



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Guy Barnett MP

Tuesday 18 November 2025

MEMBERS

Mr Rob Fairs (Chair)
Mr Dean Winter (Deputy Chair)
Mr Vica Bayley
Prof George Razay

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Rosol
Ms Haddad
Dr Woodruff
Mr Ferguson
Mr George
Ms Dow
Ms Badger
Mr Mitchell
Dr Broad

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. GUY BARNETT MP

Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation,
Minister for Small Business

Ministerial Staff

Jim Dunham

Chief of Staff

Eliza Jones

Senior Adviser

Kristers Niklavs Bosveld

Adviser

Department of Justice

Kristy Bourne

Secretary

Pauline van Adrichem

Deputy Secretary, Justice and Reform

Jennifer Lee

A/Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Governance and Major Projects

Ross Smith

Deputy Secretary

Colin Shepherd

Deputy Secretary, Corrective Services

Gavin Wailes

Director, Finance

Bruce Paterson

Director, Strategic Legislation and Policy

Penelope Ikedife

Registrar, Supreme Court

Jane Cook

Administrator of Courts

Andrew Smith

Chief Information Officer

Ann Owen

Registrar, Births Deaths and Marriages

Ross Thomas

A/Principal Registrar, TASCAT

Kristen Wylie

Director, Tasmania Legal Aid

Pia Saturno

A/Anti-Discrimination Commissioner

Andrew Hawkey

Tasmanian Electoral Commissioner

Louise Coe

Independent regulator

Chelsea Trubody-Jager

Director, Crown Law

Narelle Pamplin

Director of Prisons

Christopher Carney

Director, Community Corrections

Amber Smith

A/Director, Strategic Infrastructure Projects

Wayne Johnson

Director, Monetary Penalties Enforcement Service

Angela Mc Crossen

Executive Director, Justice Support Services

Jeremy Harbottle

Public Guardian

Statutory Authorities

Daryl Coates

Director of Public Prosecutions

Ellen McKenzie

CEO, Integrity Commission

Grant Davies

Ombudsman

Industry and Business Development (Output 1.2)

Small Business

Michael Mogridge

Deputy Secretary, Economic Development

Katherine Booth

Acting Executive Director, Business, Industry and Investment

Amanda Aitken

Director, Small Business

Joe Kanizay

Budget Consultant

Jim Dunham

Chief of Staff, Hon Guy Barnett MP

Dean Young

Senior Adviser, Hon Guy Barnett MP

Trade (Output 1.3 Trade)

Michael Mogridge

Deputy Secretary

Cameron Shield

Senior Director, Trade

Tara Martin

Director, Antarctic, Science and Technology

Joe Kanizay

Budget Consultant

Jim Dunham

Chief of staff, Hon Guy Barnett MP

Lara Hendricks

Principal Adviser, Hon Guy Barnett MP

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The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

CHAIR (Mr Fairs) - I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair, and it's good to be with you today. Thanks for having us. I'm joined by my Secretary, Kristy Bourne on my left, and my Deputy Secretary, Pauline van Adrichem, on my right.

CHAIR - Thank you. The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation is four hours. We will take a short break for morning tea at 11.00 a.m. The resolution of the House provides for a minister to provide additional information to a committee either later that day or in writing as an answer to a question taken on notice. To submit a question on notice, the member must first ask their question to the minister and the minister must indicate they will take it on notice. The member must then put the question in writing and hand it to the committee secretary before the end of the portfolio's examination so it can be included in correspondence to the minister for answer.

I remind you that the microphones are sensitive, so I ask you to be mindful of Hansard and be careful when moving your folders, documents and water glasses around the table. Also, it is difficult for Hansard to differentiate when people are talking over each other, so it asks that members speak one at a time to assist with this. Now, I'd like to ask the minister if you'd like to make a short opening statement.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair. As I said, it's good to be here today. I am pleased to back the 2025-26 state Budget. It certainly continues the government's strong track record of providing access to and investing in the justice system in Tasmania to ensure an efficient and accessible system of justice, and support our commitment to improve community safety and defender rehabilitation. The various portfolios - Attorney-General, and Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation, certainly play critical parts in the role of government in delivering access to justice and protecting community safety. All of us want to live in the safest place in the world to live and to work, for ourselves and our families and members of the community.

Unfortunately, there are a comparatively small number of people who, for various reasons, put other people's safety and wellbeing at risk or cause harm to others. It's a core part of the role of our justice system to respond to those cases, to hold those perpetrators to account and to, hopefully, rehabilitate those responsible so they don't commit further offences or endanger others in the future.

It's important to note that many decisions within the justice system are made independently by a court. I want to acknowledge in this forum all those who work in the justice system, all the staff across the Department of Justice. I thank them for their support, particularly those on the frontline in the corrective services space, who are dealing with offenders each and every day. That's an absolutely brilliant effort, and I want to acknowledge those in the correction services and the staff that support them. Our staff in the prison service, in particular, deal professionally with those offenders on a daily basis and, in so doing, help keep the community safe.

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Having said that, I won't deliver a long opening. I look forward to the deliberations today and to working collaboratively, positively, and constructively with the committee and those at the table with me.

Mr WILLIE - Deputy Premier, I hope you take these questions in the spirit they're intended. There are Tasmanian families across the state wondering what's going on with the coloured sand issue. It's obviously a national issue. We've seen some schools in the Catholic sector and some independent schools close, and it's my understanding that that sand has been found in schools. As the WorkSafe minister - I do have the advice here, and it says, if the product has already been used, you must:

Cease use of the product immediately. Quarantine the affected area. Do not sweep or vacuum the sand. Engage a licenced asbestos assessor or removalist to conduct clearance and air monitoring. Visit WorkSafe Tasmania's website to find a licenced asbestos removalist or assessor in Tasmania.

And if you're a duty holder, that is, an employer, you need to:

... treat the material as asbestos-contaminated until proven otherwise; immediately isolate the product and prevent access to the area. Arrange for qualified inspection, sampling, remediation and clearance by an independent licenced asbestos assessor, class A asbestos removalist.

Why is there a discrepancy between the response in the Catholic sector and the independent schools and the state system?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. Obviously, this question is relevant to WorkSafe Tas and, in the spirit of collaboration, we are dealing with it in overview. If I can respond accordingly to assist the committee, we have a program, but I'm happy to move to this question straightaway. The WorkSafe director is not in the room at the moment, but together with the secretary and the deputy secretary, we'll do our best to respond to the member's question.

I know that WorkSafe have been speaking regularly with the Department of Children, Education and Young People (DECYP) since Friday on this issue. That's the advice I have. I understand there were multiple conversations and meetings yesterday, to keep DECYP up to date. Likewise, I've spoken to the relevant minister, Jo Palmer, this morning. My understanding is that DECYP are acting in line with WorkSafe's advice and have engaged specialist professionals to assist them in assessing the risks at the various locations. It is important to be clear that there has been health advice on this issue published at a national level by the national Environmental Health Standing Committee. That's my advice. It's important to reassure parents and others that this advice states, and I quote,

Based on the currently available information from scientific testing there is a low risk to human health from these products. The recall is a precautionary action based on preliminary results and more comprehensive scientific testing is underway. Based on the currently available information, we do not recommend any clinical assessment for those who may have been in contact with this product. Testing results will inform, and potentially update, the

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assessment of risk and health advice will be updated to reflect developing knowledge.

That's important context and the health advice, which I understand is endorsed by Public Health here in Tasmania. It is very concerning that any trace of asbestos was detected in these products, but it's important we respond calmly and in line with the risks.

Mr WILLIE - Yes, so you're talking about clinical assessments there, and that's fine, that's Public Health advice about people checking their own health. The question I'm asking is about the response of the department compared to that of the Catholic and independent sectors who are quarantining and closing schools. Why aren't we seeing that in state schools? I think a lot of Tasmanian families have the same question this morning.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, and I think you're putting the question to the Department of Children, Education and Young People, and I'm the Attorney-General and minister responsible for the Department of Justice. I have my secretary here who's more than happy to respond or add to the answer. I just advise that I represent the Department of Justice as the Attorney-General and the questions are for the Education department. Having said that, my department and WorkSafe have been working closely with the Department of Children, Education and Young People, and likewise I've spoken to the minister this morning.

Mr WILLIE - The question to you is: is the department -

CHAIR - That's been answered, Mr Willie. Sorry, it's been answered and it's not with the relevant minister.

Mr WILLIE - No, no. I will clarify the question. I'm doing this to try to help get some messaging out to the public because there are people with questions. I hope you can take this in the spirit as it is intended. My question to you as the WorkSafe minister is, is the department following the advice? Because we're seeing a discrepancy across sectors?

Mr BARNETT - Well, again, I thank you for the question, you're asking me a question as to what the Department of Children, Education and Young People is doing and what their response is. My advice is that my department, through WorkSafe Tasmania, has been liaising and consulting very closely with DECYP, and that they're communicating directly with the public and will continue to do so. I think it's best that your questions be put to the Department of Children, Education and Young People.

WorkSafe did put a public communication out on Friday. I'm sure if they see merit, then WorkSafe Tasmania can and should communicate accordingly. Clearly, however it's directly relevant to DECYP and they need to continue to respond to the public's concerns and I'm sure they can and they will.

Mr WILLIE - Is it your expectation?

CHAIR - Sorry Josh, no.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, in the past 18 months, have you, as an individual, been a subject of, or party to, any Supreme Court matter?

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Mr BARNETT - As an Attorney-General?

Dr WOODRUFF - As an individual.

Mr BARNETT - As an Attorney-General, yes. I receive advice consistently and regularly, but not as an individual.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay. In the past 18 months, have you as an individual incurred any legal costs that are being covered by taxpayer dollars?

Mr BARNETT - Again, as an Attorney-General and as a minister, I take legal advice with respect to a whole range of matters on an ongoing basis. I'm not going to go into any detail in that regard. I think I've answered your first question adequately.

Dr WOODRUFF - Everyone else, all the other ministers we've asked, have been able to answer that question. I'm not asking about you in your role as the Attorney-General, I'm asking about you as Guy Barnett MP outside of your role as Attorney-General. So far we've asked four other ministers, the Premier, and they've all given an answer on this.

Mr BARNETT - I can take it on notice. I'm happy to take it on notice. I'm not aware of where you're coming from.

Dr WOODRUFF - It's just a straight question. Everyone else could answer it.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, I would like an update on the *Residential Tenancy Act* review, which you have previously mentioned would take place early in the new year. I have a few questions about this.

(1) Is a discussion or issues paper being prepared, and will it include the following issues?

- Security of tenure require genuine reasons for end-of-lease evictions;
- Rental controls - limit of rental increase to CPI;
- Limiting lease break fees;
- Require minimum energy efficiency standards;
- Stronger regulation of the short-term accommodation sector.

(2) When will the discussion paper be released for comment?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. That's a very fair question. It's in what we would describe as the Consumer, Building and Occupational Services (CBOS) relevant to that particular part of the Department of Justice. I think we're moving to overview and I'm happy to assist the honourable member. Normally we progress through the outputs, but it appears that we're not progressing in accordance with the outputs. So let me see if I can assist

the honourable member. It is a very important reform, the *Residential Tenancy Act* reforms. Obviously, we've had the pets in rentals, toppling furniture, and so on.

We did have the national Cabinet agree in August 2023 to harmonising our rental laws across the country, strengthening renters' rights. Tasmania already fully or partially delivers on seven of those measures. Two measures require further work.

Likewise, in terms of the review that you've asked about, that is important, and the government's already indicated through the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2023 to 2027, which I released when I was Minister for Housing - very pleased with that strategy - that we'd be completing a review of the residential tenancy legislation by 30 June 2027. That review will look at how renters' rights can be strengthened and how we can further make effective use of social housing.

The department's already commenced internal work to meet our commitment to review the legislation, and stakeholders across the community will be comprehensively consulted before any changes to the act are considered.

In terms of the review, that's my understanding is we're going to kick it into play early in the first half of next year, and we will be able to respond following the feedback to that review. Then I will be able to have more to say, but it's very important. We have the commitments. I did make commitments in the House just some weeks ago regarding the review of the *Residential Tenancy Act*, and we can certainly update you further with respect to those initiatives. We're looking forward to the review. It's very important.

Mr FERGUSON - I have a list of questions that I want to address, but is it best for us to do it in overview? Can I just get a signal from the committee at what point we go to outputs, because we have something like 25 output groups.

CHAIR - It's up to the committee.

Mr FERGUSON - If we're not going to outputs, I will go to my question.

CHAIR - Again, it's up to the committee.

Dr WOODRUFF - I don't want to go into outputs. I just want to speak in general.

Mr FERGUSON - I'm happy with that as well, then. Attorney-General, I want to ask you about post-prison, post-corrections and periods of time in jail, about reintegrating back into the community. I know you share a common interest with members of the committee about ensuring that offenders who have spent time in jail or in correction facilities are rehabilitated while they're in custody. Then, at such time when they are released into the community, that they're able to successfully reintegrate, hopefully, as a better person with some rehabilitation.

How are the government's policies supporting that to occur? What support programs are in place to reduce reoffending rates, to ensure the community is safe?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thank you for the question. I'm really pleased, as Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation, to be able to respond to that. Certainly, we're continuing to work hard to lower the rate of reoffending. I know it's very important to me, and the government

and the community. It's a challenging issue. It does require substantial commitment to address the range of issues, some of which are intergenerational, that impact the rate of recidivism in our offenders.

Tasmania's recidivism rate dropped slightly in the 2023-24 year, from 52 per cent to 51.3 per cent - the first decrease in seven years. We hope to build on this in coming years; it's encouraging. Albeit a small improvement, but it is encouraging. Intervention programs are critical to reducing reoffending rates, ensuring our community is safer for all Tasmanians. We continue to increase services that support offenders to rehabilitate and successfully reintegrate into the community.

In the 2025-26 Budget, we have \$1.5 million being allocated as an extension of the 2023-24 Budget for family violence programs, an increase in therapeutic staff to community partner organisations for interventions and throughcare initiatives, as well as education, rehabilitation and support services, a further \$500,000 in the 2026-27 forward Estimates.

In the 2024-25 budget, \$4.1 million over four years was committed to fund the correctional improvement program. An initial focus of this program will be improvements to the rehabilitation services at Risdon Prison and the additional drug and alcohol treatment programs, which are important and have expanded in recent times. We legislated actually on that in the last 18 months.

We have the correctional improvement program providing accommodation and reintegration services to female prisoners in the north-west, to support their move back to the community, including through the provision of transitional housing for females leaving custody. I'm very pleased to say we're moving quickly towards a new in-cell technology pilot intended, amongst other functions, to enable increased participation in programs. The government continues to improve and expand services and programs for prisoners to promote opportunities for change and to break the cycle of reoffending.

I do want to pay a tribute to the former attorney-general, Vanessa Goodwin, who did so much in this space in terms of breaking the cycle. She really championed that. I just want to do a little shout out to her on this special day. Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - Just a couple more questions. Attorney-General, you said earlier that the Department of Education and WorkSafe had been in communication. Is the Department of Education trying to get WorkSafe to change its advice?

Mr BARNETT - Excuse me, say that again?

Mr WILLIE - You said that the Department of Education and WorkSafe had been in communication. Is the department trying to get WorkSafe to change its advice?

Mr BARNETT - That's obviously a question for the department, but I'm very confident -

Mr WILLIE - You're the minister for WorkSafe.

Mr BARNETT - I'm very confident in in WorkSafe and their efforts and their initiatives. They're having direct conversations with DECYP. I talked directly to the minister this morning, and they're taking it very seriously.

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I have a communication from the department for whom you're asking a question, and I can read it to you. That might assist the member and the committee in terms of the views of DECYP. The DECYP spokesman said as follows:

The ACCC has issued an urgent recall of several children's coloured sand products that have been found to contain naturally occurring asbestos. The current advice from the Commonwealth Department of Health is that the health risk is low and that respirable asbestos fibres have not been detected in any samples.

The department has undertaken an urgent audit of all schools and childhood learning centre sites to determine the use of the sand throughout these sites. All schools and child and family learning centres have been provided with the appropriate advice regarding correct quarantining or disposing of all existing products.

The Department of Education, Children and Young People has engaged an accredited asbestos assessor to assist in identifying the risks and any controls that may be necessary to mitigate and prevent any future risk. Information has also been provided to schools and CFLCs to pass on to families.

DECYP are taking all necessary actions to quantify the risks that may exist, with all work informed by a qualified professional and overseen by an incident management team within DECYP.

No government school sites are closed at this stage, however, the situation is being closely monitored and that may change depending on each school and the CFLCs' risk assessment.

DECYP is also liaising with the childcare sector in Tasmania to ensure they have up-to-date information and support. DECYP is serious about any concerns that could affect the safety of the children and their families. Our staff are monitoring this situation carefully and working closely with all schools, CFLCs and WorkSafe Tasmania.

DECYP will provide more information about the actual sites affected as soon as possible.

Mr WILLIE - Is it your expectation WorkSafe's advice will change today?

Mr BARNETT - I don't appreciate the characterisation of the question. WorkSafe is incredibly professional. They're doing the job, they're in close contact with DECYP and likewise, I have confidence that through the minister DECYP is getting on with the job, as outlined by the statement I've just read to the committee.

Mr WILLIE - It looks like a department is trying to influence the regulator to change his advice.

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CHAIR - Sorry, Mr Willie, the minister has answered this question. This isn't a hearing into WorkSafe, this is a hearing for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation. I've given you a lot of latitude, but we have to focus on the hearing at hand. Ms Haddad, do you have a question?

Ms HADDAD - How many are left in this round?

CHAIR - You've got one left.

Ms HADDAD - Yes, I will ask one quick question. Minister, the *Judicial Commissions Act 2024* received royal assent in December of last year but it's not yet proclaimed. I'm sure we would be of the same mind that it's very important that that work progress so that the courts, the community and the parliament don't find themselves back in the same situation that we did just a little while ago. Can you provide an update about when that act will be proclaimed and when resourcing will be provided to enable it to take its course?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks very much for that and thank you for acknowledging the importance of the establishment of the commission; like yourself and the entire parliament, we know how important it is. It's landmark reform for Tasmania and I'm really pleased with the collaboration and support across the parliament to get that legislation through under difficult circumstances. I wanted to acknowledge that and your support as well, shadow attorney-general.

I can give you a heads-up that work is ongoing in terms of the establishment of the Judicial Commission. The legislation lays the foundation for a modern, robust and independent complaints process for judicial conduct in our state. The model adopted draws on best practice from across Australia. It's designed to be independent, fair and transparent with strong safeguards in place to protect complainants and ensure procedural fairness for judicial officers.

The Judicial Commission is the permanent body that has the important function of receiving, examining and either dismissing or referring complaints about judicial officers. It consists of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Chief Magistrate, an Australian legal practitioner appointed by the Minister for Justice on the joint nomination of the Law Society of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Bar, and a non-legal member appointed by the Minister for Justice.

I would like to pass to the secretary who's working through the operational matters with respect to the establishment of the commission and of course the council, as I know the secretary and her team have been working hard on this important matter.

Ms HADDAD - And the proclamation, if that date is known, would be great.

Ms BOURNE - As the deputy has noted, now that the legislation has passed, the department has been undertaking a recruitment process for members of the Judicial Council and Commission, effectively lay members of both of those bodies, so a non-judicial member of the council and a pool of potential members for the commission should it need to be established on any occasion. That process commenced before the government went into caretaker and continued over that period. I chaired a panel to oversee those applications.

We are seeking some further expressions of interest through that process to ensure that we have at least six members that the deputy can consider as potentially sitting in the pool of

members for the Judicial Commission, as per the requirements under the act, and to make sure that we have an appropriate mix of people in accordance with the information package.

We are hoping we will be in a position to finalise the recruitment process ideally by the end of this calendar year so we can then package up advice to the deputy around those potential members, noting that those names need to be laid before the parliament in the new year for allowance or disallowance, as the case may be. At the same time, the office of the secretary is resourcing, effectively, the registrar-type position, which is the conduit and initial point to receive complaints and triage them to the council as required. We anticipate that this will initially be a fairly substantial body of work whilst the commission is bedded down, and then we can work through longer-term arrangements for that registrar position.

In summary, we are hoping we can get something to the deputy by the end of this year to enable proclamation as soon as possible in the parliamentary year 2026.

Dr WOODRUFF - Attorney-General, justice for mothers who had their babies forcibly adopted - effectively stolen - has been a long time coming. The apology in 2012 was a start, and it was so welcome to hear your announcement that there will be a redress scheme and that you've made a commitment to that, and to ensuring the process is not adversarial and does not require the retraumatising of women who have shared their stories many times.

I'd like you to outline the process for developing the scheme and also speak to the payments that were promised to women who have waited such a long time, who are very elderly and have felt there has been a purposeful stonewalling. I think we acknowledge that regardless of the truth or not of that, there is a great need to have swift justice and redress for those women.

Mr BARNETT - I appreciate the question and your acknowledgement of the importance of this matter. I want to acknowledge not just yourself but many others around this table and other parts of the parliament who have advocated for those women, the shadow attorney-general included. I firstly acknowledge that. I acknowledge the tripartisan apology in 2012 that was supported across the parliament in terms of offering that apology for the historical forced adoption practices in Tasmania, and as you've indicated, I was pleased to be able to announce that with the Premier some weeks ago now, because of the Tasmanian mothers impacted by those historical forced adoption practices.

The outline that I indicated then and confirm on the record now is that we will establish a redress scheme. It will require legislation which is expected in the first half of next year, but we will provide transitional arrangements. I will pass to the secretary shortly to outline the operations of those transitional arrangements to allow for those mothers impacted to be able to apply accordingly for that redress payment, noting that this is - I won't say nation-leading because Victoria has a payment process in place, some \$30,000 of redress payment there and Western Australian parliament has indicated they're heading down that track as well. We're aware of that. We already have processes in place to progress this announcement and that is happening as we speak. I might just pass to the secretary to outline to the committee in a little bit more detail in response to the member's question.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks Deputy Premier, through you. As you would appreciate, the first step in giving effect to the government's commitment to establish that scheme is to consult widely and get the settings right to inform our advice to government about what that scheme will look like; to make sure it's trauma-informed and a compassionate means by which to

provide financial assistance to these individuals. That consultation period has been open since the government made its announcement and we continue to receive a great deal of very helpful feedback - input, shared stories, many from people who have lived experience, which, as an agency, we're very grateful that people feel that they can share that with us.

The transition arrangements the Deputy Premier's referred to, we're also working through to ensure that where there are exceptional circumstances - affected mothers don't necessarily need to wait for the commencement of that scheme. We're working very closely with the acting State Litigator who has a specific role in some of these matters that may be on foot or there is an awareness of them soon to be on foot to make sure that we can appropriately scope those transitional arrangements. And, we're looking very closely, again, as the Deputy Premier noted, at the Victorian scheme and also the experience of past inquiries in the Tasmanian context as well. We certainly encourage people to continue to provide feedback through the consultation process as we provide advice to government about the nature of that scheme, including the amounts of compensation and the like.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. A follow-up question, Attorney-General. I know that there will be, I guess you could say two groups of women. There is a group of women who have been working for a long time with the lawyer Angela Sdrinis, on a class action, and their stories have been well documented. There may well be another group of mothers who live in Tasmania and have not been part of that and would like to seek justice, as would be their right.

Can you talk about that transitional payment? When Ms Bourne talked about trauma-informed consultation and processes, the most important thing, particularly for that group of some 18 women, is speed and for a transitional payment to occur very swiftly without waiting for the machinery of legislation and so on. Can you talk about the timing of that and how you're going to deal with the difference between women who've told their stories and had them documented, and women who maybe haven't had the opportunity to do that?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Understandable question. I will pass to the secretary in a moment to talk about the operational parts of that. Just in terms of the first half of next year, for clarity purposes, it may or may not require legislation to establish the scheme, but it's to get the scheme up and running fully in the way that we wish, that will be in the first half of next year, is the expectation, and that may or may not require legislation. I want to put that on the record to clarify.

In terms of the transitional arrangements, you've made reference to women who've been subject to forced-adoption practices and have been expressing their views through yourselves and through Angela Sdrinis and, indeed, others. We're certainly aware of that and, of course, the State Litigator is acting in good faith in that regard, but in terms of the transitional arrangements, I've had a number of meetings with my secretary and department about moving as swiftly as possible. Likewise, in a trauma-informed way, which you indicated in your question. It's very important to us, hence we are acting swiftly but in a trauma-informed way on those operational arrangements. I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks Deputy Premier, through you. Effectively, there are two concurrent projects that the department's prioritising. First and foremost, the establishment of the scheme, which is being led within our Justice Support Services team who have a great deal of background and knowledge in the administration for the state's perspective on the national redress scheme, but also the transitional payments, to make sure that - and in consultation with

the State Litigator - to make sure that they're framed in a way, that is trauma-informed and prevents further trauma by virtue of the process. Also, whilst we're coming up with the terms of the redress scheme, we don't unnecessarily - I guess, deal with this cohort of individuals unfairly. We want it to be as consistent as possible with what we anticipate the redress scheme to look like.

