

**Tuesday 17 March 2020**

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

## **STATEMENT BY PREMIER**

### **COVID-19**

[10.02 a.m.]

**Mr GUTWEIN** (Bass - Premier - Statement) - Madam Speaker, we are in difficult and challenging times but I know that all of us, along with all Tasmanians, will work together to ensure the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians and importantly we will work hard to ensure that they remain in jobs.

It is important that important public institutions like parliament, and also private institutions that provide services to Tasmanians, all do our bit to ensure that we can continue, taking into account effective appropriate social distancing measures.

I want to thank all of the members, importantly the Leader of the Opposition, Rebecca White, and the Leader of the Greens, Cassy O'Connor, along with yourself and all of your staff for being prepared to work together to ensure that this parliament can continue with its important work.

I also acknowledge the Clerks in both Houses for the work they have undertaken with the staff who work here in Parliament House to ensure that, likewise, there is appropriate social distancing and this place can continue.

Madam Speaker, thank you.

**Statement noted.**

## **MOTION**

### **Sessional Orders - Interim Arrangements**

[10.04 a.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) (by leave) - Madam Speaker, before question time commences I wish to move a minor change to the Standing Orders in relation to Sessional Orders being established for an interim period.

Madam Speaker, I move -

That for the remainder of this session:

1. Standing Order 18, paragraph (a), be amended by leaving out 'be at Six o'clock p.m.' and insert instead 'be no later than 5.25 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays; and 2.30 p.m. on Wednesdays'.

2. Standing Order 119 be amended by leaving out the words 'in the Member's place'.
3. Standing Order 76 be suspended.

To speak very briefly to this motion; first of all, it has been remarkable and positive to be working with the Labor Party, the Greens party, the independent member for Clark, Ms Ogilvie, and yourself, the Clerk and your respective officers. We have sought a way to follow the public health advice around social distancing, and people can now see how we are conducting ourselves in this House.

By agreement all parties are agreeing to set aside the usual use of MPIs and Private Member's times. The time that is therefore not allocated to that purpose will not be in this Chamber. Government business and the usual affairs of the House will continue unaffected. In the meantime, we have found ways to follow that advice to minimise contact as an exemplar to the community.

I thank Ms White, Ms O'Connor and Ms Ogilvie, yourself and the Clerk for your support and the Premier and his team for helping us to fashion this.

I will make a quick point that this is a Sessional Order. It continues until otherwise ordered. We expect that if and when the times change we will again meet to revise these arrangements to relax them or to tighten them as the advice would suggest.

I commend the motion to the House.

[10.06 a.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I echo the sentiments of the Leader of Government Business, Mr Ferguson, on this matter. These are difficult and unusual times and appropriate measures need to be put in place to ensure that the conduct of the House, and the leadership the state is expecting, can continue. We are supportive of the change to Sessional Orders to facilitate the running of the House in these times. Obviously, when we get to the other side we will be supporting a return to normal business so that we can conduct ourselves appropriately.

We thank the Leader and the Premier for supporting enablements to occur.

[10.07 a.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, I echo the sentiments that have been put on the table already to indicate that we will be supporting this change to the Sessional Orders.

Today, Tasmania has declared a public health emergency. We are living in unprecedented and dangerous times. As we know, this situation is rapidly evolving day by day. We will need to work together, quite closely, but at least 1.5 metres apart from each other, because we will need to be nimble and responsive to changing events.

While I understand these are the arrangements that will be in place for the foreseeable future, - and I know this has been central to the thinking of everyone who took part in the meeting yesterday - we need to keep people in this building safe. There are a number of older workers in this building and their safety has to be paramount. We do need to keep ourselves and each other safe, given that we have very public roles. We are arguably in a risk category for spreading the disease. This is a

time when we, to the greatest extent possible, need to work together to put the politics aside, because the party stuff is irrelevant now. It is our job to look after the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians.

Dr Woodruff and I are wholly committed to working with everyone in this room and in this building to keep people safe and, therefore, hopefully to model the right social distancing behaviour into the wider community.

[10.08 a.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I would like to make a short contribution and I think it has been well traversed by the previous speakers. My perspective on this is actually we are very well able to look after ourselves as MPs. We have come together to sort this House out and you will note that there is adequate distance between people and different speaking arrangements, which I believe is entirely appropriate.

I am also concerned about the staff who work in this place, about electorate officers and about everybody who is connected to us and how we run the thing. I request perhaps some communication around how that is being managed, just to put people's minds at rest. It would be helpful. With my own staff, I have asked them to work remotely for the time being. They have been struggling a bit with remote access and organising those things. There has been great support from the parliamentary IT unit.

I thought it worth putting on the record that it is not just us; it is everyone who keeps this place rolling. I see some worried faces around. I wanted to make that contribution.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **QUESTIONS**

### **COVID-19 - Travel Restrictions**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.10 a.m.]

At this time of global uncertainty, Tasmanians want their leaders to come together. They want us to be using this parliament to work together to implement strategies to protect our state and its people from the threat of COVID-19. Right now, nothing else is more important.

Dr Michael J Ryan of the World Health Organization put it like this -

Speed trumps perfection and the problem in society we have at the moment is everyone is afraid of making a mistake, everyone is afraid of the consequence of error, but the greatest error is not to move. The greatest error is to be paralysed by the fear of failure.

As an island we have a unique opportunity to slow the spread of the disease and ultimately save lives but to do that we have to act quickly and decisively. Requiring everyone who enters Tasmania to self-isolate for 14 days would help to dramatically slow the spread of COVID-19. This decision would undoubtedly save lives. You have the backing of many Tasmanians to make this decision. You have the backing of medical professionals and you have the backing of this parliament to do

what is necessary to limit the spread of the virus. Are you actively considering this strategy? If so, will you work with Tasmanian businesses and the broader community now to manage the impact of travel restrictions? What is your threshold for action? In other words, how bad will the situation need to get in Tasmania before you are compelled to act?

**Madam SPEAKER** - I am trying to keep everyone to four minutes in reply, if that is possible.

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. I again thank her, the Leader of the Greens and Madeleine Ogilvie, Independent, for being prepared to work with us.

Regarding travel restrictions, what was announced on Sunday night, international travel into Australia will stop in the coming days. Everyone who is leaving from overseas who was coming here, either for work or for holiday, will be provided with information at their port of departure which will indicate that should they come to Australia they will go into a two-week self-isolation or quarantine. International visitation to the country will come to a stop.

In terms of the movement between the states, Tasmania relies on the mainland, both from the point of view of trade and our broader economy. There are challenges of putting a self-isolation period on anybody who arrives in Tasmania. For example, the truck driver who is bringing the Woolies pantec into the state to provide food for Tasmanians would, under those provisions, be required to go into a two-week isolation period. Regarding other travel movements we receive into the state, doctors and medical professionals - in fact, Dr Veitch is now currently in Canberra at a very important meeting and will be returning to the state either later today or tomorrow morning.

These are all important considerations. You asked the question whether I am considering this. The answer to that question is absolutely yes. I am taking advice and I am working through these matters. I am being guided by the medical professionals. Today Dr Veitch will once again meet with the AHPPC - the Australian Health Principal Protection Committee - which is the coming together of all the chief medical officers or their equivalents from all the states and territories. They are looking at a range of matters in Canberra at a face-to-face meeting, which they felt was important because of the importance of the measures they are discussing, which will be in respect of aged care homes and other social distancing measures. Dr Veitch and his team are in contact with that committee on a daily basis, feeding information in. At this point, I have no advice that I should take that step but we are working through it. I am looking to understand what the impacts would be on our broader economy, on our businesses.

It would be fair to say that there are two challenges we face. The first and foremost is ensuring that we look after the health and wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians. I am certain we will all work hard on that. The second challenge is to ensure that we work hard to ensure that Tasmanians can economically and financially support themselves. All of us in this Chamber will work hard on that as well.

In balancing and working through the challenges I have just outlined, I am taking advice. If and when I receive that advice that it is the right thing to do, then I will act in a heartbeat.

## **COVID-19 - Communication regarding School Closures**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.15 a.m.]

In these unprecedented times, Tasmanians are crying out for decisive leadership and a clear plan. They want to know that their leaders are doing everything in their power to keep them safe. Faced with an inevitable escalation in the crisis, the choices in front of us are clear. Either we make dramatic changes now or we become like China, Italy and the United States, who missed the window for action. Unfortunately, the messages coming from Canberra have been confused, inconsistent and ever-changing.

In this leadership vacuum, it has been left to individuals and organisations to take their own actions. The University of Tasmania and Scotch Oakburn College have decided to deliver their courses online to protect their staff and students. It seems inevitable that more will follow. Some parents are already choosing to keep their children at home.

Can you guarantee that clear messaging will be provided to schools and parents that it is okay to keep students home from school? That is not clear at the moment. Can you guarantee that parents will not be penalised for making this choice? Will you begin working with schools to prepare for the possibility of closures, including preparing home teaching materials and making sure all students have access? What is your threshold for making a decision to close all state schools?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition, Ms White, for her important question. The health and safety of Tasmanians and their wellbeing is our number one priority. The health and safety of our students is a top priority.

The Government is taking a precautionary approach and implementing measures in public schools on advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the key decision-making committee for health emergencies. It comprises all state and territory chief health officers and is chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer.

Although keeping schools open as long as possible is currently the most appropriate option, plans are well underway to provide every reasonable opportunity for students to engage in learning programs if it is advised that schools need to close.

I think Dr Veitch has written to schools today. I know there has been correspondence from the Department of Education and other education departments around the country that has said that it is a matter of getting the balance right but sometimes the benefits of closing schools can be over-estimated and the impacts of closing schools can be under-estimated. We are taking advice on these matters.

**Ms White** - Can you make sure there is clear communication, please? That has been a real problem.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - The schools have received communication.

**Ms White** - Parents are being told they are unauthorised absences.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I will be clear. I said publicly yesterday: if a parent is concerned about the health and safety of their child and they decide to keep that child at home, they will not be penalised.

**Ms O'Byrne** - They have been told at the moment that they are unauthorised absences until we get the act to be implemented. That is not true.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - We will take care of that matter.

We believe, based on the advice we are receiving at the moment, the course of action we are taking is the appropriate one. As I have said on a number of occasions, if that advice changes, we will act immediately; make no mistake about that.

Concerning communication, I will check but I am certain that schools have been communicated with and that they have been receiving regular updates. Schools are preparing themselves for the possible option that they will close and how they should ensure that education and learning keeps going.

I make a point that was made by the Chief Minister of the ACT last night. Once schools close, they will not close for a short period of time. They could very well be closed for the rest of the year. That is a matter we need to take into consideration as we work through this. That in itself would not only bring with it social dislocation but it also raises challenges in how we ensure that children and students are appropriately managed through that, should it be for an extended period of time.

### **COVID-19 - Restrictions**

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

[10.20 a.m.]

As you know, at this extraordinarily difficult and unprecedented time, Tasmanians are looking to all of us, but particularly to you, for leadership. In a number of ways I respect that you have demonstrated that, but health professionals are imploring you to do more. Medical professionals are becoming increasingly alarmed about how infectious and lethal COVID-19 is as a threat to the Tasmanian population.

In an open letter to your Health minister, more than 140 doctors have warned of impending disaster and implored your Government to do more before there is rapid community transmission. They want schools to be closed and incoming travel to be severely restricted for international and interstate travellers. Why are you yet to place restrictions on interstate travellers, including mandatory self-isolation? Given there is now widespread community transmission along the eastern seaboard, will you use the powers granted under the public health emergency that you declared today to close schools, pubs, gyms and other social venues in line with the recommendations of the open letter from health professionals? As you know, the advice from the Commonwealth has been patchy and variable at best. Why are you waiting to put more severe restrictions in place in order to save lives?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens for that question and acknowledge that we have taken a leadership position in this. I acknowledge the discussions we have been able to have privately - and I would make that available to any member of the House should they wish to pick up the phone and have a conversation with me about these matters. They are important and we are in very difficult circumstances so I am very happy to discuss these matters with you.

Regarding the steps we have been taking, our advice is still that the risk to Tasmanians remains low and we continue to take all precautionary steps. As of today, we have elevated our position in terms of the declaration of a public health emergency, which will provide the Director of Public Health with powers to ensure that self-isolation or quarantine can be mandated, and to direct a person to go to a certain place or to do a certain thing, or to have control over a vehicle. The powers are wide.

As to the process we are going through, we are acting on advice every step of the way. I believe members are aware that this evening there will be another meeting of the National Cabinet which was established last week and had its first meeting on Sunday. Today in Canberra those matters of social distancing are being considered by the heads of public health from around the country with the Chief Medical Officer. They are looking at where it is appropriate for gatherings to occur and where there should be more stringent social distancing measures. That advice will be provided this evening. I am certain I will have more to say in the next 24 hours about that.

Regarding the broader matter of border control, I spent some time on that in the last question from Ms White. As to whether we strengthen the provisions around our own borders, those matters are under active consideration but I have no advice yet to take that step. I am looking to inform myself of what the impact of that would be both in a public health case and also in an economic case and, importantly, in terms of the supplies we would require into Tasmania and how those essential services would be managed.

I want to be clear that I am going into this with my eyes wide open. I am taking advice and am prepared to act on that advice. I demonstrated that on Sunday when we moved on cruise ships. In terms of any advice we receive that changes the current position the Government has, I will act on that in a heartbeat.

## **COVID-19 - Public Transport**

**Ms OGILVIE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.25 a.m.]

I have long been an advocate of ramping up what we do to combat this virus, particularly Singapore-style controls, and that is not just about the borders but about what we do internally, particularly around transport. I am a mother of three and as I sent the children off to school this morning I consider the buses' movement through public spaces where hundreds of children gather, particularly in the mall. I wonder if you, or perhaps the minister if it is a question that cuts across two portfolios, would be able to articulate for us what additional safety measures, particularly around cleaning and disinfecting buses and public transport for our children, are underway or what plans you have to ramp that up to put our minds at rest, particularly as I know parents are already concerned about sending their kids to school?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank Ms Ogilvie for that question and her interest in this. Like her, I am a parent of children who left today to go to school; in fact one of them left yesterday to go on a short school camp, which I thought was interesting. I understand the challenges that we all face.

Regarding our buses and Metro, they will be taking advice from the Director of Public Health as to what they need to do and what further steps they need to take.

**Ms O'Byrne** - Having spoken to bus drivers, they haven't had that yet.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I think members should be comforted that all our government businesses are in contact, as I understand it, with Public Health and are working through their own pandemic plans. In this case I will seek further advice and we can release that publicly so that everybody has an understanding of that. My understanding is that our government businesses are engaged with Public Health and are taking advice in terms of the pandemic.

## **COVID-19 - Effect on the Economy**

**Mr TUCKER to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.27 a.m.]

Can you update the House on how the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is taking action to keep Tasmanians and their families safe during the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of a strong economy in uncertain times?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank Mr Tucker, the member for Lyons, for his question and his interest in this important matter. The health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians is the Government's top priority, along with supporting the Tasmanian economy and keeping as many Tasmanians in jobs as we can. Our Government will do everything it can to manage and mitigate the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will work with our businesses, our workforce and our communities to ensure we are well positioned to face the brunt of this pandemic but, importantly, to recover from it.

As with all other Australian states and territories, I want to stress that we are taking a highly precautionary approach that is consistent with the most up-to-date medical information and advice. We are taking action to ensure we can keep Tasmanians and their families safe. At COAG last week, together with other leaders, I committed to leveraging our combined resources to slow the spread of the virus and ensure that we stay ahead of the curve in minimising the impact of the coronavirus on our community and our economy. We will continue to manage the risk of the virus based on the best and latest evidence and medical advice.

Today we have moved a further step forward in our precautionary and scalable approach. I want to ensure that Tasmanians understand exactly where we sit in terms of the public health emergency setting. Tasmanians are well aware of a state emergency. The state emergency management committee has been stood up on many occasions in the past to ensure that we can manage mainly the threat of bushfires or floods, as we have seen in recent years as well. The



graduated response that we have taken has started with the formation of an interdepartmental committee several months ago, in having an overall approach to the public health response and to the broader response.

We have stood up the State Emergency Management Committee. That is operating, but we have not declared a state of emergency. Health is the lead agency. The Director of Public Health, under the Public Health Act, has been managing the Tasmanian response under the notifiable diseases division in the Public Health Act. That has been a graduated response. A little over a week and a half ago we stood up and declared that we were at level 2 in the response that Public Health was taking.

Today, we are taking the next step: to declare a public health emergency setting, which provides further levers for us to use to make the decisions we need to act swiftly, calmly and sensibly. The next elevation would be to a state of emergency. We are not there yet, but the State Emergency Management Committee has been established and has been operating, led by Darren Hine, taking a helicopter view over the roles and functions of the different agencies that have been operating. As I have said, Health has been the lead agency through this period.

By activating a public health emergency setting, this provides increased powers and sanctions which support measures, including quarantining and mass gatherings. This includes power for the Director of Public Health to make decisions to manage an imminent threat to Tasmanians, for example to direct people to be quarantined, isolated or even evacuated from an area. It provides power to direct or permit people from accessing an area and control the movement of vehicles. It also provides the power to enforce testing.

This is about putting Tasmanians' health first and keeping Tasmanians safe. We will work, and continue to work closely with our health professionals to ensure we are primed to meet demand. That is why it is excellent news today - I will hear more about this - that we have taken possession of K Block. We will begin the operational commissioning phase of that building.

Madam Speaker, we come to this in terms of an economy that is strong and a balance sheet that is strong. We are well placed as we go into this. Tasmania's strong economic performance leaves us well placed to respond to the challenges that we are going to see across our broader economy as we move forward. The Government will continue with its infrastructure program, which is now \$3.7 billion. The challenge is to respond and leverage off the back of the Morrison stimulus package, which was \$17.6 billion, and which will provide vital support to households, our businesses and assist those in our regions. It is a package that will go directly to providing support to businesses and their employees to ensure that the economy can continue to operate. It will help fixed-term, casual and relief employees affected by the virus, and some of the most vulnerable people in our community as well, our pensioners, through the health response that was provided. It also underpins the additional support to the national medical stockpile, a new Medicare service for health consultations over the phone or through video applications, home delivery of medicines and on-line or remote filling of PBS prescriptions and funding to train our aged-care workers.

This afternoon my Government will announce and outline our first-stage response to the virus. A couple of weeks ago during the state of the state address, I announced a range of measures which will stand us in good stead: the additional funding into health, and the additional measures that will ensure that we provide support in the construction industry. But we need to do more, and this afternoon we will.

Over the last six years we have demonstrated that we have been a disciplined, unified and responsible government. Nothing will change through this period. We have proven that we were able to build the foundations for, and sustain, strong economic and jobs growth for our state. We worked hard to build business confidence, attract investment, to grow the economy and to create jobs.

Our focus moving forward will be to continue to do that, but importantly our number one priority will be the health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians, and working hard to ensure that they have jobs as well.

### **COVID-19 - Use of Hotel Rooms as Accommodation for Health Workers**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.35 a.m.]

Coronavirus is now a national public health emergency and is having a devastating economic impact. With the cancellation of large events, and public concerns about non-essential travel, Tasmania's hospitality sector has been hit hard and hotel vacancy rates are high.

At the same time, health workers are struggling to identify accommodation options, so they are not leaving a high-risk work environment, and potentially exposing family members to the virus. Using vacant hotel rooms as accommodation for health workers would not only keep them and their families safe, but also provide much needed activity for a sector of the economy that has been particularly hard hit by the spread of coronavirus.

This proposal has the support of the AMA and the THA. I raised it with you over the weekend, so you have had time to think about it. Will you also support this proposal and act immediately to implement it?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question.

We did have a discussion on the weekend and I have spoken with the THA as well, and I am looking at a range of measures that are going to support affected industry sectors.

It is quite obvious that the seafood sector was the first to be impacted, and the Government acted swiftly. Within hours, Mr Barnett had provided some support in terms of rolling quotas and also providing assistance with their fees. The whole economy is going to be affected by this. There are industries that are at the front of the curve, though, and this afternoon I will be saying more about what we will do to support them. I will also be saying more about what we will do to support the community and our public sector workers.

**Ms O'BYRNE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker. I do apologise, but given the serious nature and the way we are attempting to conduct Question Time, if the Premier could perhaps address the specifics of the question. It was a very specific question and I do think this is a time for politics aside, and spin aside. Could you just answer the question?

**Madam SPEAKER** - That is not a point of order, and I think the Premier is getting to that point.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I must admit, I think it was a particularly poor interjection. To be frank, in terms of the politics being played, I was answering the question. I made the point, in fact, I think *Hansard* will demonstrate when we can actually read it, noting that I think we have social distancing occurring with Hansard staff. But noting that *Hansard* will reflect that what I had just said was that there would be broad impacts across the economy.

I acknowledge that the hotel sector has been impacted. There will be measures that we will introduce today that will be designed to assist those businesses that are at the front of the curve. I have also acknowledged in my previous comments that we will be saying more about how we will support state service workers as well.

I have answered and gone to the substance of the question. As I have said, I will have more to say this afternoon when I outline a comprehensive support and economic stimulus package.

### **COVID-19 - Provision of Personal Protective Equipment**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.38 a.m.]

I have to say my alarm levels are rising quite rapidly at the lack of response from the Premier to these serious questions.

Coronavirus is now a national public health emergency. This is a public health issue that should take precedence above everything else.

We rely on Tasmania's Health and Emergency Service workers to care for community members at this time but we must also make sure that we look after them. That is why I asked you the last question, which you failed to answer.

I will ask you this one, because they are working in high-risk environments on the front line of the response to the coronavirus pandemic. It is vital that they have a reliable supply of personal protective equipment, including gowns, masks, and gloves, so they can keep treating patients safely in our hospitals, and in all health care settings across the state. We cannot risk their health by having them reuse, or go without, these items. We are hearing from those on the front line that there is a shortage of personal protective equipment and that they have not had the training time to learn how to use it properly. Victorian Premier Dan Andrews committed \$10 million to ensure that his health workers have adequate supplies of gowns, gloves and masks. What steps are you taking to ensure that Tasmania will have reliable access to adequate supplies of appropriate personal protective equipment?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I am doing my best today not to get into the politics of this and I will refrain from doing so. The people watching this need to understand and accept, as I know you do, that this afternoon there will be a ministerial statement provided to this House that will outline a comprehensive -

**Ms O'Byrne** - It does not stop you from answering questions.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - support and economic package designed to support both our economy and our healthcare and community workers.

**Ms O'Byrne** - This is more about your media strategy than answering questions, Premier. This is outrageous.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Madam Speaker, I am sorry that Labor wants to play politics with this.

**Ms White** - We want answers.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - This afternoon, as per the normal forms of this place, there will be a ministerial statement -

**Ms WHITE** - Point of order, Madam Speaker, under standing order 45. The question was about the provision of supplies of personal protective equipment. It could not have been clearer. Surely if the Premier is going to make an announcement later this afternoon he can at least flag now that he is considering that and that they are making provision to provide adequate supplies. There is no reason he cannot answer that question now.

**Madam SPEAKER** - That is not a point of order. I am sure the Premier is going to be relevant.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the Leader of the Opposition was listening to one of my previous answers, I indicated that one of the first steps of the National Cabinet was to consider the national stockpile of PPE to ensure that all states would have access to the PPE gear they require. This afternoon I will provide a comprehensive -

**Ms O'Byrne** - So is there any point in question time if you're not going to answer anything until 2.30?

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

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I will provide a comprehensive response of both our support to our medical and health professionals but also our economic stimulus package as well.

I am sorry that the other side wants to play politics with this. They understand the forms of the House and there will be a comprehensive package outlined this afternoon which will provide detail of the Government's response.

## **Royal Hobart Hospital - Redevelopment Update**

**Mr STREET to MINISTER for HEALTH, Ms COURTNEY**

[10.43 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on the Royal Hobart Hospital redevelopment?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, as a government we have made it clear, both prior to COVID-19 but particularly now, that the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians is our top priority. That is why I am pleased we have taken the next step with regard to K Block. I am delighted that the certificate for practical completion for K Block was issued earlier this morning. This \$689 million project is one of the most significant in Tasmania's history. I would like to pause and take a moment to thank all the people who have worked on the project. There has been considerable focus and effort, particularly over the past few weeks and months but over the entire length of this project there have been many Tasmanians who have contributed a lot to this project.

While there are a small number of locations where water quality remains an issue and adjustments will be made to the air conditioning system, these issues will be appropriately managed to ensure they do not disrupt operational commissioning activities. I also want to make it absolutely clear that no steps are being taken that will impact on the health and wellbeing of workers, patients or clinical staff. Based on the additional work undertaken by the contractor, further documentation provided and the expert advice we have received, we are confident that the outstanding issues with regard to water and noise can be addressed during the three-month operational commissioning phase. We are working with the builder on the rectification of these outstanding matters and they include the flushing and testing of the water system and ensuring they comply with Australian drinking water guidelines.

I assure Tasmanians that the safety and wellbeing of our staff, workers and patients are the number one priority while these rectification works are happening. I am advised they will be able to be undertaken with minimal disruption and with no impact on the health and wellbeing of the staff.

We want our Tasmanian health professionals and patients to have access to this state-of-the-art building as soon as possible. We are working with our staff, both within the THS and the Department of Health, to ensure that we can move into the operational commissioning phase as quickly and as appropriately as possible, considering COVID-19.

We have commenced recruitment. This has already happened and has been in place for a period of time to ensure we have the people in place to support this. We are getting on with the job of making sure that not only at the Royal Hobart, not only at K Block, but across our entire health system, we are escalating preparedness so we can make sure we are in the best possible position to make sure Tasmanians are kept safe.

