think that question was asked to us when we heard the previous as well. We can't answer those questions as a Committee.

Ms LEWIS - You can't answer that. Is that something that you can maybe look into, because it's costs, significant costs for this.

Anyway, I've talked about the use of water because in time - you know, this is one of the driest areas of Tasmania and in time these sorts of things aren't going to be tolerated, possibly, by the public for that much longer.

Fitness for purpose: I don't believe, as I've just mentioned, that it's fit for purpose if it joins up with another project, the other section of sets which may be rejected and require redesign or further avoidance measures. It may well be that they don't have to do redesign, but there may be further avoidance measures required. We don't know. I think it's just simply premature to do that.

I did have another note about - I've consulted with a couple of other stakeholders, including Hobart Airport and Barilla Bay oysters, and we need written confirmation that the sewage pipeline between the TasWater treatment plant at Hobart Airport and Midway Point is actually in the plans. As I said, I haven't been supplied with the plans, so I don't know - or the current set of plans. Perhaps the proponents can answer that, but it needs to be confirmed in writing that this meets TasWater and Hobart Airport's and surrounding growth requirements. Is there a pipe for this wastewater? What's the diameter or capacity of it, and also of the mains to Sorell? Sorell is under significant growth constraints. What is the diameter of the new - what is the capacity of the new pipeline being proposed over to Sorell?

CHAIR - We don't have all that detail, but there's certainly in the capital works a reference to sewer rising main works at TasWater's cost.

Ms LEWIS - Right, okay.

CHAIR - They're taking the opportunity if this proceeds to use -

Ms LEWIS - That's great to hear.

CHAIR - the excavation and whatever else to upgrade, but I don't know the diameter.

Ms LEWIS - Yes, excellent. It's certainly needed but I think it has - well, there are two pipelines. There's the water pipeline, which has to go and be renewed and that needs to be as large as possible. It's part of the regional planning and presumably that's been taken into account, but I think it certainly needs to be checked.

The other thing I discussed with the proponents was that the new causeway design includes a second flow channel. I don't know whether any of you remember when the first time the causeways were put across Orierton section, that area used to eutrophy and smell appallingly in the 1970s and so on, until they put a couple more drains through. I have asked for consideration to be put on another channel as well as McGees Bridge, because what we're seeing now is a lot more nutrient being used by farmers, viticulturalists, horticulturalists, wastewater use in the upper Coal River Valley. There's a lot more nutrient flow and we're getting very big algal blooms, in lower Pitt Water, in particular, because there's not enough flow through. It's also a shark and ray reserve and there are handfish in there, and algal blooms have been shown to be detrimental to all those.

I've been told by the proponents that there's no engineering reason for it, but I'm not talking about engineering reasons, I'm talking about environmental reasons. I don't think there's been any consideration given to that at all. Again, one could argue that it might harm the sea stars, but the sea star - there are other populations, we don't know. Like everything, it's a balance, but what we don't want to see is eutrophication of that whole area and then having to do it retrospectively in 20 years when this problem is getting worse. It does impact on the bird life as well because the algal blooms are killing the fish that they eat and various others.

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Ms BURNET - Are you saying that there has been an increase in those algal blooms?

Ms LEWIS - Absolutely. I've lived there for 25 years and I monitor the seabirds. They are declining in population, but the algal blooms are lasting longer. They're still active at the moment. They used to be like - when I first moved there, none. Probably 20 years ago, just starting, 15 years ago, getting worse, but only in summer. Now, they're persisting through to May, and then they die and that's when the smell starts. It takes all the oxygen out of the water as well. I think we need some ecological modelling on that rather than just relying on the engineers for that.

I realise we're running out of time.

As you know, we do have international obligations as well in our environmental things. It's not just Ramsar, we're in the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and restoration means making things better, not just keeping them as they are. We also are signatory to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which is a national plan. I think Peter McGlone is going to talk about the sea stars, but I was recently told that in a recent relocation trial, it was 100 per cent mortality at Pipe Clay Lagoon. You'll need to ascertain that.