We are working through that. There aren't details that I'm in a position to share today other than to echo the Deputy Premier's comments that this is a priority for the agency, in close consultation with the acting State Litigator who has that professional legal relationship with these individuals, particularly through their legal counsel, so that we can make sure first that there's a transitional payment that actually reflects and addresses the trauma, and that there's a pathway for that. We're currently working through what is, I guess, the legal framework for a payment, counselling and a package of supports that we can provide in a transitional sense ahead of the commencement of the redress scheme.

Mr GEORGE - So much more to ask on that. May I move on to the Integrity Commission and reforms to the *Integrity Commission Act*? As I understand it, in our conversations, there will be some proposed amendments that will be circulated from early December and there'll be a consultation period up until February at least, hopefully, a little longer than that. Then you're hoping to introduce those amendments in the March sitting of parliament.

The one thing that we haven't really resolved is that there is no point in making changes which will incorporate the Cox review and the Weiss review and others, unless the commission is properly resourced and has the finances to employ the people it needs. There is, so far as I can see, no guarantee that that's on offer. I'd like to know where you are with your discussions with the Treasurer, where the government is, because the commission has made it quite clear that it is not capable of even carrying out the duties that it's supposed to perform up until now.

Mr BARNETT - Through you Chair, thank you for your collaboration and deliberations with me directly, in correspondence and personally. I'm very grateful for the open and transparent relationship and I note you're very careful focus and interest in the Integrity Commission, how it operates and its adequate resourcing.

To confirm, yes, we've introduced the mandatory notifications legislation in the last week. I look forward to that progressing positively through the parliament, all being well. Then, as I've indicated, before Christmas we will release a very substantial piece of draft legislation, which will pick up many of the amendments and recommendations from the commission of inquiry, and the Cox and Weiss reviews, which you also made reference to. The government has supported those reports and recommendations, certainly as strongly, and wants to act on those. That legislation will wrap lots of that up together then, yes, there'll be adequate consultation and then the first quarter, first half of next year - I'm a little bit ambitious. I'm aiming for the first quarter, but it might slip into the second quarter depending on the feedback. I'll have to assess the feedback, work with my department, get advice, and then, yes, bring that back to the parliament for consideration and then there will be the opportunity for a further legislative reform in the second half of next year, as and when required.

You asked about resources. It's a very fair question in the budget Estimates. We do take it seriously. The Premier has indicated that he also takes it seriously. We need to have a better understanding of that legislation and what resources will be required by the Integrity

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Commission to respond to the legislation. For example, the mandatory notifications legislation will provide more involvement of the Integrity Commission. It will require more effort and, indeed, more resources of the Integrity Commission to respond to the legislation which we as a parliament, all being well, will pass.

As you know, we're at an interim budget. In May it will be a very substantial budget and then there will be further budgets into the future. As Attorney-General I take this very seriously. I will be having ongoing discussions with not just the Treasurer but the Premier and across the parliament to ensure that the Integrity Commission operates in accordance with good practice in terms of its role, functions and responsibilities.

I would just note, in concluding, a special congratulations to Robert Hay KC, who's just been appointed as the new Chief Commissioner. I wish him well. I think he has incredible experience and background for the job and I think he will do a great job. I've already met with him in recent days. I look forward to ongoing relationship with him and of course, Alan McKenzie, the CEO, as does my secretary and my department.

Mr GEORGE - Have you discussed with Mr Hay the budgetary requirements? Have these been raised as a matter of concern between the two of you? What I'm looking for is an assurance that the new Chief Commissioner and the commission can fulfil all its functions and therefore your government will respond to the sort of benchmark that the commission will put to the government for the next budget in May.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I won't reveal private conversations with the Chief Commissioner of the Integrity Commission, but there was certainly a good, positive discussion. He's just getting his feet under the desk and doing a very good job at that in the very early days of his role. There will be ongoing deliberations and discussions with Mr Hay, which I'm looking forward to, as will the secretary and the department, no doubt, over time.

I can give you an absolute assurance that I take my role very seriously and the role of the Integrity Commission very seriously, and you can then hold me to account and the government to account based on that assurance of that very serious consideration of its role.

Mr FERGUSON - Attorney-General, I want to go back to the previous question on rehabilitation and bring in an edge on education. I'm sure you'd be more than aware that prisoners have on average lower levels of schooling, educational attainment, adult functional literacy - which I will come back to - and higher levels of learning difficulty and learning disability. I'm tough on crime. I want to see people who break the law made accountable for that, but while an inmate, while in a custodial environment, I want to see them take every possible opportunity for rehabilitation and human improvement. I believe you share those views and I would ask what efforts are being taken to rehabilitate using the power of education, noting that adult literacy is a problem for the whole country and Tasmania? Would you outline those educational programs? When I next get a question I'm going to ask you about adult literacy specifically.

CHAIR - Minister, before you answer, we are actually with the Justice portfolio at the moment. It's up to you if you want to answer that question.

Mr BARNETT - It seems that we're moving around as a committee. I'm trying to be flexible to assist the honourable members of the committee.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - I am happy to be flexible because I gave Labor a lot of latitude at the start.

Mr FERGUSON - Chair, if I can quickly respond on that, if it's a point of order, I note that between 9.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m. we have Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation and I did specifically ask if we were in overview or going to outputs. I'm in the committee's hands, but given that we've had questions on CBOS matters, which in fact is in the next portfolio, I'm surprised that somebody would query that.

Mr BARNETT - As Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation, I am more than happy to assist the honourable member in responding and hopefully other honourable members whenever their questions come forward. We will try to be flexible and adapt. Yesterday we went through every output in accordance from A through to Z, but we try to be flexible.

I appreciate the question, it's a very good one. That's why I am absolutely delighted with my role as Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation; those portfolios are a really important addition to the role, because preparing those in our prisons for civilian life is an ambition of mine and of the prison service. I want to thank on the record Narelle Pamplin, the Director of the Tasmania Prison Service. She recently arrived some six months ago and I think is doing an excellent job with that focus as well.

I will give you a few examples. We are about to conclude the building of the kitchen at Risdon, some \$15 million. It's my ambition that everyone who is able can either work, be educated, or do some training every day, to build good habits for when they transition to civilian life. Working in the kitchen will be one of those opportunities for those within the Tasmania Prison Service at Risdon at least. Likewise, we have a laundry there, and working in the laundry is a good opportunity to build good habits in terms of work, education and training. Helping the reintegration back into the community is definitely an ambition of ours and the Tasmania Prison Service.

The director could outline in more detail, or the deputy secretary responsible for corrections, to assist the honourable member. We've got a whole range of programs that I could assist the honourable member with, but that's a big picture response. I am happy to deliver further responses as and when appropriate.

Ms HADDAD - Attorney-General, in January, Mr Christopher Shanahan SC was appointed to the position of Chief Justice. I don't wish to provide any personal reflections on Mr Shanahan, but the reason for my question is it's fair to say there was a certain amount of surprise within the legal community in Tasmania, not about him as an individual but specifically because he didn't have experience previous to this role serving in any judicial role or magisterial role, for example, and he didn't have experience in the Tasmanian legal profession. I just wondered if you could share with the committee the process that went into that appointment, understanding that it was known about for quite a while before Mr Blow retired. How many applicants were there, how long the process took, that kind of thing?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I can respond to that question. Thank you for the question. Firstly I want to indicate my thanks to Chris Shanahan, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Tasmania, for his excellent work to date in Tasmania leading the Supreme Court of Tasmania. I thank him for that. From all the feedback I have and from me directly, he's doing an excellent job and of course there's many challenges, because there's a heavy workload there, as I think

people around this room would be well aware. I just wanted to say thank you to the Chief Justice for his work and I look forward to continuing to work with him and the department.

I note that it is not part of government, it's a separate body undertaking judicial functions which are separate to government and we need to acknowledge the independence accordingly. The process went through the usual protocols and processes. I will ask my secretary to outline the process to assist the honourable members at the table.

Ms BOURNE - All significant judicial appointments are undertaken through the judicial appointment protocol that's available on our website, and I'm just trying to remind myself of the number of applications we received for that position, but in accordance with that policy we constituted a selection panel chaired by myself, with representation from the Tasmanian Bar, and other senior legal practitioners from interstate and Tasmania to assist me in that process. At that same time, we were obviously seeking expressions of interest for a puisne judge in the event that an existing puisne judge was successful in the position of Chief Justice. Bear with me, while I find that material.

Ms HADDAD - While the secretary looks, maybe I can just add to that question whether or not previous judicial experience was one of the criteria that was considered in that application process?

Ms BOURNE - Thank you. Attorney-General, through you, and thank you for that grace in providing me time to find further material. There's a publicly available information package around the requirements for a Chief Justice or a puisne judge of the Supreme Court. Previous judicial experience is not a criteria as such. The panel obviously looks at a range of criteria in terms of legal aptitude - obviously Mr Shanahan is an SC, so a senior practitioner from WA - and a range of other factors. These include their previous decision-making ability, their approach to judicial decision-making, whether they have a focus on education and training, their awareness of developments in the law, and the application of the law in a code jurisdiction such as Tasmania. There are a broad range of attributes that the panel would look for.

The process was conducted in accordance with the protocol for judicial appointments. It was advertised by the agency, as per our normal process, across the three Tasmanian papers and the *Weekend Australian*. We promoted it via our website and through the Law Society newsletter. Given the significance of this position, we also brought in the services of an external executive search firm that has a particular interest in finding senior legal positions, just to make sure that we had covered the field.

Expressions of interest were assessed and shortlisted for interview by myself and the panel, including Chief Justice Will Alstergren, Tom Cox, who was then head of the Tasmanian Bar, and another senior representative of the Tasmanian profession.

The assessment report that was prepared was based on written application as well as performance at interview. We then provide that assessment report to the Attorney-General, who is to consult on a strictly confidential basis with whoever they see fit. I then have obligations, under the protocol, to consult. I consulted with professional jurisdictions in Western Australia, given that Mr Shanahan was based in Western Australia, seeking comment on whether there was any reason that would impede his appointment. There was none.

PUBLIC

Mr Cox was on the panel, representing the Tasmanian Bar. I have had discussions with the Law Society about the need for me to strictly consult with them in the context of a potential appointment of someone from another jurisdiction, with whom they may not be aware of their style or their history, so to speak. That's something that I have had very robust but very helpful discussions with the then-President of the Law Society about. We certainly consulted with the Law Society with respect to our proposed nominee for their puisne judge position.

Obviously, we undertake a very rigorous referee checking process to further inform the Attorney-General's considerations about the appropriate person for that position. Very briefly, I think it's really important to note that Mr Shanahan had a range of credentials and experience as an independent barrister. He was head of his chambers, admitted to the Supreme Court in multiple jurisdictions in the High Court, adjunct clinical professor of Curtin University, and senior positions with the Bar Association and also the acting Commissioner of the Corruption and Crime Commission.

It's probably not appropriate, subject to your views, Deputy Premier, that I disclose the numbers of applications received, without wanting to breach any confidences. It was a very competitive field and the panel took some time to read applications, speak with a number of applicants for both roles, and undertake referee checks thereafter.

Ms HADDAD - Okay, thank you. It wasn't a personal reflection on Mr Shanahan, much more just a question about the process and, I suppose, the reaction within the Tasmanian legal community.

I understand the Secretary's reticence to disclose the number of applicants and number of interviews, but I might just open that to you, Deputy Premier, in case you're comfortable sharing that information or not.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, more than happy to. I'm happy, but I wanted to consult with the Secretary. We have to make sure we've got the exact numbers right so the secretary does have that, and I'm more than happy to pass to the secretary. Just to be very clear, the process was absolutely followed through in the normal way. You know me - in terms of the process, it's very important.

I do want to put on my record my sincere thanks to Justice Kate Cuthbertson, who I also appointed on behalf of our government. She's doing an excellent job as well, so I wanted to put that on the record. Both Chief Justice Shanahan and Justice Cuthbertson are doing an excellent job, for which we're very grateful.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks Deputy Premier, through you. Expressions of interest were received from 17 candidates across both positions, eight expressions of interest for the role of Chief Justice and 16 for the role of judge.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, the Cox Review is nine years old and only six of the 55 recommendations have been implemented. You've said that you're bringing legislation to parliament this year to progress reforms. As it stands, MPs and candidates cannot be investigated during election periods. Can you please tell me whether reforms to that aspect of the act will be included in your tranche by the end of the year, and how many of the Cox recommendations will form part of that legislation?

PUBLIC

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. As I've indicated to the honourable member, Mr George, that very substantial draft legislation is expected to be released prior to Christmas for consultation, and then to progress through the parliament in the first half of next year. The sooner the better. I will take advice from my secretary or the deputy secretary to assist in terms of a further response to add to my answer, if they have that to hand. Otherwise, I'm sure we could take it on notice, but let's see if we have it for the committee.

So, my advice is, the reference you made to those actions of MPs during election campaigns is expected in the second half of next year.

Dr WOODRUFF - The third tranche?

Mr BARNETT - There will be a third tranche, yes. We have the main body of work, which will be delivered prior to Christmas, draft feedback in the first half of next year, but sooner is possible. Then we have allocated an opportunity for a further tranche in the second half of next year. I can't make a commitment to that, but that will be considered as part of the third tranche. As I say, we'll get feedback on that and provide a consultation process in the usual way. Regarding that third tranche, that'll have to be carefully considered and obviously responded to in the usual way.

Dr WOODRUFF - Before I ask my second question, you were going to answer how many of the Cox recommendations will be in this first tranche?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. I don't have that to hand. We could return hopefully while we're having the hearing and get back to you.

Dr WOODRUFF - Regarding the recommendations of the Weiss and the Cox Review - the Weiss review being about preventing child sexual abuse in terms of investigations that can be done. The past commissioner of the Integrity Commission was abundantly clear that they can't do their current body of work without extra funding and was specifically clear they could not take on actions for the Weiss review recommendations without extra money. You haven't provided that in this Budget for the Integrity Commission. How do you expect them to be able to do the work they already have as well as fulfil the requirements of the legislation you're proposing? Do you think they can make money out of thin air?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I don't appreciate your last comment, but it's similar to Mr George's question earlier today. We obviously have an interim budget which we're sitting here talking about now. There will be a May budget.

I draw to your attention that the mandatory notifications legislation, if passed, will not kick in until halfway through next year. Once it's passed, it won't be until next year because we won't have time to conclude it this year. That will require more resources for the Integrity Commission. That's my view and I hold to that view and you can hold me accountable to that view.

We then have the May Budget and then future budgets. In terms of the Integrity Commission's efforts and resources, you'll have to watch this space, but we have every belief that there will be further resources required by the Integrity Commission and that will be reflected in future budgets.

PUBLIC

Prof RAZAY - Honourable Attorney-General, access to justice is a cornerstone of a fair and equitable society. It requires not only the availability of legal services but also the physical, technical and regional infrastructure that enable all individuals, regardless of their location or circumstances, to engage with the justice system. With this in mind, could you please outline what commitment or investment the government has made to improve the justice system's accessibility, particularly in my electorate of Bass?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question, and it's a fair question for the electorate of Bass and those in the north and north-west of Tasmania, because access to justice applies to all Tasmanians. We're a regionalised and decentralised state in the regions, so getting that access is really important wherever we are in Tasmania.

I've indicated before on the public record that TASCAT, the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, has been one of the best reforms in the justice space in the last decade. They have been able to extend their remit to the north with the recent establishment of their facilities in Launceston. I was there with the president, Malcolm Schyvens, and many legal stakeholders from the Law Society, the deputy chief magistrate was there as well, and it was an excellent day. It highlights the importance of access to justice in the north in your electorate of Bass. In fact, it's about 30 metres down from your office on the corner of George Street and Brisbane Street, so you should be able to pop your head in there one day and enjoy perhaps a short tour that we could arrange for the honourable member.

TASCAT has broadened its remit to allow for easier, faster and cheaper access to justice for individuals, businesses, community groups and families to get access to justice. I mentioned the north-west coast because I can see sitting next to you a certain member for Braddon who would be interested in the fact that the Burnie Court is well and truly progressing in terms of building this facility. This is a new Supreme Court and new Magistrates Court for the north-west coast, giving access to justice on the north-west coast and we are really pleased with that progress. I have regular meetings and updates from the Department of Justice and they're progressing really well in terms of that. There will be a request for tender for the construction of that facility in coming months and that's really encouraging, so that's getting on with the job, and I'll be providing further updates as we progress.

Mr O'BYRNE - Attorney-General, last year you controversially announced some privatisation of some aspects of the work of the Public Trustee. A couple of months ago, I think it was during the election campaign, the Premier seemed to rule that out. Have you any more plans to reorganise or privatise aspects of the Public Trustee? Have you any plans for reform in that area? Can you rule out that that won't occur and confirm the Premier's commitment during the campaign, please?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks very much for the question and your ongoing interest in this matter, which I acknowledge. In terms of the government's decision, it's our view that it best remains in the ownership of the government and public hands, albeit under stronger governance arrangements. You'd be well aware of the various reviews, the Bugg review and a further review of the Public Trustee. They are now implementing all of the recommendations of those reviews. I can indicate that in the Budget we've provided \$25.6 million over four years to support the delivery of the Public Trustee's community service obligations and I'm advised this represents an increase of 75 per cent to the Public Trustee's community service obligation funding for 2024-25 compared to the allocation from the previous budget.

Yes, it's remaining in government hands. It has improved in terms of implementing the recommendations out of the Tasmanian Economic Regulator report and the Bugg report and review of some years ago now and it has now nearly completed all of the recommendations of both reports. There's still a little bit more to go but they're heading in the right direction and they've made a surplus in fact in the last 12 months, which you might see in their annual report. That's encouraging news. Those reforms have been delivered and are continuing to be delivered. It's important those reforms are implemented and I'm pleased with that progress and note that on the record.

Mr O'BYRNE - Just a quick follow-up. There was a Treasury review that was called for by the treasurer before the previous treasurer. What's the status of that review? Is that still ongoing and will you be able to release it?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I think you might be referring to the Tasmanian Economic Regulator report.

Mr O'BYRNE - I think Treasury were tasked with doing a review, is that right?

Mr BARNETT - Okay. The Tasmanian Economic Regulator report did make recommendations in July 2023. There were 34 findings and 18 recommendations with three additional notes for consideration.

With respect to the latter half of the question, I'm happy to take that on notice and get back to the honourable member.

Mr FERGUSON - I'm staying with Corrections, Attorney-General. To conclude my line of questioning on corrections and rehabilitation and the role of education, I bring to your notice that there has been a massive shift in education policy in our government, governments around Australia, the Catholic sector and the independent sector to move away from the now discredited whole language method of teaching literacy to structured literacy, which includes phonics. It's been a game-changer for particularly primary education. We're seeing young people finishing school with far better literacy rates than previous generations.

I want to ask if you could tell the committee if you are aware of the functional literacy rate of inmates. I'm happy, very content, if you take it on notice, but is TPS moving in a similar direction in partnership, perhaps, with DECYP so that we can have really strong adult literacy programs for inmates so that on release they are better equipped to be able to survive in the workforce, to find employment and live a better life?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. It's a very good one in terms of preparing those in our correctional facilities for civilian life. As I indicated earlier, that's a key objective of our government. In terms of prisoner education and training, it is a priority, as I've indicated earlier, so thank you for the follow-up question. Our government has allocated approximately \$2 million for the rollout of the pilot in-cell technology project across the prison service and the relevance of the project to education and training is that in-cell technology for prisoners will increase prisoners' ability to engage in education programs and possibly training opportunities, even when confined to their cells.

We're prioritising literacy programs and support in the Tasmanian Prison Service with an ongoing literacy program that supports prisoners to improve their functional literacy and

improve opportunities for employment upon their release. The initial investment is to support an expanded literacy program delivery model in the TPS, providing greater access for prisoners across our custodial facilities. In July 2024, this intensive literacy program was extended for a further three years until July 2027 as part of a newly signed partnership agreement between Libraries Tasmania and the TPS.

Over the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, Libraries Tasmania engaged with participants on 1286 occasions, with 170 in one-on-one literacy sessions, 788 in a one-on-one intensive literacy program, and 328 in literacy group sessions. This expanded literacy delivery model, offers more prisoners the opportunity to improve their functional literacy skills. It's extended one-to-one literacy tutoring to the Southern Remand Centre, Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison, and the Risdon Prison Complex. It includes a better assessment of individual literacy needs and the delivery of programs to target those specific needs.

There is more I could say and also more that the Director of Prisons could say, but it's a very good question about assisting those in our facilities to prepare them again for civilian life.

Mr FERGUSON - That's a great answer. If I could just conclude and clarify. I'm very satisfied with the answer. Thank you for your work in this space. I will ask you, to have a look at my question again and maybe discuss if you could adopt those new approaches as DECYP have?

Mr BARNETT - All right and thank you for that. I will give them an undertaking to follow up on that matter in accordance with your request.

Ms HADDAD - Attorney-General, I want to take you to the Astria project, previously known as Justice Connect. I'm conscious of time, I know that a lot of what causes delays, access to justice, blocks, and backlogs in the Magistrates and Supreme courts come down to IT issues. I know the original budget allocation was \$16 million. They received an extra \$25.5 million two years later. That's between 2017 and 2019-20. I want to ask you, first of all, how that project's implementation is tracking? What the delays might be; where the blocks in information sharing might be, recognising that the original intention was that it would share systems cross criminal and civil divisions as well as TASCAT, the police and potentially others involved with the justice system.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. It's a fair question. Justice Connect is very important, significant, and complex program of work that has taken time. I will ask my secretary to add to this answer shortly with updated details on the process. It's certainly designed to improve our system's processes, data support in the criminal jurisdiction managed by the Department of Justice.

I should indicate right up front that I have re-established the Justice Forum, where we meet with key stakeholders - Chief Justice, Chief Magistrate, DPPs, Solicitor-General, and the Law Society - and these are the sorts of things that are discussed at that forum -

Ms HADDAD - I imagine they would be.

Mr BARNETT - to work on court improvement and improving our efficiencies across the Justice system. It is very important to me as an Attorney-General.

PUBLIC

I should note that Astria will impact multiple government agencies, as you indicated in your question, across the Department of Justice, from courts and prisons to community services and the like. The implementation is led by a consortium led by Fujitsu Australia in partnership with US and Canadian software vendors, and I will let the secretary speak to that very shortly.

As you indicated, the first release was back in November 2022 and it has been interacting with the system since March 2023. The production release for the corrections and rehabilitation components of Astria went live in April 2025 and release two enables both community corrections and the Tasmanian Prison Service to work in the same system using the same data, which will significantly help eliminate the potential for human error or the unnecessary doubling-up of data.

A go-live date for the courts and prosecutions component will be established following completion of the scoping phase of the South Australian system, which is built on the same software. This will simplify and likely expedite the courts' implementation.

In the 2024-25 budget the government provided ongoing support funding of \$4.1 million, rising to \$7.3 million, I'm advised, to fund the cost of supporting Astria, including user-support services, hosting, licencing and other vendor support and ongoing costs of the system. I will refer to - to add to that answer -

Ms HADDAD - Maybe I can jump in before you divert to the secretary. It sounds like it there's a staged process for implementation. Can you just indicate - or the secretary through you, minister - basically, who is in board and who is not, and how long it is going to take? Because it has been a very long time since that original project started and the Criminal and General Division bill passed the parliament. Are all the relevant departments participating? For example, is Police sharing data through - I thought it was 'Astoria', you said 'Astria', I probably mispronounced it - is everyone on board? If not, who isn't on board, and when do you think it will be completely in operation?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I will pass to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks minister, through you. As has been noted, the Astria solution will provide an end-to-end solution effectively, from the moment an individual is charged by police right through to the moment they're in our care and custody, either in the prison or in the community under community corrections.

The range of services that it impacts are: the Director of Public Prosecutions; the courts; the prison; community corrections; Tasmania Police, particularly their prosecutions arm, but also the reliance on court data; victim support and the parole board. As Ms Haddad alluded to, it is reliant on the implementation of the Magistrates Court (Criminal and General Division) act, which contains a number of significant changes to the *Justices Act* around processes, procedures and regulations.

Suffice to say, the initiation of the jury system and, as the minister mentioned, the corrections component earlier this year, really are significant milestones in the journey, but it is a complex project. In particular, release three - the courts and prosecutions component - has experienced delays due to complexities associated with working through the new legislation. There is a great deal of time and effort from all stakeholders, from police to the DPP, and

particularly the Magistrates Court, who are providing subject matter experts to feed into the project team.