## **COVID-19 - Protection Measures**

**Dr WOODRUFF to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.46 a.m.]

The open letter from the Tasmanian GPs expresses their dismay at the disconnect between the actions that have been taken in Tasmania so far to prevent the spread of the virus and what the global evidence shows needs to be done. On current growth rates, the now 400 cases today in Australia of COVID-19 would become 10 000 by 4 April, in just a few weeks' time. New South Wales has admitted they have exponential growth in their state and that is apparent from the data in Victoria as well. We have precious little time to act and isolate people in Tasmania who have come from mainland states as well as travelled from overseas, and Tasmanians who have returned to the state, and to close schools to reduce the spread of the silent infection which exists in Tasmania.

I listened to your answers to earlier questions about why you would not have 14 days self-isolation for everyone entering the state by sea and air. With respect, I think the reasons you gave for not doing that were trivial and could easily be resolved by prescribed exemptions for trade and requiring people such as the chief health officer to have a teleconference instead of flying interstate. These are pretty obvious responses. The longer you delay, the longer schools will have to remain closed. Fundamentally, these measures are inevitable. You have already said they are inevitable at some point. You are delaying and every day we delay increases the risk to Tasmanians. Will you use those two measures that have been strongly asked for by the medical community to protect Tasmanians today?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank Dr Woodruff, the member for Franklin, for that question and her interest in this matter. As I have said, we are acting on advice. We are taking advice from the country's health professionals. Regarding the Australian Health Principal Protection Committee, which is meeting today and has been meeting on a daily basis, the best advice I have to hand at the moment is that schools should still continue, obviously with appropriate social distancing measures, but should that change we are well prepared to move to a distance learning environment to support our students. I make the point, however, that once the schools close they will be closed for a very long time.

**Dr Woodruff** - I agree that is the case. We want to reduce that risk.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I have been clear that we are acting on advice on that measure. Concerning other border controls, I have been clear in this place this morning that I am taking advice on that. There are challenges that need to be managed, understood and considered -

**Ms O'Connor** - Trivial ones.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - None of these matters are trivial.

**Dr Woodruff** - Relative to the cost of not acting, they are.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - We will take advice from experts. As I have said, our number one priority is the health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians. Importantly, we want to ensure they can have a job under these circumstances as well.

As of Sunday night, the country has put in place stricter international border controls, which we have supported. We have also taken a further step whereby anybody who has travelled from overseas, whether they be a visitor to this country, this state, or a Tasmanian returning home, when they arrive at one of our entry ports, they must fill out a Tasmanian Arrivals Card. They will be provided with information of how best to manage and to understand the onset of the disease should it occur to them; and importantly, where to call and who to contact to receive assistance. My understanding is that each and every one of those people will receive a text on a daily basis reminding them of the need for self-quarantine but also inquiring about their health and what other services they may need to support them.

I provided this response to the first question from the Leader of the Opposition - I am taking advice on this. If the advice is to implement stronger border controls then in a heartbeat, I will do that. I am relying on the experts to provide that advice. There is another meeting of the National Cabinet tonight and we will again discuss these matters. If the advice changes, I will act in a heartbeat.

### **COVID-19 - Education Facilities and Student Health**

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

[10.52 a.m.]

Can you advise the House of what measures the Government has implemented to reduce the risk to students and staff in our public-school system as a result of the coronavirus and share with us what the latest health advice is in relation to education facilities?

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. As has been articulated by the Premier, the health and safety of staff and students is, of course, our top priority. I understand the community is feeling anxious right now and is seeking guidance and direction. It is important that the Government receives and acts on the best and most current health advice available. We also have a responsibility to make sure the public is informed and understands the decisions that are being made.

The Government has received advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the key decision-making committee for health emergencies. It is constituted of all state and territory chief health officers and is chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer. The advice we have received is reflected in the precautionary measures introduced into public schools this week: to reduce the exposure and lower the chance of spreading coronavirus. This includes schools adopting social distancing measures, such as the cancellation of all assemblies and presentation nights, excursions, travel, fetes, fairs, concerts with audiences, all sports carnivals, and school camps. The restriction on these activities will be in place until further notice and will be regularly reviewed.

I have also written to all principals about the importance of supporting good hygiene practice to limit the spread of coronavirus. This means ensuring strict handwashing protocols are in place. Schools have been advised that hard surfaces in classrooms such as door handles, keyboards and desks should be regularly disinfected.

The health and safety of Tasmanians is our highest priority. We will continue to act on the best advice we have available at the time, noting that this is an evolving situation.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has met to specifically consider the issue of school closures in relation to the community transmission of coronavirus. The committee's current advice is that the pre-emptive school closures are not likely to be proportionate or effective as a public health intervention to prevent community transmission at this time. Previous work suggests that potential reduction in community transmission in pre-emptive school closures may be offset by care arrangements that are in place for children who are not at school. Children may require care from vulnerable grandparents or may continue to associate outside the school settings.

While we advised that currently it is not required to close any school sites, we are preparing for all situations so if advice does change we can act swiftly. The Department of Education has been working for a number of weeks on developing a range of at-home learning materials from online to literacy packages, which could be made available to families who do not have access to online access resources. We are also mindful of vulnerable students such as those with existing health concerns who may be at high risk if they contracted the coronavirus. Conversations with families are currently occurring in schools to explore options to ensure students health and safety while maintaining their learning programs -

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please. Could we please hear this?

**Mr ROCKLIFF** - We will continue to take advice from the experts and also be prepared for all possible scenarios.

I take this opportunity to thank the Department of Education for the work they are doing, including the establishment of a service centre of parent inquiries, which is being very well received. In particular, I commend the leadership of the Secretary of the Department of Education, Tim Bullard, who continues to demonstrate strong and empathetic leadership in managing emerging situations such as the coronavirus.

### **COVID-19 - Intensive Care Capacity**

**Ms WHITE to MINISTER for HEALTH, Ms COURTNEY**

[10.57 a.m.]

While most people will experience mild symptoms, COVID-19 can be a very serious illness. The World Health Organization states -

Although the majority of people with COVID-19 have uncomplicated and mild illness (81%), some will develop severe illness requiring oxygen therapy (14%) and



approximately 5% will require intensive care unit treatment. Of those critically ill, most will require mechanical ventilation.

Clinicians in Tasmania's hospitals are concerned about the number of intensive care beds and the ventilators available in the state and the capacity of our hospitals to treat critically ill COVID-19 patients, particularly given our aging population and the prevalence of underlying health issues in the population.

How many ICU beds are there in Tasmania? Where are they located? How many ventilators are there in Tasmania and where are they located?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I assure those members in the House and also the Tasmanian community that we are working very hard on preparedness across the entire THS.

The member asked about intensive care capacity. Obviously, that is a critical area and that is why a strategy is being developed. We are looking at having staged increases in capacity across the ICU and the high dependant units across the state. I have had the opportunity to speak to a number of health professionals in different facilities around the state and it is great to see that that work is being focused on with such intensity. This also includes looking at the recovery spaces that can be used for ventilating and monitoring patients and we are also looking at ways that we can stage ways of sections of recovering that could be still used for routine surgical throughput.

We have seen what has happened in other jurisdictions and we are also very mindful of the escalation that may occur here in Tasmania. This is why we are increasing capacity as much as we can within the ICU and HDU in terms of physical capacity and also ordering further equipment.

We know that we need to be looking at our entire health system as well, which is why a number of weeks ago we launched our respiratory clinics. They are in each jurisdiction around Tasmania and what they are doing is ensuring that we are keeping those people with -

**Ms WHITE** - Point of order Madam Speaker, it goes to standing order 45, relevance. The question to the minister was very specific: how many ICU beds are there and where are they? How many ventilators are there and where are they?

I hoped you would be able to give a current figure. I understand you might be flexing up but right now what is the answer to that question, please? If you could ask the minister to address that.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Unfortunately that is not a point of order. However, I think that would be of interest to the House if the minister could provide the information, even at a later stage.

**Ms COURTNEY** - Madam Speaker, the information I am able to further provide I will. I want Tasmanians to be fully informed. I was also explaining about the fact that we know there are constraints within our health system and that is why we are looking to increase capacity in all locations. I understand in terms of the location of capacity that this is spread around the state and we know that we need to be prepared in all areas of Tasmania.

As well as the ICU and the HDU capacity we are also doing extensive work in each of our major hospitals to ensure that we have clinically appropriate areas. This is in our emergency departments having cold and hot areas, making sure that we have separate entrances. We are looking at how we can reconfigure wards. We are also looking at ensuring we can reduce the pressure on our ICUs and our high dependency units through other areas. That is why we are looking actively at elective surgery to ensure that we have as much capacity as possible. We are in negotiations with private hospitals as well as aged care to ensure we can free up as much capacity as possible. We are working with our district hospitals to see where we can move patients from our big acute hospitals into those and see how we can support those with clinical staff.

I can assure the member, and I can assure Tasmanians, that we are taking this seriously. There is a large body of work going on at the moment but we know that this is a challenge. I also point out that because of the challenge that we know and that we have seen in other jurisdictions, this is why we are taking the measures that we have been. This is why we acted a week and a half ago to escalate to level two. This is why we are working with GPs; this is why we are negotiating capacity; this is why the Premier has only in recent days banned cruise ships and taken further measures at our border.

This situation is evolving. Our professionals are meeting daily and our directors are meeting daily to ensure that the actions we are taking are appropriate. As a government, both the Premier and I, every piece of advice we get that will be to the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanians, we will act immediately.

**Ms WHITE** - Can I take a point of clarification, Madam Speaker? You just indicated that the minister should come back to the House with an answer, and the minister indicated that she would by today.

**Ms COURTNEY** - I will provide the information I am able to.

### **COVID-19 - Testing Facilities**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER Mr GUTWEIN**

[11.03 a.m.]

One of the most important earlier responses to a potential COVID-19 infection is isolation. Currently, public testing facilities are available in Hobart, Launceston, Burnie and Latrobe. Given that many Tasmanians live well outside of these population centres and may have limited access to private transport, GPs are calling for increased testing capacity, particularly in the regions.

What are you doing to increase our testing capacity in regional Tasmania and ensure that all Tasmanians can access testing as required without putting other members of the community at risk? How many tests are there in the state and under what circumstances will they be rationed?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question and her interest in this matter. First, I make the point that one of the safest places in the world that you could be in at the moment is regional Tasmania. If you live in regional Tasmania and you have a concern -

**Dr Woodruff** - Do you think people do not travel to Hobart or Launceston for work?

**Mr GUTWEIN** - because you have travelled overseas -

**Dr Woodruff** - Where do you get your thickness from?

**Mr GUTWEIN** - or you think you have been in close contact with somebody who has or you are exhibiting symptoms, then I encourage you to call the Public Health hotline.

**Dr Woodruff** - That is so irresponsible.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I encourage you to call the Public Health hotline and they will assess the concerns that you have and they will advise you as to whether you should be tested.

**Dr Woodruff** - People have not been able to get through.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Dr Woodruff, order, please.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - That system has been in place now for a number of weeks since we first began testing for any Tasmanian, regardless of where they live. If they have concerns they should make contact with the Public Health hotline or their GP and, based on that advice, then they can proceed to a test or not.

Regarding supplies, my understanding is that we have sufficient supply to ensure that we can continue to keep testing those people who fall into those groups that I have just mentioned. I make the point, and this was something that has become clear, that around the country we are all working from national advice. We are all taking the national advice regarding the testing regime. That is the most appropriate thing we can do. For Tasmanians who have questions about this we are providing the opportunity for them to seek advice from somebody through the Public Health hotline or via their GP. Should there be a view that they require a test then they will be tested.

### **COVID-19 - Support for Vulnerable People**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[11.06 a.m.]

The impacts of COVID-19 are going to be most acutely felt by those in our community who are vulnerable and people like older Tasmanians, people living with a disability and those on low incomes. Other states are working with community service providers and charities and have introduced support packages to assist vulnerable people who may be required to go into self-isolation. This includes ensuring that food provisions and other essential items are delivered to their door. What are you doing to ensure that vulnerable people and those who are self-isolated are supported?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I can assure her that we are on exactly the same page. Today, I will be outlining the supports that we have put in place

and what we will be doing into the future for those people who are self-isolating, or have been tested and are in self-isolation.

In terms of the immediate response, the Government has worked with those who have been asked to self-isolate post a positive test. We have worked with them individually to ensure they have sufficient support in ensuring they can receive the food they need or other supports. With those people and their close contacts, we have ensured the support is available.

This afternoon I will be outlining a comprehensive package -

**Ms White** - Can't you do it now?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. He has promised to do it this afternoon. Let it go.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I make the point again: I understand the desire to play politics in this place. The forms of the House are such that the other side of this House understands there will be a ministerial statement this afternoon that will provide the Government's response. I have made that point.

**Ms O'Byrne** - What is the point of question time?

**Mr GUTWEIN** - Tomorrow you can ask me questions about the package if you wish, or on any other matter. As I have said, we will be providing a comprehensive response -

**Ms White** - It is hardly working together, is it?

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I encourage the Leader of the Opposition and members on the other side to work with us on this. There will be a comprehensive response later this afternoon that will go directly to ensuring that we look after the health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians. Importantly, there are measures in there that will support their jobs and their businesses. We will use the budget as an economic stabiliser through this period to ensure we can provide some level of normality both in an economic and social sense as well. Those measures will be outlined today in a comprehensive package. You are aware of that. I am sorry that you want to take the opportunity to play politics this morning.

**Ms White** - Do not do that. This is question and answer time.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - In providing the answers, I have quite comprehensively, throughout the morning, without playing politics, provided those answers. I will continue to do so via Question Time each day this parliament meets.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition, concerning the questions you have asked today, we are going to be broadly on the same page. A comprehensive response will be released this afternoon. You will be the judges to whether or not it meets all of your needs and aims, but it will be comprehensive. It will be the first stage of the response that we will make, with a further follow-up in the Budget.

## **COVID-19 - Effect on Building and Construction Sector**

**Mr STREET to MINISTER for BUILDING and CONSTRUCTION, Ms ARCHER**

[11.10 a.m.]

Can you outline how the Government is working with the industry to tackle the serious challenges of coronavirus?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Franklin for his interest in this very strong area of our economy. The health, wellbeing and safety of all Tasmanians is our Government's priority, along with supporting the Tasmanian economy and keeping as many Tasmanians in jobs as possible. We will continue to manage the risk of the virus, based on the best and latest evidence and medical advice.

Over the last six years we have demonstrated we are disciplined, unified and a responsible government. We have proven that we are able to build the foundations for, and sustain, strong economic and jobs growth for our state. Rather than play politics, this is a key indicator of our economy.

**Members** interjecting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please.

**Ms ARCHER** - It is important for all Tasmanians to hear this information, even if the Opposition wishes to play politics on it.

We must keep our state's economy strong. I listened to the interjections from the leader of opposition business in that regard and *Hansard* will record them. We must keep our state's economy strong so we can meet existing demands for essential services, but also to respond strongly and with agility to the effects flowing from the coronavirus challenge. While the challenges of coronavirus present some uncertainty, it is an opportunity not to lose sight of positive outlooks for Tasmania, with the state's building and construction sector a vital part of our ongoing growth.

The Master Builders Tasmania Industry Forecast, February 2020, which was released yesterday, indicated the strong state growth of recent years is set to continue in coming years. According to the forecast, the total value of construction work is expected to expand significantly over the next two years, including expansion of 12.6 per cent next financial year and by 2021-22 reach a total value of \$3.98 billion.

In positive signs for the future, the forecast shows that the demand for new building work is strong as the state continues to win more residents from the mainland. Master Builders Tasmania has largely credited government-backed infrastructure and our nation-leading economy for an unprecedented pipeline of commercial and engineering construction projects.

**Mr O'Byrne** - This is so time wasting.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order, please.

**Ms ARCHER** - This growth has Tasmania bucking the national trend and leading the way on many true state and territory indicators.

While we know these are challenging times, particularly around the impact of the coronavirus, Tasmania's building and construction sector is critical to the ongoing strength of our economy. That is why we are working closely with key stakeholders including Master Builders Tasmania and the Housing Industry Association to identify how we can best assist their industry members through this difficult period.

The constant sniping -

**Mr Ferguson** - Yes, it is disrespectful.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Order. Allow the speaker to be heard, please.

**Ms ARCHER** - I was in a public place the other day and was approached by a number of people from the building and construction sector who were very willing to work with government in relation to their strong pipeline of work. It is an important area of our economy and is an important creator of jobs in Tasmania. Now, more than ever before, this information is relevant to canvass in this place.

This was particularly evident at last week's industry round table, hosted by the Government, where both organisations made important contributions on how to protect and strengthen our building and construction sector. I thank the MBA and the HIA for their contributions at that round table.

In conclusion, Tasmanians trust a majority Liberal government to prudently manage our finances in uncertain times. A strong economy, including a strong building and construction sector, is the best buffer for emerging challenges.

**Time expired.**

## **VEHICLE AND TRAFFIC AMENDMENT (ROAD VEHICLE STANDARDS) BILL 2020 (No. 8)**

### **First Reading**

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

## **ARCHITECTS AMENDMENT BILL 2020 (No. 6)**

### **First Reading**

Bill presented by **Ms Archer** and read the first time.

## **SAFE CLIMATE BILL 2020 (No. 9)**

### **First Reading**

Bill presented by **Dr Woodruff** and read the first time.

### **SPEAKER'S WARRANT**

#### **Deputy Chair of Committees - Appointment of Mr Street MP**

**Madam SPEAKER** - Honourable members, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 I hereby nominate the member for Franklin, Mr Nic Street, to act as Deputy Chair of the Committees in the absence of, or when requested so to do so, by the Chair of Committees.

Given under my hand this 17th Day of March.

### **MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR**

#### **Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation - Resignation of Mrs Petrusma MP**

**Madam SPEAKER** - Honourable members, I have received the following message from Her Excellency the Governor, dated 11 March 2020 -

Dear Madam Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that on 3 March 2020, the Honourable Jacqui Petrusma MP tendered her resignation as a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation.

I have enclosed a copy of Mrs Petrusma's letter of resignation.

Yours sincerely

C A WARNER  
Governor

### **MOTION**

#### **Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation and Joint House Committee - Appointment of Mr Street MP**

[11.19 a.m.]

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

That Mr Street be appointed to serve on the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation in accordance with the provisions of section 4 of the Subordinate Legislation Committee Act 1969; and

That Mr Street be appointed to serve on the Joint Committee of both Houses to manage the Library in place of Mrs Rylah.

I know that Mr Street will enjoy his service on all of those important committees. I appreciate, on behalf of the Government, the service of Mrs Petrusma and Mrs Rylah and commend the work now of Mr Street.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **PREMIER'S ADDRESS**

**Resumed from 5 March 2020 (page 88)**

[11.21 a.m.]

**Ms DOW** (Braddon) - Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present my response to the Premier's Address. It seems a lot longer than a week ago that we sat in this place, and much has happened in that week.

The coronavirus is an unprecedented pandemic, with the health and economic impact being felt the world over and here in our local communities. It is not business as usual. From the cancellation of major community events or ordinary everyday rituals, like school sport or Girl Guides, everything has changed and life is no longer as we knew it. National and international events, including sporting events, are being cancelled, with significant economic impacts being felt right across the country.

There are also major concerns about whether we should be sending our children to school. Parents and educators need concise and considered information. If and when our schools close over the next weeks, ample information and notice needs to be given to the Tasmanian public to ensure that educators, parents, carers and employers have time to plan for this huge disruption.

Expert advice and the experiences of other countries around the world suggest that we cannot overprepare for this, and it is never too early to act. In fact, the earlier the better, is the current advice of many experts the world over. We need to be guided by the experts.

There are members of our community who are gripped with panic. There are some who are not but, quite rightly, most are confused about what they should or should not be doing. As we watch the scenes of emergency situations evolving overseas and take in the constant rolling media coverage, it is all-consuming. This is frightening for people and with a number of mediums including social media available for people to get information, it is very important that clear and concise information and directives are provided by government through a variety of mediums.

A clear, concise and targeted communication strategy with the federal government has been missing in action. More information provided will assist with relieving anxiety and fear. People want fulsome information and a clear understanding of the actions being taken to mitigate risk, keep our communities well and our businesses afloat. They want to understand the seriousness and they want to be able to plan accordingly.

Withholding information fosters distrust and fear, and the responses we are seeing locally in our communities demonstrate this. Our activities of daily living are being disrupted, including our



weekly trip to the supermarket, where our shelves are empty and customers are fighting over toilet rolls. Our retail workers are being abused, and I put on the record today my thanks to them for the work they are doing in our local communities.

Our culture and social mores and customs, such as a simple act of shaking hands or embracing one another in a hug, are also being questioned, and this change feels wrong and is very confronting.

Media outlets themselves are facing the threat of closure and will need to prepare for this as it becomes challenging to share up-to-date information. We have no choice but to endure this significant change to our way of life and look out for each other and, as community leaders, act swiftly and decisively to reduce the spread of coronavirus, flatten the curve and ensure the threat to our health system is reduced.

This is also applicable to the need for immediate and ongoing economic stimulus. This is a very different situation to what we found ourselves in with the GFC. We will require additional supports in our communities.

My heart goes out to all those in our industries, businesses and their employees who are impacted by this pandemic. Small to medium enterprise is the backbone of our state's economy. We must provide economic stimulus and support but we must also offer psychosocial support and financial counselling to smaller business owners and those employed in small business right across our state. This is an incredibly stressful and distressing time for them and this support needs to be decentralised out into our regions.

This will also be a distressing time for employers as they have to let staff go and for those staff and their families. Financial support for casual staff is paramount and has been raised, as has the deficit in assistance for sole traders. Our tourism industry is certainly suffering and has also been severely impacted.

Many Tasmanians already live alone and are isolated. A situation such as this, which we find ourselves in, now intensifies this social isolation and investment in community-based psychosocial support services will also be essential, as will the emergency response required to supply food and essential services to isolated individuals and families. All of this needs to be planned for now and Tasmanians need to know that there is in fact help at hand, as would be the case in a natural disaster.

I believe local government has a very important role to play in this and perhaps regional committees similar to those formed post natural disasters in the past may be an effective way to plan effectively across communities to centrally disseminate information and coordinate community responses. Due to social distancing this would mean virtual or telephone meetings and would importantly include agencies working together with local government, state emergency services and community service organisations to plan for providing supplies to those in isolation and the closure of non-essential services.

Our response may vary across the regions. Each level of government has a role to play, as do the opposition parties, and we have clearly stated our intentions to work collaboratively with the Government for the good of all Tasmanians and, indeed, our country.

We need plans for quarantine facilities. We have offered some suggestions regarding using hotels and there is also some merit in local government facilities being used around the state. Our most vulnerable, our elderly, our immuno-compromised but, importantly, all age groups will not be

unaffected by this. Greater financial support for those self-isolating and unable to attend work is needed, as is a greater resource in our healthcare system. We need increased investment in PPE for our frontline workers and health workers and investment in increased testing, no matter where you live around Tasmania. We know that this has been successful in other countries.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all those working in an already compromised health system and our primary healthcare setting.

The new Premier stated that his Government would be a compassionate one. The current uncertain times in our community present no more important time than now for compassionate leadership that instils trust and shares information from experts with our communities. We should be looking out for each other, not fighting over toilet rolls, and spreading kindness, not fear. We will get through this, but we have to be willing to endure disruption to our daily lives and the things we enjoy for the greater good, for the health and wellbeing of those we love, live and work alongside and to all those who provide care for us each day.

My thoughts are with all those currently impacted in Tasmania with COVID-19 and those in self-isolation or anxiously awaiting their test results. It is a very difficult and unnerving time for us all but we will get through it. A whole-of-community, government, union, business and industry response will be required.

I move now to my broader contribution on the Premier's Address. Whilst it might seem that some of the things I go on to talk about today are not the main priority for the state at present, they certainly are the foundation from which we start as a state to look at how we respond to the immediate threat of the coronavirus.

We have a new, unelected premier. It would be fair to say that Will Hodgman's resignation came as a surprise to most, his colleagues included. The fact that there was no clear succession plan was all a bit awkward, so early in the new year the division in the Tasmanian Liberal Party was front and centre for all to see. Others have said it was fascinating to watch it unfold. I take this opportunity to expend my best wishes to Will Hodgman and his family and thank him for his contribution and service to Tasmania and its people. There may have been a change to the political landscape in Tasmania but as you will see throughout my contribution today, the challenges remain for this Government. Unlike the Government, Tasmanian Labor remains committed to creating a better and fairer Tasmania for all.

As I sat in traffic in Hobart this week, my attention was drawn to the number plate of the car in front and to a familiar phrase, 'Tasmania explore the possibilities'. With imagination and vision, I believe Tasmania can reach its full potential and the possibilities are endless. Right now, though, not all Tasmanians are getting the opportunity to explore the possibilities. There is a clear dichotomy in Tasmania between the haves and the have-nots. It is important given the current circumstances that we find ourselves in. We are now seeing the result of a short-term approach taken by this Government impacting on the quality of life and opportunities that we as proud Tasmanians have enjoyed for generations.

Tasmania is the state of beautiful landscapes, talented people and tremendous opportunities and possibilities. We must think big, think differently and have the courage to face up to our challenges and plan together as a community for our future.

This Government has no long-term plan for Tasmania, no shared objectives or goals or no insight into what is important to Tasmanians. The Government and the Greens are all about politics, not Tasmanians. We know the politics of division is not good for Tasmanians and the Labor Party is not interested in the extreme left or extreme right. We have a party for everyday Tasmanians. We will not be drawn into wedge politics. We are clear on our priorities. We want to help Tasmanians get a job, have access to quality skills and training, make sure they can get into see their GP when they need to and have a roof over their heads. We recognise that one in four Tasmanians lives in poverty and this is simply unacceptable.

The Government needs to recognise that the time has come that we cannot continue to do things the way that we have always done them. The Government needs to stop throwing good money after bad. Why has it taken this Government six years to acknowledge that all Tasmanians are not benefiting from our economic prosperity and why is compassion a priority now?