I think probably that covers most of what I would like to talk about. I'd really like to see a full holistic transport solution, not just road widening, because when we fill that road up again, what's going to happen then, basically?

CHAIR - Thank you. I'll now open it up for questions. Thank you very much. Who would like to start? Any questions related to the information that's been provided?

Ms BUTLER - I had questions about the orchids. I remember from our previous project, the land - because we can only deal with this project, what's in front of us.

Ms LEWIS - Yes, yes, I understand.

Ms BUTLER - The land - your land - which is being negotiated at the moment, I believe, for potential acquisition?

Ms LEWIS - Well, it's been pegged out. I've had no further discussion.

Ms BUTLER - Are there orchids on that land?

Ms LEWIS - No-one knows. It's never been assessed.

Ms BUTLER - Okay.

Ms LEWIS - It hasn't been mapped for habitat, it hasn't been assessed for orchids, never been looked at by anybody.

Ms BUTLER - But we definitely know there are critically endangered orchids at Milford.

Ms LEWIS - Well, there are critically endangered orchids at Milford. There are two species and there's also an endangered species, but to get back to my earlier point, what we're

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supposed to be avoiding and protecting is their habitat. You can't just say, there's a flower over there, we won't go there. We have to protect the habitat by law and the habitat is defined under the Tasmanian orchid recovery plan very specifically. It's basically white gum habitat. I've had an independent person look at it. He said basically the whole extent of the white gum forest is potential habitat, but it hasn't been assessed not even by me, so -

Ms BURNET - I just had a question about the swimmable beach.

Ms LEWIS - Yes.

Ms BURNET - Is that, as part of this project, at the end of the causeway?

Ms LEWIS - Yes. There's what's called the bluff, which is the sandstone protuberance historically known as the bluff and there's a beach between the bluff and the causeway, which is part of my land. It's a high water title, so it's part of Milford, and it's the only sandy beach - well, round the other side is sandy, but it's very, very shallow, so that's the only swimmable beach.

Ms BURNET - Is that at the junction with the causeway?

Ms LEWIS - The junction of the causeway and there's a set of stairs going down to it that were put in there.

Ms BURNET - So people windsurf there?

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

Ms BURNET - I think we just need to ascertain -

Ms LEWIS - But it is a private beach.

Ms BURNET - with the proponent the impacts on that as they've seen.

Ms LEWIS - Well I don't - none of that area has been environmentally assessed.

Ms BURNET - Thank you.

CHAIR - But that access to that beach will be gone?

Ms LEWIS - Yes, the whole beach will go, yes, the whole beach.

CHAIR - Okay.

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

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CHAIR - Thank you very much, Robyn.

Ms LEWIS - If you need any further information, I'm happy to provide it.

CHAIR - Looks like you've given us a bit of homework, actually.

Ms LEWIS - Alright, thank you very much.

CHAIR - I just need to let you know that, as I advised at the commencement of your evidence, what you've said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. You've already indicated you've done this before, so you understand that. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware the privilege does not attach to your comments that you may make to anyone, including the media. Even if you're repeating what you've just said to us. So, just again, do you understand that?

Ms LEWIS - I do, can I just ask you, the minutes of this, do they get published?

CHAIR - Yes, with the report.

Ms LEWIS - So when that comes out, they become public.

Ms BUTLER - They are also on the *Hansard*.

Ms LEWIS - Alright, I just wasn't sure on the timing of that.

CHAIR - Thank you very much.

The witness withdrew.

The Committee suspended at 3.53 p.m.

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The Committee resumed at 3.54 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you very much and first of all, welcome. I'll get you to state your name, any title you might add to it and take the statutory declaration.

Mr McGLONE - Peter McGlone, CEO of the Tasmanian Conservation Trust.