Despite those challenges, there have been significant delays and, as the minister said, that go-live date is anticipated for late 2027. The work is overseen by a project steering committee with representation from police, the courts, DPP, and the like. I'm very comfortable in saying that all stakeholders are very much engaged and the agency is very grateful for that engagement.

The benefit of this project to the entire system cannot be overstated and we are painstakingly close to getting release three off the ground. I am conscious of the delay and the challenges, but the department is absolutely committed to it and will continue to provide ongoing support for the project to ensure that the rollout is satisfied.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. Just on that, I understand the frustrations of the department, no doubt, with the delays, because the go-live date of 2027 really means it's been 10 years in the making. I understand that IT projects are complex, but that's a really long time. In the meantime, there continues to be a lot of frustration within the court system and within police with how things go; not to mention people appearing in our court systems.

You mentioned the contractor, Fujitsu. I wondered if you are able to give a bit of a global figure of the budget, recognising the original budget was \$16.6 million, and there was an added allocation in the next budget. You mentioned another allocation in last year's budget. Just recognising that Fujitsu hasn't conducted this work elsewhere without controversy. They were involved with an IT project in Queensland Health that failed and cost \$1.2 billion to fix. They were involved with a project for WA Health which blew out to \$175 million due to poor governance from Fujitsu. Outside of Australia, they were also involved with a UK project, the Horizon IT system, that led to hundreds of wrongful convictions of postmasters. I'm sure you saw that in the media as well.

How satisfied are you with Fujitsu as a contractor, and what due diligence was done into employing them as the contractor to provide this project? Are any of the delays down to their performance?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the questions. I will refer that to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, Attorney-General, through you. The relationship we've had with the vendor has generally been a very positive one. I think the complexity of the project was probably unanticipated, in some ways. It probably should have been in the context of knowing our business.

Our system requirements, as you've referred to, Ms Haddad, were undertaken some time ago through that procurement process. The work of our courts, and the system generally, has moved on somewhat, so there's had to be a bit of calibration with the vendor about what the system actually looks like. I think the relationship has been very agile. For example, the South Australian ECMS system the Deputy Premier referred to was, I think, a great example of where the vendor and the agency could work together to work out a way forward to try and pull back some of those time blowouts, while still getting a product our stakeholders would use.

PUBLIC

I do have a breakdown of costs, if the Deputy's happy for me to talk through those. The total government contribution thus far to the project has been just over \$32 million, so \$32,219,724. Vendor costs to Fujitsu have been \$17,146,173.

Ms HADDAD - They're separate figures - \$32 million and \$17 million?

Ms BOURNE - The \$32 million is the bucket that the department has received from government. The \$17 million is taken from that overall figure and attributed to vendor costs under the contract. We've spent just over \$13 million of that to date, so \$13,077,415.

Ms HADDAD - Of the \$32 million?

Ms BOURNE - Of the \$17 million vendor costs in total, without breaching any commercial-in-confidence, obviously. As the project has moved on, there are levers under the contract to ensure that certain payments aren't made until product is received. I continue to look forward to a productive working relationship with Fujitsu in the middle of this third stage of development.

Ms HADDAD - Okay, thanks.

Dr WOODRUFF - Attorney-General, can you outline for us the total figure for legal expenses that has been incurred on behalf of ministers or government backbenchers in 2023-24 and 2024-25?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I think that would be a question for the Premier or head of the State Service. I can help you with respect to the Department of Justice.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay, in relation to the Department of Justice?

Mr BARNETT - What's the question?

Dr WOODRUFF - The same question.

Mr BARNETT - Alright, I will take it on notice.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you - and can you break that down by individual MP?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for your question. I think I will take that on notice.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay, you mean you will provide that?

Mr BARNETT - I will do my best, if there are relevant MPs for which fees are being paid through the Department of Justice, consistent with your question. I will take it on notice.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thanks. In relation to any legal expenses, can you also confirm whether any of them were related to an investigation by the Integrity Commission?

Mr BARNETT - I will take the question on notice.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you.

PUBLIC

Mr GARLAND - Attorney-General, I've been contacted by several constituents with complaints about the Health Complaints Commission, particularly the delay in resolving complaints and poor communication with complainants. The commission identified problems over complex and ambiguous legislation in their strategic plan in 2022, and suggested a review and update of the act is required.

This review has been referred to in three annual reports. The act is not a large or complex act. Apparently, an issues paper has been finally produced. Can you advise where this is at, and why it has taken so long, what the time frame for the review will be, and will the public get to have input into that review?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, through you, Chair, for the honourable member's question. It relates to the Health Complaints Commissioner. It's an independent statutory authority represented at the table by Grant Davies, who's not here at the moment. He's expected to be here later this morning and I'd be more than happy to ask Mr Davies to respond to your question when he gets here, if that's satisfactory to you and the committee.

Mr GARLAND - That's fine.

The Budget showed that the legislation and development section of Justice have had a 20 per cent funding cut. How can this be justified when there are so many acts in need of reform, and in the last parliament your government ran out of bills to present?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. I want to put on record my sincere thanks to the strategic legislation branch of the department. They are really appreciated by myself, my office and indeed, the department. Bruce Patterson and the team do an excellent job there. I think many members around this table are aware of that. With respect to the specificity of your question, I will pass to the Secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, Deputy Premier, through you. The government is now working, as I understand it, through transitioning some of the funding arrangements we received in last year's budget for commission of inquiry implementation work, with a focus on putting some of that funding into the core business of agencies.

Certainly, the work of our amazing strategic legislation and policy team - we'll prioritise its existing work to focus on commission of inquiry legislative reforms, to ensure that there are no delays to that implementation agenda. We note a reduction in what was a significant uplift in funding in the last budget, particularly which has gone towards an explicit resource for the legislation to underpin the new Commission for Children and Young People, which is now in this place. We're fairly comfortable that we'll be able to absorb commission of inquiry work moving forward into the general legislative program.

Mr BARNETT - I will just add to that answer to assist the honourable member, because you mentioned the last parliament. Since 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, some 22 bills in my Attorney-General and Justice portfolios have been developed through the office, or rather introduced, debated or passed by the parliament. I have a list of all of those bills, some of them very substantial, as you would be aware - they do a lot of work - and obviously produce that and present it to the parliament. You would have seen in more recent weeks since we've come back from the election, we've had a very, very substantial body of legislative reform agenda,

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which is again gone through the strategic legislation and policy section of my department, for which I'm very grateful.

Mr FERGUSON - Attorney-General, I want to ask you about family violence measures and the proposed reforms in the discussion paper that you announced yesterday with our colleague, the Minister for Women and the Prevention of Family Violence, Jane Howlett. Thank you for your work in this area. I also note Vanessa Goodwin's and Elise Archer's reforms on behalf of government and others.

I'd ask if you could speak to the scope of the discussion paper that was released yesterday, how the government will progress reforms through this process, and as I close the question, I just want to also note and congratulate you and your department for the way in which you've made it so easy for people to make submissions formally and informally. I thought that was very good.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. Sadly, family and domestic violence is a scourge on our community and we all need to do better. We need to do everything we possibly can as a government to address family violence and to keep Tasmanians safe in the community where they are recognised as equal and respected and ensure that our homes and families and communities are free of all forms of family and sexual violence.

You've noted the release of the discussion paper yesterday, but before commenting on that, I just want to acknowledge Will Hodgman in 2015 with his nation-leading approach and \$100 million commitment to a family violence action plan. It really led the charge in those early days. We've got the third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan now, for 2022 to 2027 with survivors at the centre.

We've been building on that momentum, again with a lot of support around this table. I want to acknowledge that across government and acknowledge Jane Howlett, my colleague and friend as Minister for Women and for the Prevention of Family Violence.

The discussion paper, as you rightly note, provides an opportunity for relevant stakeholders, women, men and others, to express their views through until 1 March 2026, so there's plenty of time in my view. Yes, we will have a Christmas period, but there will be time to feed back on that discussion paper in an easy and sensible way. There will be a vast array of issues no doubt raised as a result of the discussion paper regarding family violence, including definitions, behavioural programs, system abuse and penalties for offenders.

The legislative review contributes to Tasmania's role in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32. It reinforces our commitment to inclusive protections, a consistent risk assessment framework and a justice system centred around victim/survivors. As I say, there will be opportunities for feedback through to 1 March. Certainly we need to do more in this space and all of us can work together to make that happen.

I should indicate that in the last 12 months we haven't been sitting on our hands. We have responded to the commission of inquiry, we've acted and legislated accordingly. I do a call-out for a number of justice miscellaneous amendment bills, which is a long number of words, but there's some very important reforms in those, one of which related to requiring a coroner to hold an inquest if they suspect that family violence has materially contributed to the death of the deceased. That's a more recent reform in the last 12 months.

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Mr FERGUSON - Congratulations.

Ms HADDAD - It's a good one.

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I think there's very good support for that and I appreciate your feedback. There are a number of other legislative measures that we've put in place the last 12 months to address family violence in our community. As I say, I'm very committed, as is Jane Howlett, and I acknowledge your good leadership as well, member for Bass, but hopefully all of us in this room and elsewhere can do everything we can to address family violence and sexual violence in the community.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. This is not my question, but considering the Attorney-General and Mr Ferguson put thanks on the record to a number of people, I think you missed out a couple. Your colleague Jacquie Petrusma also did a lot of work in that space, as did my colleague Michelle O'Byrne, and I'd like to recognise her longstanding advocacy around family violence.

Mr BARNETT - I concur with that.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. My question is around the importance of the community legal assistance sector, a little bit like my question before about the Astria project. Part of what impedes access to justice in Tasmania is adequate funding for the community legal assistance sector so that people can be represented. If people are turning up to court unrepresented or underrepresented, it leads to delays that block the system not only for defendants and people appearing but also for the courts themselves.

Notwithstanding that there has been an uplift from the federal government in the NAJP, it's still a very underfunded sector. I wondered if you could give an indication to the committee about the funding your department has distributed from the federal government through to each of the CLCs and to the Legal Aid Commission as well. I've got some follow-up questions, but I might pause there and see if you're able to provide that information to the committee around funding for each CLC and any comments you might have about the importance and the underfunding of that sector generally.

Mr BARNETT - I really appreciate the question on the importance of providing support for legal aid and the community legal centres. As you've made reference to, they have an important role to play and I appreciate what they do. I have put that on the public record before and I say it again: I really appreciate their work to support vulnerable Tasmanians across the community.

I also want to say thank you to Tasmanian Legal Aid for the work they do. In our Budget we've increased support for a further \$4 million for Tasmanian Legal Aid over the next two years. I'm really pleased and proud of that initiative, and I thank the Treasurer and the government for agreeing with that request. That's in our interim Budget and it will certainly help ease court backlogs and address the concerns of vulnerable Tasmanians in terms of representation in our criminal courts. Likewise at TASCAT, as I mentioned earlier, in terms of the mental health and guardianship divisions, Legal Aid will be able to assist vulnerable Tasmanians in that space as well.

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You made reference to funding generally. The Commonwealth, unfortunately, hasn't provided adequate funding in Tasmania and in my view across the country in terms of providing that support. You would have seen the views of Tasmanian Legal Aid's Kristen Wylie in recent days reflecting that view that the federal government needs to do more. I think there's also been a story in the local newspaper about that today; I draw that to your attention.

In terms of the specificity of your question, I will pass to the secretary to assist the honourable member.

Ms BOURNE - The National Access to Justice Partnership - and I apologise, minister, if you've referred to this figure - provides the state with just over \$127 million over five years. That includes funding from transitioning programs and administrative funding for the state. With that administrative component removed, it equates to \$123,000,917. I've got a breakdown of the proportional allocation of that funding to service providers. I can provide the total or breakdown year by year.

Ms HADDAD - The breakdown would be great, but I am conscious of time, so if it suits the Attorney-General, maybe I could put on notice the individual rates and ask a different question in this area.

Mr BARNETT - We do want to answer the questions and I don't think it will take too long to answer, so if the committee is happy we will do that.

Dr WOODRUFF - I think there's a three-minute time limit on responses.

Mr BARNETT - You've asked the question, we've got the answer.

Ms HADDAD - Okay.

Dr WOODRUFF - Three-minute time limit.

Mr BARNETT - Sorry, we've got the answer, you've asked the question -

Ms HADDAD - Let's go.

CHAIR - Sorry, minister, before you get into that, with the time limits, I'm being very relaxed on that at the moment -

Dr WOODRUFF - You are, Chair.

CHAIR - I am happy to rule with an iron fist on that, but just remember that half your questions have gone well over a minute. They will be cut off, but also a lot of the answers will be cut off too. I'm happy to keep it cordial -

Dr WOODRUFF - Let's keep going.

Ms BOURNE - The Hobart Community Legal Service will receive over five years a total of \$8,162,000; Launceston Community Legal Centre will receive a total of \$4,887,000; the North West Community Legal Centre will receive over five years a total of \$4,037,000; Tasmanian Legal Aid over the life of the NAJP will receive \$60,471,000; the Tasmanian

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Aboriginal Legal Service will receive \$31,605,000; the Tasmanian Refugee Legal Service will receive \$1.821 million; the Tenants Union of Tasmania will receive \$1,471,000; and the Women's Legal Service of Tasmania will receive \$17,426,000.

I should note that is inclusive of some state top-up funding that was provided in a previous budget when, from memory, the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund was not in surplus.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. Just on that, I don't disagree with you, Attorney-General, that the federal government could be providing more funding, and I've certainly made that view clear to my federal colleagues. However, the NAJP does also make it clear that states are required to maintain their level of effort and investment in legal assistance services in real terms over the life of the agreement for each subject of the legal assistance sector under the NAJP. That's clause 51.

I note the secretary spoke about the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund, and I know that there are some legal services that are funded through that fund, which is a volatile fund. In my view, it's not something that should be used to fund core services. Can you advise whether or not the duty lawyer service is still being funded through the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund or whether there's been permanent funding found for that service? Also, considering that clause in the NAJP, what other state funding is being provided to the CLC sector?

Mr BARNETT - Okay. Well, there's a fair few questions there, but we will do our best to respond.

Ms HADDAD - It's really just two.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Certainly, the National Access to Justice Partnerships are important, and we'd like the federal government to do more. We are certainly putting our shoulder to the wheel when it comes to supporting Tasmanian Legal Aid and those that are vulnerable. We increased that by \$4 million. In terms of the different parts of your question, I'll see if the Secretary or the Deputy Secretary can assist accordingly.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, Deputy Premier, through you. The state funding component is spread across a number of buckets, if I can crudely call them that. There was permanent committed additional funding of \$640,000 per year to the sector in the 2021-22 State Budget, which provides certainty in CLC's and TLA's baseline funding, and it's indexed each year. That budget also provided \$8.8 million over four years, which is the top-up funding that I referred to earlier, with \$7.4 million of that allocated to maintain core legal assistance services. The remainder of those funds were allocated through an expression of interest process.

The 2023-24 Budget included an additional \$820,000 to extend this commitment for a further year until 30 June 2026. CLCs and the TLA, through the department, have also received funding from government to support the Just Healthy Families program to the allocation of \$1.2 million over two years in the 2024-25 Budget.

Deputy Premier, the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund question, my understanding is that TLA's duty lawyer program has received funding out of the allocation in May this year from the Solicitors' Guarantee Fund.

Ms HADDAD - Okay. Thanks.

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Dr WOODRUFF - I speak to you, Attorney-General, on behalf of a child sexual assault survivor who has the court-nominated pseudonym of Zab, and I have his permission to ask this series of questions.

In July this year, Zab wrote to all leaders of political parties calling for an inquiry into Tasmanian government departments, museums and art galleries, and their dealings with artworks for the bankrupt estate of a convicted paedophile. Zab's abuser successfully divested his considerable collection of colonial paintings whilst he was in Risdon Prison and during court civil proceedings for damages that were being brought by his victim/survivor.

While Zab won the civil case and was awarded \$5.3 million in damages in 2021, because of the conduct of his abuser and the willingness, he says, of Tasmanian institutions to purchase artworks from a convicted paedophile during well-publicised civil proceedings, no compensation monies have ever been paid to Zab.

This is a very serious matter. Zab wrote to you and wrote to the Premier and has not received a response. Cassy O'Connor MLC wrote to you on 11 September and has not received a response. My question is has the government initiated any investigation into why and how so many government departments, government-supported foundations and state museums and galleries dealt with the art collector of this convicted paedophile while proceedings against him by victims before the Supreme Court of Tasmania were in place, 2016 to 2022? I will just note, I haven't mentioned the paedophile's name, but you know who I'm speaking about.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. Through you, Chair. It's obviously a very serious matter that you've made reference to this morning. It's also a complex matter. We're giving it, through my department, very careful consideration. A response will be prepared and forwarded in due course, following that careful consideration. It's very inappropriate to say anything more than that at this stage.

Dr WOODRUFF - Well, a few questions. Thank you, Attorney-General. It must be said that without those institutions dealing with that paedophile's art collection during civil proceedings, government-funded or supported institutions, money would now be vested in the trustee of bankruptcy and would have been available for compensation for the victim. It is, as you say, a very serious matter.

In your consideration, first of all, will you please respond to Zab immediately, because this person wrote to you as a victim/survivor, your government, on 14 July. No response at all is entirely inappropriate for a victim/survivor, entirely inappropriate, so an initial response would be much required.

Will you look at people who hold board positions of TMAG and Glover and others involved to look at their responsibility on these matters?

Mr BARNETT - Again, through you, Chair, to the honourable member. It's a very serious matter that you've raised. I've indicated already that we're looking into the matter. We're taking it seriously. It is a complex matter with various parts of government where, obviously, consultation is required, I draw that to your attention. I don't think I can add further to my earlier answer. I appreciate your interest and that of the person to whom you refer, and indicate that we take it seriously and will respond as soon as we possibly can.

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Dr WOODRUFF - When? This has been going on - it's been five months. No response. It's pretty outrageous. Why won't you?

CHAIR - Order. Dr Woodruff, you've had your two questions. Prof Razay.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable Attorney-General, according to Lifelong Respect: Tasmania's strategy to end the abuse of older people 2023-2029, many older people in Tasmania are experiencing some form of elder abuse, including social, emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse. My question is: what budget measures and legislative safeguards are being implemented, in light of the strategy, to prevent and respond to elder abuse, particularly in relation to the requirements of the act and need for specialist elder abuse legal services for older people at risk?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, through you, Chair, to the honourable member for Bass and your interest in this matter - in fact, a very special interest in this matter based on your history and background and excellent work in this space. I want to acknowledge the new minister for Ageing, Bridget Archer, and thank her for her leadership in this regard on behalf of the government and the community, and certainly on behalf of the government. We do take it very seriously. In fact, at the Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) on Friday, this was the very topic - a topic that had considerable interest from all Attorneys-General around Australia and at the Commonwealth level. So, we're taking it seriously across the nation, and likewise in Tasmania.

We have the national plan to respond to the abuse of older Australians. That's 2019 to 2023, and we're building on that. We have the national plan to end the abuse and mistreatment of older people 2024 to 2035, and that's the second national plan. That was endorsed by all ministers, just a few last week. Work is now underway across jurisdictions, and certainly in Tasmania, to address the feedback in the plan by developing the first two action plans. That work at the national level aligns with priorities identified in Tasmania's own Lifelong Respect - Tasmania's Strategy to End Abuse of Older People 2023-29, and the recently released action plan A Respectful, Age-Friendly Island: Older Tasmanians Action Plan 2025-29 and again acknowledge Bridget Archer, my colleague and friend in that regard, as Minister for Ageing. This action plan includes measures to prevent and respond to the abuse of older Tasmanians while also addressing their broader needs.

A number of related projects continue to be progressed in my portfolio. The first is law reform to improve safeguards against financial abuse arising from the misuse of enduring powers of attorney, which is progressing through SCAG as well. While the National Register for Enduring Powers of Attorney instruments have been considered, the focus is now on national law reform to drive consistency across states and territories.

Another ongoing major project members might have an interest in has involved the identification of gaps in safeguarding provisions and the development of appropriate reforms aimed at preventing and responding to abuse of older Tasmanians. The draft options paper discussing options for legislative reform was made available to the statewide Elder Abuse Prevention Advisory Committee in late 2022 and finalisation of this work has been contingent upon several concurrent initiatives occurring in this area, Tasmania's new *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act*, which commenced on 1 July this year, and recommendations arising from the disability royal commission. The Tasmanian Law Reform Institute is currently

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conducting a research project on safeguarding arrangements in Tasmania, with its report expected later this year, so not far away.

Another recent reform that has been on the public record is promoting the rights of older Tasmanians. On 1 September 2024, a second round of amendments to the *Guardianship and Administration Act* was commenced - again, more law reform in that space. All those amendments have helped address abuse of older Tasmanians and Australians. We'll continue with those various reforms. It's a very large body of work and we're very pleased to be progressing them, but I am always happy to hear feedback from you or others around the table with respect to this important work.

Mr O'BYRNE - Attorney-General, I want to talk about the Tasmanian Industrial Commission. I raised a question with you in parliament last week around a particular case where a person is still waiting over two years for a decision from the commission. Whilst I don't want you to intervene in that case, my point was more about the delay of justice for that worker. I've also been talking to a number of public sector unions who've echoed frustration with delays in decisions with the Industrial Commission. Justice delayed is a real concern for a whole lot of working people. Their lives are in limbo. Classes of workers are having issues unresolved for extensive periods of time. How can you defend over two years for decisions from the Industrial Commission?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. It is similar to the question in parliament last week, a very good question. You acknowledge the concerns of your constituents and highlight the very considerable delays. I don't think they can be defended and it's not satisfactory. I should make it clear that it's timely to consider the roles and functions of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission to ensure they continue to be required and equitable within the broader employment framework the State Service now operates. The establishment of TASCAT, a very serious and important reform, has shown the great benefits and efficiencies that can be achieved, providing consistency in decision-making and increasing transparency and accessibility, bringing together nine separate boards and tribunals.

The government has committed to expanding the jurisdiction of TASCAT and this reform presents another opportunity to achieve these benefits. The objective of this overarching reform is to achieve budget savings that do not impact on frontline services and continue to deliver key essential services. Transferring the industrial functions of the TIC to TASCAT will allow for the abolishment of the TIC in its current form, whilst achieving economies of scale through shared accommodation and resources. The Department of Justice will lead this reform. It will liaise closely with TASCAT and the State Service Management Office. The department also intends to consult with public sector unions as part of this process and others.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's a significant change historically - this is just a quick follow-up to that, if that's okay. The budget papers allocate \$1.4 million per year to the Industrial Commission, but in the forwards it goes down to \$700,000 per year. The Industrial Commission is a very specialised and targeted form of industrial justice for working people. It relies on people who have experience not only to arbitrate but to conciliate. These are very important roles. Are you saying it's just going to be subsumed into a general administrative appeals body? Is that what you're proposing?

Mr BARNETT - The transfer of TIC through to TASCAT, so those functions will continue, but there will be some budget savings offered as well.

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Mr O'BYRNE - So you're abolishing the Tasmanian Industrial Commission.

Ms HADDAD - That is huge news, minister.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is massive, that's a bomb. That's been around for over -

CHAIR - Mr Ferguson has the call.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's the first time I've heard that. Wow.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I'd like to take you back to justice and corrections, since we're not going to outputs and we're staying in overview. I want to explore with you the electronic monitoring program and home detention and I'd like if you would outline how the implementation of electronic monitoring is supporting a range of sentencing options and increasing community safety. Has it proven to be a positive measure? Is it effective in operating as intended?

Mr BARNETT - It's a very good question and a key part of our corrections and rehabilitations process. The introduction of electronic monitoring to support the implementation of several new sentencing options in order to increase community safety has proved to be a very positive measure. We've used it in terms of family violence, which has been a very important topic today, and to support victims of family violence, which has in some respects being nation-leading.

Community Corrections has now been delivering electronic monitoring for more than six years. The different order types that may attract an electronic monitoring condition are home detention orders, family violence orders, parole orders and high-risk offender orders.

In terms of home detention, as part of the government's policy to progressively phase out the use of suspended sentences, we explored ways of improving sentences, including the introduction of alternative sentencing options such as home detention with electronic monitoring. Due to the legislative reforms progressed by the government, that continues.

You made mention of electronic monitoring and GPS tracking. I've been to the facility at Community Corrections. They do an excellent job and they've got a unit there that monitors and manages it very carefully. It's relevant to family violence orders, parole orders and relevant high-risk offender orders. The equipment and technology is well used. It's very clever and we're very grateful for the work. We're looking very carefully at opportunities to expand on those electronic monitoring and home detention orders. We're looking at that very seriously as we speak.

CHAIR - As it's almost 11:00 a.m., we will take a short break now. As time taken for breaks must be made up, I encourage members to be as quick as they can.

The committee suspended from 10.59 a.m. to 11.12 p.m.

Mr BARNETT - I've got an updated response to Dr Woodruff's question about the Cox review I will share with the committee. Following up on Dr Woodruff's question about which recommendations from the Cox review would be in the bill released for public consultation this

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year, we provided a detailed briefing to the crossbench on these reforms recently, but I'm happy to reiterate.