During his address the Premier stated that this Government was elected in 2014 to undertake the following:

... deliver a strong economy and jobs; build Tasmania's infrastructure for the twenty-first century; keep Tasmanians safe; invest in health and education and Tasmanians in need; act on the cost of living and protect the Tasmanian way of life.

In all six areas they have failed. Under 'delivering a strong economy and jobs', our economic position is vulnerable and that is no more evident than as we see events unfold around the world, around the country and locally, the impact of this pandemic on our economic wellbeing and our vulnerability. We are vulnerable to external factors. The recent fires and now the coronavirus are examples of this. Economic growth is not translating into full job creation in Tasmania and over 70 per cent of new jobs since 2014 have been part-time. Right now, there are 46 100 Tasmanians who are either unemployed or need more hours. In my electorate of Braddon 1300 jobs have been lost in the past 12 months.

We look at 'building Tasmania's infrastructure for the twenty-first century': failing to build anything from the completion of K Block - today there has been an announcement about that, I acknowledge - the mirage of the underground bus mall, the coastal pathway where I live and the delay in the delivery of the *Spirits*, are just a few examples of this.

'Keeping Tasmanians safe': crime is at an all-time high with horrific crimes being committed and concerns about community safety, especially in our northern communities. Demand for Family Violence and Counselling Services has tripled and the Government needs to respond with adequate funding to ensure the service can cope. The Family Violence and Counselling Service employees have been calling on the Government to provide an additional \$1 million annually in funding to make sure they can help some of the state's most vulnerable women and children in their time of need. How can you justify \$600 000 for a consultant to tell you how to save money on the Bridgewater bridge and not find the money required to protect vulnerable women and children?

'Investing in education, health and Tasmanians in need': Tasmanians are the unhealthiest, oldest, worst-educated, most under-employed and most dependent on Government benefits in Australia. That is the foundation that we start from as we look to strategies to overcome the severe impacts of the coronavirus in Tasmania. All these factors impact significantly on the health status of Tasmanians. This Government has failed to invest in primary health care, allied health and has chosen to concentrate its efforts on funding the acute care sector.

I will read an excerpt from the recent TasCOSS Budget Priorities Statement during my contribution. It says:

Thousands of Tasmanians cannot access basic health care when they are sick. Thousands of Tasmanians cannot afford to see a general practitioner, fill a prescription or access follow-up treatment for their chronic diseases. Well over 200 000 Tasmanians have two or more chronic conditions.

The key priority for the Government in preparing the 2020-21 state budget must be to re-set access to basic health care available to Tasmanians in our communities, not just in our hospitals.

In doing so, the state government would fulfil its core duty of care to Tasmanians, ease pressure on the state's hospital system and open up a wealth of federal funds to cover costs.

Every time a Tasmanian who needs a GP does not access one, the costs are threefold for them, their community and our state. The person gets sicker, suffers more and will eventually require acute care in the long term. The person will ultimately present to the emergency department and will often require one or more potentially preventable hospitalisations costing thousands of dollars and placing an avoidable burden on our overcrowded hospital system.

Tasmania misses out on Commonwealth dollars because a GP directed Commonwealth-funded care plan is not set up to fund the care the person requires. Therefore, the Tasmania health budget picks up the costs.

This is so important to set the scene for where we are at in Tasmania around the provision of health services and the dire need to invest more in primary health care, particularly across our regions.

Recently, the Commissioner for Children and Young People had an editorial in the *Mercury* newspaper which presented some alarming statistics around education and the wellbeing of our children and young people in Tasmania. I will read a couple of those into *Hansard* under this particular criterion which the Government is assessing itself against. That is:

... a 37 Per Cent Increase in the number of children and young people in out-of-home care in Tasmania since 2011.

Children And Young People who report having a mental or behavioural condition has increased from 10.6 per cent in 2012 to 18.8 per cent in 2018.

The proportion of children meeting all 21 markers on the Kindergarten Development Check has declined year on year from 74.5 per cent in 2013 to 67.8 per cent in 2018.

This is a stand-out for me:

The Proportion of school leavers aged 15 to 24 who are fully engaging in education, training or employment is 48.1 per cent in 2019 compared to 74.6 per cent in 2015.

That speaks for itself.

The last criterion was around acting on the cost of living and protecting the Tasmanian way of life. Less and higher priced regional accommodation, increasing cost of living, sitting in traffic, unemployment, unsafe communities, over-populated holiday spots are all threats to the Tasmanian way of life.

In the words of the recent Tasmania Report, the significance of economic indicators alone can cloud vision and judgment and this is the position Tasmania finds itself in right now. Our budget position is deteriorating and we are moving towards a position of net debt with little to show, a position we have not been in since the last Liberal government was in power.

I will take some time now to examine progress made against my shadow portfolio areas. Small business is the first one and I have spoken at length about the current situation and the threat to small business owners and employees right around the state at this very moment.

Labor is a strong supporter of small business and we want to do more to support small business, particularly across regional Tasmania. Whilst the Government talks up business across the state, the reality is in regional areas, and particularly in the retail sector in those regional areas, many small business operators are doing it really tough and I am afraid to say, that is only going to get worse.

The recent red-tape reduction update released recently was largely a cut and paste exercise by the Government and that says it all. We are working through our industry advisory councils and with key stakeholders around our ideas and positive plans to support small business in the future in Tasmania. Over the next weeks to months and years, we will certainly be looking very constructively to work with stakeholders and the Government in their response to small business. It is absolutely paramount as we take on the uncertainty we are seeing with the coronavirus around the state.

The second shadow portfolio I will talk about is regional development. The Government is still failing to strategically invest in regional Tasmania. It talks about it a lot but it does not do it. From poor access to skills and training, poor community transport services, poor access to general practice, the list goes on. We believe local government is an important strategic partner in regional development and in addressing these issues. I want to ask about the \$6 million that was allocated to the strategic growth initiative. What has been achieved with that and how many regional Tasmanians have really benefitted?

If we look at transport, we have congestion, no progress made on the Derwent ferries, no underground bus mall, more feasibility studies on light rail, poor public transport amenities, and that is right around the state. We have a compelling vision from the RACT that developed a vision around transport and improvements in and around Hobart and I would hope the Government is working very constructively with the RACT to implement some of those suggested actions within that vision.

In the north there are changes to bus services which have caused significant disruption to people's daily lives and people are concerned about it, despite the rhetoric of the Government. I know that my fellow colleagues in Bass, Michelle O'Byrne and Jennifer Houston, have been working with the local community to address some of these concerns. In the north-west the review of bus services and school bus services continues to concern people. Our changes will not be implemented until April but I believe it will be a case of people not understanding the changes or having the information until they are in place. We will continue to offer assistance through our office in Burnie.

The community transport scheme is another area of concern that has been raised with me regarding caps on funding, therefore making it more difficult for people to access community cars, particularly in rural and regional Tasmania to get to critical medical appointments such as dialysis. I have written to the board of CTST and spoken with them at length about that and there is a need for greater investment, particularly from the state Government, into CTST. There is also a significant need for investment in public transport in the upcoming state Budget.

That brings me to local government. Feedback from stakeholders suggests the review of the act seems to have stalled. There are sentiments within the sector and the community that the code of conduct needs to be reviewed. I understand that the minister has undertaken to look at that. I commend local government on the work they do around our communities and the important services they provide. We will see that important role come into play again around looking at responses to providing essential services across Tasmania.

In looking at planning, there has been so much emphasis on planning being around regulation in this state for a very long time and we are seeing the consequences of that. As to the progress of the LPSs, it is unclear whether they have all been submitted yet and there have been some significant concerns about the changes mooted in those local provision schedules by local communities. Riana is one that comes to mind for me and I have met with concerned community members about that.

The major projects legislation is undergoing its third iteration and is currently being prepared. That preparation started in 2016 and was meant to be tabled by December last year. We are looking at paying a consultant to review the role of the TPC when really there is a need for greater investment in the TPC and the PPU to enable state policies to be developed and that is still lagging. One of the things that is constantly raised through our industry advisory councils is difficulty with the current planning process and the need for better strategic planning across the state.

That brings me to advanced manufacturing. I am proud of the advanced manufacturing sector in Tasmania and particularly in my electorate of Braddon. The sector has undergone significant change over the last few years but that change has brought loads of opportunities to those small to medium enterprises and to the sector. I recently attended the opening of Jayben's new facility at Cooee in Burnie which was enabled through a government grant and also the launch of their collaborative project with Grain Resources where they launched their world-class specialised vehicle that they have been working in partnership to develop. It always amazes me that these types of things are being developed in my own backyard. We do not talk that up enough and we should be really proud of the work people are doing in the advanced manufacturing sector right across Tasmania.

Since I have been in this role, advance manufacturers have raised with me the need for access to skills and training for middle management positions and leadership roles, as they work to embed systems and processes in their businesses which will enable them to receive manufacturing

certification and, more importantly, access to markets. The anecdotal feedback I have received also said that the focus on defence has not been as big a benefit to the sector as first envisaged. I am looking forward to working advanced manufacturers over the next couple of years as we look at our policies around an investment in advanced manufacturing.

I thank our volunteer and career firefighters fighting the fires in Tasmania over the Christmas period, and those who travelled interstate to assist with the unprecedented fire events on the mainland. We thank you very much.

We all love living in Tasmania, and I am proud to call the north-west coast of Tasmania my home. It is the place I have grown up in, that has provided me with many opportunities and a unique quality of life. Quality of life is indeed very important to Tasmanians.

The recent mining tragedy on the west coast was devastating for our west coast communities. I extend my deepest sympathy to Cameron Goss's family, his friends, his loved ones, the team at Henty, and our west coast communities. It has been an incredibly difficult time of uncertainty and loss.

In looking back at the last 12 months in the electorate, some key projects come to mind. We are still awaiting the delivery of the palliative care beds at the Mersey Community Hospital. As to the Cradle Mountain gateway precinct expressions of interest, we are still awaiting the public release of those successful tenders. We are still waiting for the development of the antenatal clinic at the North West Regional Hospital. There has been significant delays with the *Spirits of Tasmania*. We are awaiting the development of the Agricultural Centre of Excellence at Freer Farm. The coastal pathway project has stalled and there has been a lack of action on erosion. We have seen the closure of rehabilitation beds in Burnie and there has been a lack of investment by the State in the Burnie Court.

We have seen numerous skills packages promised by federal and state government representatives to our region, but who is really benefitting from these skills packages? It is not clear. Regarding the skills hub, I think people are pretty disappointed that that is not a physical structure providing services and greater access to skills and training for young people and those transitioning in the workforce. There is a bit of disappointment about the skills packages that have come to Braddon and what has really been achieved with those.

Over the last year, I have enjoyed getting out and about around the electorate, learning more about local issues and, more importantly, how I can assist my local community. I thank the people of Braddon for what is an incredible privilege it is being your local member and I look forward to the year ahead. I would like to thank Kaye and Jess for their work in my electorate office and Theresa for her stellar job volunteering.

We are often asked in this place about alternatives. I am proud to say Labor has a suite of positive, fully costed policies that will make a difference to the lives of Tasmanians. Last week, we held our first jobs forum in Burnie. Unfortunately we have had to cancel the others due to the coronavirus, but when it is safe to do so we will continue this important work with our communities.

We invited the community to come along and learn about our free TAFE policy and plan for jobs growth across Tasmania. We also invited them to share with us their experiences in getting a job or getting access to skills and training. It was a pretty frank conversation and I thank all of those who attended for sharing their personal experiences with us.

We have announced our Housing Works project, our commitment to building 490 homes and 75 apprentices. We are also committed to investing in mental health workers in all Tasmanian schools.

Our primary focus in 2020 is to work with the Government on the immediate and long-term response to the coronavirus to keep all Tasmanians safe and well, and to support our local industries and businesses. We are also focused on giving people the skills they need to get a job, supporting the industry that provide those jobs, attracting new business and industry to invest in Tasmania and supporting existing industry to expand and diversify to employ more Tasmanians. This is our commitment to Tasmanians.

[11.50 a.m.]

**Mrs PETRUSMA** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Premier's address.

As a very proud member of the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government it is an honour and privilege to be back for this the third year of the 49th Parliament of Tasmania.

I congratulate Premier Gutwein on his election as Leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party of Tasmania and as the 46th Premier of Tasmania. With Deputy Premier Jeremy Rockliff, the Premier has been an integral part of the leadership team of the Tasmanian Liberal Party since his election in 2002 and, as Treasurer, Premier Gutwein has certainly overseen the repair of Tasmania's finances and the turnaround in our economy over the last six years. I also congratulate Premier Gutwein on his first state of the state Premier's Address. As the Premier outlined, as a government our priorities continue to be: to deliver a strong economy and jobs; to build Tasmania's infrastructure for the 21st century; to keep Tasmania safe; to invest in health, education and Tasmanians in need; to act on the cost of living; and to protect the Tasmanian way of life.

This Government also knows that there is more to be done, especially during this unprecedented time. However, we know that we need to ensure that all Tasmanians, regardless of their background or where they live or their circumstances, are able to grasp the opportunities that our growing economy offers. This is why this Tasmanian majority Liberal Government will address the challenges, including those of the COVID-19 pandemic, as we likewise do all the opportunities. We aim for strong economic and strategic growth so that more Tasmanians across our region can share in our state's prosperity making our great state an even better place in which to live, work and raise a family.

I especially acknowledge and pay tribute, with a very grateful heart, to my former Franklin colleague and the former premier of Tasmania, the honourable Will Hodgman. For nearly two decades, Will Hodgman showed true leadership and dedicated service to the people of Tasmania and most of all to the electorate of Franklin that he dearly loved. Today, I say a huge thank you to Will Hodgman for his leadership and loyalty, as well as for being a heartfelt and passionate, very committed, inspiring and wonderful colleague of mine in the great electorate of Franklin for the nearly 10 years that we served together. I thank him for all that he did to lead this Government towards even more exciting days ahead.

I also commend the immense contribution to the Liberal party made by Will. Will Hodgman is the Liberal Party's longest-serving leader, having served for 14 years, including six years as premier. He won both the 2014 and 2018 state elections with over 50 per cent of the primary vote,



the first time in consecutive elections for any party since the 1970s and the first time in over 100 years for our side of politics.

I have deeply appreciated Will's friendship and incredible support of me and my family over so many years. I will miss him deeply. Today, best wishes and many blessings for the future to Will, Nicky and their family and a big thank you for the many sacrifices that they have all made for the people of Tasmania for so many years as a family.

Parliamentary careers are demanding ones. No-one knows this more than the family and friends who surround you. I am very grateful to my number one supporter, my husband Tim, as well as my children and all our grandchildren. I would not be here without their love and encouragement. I am always conscious of the many sacrifices that they too make on a daily basis to allow me to have a career in public life.

Talking about a career in public life I very much welcome back my wonderful parliamentary colleague and fellow member for Franklin, the honourable Nic Street MP. Franklin will be well served by Nic Street in this parliament. He has always demonstrated his commitment to working hard for his electorate. It is great to be working together again in the best electorate in Australia, the great electorate of Franklin.

I also gratefully thank the world's best and most amazing electorate officer, Rochelle, without whom I could definitely not do this role. Likewise all the wonderful Franklin members of the Liberal Party who supported me, and the Liberal team, are invaluable.

This month also marks the second anniversary of the very sad and tragic passing of our former Liberal member for Pembroke, the honourable Dr Vanessa Goodwin, who died in March 2018 after a battle with brain cancer, aged only 48. While Vanessa is primarily known for her inspiring work as a criminologist before entering the Tasmanian Parliament in 2009 and serving as Attorney-General during her time in government, Vanessa as minister for the Arts was also a very passionate advocate for the arts portfolio. In this role, she provided strong support for the sector, overseeing reforms to ensure more contemporary management of TMAG and the creative industries. The arts and cultural sector is one of our strongest growth sectors in terms of economic value and jobs. According to ABS data, the state's arts and cultural sector injected approximately \$179 million into the local economy last year and employs around 5000 Tasmanians.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government is proud to support the new vibrant Hedberg precinct, Hobart's newest creative and performing arts centre, which is one of Tasmania's most ambitious cultural and arts infrastructure projects ever delivered. It is a partnership between the Tasmanian Government, the University of Tasmania and the Theatre Royal, in line with our plan to grow our creative industries and to attract even more visitors to our state. It is wonderful to hear that the Hedberg precinct in Campbell Street will now honour Vanessa as it prepares to open its doors by having two areas named in honour of Vanessa - the Vanessa Goodwin City Room and the Vanessa Goodwin Roof Garden.

I congratulate Lily Russell, who was recently announced as the inaugural recipient of the Dr Vanessa Goodwin Law Reform Scholarship. I wish Lily all the best for the future.

With regard to my role as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees, I am inspired by and really enjoy the respective committees I have been a member of and continue to be a member of. Committee work is a very important role and function for members of parliament. I commend the

professionalism, positive attitude and commitment that members in both this House and the upper House of the various committee show. I will also put on the record how much I have appreciated working with the respective committee secretaries and thank them for their excellent professionalism and tireless support, not only on committees but for what they do each and every day for us in this House.

Unfortunately, again this summer, we have witnessed intense bushfires. I thank our firefighters and our volunteers for their bravery, commitment and selflessness both here in Tasmania and on the mainland. So many brave people put their lives on the line to keep Tasmanians and Australians safe and no words can express our collective gratitude. My sincere condolences to all the families, friends and communities for those who lost their lives, their homes and animals this fire season.

As we saw last year, especially in my electorate of Franklin in the Huon Valley, Tasmania faces the same threats as we saw this summer on the mainland. I therefore very much welcome the Premier's announcement that this Government will commit to doing even more on top of our leading-edge fuel reduction program to keep Tasmanians safe and to be better prepared before next summer so as to protect life, property, infrastructure and our natural assets.

Our fuel reduction burns conducted over the autumn 2019 burn season have resulted in Tasmania's statewide relative bush fire risk being the lowest it has been for 15 years. However, the traditional window available for fuel reduction is narrowing and the intensity of our bushfires is increasing. On top of this, under the current planning controls and regulations, landholders and our emergency services are limited in taking preventative action. This will now change.

To keep Tasmanians safe, the Government will introduce legislation in the coming months to make it easier, faster and a more streamlined process to reduce fuel and mechanically clear vegetation for a fuel break, once a bushfire hazard reduction plan has been issued, while balancing environmental and community concerns. The legislation will ensure that landholders, both public and private, are responsible for undertaking fuel reduction activities under a bushfire hazard management plan in order to keep the broader community safe.

We will also create two new fuel reduction teams with 12 extra staff to reduce fuel loads across the state. We will provide additional resources to help landowners plan and undertake fuel reduction activities. We will provide more resources to the Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure we have winch-insertion capability for remote area fire teams within Tasmania so we can insert specialist firefighters and respond quickly when needed. We will also begin the establishment of a new state operations centre in a central location through which all of our emergency services can coordinate our response to emergencies.

We have announced the creation of three new specialist Aboriginal ranger positions within Parks and the creation of a \$100 000 pilot grant program to work with the Aboriginal community, in order to draw on their expertise in fuel reduction and the maintenance of landscapes through cultural burning.

The Huon Valley is still in the recovery phase from last year's devastating fires. I would like to again pay tribute and thank the Huon Valley Council, the wider community, as well as all the efforts of our emergency services and all the volunteers who, through their commitment and diligence, ensured that no lives were lost. I also acknowledge and applaud the fact that during the fires and over the years since the fires we have seen the best of the wider community, government, community sector organisations and the business community coming together and working in

tandem to combine all their efforts to help the Huon Valley to rebuild what was lost and to support each other.

Sadly, last year four homes were destroyed due to the Riveaux Road blaze and many more were threatened in the vicinity, particularly at Geeveston. To aid in the healing process, it was great to attend the official opening of the Riveaux Road memorial barbecue with minister Mark Shelton on Saturday at the Geeveston Fire Brigade. This memorial commemorates the devastating impact that the fires had on the Huon Valley, as well as expresses thanks and gratitude to all the volunteers and members of the Tasmania Fire Service, their interstate colleagues and everyone who assisted during this tragic period. The memorial also plays a vital role in honouring the true resilience, spirit and courage of the Huon Valley community, who have never given up in their quest to rebuild from this tragic event.

This rebuild includes the iconic Tahune Airwalk, which was severely damaged in these fires. It was fantastic to see Tahune reopen to the public on 29 February. This reopening is a major boost for the community. I congratulate the minister, Mr Barnett, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, Tahune Adventures Tasmania and all their contractors for their investment, hard work and efforts in getting this popular and important tourism site for the Huon Valley back up and running to full operation. The airwalk is now employing both former and new employees and providing job opportunities to locals in the area, with the flow-on economic benefits to the Geeveston community and the wider Huon Valley, immense.

As Alex Heroys, chief executive of Destination Southern Tasmania, stated in the *Mercury* on 29 February:

Like many Tasmanians, we have strode the Airwalk and marvelled at the views it grants us within the trees. Just to stand still and smell the bush is truly special. My fervent wish ... is that people across the state will walk the airwalk again. The experience will be different, but rich with the story of regeneration.

When you drive from Hobart to Tahune Adventures you pass through Huonville, Franklin and Geeveston, stopping to fill your car with petrol, shout the kids an ice-cream, or grab a coffee at one of the many restaurants and takeaway outlets on the way.

A little further, past Dover and Southport, lie the wonderous Hastings Caves, with their spectacular subterranean formations including flow stone, stalactites, columns, shawls, straws, stalagmites and the usual helictites. But the reality of the Huon Valley is that there is so much more to see and do.

If you really want to support your Tasmanians in the far south, stay a night, maybe two. Eat in the many fantastic eateries. Indulge in a new experience in the waterways and sample a few wines. The Huon Valley is abundant with many well-known experiences, cider and wine enthusiasts can get their fill, Cygnet, Franklin and Geeveston each boast an impressive array of superb eateries, there are classes for cooking enthusiasts, experiences for water lovers, from kayaking to boat building, not to mention art studios and galleries at every turn. Visitors can drive all the way to the end of Australia, stopping to enjoy short walks, wildlife and World Heritage wilderness that are second to none on our planet. All these make for a beautiful, although long day out from Hobart for the

unsuspecting visitor. I say 'unsuspecting' because the most common feedback tourism operators receive is, 'We had no idea how much there is to see and do down here'. A day trip is nowhere near enough time, especially when you consider some of the superb accommodation. Why wouldn't you stay a night or two? Some are even dog-friendly. It is well worth making your way home up the Channel Highway or even popping over to Bruny Island for even more eating, drinking and water loving. And, as you meander around the Huon and Channel, why not challenge yourself to uncover a treasure you never knew existed? Every little township and hamlet is a gift waiting to be discovered, and every cent you can afford to spend is supporting local businesses and the people who rely on them.

I urge those who have the opportunity to get in the car and head south this autumn. Whether it is for a day, a night or long weekend, you will not be disappointed and along the way you will be helping those communities on their continued road to recover.

Mr Deputy Speaker, like Alex, I too encourage everyone, both visitors and locals, to visit our iconic Tahune Airwalk, the Riveaux Road memorial barbecue area, as well the wider Huon Valley and Channel region so as to support this wonderful, inspiring wider community in their continued recovery, especially in this time of travel restrictions.

When it comes to tourism, Tasmania is world-class. It injects \$2.5 billion into our economy and supports more than 42 000 local jobs. The recent Qantas Australian Tourism Awards are a spectacular recognition of our success, with Tasmania taking home more medals than any other state or territory. Fearless Tasmanians quietly pursue the extraordinary and Tasmanians have definitely set themselves apart from the crowd, including the very inspiring Gary and Lorraine Ashdown, who won gold for their Ashdowns of Dover bed and breakfast hosted accommodation and Rob Pennicott and his fabulous team, who won bronze for Pennicott Wilderness Journeys, major tour and transport operators.

Speaking about the pursuit of extraordinary, I thank everyone who volunteered, had a stall, entertained or attended this year's Taste of the Huon. This was its twenty-eighth year. Once again, the Taste of the Huon showcased Tasmania's exceptional food, wine, cider, beer, fresh produce, arts and crafts and fabulous live entertainment at the Ranelagh Recreational Grounds on Sunday, 8 March and Monday, 9 March. The Premier, Nic Street and I certainly enjoyed attending the Taste on the Monday and it was fantastic to meet the people behind the businesses that help the Huon Valley thrive, as well as seeing around 20 000 attendees enjoying over 100 stalls, including Churchill Brewing and Bruny Island Beer Co, Masaaki's Sushi and Waji Food and excellent entertainment, including Bjorn Again and crowd favourites John X, Frankie J Holden and Wilbur Wilde. This year there was something to entertain everyone.

I especially commend and thank all the volunteers who each and every year go above and beyond to ensure that the Taste gets better and better. The Taste is run entirely by volunteers who are passionate about ensuring not only great food, beverages, arts, crafts and live entertainment, but also to ensure that the Taste also caters for families with lots of children's activities and a host of rides and ensure the festival continues to play its essential role in promoting the Huon Valley to visitors, who flock to the region to sample its fine produce.

The Franklin electorate is also the base for Tasmania's two largest salmon farming companies, Tassal and Huon Aquaculture. The farmgate value production for salmon in Tasmania for 2018-19 was \$824 million, with the majority of this production occurring within the Franklin electorate. In Franklin there are also numerous other shellfish farming operations with an estimated farmgate value of \$10 million. Combined, both sectors of the agriculture industry and the Franklin electorate directly employ approximately 1500 FTEs.

The Franklin electorate also plays a key role in Tasmania's iconic wild commercial fisheries such as abalone and rock lobster. For example, Actaeon Island located in Franklin has some of the most productive wild abalone fishing grounds in the world. In the 2019 abalone season 737 894 kilos of abalone was processed in Franklin, equating to 58.4 per cent of the state's \$82.5 million total catch. The commercial rock lobster fishery provides significant benefits from exports. For the 2019-20 rock lobster season 310 349 kilos of rock lobster was unloaded in Franklin, equating to 32.3 per cent of the state's total \$89 million catch.