Mr PETER McGLONE, CEO, TASMANIAN CONSERVATION TRUST, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today, and the Committee is certainly pleased to hear your evidence. Just before giving your evidence, and I know you're well versed in this process, Peter, I'd like to inform you of some of the important aspects of committee proceedings. The committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament. This means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege. This is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom without the fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of parliament, and it applies to ensure the parliament receives the very best information when conducting its inquiries and it is a really important part of this committee process. It's important to be aware this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings and this is a public hearing and members of the public, journalists may be present. This means your evidence may be reported. Do you understand?

Mr McGLONE - Yes. And it is being recorded.

CHAIR - We'd be happy for you to make an opening statement. Thank you, Peter.

Mr McGLONE - There are a few things I'd like to go into. First of all, I'm going to speak to the submission that I sent to the Commonwealth government on their recent assessment. One of the reasons I want to give a bit of a verbal presentation is just to delineate the things that I think are most relevant to this Committee's work. The concerns I raised relate to two quite distinct things: one is the sea star and the other is the much broader issue of is there a need for the project? Is there a demonstrated need for that? Has the problem been identified? Is this the best solution to that problem?

I'll just start by saying that the - I'm going to go into some critical comments on how the sea star has been managed - but off the bat I'll just say that often - probably most of the time in submissions - you don't tell government agencies what they've done right, but they have done a lot of really good work and I want to acknowledge that to begin with. One thing that maybe you haven't had is, let's introduce the character we're talking about here. You can get this document easily from NRE on their website.

CHAIR - One of the members actually brought it up on the phone to show me, so thank you.

Mr McGLONE - It's called - I don't think that they are 'he's' and 'she's.' I think they're one sex; they're *Parvulastra vivipara*, and understandably, everyone in the business calls it *vivipara*. One of the reasons it's really unique, I'm sure you've heard, is that it's one of only a couple of species of sea star globally that gives birth to live young. Most of them give birth

to eggs that later hatch. This gives birth to live young. That's about the biggest they ever get. When they're mature, sexually mature, they can be as small in diameter as 5 millimetres. When they're born, they can be as small as 1.5 millimetres across, so they're specks on the rock. Most of them are probably the size of a piece of confetti and the scientists are looking for something that's almost identical colour to the sandstone.

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

Just quickly going through a few of the critiques I gave of the work that was supplied to the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth has now triggered the process that it's now a controlled action and there will be an assessment, and Robyn Lewis referred to the type of assessment. I have great confidence that there will be a very thorough assessment. We also have to remember that it will come through the local councils and the EPA in Tasmania, but I just want to flag, and I think this is relevant to the Committee's work, and I'll come to the conclusion later about why.

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

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

The most important thing that's wrong with the commitments to the Commonwealth process is that there was a recommendation from the consultant, Echo Marine, that wasn't carried through to the final report to the Commonwealth. The consultant recommended this recommendation, this action, and it wasn't committed to by Department of State Growth. The

commitment - it's only very short - says 'Consultation with land and waste managers in Pitt Water should be conducted to communicate the impacts of current anthropogenic' - that's us - 'inputs on *vivipara* habitat and the urgent need to improve management practices.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

I am happy to answer questions on *vivipara* now or later. I just want to move on to the other issues.

The bigger picture issue is what the need is for the project and the only document that I have been able to find is the alternatives analysis that was submitted to the Commonwealth government as part of the EPBC analysis.

In 2021 and 2022, I did request - there was reference on the website of State Growth to a feasibility study - I made a request for that. I never got given it, so I don't know if that addresses the issue of the need for this project, I couldn't tell you. I've never seen it, but the alternatives analysis is the only document that goes to that issue in any way, and it fails to give

any evidence to substantiate the need for the project. The closest it goes - and a couple of quick quotes from that document give you a feel for what they say:

Major improvements and/or development of an alternative route are required to address the deteriorating seawalls and to accommodate future predicted traffic volumes due to growth in Sorell and the southern beaches.

The analysis then goes on to say that the project goal is to:

... improve travel time reliability through a more efficient and safer road network, and maintain the livability of Sorell and southern beaches by improving travel time.

The alternatives analysis provides no data to establish the travel times between Sorell, Midway Point, southern beaches and Hobart CBD or other key destinations. They are too long, based on any standards such as driving speed and driving time.