The consultation draft is expected to address 35 Cox review recommendations plus 30 specific items from recommendation 50. A number of other recommendations are already implemented, will be implemented by the mandatory notifications bill, or are not legislative recommendations. This bill will be released for consultation later this year.

CHAIR - Thank you. Did you want to bring up anything else?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, just to advise the committee that Grant Davies, the Health Complaints Commissioner, is here to assist the honourable member for Braddon. He's here and available to answer any questions, so I ask Mr Davies to come to the table and answer the question from the member for Braddon.

Mr GARLAND - Will I read it out again?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, if you could.

Mr GARLAND - I've been contacted by several constituents with complaints about the Health Complaints Commission and particularly the delay in resolving complaints and poor communication with complainants. The commission identified problems over complex and ambiguous legislation in their strategic plan in 2022 and suggested a review and update of the act is required. This review has been referred to in three annual reports. The act is not large or complex. Apparently an issues paper has finally been produced. Can you advise where this is at, why it has taken so long, what the timeframe for the review will be, and whether the public will get to have input into that review?

Mr DAVIES - Just to give you some context, I was appointed in mid-July this year, so I'm still getting across -

Ms HADDAD - Congratulations.

Mr DAVIES - Thank you very much - still getting across the seven jurisdictions. I am aware that the discussion paper has been produced. It identified complexities in the act and given the context of the Dawson review around the national health complaints process, we really need to incorporate the code of conduct for unregistered healthcare workers to be able to do a fulsome review of the act. We anticipate that will move on apace into early next year and I would hope to be able to work with the Department of Justice around any legislative changes that might be required.

Mr GARLAND - All right, very good. Commissioners also highlighted in previous and current annual reports the challenges they had with resourcing -

CHAIR - Sorry, Mr Garland, but that's a separate question.

Mr GARLAND - All right, no worries.

CHAIR - We'll come back to you when we circle around. Ms Haddad has the call.

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Mr BARNETT - Just quickly, Chair, I wanted to acknowledge Grant Davies, who's been here for just a number of months and thank him for his service and support. Likewise I want to acknowledge Richard Connick, former Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner, for his long service to the people of Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Ms Haddad.

Ms HADDAD - I add my congratulations to Mr Davies. I hadn't had the chance to meet you yet, but congrats on the complex role.

I just wanted to go, Attorney-General, to the comments you made before the break around your plans to abolish the Tasmanian Industrial Commission. That's the first I've heard about that plan and it's fairly big news. I want to ask you what the timeline is on your plan to move the TIC into TASCAT, and more importantly, whether or not you're going to retain the specific expertise of the commissioners and whether they'll be moving across or whether you expect it to go into it one of the existing divisions of TASCAT.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. The information with respect to the transfer of TIC to TASCAT was in the May budget. It's also in this Budget on page 122 of budget paper 2 which says the decrease in appropriation revenue and expenses for the Tasmanian Industrial Commission output in 2026-27 reflects the transfer of the public sector industrial relations to TASCAT from 2026-27 and the figures are set out in the budget papers.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you for that. Perhaps you can go to the other part of my question around the commissioners and the importance of that specific expertise.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. The role, functions and responsibilities we plan to extend and transfer to TASCAT. In terms of TASCAT, they have already successfully taken on board a whole range of transfers from the public agents board, the Magistrates Court, mental health services and other streams and they've done that successfully. The roles, functions and responsibilities will transfer to TASCAT. Of course, it's subject to legislation which is scheduled for next year, so we wouldn't see the final transfer until towards the end of next year, subject to that legislation. I will pass to the secretary to outline some of the detail to assist the honourable member.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, Deputy Premier. To echo your comments around the ability of TASCAT to absorb additional streams that have particular subject matter expertise, I think really speaks for itself, but also noting that this reform will be the subject of an extensive consultation process, including with key stakeholders such as the State Service Management Office and the Department of Premier and Cabinet, of course, of which SSMO is part.

Obviously a priority for me as head of agency is to consult closely with public sector unions as part of this process to inform the draft legislation, working very closely as well with others in the agency ahead of an anticipated February release of a draft bill and very conscious of the impact of the decision on existing TIC staff and the commissioners and engaging with TASCAT as well as part of that process about the transition of those personnel to the new structure.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. Is it the intention that those commissioner roles will move across?

Mr BARNETT - In terms of the roles, yes.

Ms HADDAD - Okay. Finally, I would just note that TASCAT continues to report, as many other parts of the justice system do, significant pressure on their existing staff and under-resourcing to complete the work that's already before them across those various streams. Do you have a long-term plan through next year's budget to ensure that TASCAT has the funding and resourcing it needs to do the job Tasmanians expect it to be able to do well?

Mr BARNETT - There's a short answer to that and it's yes.

Ms HADDAD - Okay, thank you.

Ms ROSOL - Minister, I'd like to ask some questions around lockdowns in corrections. There have been significant issues with lockdowns, first identified or reported on by the Custodial Inspector in 2018, with ongoing repeated reports. Since then the government's performance has continued to deteriorate in this area. We obtained an RTI that showed that in 2024 there were 6000 lockdowns, almost 2500 of which were over four hours long and almost 900 over eight hours long. The prison system experienced an average 16 lockdowns per day, 2.5 of which are over eight hours long. Unsurprisingly, Tasmania has the lowest out-of-cell time in the country. What steps, if any, are you taking to reduce the number of lockdowns that take place?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I can appreciate your interest in this matter, which you have had for some time. The government is focused on reducing the amount of time prisoners spend in lockdown across all our correctional facilities and we acknowledge that this is a challenge and an area for improvement, as noted by the Custodial Inspector. I want to acknowledge that upfront and that's why we're investing heavily in recruiting more staff and building more capacity within the system.

Lockdowns occur for many reasons, including managing prisoner behaviour, security protocols and staffing issues to meet the demand in the prison system. Since 2020, there have been 257 new correctional officers employed within the TPS, and again I put on record my thanks to those correctional officers and the staff that support them. They're on the front line and they do a great job.

We're investing \$38 million into the construction of a new maximum-security unit within the Risdon Prison Complex to help alleviate bed pressures for this cohort of prisoners. Over the last five years we've made significant infrastructure investments, including constructing the new Southern Remand Centre at Risdon. Lockdowns do not always necessitate prisoners being confined to their cells, often they may only be limited to their accommodation units or divisions.

It is important to note that when lockdowns do occur, essential services and inmate supports, including personal visits, are maintained wherever possible and when it is safe to do so. I'm aware there was a particularly difficult period of lockdowns over October and to date in November in the Southern Remand Centre, so I note that as well.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you, minister. You talked about increasing staff numbers. The lockdown data shows that 94 per cent of lockdowns over four hours long were caused by

staffing shortages. Have you met with the CPSU to seek their advice on how to reduce staff shortages, and are you acting on any advice from the union?

Mr BARNETT - On the first day in my job as minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation, I visited Risdon Prison. I visited and met with Narelle Pamplin, the Director of Prisons, who's also with us today, and I was very impressed with her level of professionalism and dedication to the role. As I said, since 2020 we've employed an extra 257 correctional service officers. I will just see if the secretary or the deputy secretary can assist with respect to the other part of that question, if that's possible.

Ms BOURNE - Sure, through you, minister. I don't want to speak for the director or the deputy secretary of Corrective Services, but engagement with unions continues and is frequent at various levels of existing engagement, working groups and the like. I engage with the CPSU as well, and I know in the past my colleagues openly talk with the unions about their views on the range of strategies that can potentially be actioned to reduce the number of lockdowns, because, as the minister alluded to, in some ways, locking down a facility or a part of a facility is an important operational tool to ensure a safe correctional environment and environment for staff, but, obviously, there is a compromise to be had. One example I think I can refer to is the Risdon Prison Complex's flexible staffing strategy that has been implemented, as I understand it, in consultation with unions. I guess, in summary, that consultation continues and we need the input of unions and staff to to inform our processes, to ensure their safety and the operations of the prison.

Mr GEORGE - Attorney-General, we've had a discussion raised by my colleague from Franklin, Dr Woodruff, referring to a number of the women whose babies were forcibly adopted, and many of them have now died or are old. I think there were about 11,000 overall. You referred to consultation with these women, or your secretary has, I'd like to know how many of those women the department has engaged with, and in what way they are engaging, and whether there is any ongoing litigation over this matter.

Sort of connected to it, although I concede it's a little separated, I'd like to know where we are up to in consulting with the community on the expungement of archaic crimes of homosexuality and crossdressing, too.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the questions. A two-part question it's probably fair to say

Mr GEORGE - It is, I'm afraid, apologies.

Mr BARNETT - I will answer the second part of the question first, to say that parliament has only recently passed that legislation about providing redress for those people affected and that goes back many decades. To indicate, as the secretary did yesterday, and I will ask the secretary to add to the answer, it's very important to address privacy matters and to take those into account, but I will ask the secretary to add to that answer very shortly.

Going to the first question, the consultation and the redress system that we have announced, and the importance of transitioning to established redress arrangements in the first half of next year - that is the ambition - but to progress as swiftly as possible as, in light of the views that you expressed that many of the women subject to forced-adoption practices are quite elderly. We want to act as soon as possible. I will ask the secretary to add to the answers to both questions.

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Ms BOURNE - Thanks, minister, through you. In relation to the first part of your question about the level of engagement, I don't have any particular data in front of me about the extent of that engagement, but we are doing that predominantly through our Have Your Say website to encourage people to contact the agency. Also, on the day of the government's announcement, I wrote directly to a range of stakeholders, particularly support stakeholders, that may be able to seek or initially inform their clients or those that use their services of the government's announcement, but also to draw their attention to the fact that the agency is consulting on the nature of the proposed redress scheme.

I understand that that engagement has been wide and varied. Some individuals have shared their very personal experience; others have put forward particular suggestions, and there's an opportunity for our team to engage with them further to clarify and seek further details, if the person is happy for that to occur. I may be able to, through you minister, get that information as the course of the session moves on.

In terms of existing matters, I'm not able to talk to the specifics of those, other than to say that there are existing matters on foot that the State Litigator is managing on behalf of the Crown. Some of those potentially fall into the category that we'll be considering around an appropriate transitional framework ahead of the commencement of the redress scheme.

Mr GEORGE - Can we get those figures, if it's possible?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, minister.

Mr GEORGE - Sorry - through you.

Mr BARNETT - Yes. We will take that on notice and respond as soon as possible.

Mr GEORGE - Thank you.

CHAIR - Just before we move on, I'd just like to remind the committee, and Mr Garland, this is in relation to you with the Ombudsman, if the committee agrees, we can bring him back now for your follow-up question, or we can wait until the last half an hour, at 12.30 p.m., deal with the other portfolios first and come back to your follow-up to the Ombudsman then. It's up to the committee to say if they're happy to come back now for that question or wait till 12.30 p.m.

Mr GARLAND - The final commission of inquiry report's recommendation 15.21 is for a review of the *Health Complaints Act*. Why is it taking so long to get this review done? Can you give a firm timeframe for when the discussion paper will be given up to the public, and are there any funding cuts in the forward Estimates for the commission, which has already flagged how it is struggling with limited resources?

Mr DAVIES - Through you, minister. The review was an internal document to us seeking to review the *Health Complaints Act*. As I indicated in my last answer, the landscape has moved on, somewhat, from that. That report was provided to us in September 2024. My view is that we need to look at those recommendations, look at what we need to do in terms of meeting, look at what health ministers agree to as a result of the NRAS complexity review done by Sue Dawson, and then come to a view about how we implement those.

PUBLIC

Mr FERGUSON - Attorney-General, I want to bring you to a corrections question again, please, around court-mandated diversion programs. I've been on the record for a long time for being very supportive of those initiatives - they still provide justice but also a health response and hopefully reduce reoffending for the use of drugs. As you know all too well, our government introduced additional extension to that for alcohol treatment orders. Would you outline how the court-mandated diversion program for alcohol treatment orders that were legislated last year will or hopefully are already reducing reoffending through the treatment of substance dependency issues?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question and for acknowledging the legislative reform to include court-mandated diversion for alcohol treatment in addition to drug treatment. It's a really good measure to provide an alternative to imprisonment, as you've noted, and the government has broad support across the parliament to help those participants to address the risk of reoffending by treating their illicit substance or alcohol dependency in the community.

It's a program that allows participants to establish a meaningful therapeutic relationship with services in their community of origin to help them manage their substance abuse and in this case, alcohol abuse, while at the same time reducing the negative impact of imprisonment on themselves and their families. The program ensures that participants can access the services and treatment necessary to address the issues that contribute to recidivism and relapse. Addressing these issues as a long-term process - it's not a quick fix, as you would know - given the chronic nature of participants' substance use histories and offending behaviour.

The programs are quite extensive. I want to underline the importance of the role of Community Corrections services within the Department of Justice and thank them for their work. They do a great job. The CMD program is currently only available to support offenders whose offending is related to their illicit substance abuse issues. It's not an available sentencing option for those managing similar issues related to alcohol abuse, but we did pass that legislation, as you know, to broaden it to alcohol.

In terms of the the funding support, given the intensive nature of the program the preferred caseload is 10 participants in drug treatment orders. I will just check with the secretary or deputy secretary in terms of the arrangements for the alcohol treatment orders and what's available on the record. I'll just see if the secretary or deputy secretary can assist.

Ms BOURNE - As the Attorney-General has noted, the CMD program is currently only available to support offenders where the offending is related to illicit substance abuse issues. However, noting the passage of legislation in 2024 to open up that sentencing pathway for offenders where their offending is alcohol-related, work is underway to give effect to that. I understand Community Corrections is currently working with particularly the courts to design the case management approach to support the proclamation of that change and ensure that there's the same level of confidence as there is for those offenders who are subject to current CMD orders.

That is a very good question. I might take that on notice so I can give you some further clarity. I know that work is happening in earnest, given the interest. I know Community Corrections has some of the devices they're starting to work with, so work is very well progressed, but I'm happy to get a timeline.

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Ms BUTLER - My question is to do with the lockdowns that Ms Rosol previously raised. Commentary from prison advocates state that the cause of those lockdowns is a hostile management regime, overcrowding and insufficient staffing. An email from the Director of Prisons dated Monday 17 November at 2.55 p.m. which was sent to prison staff, actually relates to that. I will read a section of this where it states:

Another immediate priority will be to improve our out-of-cell hours and access to rehabilitative opportunities. I have heard from staff the impact on morale of constant lockdowns, the challenges of balancing increasing demands and the desire to address factors that impede people coming to work.

Minister, what are you doing to address the toxic culture at Risdon? Do you understand that that culture is one of the main contributing factors to why we have the highest lockdowns in Australia?

Mr BARNETT - Firstly, I acknowledge the question but I don't appreciate the characterisation.

Ms BUTLER - I don't really care what you appreciate, minister, if you can just answer the question.

CHAIR - Let the minister answer.

Mr BARNETT - I don't appreciate the characterisation shared by the honourable member. I have incredible admiration for those on our front line and noted earlier that some 257 correctional officers have been employed in the Tasmania Prison Service since 2020. I thank them for their service and those staff who work with them to provide those frontline services to keep the Tasmanian community safe.

Of course, out-of-cell hours is a challenge. I indicated that in response to the honourable member for Bass, Cecily Rosol, but note that lockdowns occur for many reasons, including managing prisoner behaviour, security protocols and staffing issues. To meet that demand, we've put those correctional services into the Tasmania Prison Service. We've invested in the infrastructure at the prison. I've mentioned the maximum security prison facilities which are now being expanded significantly with some \$38 million. The expansion of the kitchen will provide more work opportunities and healthy eating options. We've got a new southern remand centre at Risdon and we have plans for further expansion and establishment of further infrastructure at Risdon itself. I appreciate the work of the Tasmania Prison Service but don't appreciate the member's characterisation.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you for that but you didn't really go anywhere near answering my question. This this note to prison staff talks about increasing demands and the desire to address factors that impede people coming to work, that being lockdowns. It also goes on to state:

It is unfortunate to also regularly hear of people feeling unsafe to be at work -

This is from your Director of Prisons.

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- feeling that they aren't adequately trained, supported or equipped and some who feel they are actively bullied, harassed and discriminated against.

What do you say to those comments, minister? This was sent to all correctional officers yesterday.

Mr BARNETT - I appreciate your question. In terms of delivering a safe workplace and an environment in which you want correctional officers to work, obviously we want to provide a positive and safe workplace. A prison is a difficult and challenging place to work for anybody. I say thank you to our new correctional officers and all our correctional officers. I will ask the secretary to respond to that question and add to my answer.

Ms BOURNE - Again I won't speak for the director or the reasons for that communication, but what I will note is I think for some time there have been cultural issues and the acknowledgement in that email is I think a very positive development in terms of a director and a leadership team supported by the deputy secretary and myself to really start to address some of the underlying issues.

Tasmania Prison Service staff are utmost professionals but they're often not recognised as such, particularly in comparison to members of Tasmania Police and the like. It's certainly my priority to make sure that we acknowledge the work that they do, but provide them with the supports to do that work. That's across the board: increasing the professionalisation of the service, ensuring that we have adequate staff, and addressing how we manage staff who are injured in the course of their employment.

I note that our workers' comp numbers for the prison in the past year have actually decreased - not enough, but I think that's testament to the work we're doing to support injured workers and provide other opportunities for them to come back to work.

I think there is a concerted effort, and the director's expressing her clear commitment to make sure staff feel supported as she, with a different, new approach, undertakes the task to tackle some of those longstanding issues.

Ms BUTLER - I acknowledge that this is a different approach, and it's an honest approach, and I think it's high time we have that honest approach when it comes to our correctional system in Tasmania, because there are significant issues. May I ask, Attorney-General, the amount of correctional officers currently on workers' compensation, or claims being investigated, that are due to bullying? The number of correctional officers and the percentage of the workforce on workers' compensation, please.

Mr BARNETT - Well, there's two or three questions, so let's be clear of the question.

Ms BUTLER - Okay, I can make it really clear. What is the amount of correctional officers that are currently on workers' compensation? How many of those correctional officers on workers' compensation claims state that that is due to bullying in the workplace, and what is that percentage? I'm happy to take that on notice, because it is a complex question.

Mr BARNETT - We can assist the honourable member with most of that question and we're happy to -

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Ms BUTLER - Which sections can you assist with? I just don't want to get a response that's not what I asked for.

Mr BARNETT - I will pass to the Secretary to answer as much of the question as possible.

Ms BUTLER - Okay, thank you.

Ms BOURNE - Thank you, Deputy Premier, through you. The information I have at hand is that, as of 30 March 2025, in the 2024-25 financial year, there were 110 claims for workers' compensation for the following types of injuries: 67 claims for physical injuries; 43 claims for psychological injuries.

I don't have a breakdown regarding the nature of all the causative factors for the psychological injuries. I would note that those figures represent a 25 per cent decrease in physical injuries in the last financial year, but an increase in psychological injuries - up from 34 claims in the same period. This is consistent with what the agency more broadly is seeing.

Ms BUTLER - Okay, thank you.

Ms ROSOL - Minister, you've mentioned multiple times that 257 correctional officers have been employed since 2020, which is five years now, so quite a long period. We know at the same time that the government are working to cut 2800 jobs in the public service. Could you please outline how many jobs have been cut within Corrections and Rehabilitation in the last 12 months, and then how many you plan to cut as part of the public service sector job cuts?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. I can't pre-empt the May budget or any future budgets, but I can speak to the Budget that's before us, and the secretary can assist me shortly in that regard. Obviously, in terms of frontline staff and those correctional officers that I've mentioned, the 257 since 2020, we're very grateful for their work and that's clearly a priority that we provide that support. In terms of the numbers, I'd have to refer to the secretary to see if she can assist the honourable member.

Ms BOURNE - Thank you, Deputy Premier, through you. I will just bring up total staff numbers. As of 30 June 2025, there were 466.3 FTE correctional officers, a headcount of 503. From 2014 to 7 November 2025, the TPS recruited 469 correctional officers. During that same period, the TPS has had 228 staff leave due to retirement, transfer to other roles, resignation or termination, which is a net increase in COs of 241 during that period.

Ms ROSOL - Can I just follow up? Have vacancy control measures or budget efficiencies been applied to any positions within Corrections and Rehabilitation?

Ms BOURNE - Through you, Deputy Premier. No. Correctional officers are an essential service and there have been no vacancy controls measures put in place for correctional officers. Obviously, our existing budget efficiency dividend is applied across all outputs of the agency, but that's being achieved through other means, and not a reduction in correctional officers.

Ms ROSOL - Thanks.

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Prof RAZAY - Honourable Deputy Premier, registration to work with vulnerable people is a top priority for the Tasmanian government to help to protect vulnerable people, including children. This is only mandatory for those working or volunteering in regular activities with children or providing supporting services through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). What changes are the government considering for the scheme in response to relevant recommendations from various recent inquiries?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. It's quite a substantial question. It's a very important matter. It was front and centre for the Standing Council of Attorneys-General last Friday, where we, as various jurisdictions with the support of the federal Attorney-General Michelle Rowland, agreed to do further work to protect children in vulnerable positions across our community. We've recently legislated, as you know, to extend that protection, and we will continue that reform into 2026.

Regarding the scheme itself and expanding the scheme, we're aiming to close the gaps in child-related activities and increase the protections for broader categories of vulnerable adults. The three phases will result in legislative changes to the Registration to Work with Vulnerable People regulations. I can outline those to the honourable member if he has an interest, but there's a lot of work going on in this space. The reforms are very important and we take it very seriously.

Prof RAZAY - Thank you.

Mr O'BYRNE - Attorney-General, back to the shock decision that you've just announced, that you're abolishing the Tasmanian Industrial Commission. I note the comment around consulting - I'm not sure what use that is, given you've already made the decision. Once you've made the decision, it's hard to consult on it.

My question is that the appointees to the Tasmanian Industrial Commission need to fit a certain criteria of experience and skills. It's a very defined area of industrial law and injustice. Workers seeking industrial justice similar to the federal system of the Fair Work Commission (FWC) separate to the day-to-day workings of courts and magistrates' courts etc. Could you explain how you're going to accommodate the skills required across all of TASCAT? Surely, that actually runs against, I suppose, the ability and skills required to resolve these industrial issues?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. It's a fair question and I understand where you're coming from. To make it very clear, it is important in terms of the roles, functions and responsibilities that will transfer to TASCAT. To make it very clear, obviously that will need to be managed by the President of TASCAT and through the transition process, which will be led by my department, the Department of Justice. I will pass to the secretary very shortly in terms of that process. Yes, they do have important skills and expertise, and of course, those skills and expertise will be required as part of the TASCAT team going forward.

There is a commitment to have a transfer of those roles, functions and responsibilities. To clarify, it may not be the same commissioners, but certainly in terms of the roles, functions and responsibilities will transfer - just to clarify, I think, a question earlier from Ella Haddad.

I will pass to the secretary because there will need to be consultation. It is important. There has already been some consultation through the Department of Justice and various parts

of government. There's a lot of work that's gone into this already, but there will need to be a lot more work done and a lot more consultation with the relevant State Service unions, for example, they're very key stakeholders. I take that job seriously, and the secretary together with her team will be doing much more consultation to progress this important objective.

Ms BOURNE - The only thing I'd add is that TASCAT, without pre-empting the consultation process, is likely to have a specialist stream to consider industrial matters, similar to the subsets or the existing streams it has, and also the particular members it has with sessional members with resource management experience or mental health and guardianship expertise.

I think one of the benefits through the work of the president and the executive at TASCAT is that they've been able to develop a strong, comprehensive set is probably not the right word, but membership of sessional members with particular skill sets. Each time there's an expression of interest for TASCAT sessional members, it's often done with a particular mind to expertise it doesn't have or is anticipated to need in the future. I'm very confident that throughout the consultation process that will be worked through and there's little risk of these matters sitting with an inappropriate stream or one that's not specific to the industrial context, given its speciality.

Mr FERGUSON - I want to ask the minister about Legal Aid funding. I noticed today in the *Examiner* on page 5 great concern was being raised about representation of children with independent children's lawyers. As we know, Tasmanian Legal Aid provides really important legal services to people who may otherwise be unable to afford legal representation. My question is about how the Budget will address the concerns generally about extending representation to people who need it, who are participating in the legal system, so they get fair treatment. I would ask you to speak to the concerns that have been raised by a number of individuals in that in that story from Owen Sinclair in relation to the federal government's cuts to Legal Aid for family law matters. How are we going to manage those issues while all of us are advocating for the federal government to review that?

Mr BARNETT - Firstly, thank you for the question. I want to put on record my sincere thanks to Tasmanian Legal Aid and Kristen Wylie, the director, and Jules Scarlett and the board. They do an excellent job for and on behalf of all Tasmanians representing vulnerable Tasmanians, as you've indicated in your question.