Franklin is also central in the control of one of Tasmania's most significant marine pests. *Centrostephanus*, or the long-spined sea urchin, is a marine pest that is impacting the habitat of our high-value rock lobster and abalone fisheries. Therefore, the development of a new fishery which targets this sea urchin is vitally important for the sustained productivity of these fisheries. It is fantastic that a fish processing facility at Electrona is leading the way in processing and marketing the roe from this sea urchin, including recently processing more than 90 per cent of the 555 tonnes processed statewide.

The Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is investing in the infrastructure our growing state needs with a \$3.7 billion infrastructure program to maintain our strong economic momentum and create a further 10 000 jobs across the next four years. As a member for Franklin I am particularly excited to see the raft of infrastructure measures being planned and implemented to deal with traffic congestion in Hobart, as people from both sides of the river in my electorate need to get into and quite often through the city to get to their work, drop off kids at school or just participate in daily activities.

Last week, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Michael Ferguson, Nic Street and I visited one of the sites in the Richmond Road master plan, this stage of work being the new Cambridge link road connecting Richmond Road to the Tasman Highway at an interchange. This link road will provide a more efficient route that avoids Cambridge village and is due to be completed this year.

I note that some of the other works being planned for the Franklin electorate include a \$17 million East Derwent Highway duplication at Geilston Bay, \$1.2 million for the Rosny ramps and \$1.6 million for the Bowen Bridge eastern connector. There is \$12.5 million for the Hastings Cave road sealing which is due for completion this year, \$7.5 million for the Channel Highway diversion at Huonville, and \$1.5 million for the Huon Highway visitor safety treatments. On Bruny Island there will be upgrades from Alonnah to Lunawanna of \$6.5 million, again due for completion mid-2020, as well as a \$1.5 million grant to Kingborough Council for other Bruny Island road upgrades.

Furthermore, detailed design options and operational requirements for a suite of projects under the Hobart City Deal are now being progressed including the Southern Outlet transit lane as well as concept designs for two park-and-ride facilities in Kingborough. I note that the Hobart City Deal also includes plans for bus priority measures on Macquarie and Davey streets, which will further

assist in reducing traffic congestion for Franklin constituents along with other Hobart City Deal initiatives including improved cycleways, common ticketing and smart traffic management systems.

Bruny Island residents and visitors are also set to benefit from multi-million dollar upgrades to the landside ferry infrastructure as part of this Government's comprehensive plan to improve transport to Bruny. The new landside infrastructure will provide much better traffic management for vehicles and the ferries, with more orderly and safer boarding, and far greater amenity for both local residents and other road users. The significant upgrades include the doubling of the number of ramps at both Kettering and Roberts Point which will remove the current single ramp dependency at each landing and improve vehicle access and safety, fast turnarounds, less waiting time for another vessel to unload and reduce queueing. To ensure these upgrades meet the needs of the community, the Government is consulting with the Bruny Island Ferry Reference Group and the local Bruny Island community as the infrastructure designs and upgrades progress.

As the Premier stated in his address, Tasmania has a very proud history as a quiet leader on climate action with a strong track record of renewable energy and innovation that has not only helped to reduce our emissions but also those of our nation.

We are the first state to achieve zero net emissions. We have the lowest per capita emissions of all states and territories and we are one of the lowest emitters in the world. However, we know that there is more that we can do. The fact is Tasmania has enormous opportunities in renewable energy to grow our economy, to attract industries and investment, to create jobs and to also support Australia's transition to renewable clean and reliable base load energy supply.

Importantly, we are also on track to meet our target of being 100 per cent in renewable energy by 2022, which is why this Government has announced a new renewable energy target of 200 per cent of our current needs by 2040 to double our renewable generation. This target will be detailed in a new renewable energy action plan to be released in April that will see Tasmania on the pathway to becoming the renewable energy powerhouse of Australia.

An important part of this plan would be to capitalise on Tasmania's competitive advantages in producing hydrogen for domestic use by 2022 to 2024 and export by 2025 to 2027.

Tasmania's low cost and reliable renewable energy means that Tasmania is 10 per cent to 15 per cent more competitive than our mainland counterparts when it comes to attracting investment in green hydrogen. This is why we have announced a \$50 million package of support measures over 10 years to bolster and fast track renewable hydrogen industry development in Tasmania. This Government is also committed to help with the energy demands on the mainland whilst reducing Australia's emissions by exporting more renewable energy which will also create new jobs and industries for Tasmania.

We are also progressing the Marinus Link, which is set to underpin 1400 new jobs in Tasmania with up to 2350 jobs to be created from further renewable energy investment and our nation-leading battery of the nation proposal. This combined investment has the potential to inject \$7.1 billion into the Tasmanian economy over the coming years, leaving no-one in any doubt that Tasmania is in fact the battery of the nation.

In regards to safety, one of our many achievements that I am the proudest of is our nation-leading Tasmania's first family violence action plan, Safe Home Safe Families, and a release last

year of Safe Homes, Families, Communities, Tasmania's action plan for family and sexual violence 2019-2022. This Government took a whole-of-government approach to tackling the scourge of family and sexual violence and to stop violence from the start as a top priority for us. With actions under our action plans well underway, we are continuing to take a responsive and evidence-based approach to address this scourge.

Sadly, in recent times there have been some distressing and shocking incidents of family violence both interstate and here in Tasmania. It is horrific incidents like these that remind us we still have a long way to go to change the attitudes that lead to such terrible, senseless and unforgivable acts of violence. Whilst since 2015 we have invested more than \$50 million in new funding to combat family sexual violence, there is more we can do to ensure our efforts are geared towards keeping people, mainly women and their children, safe and that the perpetrators are held to account. That is why, in this coming year, the Attorney-General will introduce a number of legislative reforms aimed at protecting victims and ensuring offenders are dealt with in a manner consistent with community expectations.

The Attorney-General has already introduced legislation to amend section 194K of the Evidence Act to allow victims of sexual offences to speak out if they choose to, while providing appropriate safeguards and protections. We will make legislative changes to the names of sexual crimes, especially those involving young people, to better reflect the true nature of those crimes. Language used, for example, in the crime of maintaining a sexual relationship with a young person, in no way reflects the profound gravity of that crime.

Another important part of our agenda for young people is investing in their wellbeing. Our young Tasmanians are our next generation in the future of our state. I am delighted that in the upcoming Budget, this Government will be providing funding to commence Tasmania's first-ever comprehensive long-term, whole-of-government, child and youth wellbeing strategy. This strategy will not only include the first one thousand days of life, where there is clear evidence that a good start from conception to aged two is vitally important to a child's development, it will take them through to 25 years of age. This is because young people who have safe, nurturing and supportive environments and greater wellbeing are more likely to have better educational outcomes, a better quality of life and a happier more resilient and improved long term health outcomes.

Further investment in young people's wellbeing includes our successful Ticket to Play program, which was launched in February last year and is the first of its kind for Tasmania. What I love most about Ticket to Play is that it reduces the cost for children participating in sport as cost is the main barrier to children participating in sport. By decreasing this barrier, we are aiming to increase the number of young Tasmanians playing sport. I am delighted that the response to Ticket to Play from the community and activity providers has been overwhelmingly positive. I encourage all those with eligible Tasmanian children to apply for their Ticket to Play voucher. The voucher provides up to \$100 towards the cost of sporting club membership, as well as scouts, guides and cadets, to Tasmanian children aged five to 17 who are listed on a valid Centrelink Health Care card or pensioner concession card or who are in out-of-home care.

I now turn to Tasmania's economy. When we came to government six years ago, two out of every three small businesses thought that the previous government's policies were working against them. Therefore, our key aims were to ensure that we could rebuild business confidence, grow our economy and create more jobs and that is what this Government is doing. Through our policies and through our actions, Tasmania is now in a position where we lead the country in business confidence. For a small jurisdiction like Tasmania, confidence is vitally important. If businesses

and consumers are feeling confident, then the economy works very well. I am pleased the private sector especially, has responded to the government's policies as in state final demands concerning growth we lead the rest of the country. That is a fantastic position to be in for a small jurisdiction like Tasmania.

Tasmania's economy is in the best shape it has been in for 30-years with 21 100 more jobs and there are now 39 448 businesses operating across Tasmania, over 2400 more since we first came to office in 2014, and an increase of 1000 more businesses in the last year alone. A total of 256 100 Tasmanians are now in work. There are more jobs in every Tasmanian region. We have the highest annual employment growth rate in the country. We have the fastest-growing economy, faster than the power house economies of Victoria and New South Wales. Because Tasmania is the most confident state, we have more job creating business investment which is stimulating greater opportunities for more Tasmanians.

This Government thanks the private sector for this success. Ultimately, it is because of the private sector having the courage to invest and employ that we are seeing much greater opportunities for Tasmanians. There is no doubt that our strong economy has and is making a difference to the lives of a great many Tasmanians and we are committed to maintaining this momentum to ensure more people benefit from our strong economy and growth, led by our record \$3.7 billion job-creating infrastructure pipeline.

### **Time expired.**

[12.19 p.m.]

**Ms BUTLER** (Lyons) - Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the Premier's Address on the state of the state address for 2020. This is a time of uncertainty. It is a time when the resilience of the Tasmanian people that 'when the chips are down we have each other's backs' ethos of our island state must prevail.

Tasmanians are not a dramatic people. We are thoughtful, mindful and resilient, especially in times of adversity. It is essential that we put the health and wellbeing of our community at the forefront of our approach. I am mindful of healthcare workers, essential services employees, casual workers who are already experiencing cutbacks, and business owners.

It is very important that we as a community do everything we can to stop the transmission of this virus. We need to support one another. We need to be able to look back when this is finished and know that we did everything in our power that we could do to protect our community. We know that community programs are suspended. We know that community houses and also neighbourhood houses are closing. We know that workplaces are closing.

We are simply not prepared for this epidemic. The actions required to deal with this needed to start happening last week or even two weeks ago. There are not enough ventilators for our people, our health system is already fragile with massive waiting lists already just to get into a hospital, regardless of whether or not there is a pandemic. Our emergency services staff are still waiting for directives.

There are aspects of this virus known mostly only to the research committee. It does not just attack the lungs. It attacks the heart, the intestines, the kidneys, and the blood vessels. The best death toll projections anticipate that mortality from COVID-19 will equal that of all other forms of death over a whole year. This means that the number of people who perish from the coronavirus



over the next six months is likely to be equal to all the people who die from accidents, heart disease, suicide, cancer and conflict, and all other ailments of the human condition over a full year combined. This is not causing panic; this is the truth. It is very important that we let the public know that unless proper actions are taken to self-isolate this problem will get much worse.

Even for the majority of us who will survive, the long-term damage looks potentially severe. This is serious and early action is our best antidote. The steps that are awkwardly being undertaken now by the federal and state governments should have happened last week. The RPAT in New South Wales was ready to go two weeks ago. This morning the Health minister announced that K Block will open - two years late, mind you - but this should have happened last week. Tasmania should have been isolated last week.

We know that there is not enough PPE, there are not enough tests, and there are not enough respirators. It is not time to play politics and Labor will stand by the Government as long as they are taking proper steps. This is one of the most serious health issues we will ever face as a community. We do not panic. We do not put our heads in the sand either though. We act and we do it fast. We know that the United States has declared a nationwide state of emergency. The Louvre is closed until further notice. Even the Canadian Prime Minister's wife, Sophie Grégoire, tested positive and Justin Trudeau is now in isolation.

Mt Everest is shut down because of the coronavirus. Pakistan closed all borders, schools and universities - 210 million people affected. India has closed its borders. As our second largest market of higher education it is very important to our economy. Italy has gone from three confirmed cases to close to 20 000-plus more in less than a month. Australia is on the same trajectory. The mortality rate in Italy continues to climb, now at 7.2 per cent. This will be a combination of (a) an older population, (b) likelihood that testing is being prioritised to sicker patients, and (c) the breaking hospital system is resulting in preventable deaths. To that end, a comprehensive expert analysis concludes that all ICU beds in Italy able to treat the coronavirus complications has hit capacity. With approximately 9 per cent to 11 per cent of infections in Italy requiring ICU treatment, death rates are expected to continue spiralling upwards.

This is very important and it is important that we take decisive quick action now to make sure we can minimise this and protect the Tasmanian community. Many European countries reported the largest increases in infection rates so far. Angela Merkel projects that 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the population of Germany will become infected. Spain's number of infections triples every three days.

Globally, airlines are tanking. Delta Airlines has grounded 40 per cent of all flights. British Airways announced major job cuts. All of the Sahara and Africa are now recording cases. First cases have also been announced in the Cayman Islands. The entire Manila train system is also shut down. The global system is unravelling. Hundreds of millions and potentially billions of people are going to be out of work. Stock markets are in free fall. Whole institutions will vanish and governments will collapse. We need to take this seriously.

We want to look back on this period knowing that as lawmakers we did everything that we could to lessen that contagion. One in five of us will contract this virus. We do not want to panic but we do need to make sure that we are doing everything we can to protect our state. We need truth and we do not need unnecessary panic and fear. It is uncertainty that creates fear in our people. Give people some certainty. Give people some facts. Give people a sense of direction. Give them

an understanding of what is going on and then you will find that the community will be much better at self-isolating and, hopefully, looking after each other.

I will now go back to respond to the Premier's state-of-the-state address. When the Premier made his address, we were not privy to the information that we are privy to now in relation to the coronavirus.

On behalf of my family, I acknowledge Will Hodgman for his near 20 years of service to the people of Tasmania. Will worked with my mother, Heather Butler, when she was a local member for Lyons. My mother also worked Will's father, Michael Hodgman. I wish Will and his family all the best in their future endeavours. I extend my congratulations to Nic Street, member for Franklin, and wish him all the best.

I also congratulate Peter Gutwein on his promotion to the role of Premier. We worked together in 2018 to try to soften the blow and create protections for the community after the announcement by Bishop Condie to sell many of the Anglican Church's lots and sites belonging to communities of Tasmania, mostly rural communities. I support the redress scheme. It is financial compensation and recognition of the terrible wrongs committed. For many, the compensation will never soften the trauma experienced by these monsters. Yet I remain mindful that only 25 per cent of the funds raised by the sale of these Anglican churches and sites will be allocated to the redress scheme itself. Selling sites which are well-patronised and which have community value should not be sold, especially when the sites and sales were donated by a community to the Anglican Diocese in the first place.

Providing perpetuity to protect Tasmanian burial sites was an idea which I initiated with the Government. It was Elise Archer and Peter Gutwein who supported this concept and together we made this happen. I hope there will be opportunities in the future again where we can work together as elected members to do the right thing and find solutions that put the best interests of Tasmanians first.

As a member for Lyons, I am hoping for compassion from the new Premier. We are all hoping for common sense, so it seems are other leading Liberal identities too. On 29 February, Brad Stansfield stated in an article in the *Mercury*, that, and I quote, 'so far the new Premier has failed to put his own stamp on job or to demonstrate how he will be the "Hodgman plus" that Tasmanians are hoping for'. He wrote, and I quote:

Rather than being turbocharged by a new Premier, decision-making seems to have stalled.

For example, the Westbury prison boil should have been lanced but instead the situation is more confusing than ever.

Building a maximum-security prison next door to the historical village of Westbury does not make any common sense. There is no feasibility study. The socio-economic impact assessment is being undertaken right now through a push poll-style phone and written survey, and local people are reporting that they have been contacted sometimes three times in two days. There are no transparent terms of reference and the questions themselves are quite dishonest.

The building and construction industry is crying out for a northern project. They want the investment of \$270 million, a project undertaken over many years, a job creator, full-time consistent

work, apprenticeships and economic stimulus to the north of Tasmania. Labor supports this investment, and Labor also supports a northern prison with a focus on rehabilitation. Tasmania has some of the worst recidivism rates in Australia, at 48 per cent. That means that just under half the Tasmanian prison population will reoffend. That must be addressed. It beggars belief that a project of such importance to our state can be botched from the start. Labor has called for the list of preferred sites to be made available to start the expressions of interest process again, an appropriately constructed process where local councils understand their obligations under the planning laws. There is an example of one council that did not put in an expression of interest for a prison because they received advice that the EOI could compromise them as a planning authority in the later stages of the process.

Overwhelmingly, the people of Westbury were not consulted and they have made it very clear that they do not want to have a maximum-security prison close to their village. No real plausible explanation has been provided to the community why the site was chosen. It is not close to health services or transport facilities. The infrastructure is inappropriate. The site itself is located next to a world-class poppy manufacturer.

The industrial site at Westbury is, however, thriving. The industrial site will turn over \$64 million per year over the next 10 years. This will be \$640 million of gross domestic product. There are already 126 employees. This is based on five sites that have been in operation since 2010. Some businesses have invested \$50 million in infrastructure of the site and others have invested \$3 million in infrastructure. Overall, \$82 million of private funds have been invested in the industrial site to date by business.

The employment capacity and ability to contribute to the local economy is greater than that of a prison. The existing industrial site is set to expand further, increasing the projected growth. A maximum-security prison will impinge on the site, limiting the growth and compromising what the existing industrial site has already achieved. In short, the Government's claims that the prison will improve the local economy is unsubstantiated. There are better places for a prison to be built. It is time for the Government to start looking for those sites in a transparent, non-political fashion. I am hoping the Premier and the minister go back to the drawing board and find a more suitable site for the prison. We need building investment in the north. Despite the Government's public relations mantra of us being in a golden era, the negative growth figures and the facts cannot be denied.

I am concerned with recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics which reveal the number of building approvals in Tasmania has fallen for the third month in a row. The data shows building approvals in January fell by more than any other state or territory, and are now almost 20 per cent lower than at the same time last year. These are facts. The decline comes on the back of similarly concerning falls in business investment, international exports, job vacancies and the amount of building work completed.

Our economy was already in decline. It is important, especially now, that we look at ways to minimise the impact of the pandemic. A good place to start is by being honest. Communicate with all Tasmanians so we can bounce back in time. It also comes in the context of delays to almost every major infrastructure project in Tasmania, a significant deterioration in the state's finances and the looming economic challenge posed by this coronavirus.

In a recent independent survey undertaken by the Northern Midlands Business Association, respondents overwhelmingly claimed that the development and construction industry views state government agencies as unacceptably slow. I quote:

... it is the officer you are dealing with, rather than consistent processes and clear guidelines, that dictates whether a road or rail access, parks, environment, EPA or heritage application goes through.

The Government has forgotten to support young people as well. They are the future and they need security and an opportunity to stay in Tasmania, contribute to our economy and raise their children. Rental affordability is a huge burden on Tasmanians and young people are worried about being able to afford rent. Their concept of purchasing a home is often an unlikely scenario. We support the extension of the First Home Owner Grant but it does very little to address the fundamentals of unemployment, underemployment, homelessness, cost of living rises and inequality.

The Government needs to be supporting the creation of apprenticeships and traineeships, providing the next generation with hope, a career and the opportunity to participate productively in our community. Our youth unemployment rate is 12.2 per cent and there is an over-concentration of young people in regional areas of Tasmania. It seems ludicrous that employers are crying out for skilled work-ready young people and we have some of the highest youth unemployment figures in Australia. The problem is in the middle ground, the glue, the mechanism to address these two extreme ends of the issue. There is demand and there is supply. It is the job of a good government to create the opportunity to balance this.

My very good friend and colleague, Labor leader Rebecca White, recently announced that Labor will reinstate the requirement for 20 per cent of the workforce of all government buildings and construction projects to be apprentices and trainees. We would also extend this policy to the civil construction industry for the first time to ensure that as we build roads and bridges for the future we are also building the workforce for the future.

The Liberal Government does not measure how many apprentices are employed on government projects and is certainly not making every effort to make sure Tasmanians get a job on these work sites. With huge demand coming from Tasmanian businesses for skilled workers and a high unemployed and underemployed population, why do we continue to find skilled workers from interstate to work on major projects? The building and construction sector needs certainty and consistency from government to facilitate the rollout of a constant stream of good quality projects. This allows employers to take on new apprentices, invest in new plant and machinery and control their business activities.

The peaks and troughs scenario has always been a curse for the Tasmanian economy. What happens to the business operators that put in tenders for government projects? How can the Government expect the building and construction sector to remain quiet with so many promised in the holding pattern infrastructure of projects? The sector needs better management of the government tendering process, greater priority and accountability to Tasmanian workers and organisations and shorter delays in both the awarding of tenders and start dates. We know Tasmanian businesses are crying out for trained quality workers in nearly every sector. Our industry advisory council provided all members of the Labor team an opportunity to meet with stakeholders and listen and learn straight from the horse's mouth about the good, the bad, the hopes and solutions to take Tasmania to where it should be.

Tasmania has so much going for it. There is a sense of pride we all feel when we talk to mainlanders or people from other countries about our unique home. We have the cleanest air and water in the world, we are only 520 000 people and we certainly punch above our weight in many

areas. We know we can do things better. We are all in this together and we cannot stand by and watch the growing inequality of our communities; we all must prosper together. We know that one in five Tasmanians are living in poverty, and single parent families, young people and people living alone, including the elderly, are struggling with rents and essential costs of living. Our fragile housing system is already struggling. The benefits of economic growth are not reaching all Tasmanians.

About 27 per cent of Tasmanian households, almost 40 000 and most low-income households, are renters, more than one in four Tasmanians. I am concerned how many of these people will be able to pay their rent and afford food, power bills and phone accounts over the next month. Many people in our community cannot afford to stockpile food and essential items. The data tells us that a significant number of Tasmanians are experiencing housing stress and that this number is increasing. Rental affordability is at an all-time low. Hobart now ranks as the least affordable capital city in the country, for the first time overtaking Sydney. Meanwhile rental vacancy rates have decreased across the state over the last several years. In their submission to the housing affordability committee, TasCOSS stated that 120 000 Tasmanians live in poverty. This level of poverty and disadvantage is high compared with other Australian states and is an important context when considering the impact of a lack of affordable housing on the economic and social wellbeing of Tasmanians.

Tasmania has the highest proportion of low income households in Australia. Almost one third of the Tasmanian population receives some form of social security payment compared to less than a quarter nationally. Tasmanian's average full-time earnings are 87 per cent of the Australian figure and 88 per cent of Tasmanians earn \$80 000 or less, the highest proportion in the country.

Tasmania is also the most regional state in that the majority of the population lives outside of the major capital city. This, combined with Tasmania's high level of poverty and disadvantage, means that addressing affordable housing has particular challenges which require a broad and multifaceted approach involving all levels of government.

There is a massive divide between our communities. Inequality is growing and there is very little work being undertaken by this Government to address it. The socio-economic indexes for areas, indexes relative to socio-economic disadvantage, it ranks highest to lowest for disadvantage. The index of the disadvantage is one of our four socio-economic indexes for areas compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics after the Census of Population and Housing. The aim is to represent the socio-economic status of Australian communities and identify areas of advantage and disadvantage. It reflects the overall or average level of disadvantage of the population of an area.

Statistics from this reporting shows that Bridgewater/Gagebrook is the fifth most disadvantaged area in Australia. We know that the area reports the second highest rates of trauma in children in Australia. We know that the average life expectancy of a man in Gagebrook is 66 years old. In Bellerive it is 82 years old. That is a lot fewer years considering the distance is only 15 kilometres. We know that Gagebrook Primary does not have a funded music or sports program anymore. We know that the rate of serious crime in that area is a real problem.

A growing concern is public safety and how Tasmanians feel in their communities. In the December corporate performance report for the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management when asked, 'how safe do you feel out in public locally after dark?' only 58 per cent answered that they felt safe. The national level is 53 per cent. Tasmanians have always been proud

of the fact that they feel safe, that Tasmania is the safest place in Australia to raise a family. This is not the case anymore. We are the same as the rest of Australia. This is a major point of concern.

In fact, in Launceston there has been a 20 per cent increase in public place assaults with clearance rates at 70.6 per cent. In Launceston there has also been a 12.6 per cent increase in offences against the person and a 35 per cent increase in robbery offences. The clearance rate is 62 per cent. This means that police resources in Launceston are stretched to capacity. Statewide, there has been a 19 per cent increase in dwelling offences against the person. Serious crime offences are up by 12 per cent across the state. Bridgewater had a 58 per cent increase in serious crime in November 2019. Assaults on police are also becoming more serious with a staggering 680 per cent increase in Criminal Code offences. That is not okay.

It is obvious by looking at the facts and figures that Tasmania Police is facing a huge increase in crime and they are largely bearing the brunt of the rise in serious crime without the required resources. The tough on crime rhetoric is a bluff on crime and these figures speak in yards about the real story. The promised new recruits in frontline services will not meet the target. We know that there will be 40 fewer police officers by the end of this financial year than the Government has promised and the Government know those numbers too.

The police allocation model is outdated with police officers forced to work ridiculously long hours to meet the needs of the communities they serve. Because of the culture of our dedicated professional and hardworking police service, officers will often stay on longer to fill gaps in service or to provide assistance to fellow police officers already over stretched. At this moment police are still waiting on protocols for how they deal with this pandemic. Total uniformed police patrol hours have dropped significantly with 9000 fewer uniformed police patrol hours to date in the north. Our recording of statistics needs to display the increase in shotgun crimes, not just serious crimes. These are currently lumped into serious crime and must be recorded separately.

It is important that Tasmanians know the truth that there is a growing problem. Tasmanians are reporting that they do not feel safe on the streets in the dark these days. This must be taken seriously with real solutions, not publicity politically charged vote grabbers to manipulate the voting public.

It is also time for us to all to be honest about the Tasmanian bushfire prevention program and to be honest about the status quo. I take this opportunity to thank the Tasmanian volunteers, careers, Sustainable Timber and Parks and Wildlife firefighters who kept Tasmanians safe this summer. We were blessed with a relatively cool summer and on few occasions forgiving conditions. Thanks also to the Tasmanian firefighters who were deployed to the mainland to assist firefighting capabilities. More than 18 million hectares have burnt, destroying over 5900 buildings including over 2800 homes. My condolences to the families of those who lost loved ones and also to acknowledge the large number of animals - there were millions - that also died. The huge trauma has left many communities with serious spikes in mental ill health. The price tag to the Australian economy is still being analysed.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - the IPCC - is the United Nations body for assessing the sites related to climate change. They published a report in September 2019 called 'When disasters collide: helping Australians adapt to new risks under climate change'. It states that a collision of severe weather events can destroy lives and infrastructure, destabilising economies and ecosystems. In a rapidly warming world the frequency and magnitude of these compound events will only increase.