There was reference earlier to the number of cars that travel daily from Midway Point and Sorell, and the document submitted to the Commonwealth makes one statement about this issue of what the problem is. It says that 21,000 vehicles per day travel on the Midway Point causeway, 17,000 on Sorell Causeway during the morning and afternoon peak periods with only a single lane in each direction. The existing causeway traffic lanes approach capacity causing queuing and delays.

I assert that there is no data being provided through this process, through the EPBC, nor through any document I could find on the website, that gives any basis to those claims of queuing delays. No data whatsoever. I'm glad that the Commonwealth has picked up this problem as well, and the Commonwealth has said that the part of the assessment is now that they need to clearly define the problem the proposed action is trying to address, and that will include quantifying the severity and regularity of the queuing and delays.

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

Now, I don't claim to know exactly how your advice is given, how direct it can be. I don't think you have to be saying, 'We won't give any more money.' But, certainly, I think one thing that this Committee should be demanding is a priority for the funding that should be to justify the project to actually provide the data that is now demanded by the federal government.

The thing that came up with Robyn Lewis's evidence is that you don't wait until a problem confronts you and stops the project and then try to deal with it. You need to see it coming. Now the Commonwealth have given warning here and I think that this Committee needs to make a

demand, a request for the same level of evidence. We actually need to have it documented to a sufficient level for the Commonwealth and brought back to this Committee.

Now you can make recommendations about prioritising expenditure for that work. It's the sort of work that I thought with a project worth \$159 million ought to have been done years ago. The sort of evidence that came forward from State Growth this afternoon was the sort of evidence around population change, around numbers of vehicles using the road. That, in my mind, would trigger an interest to find out what the problem is. What is the problem, how severe; and here we are, five years down the track, or four years down the track, asking for basic data.

CHAIR - The interesting question is then, why would the federal government have funded this as a joint commitment of \$349.5 million?

Mr McGLONE - I wish there was a committee I could go to in Canberra to raise these questions too, because they're just as much to blame in funding these things and then hoping to death that the data backs us up down the track. Of course that leads you to think the Commonwealth also requires an analysis of alternatives. If you assume there is a body of data that can substantiate the problem, the analysis that was provided in the earlier stage to the federal government was very elementary, and the key problem with it is that it didn't look at any demand-sided solutions.

If you assume that there is a problem that needs fixing, they didn't look at anything to do with demand responses, and they basically fall into: look at whether we should continue to advance more population growth or the same rate of growth in that area. That's something that's a live issue with the regional planning strategies, the urban growth boundary right now. Then there's the other issue of managing driver behaviour. Can people be encouraged to drive at different times, take different routes?

There are things that are being done by this state government, in a way that I don't think is very effective, such as giving advice to people about journey times, for example. You could be far more proactive about trying to convince people into not using roads at certain times if it's not absolutely essential. That's a general strategy, and the other one that probably most commonly comes to mind is public transport, getting more people onto smaller numbers of vehicles. As a regular user of Kinetic buses from Dodges Ferry, I think it's a fabulous alternative.

One of the things that - sorry, this is sort of a bit of an aside, but it brings it to mind - is that I travel hundreds of days a year in peak time, and almost always on the bus, and the amount of delays that I experience - and I know this is ad hoc, it's just me - the only delay that is ever noticeable, except for perhaps a couple of days a year, is you slow down for a few minutes on the Sorell Causeway before you get to Midway Point. Hardly noticeable, hardly noticeable at all, and then you very occasionally get a bottleneck beyond that. That's like a couple days a year that you look at your watch and think, I'm going to be late. That's my personal experience of it. I should stop there so I can take questions.

CHAIR - Thank you. I'll open it up for questions. I really appreciate what you brought forward to the Committee.

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

Mr McGLONE - Ninety-six per cent decline, yeah. I would say we need to do that other recommendation as well, address the water quality issue as well, as if you are doing works on the causeway, the sort of actions they're recommending are really excellent, but you need to look at doing both, and the water quality issue seems to be the main driver of decline, so doing one without the other is arguably futile. Maybe it's futile. Maybe it's a waste of money.