In this Budget, we have provided an additional \$4 million, with \$2 million this year and \$2 million next year over a two-year period. We're pleased and proud of that investment. That will provide further support for vulnerable Tasmanians, particularly in the criminal justice system and the criminal courts, as well as representation for people at TASCAT in terms of the various streams like the mental health and guardianship, divisions of TASCAT. As we've noted through the hearing, there's different parts and divisions of TASCAT and Legal Aid will provide that support going forward.

This was raised last Friday at the Council of Attorneys-General. I think it's fair to say a number of jurisdictions, including myself, raised concerns around Legal Aid at both this recent SCAG meeting and the one in September, and basically put it on the agenda to say it is a big issue for Australians and vulnerable Tasmanians.

Mr FERGUSON - It's not just Tasmania-specific.

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Mr BARNETT - No, it's across the country. We have an agreement with the federal government that's relevant to Tasmania, and each jurisdiction has its own agreement. Support for families and children in particular, as you know under the Constitution, is a responsibility for the federal government. You would have seen in the papers today the lack of support and funding from the federal government for those seeking support for vulnerable children, in terms of their family relationship.

Mr FERGUSON - They need representation more than anyone in a family law matter.

Mr BARNETT - They need that representation, absolutely. It's important and that's why I've made the call publicly to ask the federal Attorney-General and the federal government to step in and provide that support. I note the views of the director of Tasmania Legal Aid which concur with that view. We will do everything we can to represent and advocate for vulnerable Tasmanians. We realise that the Budget is tight, but I'm very pleased with the increase over the next two years to support Tasmanian Legal Aid and vulnerable Tasmanians.

Ms HADDAD - It is a shared responsibility, though, I would say, Attorney-General. One of the challenges in people accessing justice at all across our justice system is being represented by a lawyer in any capacity. One of the impediments to that right now is that fewer private practitioners are taking on legally aided work because the hourly rate that Legal Aid Tasmania can pass on has not kept up with industry rates and pace. The result of that is that people are going unrepresented, which is a problem for them as participants in terms of access to justice, but it's also a problem for you as the minister responsible because it leads to delays across our court system. What specific measures are you taking specifically on that issue of the hourly rate that the Legal Aid Commission is able to pass on to private practitioners taking on legally aided work and encouraging the private profession to do that work?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. As I've indicated, we are specifically increasing the funding to \$4 million for Tasmanian Legal Aid. I've acknowledged the good work of the board and the state director of Tasmanian Legal Aid and I thank them for their work. They make decisions for and on behalf of the board to support vulnerable Tasmanians who need it and I know they are appreciative of that extra funding in the Budget. Of course funding is always tight, but to have that additional funding will absolutely assist Tasmanian Legal Aid to help and support those vulnerable Tasmanians. I'll just check if the secretary can add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - The only thing I'd add is that, as the minister has noted, it is a national issue. Under the National Access to Justice Partnership there is a requirement for there to be a look at workforce strategy across the legal assistance sector, which I think will be helpful. Queensland is leading some work with a particular focus on legal aid commissions, which I think inevitably will look at fee structures and broader issues that will help inform at a national level further advice that we can provide to Attorneys-General to try to collaboratively address what is a shared issue.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. My second question goes to a different topic. You'd be aware of the High Court case of DP and Bird which involved a victim/survivor of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The High Court rejected the extension of vicarious liability to religious institutions for that historical child sexual abuse committed by clergy, and they said they are in a relationship akin to employment, but because they're not employees that vicarious liability doesn't extend to them. I'm sure you'd agree this has significant implications for

victim/survivors in this state. We've had a shared passion for the commission of inquiry across the whole state, but I wondered if you can tell me specifically if you plan to legislate in Tasmania to extend vicarious liability to people in these 'akin to employment'-type relationships.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. It's a very important question that was raised at SCAG on Friday. It's something as a state government, through myself at the SCAG meeting, certainly represents the view of the state and highlights the importance of working together and discussing any legislative reform options and identifying opportunities for national consistency wherever possible. This has been on our agenda at SCAG for some time/ It was raised in September and raised again last week and certainly from Tasmania's point of view, the Department of Justice is considering the judgment. It's a very complex matter. I've received much correspondence on this from various stakeholders from all sides. We are considering the matter, as I said, as to whether to make any legislation retrospective or not, and if so, whether this extends to all relationships akin to employment or select groups such as religious personnel. There are a number of options. We are considering all of those options.

We had previously legislated to prospectively extend vicarious liability to child abuse to relationships that are akin to employment. That was legislation of, I think, a couple of years ago consistent with a recommendation from the royal commission into child abuse. We have already acted, actually in advance of a number of other jurisdictions.

Ms HADDAD - That's good to hear. I'm sure you'd agree it doesn't really pass the pub test, and it's not in line with other work the Tasmanian government has done on mandatory reporting of people who are, for example, in voluntary positions who are working with young people. I note your comments about SCAG, but it would be good to know if you intend to legislate here or if you're waiting for a national decision - because there is the option for you to act first.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. As I indicated, we'd far prefer a nationally consistent approach wherever possible. It is a very complex matter. I'm taking advice on this. We considered it at SCAG on Friday. It's fair to say that Victoria appears to be leading, but they have not released their bill, as of Friday at least, so that we could analyse that and consider it. I believe a cautious approach is sensible. We need to consider all the options before making any unilateral decision, noting that a national approach is preferred.

Ms ROSOL - Coming back to corrections and rehabilitation again. Tasmania has one of the highest rates of recidivism in the country, which highlights the importance of rehabilitation. I receive letters from people who are currently in prison and I've spoken with people after they've been released and, often, what they tell me is that they've had a lot of difficulty accessing rehabilitation while they're in prison.

I'm wondering if you could outline for me the specific rehabilitation programs that have been provided. I understand there's more funding in this interim Budget for programs. What have been the specific rehabilitation programs that have been provided within Tasmania's prisons? How many people have participated in each of the programs? What are the waitlists for each of those programs?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate your interest in this matter. I want to indicate that the recidivism rates in Tasmania have reduced for the first time

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in seven years. Only a little bit, but they've reduced and that's good news and I hope we can continue that progress. I thank the correctional service officers and the Tasmanian Prison Service for their efforts. I should also note there's been a reduction in the number and rate of assaults on staff. There's also been a reduction -

Ms ROSOL - Sorry, can I bring attention back to the question? My specific question was about rehabilitation programs, please.

Mr BARNETT - I'm about to address that. There's been a reduction in the cost of prisoners per day costs and no escapes from custody in the last two years. So, they're all positive.

Going to the specifics of your question, we have a whole range of programs to address rehabilitation and reintegration - peer support programs, dress for success, welcome back programs - and I can outline those further. I'm also happy to pass to the secretary to add to the importance of reintegration into the community for our prisoners and to say that the drug and alcohol treatment measures that we talked about earlier today is part of that process. There are therapeutic services that the Tasmanian Prison Service provides, crisis support and a new stream of specialist support. So they are many and various, and I am more than happy to pass to the secretary to add to my answer, if that would assist the member.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, minister, through you. Without repeating what you already said. Funding provided in last year's Budget was significant in this particular area. We received just over \$3.6 million over the forward Estimates for treatment programs for sex offenders in response to a commission of inquiry recommendation; \$4.11 million over the forward Estimates for a correctional improvement program, which includes additional drug and alcohol treatment programs within the TPS, as well as transitional housing in the north-west for transitional women's accommodation; and the Risdon Prison Construction program, which provides \$15.89 million for improvements including the development of a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation program, and additional funding for the new kitchen that the minister has referred to.

The TPS provides a range of programs: sex offender treatment, family violence treatment, violence, drug and alcohol, and also treatment of general offending. In terms of key figures, I have a more global set of figures. For the period from July 2024 to 30 June 2025, there were 217 new enrolments in intervention programs, 128 completions, 53 still participating and 37 non-completions due to relocation or early release.

In addition to group-based programs, our rehabilitation and reintegration staff provide ongoing case management to prisoners. We have one-on-one program work for a number of prisoners, including in relation to drug and alcohol treatment and behavioural therapy. I do have a breakdown of those figures, minister, I'm not sure if you'd like me to - in terms of completion rates for -

Ms ROSOL - Yes, that would be good. I'm looking for quite specific information about yeah, specific programs, specific numbers, so if you have that information that would be great. Thank you.

Ms BOURNE - Minister, through you. These are all for the period 1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025.

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- For the New Direction Sex Offender Treatment program, there were 31 prisoners enrolled, 23 completed, 8 currently participating, and 1 not completed;
- For the Family Violence program, there were 23 enrolled, 22 completed, and 1 not completed;
- For the Dialectical Behavioural Therapy program (DBT), there were 30 enrolled, 9 completed, 13 participating, and 8 not completed;
- For the EQUIPS program, there were 75 enrolled, 45 completed, 18 participating, and 12 not completed;
- For the Resilience program there were 42 enrolments, 29 completions, and 13 non-completions;
- For the Making Changes program there were 8 enrolled, and 8 still currently participating, and;
- For the EQUIPS Aggression program there were 8 enrolled, 6 participating, and 2 not completed.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Just following on, and still talking about rehabilitation. My understanding is that people who are in remand can't access rehabilitation, but many of them want to. What avenues are available for them to participate in programs and what plans do you have to make them more available in future?

Mr BARNETT - I'll pass to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks minister, through you. It is often a challenge, I know, for staff at the prison, in terms of the intent to provide rehabilitation to remandees, but for factors I'm sure are well known to this committee that's difficult, so as to not pre-empt the outcome of their sentence. However, the prison is also receiving \$1.5 million from the Commonwealth Government over four years for an innovative perpetrator response program specifically designed for remandees and prisoners on short sentences for family violence offences.

The first of these programs commenced in the Southern Remand Centre on 30 April of this year, delivered to remandees who, as I said, have not traditionally been provided with access to programs. Hopefully we'll be able to provide further data to the minister in due course about how that first-of-its-kind program plays out to inform further work that we may undertake with our remandee population.

Mr GEORGE - Continuing with the prison systems and justice systems. Aboriginal men and women still over-represented in courts and in prisons, and the recent release of the Tasmanian plan for Closing the Gap 2025-28 includes five actions for the Department of Justice that seem to focus specifically on scoping research and review. I am wondering if the Attorney-General can tell us what practical and safe programs, including diversionary conferencing, are being implemented or are currently operating to divert or support Aboriginal people? How much additional funding that is not funding for business as usual is allocated by the Department of Justice for these programs?

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Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. For the last part of that question, I will pass to the secretary shortly, but certainly the issue of Closing the Gap is very important and as a government we take it very seriously. I thank you for the question and your interest in the matter and acknowledge my colleague, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Bridget Archer, and her good work in progressing the interests of our Aboriginal community.

There is obviously an over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody compared to the average population. There's been a commensurate increase in the number in over-representation for some time. Certainly as a government we're committed to working collaboratively across jurisdictions across the country at a national and local level as well as participating in initiatives aimed at reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in our criminal justice system.

I can indicate, based on advice I have, that in terms of their disproportionate representation in the Tasmanian prison system, an Aboriginal person is 5.4 times more likely to be imprisoned than a non-indigenous person. For context, this is the lowest over-representation rate in Australia, where the average is 13.2 times and no other jurisdiction is below 10 times. Tasmania stands out in that regard, but I recognise there's still a lot more work to do to address over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody. Certainly as a government and as a community we have a lot of work to do in Closing the Gap. In terms of working at state and national level, but also with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service and other key stakeholders, there's a lot more work to do.

For the other part of your question, I will pass to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Closing the Gap is one of the six strategic priorities under our Corrections strategic plan, as well as the input the agency has, as the minister has referred to, to the broader Tasmanian plan around Closing the Gap. The government has previously funded the Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service to deliver a bail support program trial. We're currently evaluating that trial and will provide advice to government hopefully this year to identify the future of that particular program. Other work we're engaging with is we're represented on the National Justice Policy Partnership with a range of community and other government representatives as well that particularly focuses on reducing the rate of Aboriginal prisoners in custody.

The government has also invested \$500,000 up until 30 September 2026 for providing Aboriginal cultural wellbeing supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in our custody, which was granted directly to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service to employ two Aboriginal wellbeing officers, who provide services that include participating in case management and making appropriate referrals within the Tasmania Prison Service and other community organisations.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, we have a constituent who was notified that the remains of their family member were unlawfully displayed at the RA Rodda museum. To make matters worse, after she was notified about this and requested the return of the remains, they were cremated against her wishes. This constituent has been extremely upset by this and wants to know what date the remains were cremated. She hasn't received any answers from your department, despite repeated requests. How can this person find out this basic information? Will you commit to providing a ministerial statement to the parliament to update it on how the government was proposing to manage this issue to give some answers to impacted families?

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Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. It is clearly a very sensitive and important matter and I take it very seriously, as you probably recall from a recent question in the parliament, which I responded to at the time. Flowing from the coroner's report, it has highlighted some very concerning matters that have been raised and as a government we take it very seriously.

With respect to the last point of your question, there will be a ministerial statement provided. That will need to be done at a time in consultation with the relevant families and others. That will be early next year's sitting and led by the Minister for Health, Bridget Archer. We will have more to say in coming weeks in terms of details around that to update the parliament, the public and those families affected. I've taken very seriously the correspondence and feedback I've had directly from people such as your constituent and the department does as well. We are getting on with the job. As you might recall, there is a review of the *Coroners Act* by the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute, which I requested in the middle of this year and that is also underway.

This has been somewhat of a surprise to many families and clearly impacted on many families. It is with some considerable deep sadness that I've had to share this information but we are taking it seriously and responding accordingly. I would like to go to the secretary to add to my answer.

Ms BOURNE - The only addition I would make is that I would encourage your constituent to contact the Coronial Division of the Magistrates Court directly who, without in any way wanting to speak for the division, should be able to provide that detail. I just want to acknowledge the work of the staff at the Coronial Division in very difficult circumstances, working with impacted families through what is a fairly traumatic circumstance.

Mr BARNETT - I should just quickly say that there will be an apology provided and expressed in the parliament. The Minister for Health and myself will have more to say about the timing around that to support those families that might be interested in listening to that. I just want to say we're taking it very seriously and are more than happy for any other feedback from yourself or other members of the community and we acknowledge the importance of this matter.

Mr GARLAND - I will just add that the lady has already approached the coronial body and they have ignored her request.

Ms BOURNE - I'm happy to follow that up out of session, so to speak.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. Perhaps the member can let me know as Attorney-General and then we'll follow it up through my secretary.

Mr GARLAND - Thank you very much.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, back to Corrections, following a line of passion and interest for me as part of the \$180 million funding to deliver a range of capital and maintenance programmes across the Corrections and Rehabilitation portfolio. It specifically mentions here the delivery of the new maximum security accommodation unit at Risdon Prison Complex and also the new modern kitchen. How are these investments going to help address capacity issues, but also importantly, following on my long line of questions here, how will these enable the

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delivery of a range of intervention programs, supports and education and training within the precinct, including the new drug and alcohol treatment unit? I applaud your efforts in this space and those of previous ministers, but I'd ask how those things will support those activities.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. Likewise, I'd like to acknowledge the previous minister, Madeleine Ogilvie, for her work, and before that going all the way back to Vanessa Goodwin, and put on record my sincere acknowledgement and thanks for her service.

In terms of the infrastructure upgrades, it's very important to assist in prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration and you've made mention of the considerable investments by our government. It was actually a \$50 million investment in the 2023-24 budget to deliver the maximum-security accommodation unit and that's the Correa Unit, which is progressing positively and really well. I'm looking forward to that continuing. There's been a significant investment in our security arrangements, likewise, at Risdon Prison - that's the electronic security and mobile duress alarm system replacements. That's caused - infrastructure upgrades that are required to make that happen.

You made mention of the kitchen which I'm hoping will be close to being open in and around Christmas this year, which is a very good \$15 million investment to support a healthier outcome for our prison population and provide work opportunities. You mentioned rehabilitation and opportunities for education and training and work, so work and training will be made available in the new kitchen and -

Ms HADDAD - Can I butt in? Is it for all rated prisoners or just minimum-security who will be able to access the kitchen?

Mr BARNETT - It'll be carefully managed and it's not for me to say exactly who, but it'll be carefully managed in terms of security and the safety of those in the prison system. I'm sure the Director of Prisons will have more to say about that, and indeed my secretary or deputy secretary, but, yes, safety is a top priority. In terms of offering those education, training and work opportunities to build good habits as they transition to the civilian workforce and civil society more generally, it's an excellent opportunity.

I should do a shout-out for the laundry service, which is already providing opportunities for education, training and work within our prison system. There are a lot of good things already happening and we want to build on that for the future.

Mr FERGUSON - My closing point, if I may.

CHAIR - Sorry, we have to keep going. I'm very aware of time.

Ms BUTLER - Last November, Community Corrections workers from Hobart and Glenorchy walked off the job, minister. The reason they provided was to 'highlight the impact of under resourcing of the central public services and the poor workplace culture that is driving staff out the door.' That's their words.

When I raised this issue with the previous minister for Corrections in last year's estimates committee, about six weeks before the staff walked out the door, I asked that question. I now believe I may have been misled in that committee because my question was about whether

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people were leaving those roles due to workplace bullying and related issues and I was told no, it was due to promotions and retirement.

Minister, I'm going to read to you some of the information that was provided as part of that walking off the job. Workers say the problems range from under-resourcing and unmanageable workloads to workplace culture issues driving workers out the door - I asked about that in that committee, too, and I was told there wasn't a problem but clearly there was because six weeks later the workers walked out of work.

Community Corrections workers provide a range of services to the community, including supervising offenders on parole, providing pre-sentencing advice and delivering offender intervention programs, so they're very important roles. What they stated in their media release, minister, was staff working in Community Corrections are telling us that:

Public safety is at risk due to the under-resourcing of their work and poor management practices. There is significant concern from staff about their own wellbeing, the wellbeing of the community, and the wellbeing of the offenders they are trained to support.

My first question, minister, is, why was I misled in the previous Estimates committee?

Mr BARNETT - I can't accept that question.

Ms BUTLER - Why not? I was misled.

Mr BARNETT - I'm the new Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation. I want to assist the committee. I wasn't sitting here last year, so if you have an issue, then you need to use the appropriate forms of parliament to express your concerns. I've noted them and in terms of our correctional staff, I have a very clear view and the government has a very clear view and that is one of acknowledgement and thanks for their work on the frontline -

Ms BUTLER - This is Community Corrections, minister. Please just stay on target. It's Community Corrections I'm talking about now and why I was misled in the previous Estimates committee when I asked this question around whether there was an issue with workplace culture -

CHAIR - Ms Butler, the minister has answered that question.

Ms BUTLER - No, he hasn't answered the question.

CHAIR - He wasn't Corrections minister then.

Ms BUTLER - That information that was provided during that was through the Chair by the head of Community Corrections. Could the minister outline to me what parliamentary processes I could access to be able to query whether or not I was misled, because six weeks after I asked those questions and was told it was due to retirement, staff walked out of Community Corrections for exactly the questions I asked.

Mr BARNETT - Through you, Chair, to respond to the member, if you feel as though you have been misled, there are certain forms of the parliament where you have an opportunity

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to express those views consistent with Parliamentary Standing Orders, and you can express those views consistent with that.

Ms BUTLER - What are they?

CHAIR - Ms Butler, the minister has answered the question. Do you have you another question?

Ms BUTLER - These are subsequent questions to that first one. I'm still on my first question.

CHAIR - No, Ms Butler -

Ms BUTLER - The constant staff turnover means caseloads are constantly being redistributed, which causes inconsistency and confusion for both staff offenders and their families. Minister, do you believe that because of the understaffing that it is impacting whether or not court orders can be fulfilled because of the issues within Community Corrections?

Mr BARNETT - I have such admiration for those in Community Corrections. They do an excellent job and I highlighted the important work that they do to keep the community safe in a response to member for Bass. That's our top priority, and those in Community Corrections are delivering exactly that, consistent with government policy. There's always room for improvement and more work to do. That's why I work very closely with my secretary. I have regular meetings with the department, including updates on the work of the Community Corrections part of my department -

Ms BUTLER - There is a stop-work, minister.

CHAIR - Ms Butler, please.

Mr BARNETT - They do an excellent job, I will pass to the secretary to see if there's anything else to add, but I do not appreciate the besmirching of a colleague-minister's reputation in this forum, and if you have an issue -

Ms BUTLER - And I don't like being misled in a committee -

Mr BARNETT - If you have an issue, you need to raise it in the normal forum.

Ms BUTLER - especially when people are under oath, minister.

CHAIR - Ms Butler, please.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, minister and through you. Some reflections may help the committee's understanding. It's important to note that the Community Corrections portfolio has changed significantly over recent years with the introduction of home detention, high-risk offender orders, and electronic monitoring. I'm very aware of the industrial action and the engagement that we've had with unions on those matters.

I think Community Corrections has seen a significant increase in its funding, and I note that it's caseload in comparison to other jurisdictions is the fifth lowest ratio, nationally. All of

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that said, employee turnover is important point to note. We are seeing an increase in the number of staff who have accepted promotions or transfers to higher-level positions in the State Service, which, in some ways, the Justice department suffers from regularly. I like to see that as the transferability of our staff's very sought after skills and the investment that Community Corrections has made in developing its people.

This is an issue that I'll continue to look at and engage with, as I do about the importance of culture across the entire agency; but I do note that the last state survey didn't highlight any particular areas of concern from community corrections staff. I will endeavour to continue to work with staff and unions about concerns they may have in an incredibly busy and stressful workplace that really is at the cornerstone of the services we provide to people where the court makes orders about their care in the community.

Ms ROSOL - Just following on with some more questions about Community Corrections. How many workers in Community Corrections made workers compensation claims both in 2023-24 and 2024-25, and how many of those claims are currently open?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I'll just see if the secretary of the department can assist the member on that specific question.

We're more than happy to take that on notice, with the ambition to respond before the close of this session, in light of the specificity of the question.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. How many grievances have been lodged by workers in community corrections in 2024-2025? Can you step me through the process for how you've responded to those and how many remain unresolved?

Mr BARNETT - I will pass to the secretary. Again, a very specific question related to the operational matters of the service, but I will see if the secretary can assist the honourable member or whether we need to take it on notice. The secretary can speak to the process and take on notice the specificity of the numbers and get back to the committee as soon as possible. I will pass back to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, Deputy Premier, through you. The department has fairly well-established grievance management policies in place and has recently looked at those to make sure it's fit for purpose. Ordinarily, as members would know, it involves a concern or some personal distress that a staff member wants to elevate to their manager or relevant personnel from human resources.

Generally speaking, the agreed process is that ideally, you raise it with your manager informally, consider what options are available to you to resolve that, and sometimes that can be escalated to a grievance coordinator, who can support the employee in that process. In some ways, I see it as related to a bit of a restorative justice-type process. I think each grievance turns on the particular facts, and my preference is for employees to have say in how they would like that resolved.

The process, once it's followed through, is ordinarily reviewed in consultation with HR, and the primary outcome is to make sure the impacted employee is satisfied with the result. If the employee is not satisfied with the outcome of the matter, again, that can be reviewed or put to the grievance manager for further action.

Then there's a process following the resolution to make sure that the behavioural situation that led to the grievance doesn't happen again. We provide the guidance to the detail of how employees can go about first meeting with their manager, around detailing the specifics of their grievance. If they're not comfortable reporting to their manager, does it need to be made in writing? All those sorts of things. Noting that sometimes grievances can blur the line between a grievance and more serious conduct, and our human resources team is always available to provide advice about where a complaint or a particular matter should be raised or elevated, if need be.

In summary, there's a very dedicated process and we encourage staff to talk to their direct manager or engage with HR in the first instance, if they need further support.

Mr GEORGE - Attorney-General, a complete change of subject. You'd be aware, I imagine, of the work of the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute, both in 2007 and 2024, on a Human Rights act. There is clearly a growing community interest in a Tasmanian Human Rights act, as I discovered during the election campaign. Of course, if we'd had a Human Rights act in place, that would have covered some of the issues that we've talked about today, which would include forced adoptions, gay rights, recompense and so on.

Are you prepared to consider, as a signal milestone in your tenure as Attorney-General in this term of parliament, to introduce or to work towards and introduce a Human Rights act for Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. I don't concur with all the parts of the question, particularly the first part, but I want to make it very clear, as a government we do support freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of worship, freedom of association, parliamentary democracy. As a government we have had a longstanding support for those ambitions and of course, human rights are the cornerstone of a strong and inclusive society.

We believe that Tasmania should be a fair, accepting and inclusive state with protections in place that safeguard and promote human rights. We're committed to protecting and respecting the human rights of all Tasmanians. This commitment is demonstrated through many of our key policies and reforms, including legislative reforms in relation to family violence, mental health, guardianship and safeguarding adults.