Without getting in the way I was fortunate to visit Fingal the morning after the fire had started in December 2019. I noted that Mark Shelton was also there that morning, as well as John Tucker. I visited the community house and they did an amazing job as did the Break O'Day Council through that whole period. The TFS, local volunteers, dozer drivers, Sustainable Timber, Parks and Wildlife, firefighters - they should all be commended.

I undertook doorknocking in Mangana - that was after the fire had gone through - I certainly did not put myself in the wrong place at the wrong time. I spoke to many of the locals who lost everything and also to another man who stayed back to fight the fire and his was an incredible story of survival. Despite a review into the St Marys fire of 2006 where a recommendation was made to better protect the area of Mangana with mobile coverage, the people of Mangana still do not have that mobile coverage. I have assessed the national Mobile Black Spot Program round four guidelines and there is not a priority in the criteria for areas to fund as bushfire prone areas to have mobile coverage. This is an example where the federal government could improve already existing programs to help better protect bushfire prone areas in Australia.

In my role as shadow minister for police, fire and emergency management, I had the pleasure of visiting a number of fire stations across the state. All stations that I have visited have tremendous pride in their stations. Their appliances, equipment and the camaraderie between the people is outstanding.

There is much work to be undertaken by the Liberal Government in relation to these brigades and creating a uniformity across these brigades, especially when it comes to equipment and the different levels of the buildings themselves. There is an inconsistency across brigades. Some brigades have new equipment, others are relying on older equipment. Some stations are state-of-the-art, others are not compliant with current building standards. This work must be undertaken. It is well overdue for Tasmanian firefighting capabilities to be properly resourced and coordinated.

We know that the bulk of the recommendations made in both the AFAC independent operational review 2016 and the AFAC operational review 2018 are incomplete -

### **Time expired.**

[12.50 p.m.]

**Mr SHELTON** (Lyons - Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management) - Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the Premier's Address. In doing so, I acknowledge that a week in politics can be a very long time and a fortnight since the Premier's Address has seen significant changes not just in Tasmania or Australia because of the coronavirus and what is happening around the world.

I congratulate, in particular, the Premier for his actions and the work that has gone into the last fortnight as well as Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the federal government for the stimulus package they have put together. We have the Premier and the Health minister working together. I see the work and effort that has gone into the Tasmanian response. I look forward this afternoon to the Premier's ministerial statement. I am acknowledging that in speaking on the state of the state over the past 12 months ago, the last fortnight comes into that. The coronavirus does make a difference to how we address our portfolios and what is happening in our local constituencies.

First, I acknowledge Will Hodgman and his leadership of the Liberal Party and this state. He did the hard yards in opposition and then when in Government, took Tasmania's economy that Labor

and the Greens had destroyed to one where 21 000 more jobs in Tasmania have been created. Tasmanians are proud again. Tasmania is on the up and moving in the right direction because of Will Hodgman's leadership. That is one of the reasons I stood for parliament. I wanted to be part of the Liberal team because Will knew that the best way of bringing prosperity to the people was to offer jobs to those who wanted one. The evidence is clear and it is out there.

I love that whether it is a region or a big town or a city, wherever we are in Tasmania, people are out and about, going about their business - this is before we had the issue of coronavirus - creating work for themselves and working, whether it is in schools in greater numbers, going to school or getting a job.

We have been joined by visitors from interstate and overseas. As I travelled around the state over the Christmas break, it was fantastic to see so many people in our coastal communities holidaying and driving the economy. Tasmania is busy because all this is happening around the state. There is always more to do. That was one of Will's favourite phrases. He recognised that the work is never finished and that you cannot take your foot off the pedal. Very few politicians go out on top like Will did. That alone is a tribute to the man. He spent almost 18 years in this place and rose to the pinnacle of his profession and knew when the time was right to hand over the baton. I offer my best congratulations to Will. I am sure that Nicky and his kids will enjoy having him around a little more often than they have in the past. The other great thing about Will Hodgman is that he built a great team environment, full of talent and future leadership.

To our new Premier, Peter Gutwein, I look forward to continuing to work with you and continuing the success of the Liberal Government for the betterment of Tasmania.

I turn to the Premier's Address and our plan and the task ahead for continuing to keep Tasmanians safe. I talk about that from my portfolio point of view, Police, Fire and Emergency Management. There are some difficulties now with the coronavirus. I appreciate that the Premier and the whole Cabinet is working hard on that.

It has been a tough year for our fellow Australians. I acknowledge the incredible efforts and sacrifice of our volunteer and emergency service personnel this bushfire season. Across Australia, a total of 33 people have tragically lost their lives from bushfires this season, including three volunteer rural fire service fighters, three United States aerial firefighting tanker crew, two Forest Fire Management Victoria officers and one department of Environment Land Water and Planning firefighter. I offer my condolences to the families, friends and communities who have lost loved ones.

It was a great honour and with humility that I represented Tasmania, alongside the Deputy Chief Officer Bruce Byatt, at the New South Wales State Memorial Service. The scale of the 2019-20 bushfire season in Australia, of area impacted and duration of the campaign, is unprecedented. Thousands of homes have been destroyed and millions of hectares of land have burned, causing massive devastation to our wildlife and environment.

The impact on bushfires in Tasmania has not been as significant as some of the other jurisdictions this year. However, Tasmanians have experienced three major fire seasons in the past seven years. I recognise the leadership of the Chief Officer, Chris Arnol, and the preparedness of the Tasmanian Fire Service for the 2019-20 bushfire season, helping the state to avoid catastrophic impacts, despite there being multiple hot days, equal to or worse than 1967. It is a testament to our career and volunteer firefighters that because of their strong community engagement and evolving



emergency management practices, based on historic reviews, that there has been no loss of life in Tasmania from bushfire and only minimal property losses in the past two years.

Tasmania has been called upon to provide significant resources to support other states, with over 525 Tasmanian firefighters deployed interstate since September 2019. As I move around different brigades, I listen to the stories of our firefighters who have been to the mainland. They talk about the terrific conditions that they face there with their colleagues in the mainland states. They talk about the equipment they used and have a number of stories to relay.

During that time, Tasmania was able to maintain a contingent of somewhere between 30 and 40 personnel on the mainland to assist their firefighting effort over that sustained period. I thank those people for that. Once again, I thank the magnificent firefighters for the work they do. I thank our State Emergency Service personnel and volunteers. To all of those who risked their lives here and interstate, thank you.

I have been visiting our firefighters in other stations around Tasmania, both career and volunteers as well as SES workers. I regularly visited a staging area at Brighton and Fingal during the fires in those areas. As Ms Butler stated, I was in Fingal with her. It was a tribute to our Emergency Service personnel to see how well organised the staging area was and to comprehend the information about the fire ground. The efforts of the Tasmanian Fire Service, along with the SES, Parks and Wildlife Service and Sustainable Timber Tasmania, managed as one by Tasmania Fire Service, was fantastic to see. The interaction of the SES in managing people on the fire ground was substantial. The efforts to see them all pull together was fantastic.

I acknowledge local government as well. The efforts of John Brown and Mick Tucker from the Break O'Day Council -

As it is almost 1 p.m., I request we adjourn this debate to a later hour.

**Debate adjourned.**

**The House suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.**

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **COVID-19 Response Measures**

[2.30 p.m.]

**Mr GUTWEIN** (Bass - Premier) - Madam Speaker, today I wish to provide members with an overview of the important work the Government is undertaking to both contain and respond to the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic - COVID-19 - on the Tasmanian community.

The health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians is our highest priority, and we will continue to manage the risk of the virus based on the best and latest evidence and medical advice. In addition to the health impacts, this pandemic will have very real and significant economic and social consequences, many of which are just beginning to emerge. Our Government will also do everything it can to manage and mitigate the economic and social impacts and will work to ensure that our businesses, our workforce and our communities are well positioned for a successful recovery.

As soon as information about the virulence and potential global spread of COVID-19 became available in January we immediately stood up a whole-of-government approach to prepare for the emergence of the virus in Tasmania. On Monday 2 March, Tasmania's first case of COVID-19 was confirmed, leading to a rapid and comprehensive government response, led by our Department of Health. At the same time, the Government's State Emergency Management Committee, with Health as the lead agency, assumed responsibility for overseeing our emergency response activities and for monitoring the progressive impact and consequences of the situation. As with any emergency incident, these activities are being conducted in accordance with our longstanding and well-tested emergency management plans, guidelines and operational protocols.

As members would be fully aware, there are now seven confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Tasmania. The three most recent cases were all close contacts of each other and were travelling in a group after arriving from overseas. To date we have had no local person-to-person transmissions detected within Tasmania.

COVID-19 symptoms range from mild illness to pneumonia and whilst some people recover easily, others may get very sick very quickly, which is why the Government is being advised daily by health professionals and is acting on that advice.

In addition, along with other premiers, first ministers and the Prime Minister, we have established a new National Cabinet to work together to address Australia's response to COVID-19. This role is to coordinate a national response to COVID-19 and whilst it will not override any state and territory authority, it will ensure that as a country we respond and utilise our resources together. However, decisions will remain the authority of the states and territories.

Tasmania is well-prepared to manage the impact and consequences of all eventualities associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As with all other Australian states and territories, we are taking a highly precautionary approach that is being informed by the most up-to-date medical information and advice.

The plan allows for a stepped increase in the Government's response. Last night the Director of Public Health, Dr Mark Veitch, who has been leading our public health response, advised that we should take the next precautionary step and increase our readiness and declare a public health emergency. Tasmanians should understand that there has been no specific elevation of transmission of the virus in our community nor any particular event or risk that has demanded this; it is just the next step in our preparedness as we ready for the months ahead.

Under our plan the final elevation will be to declare a state of emergency, which Tasmanians unfortunately have been accustomed to in the past, as this has occurred with bushfires and is the way that we ensure that our response is managed across agencies. We will take this next step when advised to do so.

We have a state special emergency management plan for COVID-19 which clearly outlines the roles, responsibilities, resources, responses and actions that will be taken should widespread transmission of the disease occur in Tasmania.

Our Director of Public Health has a direct role in the development and implementation of national policy and health responses through active participation as a member of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. The Government is also engaging closely and collaborating

with all other Australian jurisdictions on high-level preparedness, risks, issues and priorities through the COVID-19 National Coordination Mechanism.

Our Department of Health is working with Australia's National Incident Room to facilitate contact tracing of any individuals identified as being at risk of exposure to COVID-19. That includes contacting people who have been in close contact with any confirmed cases and providing advice on what to do if they begin feeling unwell.

As well as having access to the National Coronavirus Health Information Line and updated health information published online through both Australian and Tasmanian government health websites, I encourage anyone who may be concerned about COVID-19 because of recent travel or contact with a confirmed case to refer to the self-assessment tools on the Department of Health website, call the hotline or discuss their circumstance with their GP.

Madam Speaker, as part of our public health response, supported by funding from the Australian Government, we moved quickly to establish respiratory clinics in the four major population centres of Hobart, Launceston, Burnie and Latrobe. To ensure a safe clinical environment and minimise possible transmission, people who require testing are referred to the clinics through the Public Health Hotline or their local GP. Once referred, those tested are instructed to self-isolate until test results are known, usually within 24 hours. To date there has been a total of seven positive cases.

Additional resources have also been assigned to support preparedness and response activities across the Department of Health, Public Health Services, hospitals and Ambulance Tasmania.

I want to make the point very clearly that we will not limit our response nor our financial effort. The Government will make available whatever resources are required to combat this virus, to keep people safe and to support our economy and Tasmanian jobs.

A COVID-19 emergency coordination centre is now operational within the Department of Health, led by an incident controller reporting directly to the secretary of the Department. The centre is responsible for the direction, coordination and management of our system-wide health services' response and consequence management. To support this work, we have also established emergency operations centres in Public Health Services, across the Tasmanian Health Service at regional and state levels, and within Ambulance Tasmania.

One of the most effective ways to 'flatten the curve' and slow the transmission of the virus is social distancing. This aims, through a variety of means, to minimise contact between individuals and thereby to reduce the possibility for new infections. I urge all Tasmanians to practice social distancing in their day to day activities, and in particular:

- do not go out in public when you are sick;
- avoid medical settings unless necessary;
- give people 1.5 metres of space;
- wave instead of shaking hands, hugging or kissing; and
- practice excellent personal hygiene – clean your hands often and thoroughly.

If you are at work:

- work in ways that minimise close contact;

- give people 1.5 metres of space;
- minimise groups over 10;
- encourage the use of technology for meetings; and
- clean your work space frequently.

We all need to be responsible and will need to practise these things frequently and for an extended period of time. This virus will be a marathon, not a sprint, and throughout this period we need to continue to support those around us and, in particular, our most vulnerable.

On Sunday, following the National Cabinet meeting, the Prime Minister announced that all visitors to Australia, including Australians returning from overseas, will have to self-isolate for 14 days. My Government strongly supports this decision.

To enable the Tasmanian Government to understand who those people are when required to self-isolate, as from today the new Tasmania Arrivals Card (TAC) has been introduced which people will be required to fill out when they enter Tasmania from an international destination. It will be available online or in hard copy at each of our arrival ports and will provide us with the necessary information to support and assist these people whilst in self-isolation. They will be sent a daily text to check on how they are doing, offered support if they require it and to importantly remind them to remain in self-isolation for the full 14 days. It will be an offence to not comply and penalties will be imposed for those that do not.

It is also important that we protect our State Service workers and ensure continuity of Government, particularly in our health and community services. Last week I made the decision to restrict international travel to protect the health of public sector staff, the broader community, and to help safeguard the continuity of government business. Today I am further strengthening these measures for our public sector workforce, with all international travel banned until further notice unless approved under exceptional circumstances. Official domestic travel will only be undertaken if it is absolutely essential.

On the weekend I announced that the Tasmanian Government would suspend all cruise ship visits to our ports until 30 June, at which point we will undertake a review of the current situation. Following my decision, the National Cabinet adopted this principle and all cruise ships visits across the country are now restricted to any other port in Australia for 30 days pending a review as well. While I know this places challenges on our tourism industry and visitor economy, I strongly believe we needed to do this to manage the COVID-19 risks to our state.

Large public gatherings and major events pose increased risks. We have already seen the cancellation of this year's Dark Mofo Festival. Given the growing evidence of greater community transmission of the coronavirus throughout the rest of Australia, the National Cabinet agreed to restrict non-essential organised public gatherings with static crowds of more than 500 people. This is a precaution to ensure we can manage the transmission of this virus in the most effective way possible.

There are a number of exceptions to this restriction. This means our schools can still function, our transport system can still function and fairs, festivals and markets that have people moving through them and attend at different times during the day can still be held. However, the principle of social distancing should still apply in these settings.

Tasmanian schools are currently adopting social distancing measures, requiring the cancellation of assemblies, excursions, travel, some events and conferences, and I thank all staff at schools for helping to convey this to our children and young people. We are keeping our schools open at the moment based on expert medical advice, whilst at the same time putting in place distance education and other support services, should this change. As I have said, should the advice change, I will act swiftly and decisively.

Madam Speaker, we are all very aware of the escalating impact of the global and national situation on world and interstate markets, tourism, travel and visitation, our seafood industry and the broader local economy. However, Tasmania goes into this crisis from a position of strength. Our economy has been the strongest in the country and our state's balance sheet is strong, which means we are well positioned to respond to the economic impacts of the virus. However, the flow-on effect of the virus on Tasmanian businesses, their workers and the overall economy will be significant.

We expect to see increasing economic impacts on a wide range of Tasmanian industry sectors, from tourism and hospitality businesses, seafood exporters and wild fisheries, through to retailers and manufacturers reliant on international supply chains. Already many small businesses across the state are feeling these impacts. My Government's aim is to protect the Tasmanian community, respond quickly and effectively, and support Tasmanian people, businesses and industries and ensure that Tasmania comes out of this event strong, healthy and returns to being the economic powerhouse of the nation.

The Australian Government's \$2.4 billion health package will help protect all Australians and all Tasmanians. The package provides critical support across primary care, aged care, hospitals, research and the national medical stockpile. It includes a new Medicare service for people in home isolation or quarantine to receive health consultations over the phone or through video applications such as Skype or FaceTime. It also supports home delivery of medicines, and online or remote filling of PBS prescriptions. The package also includes funding to train our aged care workers in infection control and enables aged care providers to hire extra nurses and aged care workers for both residential and home care services.

In addition to the health package, the Australian Government's economic response of \$17.6 billion will support Tasmanian households and underpin jobs, whether they are in a large or small business.

The Prime Minister has confirmed that these measures will provide additional support for our fisheries and tourism industries through the \$1 billion fund to support regions and sectors most significantly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. This economic response will also support our casual and relief employees who contract COVID-19, or who are instructed by health authorities to self-isolate, through access to the Commonwealth sickness payment.

The Australian Government's stimulus package has been designed to provide an immediate stimulus to the Australian economy as well as ensuring the beneficiaries of the package include those who are most vulnerable in our community as well.

The Tasmanian Government will also respond immediately with the first stage of our package today and this will then be built upon in coming months with further measures to be included in the state Budget.

We understand that this will be a difficult time for communities across Tasmania and we have been working hard to ensure that we are prepared and can provide support where it is needed.

This Government has worked hard to build business confidence and economic growth in Tasmania and it is important that we continue to work closely with all industry sectors to strengthen resilience and to respond effectively and proportionately to this challenge.

Last week we met with the Tasmanian business community to encourage a coordinated approach to the potential challenges that lie before us. After hearing from the business community, it is clear that any Tasmanian Government economic stimulus measures need to be proportionate to the developing impact on the economy; scalable and timely, so they can be adjusted appropriately as the situation changes; delivered quickly providing immediate economic benefit; and will also position Tasmania well for a strong economic recovery.

It is important that we get in early and support businesses and individuals who are suffering as a result of COVID-19. Today I am announcing as an initial response to this pandemic that the Government will provide further support and economic stimulus to help businesses and Tasmanians affected by the virus.

The package will include further support for our community. There will be one-off emergency relief payments of \$250 for individuals and up to \$1000 for families who are required to self-isolate by Public Health as a result of coronavirus. This will be available to casual workers and those on low incomes. Funding for this measure will be uncapped. To further help those who are self-isolating, the Government will provide \$1 million through Communities Tasmania to organisations such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and Rural Business Tas. These organisations will support vulnerable people through provision of food hampers, medical supplies or counselling.

An amount of \$2 million will be made available to our primary health care sector to ensure that GPs, pharmacists and other healthcare providers are supported, for example by enabling minor capital works and the purchase of equipment including PPE so they can continue providing primary health services. An amount of \$1 million will be available to support frontline workers with accommodation, such as in circumstances where their family members are ill, so they can continue to contribute to our response. The accommodation will be provided for the period required to effectively manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government will provide an additional \$1 million in grants to mental health organisations to support individuals experiencing mental health difficulties as a result of the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. We will also establish an emergency accommodation support fund of \$1 million to be administered through the Department of Communities Tasmania. This will be available for individuals and families who have been placed on home quarantine but who are unable to return to their regular place of residence due to self-isolation measures being in place. This will provide additional support for members of our community at this difficult time.

Whilst ensuring that Tasmanians' health, wellbeing and safety is our most important aim, we must also ensure that we support Tasmanian jobs and those businesses most affected by the economic impacts we are facing. The Government will take strong action and in the first stage of our economic stimulus plan I can announce the following measures.

There will be \$20 million for the provision of interest-free loans to businesses in the hospitality, tourism, seafood and exports sectors. The loans will be available to small businesses with a turnover

of less than \$5 million for the purpose of purchasing equipment or restructuring business operations and will be interest free for a period of up to three years.

To support Tasmanian jobs, the Government will waive payroll tax for the last four months of this financial year for hospitality, tourism and seafood industry businesses during 2020. This will save businesses around \$7 million, enabling them to keep more Tasmanians employed.

Other small to medium businesses with an annual payroll of up to \$5 million in Australian wages will be able to apply, based on the immediate impact of the virus on their businesses, to waive their payroll tax payments for the remaining three months from March to June 2020. This initiative is costed at up to \$9 million.

The Government knows that cash flow for small to medium businesses is critical and will assist the cash flow of small business by requiring agencies to pay quicker. Unless otherwise required by contractual arrangements, the normal terms of trade for payments by government agencies will be reduced from 30 days to 14 days.

We know our tourism industry has had spectacular growth, but the world is now closed for the foreseeable future and visitor numbers will suffer as a result. However, our world-class natural assets and beautiful scenery will remain and this industry will bounce back once this is over, so we will take this opportunity to make our offering even better when it does.

Local government owns many of the local tourist facilities around the state, many in regional areas including rest areas, rest and change rooms, toilets and visitor centres, and now is the time to make those many small but important facilities that serve our visitors and locals alike the best in the country for when we bounce back.

There will be \$50 million in interest-free loans over three years made available to encourage local government to invest and employ more Tasmanians to upgrade, renovate and do necessary maintenance to improve our tourism assets so that when the visitors come back we are ready.

We know that the construction sector employs more than 20 000 Tasmanians and if the construction sector remains strong it will underpin spending in our community. As a sector it will not be immediately impacted as sectors like hospitality are by the number of visitors who come to this state, nor by world markets, but its businesses and workers can support those sectors by spending money in our shops, purchasing accommodation in our regions and buying lunches at our local takeaways and shops. We need jobs for people who are in the most affected industry sectors and we need construction businesses to gear up and hire.

We cannot wait for shovel-ready projects to go through planning. We need screwdriver and paintbrush-ready projects that can start straight away. Today I am announcing an immediate bring forward of \$50 million for the maintenance of public buildings over the next 12 months such as affordable housing, schools, police houses, park assets and health centres. This will create jobs and underpin small construction businesses, many of which are in regional and rural areas of the state. This measure will complement the recently announced two year extension of the First Home Owner Grant which provides \$20 000 for Tasmanians building their first home and increases activity in the building and construction sector.

The Government will also provide \$2.1 million for one-off \$5000 grants for businesses that hire an apprentice or trainee, complementing the federal government's apprenticeship package. To

encourage businesses to employ young people the Government will introduce a youth employment payroll tax rebate scheme for young people from 1 April 2020. At a cost of around \$280 000, the scheme provides a payroll tax rebate for one year to businesses that employ a young person aged 24 and under.

Tasmania has over 300 businesses that rely on visitation to our national parks and wilderness areas. For the fourth quarter of 2019-20, the Government will waive tourism operator lease, licence and entry fees for our important parks industry. At a cost of approximately \$630 000, this initiative will support around 300 of our hardworking tourism businesses right around Tasmania.

The Government will also provide a 50 per cent discount on liquor licensing fees and waive all application fees for the calendar year 2020, backdated to 1 January 2020. At a cost of around \$500 000, this initiative will reduce the costs of the hospitality sector at a time when they need the relief most.

In the state of the state address, I announced an additional \$1 million for Tourism Tasmania. This funding will be directed towards the development of a local holiday campaign to encourage Tasmanians to holiday locally this year. The Government will provide \$100 000 to the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Hospitality Association for training and support of workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors over the winter months to improve productivity and to be ready when tourism returns to normal busy levels across the state.

To assist businesses navigate the industrial relations issues associated with the virus, the Government will provide \$80 000 to the Tasmania Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide advice to businesses on the implications of these workplace issues. This will ensure that both employers and employees are better informed.

The Government is working with the Australian Government to provide greater support to the rock lobster and abalone industry and has already extended rock lobster quotas for that industry. We have also assisted with rock lobsters being sold into local markets. We have already provided for annual fees and levies to be paid by instalment in rock lobster, giant crab and finfish fisheries, and for abalone divers. These fees will now be waived for 12 months at a cost of \$670 000.

Staff in government agencies are working very hard to deliver efficient and effective services to the Tasmanian community, and the impact of the pandemic has placed significant additional requirements on our staff. Accordingly, now is not the time to place further efficiency requirements on agencies and the Government will not be applying the efficiency dividend to state government agencies over the forward Estimates. Agencies will not be required to achieve the 0.75 per cent efficiency dividend over the forward Estimates, which will ensure agencies can focus fully on supporting Tasmanians through this crisis and will also provide a further stimulus measure for the Tasmanian economy of an additional \$268 million in government expenditure.

This comprehensive support and economic stimulus package of \$420 million in total is designed to help us fight the economic impact of COVID-19 and also prepare the foundation to set Tasmania up for a rapid recovery when the pandemic eases. It will impact our budget. However, at this time we need to take decisive action and we need to use the budget to support the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians. Now is the time to use the budget as an economic stabiliser to support our economy and keep Tasmanians in jobs and that is exactly what we will do.



Madam Speaker, in closing I want to wholeheartedly thank all our staff who are managing the pandemic at the moment. Our health professionals are doing an incredible job, as are our public servants and all of those working with the most vulnerable members of our community.

Tasmanians are incredibly resilient. When we face challenges, we rise to the occasion. We have seen this when facing bushfires and floods here in Tasmania and unfortunately only recently as well with our volunteer firefighters and the assistance they provided to the mainland states over summer. Together, we will get through this because we are Tasmanian, we have faced challenges before and we have overcome them. This will be no different. It will impact on all of us, so importantly all of us need to work together and make our number one priority to protect and care for all Tasmanians.

## **MOTION**

### **Note Statement - COVID-19 Response Measures**

[2.55 p.m.]

**Ms WHITE** (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the statement be noted.

The Premier is quite right. This is an unprecedented public health emergency. It requires us to work together to provide leadership and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the state. I commend the Government for the action they have outlined today; that they intend to take to support our health workforce and the businesses and broader workforce across the Tasmanian community.