Ms BURNET - You've explained it fairly comprehensively, so thank you.

CHAIR - We've all read your submission as well, so that was the opportunity to revisit that, while you were speaking to what was provided to us.

Mr McGLONE - On that issue of the two actions: the action that was recommended but not adopted by State Growth, I would argue - and we're probably too late now because there's been a lot of expense on detailed work looking at how to keep parts of the causeway, and how many sea stars are there, and whether we need to translocate - the cost-benefit analysis of - it might just end up being that some better educational work and communications with those users of Pitt Water could deliver a far greater outcome. Anyway, both things need to happen.

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

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

That issue is not easy to fix, but something's changed in the last 20 years, perhaps, that's been critical and maybe it's only a few discrete actions that need to be followed up to actually have a big impact on it. And just remember, 1.5 millimetres when they're born. Not much bigger than the head of a pin, hey.

CHAIR - No good me looking for them if I didn't have my glasses on, that's for sure. Thank you very much, Peter, for the time and you've sat through the entire hearing today. As I advised you at the commencement of your evidence, what you've said to us today is protected by parliamentary privilege and once you leave the table, you need to be aware the privilege does not attach to your comments that you made to anyone, including the media, even if you're just repeating what you've said to us.

Mr McGLONE - Understood, thanks.

The witness withdrew.

The Committee suspended at 4.17 p.m.

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The Committee resumed at 4.18 p.m.

CHAIR - We've invited the proponents of the proposal for the Midway Point and Sorell Causeway back to the table.

Obviously there's been quite a bit of information provided to the Committee additional to what we've heard at an earlier time. Is there any aspect of what the Committee has heard given that you've been sitting in the committee room that you would like to address or are you just looking for the Committee to ask some questions? I'm just giving you the opportunity.

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

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

The other thing in regard - I don't know, I've lost my train of thought, sorry.

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

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

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

CHAIR - In regard to the assertions that were made about the previous project that had been approved but not progressed and around the compensation, I know it doesn't necessarily relate to this, but I think the point was made that you've got the causeway but you don't have the hook-up to that. Do you want to make some comment about that? That was raised by Ms Lewis.

Mr PAINE - Yes. The SETS project as we have outlined is a - well, SETS program funding - is an end-to-end - from the airport all the way to Sorell and beyond with the Sorell Bypass. That's the whole complete package. As we have identified, quite clearly, each component adds to the overall benefit of the project. Yes, that's been a very challenging section. We have worked through a revised design, which has changed the acquisition on the Milford property and on the golf course property. We've narrowed up the footprint and changed the

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acquisition to try to address the concerns that were raised through the environmental process that we progressed through.

CHAIR - Is that likely to come back to the Committee for a reapproval?

Mr PAINE - My understanding is it wouldn't, no. It's substantially the same project, it's just got a narrower footprint to reduce environmental impacts. That acquisition, therefore, is not resolved because we've been changing the design and we've actually reduced the impact. There will be some land we'll be returning to the Milford property as part of that redesign that we've recently completed.

CHAIR - Do you acknowledge that four years of waiting for some compensation and still having legal demands yourself doesn't help the community get on board, if you like?

Mr PAINE - Yes. Typically, we do pay people's legals and financial out-of-pocket expenses through an acquisition process. I'm not sure about the specific case that's being referred to and I wouldn't want to talk to specifics, but that is our policy. That is our approach.

CHAIR - Is it possible to put that down for your homework, Adrian?

Mr PAINE - Absolutely. The Office of the Valuer-General actually coordinates the process once we've determined the area of land that we - so they do the valuation; they work with the landowner to finalise and settle the final compensation payment. That process is out of our control and it can take some time. Normally, our policy is to pay -

CHAIR - That would appear to be very lengthy, in your view?

Mr PAINE - I would need to refer that back to the OVG to give me some stuff. I've certainly heard of processes that have been even longer.

CHAIR - Alright. I am sure it is on your radar.