I specifically note the recent tabling of the Sentencing Amendment (Aggravating Factors) Bill, which is a response to the Sentencing Advisory Council's 2024 report. You made reference to the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute, and I acknowledge their work in a whole range of areas. I thank them for that work.

While we strongly support the protection of human rights in Tasmania, it's not the policy of our government to support the creation of a standalone statute relating to human rights. We don't want to see Tasmanians and Tasmanian businesses and families and community members, acting in good faith, drawn into the courts and the tribunals in increasing numbers due to litigation under a Human Rights act.

Mr GEORGE - Well, that's not going to happen. A Human Rights act will codify, surely, all the issues you've just spoken about. I mean, that's the whole point of a Human Rights act. you have just described a Human Rights act.

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Mr BARNETT - Through you, Chair. Thank you for your comment. Maybe there's a little rhetorical question there.

Mr GEORGE - Have you not just described what a Human Rights act would look like?

Mr BARNETT - I've highlighted the fact that, as a government, we support the rights in so many respects, and we've acted accordingly with respect to protecting those rights and the freedoms we enjoy today: freedom of thought, freedom of association, freedom of speech. We stand strongly behind those various freedoms and rights, which are a cornerstone of a very strong and active and progressive community, but we do not support the establishment of a standalone bill to establish those rights, because it could lead to further litigation and the impingement, indeed, of those rights. It could have the perverse effect of impinging on those rights. You need to approach this matter, in my humble opinion, very carefully and in a considered and measured way.

Mr FERGUSON - Attorney-General, this is probably the last rotation I may be able to say thank you for your evidence today. You're doing a great job and you're right across your brief, and I've appreciated your answers and the respectful tone you take from a range of people across this table. I want to ask you about -

Mr GEORGE - Just ask the question.

Mr FERGUSON - It's called a preamble to a question. We have the opportunity to be nice here as well, don't we? I hope we do. A respectful workplace.

I would ask you, please, for an update on actions, specifically in your portfolio, around the very important recommendations from the commission of inquiry.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. The commission of inquiry has delivered 191 recommendations. As a government, we've accepted those recommendations and the legislative program is very substantial. I want to put on record the thanks to my department and the secretary sitting on my left, and I hope she's not blushing, but in terms of the leadership on behalf of the department she has done a terrific job in progressing those recommendations. She is blushing a little bit.

Mr FERGUSON - You've got great people.

Mr BARNETT - I do, and I'm very grateful for that and honoured to work with them. In terms of the commission of inquiry, of course, it's a whole-of-government approach, it's a community approach. DPAC, of course, DECYP, and a whole range of various government departments, are part of the story.

In terms of, specifically, the commission of inquiry, I can advise that we have a legislative program which has acted very quickly and swiftly. In the 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 year, we've introduced or debated or passed some 22 bills. With respect to the commission of inquiry, but also related justice reforms, so there is a very significant body of work that's been undertaken already.

I can outline some of that work but, in short, it's been a huge body of work. The most recent was the establishment of the Commission for Children and Young People, legislation

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that's recently been debated through our House successfully with strong support for which I'm very grateful. It has passed through the second reading but there is an amendment that upstairs is looking at, which we will look at very carefully and seriously. That is probably the major structural reform in terms of the commission of inquiry in recent times.

There's a host of bills and legislation that we've already progressed. As you know, it's in three phases, from 2024 to 2026 and then through to 2029. We've got a legislative program that started last year and goes through each phase and the Premier recently released an update in terms of the timeframes around that. I want to acknowledge the Implementation Monitor, Robert Benjamin, for his excellent support to government in keeping the government accountable as implementation monitor. I'm sure many around this table have met him. I also thank the independent regulator and different parts of government and those who are acting independently of government to keep government accountable to the implementation of those recommendations. I appreciate the question. It is something we're taking very seriously and there's a lot more work to do.

CHAIR - Thank you. Seeing that it is now past 12.42, as agreed by the committee, examination of the Estimates contained in Appropriation Bill (No. 2) may commence with representatives from the Integrity Commission, Ombudsman and DPP available. Would the committee like the representatives to attend the table? The committee should note that this would constitute the end of the examination of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation outputs.

Ms ROSOL - Can I just clarify when this was agreed to, please?

CHAIR - The substantive committee agreed.

Ms ROSOL - In the Chamber or the standing members?

CHAIR - The substantive committee made the ruling, but the committee can obviously change its mind if they don't want it. It's up to the committee.

Ms HADDAD - I prefer to stay on Corrections.

Mr FERGUSON - I'm not participating in the vote of the committee. I've said from the beginning I will go with the flow. Is the substantive committee here to make a different decision?

CHAIR - That is the normal process, but the committee can change that.

Ms ROSOL - As it stands here, without the substantive members, we can agree.

Ms HADDAD - It would have been good to have this explained because in previous years the committee's discussed it at the beginning of the output and I notice that didn't happen this year. We were kind of pretty loose in terms of the allocation of questions and outputs and portfolios. I wasn't aware that the substantive committee had made that private decision.

CHAIR - Well, that was made, but it's up to the people here at the table.

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Mr BARNETT - Sorry, Chair, before we have another question, we have an answer to the honourable member for Franklin, Peter George, and an answer for the honourable member for Lyons, Jen Butler. I will pass to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - In relation to Mr George's question around how many individuals have contacted the department as a result of our initial consultation process on the redress scheme, so far we've been contacted by 40 individuals or organisations. This initial process on the department's web page, as I mentioned, is seeking expressions of interest from people who would like to be engaged in further consultation activities. All the contacts expressing interest in being involved have been acknowledged by my office, or are in the process of being acknowledged. Individuals who included details of their history have received or will receive a formal response letter from our executive director of Justice Support Services to acknowledge and note the appreciation for their more personal contribution on this issue.

Mr GEORGE - Did you say 40 individuals and organisations or 40 individuals or organisations?

Ms BOURNE - Or, so 40 contacts in total.

In relation to workers compensation claims from Community Corrections, between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, 12 Community Corrections employees made claims for workers compensation. Eight of those were claims for psychological injury and four of those were claims for physical injury. We may be able to break down the psychological component further in terms of causation, but subject to the minister's views we may need to take that on notice, and similarly for the grievance information. We were unable to pull that together and consider some of the nuances between grievance types and the like before the conclusion of this hearing but we could take it on notice.

Mr BARNETT - Happy to take it on notice, Chair.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, do you recognise Tasmanian custodial officers as essential workers?

Mr BARNETT - I would need to check with the secretary, but I would imagine it's a yes. It is a yes.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you. My next question is around the Launceston Reception Prison, and I have a quote here from the Custodial Inspector's report entitled Children in Prison Watchhouses - the Evidence, Children in Tasmania Prisons review report 2025 and it states:

LRP is antiquated and conditions are very poor. Over 25 years ago, a former General Manager of Corrective Services Tasmania described it as a horrendously bad building. That is still true, and we have raised this issue in a number of previous reports. Some renovations and upgrades have been done, but they cannot change the fundamental reality that it is an inhumane and degrading place for adults, let alone children.

Minister, what is the trigger point for the closure of the LRP? What would that look like? Would that be a note for closure from the Custodial Inspector? Would it be Workplace Standards? Would it be the Department of Health? What would trigger the closure of the

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Launceston Reception Prison and is there a backup plan for what would happen if there is a notice to close that prison? Are you aware that there's a rat infestation at the moment? There's also plumbing issues, the intercom systems keep going down and there's only three showers.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you. There are quite a few questions there, but I do appreciate your interest on behalf of the community about the Launceston Reception Prison. It's a prison I've visited on a number of occasions since I became Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation. It's a small facility with a capacity of 26. It was opened in 1977 as a remand prison and was not envisaged as a place in which prisoners would be detained for lengthy periods. For the last 20 years or so it's been used as a reception prison to receive prisoners, both sentenced and on remand, from the courts. It also contains a watchhouse, as you've noted in your question, where newly arrested adults and young people can be held before attending court or for other purposes. I acknowledge that the conditions are not optimal for staff or detainees, and the Launceston Reception Prison is not fit for purpose as a long-term placement option for prisoners.

Since the decision to not proceed with a northern correctional facility, my department is exploring options for the use and future of the Launceston Reception Prison. In the meantime, my department is making a number of interim upgrades to the current facility, such as ergonomic work in the control room, which I visited recently. I'm engaged with my department and receiving advice on possible electronic security systems and other upgrades.

I will refer to the secretary in a moment to add to that answer, but I take it very seriously and I appreciate your question.

Ms BOURNE - Through you, Deputy Premier. I believe it's fair to say that the current state of the facilities and the need to find alternative or replacement facilities remains a key priority of the agency as part of our overall correctional infrastructure planning. I believe the provision of \$450,000 in this Budget to develop a detailed business case to further inform that work will accelerate that, in recognition of the inclusion of replacement in the original plans for the northern correctional facility.

In the meantime, the agency is endeavouring, through internal resources, to make some improvements to LRP, noting that it will not, in any way, address the more substantive issues, but matters around improvements to the control room, the electronic security system, and staff amenity. It's something that we're trying to do within internal resources to demonstrate that, while it's not fit for purpose, there are things we can try to do whilst we undertake the substantive work around future opportunities to replace that facility.

Ms BUTLER - Through the Attorney-General. A follow-up to that question: is there a trigger point? Is there a mechanism where a closure will be forced? Is that a possibility? Could it be a workplace standard order, or WorkSafe, or the Department of Health, or from the Custodial Inspector? Is there a mechanism for immediate shutdown of the facility? It's a genuine question; it's not a 'gotcha' moment. I'm really very curious.

Mr BARNETT - I'm sure you are, and I appreciate your interest, and I know others are interested in this important matter and I take it very seriously as the relevant Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation and Minister for Justice as well.

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Obviously, I can't answer hypothetical questions, but I can answer questions relevant to the Launceston Reception Prison, which I think both I and the Secretary have provided very comprehensive, thoughtful responses. I do take it seriously. It is not fit for purpose.

Ms BUTLER - We don't know if there's a trigger point?

Mr BARNETT - I'm just saying it's not fit for purpose, so that's why we're engaging the department and getting advice on what more can be done to provide that support necessary and those upgrades that are necessary. We've made mention of the electronic security system upgrades in terms of improving the facilities, such as the ergonomic work in the control room. I believe further offices for staff is another area. We're doing what we can to address the conditions for both the staff and those prisoners and those on remand in the facility.

Ms ROSOL - I have some questions relating to the mother-baby unit at Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison. The Greens understand that it hasn't been used by mothers and their babies for large portions of this year. We've heard that it's being used to house women who are not accompanied by babies or children, because there's so many of them in the prison.

Are you able to confirm that? How many days has the mother-baby unit been utilised for its intended purpose in the last three financial years?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. It's obviously a very specific one related to the operations of the prison, so it's best that I refer that matter to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - As the member's indicated, currently infants and toddlers up to the age of two can reside with their mothers in the mother-baby unit, if assessed as safe and as appropriate. There are currently no children residing with their mothers in the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison, and there have been no children residing in the women's estate between 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025. I can't comment specifically on the member's particular question about what inmates are in there at the moment, but the agency is assessing our mother-and-child program, including the age range of children who may reside with their mother. I think we're very conscious that that may be a factor that's limiting the availability for mums to make the most of that unit.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Have mothers applied to be part of the mother-baby unit, so housed in there, and been rejected at any point because the space has been filled with other women?

Mr BARNETT - We don't have that information to hand, but we're more than happy to make inquiries and respond to the honourable member, so we're happy to take it on notice, through you, Chair.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable Deputy Premier, in 2023, the Tasmanian government, as part of a National Cabinet agreement, agreed to a better deal for renters. In addition, the government made a commitment to ensure that the rights of long-term caravan park residents are protected. What is the government's plan to reform the *Residential Tenancy Act*, and what progress has been made by the government to protect the existing residential use and long-term rights of residents at caravan parks?

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Mr BARNETT - Through you, Chair, I think there are two parts to that question: the *Residential Tenancy Act* and when that's being reviewed - and we are reviewing it; and the other relates to the rights of long-term residents in caravan parks. I'll do those in two parts.

In terms of the residential tenancy review, that will be starting in the first half of next year. There will be plenty of time for consultation and feedback on that. It's consistent with the housing strategy that I released when I was Housing minister some years ago. Likewise it's consistent with the agreement of Premiers and the Prime Minister of some years ago, in terms of the rights for renters you referred to in the first part of your question. I'm looking forward to that; it'll be a very substantial piece of work in terms of the review. It's very important legislation providing for the rights of renters and responsibilities across the board.

In terms of the long-term residents of caravan parks, as you know, we've talked directly and also in the parliament, I've shared the fact that I've intervened in a recent Supreme Court matter as an Attorney-General. That is unusual. I take it very seriously, the role and responsibility that I have, and appreciate the views of those in the community, but particularly those long-term residents in caravan parks.

To provide clarity and remove confusion, in addition to that, I'll be releasing draft legislation for comment and feedback. It's a complex area, it's a very important area, and we've got to get the balance right. It's relevant to owners of caravan parks and relevant to long-term residents of caravan parks. That legislation is expected to be released in the coming weeks, prior to Christmas. Then there'll be adequate time for consultation on that.

In the first quarter of next year, I would hope to introduce such legislation to provide improved protections and stronger protections for long-term residents in caravan parks, and clarify the position with respect to both owners and the long-term residents. It's a very good question, we take it very seriously, and we're getting on with the job and delivering.

Ms BUTLER - I have a question around the maximum-security prison project at Risdon, Attorney-General. The construction of a \$50 million maximum security unit was announced in 2021 by former Corrections minister Elise Archer, and stated:

This new contemporary facility, along with our investment in the Northern Correctional Facility, will provide greater flexibility within our correction system and continue our strong focus on supporting rehabilitation while maintaining strict security and safety requirements.

That was in 2021. Why is the building of that new maximum-security prison four years late?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for your question. You've made reference to the considerable infrastructure investment in our prison systems, and the \$180 million in funding to deliver a range of capital and maintenance programs across the Corrections and Rehabilitation portfolio. There was mention earlier of a kitchen at Risdon, but there was \$38 million for the Correa Unit, which is the maximum security prison you mentioned, and funding of \$50 million was provided in the 2023-24 budget to deliver a new maximum security accommodation unit, the Correa Unit, along with additional spaces for support, education and training within the Risdon Prison Complex.

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The program of work for the Correa Unit is disaggregated into two projects: the delivery of a maximum security accommodation unit, with additional space for activities, training and associated staff; and the upgrade and replacement of the existing security systems across the RPC facilities. The project aims to address the acute current and projected capacity issues across the TPS and enable the delivery of a range of intervention programs within the maximum rated precincts in the RPC that are currently restricted by existing facilities.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, you still haven't quite got to the bottom of why that maximum security prison is so far behind schedule, because it was announced in 2021 and it's needed. The prison's full, so what's the hold up?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I can give you a heads-up and respond accordingly that the request for tender for design and contract administration services for the project was released on 1 June 2024 and closed on 11 July 2024. Xsquared Architects were the successful tenderer, with the contract awarded in October 2024. Xsquared, alongside Guymer Bailey Architects and many other experienced subconsultants in consultation with the department's project team and key TPS stakeholders, including union representatives, are diligently working to refine the design and scope required for the project.

Subject to all relevant project approvals, it is anticipated that construction on the Correa Unit and associated facilities will commence in May 2026 - that's the advice I've received - and be completed by the end of 2027, noting there will be complex construction challenges associated with building in an operational prison environment.

Ms ROSOL - I have a question relating to the bunks that are being placed in Ron Barwick Prison. In 2021 the Custodial Inspector released the capacity utilisation review and noted that none of the five custodial centres in Tasmania meet the minimum cell size for cell type. The standard guidelines for prison facilities in Australia and New Zealand set the minimum size for a one-person cell is 8.75 square metres and at least 12.75 square metres. The cells being converted at Ron Barwick are less than this at only 7.5 square metres, effectively smaller than a car parking space. In view of that, minister, how can you justify converting cells that are already too small for one person into double-occupancy cells? Did you consider any other options such as modular accommodation or temporary relocations?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. I appreciate that and you've certainly raised an important point that we take seriously. In terms of imprisonment, of course that's always the last resort and in terms of the prison capacity and the numbers, it's obviously challenging. I will refer to the secretary in terms of the detail of your question, but in terms of double-bunking, some of the cells in the Risdon Prison Complex and the reception prison were previously upgraded to include two bunks as part of the surge capacity strategy. On occasion prisoners may co-locate in these cells, each having their own bunk depending on capacity. It's undertaken based on professional advice consistent with the appropriate arrangements being put in place.

The TPS has recently commenced work on the electronic security system upgrade project across all Risdon site facilities and as part of the upgrades, prisoner accommodation areas will be required to be decanted whilst the work occurs. The decanting of prisoners will require increased cell sharing across the facilities at times, including within the Ron Barwick Prison and Southern Remand Centre. Prior to any cell-sharing arrangements correctional staff are required to complete a risk assessment which considers both the suitability of each prisoner to

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share a cell generally as well as the suitability of two particular prisoners sharing a cell together. Cell sharing can be beneficial for some prisoners, for example, if prisoners are able to co-locate with their family or where a prisoner is seeking peer support. As to the other part of your question, I will refer to the secretary.

Ms BOURNE - If appropriate I will need to take on notice the important reflections about the size of Ron Barwick cells. I think we're very aware of the constraints of that facility. As the minister has noted, part of the electronic security upgrade program requires us to put further bunks into existing facilities. Ordinarily they are in the Risdon Prison Complex and I know that the prison considers floor space, particularly if we ever need to temporarily use mattresses, which is obviously a last resort, has to make sure that is in cells of appropriate size. I understand that as of 13 November, currently we have 33 double bunks, if that's of assistance to the committee.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Could I ask a follow-up on that, please? What kind of record-keeping and monitoring will you be doing? Will you be keeping records of the numbers of times those double-bunking cells are used? Will you also be monitoring and tracking the impact of double bunking on prisoner welfare, cell incidents, conflict rates and staff workload? Will you be gathering information and is that something we will be able to access?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question.

Ms BOURNE - Absolutely yes. I think the TPS has a very extensive compliance and audit monitoring regime at the moment, as the minister has alluded to. There's a significant process behind decisions around accommodating prisoners, including when there may need to be double bunking to make sure there aren't any unintended issues with co-location. I'm confident that by virtue of being able to provide a number of double-bunking cells at the moment, or as of 13 November, is demonstrative of the record-keeping the prison undertakes. Certainly as we undertake the rollout of the electronic security work, I am sure monitoring the impact of that on prison cohorts will be really critical to inform the ongoing rollout of that service to make sure there aren't any unintended implications.

Ms HADDAD - I know that we're nearly at time, but Attorney-General, I wanted to ask you about conversion practices and when we might see some legislation tabled by the government. I know there was an exposure draft bill released that got some pretty significant community feedback that it might have the unintended counterintuitive effect of allowing more conversion practices to be conducted in Tasmania. Is this still a commitment of your government and you as Attorney-General and when might we see a bill tabled?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. As you've noted, we consulted extensively on the issue in terms of public consultation in 2024. We certainly received a large number of submissions during the public consultation, and considering the varied and detailed feedback received, it is a complex matter. I've not received any advice that harmful conversion practices are currently occurring in Tasmania.

Ms HADDAD - They are. They do occur in this state, minister.

Mr BARNETT - Our government has a significant legislative reform agenda, which you would be aware of and I've spoken about today, and there are many competing priorities. Given

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the complexities of such a ban and the diversity of views, it is critical that we take the time to get the balance right. That's the ambition of our government.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. Yes, it is important to get the balance right. I'm just a bit concerned that you said you've not heard any evidence that conversion practices occur in Tasmania. They do, and I would really encourage you to meet with advocates who have undergone conversion practices, including recently in Tasmania. They do occur here and if we're the last state to act, we run the risk of being, for want of a better term, a safe haven for these very unsafe pseudoscientific and dangerous practices.

Mr BARNETT - I note your comments.

Ms HADDAD - Thank you. I did ask about a timeline. Do you have any anticipated timeline for that consultation and a new bill to be released for consultation?

Mr BARNETT - I don't at this stage. It's a very complex matter and we've got to take the time to get the balance right. We have a lot of competing priorities, a lot of heavy workload in the justice space, as you know, following up on the commission of inquiry and related matters. We've been very busy in the Department of Justice and across our government to introduce and then implement the various bills -

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Small Business, Trade and Consumer Affairs at 2.00 p.m.

The committee suspended from 1.12 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.

CHAIR - I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table names and positions for the benefit of Hansard, please.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair. I have a number of officials at the table. On my right, is the Deputy Secretary, Mike Mogridge, and also Daniel Shields, who's the Director of Trade in the Department of State Growth. On my left is the Secretary, Kristy Bourne, and my Deputy Secretary, Mr Smith.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Minister for Small Business, Trade and Consumer Affairs is 1.5 hours. Would the minister like to make a short opening statement.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Chair, and I'm very pleased in this part of the day to highlight the importance of small business to the Tasmanian economy; 97 per cent of all our businesses are small businesses and we've now got more than 42,000 across the State of Tasmania and they are the lifeblood of our rural and regional communities, the backbone of our economy.

The NAB survey came out last week, putting Tasmania on top of all jurisdictions in Australia in small-business confidence, which we're very pleased with, and we came second for business conditions from the Business Council of Australia's Regulation Rumble report, which was released last week.

We had a very good result for trade in the last calendar year with exports hitting \$6.16 billion, a 5.2 per cent increase in our exports. In short, exports means jobs and it's a really good result for Tasmania. The average for Australia was a decrease and Tasmania went up, so I'm very pleased and proud of the team's efforts that continue to deliver results in our exports and I want to acknowledge the work of the team.

Likewise, with consumer affairs I indicate, I am happy to deal with matters related to consumer affairs and WorkSafe Tasmania and again, both my secretary and deputy secretary are here today. I'll leave it there for questions.

Dr BROAD - You're the minister responsible for product recalls. In the recall notice for the coloured sands, were there instructions on how that product was to be cleaned up and disposed of?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. It's an operational question and we have the CEO of WorkSafe Tasmania, Brad Parker, here, so, I suggest he comes to the table to assist the committee in answering this and potentially other questions. I welcome Brad Parker to the table. Perhaps to assist him, you could repeat that question.

Dr BROAD - It's just about the recall notice. Were there instructions in that on how the product should be cleaned up and disposed of?

Mr PARKER - Through you minister, the ACCC issued a recall notice. My understanding is that that was based on information from the company and that the information did not necessarily refer to any specific requirements about handing the product back, but rather just gave guidance about how the product should be disposed of.

Dr BROAD - How do we, I suppose, understand the different levels of reaction to that recall notice? We have Catholic and independent schools shutting down classrooms and indeed whole schools, and we have public schools who aren't shutting anything. How can we get a different reaction to the same recall notice?

Mr PARKER - Through you minister. The requirements around managing the risks associated with the product are linked back to the work health and safety legislation and that specifically identifies the process for getting a licenced assessor in to assess the risks within the specific circumstance, then determining what action should be taken in response to the risks identified. Given the nature of the product and where it has been used, no workplace or facility is the same. With some products, it's been a long time since they've been used. There have been different cleaning regimes within the school. There are different locations throughout the school that are used. That is the reason why we are requiring the assessors to come in and work with the schools to make that judgement.

With respect to your question around the private schools, they engaged a qualified specialist who provided them with advice in regard to what the risks were. They chose, on the basis of that information, to err on the side of caution and chose those schools that they opted to close.

My understanding is that the Department of Education, or DECYP, are working through with an accredited specialist and assessing the risks on a case-by-case basis within each school.

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Dr BROAD - There's a blanket difference, though, isn't there? There's a blanket difference between Catholic and independent schools, and public schools. There's not a single public school that's been shut, and yet there's a number of Catholic and independent schools. It seems like there is a significant difference in the interpretation of the *Work Health and Safety Act*. I didn't hear an explanation, I suppose, that justifies that blanket difference between those two different types of schools.

Mr PARKER - Through you, Deputy Premier. The difference is the risk appetite of the organisations based on the evidence and the information they have to make a decision around what the risk is to staff and students within those areas.

The private schools have made the decision based on the advice. As I mentioned, it depends on the product, where it's been used, how it's been used, how they've cleaned up, how it's been dealt with, and their risk appetite in regard to how they wish to control it. It also goes back to whether they may choose to isolate the area to remove it so that there is no ongoing risk to students, whereas other schools may choose to reallocate or relocate students to a different area while the remediation work is undertaken.