Nonetheless, what is most important to remember here is that we are dealing with a public health pandemic. The lesson from other countries is that the biggest threat to our economy is failing to contain the spread of the virus. We still have the opportunity to act here in Tasmania, but health experts tell us that window is closing. Having an economic stimulus package and the number of measures as outlined by the Premier today, is commendable but it may end up being a recovery package if we do not act swiftly now to address the public health issues that are confronting our country. This is incredibly serious. These are very uncertain times and it is raising concerns in the community.

I draw to the attention of the Chamber that right now we are not flattening the curve in this country, which is the argument that all public health experts are warning us we need to do if we are really going to get ahead of this. I have a graph that demonstrates that the number of cases Australia is doubling every three days. In Tasmania, cases per 100 000 residents, has us sitting in the middle of the pack. We may only have seven cases to date, but we need to be aware of how serious this is.

The communication from all levels of government has to be clear. People need to self-isolate. We should be doing more to reduce mass gatherings. Today the United States has reduced mass gatherings to no greater than 10. Canada has closed its borders to any foreigners entering. They are allowing their own people to come home.

On Norfolk Island, off the coast of Australia, Administrator Eric Hutchinson today declared that their borders are closed because they are small and isolated. They do not have capacity to respond if there is an outbreak.

We are an island. I reiterate our call for the Government to seriously consider and, indeed, take action to require quarantining for 14 days of anyone coming to Tasmania. Appropriate protocols and exemptions can be put in place for freight and trade and, in exceptional circumstances, for specialist staff, if required. We have an opportunity and we need to take advantage of it. The window is closing rapidly. The biggest threat to the Tasmanian economy is failing to learn from the mistakes of other countries.

We commend the Government for the program announced today, but it will be meaningless if we have further spreads of this virus within the community that are detrimental and devastating for individuals and their families and for our business community. That is the reality of the situation. From the messages from the Premier today, my fear is that the broader community will think that everything is okay. They will think that these measures will support them to continue operating and things are going to be as they were last week. Things are changing rapidly and they are evolving very quickly.

The responsibility we have as leaders of this state is to collectively agree; this is serious. We must work together to address this as a public health pandemic. It has to be our number one priority and the best way to support the economy is to get on top of the spread of coronavirus in Tasmania.

As an island, we can take advantage of that by making sure that we are: providing greater protections at our borders; encouraging people to self-isolate if they are vulnerable or at risk; making sure that there are clear messages to our schools and parents about what they need to do; and supporting our health workforce with the resources that they need. I acknowledge that the Government has announced today more resources for PPE but that has to extend beyond the health workforce to the cleaning services provided in our schools; the provision of sanitation services, sanitisers, and hand wash. We are hearing that schools cannot access that. Students are being asked to take their own hand sanitisers with them to school in the morning. They need to have the cleaning products necessary so we can practice social isolation if we are going to continue to have these gatherings to limit the threat and spread of the virus.

Premier, I point out that there were no additional resources announced in your statement for Family Violence Counselling Support Services. That is something that will need to be considered. Child protection services is also an area that will need to have an increase in resources because we do know that with increased isolation in families, in homes together, that this is a risk. We need to be prepared to respond and to respond quickly.

We really need to resource public health with more staff. I know that staff there are working very hard but they are not able to take days off and they are working extended hours. They are going to burn out. They are our front line in thinking about how we respond to this pandemic particularly now with the efforts to introduce the Tasmania card at points of entry, which is commendable and that is an excellent decision. The processing of that information needs to be undertaken by more people than are currently dedicated to that task.

The whole argument we are hearing from health experts is that we have to flatten the curve. That is the only way that we are going to be able to look after each other as a community and to get through this together as Tasmanians. It is the best way to support our economy and small business

and the broader business activity that is taking place here in our state. It is the only way that the stimulus measures announced by the Premier will be effective. Otherwise, it will not be a stimulus package, it will be a recovery package.

I implore the Premier and other members of this Chamber to realise that the best way we can support business and the economy is by tackling this as a pandemic, flattening the curve, learning from the mistakes of other jurisdictions because, right now, this has us tracking on the same trajectory as Italy. That is unacceptable when we are an island and we have the capacity to protect the community of Tasmania because we can do different things at our borders compared to other states. Even the Northern Territory today has announced measures around how it is managing its state borders.

We are a population that is generally older than the national average with more underlying health issues than the national average. We have a health system that is at capacity. We must be vigilant in our response here and take this seriously. Our health system will not be able to cope if we have presentations of the type we are seeing in other states. We cannot take for granted that we will not have community transmission here in Tasmania. In fact, health professionals are already arguing that may be occurring because we are not testing for that in the broader community.

There was no indication from the Premier that he is expanding testing to regional centres. That also must be done as a priority. We stand ready to work with the Government to do these things. It may be an inconvenience for some but it is necessary to make sure that we protect the health and wellbeing of all Tasmanians.

[3.03 p.m.]

**Dr WOODRUFF** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, the Greens were very supportive of the strong announcements that the Premier made on the weekend and we commended him for the decision around the ban on cruise ships to the state.

Coming to parliament today, we were expecting that we would hear more of that strong language and strong restrictions from the Premier in response to what has been so much change since just Sunday afternoon.

It is good to hear some of the things that the Premier has just announced but I am saddened in reading and listening to him about the lack of attention to the urgent issue which needs to be addressed today and that relates to the restrictions for the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanians.

What the Premier has discussed in here in terms of restrictions that will be used to limit the spread of the virus is that he is urging Tasmanians to practice social distancing. The sort of social distancing that he is urging people to individually take responsibility for will go a very, very small step of the way along the long road that we have to go to get on top of this virus and the serious impact it will have on all Tasmanians. This includes the overwhelming of our hospital systems with having to care for sick people and the expected deaths from the number of cases which are being predicted by senior medical officers around Australia today. It is very concerning to hear only small steps happening at a time when we were expecting to see, and hoping to see real, strident and strong responses.

Tasmanians' anxieties around the changing nature of this global pandemic can best be embodied by the open letter that was written last night – signed by up to 140 Tasmanian GPs. These are the people who are at the coalface already dealing with people who are anxious, already testing

for people for coronavirus, and now cautioning us that they wanted to hear so much more from this Premier today. They have written to him, written to all members of parliament, asking for the interventions which have been shown to be effective globally to slow down the spread of this disease.

The only interventions that have been shown to be truly effective to slow down the spread of disease across every country so far, that is in advance of us, are strong social restrictions and very strong and stringent quarantining of people coming into areas. In this case it would be into Tasmania, so that the number of cases moving into a region, infected people, can be slowed down. That gives the health system in each area an opportunity to deal with the cases that will arise, 5 per cent of whom will be serious and will require high level hospital care and at least 1 per cent of whom will die.

What we have heard from the Deputy Chief Medical Officer at the federal government level yesterday in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was a very clear statement. He said we have been asked to give frank and fearless medical advice from the beginning. The medical advice that he gave yesterday was the expectation that a minimum of 20 per cent of the Australian population would be infected with the COVID-19 virus and up to 60 per cent. If you look at those figures Australia wide, as he told us yesterday, that is 50 000 Australians who will die from the COVID- 19 virus as a minimum and 150 000 is also possible.

If we look at those figures in Tasmania, what that equates to, at a minimum, is 104 600 Tasmanians becoming infected with COVID-19 virus, 5230 of them needing hospitalisation and 1040 people dying. Those are the figures that our Australian Deputy Chief Medical Officer tells us. At the higher end that equates to 313 800 Tasmanians becoming infected, 15 700 hospitalisations, most of whom may require intensive care, and 3130 people dying. These are the serious figures that we are dealing with here.

My question is, Premier, are you preparing for those figures? That is what we are confronting. What this day provides us with is a really important moment. Every hour that goes on, more people are likely to become infected. It gives us an opportunity to grab this time and understand that we have the opportunity to restrict people coming to Tasmania, who are travelling back from the mainland. They may be Tasmanians, or who may be Australians living on the mainland, as well as international visitors. The people on the mainland, as the New South Wales Health minister has said, have already exponential rate of cases. We have a huge increase; 37 cases in New South Wales, just today.

These are the actions that we need. What we have is 23 economic stimulus actions, six of which are directed at supporting the community. We need to have a much greater focus on vulnerable people. We have so many vulnerable communities. When the Western Australian and the French governments can waive electricity charges, rents, waive the costs that are really going to cause harm for families in the community; when they can do that, we can take the opportunity to do that.

Around \$10 million of this is focused on supporting vulnerable people and communities, and about \$410 million is an economic stimulus package for businesses. That is a very important part of it. I do not understand that there is the correct focus on looking ahead for vulnerable people and implementing today the restrictions that we need to protect those communities, including those in schools, limiting people in public places, which is what all other countries around the world are now doing -

**Time expired.**

[3.12 p.m.]

**Ms COURTNEY** (Bass - Minister for Health) - Madam Speaker, in my contribution in response to the Premier's ministerial statement, I will first reflect on the two contributions we have had from members opposite so far. I would like to absolutely reject any inference that the Government is not taking action.

We escalated to Level 2 on Friday, 6 March. We have been proactively monitoring, working, and escalating across government. We have a whole-of-government approach. We have implemented inter-operability across government to ensure we are resourcing. I note Ms White's comments regarding the burden on the team. I accept the fact we are working very hard. These are unprecedented times that we are in and we are focused across government, with regards to the escalation to Level 2 and the inter-operability. We are providing additional resources and support across government. I am very aware of that, but likewise, Ms White, we are all very focused on the enormity of the task, and the implications that this has for Tasmanians. I would like to put on the record my thanks to those staff and as a government we are supporting them all as much as we possibly can.

I reject Dr Woodruff's allegation that the Government has not taken action. As I just outlined, we escalated to Level 2 on Friday, 6 March. We have been expanding our planning across the entire Tasmanian Health Service. We have been negotiating further capacity across the system. We are assessing elective surgery. We have also taken steps with regards to public preparedness. Over the weekend, I was standing next to the Premier when he announced that cruise ships would no longer be visiting Tasmania. We have seen the federal government take steps with regards to arrivals into Australia. This morning we saw the Premier take steps with arrivals into Tasmania.

We have seen the Education minister provide further advice to schools. I know that we are engaging on a daily basis, indeed an hourly basis, with our health professionals, to make sure that should advice come that we should do something, we will act. I want to assure the people in the Chamber, and the people of Tasmania, that I am absolutely resolved to make sure this Government is doing everything we can to respond appropriately.

I understand that members are concerned and I understand that there is concern in the community. I do not, for one moment, want my comments to be construed that I do not understand that, because I do. I want to make sure that for the Tasmanian people the Government is taking the most prudent steps possible.

We know at the moment that our Director of Public Health is meeting with officials to make sure that we have a response that is appropriate not just for Australia but for Tasmania. The Premier has outlined on many occasions over recent days and weeks that as a state we will take whatever action is advised to us by our experts so that we are best maintaining the interests of the health and welfare of Tasmanians.

In the time I have remaining I want to briefly touch on the economic response that the Premier has outlined - I know that we have in the contributions talked about the public health response - but for a moment the importance of that for businesses and for the thousands and thousands of Tasmanians who are employed with them.

One thing we are focused on is the mental health of Tasmanians. This is a time of anxiety at the moment. This is why the Premier has outlined additional funding for mental health. All the economic measures that the Premier has outlined will go directly to support communities, regional areas, and small business owners to continue doing what they are doing. These are unprecedented times and the Government is taking unprecedented action.

I want to assure members opposite in terms of their contributions and their assertions that the Government will not act proactively that I reject those absolutely. The Premier, myself, the secretary of the Department of Health, indeed the entire Government, is focused on this response and we will take whatever measures are necessary to ensure the health and safety of Tasmanians.

[3.17 p.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, in response to the ministerial statement, let us be clear, from Labor's perspective any constructive criticism or views that we put on the record around the Government's response is by no way a criticism of staff within the public service. We know them personally. We know across Tasmania that they are doing all they can, their level best to respond to what is unprecedented and unusual times. It is not a criticism in any way of the actions of staff, but we have a legitimate right to give voice to concerns that are in the community of the Government's performance in this matter. We do so in a constructive way.

The Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, Rebecca White, have had a number of conversations. Every time we have come together to discuss this matter we have been focused on the role we can play in a positive way to support the community, to support their response and to support actions of government.

In saying that, the issues the Leader of the Opposition raised in response to the ministerial statement are an echo of the concerns in the community. The 100 doctors who signed that letter raised serious concerns with decisions from senior government in terms of response. It is very clear: the global experience is if you act early and if you get ahead of the curve you have one chance to flatten the curve. That is the focus of our constructive criticism of the Government. Our view that some decisions, echoing medical professionals - and all of us have been no doubt contacted privately by a number of people within the Health department and health services with very strong views. These are people who work in the health system; experienced, quality people who understand the nature of the risk far better, in many cases than some of us. When they give these concerns to us we have an obligation to raise it with government. It has been raised in the public domain.

**Mr Gutwein** - What about Dr Veitch? We are acting on his advice.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Absolutely, but there are many voices in this debate. There are many views. It would be an abrogation of our responsibilities as an opposition party not to raise and give voice to these issues as they have been raised with us. We are not criticising but we are saying that stronger action needs to be taken to get ahead of the curve. The international experience is clear. You react and be criticised for an over-reaction in the short term that will resolve and helpfully get Tasmania through this issue in the medium to longer term.

We would rather leadership be criticised for over-reacting early than having the consequences of under-reacting and extending and creating greater problems in our community. Labor's motivation in this debate is to give voice to those medical professionals who raised these issues with us and raise them publicly with you. We are talking about measures that are actively being

considered by other jurisdictions in this country. We are worried you are a step behind what may be needed and the best advice that we are also receiving.

Our concerns are that it would be naïve to think that we can, with incremental action, get ourselves through this. We want to be like places such as Singapore and Hong Kong and other jurisdictions that have taken stronger action early to flatten the curve. We know the health system is not in the greatest of shape compared to some other states that have the capacity to respond to this surge in a pandemic event. We do not have a system that is prepared to absorb that because it is already under pressure. Tasmania, of all states, given the nature of our health system, should be considering stronger actions given the starting point we are at with our current health system and the capacity we have. These are things we need to consider.

With the economic packages outlined by the Premier and Treasurer today, we support many of these initiatives. In many cases they will go a long way to supporting regional businesses, regional communities and particularly those impacted communities, but let us not kid ourselves to say that our economy across all factors is strong and can cope with these changes. In the December quarter, for the first time in three years, state final demand was negative. Business investment was down 31 per cent last year. International merchandise is down 4 per cent and job vacancies are down 14.5 per cent for the year. We have the highest underemployment in the state and youth unemployment is well above the national average.

Whilst the Government is quick to say we have a strong economy and this package will assist that, in the second half of last year and particularly in the December quarter there were very concerning and worrying signs for our economy. The nature of the stimulus package does not come off a strong base, it comes off a concerning base.

There are a number of initiatives we would support. We support the one-off emergency relief payments for individuals and families who are required to self-isolate by Public Health as a result of the coronavirus, available to casual workers on low incomes, but we also know that casual workers in those exposed industries, hospitality, retail and events, have already lost their jobs. Casuals have already been let go. We believe there is more that can be done to support those workers. The hospitality industry is predominantly casual, 70 per cent, and those casuals do not have the capacity to hold from week to week. There is more that can be done for those workers in that respect.

It is interesting that you are able to find money for associations such as the Tourism Industry Council, the THA and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We support those initiatives but there could also be capacity to support Unions Tasmania and unions supporting workers across Tasmania as well.

[3.24 p.m.]

**Mr BARNETT** (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - Madam Speaker, I note the ministerial statement and congratulate the Premier on a decisive and proactive approach to the very challenging times we have in Tasmania and for advocating for those who are impacted.

As Minister for Primary Industries and Water, I indicate our seafood sectors are vital in delivering a stronger economy, particularly in our rural and regional communities. Recent research says that the Tasmanian fishing and aquaculture industry inject \$1.5 billion into our economy, more than any other state. The Fisheries and Research Development Corporation report shows Tasmania

has more than one in four Australian seafood industry jobs, so you can see we are punching above our weight in Tasmania and this decisive action today provides some support.

As well as our iconic salmon industry, our abalone fishery supplies over 25 per cent of total annual global production of wild-caught abalone. Our southern rock lobster fishery is a major industry providing significant benefits as a commercial and popular iconic recreational fishery. Our shellfish industry employs hundreds of people growing and selling oysters and mussels.

Under normal conditions our seafood is prized by Tasmanians and around the world. It is a valuable resource supporting small businesses and jobs across our regional communities. That is why the Government has made a \$26 million investment to help build our sustainable seafood sector with \$13.8 million in the 2019-20 Budget to benefit all Tasmanians and these industries with significant jobs and benefits for the economy.

The salmon industry employs thousands of people directly and indirectly. In the abalone industry I am advised there are some 100 active divers and 60 deckhands and in the rock lobster industry around 150 fishermen and 100 deckhands. There are employees in the scalefish industries and a range of other businesses in abalone and rock lobster doing things in the processing sector. Oysters and mussels have around 400 employees across 65 businesses, many being casuals and working across sectors, and very unfortunately I have been hearing strongly from these people from the outset of this pandemic that their livelihoods are being seriously impacted.

China initially stopped taking product, particularly rock lobster and abalone, and with impacts now spreading to the domestic market that has been and is being affected, so as a responsible government we are responding to these changing issues and challenging times with the impact of this pandemic. As the Premier has pointed out, the wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians is a top priority.

Additionally, this pandemic will have economic consequences and my office and I have been in direct contact with the fishing industries and I understand the impact it is having across those industries. The Australian Government stimulus package will assist businesses and support households and I am in regular contact with Senator Jonno Duniam, my counterpart in that space, to determine the best outcome from the \$1 billion federal government Regional Community Support Fund. We must keep working to respond effectively and proportionately to this pandemic, so I am pleased to see the initiatives from the Premier's ministerial statement that positively impact across Tasmania in the hard-hit fisheries sector.

I welcome the \$20 million concessional loans for hospitality, tourism, seafood production and export businesses and I know my stakeholders will welcome the waiving of payroll tax for the last four months of this financial year.

The industries that I represent are reporting their cash flow issues and we have responded and listened. Requiring our government agencies to pay those bills sooner from 30 days back to 14 days and other initiatives will provide relief to those businesses that need help now and help keep people in jobs. They will help those feeling the financial strain in these events and I do understand the strain being felt, so I applaud the additional \$1 million in grants to mental health organisations to support individuals experiencing mental health difficulties as a result of the issues associated with the pandemic. The Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council's Stay Afloat campaign is doing a great job in that regard.



I note that this Government already put a range of measures in place for our important seafood sector, so in a first for Australia in response to the shutdown in exports to China we rolled over the rock lobster quotas for industry. We quickly assisted in rock lobster being sold into local markets and worked shoulder to shoulder with the industry.

In addition, the Government worked with the Tasmanian Abalone Council to allocate \$300 000 from the Abalone Industry Development Fund for a processor support package and I am pleased to advise the Chamber of that initiative just today. This will help processors manage the costs of severe market challenges. We initially enabled annual fees to be paid by instalment in rock lobster, giant crab and finfish fisheries for abalone divers and these fees will now be waived for 12 months at a cost of \$670 000. I thank the Premier for his proactive and decisive approach to supporting those affected.

These initiatives and other possible actions will of course be reviewed and monitored. We understand the pressure that is being felt in the seafood sector and the aquaculture industry and we know that jobs are a top priority for all Tasmanians. Putting food on the table is vital, especially in these challenging times.

In addition to these measures we will continue to work with our fisheries and aquaculture peak industries and those working directly in them - the small, the medium, and the large. We will continue to work with the Australian Government and relevant experts regarding recovery and to come out the other side of this together.

**Statement noted.**

## **PREMIER'S ADDRESS**

**Resumed from above.**

[3.31 p.m.]

**Mr SHELTON** (Lyons - Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management) - Madam Speaker, prior to the lunch I had the opportunity to inform the House of what I witnessed when I visited the different fire activity areas, one on Pelham Road and the main fire that I visited was at Fingal with the two fires going either side of the Fingal Valley Road, north and south of Fingal. I talked about the fantastic effort that went on between the SES, the Tasmania Fire Service, Parks and Wildlife Service and Sustainable Timber Tasmania, and of course, private contractors, in attacking that fire.

I appreciated the opportunity when I arrived there a couple of times around about 4.30 or 5 p.m., when they were knocking off, blackened by the day's work and in for a bit of sustenance at the staging area to finish their day to thank those members for the fantastic work that was there. I asked the question every time I was there: how many people were on the ground? During the major part of the fire there were over 150 personnel on the ground on those fires at Fingal. It was a fantastic effort by both our volunteers and paid staff in all those agencies.

In February, I had the pleasure of attending the trainee firefighter development course graduation where I saw another 13 firefighters join the Tasmania Fire Service ranks. This brings the number of firefighters to 334 which is the highest level it has been in the past 10 years. Another

round of recruitment is already underway and this year for the first time, experienced career firefighters from other firefighting agencies are being encouraged to apply.

The Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is committed to implementing the recommendations arising from the AFAC review into the 2018-19 bushfire season in collaboration with the Tasmania Fire Service, Parks and Wildlife Service and Sustainable Timber Tasmania. I can confirm that six of the nine recommendations, numbers 1, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are completed.

In his address, the Premier has announced that a new state operations centre will be established in the central location from which all our emergency services may coordinate our response to emergencies, delivering recommendation 9 of the AFAC review. We must do everything that we can to protect life, property, infrastructure and our natural assets. We risk putting people's lives and property at greater risk if we do not act now.

To keep Tasmanians safe the Government will introduce legislation in the coming months to make it easier to reduce fuel and mechanically clear vegetation from fuel breaks once the bushfire hazard management plan has been put in place. The legislation will introduce a new streamlined process to enable fuel loads to be reduced while balancing environmental and community concerns. Most importantly, it will make it easier for landholders to reduce fuel loads by allowing approvals to be granted in a shorter time frame when a bushfire hazard management plan is in place. It will also make landholders, both public and private, responsible for undertaking fuel reduction activities under a bushfire hazard management plan in order to keep the broader community safe.

It will also ensure that we have more resources available this year to reduce our fuel loads. We will create two new fuel reduction teams with 12 extra staff to reduce fuel loads across the state and also provide additional resources to help landowners plan and undertake fuel reduction activities.

The Government will also provide more resources to the Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure we have winch insurgent capability for remote area fire teams within Tasmania so we can insert specialist firefighters and respond quickly when needed.

These commitments deliver recommendations 3 and 7 of the AFAC review. In regards to recommendation 2, the Tasmania Fire Service has a volunteer remote area team project underway with the aim of strengthening its existing career capability by training up volunteer remote area firefighters. The Chief Officer has informed me that in the near future the Tasmania Fire Service will be moving to advertise expressions of interest for volunteers to elect to train in remote area firefighting.

Looking ahead to the 2020 autumn burn season, it is pleasing to see that burn planning has been finalised and burning has already commenced. Across a fuel reduction program, there are 78 strategic fuel reduction burns around Tasmania covering over 40 000 hectares that are approved and ready to be implemented this autumn. The number of actual burns that will be implemented in the autumn of 2020 will depend on the availability of suitable weather conditions. However, every opportunity to burn is sought across the year and burning is not constrained to defined seasons. This is a continuous process of planning and adding burns to the list.

While fuel reduction is not the silver bullet, it is an extremely important element of fire management. As a Government we are strongly committed to fuel reduction and will continue to improve and innovate our nation-leading fuel reduction program in order to mitigate the effects of bushfires and make them safer and easier to fight. We are working hard to protect all Tasmanians

and to ensure that our local communities in towns, cities and regions across the state are well prepared.

It has been a strong couple of years of delivery for our magnificent police service. I congratulate them all, from the Commissioner and his leadership team to the newest recruits, on the great work they do to keep Tasmanians safe. We are investing in an additional 125 police officers to increase Tasmania Police to an authorised strength of 1358 full-time positions. In November last year we released the allocation and location of where the additional 125 officers will be deployed.

Our main focus will always be to have police on the beat. The majority of additional numbers, 109 of the 125, have been allocated to frontline duties at first response main police stations and in regional and rural stations around the state. In 2019, 35 police officers were deployed to key locations including Launceston, Glenorchy, Bridgewater, Burnie, Devonport, St Helens, Smithton, Firearms Services and Learning and Development, and an additional dog handler is also now in place.

I had the pleasure of witnessing a further 22 constables graduating on 13 March 2020, just last Friday, adding further numbers to our front line. This year, new police officers will go into Hobart, Launceston, Burnie, Sorell, Bruny Island, Kingston, Oatlands, Georgetown, Scottsdale, St Helens and Deloraine, as well as the establishment of a new statewide crime command which will coordinate a whole-of-state approach to disrupting and preventing serious and organised crime. Six specialist ice investigators will continue our war on ice-related drug activities and four officers will start the first stage of our full-time specialist special operations group for rapid response and to support high risk police operations.

We have a police service to be proud of and I thank them for the work that they do day in, day out. While parliament has been in recess I have been visiting many of the urban and regional police stations around Tasmania. I have been talking directly to the frontline police officers to hear about what has been happening in their patch and I have enjoyed that. Because of these visits, I have a greater appreciation of why we need properly resourced police.

The good news is that we have been investing in the equipment the police need. We have nearly completed the \$3.4 million rollout of body-worn cameras to frontline police officers. To date, Tasmania Police have deployed 736 body-worn camera devices across the state and all devices will be deployed by the end of March 2020.

We have purchased 17 remote piloted aircraft, or drones, which have been used in 131 operations statewide, including evades, searches for missing persons and stolen property, providing investigators with an aerial view of car crash scenes and recently assisting the rescue recovery teams in the tragic Henty goldmine incident.