Mr PAINE - Yes, sure. Yes, we will provide you with some further information on that.

CHAIR - Ms Butler, I saw you furiously making notes.

Ms BUTLER - I was making a lot of notes, but you just asked the question I was going to ask. Just about whether an assessment has been done on the site in relation to the endangered orchids - the Department has undertaken that assessment of the habitat?

Mr BROWN - Yes. The area that we've identified for acquisition on the Milford property - it's correct that we haven't assessed that in detail as yet. However, we are scheduled to have appropriately qualified and experienced ecologists go on to that site both to map if there's any potential habitat for the particular orchids of interest and also to see if any are flowering in the coming flowering season, which is, depending on the species, it's September or November. That is all scheduled to certainly look at whether there is the presence of potential habitat that would support orchids or whether they're actually definitely present. Then, we may need to revisit the design if that's the case or find some other way to mitigate any impact on that habitat or orchids themselves.

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

Mr BROWN - If we could, we'd avoid any acquisition. The reason why we need this very, very small percentage of the Milford property is to preserve the sea star habitat on the northern side of the Midway Point causeway. In order to do that, to preserve that, we need to come to the southern side of the existing causeway to do our widening and to line up - the section of highway that's on the land - to line that up with the new causeway, it needs to come somewhat to the south as it's on the approach and that results in this small portion of land that needs to be acquired. Does that answer your question or not quite?

CHAIR - There's been no preference given - I'll ask you straight out - no preference given to the golf club over the Milford property?

Mr BROWN - Absolutely not. I actually feel quite disappointed that that would be asserted. We were treating them fairly.

CHAIR - Those weren't Ms Lewis' words, those are probably my words.

Mr BROWN - Right, okay. No, they're treated exactly the same. What we wanted is a good outcome for the public monies that we're spending in terms of the road asset we wanted to deliver and the way that we manage our impact on the environment. Those are the objectives. It's not about having preference for any one landowner or the other.

CHAIR - Do you have any comment around the timeframes that were asserted around why would you need to rush this? There seems to be a lot more time, given that the Commonwealth government have a significant role to play here and they've already been asking for additional information. Do you have some comment in regard to that?

Mr PAINE - Sorry, are you talking about the timing of this hearing?

CHAIR - Yes, well, the timing of asking for this to be approved or not.

Mr PAINE - Obviously there's quite a lead-up to securing a hearing date with the Public Works Committee. Certainly when we submitted our documentation to Commonwealth earlier in the year, we believed what we were submitting as preliminary documentation would be satisfactory for them to proceed with completing the assessment. It was only a month ago, I think?

Mr BROWN - In early March, we -

Mr PAINE - Yes, in early March we got the feedback from the Commonwealth that they would be looking to do further, more extensive investigations to progress the assessment they wanted, and then it was a few weeks after that, they gave us the actual details of what that assessment would look like. We believe we can do all that work and progress that and satisfy the requirements without any significant changes to design of the project. We'll see how that

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goes, but that's our belief at the moment. We're still confident we can deliver this project as we're presenting to the Committee today.

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

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

CHAIR - Why wouldn't they have just asked for it from the Commonwealth who provided the joint commitment for the money initially? Wouldn't they have had some of that detail, or do their departments not talk to each other either?

Mr PAINE - I couldn't give you a clear answer to that one, except to say that the submission we provide for the environmental needs to be a standalone submission. We have to provide everything they ask for as it's - because it gets published publicly for review and assessment. I imagine that's the reason, rather than that they could get it from another department, they want it as a single comprehensive submission.

CHAIR - Because that information would have been all provided when the request for the funds were actually asked for at a previous time. I haven't looked up to see how many years ago that joint commitment was made of \$349 million.

Mr PAINE - It's been on a couple of iterations and I haven't got the - there was an initial commitment and then a further additional commitment made by both governments over the last six or seven years, I think, probably. I can't remember the exact dates -

CHAIR - To date, it tells us in our information that \$144 million has been allocated to the SETS projects completed to date. That doesn't include the project that hasn't proceeded -

Mr BROWN - Correct.