Ms BADGER - Minister, I'm sure you, as a fellow member for Lyons, can appreciate that connectivity for small businesses is a serious issue. There are a lot of businesses in regional communities where sometimes the EFTPOS machines fail, particularly on the east coast over summer, when there are lots of tourists in the area, or, for example, at the Campbell Town show or the Cygnet Folk Festival. The small businesses there trading can't do business because their EFTPOS machines can't connect to the internet. How much small business has been lost in Tasmania due to the connectivity issues?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. That's a broad-ranging question. I concur with you regarding the importance of the various events, having been to the Tasmanian Craft Fair, working on the gate and knowing that this year, as opposed to previous years, the connectivity was quite satisfactory. Certainly, from time to time connectivity is an issue. I followed up in recent weeks with Michael Patterson, General Manager of Telstra Countrywide, with respect to Miena and the Central Highlands' lack of connectivity or disruption to connectivity.

I'm more than happy to pass to the deputy secretary to assist the honourable member in terms of the importance of digital inclusion for small business. It is very important, and I want to acknowledge the hard work and leadership of Madeleine Ogilvie as minister for the Digital Economy and the excellent work she's providing.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, Deputy Premier, I would just add that digital inclusion is a matter for Ms Ogilvie in relation to connectivity issues. I think through this portfolio, there's a range of supports being provided to small business in the context of ensuring that they build up their digital capability and sophistication in relation to technologies. Some of that is through the Tasmanian regional Chambers of Commerce, some of that feeds directly into our small business strategies that are supporting small business. Beyond that, I do think it's broadly a matter for Ms Ogilvie.

Ms BADGER - Sure. With your Small Business hat on, and Consumer Affairs as well - this relates to customers. It's not necessarily good for Tasmania's brand if you've got people travelling from the mainland to come down to a state that prides itself on artisan markets

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and small business entrepreneurship, can you provide me with specific examples of what you're doing to help provide small businesses with that support? And based off your answer, I'm assuming that there has been no research done into the loss of small business revenue due to a lack of connectivity.

CHAIR - I remind members, please, to direct all questions through and to the minister.

Mr BARNETT - I appreciate your interest in the matter. There's clearly a crossover with the minister for the Digital Economy. Of course, the interests of small business are a top priority for our government, and we remain very focused on that and delivering in accordance with the Budget, which we are more than happy to talk to and share.

We have quite a bit of work that's already being undertaken. You've made reference, and my deputy secretary made reference, to the Small Business Strategy. We're getting on with developing that next year, and we'll have more to say about that as we consult with the small business community.

We do have a small business unit in our Department of State Growth, which is currently undertaking a full review to rewrite the Business Tasmania website to ensure it's simple and easy to use, and accessible for people at all levels of digital literacy, so that's something to be noted. They'll be able to easily navigate the site, find out information, and get the support that they need. We already provide a lot of support through the Tasmanian Business Advice Service, which is excellent, but there's more work to do in that space and that review is well underway.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable Deputy Premier, last week the Treasurer said workers' compensation costs are rising and rising dramatically, driven by increased claims and psychological injury prevalence. It's really concerning that yesterday in the Health department Estimates, more than 700 claims and a 38 per cent increase was reported. I'm concerned about our small businesses especially, because it's going to be a growing problem in our society, and how are we going to deal with it? How can we help them?

Mr BARNETT - It's a very good question, relevant to all our businesses, and small businesses in particular, of which 97 per cent are small businesses.

We need a system for workers' compensation that is balanced and fair, and also affordable. In terms of support for small business, we do have the Workplace Relations Helpline, a free service for small businesses, for an additional two years. It is continuing, which is good news, because the cost of doing business is so important - not just energy costs, but workers' comp, which is the point you're making.

As a government, we have that business advice service, plus the Workplace Relations Helpline, which is excellent. We have the Employer of Choice Assist, accessed through a Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) representative, which we fund and support to provide that HR support for small businesses, i.e. fewer than 20 employees. That's to develop better workplace practices to help to attract and retain staff. They have funding in the Budget accordingly.

You've asked about mental health and wellbeing. I will pass to the Deputy Secretary to address that matter and any other parts of the question that, perhaps, would assist the honourable member.

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Mr MOGRIDGE - The other point to add is the Employer of Choice program is ideally targeting and supporting human resource-related elements going to your question.

Additionally, we do deliver the annual cost of doing business events series. That can be an opportunity for us to start targeting those things that small businesses are acutely being frustrated by, or need greater support in relation to.

Prof RAZAY - May I make a comment? Because it's going to be a growing problem in the future, I believe we need to also provide education to our small businesses, because they don't realise how our world has changed for them.

Mr BARNETT - With the secretary sitting on my left, who's also the chair of the WorkCover Board for Tasmania, I think we could assist the honourable member and the committee with an update on the important work of the board to address not just small business but the community more generally on this topic.

Ms BOURNE - Thanks, minister. I think the member raises a really important point and certainly a priority of the WorkCover Board of Tasmania is making sure that as well as promoting the health of the scheme overall, that the education and advisory services are targeted to different levels of business and workers across the state. The board has undertaken a number of pieces of work to ideally improve the scheme and a significant focus of that is collaborating with stakeholders to develop things like a best-practice workplace health framework, working with Tasmanian State Service agencies as well and embedding resources within WorkSafe to support people where families may be impacted by work-related injury or death.

Also, particular to your question, the board funds a number of advisory services that are both provided by WorkSafe internally as well as delivered through external service providers, through things like the telephone advisory service and the like to ensure there are a range of educative and training options available where small businesses and other workplaces can find further information across a broad range of industries as well.

Mr FERGUSON - I'm grateful for the opportunity, minister, to ask you about some of the issues around dodgy construction firms or small businesses that play a role in the construction sector. I have to give some credit to Dr Broad because he asked these questions at last year's Estimates when I was in that particular role. I think all of us agree that we do not want to see companies phoenixing, dodgy builders or tradespeople who are not up to the task or are not running competent commercial enterprises leaving consumers in the lurch and then going broke and starting up again under a new name, new ABN and new logo. Credit to my colleague Shane Broad on this as well, but I know you've been working on it and I'd ask if you would update me and the committee on progress to crack down on unlawful company phoenixing in Tasmania.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question, it's a very good one. It's not satisfactory when consumers are dealt a blow as a result of company phoenixing, where a business deliberately winds up or abandons a company to avoid debts, whether payable to the tax office or anybody else. Frankly, it's not on and when they just restart under another name, that's what phoenixing is about. It's a serious issue. It harms the business community, it harms subcontractors and it harms consumers across our community.

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Obviously, our government recognises that and we're getting on with the job and progressing a suite of reforms to strengthen the law and increase the penalties when it comes to phoenixing and dodgy builders. The legislation framework will include clear powers for the occupational licencing administrator to take decisive action against licence holders who attempt to avoid responsibility for defective work or financial obligations by shifting operations between entities. Our reforms will make it harder for operators to simply shut down a business and reopen the next day under a different name, and easier for the regulator to trace responsibility and hold individuals to account.

Importantly, these reforms sit alongside our work to modernise disciplinary processes, increase transparency and ensure that the regulator has the tools it needs to act swiftly in the public interest. The changes we're looking at support the vast majority of honest builders and tradespeople. I'll give the building construction sector acknowledgement and thank them for what they're doing. They're doing the right thing while protecting consumers from those who are trying to game the system.

Our government is committed to stamping out phoenixing behaviour, strengthening the trust in the industry and ensuring Tasmanian families have that protection and confidence they deserve. We've already started work on drafting a bill and I thank the various industry groups and stakeholders for their input. We'll have more to say about that in the not-too-distant future.

Dr BROAD - Attorney-General, Mr Parker talked about risk appetite in terms of the handling of the sand, subject to a recall. As there's no known safe level of exposure, how do you justify a different risk appetite between public schools and Catholic and independent schools?

Mr BARNETT - There's been a reference to the recall notice and that's clearly a responsibility for Consumer, Building and Occupational Services, so if it's satisfactory to the committee I'll ask Robyn Pearce to come to the table to assist the honourable member in terms of the recall notice, and then we can have questions to the CEO of WorkSafe or the head of Consumer and Business and Occupational Services, Robyn Pearce. We might just deal with the recall notice matter first and then assist the honourable member with the other part of his question, if that's possible.

Ms PEARCE - The recall notice was issued by the minister on advice from the ACCC. Under Australian consumer law, the minister determines what the terms are and that's determined independently at the Commonwealth level. The first notice we had was when that notice was issued and received by both the work health and safety regulators and the consumer law regulators.

Mr BARNETT - In terms of the other part of the question, just to make it very clear, I'm the Minister for Justice and am responsible for Consumer Affairs, but I am not the Minister for Children, Education and Young People. I think the question in terms of what the Department of Education is doing is clearly a question for them.

Dr BROAD - No, it's about risk appetite. I'm trying to understand the different risk appetite. I would assume that as a work health and safety issue there should be some guidelines around who is actually approved to clean up products containing asbestos, so that is absolutely a WorkSafe issue.

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Mr BARNETT - Questions for the chief executive of WorkSafe are not a problem at all, so we'll pass to them, but as I say, questions for the Department of Education should be put to the minister responsible. I'll see if the chief executive can assist.

Mr PARKER - When located within a workplace that has been assessed by an accredited assessor, they will identify the risks associated with that product. There is a range of factors the accredited assessor will consider when determining the risk associated with that product. The removal of that product is then informed by the risks that have been identified as part of that process, and that will determine the requirements of the removalist coming in to remove that product. If it is determined that it is friable asbestos, for example, then a class A asbestos removal licence is required to be held; but if it is a low or non-friable material then a B-class removal licence could be used, and also depending on the quantity and the nature of the product, it may be able to be removed by a competent person with the appropriate training.

Dr BROAD - We're receiving communication from health and safety representatives in schools and my understanding is that principals are waiting for a directive and in the meantime principals and senior staff are going into classrooms to collect the said sand, double-bagging it and storing it in their office. In the meantime, residual sand remains in classrooms, rubber mats, walls and stuck to toys, and teachers have been told that if they don't feel comfortable they can teach elsewhere until the room is cleaned. It doesn't seem like an appropriate response to get teachers to be cleaning up until they wait for a directive.

Mr BARNETT - Just to be very clear, you keep asking questions about what's happening in schools and the role of principals and various people in the schools. The independent authority is sitting next to me and can respond on behalf of WorkSafe Tasmania, which is the independent regulator. I want to put on record my disappointment and refuting of the Leader for the Opposition this morning who called the independence of the regulator into question. The regulator is an independent authority and cannot speak for or on behalf of the Education department or anybody else but the independent authority. Having said that, I'm happy for the chief executive to respond to the best of his ability, but for matters to do with the Education department, I encourage the member to put those questions to the relevant minister.

Dr BROAD - There are things happening in schools that seem to be - they're awaiting direction about what is safe, yet the sand has been cleaned up, double bagged, and stored while they await. That is a WorkSafe matter.

Mr BARNETT - As I said this morning in response to the first question this morning that WorkSafe Tasmania is working very closely with DECYP and has had ongoing discussions with them. I talked to the minister directly this morning, she's taking it very seriously as is the department. WorkSafe can speak for WorkSafe as an independent entity, but cannot speak for the Education department. Having said that, I'll see if there's anything further that the independent regulator could add.

Mr PARKER - Through you minister. We issued guidance to industry about what processes and precautions need to be put in place or applied in order to ensure the risks are mitigated while handling the product. We run a helpline that provides and takes complaints in regard to persons who wish to report issues where noncompliance or unsafe activities are occurring. I am not aware of any like what you've described coming in.

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Ms BADGER - Minister, Tasmania's rental system is in crisis and Tasmanians are struggling to find an affordable and safe place to call home. Rents keep going up and we have homes that are barely liveable being rented out for astronomical prices. Given these urgent problems, the Greens have welcomed the government's decision to move forward with the *Tenancy Act* review. Minister, can you please confirm that the due date for that review will be moved forward by your government from 30 June 2027? If so, when to?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question and for your support of our efforts to provide and progress that reform. It's very important. We progressed with pets in rentals more recently, for which I appreciate the support of the parliament. As you know it was agreed at the national level to progress with residential tenancy legislation. Likewise, our own Tasmanian housing strategy, which I announced some years ago, was set out in that strategy that there would be a review.

As for the timeline, we've brought forward the release of a discussion paper on the importance of that matter to the first half of next year to give members of the public, tenants, the Tenants' Union, the various stakeholders, property owners, and the like the opportunity to express their views on that. In the second half of next year, in expectation to release a draft bill for consultation towards the back end of next year, is my expectation at this stage. Of course, that will depend somewhat on the feedback we get from the discussion paper, but that's the current plan. We will then progress as soon as possible. Once that draft bill is released, we'll get feedback on that, then respond to that and, hopefully, introduce the relevant legislation as soon as possible in 2027.

Ms BADGER - Thank you, minister. As a part of your response, you referenced the 2023 national - it's called the Better Deal for Renters. In this you agreed to reform a few things, including unfair evictions, limits break, lease fees and the introduction of standard rental forms. Since that 2023 deal, we haven't seen any action. I acknowledge you've mentioned it as part of the review, though. Will you honour that commitment and move forward on this reform like other states and territories have, while broader reform is being considered in the Tenancy act review?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. In terms of the Better Deal for Renters, in August 2023, the national cabinet agreed to nine measures to harmonise the rental laws and strengthen renters' rights across Australia. Tasmania's already fully or partially delivered on seven measures, the two measures that require further work and I'll identify them for the committee. Limits to break lease fees, and that's measure number six, and the current law holds tenants responsible for rents until the lease ends or a new tenant is found. The second one is making rental applications easier and fairer. Measure seven, no prescribed rental application form currently exists. There are no prescribed time periods for retention of a renter's personal information, is the advice that I have received. The government's going to consider, at this stage, in due course, what amendments are required to implement those two measures in Tasmania. We'll consider what, if any, further work may be needed to be done on the other seven measures.

Ms BADGER - Just to clarify, in 'due course,' is there any other - that you're going to consider these? Can you provide anything more specific as to what 'due course' would be in terms of a timeframe, please?

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Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I don't have a time in mind. I'm more than happy to take that question on notice and come back to the member through this committee. Following further advice and feedback, I can discuss that with the department and get back to the member through the committee.

Ms BADGER - Thank you.

Prof RAZAY - Over the last five years there has been continuous growth in the employment market, and a lower unemployment rate, with the lowest 4 per cent, nearly double the job vacancies. Add to that the decline in our young generation between 20 and 45. And we hear recently that TasTAFE is closing some courses. I believe all small businesses are desperate for skilled workers. This is an opportunity. How can we connect us with our small businesses to create opportunity?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. I appreciate the vigour and passion by which it's shared and your obvious enthusiasm for small business in the community, which I recognise. I can't respond for or on behalf of the Minister for Skills and Training, that can happen in another place, but I can say for the small-business community that, as you know, we strongly support, and now we have the NAB survey of confidence, the highest Australia, business conditions second highest in Australia on the Business Council of Australia's report last week.

We have a small business growth strategy which - 2026 - and that was launched some years ago after extensive consultation. There will be a further opportunity to review and deliver a new strategy going forward. So, that sort of thing will be taken into account - the issues that you've raised in terms of the next strategy for small business in Tasmania. I want to recognise your comments that, yes, we have had strong employment growth, some 51,000 jobs since 2014 to the economy, which is excellent. Our economy has grown more than 26 per cent since 2014. You've also rightly recognised the unemployment rate being at record levels of some 4 Per cent so there's more work to do, but it's very encouraging to know that business confidence is so high.

Noting that we want to work with the business community to deliver the people that they need to do the work that they love to do. They have their necks on the line and are delivering - and many of those family businesses, so as a government we are as strong as possible supporters. I come from a small-business background, as you know, born and raised on a farm. I've been an advocate for small business prior to my time in the Senate for some 13 years and it's a great joy and a great honour. Of course, I was delighted with the Tasmanian Small Business Council's life membership award just a few weeks ago, which I was very honoured to receive with Geoff Fader.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, my previous question was about dodgy operators, this one is about dodgy operators. This one is about professional, honest operators. They have expressed to me, particularly in the electrical and gas trades, that we can do compliance certificate lodgement better. Would you update how that project is going?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, it's an important point in terms of electrical and gas practitioners across the state. I want to acknowledge their good work, the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA), very well led by Ben Shaw, so I acknowledge that excellent work. We have a close collaboration with NECA, as you know, and certainly we've

identified a longstanding red tape issue around the manual lodgement of compliance certificates, and again I thank Ben Shaw for his advocacy in this space.

Under the *Gas Safety Act* and the *Occupational Licensing Act*, practitioners must submit certificates to confirm their installations meet all safety and regulatory standards. Right now, those certificates are handwritten and lodged manually by post, by email and in person. So, that system is slow, it's outdated, and places an unnecessary administrative burden on practitioners and regulators alike. That's why we're delivering a modern solution, as you've hinted at in your very good question. I'm pleased to announce that the government is progressing with the Electronic Gas Certificate Online Lodgement system, EGCOL - who wants another acronym? There you go, EGCOL - which will replace the outdated paper-based process with a streamlined digital platform.

Mr FERGUSON - I don't think that will catch on.

Mr BARNETT - I hope it takes off, EGCOL. Through you, Chair. The initiative will enable faster and easier lodgement, improved accuracy and data quality, support better regulatory compliance, and reduce the administrative workload faced by practitioners. Importantly, industry has been closely involved at every step and working closely shoulder-to-shoulder with the industry is absolutely a joy and really pleasing. Consultation began with a workshop in September, and the design of the system is being shaped around the feedback received to ensure it's practical, intuitive and genuinely fit for purpose. We are now finalising the technical requirements, with the procurement tender expected to be released in January 2026, so not long to go now.

We'll continue working with our tradies to ensure a smooth transition and to provide the training and support practitioners need. It's a great example of our government cutting the red tape, streamlining the process and making it easier for business to do business. Thank you.

Dr BROAD - The *Residential Building (Home Warranty Insurance) Amendments Act* passed in 2023, yet I don't believe we have any home residential building insurance in place. Can you give me an update? Has it stalled because you can't find an insurer?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for the question. We have Robyn Pearce here and my secretary and deputy secretary as well, but I appreciate the request for an update on Home Warranty Insurance (HWI). We've made significant progress in reintroducing that scheme. That legislation was passed by Royal Assent on 16 October 2023. It's been through a process, and I can pass to the secretary shortly.

Just to be very, very clear, in the Budget it does include the financial assistance, which is ongoing. The building Financial Assistance Package continues to assist Tasmanian homeowners with cover consistent with the proposed parameters of the HWI scheme.

We're also progressing a suite of reforms to strengthen Tasmania's building regulatory framework, and this includes clearer powers for the administrator of occupational licensing, and to take decisive action against licence holders who attempt to avoid responsibility for defective work or financial obligations by shifting operations between entities. We've just had a discussion about phoenixing and how we're combating that and will respond to dodgy builders. Our reforms will make it harder for operators to simply shut down a business and

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reopen the next day under a different name. We're getting on with the job, and I thank you for the question.

Dr BROAD - You didn't mention anything about an insurer or someone to underwrite, so where are things at?

Mr BARNETT - I am more than happy to answer that part of the question as well. I'll pass to the secretary accordingly.

Ms BOURNE - As you noted, the request for tender for the scheme was published in August of last year and requests for tender closed on the 16 October. That process has concluded, and no contract has been awarded following the request for tender. The department's giving careful consideration now to options to ensure that those protective mechanisms are available, in consultation with other agencies such as Treasury. As the Deputy Premier's noted, in the meantime the financial assistance package continues to be rolled out in a means consistent with the proposed parameters of the scheme.

Dr BROAD - How much is set aside for the financial assistance?

Mr BARNETT - It's set out in the Budget, so we can assist you with that, through you, Chair. The deputy secretary might have that to hand, or the secretary, to outline the ongoing support in our Budget for the building financial assistance package.

Mr SMITH - \$3.5 million in 2025-26 and \$2.5 million in 2026-27.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. Attorney-General, just on your answer to my last question, you didn't make mention of ending end-of-lease evictions, and I just note that reasonable grounds for eviction was part of the 2023 A Better Deal for Renters. Are you not going to be considering that as a part of the review you're working on - ending end-of-lease evictions?

Mr BARNETT - Yes. My advice is that the break lease measures will be part of the broader review of the *Residential Tenancy Act*, which will kick off in the first half of next year, with draft legislation in the second half of next year.

Ms BADGER - Thank you, Attorney-General. When the Tenants' Union called for that review onto the act, they called for it to cover a few different things. These included security of tenure, rent controls, lease break fees, as well as the standard forms that we've already spoken about, minor modifications, minimum energy efficiency standards, and regulation of the short-stay sector. Have you got the terms of reference for that review set out yet, or for your draft paper, and can you confirm that it will cover those areas?

Mr BARNETT - I can confirm it will cover a very broad range of areas to allow for a comprehensive review of the residential tenancy legislation in Tasmania. I can't be exact, other than saying it'll be a broad range of issues that'll be covered in that review. Once we have that together, we'll certainly release that and be able to allow for comment and feedback. We're looking forward to that feedback, engaging with the Tenants' Union, property owners, the Real Estate Institute and many, many other stakeholders. I am really looking forward to that. There's a very big body of work.

The department's already been working on the preparation for a release of that discussion paper in the first half of next year. The department knows that I've asked for it to be progressed as a priority in light of the concerns in the community and in light of the commitments that we've given at a national level, and likewise in the housing strategy that I announced some years ago.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable Deputy Premier, back to how we can we address shortages of skilled workers, we already have skilled workers - our seniors. We have the largest proportion of people over 55 in Australia, while we have a lower proportion of younger ones. How can we entice them to get back into our working environments? We have to give them some incentive.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the questions. I think there's some good questions, probably more appropriate to the minister for Skills and Training, because I know how enthusiastic the minister, Mr Ellis, is in that regard. I'm very enthusiastic about small business and, of course, it's relevant to small business. We do have the Small Business Strategy, which is through to 2026, so there's a lot more work to do. We're about to embark on very significant feedback and consultation with the small business sector, so I would like to pass to the deputy secretary to make reference to that strategy and how we intend to communicate and consult with the small business sector.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, Deputy Premier. To your point, I was just going to add that through the economic statement from the government, there was a commitment to a diversification and investment strategy for all of Tasmania. That's the opportunity for us to think about the ongoing development of different businesses and leveraging our natural advantage in Tasmania to build on small business, but business more broadly, to understand how we can grow that within the regions, how we align that with some of the areas of other portfolios like skills. For example, in our renewable space we've got our Centre for Excellence in Burnie which is focused on delivering skills and jobs in those regions, so how do we continue to build on those those priorities for the state in a way that goes to your your exact point of building capability, bringing people in and keeping them employed in jobs in Tasmania?

Prof RAZAY - I think many seniors would love to get back to work but they need incentives; for example, less regulation and bureaucracy and more tax incentives as well for them.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. It's a good point. I know our Minister for Ageing, Bridget Archer, is very enthusiastic in that regard. In terms of tapping into their skills and abilities and their experience, why not? I think you've made some good points which were well noted.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, again on the trades and licencing generally, I want to bring to your notice some concerns that have been raised with me, including during the recent winter election by one particular electrical contractor whose name is Duncan. He made a very good argument to me about some of the areas of improvement that are possible with continuous professional development for trades. I spoke to your predecessor, Mr Ellis, about it, and I was very satisfied that a review of continuing professional development (CPD) is underway and hopefully will address some of those issues.

I don't feel comfortable bringing to the public notice the specific concerns, because there would be providers of CPD that wouldn't have a right of reply, but hopefully you're aware of some of those concerns. What tradespeople want is continuous professional development that is genuine and leads to a genuine sense of continuous improvement, not just tick-a-box exercises in order to be able to achieve the points and go on with their work. To state the obvious, time out of the business is time that you're not servicing your customers and having good commercial outcomes. I don't believe there's any wish to get away from CPD, but I think we all want it to be fit for purpose and I believe you would agree with that. How is that review going? I wonder if you or your team could indicate where it's likely to go so that we can achieve those outcomes.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. Before I pass to Robyn Pearce, the head of CBOS who is at the table, I want to concur strongly with your remarks. As a former minister for building and construction responsible for CBOS some years ago, CPD has been an issue, a challenge and also an opportunity for the trades over many years. In fact, since 2016 the *Occupational Licencing Act* has required trade licence holders to undertake CPD. The electrical, gas, fitting and plumbing trades and the like are all required to have CPD and to your point, it needs to be fit for purpose and relevant, not just ticking a box so they can get through to the other side of the financial year. I agree with that. In terms of the review and where that's up to, I'll pass to Robyn Pearce to add to the answer.

Ms PEARCE - We are undertaking a review of CPD. At this stage, we're focusing on electrical, plumbing and gas tradespeople. We've looked at different models and approaches we can take. We've held two licensing forums where we've got feedback from key industry stakeholders, as well as putting out a discussion paper to gather feedback on a proposed model which is really aimed at trying to simplify the CPD model and make it more focused around ensuring that the CPD is going to be getting learning which is necessary in the area of the licence.