Construction work for the \$5 million New Norfolk police station and the \$5 million Longford police station is expected to be underway in the second half of 2020, with the subsequent work expected to be completed prior to the end of 2021. Tender documents for the construction of the new \$12 million Sorell emergency hub is scheduled for completion in the final quarter of this year.

Our extra investment into the police housing upgrade program, with renovations and purchases of police houses for police officers and their families stationed in remote and regional areas, is ongoing.

After successfully delivering phase 1 of the large vessel replacement program with the commissioning of the \$8.6 million police vessel *Cape Wickham* in August 2017, we have committed \$10.7 million for the replacement of the PV *Dauntless* and PV *Van Diemen* under the second and third phases of the program. I am pleased to advise that in December 2019 a contract was signed with the boatbuilder Hart Marine, located in Mornington in Victoria, to design and construct a patrol vessel to replace PV *Dauntless*, due to be delivered to Tasmania in early 2021.

Having mentioned our local communities, I will now speak in relation to my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Local Government. Firstly I acknowledge that at this time the Tasmanian Government is committed to working closely with local councils and their communities to ensure that we prepare for the impact of coronavirus across the state.

The Local Government Division within the Department of Premier and Cabinet is currently considering what measures are required to support our local government sector. If we need to address the legislative framework guiding councils' processes and procedures, for example how council meetings are conducted, we will do so and will work with the sector on that. The division and the Director of Local Government are currently working with the Local Government Association of Tasmania to ensure accurate and appropriate information channels are developed for the sector in relation to the coronavirus outbreak.

Councils are already doing a great job of assisting to get accurate and straightforward messaging out into the community, with council websites displaying appropriate information about COVID-19 and, importantly, directing their communities back to the Department of Health for further information and updates. The Tasmanian Government will continue to work with councils to ensure communities across the state are prepared as we go through this challenging time together.

I will now move on to the important work we are undertaking more broadly to ensure that councils are sustainable and fit for purpose for their communities into the future. As a former local government elected representative and mayor of Meander Valley Council for several years, I can say with all sincerity that it is a great privilege to serve and represent one's local community. Now in my capacity as Minister for Local Government, I can reiterate the statement and acknowledge the additional privilege and responsibility of working with the local government sector to deliver good outcomes for all Tasmania's local communities across our rural and regional areas and across our cities and towns.

I have been making my way around the state in recent months visiting local communities and meeting directly with councils in the different municipalities. I have been taking the time to speak with councils, listen to them and hear their perspective on what is important in their local areas and regions.

Tasmania's majority Liberal Government recognises that our local councils play a vital role in shaping and fostering good local communities. As the level of government closest to the people, councils are well placed to give people a say in issues that matter to them and affect their local area. As we are all aware, Tasmania has currently experienced an exciting period of growth and transformation, bringing both opportunities and challenges for everyone, including local councils and their communities.

Our strong economic performance in recent years has increased the attractiveness of our state as a place to live and work, which has led to population growth. However, we know from recent government and UTAS population studies that despite steady population growth overall, population

change at the regional and local level is more complex and varied. These trends may in the future challenge the long-term sustainability of some councils. Councils themselves will need to look for innovative responses to challenges and, in certain cases, they will face tough decisions about how the service needs and expectations of their communities can be met.

A key part of the Government's response to these issues is the review of the local government legislative framework. This wholesale review has a focus on reducing red tape and removing barriers to council collaboration and innovation. The Government intends to implement a new legislative framework by the end of 2020 which will enable councils to effectively and efficiently undertake their roles and responsibilities, whilst meeting twenty-first century expectations.

The legal framework governing the Tasmanian local government sector needs to reflect and support the important role of councils and align with the expectations of the community and other levels of government.

Public consultation on the Government's 51 proposed reforms to the local government legislation closed on 30 September 2019. The proposed reforms received a high level of engagement and received 870 submissions. It has been great to see such strong interest in the proposed reforms from both the local government sector and the Tasmanian community, which will help create a robust framework for the future of local government in Tasmania.

I thank all those members of the sector and the community who have taken the time to engage with the reforms, provided input and made submissions. Given the high number of submissions and the importance and complexity of some of the reform options, the Government's policy position is still being finalised. Given the high interest and feedback received, I have asked for specialist advice on a number of reforms to better inform me in making decisions, and I am expecting that advice imminently.

We recognise the importance of getting this major piece of policy reform right the first time round, so we are working hard to ensure that our next step will lead to the delivery of a legislative framework that is robust and fit for purpose into the future.

Once government has the opportunity to consider all final advice, a decision will be made on which reforms will be progressed. I am confident that this will occur in the coming weeks. The Government is committed to ensuring that local councils are well placed to address their long-term sustainability challenges and continue to meet modern service delivery expectations.

Through proactive government-led initiatives, including the local government legislative review, voluntary amalgamations and shared service studies, and the establishment of the Greater Hobart Act we are providing the sector with real tangible opportunities to respond to the 21st century challenges. We believe that the local government reforms stand the best chance of succeeding when progressed as voluntary and transparent and have high levels of support from the community.

This Government is providing real support and strategic opportunities for councils to respond to these challenges that they face in the 21st century. Councils themselves therefore are well equipped, and indeed, have a clear responsibility to work within the framework to provide for them and make decisions, even the tough ones. That is the best way they can serve their communities.

I acknowledge the Premier's vision in the outline of his address. It is a clear vision for the future of Tasmania, unlike the alternatives presented by those opposite. I thank the Premier for his address.

**Time expired.**

[3.51 p.m.]

**Mr STREET** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, the previous speaker, Mr Shelton, made the point that a week is a long time in politics and a fortnight is an eternity. A lot has moved on in this place since the Premier stood here and gave his Premier's Address. I feel a bit self-conscious even delivering my reply to the Address today given what we are dealing with as a parliament and as a society. I will do so with the hope that the five people who are paying attention right now understand that this was prepared a fortnight ago.

I am as surprised as anyone to be back in this place speaking today but I welcome the opportunity to serve the people of Franklin. I am looking forward to the next two years in this place and out in the community, talking to the people in my electorate about their hopes for the future and what we can do as a government to assist them in reaching their goals and aspirations.

I start by acknowledging the service and commitment of my predecessor in Franklin, Will Hodgman. Eighteen years is a long time in any one place of employment these days and 18 years in this place is an exceptionally long time. The leadership of a political party is a massive additional responsibility for any person to take on and for 14 of Will's 18 years in politics it was a responsibility that he carried. I thank Will for his service to both the Liberal Party and the Tasmanian people and wish him well in whatever he chooses to do in the future. To his wife, Nicky, and his children, thank you for the patience and commitment you showed to allow Will to do what he did for 18 years and I trust that you will now enjoy the extra time that you will inevitably be able to spend with him.

I congratulate Peter Gutwein on his election as Leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party and on becoming the 46th Premier of Tasmania. He has expressed himself what an honour it is and I am sure he will serve the people of Tasmania with distinction as he has in his previous positions. As the member for Franklin, I look forward to doing everything I can over the next two years to support him and the outstanding Cabinet he has appointed.

It goes without saying that the summer just gone was a tumultuous time in Australia for so many in bushfire prone areas. For all those who lost property or, even more tragically, loved ones I can only offer my sincere condolences. We now live in an ever-changing natural environment and we must acknowledge this and act as such. Arguments about the extent of human impact on the changing climate are unhelpful. We need to deal with the situation as it confronts us.

As communities in New South Wales and Victoria, in particular, now move into the long recovery phase I want to briefly reflect on the Huon Valley and the fact it is just over 12 months into its own recovery from the horrific fires of early 2019. I was fortunate enough to be invited to the official reopening of the Tahune Air Walk recently. The Huon Valley needs its iconic attractions for the viability of businesses right across the municipality. I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to visit the Huon Valley to do so, in particular the Air Walk as it has a great story to tell in regard to the resilience and regeneration of our natural environment. It also graphically demonstrates the scale and enormity of the fire that went through that area. When you see the fire damage on trees 70 metres above the ground you truly begin to appreciate the bravery of the professionals and volunteers who worked to keep us safe during the bushfire season.

I also believe we need to acknowledge that neither Tasmania, or Australia for that matter, exists in a vacuum. Our changing climate is a global event that requires global solutions. The basic fact of the matter is that Australia could shut down all its carbon emitting industries tomorrow and next summer we would still face the same bushfire and climate challenges we faced this summer. We need to mitigate not just our fire risk but all of our extreme events such as drought and flood while we work as a global community to reduce our carbon emissions.

China's increasing carbon emissions currently outweighs Australia's entire emissions profile. As long as this is the case it is folly to talk about Australia in isolation in relation to this issue. We must take action but we cannot afford to put ourselves at a competitive disadvantage simply to act as a test case for the world.

I want to make it quite clear that this is not to say that Australia and in particular, Tasmania, cannot be a leader on this issue. The announcement of a doubling of Tasmania's renewable energy generation by 2040 is the perfect example of this. The market has moved towards what we have, baseload renewable energy. The opportunities for Tasmania because of this are almost endless.

I want Tasmania to be the most attractive place in Australia for the industries of tomorrow to base themselves because of our abundant supply of renewable energy. Our plan to be a leader in the production of green hydrogen will be detailed in the April release of our Renewable Energy Action Plan. It is the perfect example of using our current competitive advantage in renewable energy generation to capitalise on an industry of the future. Over the next 10 years, \$50 million will assist in establishing this industry, not only leading to more jobs for Tasmanians but also the opportunity to export hydrogen to countries such as China to help reduce their emissions' profile and contribute to the global effort that I just spoke of.

While some may deride the pursuit of economic growth, the fact is we need to grow our economy to continue to provide opportunities for Tasmanians. I have spoken in this place before about the fact that my generation saw a significant exodus to the mainland and overseas looking for opportunities that were not available here. While it is inevitable that some people will leave, it cannot be for lack of opportunity. We need to keep our young people here working and raising their families if Tasmania is to thrive and advance. Since we came to government in 2014 more than 21 000 jobs have been created and there are now more Tasmanians employed than at any stage in our history.

As the Premier pointed out in his address, our economy is now growing at its strongest rate in 15 years and has passed New South Wales and Victoria in terms of the rate of growth. We have reversed the decline in population and business confidence in Tasmania is one of the highest in the nation. This means business owners are more likely to invest in their future in Tasmania, driving innovation and employment.

A growing economy and increased population growth, along with a number of other factors, has led to a focus on homelessness in Tasmania. We are increasing our investment into social and affordable housing as well as retaining and strengthening a number of government programs to assist with home ownership, particularly first home buyers. We need all levels of government to work together to deal with the issue of homelessness and housing affordability. The simple fact is that we need to increase the supply of housing across all sectors of the market and local government as planning authorities have a massive role to play in making the building of properties and the creation of new subdivisions as simple and efficient as possible.

We need an urgent injection of inner city dwellings in Hobart in particular. In the last 50 years more than 90 per cent of our population growth in southern Tasmania has come in the municipalities outside of Hobart and Glenorchy. This has led to an urban sprawl and traffic and infrastructure issues that we are now dealing with but it will only get worse unless we balance our growing population across metropolitan Hobart and the outer suburbs.

Anyone who knows me understands that one of my passions is sport, both the following of it and the appreciation of what it can do for individuals and communities. Again, it has become fashionable in some quarters to deride Australia's reputation as a sporting nation as though sport is inferior to the arts or other pursuits. To my way of thinking it is one of this country's great positives and an element of our culture that other countries would desperately like to attain. Having said that, we do seem to have lost some of our passion for participation and that is hurting us health wise. We need to work hard to increase our participation rates in sport and general physical exercise. Social isolation is also a massive problem in today's society and sport has an important role to play in connecting people, particularly across demographics that otherwise may never interact. Sport is one of our great levellers and we need to continue to promote its importance.

The recently announced deal for Tasmania's return to the NBL is such a positive one for our state. While it is a commercial deal for Larry Kestelman and the NBL, I do want to thank him for recognising Tasmania's absence from the national competition and proactively seeking to do something about it. A capital city needs a modern events' venue to attract world-class events and entertainment and the upgrades to the Derwent Entertainment Centre will provide that for Tasmania.

Our re-entry to the NBL will put Tasmania back on the national and global stage, given basketball's reach into Asia and beyond, and it is where we belong. For too long we have been denied access to these platforms and we can only hope this is the beginning of change in that regard. I was heartened to hear Mr Kestelman talking about purchasing and running the WNBL as well in the future. I hope that Tasmania's re-inclusion in that competition follows soon as well.

That brings me to the vexed issue of the AFL and Tasmania's participation in it. Four years ago in my maiden speech, I spoke about my hope that one day I would be able to support Tasmania's standalone teams in the AFL and AFLW, and I truly believe we are closer today than we were then, although we still have a lot of work to do.

The AFL taskforce has presented a clear case for how Tasmania can justify its existence in the national competition and it has also dispelled the myths used in the past to deny us access to our rightful place in the national competition, some of which the past CEO, Mr Demetriou, conveniently used to argue against our inclusion at the time. What we need now is leadership from the current AFL executive and not platitudes from past leaders like Mr Demetriou, who denied us entry into the AFL but now say it is Tasmania's time, when he no longer has any influence on the decisions that are being made.

While I understand that some people may view the Government's proposed support of an AFL team as an extravagance, I truly believe it is money well spent in terms of giving us access to an industry that will provide employment and opportunities for years to come. Teams of our own in the AFL and AFLW could be the single most exciting opportunity available to unite Tasmanians in a common passion, and a team of our own will drive visitation and tourism in our winter months when there is an inevitable drop-off in numbers.



It is my hope that one day Tasmania is a member of all the national sporting codes that exist across Australia. I talked earlier about retaining our young and talented people, and aspiration and role models are an important part of that process. We need a grassroots to elite pathway in sport as well as industry in Tasmania. Young Tasmanians need to interact with successful people in their chosen field and see that it is possible to reach your full potential in Tasmania rather than having to chase opportunities further afield.

I will change tack now. The murder of Hannah Clarke and her children, Laianah, Aaliyah and Trey, was a devastating incident for the nation, but in particular for their family and friends. It was a grotesque act carried out by a vicious coward with no regard for anyone but himself. It was difficult to watch the coverage of this incident but it was important that it was widely reported because as a nation, it is clear we still need a wake-up call in relation to this issue.

Hannah Clarke and her children were unlikely to have been the first victims of domestic violence in Australia on the day of this incident and in the intervening weeks, they will not have been the last either. It was pointed out in the MPI on our first day back here this year that nine women have already died this year besides Hannah Clarke, and last year, 61 women died. The graphic nature of this incident in Queensland made it 'newsworthy', but domestic violence is an insidious problem in Australia that we cannot turn our eyes away from just because it might make us uncomfortable.

The Premier has taken the portfolio for the Prevention of Family Violence and during the MPI referred to, he acknowledged that while not all domestic violence is perpetrated by males, the vast majority is, and all males in leadership positions or with a public voice need to accept this and work to set a better example.

I will not dignify this person by mentioning their name, but when public people are prepared to publicly voice the opinion that some men are driven to actions like those against Hannah Clarke and her children, we are at a depressing point as a society. There is no justification for domestic violence and to even begin to think that there is leads to more of the very same problems we are currently facing, where violence is viewed as a legitimate choice for some.

Support services are critical for dealing with our current domestic violence issues. Removing oneself from a dangerous situation, which is exactly what Hannah Clarke did last December, must be a decision that comes with the appropriate degree of support by government services. The Premier's portfolio is the Prevention of Family Violence, not dealing with family violence. Prevention is always better than cure and preventing domestic violence is going to require education and a recalibration of what it means to be a man in today's society.

At the same time those terrible events in Queensland hit the media, I also watched the story on *Four Corners* involving St Kevin's College in Melbourne. While the story of Paris Street was distressing to say the least, the element of the story that really hit home for me was the misogynistic culture that existed at the school that had gone largely unchallenged for so long. Young female students from the nearby girls' college told stories of feeling intimidated and uncomfortable walking past groups of male students, and I must admit that it took me back 25 years to my own time at an all boys school. I honestly assumed that the culture I experienced was a mark of the times and to see it on display in 2020 was a genuine shock to the system. Dominant superiority and intimidation are not masculine qualities. They are the defining characteristics of a bully and personally, there is nothing I hate more than bullies.

Respectful relationships need to be the example we set if we are to go any way towards eliminating domestic violence in Australia. It is not enough to simply deplore incidents of domestic violence. We need to speak out against the cultural norms that make some men feel they are justified in their mistreatment of women.

I remember once that I was speaking in this place and I was critical of the behaviour of Chris Gale, the cricketer, towards a female sports journalist. By interjection I was labelled a feminist and it has always stuck with me because I thought at the time, and still think, have we slipped so far as a society that simply believing that men and women are of equal value is a feminist belief? I would certainly like to think we have not.

The cultural change that is needed in order to properly deal with domestic violence is perfectly encapsulated in the push for more profile for women's sport and the arguments going on around it. The other day I listened to a 20-minute argument about whether the AFLW was a waste of time and money. Thankfully, on this occasion Collingwood president, Eddie McGuire, was involved and he made the point that it was not just about the standard of the game or how much revenue the AFL was or was not generating, it was about the fact that the Collingwood Football Club itself was a better environment for everyone, men and women, with the women's team participating and involved at their training base.

I want to finish by commenting on where we are at with politics here in Tasmania, across Australia and also on a global scale. I certainly do not want to lecture or pretend that I have all the answers because I do not, but these are my observations.

It seems to me that every year that goes by we are getting more and more ideologically driven and divided and we are forgetting that what separates is so much less than what unites us. If there is nothing else to be gained out of the situation we are currently going through it should be that we all, as elected officials whether in this place, in the federal parliament or in any place across the world, should be reminded of why we are here, and that is essentially at the end of the day to guarantee the health and safety as best we can of the people we represent.

We also seem to have become a society that values opinion over fact. It is all very well to have a strong opinion on an issue, but the strength of your convictions does not automatically make you correct, nor does your right to an opinion mean that I have to necessarily respect your opinion. Not everyone's opinion is of equal value either. My opinion on how to deal with the coronavirus situation we are currently in is not as important as that of the Chief Medical Officer, and to pretend otherwise is a dangerous situation we are seeing played out more and more on social media.

I talked about my passion for sport. My great love is the Liverpool Football Club and their manager, Jurgen Klopp, is one of my current-day heroes. He best summed it up for me when he said that real leadership is not pretending to have all the knowledge and answers but to have the confidence to rely on the experts around you with the best information possible to inform your decisions. Right now more than ever we need real leaders and I sincerely believe the Premier and the Minister for Health have proven themselves to be real leaders when we needed them most.

Despite the situation we find ourselves in with the coronavirus we are currently dealing with, I truly believe that Tasmania's best days are in front of us and I am looking forward to being a part of the Gutwein Government that guides this state forward for the betterment of all Tasmanians.

[4.08 p.m.]

**Mr GUTWEIN** (Bass - Premier) - Madam Speaker, it is my role today to close the responses to the state of the state address and I thank all members for their contributions. I appreciate their responses.

It would be fair to say that things have changed considerably since we were here earlier this year when I provided the Premier's Address and outlined what was a significant and comprehensive overview of the state's finances, the state economy and where we were heading, as well as over more than 30 additional commitments that we were to make and which we will continue to make for the future of this state.

In terms of matters I touched on back then, the significant funding into Health of \$600 million over four years will stand our state in good stead as we go through these difficult times. Other measures included to bring forward and ensure that we provided the ongoing support over a period of two years for those who want to build their first house or to downsize, if they are a pensioner, or conversely if they want to purchase their first house.

Things have changed significantly since then. Paul Keating once said that 'the business of politics is the conflict business'. That is something that over time I have played my part in in this place. You bring two sides together with opposing views and opposing ideas and, as a result of the debate that occurs, hopefully you create synergies that provide better outcomes. That is the essence of the Westminster system.

We find ourselves in unusual times now. It will be important that all of us in this place do our very best to work together to ensure that we make our number one priority the health and wellbeing and safety of all Tasmanians and, importantly, that we do everything that we can to support the jobs of those people whom we represent.

The speech that I had prepared for today over the previous weeks - and with the comments that have been made today - was one about looking at the contributions of members from the other side and pointing out their shortcomings and failings and a range of criticisms in terms of their responses, uncosted, unfunded and, to be frank, a response that paled into insignificance compared to the comprehensive response of the Government. But I do not intend to do that. We are in different times. We are in difficult times. It is important that in this place we do what Tasmanians would expect us to do; that is, for all of us to stand up and represent the people of Tasmania to the best of our ability and on this side of the House to make decisions informed by advice to take this state forward and to deal with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

In closing this debate I want to reflect on of the ministerial statement that I provided this afternoon. I believe the statement that I provided to the House today is a neat bookend in terms of where we are today and where we will need to go. I want to spend a couple of minutes reiterating some of the key points that I made in the ministerial statement because there are important messages that Tasmanians need to hear about the way we conduct ourselves as individuals in the coming weeks and months as we work our way through this challenging time.

One of the most effective ways to flatten the curve and to slow the transmission of the virus is social distancing. I again want to speak to Tasmanians about the need for them to: practice social distancing in their day-to-day activities; not go out in public if they are sick; avoid medical settings unless they are absolutely necessary; give people one and a half metres of space; wave instead of shaking hands, hugging or kissing; practice excellent personal hygiene; and ensure that people clean

their hands often and thoroughly. If at work: work out ways to minimise close contact to give people one and half metres of space; minimise groups to 10 or less; encourage the use of technology for meetings; and ensure that they clean their workplaces frequently. It is these small things in terms of social distancing where we can all play our part in ensuring that we do what we can to limit the spread of the virus.

In the response that I provided this afternoon I explained that it was proportionate, scalable and it could be delivered quickly, and that it will also position the state for a strong recovery. But it was also important in that response to outline those things that we would do as well to support our community immediately. We will provide one-off emergency relief payments for individuals of \$250 and up to \$1000 for families who are required by public health to self-isolate. I made the point that this will be available to casual workers and those on low incomes and funding for that measure would be uncapped.

I also made the point that we want to provide further help for those self-isolating, and we will provide \$1 million through the Department of Communities Tasmania to organisations such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, and Rural Business Tasmania. These organisations will support vulnerable people through the provision of food hampers, medical supplies and counselling.

We will provide \$2 million to support our GPs and pharmacists in the primary health care sector, as well as other health care providers to enable them to conduct minor capital work, and to provide them with funding to assisting in the purchase of equipment, including PPE. We are also providing significant support for frontline workers who find themselves in circumstances where the family members are ill. We will provide accommodation for them so they can continue to contribute to the frontline response, as I am certain many of them will want to.

The Government will also provide an additional \$1 million in grants to mental health organisations to support individuals through what will be a particularly difficult time over the coming weeks and months. We will create an emergency accommodation support fund of \$1 million, again administered through Department of Communities Tasmania to assist individuals and families who have been placed on home quarantine but who are unable to return to their regular place of residence due to self-isolation measures being in place.

We want to ensure that we do what we can to support Tasmanians, to support their health, their wellbeing, and safety. We also want to do what we can to ensure that we provide stimulus to our economy, that we support those businesses that have been affected and invest, where we can, in areas that will make a difference.

The tourism sector is going to be devastated as a result of what has occurred. Travel from international ports will stop, I imagine, later this week. It certainly will have slowed by now. People leaving countries to come to Australia simply will not come with our two-week isolation period. To be frank, that is a good thing for this country.

Importantly, we announced today \$50 million for local government in interest-free loans to assist and to make certain that they are able to look at the tourism stock that they have - the toilets, facilities, visitor information centres - and ensure that whilst we work our way through this we can keep people employed and, importantly, improve our small tourism assets so that when people come back to Tasmania there is an even better experience for them.

We looked at what we could do to get money out the door quickly, to get people into work and to support our small businesses, our chippies, our plumbers, our electricians, our painters, and our tilers. Whilst our construction sector is still strong, and we will continue with the roll out of our \$3.7 billion infrastructure program, it is important that we have additional projects available: projects that, instead of being shovel-ready that require planning, projects that are screwdriver and paintbrush ready. By bringing forward \$50 million of maintenance on public housing, hospitals, schools and Parks assets we will be able to provide work immediately.

I will not run through all the measures we announced today, but I do want to take this opportunity, as I did in the previous contribution earlier this afternoon, to put on the record my thanks to our health workers. Those who are working in public health are doing an enormous job at the moment. To those other public servants who are doing their absolute best to support Tasmanians and support the services they provide to the state, I thank you. These are difficult times. These are challenging times, and the public sector has not taken a backward step. They have been prepared to step up, to work harder, to support Tasmanians, as I hope all Tasmanians will support each other.

I said in my speech this afternoon that we will get through this because we are Tasmanians. At the end of the day, Tasmanians are resilient. Tasmanians will support each other. Tasmanians will go that extra step, and hold out their hand and provide a lift-up for people who need it.

It is going to be very important that all of us in this place do what we can to ensure that our response at a personal level, but also at a government and corporate level, is informed by advice, is proportionate, is scalable and, importantly, assists Tasmanians.

As I said in the state of the state address and in closing it today, Tasmania has changed since I delivered that. Tasmania has changed, Australia has changed and the world has changed. It is going to be important that this small state has all of us working together, assisting each other, ensuring that we focus on the health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians and, importantly, their jobs, and we do whatever we can in this place to support our fellow Tasmanians, the people we represent, to ensure we get through it and that there is a brighter future for Tasmanians at the end of it.

**Address noted.**

## **EVIDENCE AMENDMENT BILL 2020 (No. 4)**

### **Second Reading**

[4.21 p.m.]

**Ms ARCHER** (Clark - Minister for Justice) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

This bill delivers on the Government's commitment to reform section 194K of the Evidence Act 2001 to allow victims of sexual crimes to consent to the publication of their identity in the media or otherwise if they choose to.

The Tasmanian Government takes the rights of victims of crime and the protection of victims very seriously. The purpose of this bill is to modernise section 194K of the Evidence Act 2001 to bring Tasmania into line with approaches in some other state jurisdictions and enable victims of sexual offences to be able to share their story.