CHAIR - between the roundabout and the Midway Point Causeway. Is that right?

Mr PAINE - That's correct.

Mr BROWN - Oh, no, it does include the allocation, it just hasn't been - obviously, we haven't built it and spent that money, as yet.

CHAIR - All right. Has been allocated to projects completed?

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Mr BROWN - Yes, correct.

CHAIR - It says projects completed to date, so that's not quite right.

Mr BROWN - Right, okay. I might just revisit -

CHAIR - On page 14. I've been wrong before, so please let me know if I am.

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

CHAIR - We'd have some money left over.

Mr PAINE - Well, that doesn't happen. It's the one \$349.45 million -

Mr BROWN - That's it.

Mr PAINE - and that'll deliver all those projects and, as they're progressively delivered, any savings get held over to be used on the future project. If we get savings at the end of the day, we would be returning that to the Commonwealth government and the state.

CHAIR - My last question, because there are probably others that'd like to ask a question, is around the extended - the 300 metres. Do you want to make a comment about that, that it's only just been advised that they'll need this extra 300 metres?

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

CHAIR - Right, okay. That was a clear question that was asked by a previous submitter. Thank you.

Ms BURNET - Does that mean that there are any changes to those assessments of the orchid and whatever else might be on the side of the road reserve, in effect?

Mr PAINE - In terms of the movement by the 300 metres?

Ms BURNET - Yes.

Mr PAINE - No.

Ms BURNET - No?

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Mr PAINE - Because those assessments were done under one project and those assessments, wherever that's impacted, get considered in the next project.

Ms BURNET - Okay. I have a number of questions from the other deputations. If you can answer those - might be straightforward, it may not be. The swimmable beach - we did talk about that earlier - is that going to be impacted from your perspective in relation to that side of the causeway, the extension of the causeway to Milford Beach?

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

Ms BURNET - Do you have conversations with the property owner outside of these sessions?

Mr PAINE - Yes.

Ms BURNET - So there's consultation that occurs, just so I'm clear?

MR PAINE - Yes.

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

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

Ms BURNET - Thank you. Chair, can we take that on notice?

Mr PAINE - Yes, sure.

CHAIR - You can take that on notice and provide - and the Secretary will put it in writing, of course, but that'll be another lot of homework for you, Adrian.

Ms BURNET - You might have covered this in your answer, but just in relation to the upgrade from Hobart Airport, the TasWater or the sewage pipeline, is that going to have enough capacity with the change?

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Mr BROWN - Really, we're guided by TasWater as to their future planning; their understanding of population growth in that area. We are guided by them in terms of what's an appropriate size.

Mr PAINE - We have regular discussions with TasWater and TasNetworks about infrastructure upgrades and the like and how we can help facilitate that. Certainly, that's been part of the project consideration.

CHAIR - Is that something that you could request from TasWater, that we have some indication of the size of the pipe?

Mr PAINE - We could -

CHAIR - Either that or you can make some contact with Ms Lewis?

Mr PAINE - Yes, sure. We can find that out. I'm not sure how far progressed TasWater are in finalising their design. We've made room for a pipe of a nominated size, but they might not have committed to that size at this stage.

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

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

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

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

Ms BURNET - What's the length of the causeway?

Mr BROWN - Off the top of my head, I don't have that information.

Ms BURNET - Would it be about 40 or 50 metres? Or, no, probably longer? It would be much longer.

Mr BROWN - No, much longer than that. Yes, several hundred metres.

Ms BURNET - I am a bit spatially challenged. Yes. It just seems like a long way for a little starfish. Clearly, with other settling of water and so forth - not that I'm an expert in that, but just interested in - has that been considered, any sort of drainage through the causeway?

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

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

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

Ms BURNET - Lastly, I think, there was a suggestion that there was 100 per cent mortality at Pipe Clay Lagoon. Can you verify that?