At the moment, from the feedback we got from the discussion paper, there was some alternative models that were also proposed to us as well. We're currently in the process of considering those. Once we've thought through all of the issues and implications, we'll come back out with another draft determination to get feedback from those stakeholders.

Mr FERGUSON - Okay, so it won't be a decision taken and then implemented, there will be another listening opportunity. That's excellent. Thank you, minister. Great work.

Dr BROAD - Minister, have you given up on finding an insurer for a home warranty insurance program?

Mr BARNETT - No, we haven't given up. It's an important objective in terms of providing fairer protection for consumers across Tasmania. We've been through a process which I think the secretary outlined reasonably clearly. We've got investments in the Budget, as you heard from the deputy secretary, for the next two years as we progress through this important matter to ensure that consumers are protected from those defects and dodgy builders in that regard. We need to build confidence in the community. I'll just see if the secretary can add to that answer.

Ms BOURNE - Just to note that the complexity of the scheme I think is something that has been very evident and that's why we've continued to work with other key stakeholders,

namely Treasury, progressing the design of the scheme and that procurement process as we look to go back to market. I understand that that work is well advanced.

Dr BROAD - So why is the funding declining from \$3.5 million to \$2.5 million and then no funding after that?

Mr BARNETT - Obviously, we can answer questions with respect to this budget, but we can't answer questions with respect to the May budget and future budgets. They'd be hypothetical questions, but our ambition remains the same. We want to provide that protection and support for consumers. I think the secretary has outlined the process for getting to where we need to go. There's more work to do. We are taking advice from Treasury. I need to indicate as well to the committee that I have ongoing engagement with the key stakeholders in this regard, including Master Builders Tasmania, the Housing Industry Association and the Property Council of Tasmania. I appreciate their input. We want to do what's best for Tasmania and what's best for the building industry. I think we're progressing positively and we will have more to say as we progress.

Dr BROAD - Would you consider a solvency test for builders?

Mr BARNETT - We've obviously got the anti-phoenixing legislation progressing that has been referred to earlier to protect from dodgy builders and inappropriate behaviour. In terms of the home warranty insurance, we're looking at a home warranty insurance scheme. We've had a request for tender, as the secretary's outlined. We've had that feedback. We are now working with Treasury. We are getting feedback from stakeholders. Obviously it is important for the government and our community to protect our consumers, and we will continue to deliver where we can and work very effectively with those stakeholders. We will have more to say once those results come in.

Mr MITCHELL - Minister, in a media release on 9 March 2025, the Premier stated:

Work to implement the small business start-up permit is underway and expected to be in place this year.

What work has been done to implement the permit?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. You will be interested to know that I released the discussion paper on the Single Start-Up Permit yesterday. It's certainly a very important project that we've been working on with my department in consultation with stakeholders and others. As a government, we reaffirm our commitment to making Tasmania the best place in the world to invest, work, raise a family and do business in the country. Yesterday I released a discussion paper for feedback with respect to the Single Start-Up Permit. As you say, it was announced in March and I've acted on that as Minister for Small Business. That's a very important initiative which we look forward to progressing as soon as possible based on the feedback we get from that and then we will be able to act accordingly.

Mr MITCHELL - What safeguards will be in place to ensure that abattoirs and asbestos remediation sites can't be set up in residential areas?

Mr BARNETT - That's a very good question and one of the reasons I've released the discussion paper is to ensure that we get the feedback from those relevant stakeholders who

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have a view and expressed concerns to ensure that the risks are managed and taken into account before the legislation is put in place. I appreciate your interest in the matter and that's why I made that announcement yesterday.

Ms BADGER - Minister, the government received \$2.16 million in interest on tenancy bonds in the financial year 2024-25, and yet tenants seeking dispute resolution face wait times that can exceed 90 days for a determination from the Residential Tenancy Commissioner (RTC). According to RTI documents, the RTC operates with around 7.5 FTE staff who wrote 2318 determinations last year, that's 309 per FTE, on top of all their other duties.

Given that tenants are generating significant revenue through their bond holdings, there appears to be a disconnect between the funds collected and the service standards that are being delivered. Minister, can you confirm the current staffing level at the Residential Tenancy Commissioner's office and has that changed since the bond interest revenue began growing?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. There's a fair bit of detail in that question, so I'd be more than happy to pass to Robyn Pearce, who's the head of the Consumer, Business and Occupational Services to assist the member in terms of rental deposit authority, and of course, the Residential Tenancy Commissioner, who is, in fact, Robyn Pearce - one person with different roles and different hats. Of course it's important that it provides that stability, support and continuity within the rental industry. I'll just see if Robyn Pearce is able to respond to the member's question.

Ms PEARCE - Thank you. Through you minister. The current staffing levels within what we call rental services is - we're funded for nine FTEs in that particular area. The staffing levels have changed. In 2024, through a grant from the Property Agents Board to fund an additional three investigators, who have been employed now through the 2024-25 financial year. We're seeing a progressive decrease in the amount of time that it takes to resolve disputes.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. Through you minister, what is the target timeframe for issuing determinations and what percentage of cases are currently meeting this target? And, I just want to clarify, you said that there was funding for nine positions, they are all fully employed, so there would be 12 total with the extras?

Ms PEARCE - Through you deputy. No, the nine is inclusive of the three.

Ms BADGER - Okay, thank you.

Ms PEARCE - The current KPI - We've previously been resolving disputes at around the 40-45 day mark, 49 day mark. This financial year, so far, we're resolving them within 42.6 days. That's in 2025-26 to date.

Prof RAZAY - Minister, because you have an affinity to farming, I thought I'd ask you a question about that. Looking at the figure about Tasmanian exports in 2025, among seven exports, the fruit and vegetable is at the bottom. I really believe Tasmania should be and could be a leader in the production of fruit and vegetables. This is really relevant with the latest technology in greenhouses. This is what we are desperate for in Tasmania, especially when only 10 per cent of people eat their vegetables. Are you surprised when they don't get fresh vegetables? I feel we can change even the health of our nation by providing them with fresh vegetables and fruits.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. It's a very important part of our export sector. Of course, there's been significant growth in the export of berries and cherries - certainly cherries has seen significant growth. I think the members for Lyons around the table would be aware of that, mostly into Asia - China, Hong Kong, Japan. The berries, obviously, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries and strawberries, are a very important part of agriculture in Tasmania. So in terms of my advice, I have some information I mentioned the \$6.16 billion in exports and the export markets, just for your interest, China, South Korea, Indonesia, USA and Japan are the main markets. Of the goods exported, I had a number of some 39 per cent of exports were food. I'll double-check that with the deputy secretary. We're pleased and proud we've been able to diversify our export markets and that's one of our ambitions under our trade strategy, which has been reviewed and consulted on in this past 12 months and we'll have a new trade strategy released by the middle of next year, or thereabouts. I'll just pass to the deputy secretary to add to that answer.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister. I will just add that a critical part of the trade strategy is the inbound visitation program. As part of that, there's a key focus for the government that goes directly to your point about fresh produce. There will be an inbound visitation program in January 2026, which will bring businesses from across the world directly into Tasmania, so that we can maximise that exposure as a food bowl, providing healthy produce and building our exports, by driving them into Tasmania to experience Tasmania as well, and then you get that tangible connection that, ultimately, leverages our thriving businesses in that regard.

Mr BARNETT - I should just add that we directly support Fruit Growers Tasmania and Wine Tasmania, as well as the whiskey distillers in Tasmania. You would also be aware that the President of the US, Mr Trump, reduced the tariff on Tasmanian and Australian beef to zero, for which we're grateful, and that will be a big boost. We did lobby with the federal government in that regard and it's good to see some results there.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I want to follow up on the same line of questioning as my colleague in Bass, Prof Razay, on the importance of exports and growing our economy and boosting demand from away, I suppose you might say. With our economy growing so much, 51,000 more jobs since Liberal was elected, unemployment at such low amounts, some governments would rest on their laurels and just imagine that it's all going to continue without any effort. Of course, I know you don't believe that, we have to keep doing everything possible. It's the perfect time to instead work like blazes to help small business to grow new markets and find new customers. Whether they're across Australia, in other states or overseas, what is your portfolio doing to help our local businesses, especially our small businesses, to find those new markets and meet up and connect with those new customers?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question. It's a really good one. Small business is the backbone of our economy and plays a particularly important role in the exports space. As a government, we continue to provide funding support through the trade acceleration grants program. That's a very tangible result, and I can give you a heads up in terms of the last 12 months. I think it's a little over \$500,000, in fact, \$625,615 to be exact, for the 2024-25 year. Through that program, we approved 104 grants to 77 eligible businesses, supporting activities from trade shows to marketing campaigns, participating in international trade missions, and the like.

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It was a very good investment, which then helped those various entities deliver a \$34 million return for Tasmania. That's in terms of exports. That is a very significant return on investment for a little over \$600,000, \$34 million return. We're very pleased and proud of that part of our trade strategy and that's set out in the budget.

Agri-wise is a business not far from your hometown, Mr Ferguson, just outside of Launceston, and they employed some 10 people. The Premier and I were there just a couple of months ago and they benefited from that trade acceleration grant. They're exporting their technology into food and fruit-growing regions all around the globe, as a result of the benefit of that they also raised \$1 million through their own efforts -

Mr FERGUSON - Fiona is an inspiration to us all.

Mr BARNETT - Absolutely, quite an inspiration and congratulations to them.

Mr MITCHELL - Minister, I want to confirm something about your earlier answer on the discussion paper you released on the small business start-up permit. My understanding is that in the budget that wasn't passed last May, there was \$500,000 set aside for the small business start-up permit. I may be wrong and I'm happy to be informed otherwise, but I couldn't find a line item for the permit in the budget that was before the parliament by the Treasurer, Mr Abetz.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks for that. As I say, the Single Start-Up Permit efforts are well and truly progressing with the release of the discussion paper yesterday. Thank you for acknowledging that, it's very important. I failed to mention earlier that consultation on that will take place right through to 16 January. The plan at this stage is to get that feedback, then progress accordingly with the relevant legislation and the framework around that in the first half of next year. That will address the needs of business regulators and the community. In terms of the budget, I'll just pass to the deputy secretary.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister. To add to that, the department is currently managing the commitment with current savings as a product of the caretaker process. We're really keen to go through the consultation process and get the feedback to understand the appropriate design of this permit model, which is really going to the core element of supporting new businesses with how they start up and thrive in Tasmania, while being mindful of protecting community, at the same time, and having appropriate levels of regulation. Subject to that consultation process, we'll have a greater sense of budget requirement for delivering this commitment and State Growth can work to that.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you. As we come to the role of the Small Business Advocate, which is to, 'Assist small businesses trying to resolve issues and disputes with larger organisations.' Could you please provide a detailed breakdown of the issues and disputes that the Small Business Advocate has been involved in seeking to resolve since 1 July 2024?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. I want to acknowledge the role of the Small Business Advocate, Stuart Clues, and thank him for his advocacy and work. In fact, I caught up with him last week together with Bruce Billson who was down here in Tasmania as the small business Ombudsman for Australia, who you might recall Mr Mitchell in another forum, but we had a meeting of the COSBOA, Council of Australian Small Business

Associations, here in Hobart. It was excellent that they were here, promoting the interests of small business.

As to the role of the advocate and what's been delivered, I can assure you the advocate has been very busy with not just the small business start-up permit, revising the red tape portal, the parliamentary red tape repeal days, the implementation of net -1 to reduce legislation, the audit of all licences, permits and approvals to remove unnecessary red tape, the establishment of a red tape reduction industry taskforce - I was part of that last year and earlier this year in my earlier role as treasurer at the time - and, of course, specifically, my understanding is in terms of cutting red tape for poppy growers and with similar crop approval processes. Two other matters I'm advised the advocate has been involved with is simplifying event permit processes for festivals, food and wine events with a single application permit and further new digital liquor licencing with deemed approval within 30 days. So working in a whole range of areas and, again, I appreciate the work of the advocate.

Mr MITCHELL - Specifically to the question I asked about resolving issues and disputes, are you able to provide a detailed breakdown of the issues and disputes that the Small Business Advocate has been involved in seeking to resolve between small business and larger organisations?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, so thanks for the question. As you probably know, the Small Business Advocate reports directly to the Office of Coordinator General (OCG) and works within that office. Obviously, as the minister for Small Business, I have a special interest in red tape production and streamlining the process, but the Advocate and the red tape reduction coordinator report to the OCG. So, I strongly encourage the member to put the question in that forum, accordingly.

Ms BADGER - Minister, going back to the Residential Tenancy Commissioner's office, is there any data for the past few years on how many disputes have been withdrawn or resolved informally due to the excessive wait times, rather than progressing them through to determination?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much and the commissioner is here at the table, but I can assure you we have quite a lot of information about the good work of the commissioner, but I will refer the question to Robyn Pearce.

Ms PEARCE - Thank you and through you, minister. I'd just like to point out that the reason we've had such an increase in the dispute timeframes is because of the success of the MyBond system, which has made it much easier for agents and owners to manage the bond claim and the dispute process. Thanks to that improved accessibility, the parties are now more likely to engage and respond to claims, which has increased the number of disputes where both parties lodge the submissions for assessment by the commissioner. Now, within that we do hold data on the number of matters that might be resolved without a determination, but that is not going to go to whether or not that was resolved because of the wait times, it will simply mean a resolution may have been received. But, I don't have that data with me at this point in time.

Ms BADGER - Okay, thank you. Minister, as a few other members of the committee have touched on, fresh produce is an incredible asset to Tasmania, it's a large part of underpinning our brands, the pride that we have in our brand of paddock to plate. There are

new regulations coming in and I appreciate they're not directly under your portfolio minister, but, while they're aligning Tasmania with other national standards, it's a balancing act between the export of those products that you're dealing with and ensuring that small businesses, particularly those that participate in markets aren't incurring a burden of administration or additional costs.

What input are you having and working with your colleagues to ensure that those regulations are fairly balanced, so that Tasmania isn't missing out on the national stage, and small businesses can continue operating as they are?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate where you're coming from and your interest in this matter, like myself. I have a considerable interest and I raised this directly with the Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Gavin Pearce, who's doing an excellent job advocating for agriculture and our primary industries, more generally, and responsible for Biosecurity Tasmania. The question is more directly relevant to Biosecurity Tasmania as you would have heard in parliament last week with a question on notice relating to this very matter, but I'll check with my deputy secretary if there's anything to add to that answer.

Mr MOGRIDGE - A very small addition, through you, minister, is to acknowledge that we are looking at the trade strategy at the moment and are mindful of developing issues in the context of how we facilitate the best outcomes through that strategy. We will need to turn our minds to some of these issues at a higher level and make sure we're working across agencies to get the best outcomes.

Prof RAZAY - I'd like to ask a question about the impact of change in our labour workforce and work practices on our small businesses. The reason I'm asking is the figures in the Budget show that we have the lowest unemployment rate, yet it is nearly double our job vacancy. I feel like there is change in our practices, in that we more and more people are going part-time, casual, even part-time/retiree. What supports that, we have more female workers than males. What's the impact of all these changes on our small businesses in Tasmania?

Mr BARNETT - First, thank you for your question and your interest in this matter. Small business is defined as a business with 19 employees or less, and I should note that 85 per cent of all our small businesses are microbusinesses, which is five employees or less. You mentioned women in the workforce and, of course, that's not nearly as many as men in terms of small business, in terms of those being employed, it's more than 104,000 Tasmanians, you can see they really are carrying a heavy load, particularly in those rural and regional areas. The Deloitte Access Economics Business Outlook report for the September quarter 2025 forecast Tasmanian household consumption to increase by 1.7 per cent. In terms of the statistics around bankruptcies and the survival of businesses, the ABS data shows that Tasmanian businesses have the highest survival rates compared to other states and territories, with 65.6 per cent of businesses operating in June 2021 still operating in June 2025. I think that's an encouraging statistic for Tasmanian businesses. Having said that, I'll see if the deputy secretary can add to that answer.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Just to build on that and acknowledging the question and the need to be flexible in how we're supporting employees through the regions, there is that continuing support through the Employer of Choice program, which goes to how we ensure that small businesses are doing whatever they can to get workforce participation across the regions and

how we build on and educate some businesses in that context. That is a really important programme of work that we will continue to look at.

Mr BARNETT - Just quickly to assist the honourable member, we do have the Business Advisory Service that I mentioned a few moments ago and that is available free for new businesses to get on the phone to ask questions to assist them getting up and going as a business. It's a really good service. In my first few days in the role of Minister for Small Business, I went to the department to thank them for their service, meet with them and consult with those members in the team who provide that excellent service. I want to do a little shout-out to Kelly and the team at the Business Advisory Service because it really is excellent and we appreciate all the work they do to support small business in Tasmania.

Prof RAZAY - I also acknowledge how education is so important for small businesses and all the resources we have for them.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Yes, absolutely. The wealth of resources on the Business Tasmania website is really comprehensive, and there's also a lot of programs through the newsletters, with over 10,000 small businesses that are provided with that information. It's a really good service.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, thank you for your answer to my last question. I want to just go a step further with a focus on the Antarctic Gateway. This has been an area of passion for I think a number of ministers, including myself in this government. With the upgrades to airport infrastructure and the upgrades coming now for wharf 6 at Macquarie 6, together with your gateway strategy, I want to invite fresh thinking that it is not the Hobart gateway to the Antarctic, it is not even the Tasmanian gateway. It's the Australian gateway to the Antarctic and some will say the world.

With those infrastructure upgrades with your strategy, how are we ensuring that gateway will connect our smallest and microbusinesses and even our larger businesses to those international markets from our back door? While we're at it, how can we ensure that it's a statewide benefit, including for my business constituents in the north getting access to those opportunities through that gateway?

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much for the question. It's an excellent question and highlights the importance of the gateway for our great nation to the Antarctic and east Antarctica and the Southern Ocean more generally. It's a real opportunity that we want to leverage well into the future. I was very pleased last night to meet with representatives from TasPorts and the Australian Antarctic Division to discuss exactly the issues raised in your question, how we can leverage that and promote that even further.

We've got the Tasmanian Polar Network and I want to acknowledge the excellent work they do and also acknowledge the work of Dr Tony Press. I acknowledge the international investments here in Tasmania, for example, Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources that has recently had a number of meetings based in Hobart. This is an international entity that some around the table would be very familiar with. The Tasmanian Polar Network has been at major international events including COMNAP 2025 and the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. We've got a lot of work going on supporting businesses here. Recently there was the hosting of the Australia-Japan Workshop on Antarctic Science and logistics and the trade missions to Korea and Japan, the Antarctic and with Hobart being a

gateway to the Antarctic for those nations, it is a very important part of our plan for our strategy going forward.

You mentioned Macquarie wharf 6, so thank you for that and thank you for your ongoing work in the past to help bring that very important investment to fruition. Just this week, I can advise that we've released the economic contribution report of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean prepared by the Department of State Growth, and I thank them for that work. It confirms the sector continues to be a major driver of high-value jobs, investment and research across Tasmania, including in the north and in my electorate of Lyons at Triabunna with Elphinstone Engineering, which some of you around the table would know.

The summary of that report is as follows. Total real spending by public sector Antarctic and Southern Ocean entities reached \$316 million in 2023-24 prices. Spending in Tasmania by those entities rose to \$204.5 million, a 55 per cent increase on 10 years prior. The sector supported 1166 full-time equivalent jobs in Tasmania and that's around 0.5 per cent of the total workforce, including 797 public sector roles with a combined wage bill of \$129 million. The average wage in the sector is \$162,000, well above the Tasmanian average wage of some \$93,000.

After COVID disruptions, the report also reintroduced broader indicators of activity, showing the Antarctic sector's extensive local impact. Conference delegates spent 5800 delegate days in Tasmania, contributing more than \$3 million to the economy. Antarctic expeditioners stayed 16,000 nights, generating \$6.5 million in local spending, and 86 PhD students are based in Tasmania, supported by or collaborating with Antarctic organisations and/or the university. Please make yourselves familiar with the university and the good work that's happening in Hobart along the wharf.

Together with these achievements, they reflect the strength and diversity of Tasmania's Antarctic and Southern Ocean sector supporting high-value science, education and industry. Through continued investment in infrastructure innovation and global partnerships the government is ensuring that Hobart remains the international gateway to the Antarctic and a cornerstone of the world's polar research and logistics network. I see a lot of upsides for Tasmania going forward and certainly as Minister for Trade and Deputy Premier, I'll do everything I can to progress that.

I want to do a final shout-out to Richard Fader, the former head of the Tasmanian Polar Network, who for many years was a terrific advocate and still is. He has stepped down as president and I want to thank on the record Richard Fader for his efforts.

Dr BROAD - Has CBOS received and/or investigated any complaints from permanent residents of caravans or relocatable homes in caravan parks or similar?

Mr BARNETT - We'd need to check with the CBOS director. It's a very specific question. Let's see if the CBOS director can assist the honourable member and the committee.

Ms PEARCE - Yes, CBOS has received complaints from long-term residents in caravan parks.

Dr BROAD - Have they been investigated?

PUBLIC

Ms PEARCE - We've looked into those matters and considered whether or not they are actually covered by Australian consumer law and I'd have to say it was unclear as to whether or not Australian consumer law applied. For that reason, we understood that at least one of the residents was taking a matter to court and we're waiting to hear the judgment. The court has found at this stage that Australian consumer law does not apply, however that matter is subject to appeal.

Mr BARNETT - I should add to that, as Attorney-General I have intervened with respect to a particular Supreme Court matter to express the views to ensure clarification and to avoid confusion with respect to the rights of long-term residents in caravan parks. The government also takes this matter very seriously and we will be releasing draft legislation for comment and feedback from the community, relevant stakeholders, owners, long-term residents of caravan parks and others. We want to ensure there is adequate protection for long-term residents in caravan parks and to provide clarity with respect to owners and long-term residents. We hope following that consultation and feedback, we'll be able to legislate in the first half of next year.

Dr BROAD - What's the government doing for security of payment issues raised by subcontractors in the construction industry?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, thanks very much for the question. I think it's more of a question for the Director of CBOS. I'll just check if Robyn's able to assist the honourable member and the committee with that one.

Ms PEARCE - Through the Deputy. There is legislation in place to cover how disputes in relation to security of payments can be addressed. That exists for subcontractors to be able to raise issues, follow the processes to seek coverage, but ultimately, it's matter for the courts.

Dr BROAD - Which legislation are you referring to?

Ms PEARCE - I'd have to look up the particular name. I don't have it right in front of me, but it's, I think something along the lines of the Building Industry Security of Payment act.

Ms BADGER - Attorney-General, has CBOS assessed whether the three-monthly rental inspections that Tasmania has is excessive compared to other jurisdictions, and whether this frequency contributes to housing insecurity?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for the question and your interest in the matter. I'll pass to the CBOS Director, or did you want that question again?

Ms PEARCE - Yes, please.

Mr BARNETT - We might just repeat that question.

Ms BADGER - No worries. It was just whether CBOS has assessed whether the three-monthly inspections are excessive compared to other jurisdictions and whether that frequency contributes to housing insecurity?

Ms PEARCE - Through you, Deputy Premier. To my awareness, no, that matter has not been considered.

PUBLIC

Ms BADGER - Thank you. Attorney-General, I acknowledge you went some way in responding to part of this question with Dr Broad's previous question. As you would be aware, residents of the Beauty Point Caravan Park have been living under constant threat of eviction for well over a year. Hearing that the government is intervening with the active court case is a huge deal for them, but it is unclear what your intervention, as Attorney-General, would mean for them. Can you provide some more clarity to residents in that respect, and for the fact that they have been left in the dark? They've been facing eviction for over a year.

Further on Dr Broad's question, can you confirm that within the next 12 months you're going to be bringing in changes to protect the rights of long-term residents in caravan parks?

Mr BARNETT - Thank you for your question and your interest in this matter. I acknowledge Prof Razay and many other members of parliament - of course, Jo Palmer and others - who have been doing their level best to support the local community and seek support and encouragement for the long-term residents in caravan parks, including at Beauty Point. I want to recognise that. We're certainly working very constructively to address those concerns. Of course, I should mention the Chair, Rob Fairs, in terms of your commitment to the local community at Beauty Point. We've been working very constructively accordingly.

I take my role very seriously and took advice with respect to the opportunity to intervene. It's very unusual, but the Crown Proceedings legislation does provide that opportunity, so I have taken advice and have acted accordingly. I have done that with the objective of seeking clarity and avoiding confusion, and to represent my view, to ensure that the interests of long-term residents in caravan parks are protected and clarified.

Likewise, the interests of the owners of long-term residency in caravan parks as well, to get clarity around those responsibilities and those functions of both the long-term residents and the owners. We've made it clear that I'll be releasing legislation before Christmas, which will be available for public comment. It will be draft legislation. It's a very complex matter - it's important that we get the balance right.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Primary Industries and Water.

The Committee suspended from 3.30 p.m. to 3.38 p.m.