Mr BROWN - I am not sure where that information's coming from, but we had a very healthy, successful trial of sea stars in Pipe Clay Lagoon, in terms of building them a temporary home; trialling a certain number of them happening in there. I'm wondering if that's some information that is confused with the fact that there is a population decline of the sea stars in Pitt Water. Pitt Water is separate to Pipe Clay Lagoon - whether there is some just confusion about what we are actually talking about there.

Ms BURNET - I see.

Mr BROWN - No, successful in Pipe Clay Lagoon in terms of sea star trials.

Ms BURNET - Okay, thank you.

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

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

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

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

Mr HARRISS - On the acquisition of the Milford property, being that there's been no assessments done so far on that, around the research, I suppose a couple of questions: how can you be confident that construction timeframes - as in starting this year - will be met? Also, you mentioned before about potentially replanning or drafting areas if that research comes back that the design needs to change. I'm just wondering where that confidence of timeframes comes from without having any research conducted at the moment?

Mr PAINE - There's general knowledge about the environmental habitat in that area. Any environmental assessment begins with a desktop study, which is the information that's collected on the Natural Values Atlas and other areas that have - surveys that have been undertaken by others. There have been some previous surveys done in that general area. Our ecologist has been out there working nearby to do assessments on the Milford property, but not at that specific location. From their observations, without actually doing the full survey, they've indicated to us that they don't believe that there would be any particular issues with that piece of land. That's where we're at the moment.

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It's important to note that every environmental survey is a point in time. Certainly, when we're doing submissions for approvals process, it's typically got a life cycle of two years. If you've done environmental surveys and it's more than two years old, you're typically required to go and do it again because the environment does change. I suppose that survey does need to be done, but the initial information we've got from our ecologists who've been working in the region out there and know the general environment in that area is that they don't believe that it'll be identified as an issue. Yes, there is the chance that it will.

CHAIR - Just following on from the honourable member's question about the beach and access to the beach, Ms Lewis told us that there were some steps that she'd negotiated or that had been negotiated with council. Will that still be available if - I've got no real concept of how that might look like. Is there still access? Will there still be access to that portion of the beach that does -

Mr BROWN - Currently, that's correct, there are some steps that go from a path next to the highway down to the beach and that's served somewhat by a small parking area, a layoff area that came about from an old highway alignment. That area will get changed with the new road. Essentially, there'll be lanes there and so the steps -

CHAIR - So there'll be nowhere to park.

Mr BROWN - There'll be nowhere to park. People will have to, if they want to use that area, walk from somewhere else. I imagine that the interest in trying to get there would probably diminish given there'll be nowhere to park nearby. Hence, we don't see a need to provide the steps again. Through our consultation activities, we haven't heard an interest in the community for a facility there or maintaining a facility that we're aware of.

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

Mr BROWN - There's no real - if we were to provide more hard-stand area for a car park and that, we're obviously going to have an impact on probably the bushland on that side and then you'd have to build a path to go there because the path that we are building is on the other side of the highway. Domino effect of what sort of impact are you having.

CHAIR - Any further questions, members? If not, then I have a series of questions and I know that you're well aware of those. Do the proposed works meet an identified need or needs or solve a recognised problem?

Mr BROWN - Yes, they do.

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

Mr BROWN - Yes, they are.

CHAIR - Are the proposed works fit for purpose?

Mr BROWN - Yes.

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CHAIR - Do the proposed works provide value for money?

Mr BROWN - Yes.

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

Mr BROWN - They are.

CHAIR - Thank you. As I indicated when we commenced, I did advise you at the commencement of your evidence that what you've said here to us today is protected by parliamentary privilege, but once you leave the table you need to be aware that privilege does not attach to your comments that you make to anyone, including the media, even if you're just repeating what you said to us. Do you both understand?

Witnesses - Yes, I understand.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. On behalf of the Committee, again, thank you for the opportunity to have the site visit this morning. The Committee sincerely thanks you for the documentation, the work, and the evidence that's provided here today, and that also includes the other two submissions as well. On behalf of the Committee, thank you all and we will conclude the broadcast.

The witnesses withdrew.

The committee adjourned at 4.46 p.m.