Importantly, underpinning the reforms to section 194K is a victim's right to self-identify as a victim of a sexual crime or offence where they wish to do so, whilst also ensuring that those victims who do not wish to consent to the removal of their anonymity or are unable to provide consent can maintain their privacy and are protected from publicity.

This bill repeals and replaces the existing section 194K of the Evidence Act 2001 which prohibits the publication of information that identifies or is likely to lead to the identification of a victim, or a defendant, or a witness or intended witness, in a sexual offence proceeding.

The new section 194K(1) provides that it is a summary offence for a person to breach the publication prohibition. A person commits an offence if they publish identifying information, or cause identifying information to be published, that identifies or is likely to lead to the identification of a victim, defendant, witness or intended witness in relation to any proceedings in any court in respect of the crimes listed in sections 194K(1)(a) and (b) and the offence in section 194K(1)(c).

I will be referring to the term 'identifying information' a number of times during this second reading. This term has been defined by this bill to include, in relation to a person, the name, address, school, place of employment and any other reference or allusion that identifies, or is likely to lead to the identification of the person, and a picture or image of the person.

The bill provides that the prohibition on publishing 'identifying information' about a victim, defendant, witness or intended witness referred to in section 194K(1) continues whether or not criminal proceedings for the relevant crime or offence are, or have been finally determined or disposed of. However, the prohibition on publication can be overcome in circumstances where a victim has consented to self-identify in accordance with sections 194K(3) and (4) or a court order has been issued under section 194K(5).

As has been done in other jurisdictions, this bill makes it a defence to a prosecution for publishing identifying information about a victim of a sexual crime or offence if the victim consented to the publication.

The bill specifies at section 194K(3) that it is a defence to a prosecution for breaching the prohibition on publishing identifying information, or causing identifying information to be published, provided that the defendant to a charge establishes that:

- the publication is in accordance with a court order made under section 194K;
- the published identifying information relates to a person who is a victim of a crime or offence and that person has consented as required under section 194K to the publication and the identifying information is published in line with that consent;
- the publication does not identify, or is not likely to lead to the identification of another person who is a victim in respect of the relevant crime or offence unless that other victim has also given consent in line with the requirements of section 194K(4); and
- the publication of the information occurs after the criminal proceedings for the alleged crime or offence are finalised or otherwise disposed of.

For this defence, the bill requires the person or organisation that publishes the identity of a victim of a sexual crime or offence will need to show evidence that written consent was obtained prior to publication.

In cases where there are multiple victims of a sexual crime or offence, the bill provides for the protection of other non-consenting victims, as it will be an offence under the new section 194K to publish any identifying information about a victim if that victim has not consented to the publication of their identity.

The bill also applies to situations where a victim publishes their own story without the involvement of a journalist.

If a victim of a sexual crime or offence consents to the publication of identifying information either publicly identify themselves or through a media outlet, they will need to be 18 years of age at the time they gave consent and when the identifying information was published; consent in writing before the information was published; understand when they consent to publishing the identifying information that they may be identified or identifiable; and not be coerced into consenting to the publication of the identifying information.

The requirements necessary to satisfy that a victim's consent to publish their identifying information was given freely and voluntarily provide important safeguards to ensure that victims are not subject to undue pressure and are not incapable of consenting because of a mental impairment.

The bill maintains the option for any person or media organisation to apply to the court for an order authorising the publication of identifying information for a person referred to in section 194K(1).

The bill improves the previous court order process by clarifying what the court is to be satisfied of when an application relates to living victims or deceased victims of sexual crimes or offences. When the court determines whether to make an order, it is to be satisfied that the victim has been consulted, their views sought and that they understand that they may be identified if an order is made and information is published.

The bill provides that in circumstances where a victim of a sexual crime or offence is deceased, for the court to make an order, it is to be satisfied that if a deceased victim is likely to be identified, or identifiable from information being published, that the deceased's next of kin or legal representative has been consulted in relation to the order and that person has been given the chance to tell the court the wishes of the deceased victim, if known, in relation to being identified. In addition, for all applications, the court is to consider if making an order is in the public interest.

New section 194K(7) provides that a victim of a crime or offence under the section does not have to pay the application fee in respect of the application.

The bill retains the charge of contempt. New section 194K(8) provides that a person who publishes identifying information in breach of section 194K may be charged with contempt if they have not been prosecuted in accordance with section 194K(1).

Lastly, the bill defines the term 'publish' and references new modern forms of publication, in particular electronic methods of publishing.

Public consultation was undertaken on a draft version of this bill, noting that no submissions opposing the bill were received, and I thank those who made comments and suggestions in response to the draft legislation to address the serious issue of victims and survivors of sexual violence being able to choose to identify themselves, be it by their own hand or through the media, in the newspaper or online, should they wish to do so.

The Evidence Act is a complex area of law and any reform must strike the right balance, which is why the Government has consulted extensively with the broader legal sector, community organisations, media organisations, the education sector and the public. The Government believes what is now being proposed in this bill is the most balanced approach to reform and more consistent with exemption provisions in most state jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, I commend the bill to the House.

[4.32 p.m.]

**Ms HADDAD** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, it is a bit strange in the current environment to be in here thinking about anything other than the current global pandemic that we are facing. I say this because I recognise that this is an extremely important area of law reform and outside of a global health pandemic we would be feeling a bit different in this place. But this is an extremely important area of law reform and a very welcome and needed change to the Evidence Act of Tasmania. It is one that has been very hard fought for by many survivors of sexual abuse and advocates for those survivors as well as members of their family, members of the media, and members of the broader community.

I commend the Government for bringing forward these changes to the Evidence Act. As I have indicated already publicly, the Opposition will be supporting this legislation.

Before looking at the detail of the bill I also want to recognise the strength and the bravery of many of the survivors of sexual abuse and other unspeakable horrors. They have fought valiantly for this change, in particular, Steve Fisher who was the first person who fought for his rights through the current court order process to have his right to speak publicly about what happened to him. Grace Tame also fought for that right through court. She was horribly sexually abused by a teacher at a very young age where she should have been able to have the utmost faith in the adults in her life and at her school. She was sadly let down. Also, to Tameka Ridgeway who, while more recently having appeared in the media, suffered some of the most horrifying experiences I have ever read about and was required to be silent for decades about that abuse.

There are many more, as we heard in the Attorney-General's second reading contribution, many other survivors who have fought hard for this change and who have contributed to the Government's consultation process.

I put on the record my admiration for those people, particularly those three whom I have named. I cannot imagine the trauma, and the added trauma that they have gone through in fighting valiantly for that change, not just for their own benefit but for the benefit of all people who have suffered sexual abuse.

Through the Attorney-General, I thank her department and her office for the briefing I received on the bill, Brooke, Georgie, and Sean. Even though it is clear that we would be supporting this change, it was still beneficial to have the opportunity to hear some of the detail from the department



and the thinking of how the amendments were drafted, what is happening in other jurisdictions and how these amendments compare to the approach in other jurisdictions.

I note two tangible changes that occurred to the bill from its draft form that were as a result of consultation. That is the specification that a survivor needs to have been at the age of 18 both at the time of giving consent and at the time of publication. I believe this was a change made to the draft bill as a result of consultation and also the waiving of the fee payable by victims seeking a court order. Under the suggested new regime in the bill I believe that change was also made as a result of community consultation, and that is to be commended.

As we heard from the Attorney-General, there was an extensive consultation on this bill and because it is such an important area of law reform and something that touches so many Tasmanians, it was encouraging to see how many submissions had been received. By and large, they were supportive of the changes in the bill. Some of the submissions did express some concerns about two aspects of the bill which I have committed to stakeholders to put on the record here today.

I wanted to start by reading a short part of the Law Society's submission, mostly because it summarises the effect of the bill quite succinctly and note that they were supportive of the provisions of the bill. They explain that currently the publishing of identifying particulars which would likely lead to the identification of a victim, defendant or intended witness in proceedings in relation to certain crimes and an offence of sexual nature is controlled by the courts. There is a blanket prohibition on publishing such particulars without a court order, with contempt of court being the deterrent and sanctioned for doing so. The public interest test is the only guiding principle to making such an order. That is the current regime.

They explained that what was proposed under the bill is that a new regime would be in place but there would not be any significant changes to the crimes and offences that would attract the prohibition except for section 133 of the Code - Incest - now appears. In addition, there would not be any changes to the categories of people whose identity is protected or any significant changes in what amounts to identifying information and publish.

There are two significant changes, namely, that the courts will retain control of what can be published during relevant criminal proceedings but after those proceedings have been determined finally, or otherwise completed, the victim will have control because identifying particulars cannot be published without their free and informed consent. And two, it will be a summary offence to publish identifying information without an order or a victim's consent.

That encapsulates the changes proposed in the bill.

Beyond Abuse, which is an organisation founded by Steve Fisher, who I mentioned earlier and who works tirelessly for the rights of survivors of sex abuse to have their voice heard, supported the bill in its draft form and in the form that we see today. In a letter Steve Fisher wrote to members of parliament this week, he notes that he and the organisation have been working with survivors of child sexual abuse and sexual assault in Tasmania for 17 years. He congratulates the Government on listening to those survivors and making changes to section 194K of the Evidence Act to allow Tasmanian survivors a chance to be identified publicly if they wish.

Similarly, the Australian Lawyers Alliance, Tasmanian branch, expressed support for the bill. In their submission to the bill, they said their view is that the bill appropriately amends section 194K

of the Evidence Act to allow victims of sexual crime to participate fully in public discussions about the impacts of sexual offending when they freely consent to do so.

They take the view that to ensure the amendment does not offend against fundamental protections for accused persons facing trial, the amendment should expressly provide that a person cannot be taken to have consented until after the finalisation of court proceedings, including appeals. That is something the Government has included in the bill but it is an area that has attracted some concern from other stakeholders and I said I would put those views on the record.

The reason for starting with their submission is that they also make a recommendation that the Government commit to a review of the changes to the act after three years to monitor the effect of the amendments, if any, and on the rehabilitation of persons sentenced for sexual offences.

I would recommend that a review - and there are others who have called for such a thing as well - would benefit not only people sentenced for sexual offences but also survivors of sexual abuse who are either going through the court system or are telling their story publicly by way of consent or court order, and it would be prudent for government to commit to reviewing the legislation in three years to look at the effect of these changes to know for sure whether they have had the desired effect.

Community Legal Centres Tasmania was broadly supportive of the bill but they are one of several community organisations and others who submitted who were concerned about the limit on publication being only after cases are fully completed. I acknowledge that I have had the reasons for that explained to me and the Attorney-General has explained the reasons for that decision in her second reading contribution. As I said, I committed to putting those concerns of not only the Community Legal Centre but also others on the record today.

Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia is a New South Wales-based organisation that made a submission on the bill. They noted that they felt the bill was a positive step toward removing a current barrier for those who have experienced sexual violence in Tasmania. They acknowledge the safeguards, which we have done as well in this state, including that the survivor must be 18 years both at the time of publication and also at the time of consent, that they consented in writing and they have an understanding at the time of their consent that they may be identified or identifiable.

They have also recommended that there be a mechanism implemented for ongoing monitoring and evaluation in the changes to the Evidence Act and to the legal processes, with an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of any such change, including seeking to address any unintended consequences.

As with the recommendation from the ALA, it would be prudent from all perspectives to know there would be a mechanism in place to monitor the effects of these changes and to make sure they are having the intended effect over time, perhaps after three years, which is what ALA suggested.

Many members would be familiar with the work of Engender Equality in representing and supporting people who have experienced sexual assault. They welcome the bill and support the intended effects, but note that the bill, in their words, is hard to read and interpret and they saw that as a missed opportunity to educate and guide people who have experienced sexual assault.

My response is that legislation is often hard to read and complex and it is that way for a good reason, not in terms of it being hard to read but you would have to rewrite the entire Evidence Act

if you wanted to try and make these changes more publicly digestible. The reason I raise their concerns is that I believe there would be some benefit in having some plain English guides available to organisations like Engender Equality that could be distributed to lawyers, practitioners, Legal Aid, the media and available on state government websites.

That is a suggestion I would really like to see taken up in a lot of areas of law because, as they note, this piece of law is hard to read but many acts of parliament would be seen as cumbersome to read for a layperson outside of the parliament. In some ways that can be as barrier to the public understanding the intent of legislation. In an area like this where we want as a parliament to know that survivors of child sexual abuse are able to access these changes in a way that strengthens their voice and empowers them further, some kind of fact sheet or plain English guide could be distributed and I think would be well received.

Similarly, the Sexual Assault Support Service, or SASS, supported the intent of the bill. They noted that the current court process in place right now is complicated and cumbersome and I think that is widely acknowledged and part of the reason for the change. They also noted in their submission that they would like to see this new process for a survivor to gain a court order authorising publication of their name to be user-friendly, transparent and timely. That is another pointer to the idea of a review or some mechanism to monitor the effects of these changes over time to make sure that the new court order process, once it is in place, is those things - user-friendly, transparent and timely for survivors.

Those submissions and others were broadly supportive with some suggestions for simplicity and review. There were others that were a little more concerned, particularly with the issue of publication being prohibited until after all proceedings are finalised. That concern came from the Australia's Right to Know campaign, the coalition of media organisations, and I will not read them all out or I will run out of time.

Most of the major news outlets in Australia are part of that campaign, Australia's Right to Know, or ARTK. Their view is that it is a step too far to prohibit the identification of witnesses and they also have concerns around publication not being available prior to exhaustion of legal proceedings. Their view is that that subsection is unnecessary and detracts from the steps forward the bill otherwise represents. The reason for that is that they believe if the bill were to pass, Tasmania would be an outlier in this area of law.

They go on to explain that Victoria, in their section 1B of the Judicial Proceedings Act 1958, only permits complainants in sexual offence cases to consent to being identified if a proceeding in respect of the alleged offence is not pending in a court at the relevant time. In Queensland the relevant legislation only allows for consent if the intended publication is not a court report. They go on to explain the situation in ACT, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia where the complainant can give consent at any time of his or her choosing and they note that at an appropriate time they intend to make submissions to both the Victorian and Queensland parliaments.

They give some tangible examples. One of them is an example of the abuse that Steve Fisher suffered where he obtained a Supreme Court order which authorised publication identifying him as a sexual offence victim - his words - and that was called the identification order. Mr Fisher had already given interviews as part of the survivor support groups he joined or founded and had spoken publicly about his experiences. The effect of section 194K(3)(b)(v) is such that even in the face of Mr Fisher's clear consent, not only could any media publisher who identified him be prosecuted for

breaching section 194K, he too could be prosecuted for telling his own story in any of the formats referred to above.

The reason they raised that - and I acknowledge what the minister has said - is the time lag in which appeals could still be pending. The example they gave is that Mr Fisher's assailant was convicted in 2003 and was subsequently sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in jail. However, the proceedings that saw him put on the register did not occur until March 2008.

Under the proposed changes it would not be impossible for somebody to have suffered abuse many decades earlier, go through a court process in 2003, as appeals pending right up until 2008 or some matters that could still be heard. Therefore, that person would not be able to give consent or obtain a court order to have their voice heard in the public realm for years or decades.

End Rape on Campus is an organisation that was founded by Nina Funnell but also includes many other people who advocate for changes. I will use their words. They are -

... volunteer organisation that works to end sexual violence at universities and other educational institutions through prevention efforts, direct support for survivors and their advocates, and policy reform at campuses, state and federal levels.

Since its establishment in 2015, End Rape on Campus Australia has worked closely with multiple sexual assault survivors in tertiary educational settings around Australia, including Tasmania.

I know they have been very vocal in the media around the University of Tasmania and on this proposed change. They are broadly supportive of the changes and have been calling for them for some time but they are concerned about that same provision that I just outlined from the media organisation.

In a letter written to all members of parliament by the Director of End Rape on Campus, Nina Funnell, on 16 March - again it is not her submission to the consultation but rather the letter that she wrote to all of us - she is concerned -

That the current draft in complainants in sexual assault matters would only be able to self-identify in cases where their information was published after the criminal proceedings in court in respect of the relevant alleged crime or offence were finally determined or disposed of.

In her view -

The effect of that means that survivors would remain gagged throughout all criminal proceedings, including any appeals.

They note that this is out of step with how victims in all other crimes in Tasmania are treated and out of step with how sexual assault victims are treated in other Australian states and jurisdictions. She believes this creates a double standard whereby accused individuals would be free to speak out during proceedings while survivors would be unable to defend themselves until all appeals were finalised.

I put those concerns on the record today as I said that I would but I acknowledge that I have had the reasons for the style of drafting explained to me and I do understand the reasons. I went to that level of detail of several of the submissions because I think it is worth government committing to the recommendation by the ALA and by Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia to either commit to a review after three years or to take up Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia's recommendation that there be a mechanism for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of any changes to this law and legal processes with an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of any such changes, including seeking to address any unintended consequences. I think it is clear that there is absolute support across this parliament for changes to be made that allow people to have their voice heard; that allow survivors of sexual abuse like Steve Fisher, Grace Tame, Tameka Ridgeway and all the others I spoke about not to be silenced, not to keep sweeping sexual violence and sexual assault under the carpet in Tasmania, and not to treat these horrific crimes any differently to the other kinds of crimes that are perpetrated in this state.

The stories that I have read about from survivors and heard directly from survivors of sex abuse is that the court process is not only often retraumatising to those people but further to that it can be in itself its own new trauma. For many of those people going through that court process it is extremely traumatising. The words that we use in legislation and also in the media and in the public sphere really matter. There is a feeling amongst many survivors' groups and advocates for survivors that the language we have used about sexual assault for many decades has been one that had silenced people.

Many of the recommendations we have seen as a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse show that often child sexual abuse of all sorts was covered up in horrible ways that we never want to see repeated. That is why changes like this are so important that are changing the language we use about sexual violence and particularly such horrible crimes as sexual assault against children and young people.

The reason that I raise those things is to acknowledge that there is support for these changes. We support these changes and we commend the Government for listening to many of the stakeholders and the public debate around this very serious issue and this extremely vital area of law reform. For that reason, I have gone into that level of detail on some of those submissions simply to call on either a commitment to a review or a commitment to ongoing monitoring of how these practically take effect to make sure that the intended effect of the legislation, which is for survivors of child sexual abuse to have their voice in the public sphere, is in fact what we see as a result of these changes. We will be supporting the bill.

[4.56 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I will echo the comments of Ms Archer; it is a strange day to be talking about things that are not related to the pandemic issue. However, life goes on and that is why we are here. I believe everybody is very brave in coming to work. We all have concerns about how we are going to manage this week and next week but with goodwill on everybody's part we will be able to do that.

I have been a practising barrister and solicitor for nigh on 25 years now. I have just relinquished my membership because I feel it is time to move on to fresh pastures, either during or after this part of my life. With that in mind, I thought it might be helpful to traverse some of the issues and the practical experiences I had as a defence barrister. Defence work is quite tough. You are defending somebody who has been accused. I always like to say they are 'merely accused'. It is very easy for

allegations to be made but it is a fundamental principle of our legal system that you are innocent until proved guilty. That is what I want to talk a little about today.

I have had a range of experiences with trials. One that sticks in mind very dramatically is a fellow who was accused of maintaining a sexual relationship with a young person. He had the sense to plead guilty early and go through the process. None of that was easy but he knew he had a problem and shepherding him through the process was the role as defence counsel I had at that time. I had another case that sticks in my mind where we did go to full trial. A man accused of rape was acquitted at trial. A third case, which I will never forget, was a young fellow who was falsely accused. That was very difficult. In no sense was it either of the party's fault the way it unfolded but it was not handled the best in the beginning. The thing got rolling when it really should not have and with appropriate apologies it was resolved. There is a broad range of circumstances.

I hate to be Pollyanna-ish about it but we do need to protect the presumption of innocence and our capacity to deliver fairness in our justice system, not only in our trials but in our justice system. It is a jigsaw puzzle of players and the media is part of that. I am always open-minded when I hear from the media, particularly around suppression orders.

I have been in a situation where I have had to request suppression orders for names of people where, for example, the young fellow, we were adamant it was a mistake what was alleged to have occurred and that the mere publication of his name would have destroyed his life. As it transpired, sense prevailed.

With victims as well, the amendment that has been brought in, I did not think I would ever see this change in my lifetime. We got used to dealing with the way things have been but the empowerment of women is really great and to see young women step forward and step up. People of the ilk of Steve Fisher have spent a lifetime laying a strong foundation for this stuff. So, times do change is what I am trying to say.

We do need justice not only to be done but to be seen to be done, and that is important. The processes we use, the adversarial system, the use of our police prosecution and the DPP, the battle that occurs in the court between the prosecution and defence to get the appropriate evidence out, within the rules of evidence, is really important.

The Attorney-General mentioned - and she used less nice words than I am about to use - but it is a very arcane act, the Evidence Act. It is a difficult act and no case is the same. Each context, each piece of evidence, the trajectory of every trial is very different, which is why sometimes you have to have swarms of lawyers and helpers to work through it.

I commend our legal profession who behave pretty much at all times with the utmost professional ethics. When you are responsible for defending or prosecuting, you are treated as an officer of the court. You have a higher moral obligation and you have to have a higher degree of ethics than just being a lawyer out there in legal land. From experience, my friends and former colleagues, particularly at the criminal bar were extremely experienced and treat their cases with utmost care and look after people as best they can.

There is general support for this change. I agree that waiting until the conclusion of a trial and finding the outcome, is probably the appropriate trigger point. Remember that the person or victim who may wish to be free to publish their name and speak freely with their name attached will still

have access to legal representation. So, the time is right at that inflection point, to allow that submission to be made and granted by the Supreme Court or by the Magistrates Court.

Ultimately, there will be situations and cases that perplex us because we do not know what the right thing is to happen. It could be situations perhaps where there are multiple victims, where there is a range of issues, a range of evidence, may be even matters happening in different courts. I am certain our judiciary and our magistrates will be able to work through that. They are very experienced and completely independent which is essential to the running of our legal system and the delivery of justice.

We want to make sure that people, both defendants and victims, have an experience through the justice system that is as sound as it can be. I have personal experience of these matters. It is a very stressful thing both to be on the prosecution side and on the defence side. I am always keen to do what we can do to underscore the need for fairness and for a proper trial, for rules of evidence to be followed. When they are followed it is less likely that an appeal point will emerge and the last thing we want is mistrials which add stress to the process for everyone.

I took the chance to refresh my own mind about what the appropriate elements of a fair trial are. Here in Australia we say that it needs to be a public trial. It needs to be open. This question of disclosure of names that is really where the rubber hits the road because the media of course have an interest. They are part of this conversation and part of our capacity to not only deliver justice but to allow justice to be seen to be done. Their voice is important. I have certainly had engagement with the media during trials in the past and some fairly high profile cases.

The trial should be held in public and judgment given in public. That is so we all know what goes on in the court and in our justice system. The biggie, the one that really matters, and it matters a lot even though sometimes it is very, very difficult even as a seasoned practitioner to stick to this line, which is the presumption of innocence. That is the defendant should be presumed to be innocent until proved guilty and the burden of proof is with the prosecution who must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. It is that question of reasonable doubt, that is why we have these rules of evidence, that is why we have the Evidence Act and a huge body of common law around evidence.

This presumption of innocence goes beyond just a mere presumption that they might be guilty or might not be guilty. It is a presumption of innocence such that until proved guilty, the defendant is still a normal person like one of us. He has to be proved guilty. Some of the concern or risk, particularly coming from those who do not agree with the media's position, is that there is a risk that if you disclose names too early, go out to speak too early during a trial that you might actually interfere with that presumption. It is such a core and fundamental piece of our legal system that that in itself may derail proceedings or at least provide appeal points and off we go to appeals and up the ladder.

It is very important that we are circumspect, that we make amendments that are reasonable, that support people's right to speak. Sometimes it is about timing. That is not an easy thing in itself either. Some of these trials, particularly rape trials, can run for over a year. Hobart is a small town. Now we have social media it is very difficult to contain chatter. Can you do it? I do not know. We are going to have to think about that. There is already a lot of discussion in legal circles about the jurisprudence of people talking external to juries, but people talking about community discussions that go on about cases and events. You can bet your bottom dollar that it is hearsay, somebody has heard this and that and the other, but you can get a bit of a mob element going. That is not specific

to this issue but right across all of our legal work and our cases. I do worry about that. I worry about how we are going to manage that in future.

When it comes to juries, there are some fairly strict rules around empanelling juries and how we ask them to be quarantined - what a phrase to use in the current circumstances - from external information. Again, I would like to think that part of the reason you would allow an application for disclosure of name to happen at the conclusion of a trial is also to protect that element so that people come, they are empanelled as jurors and they have clear minds. They have open minds that they have not prejudged a situation. All of this goes to proving guilt or innocence which, as I said, is the prosecution's job to do.

There is a range of other elements to ensuring that we provide a fair trial and a fair trial has to be for both parties but also for the community looking on. As a community, we want to know that our justice system works properly. We want to know as a community that we have confidence that the results that come out of our courts are substantive, can be supported, follow precedent and meet community expectations around what we would anticipate outcomes to be, all things being equal and the evidence being put where we think those cases would land.

It is really important that both parties have the time and facilities to prepare. It is sometimes very difficult for people who have been accused who might be young, as my fellow was, to know what to do. What do you do? 'This has just come out of the blue and I do not know what to do. Who do I speak to?' Some want to call their mum and others have much more capacity to be able to call in some top silks if they need to. They are well-funded and well-heeled. Private criminal work, though there is a small amount of it, is certainly an area of practice that keeps quite a few barristers in business, as it should, but not everybody can afford a lawyer and certainly we would not want to think it happens but sometimes it seems to me to be a little unfair that one side has more capacity to get proper representation than the other.

We also as a community demand that the trial is conducted without undue delay, and let us remember that upon arrest we can find people the sufficient reason popped over in remand awaiting a trial. We want a fair trial. You have to gather the evidence, you have to do all of that work and the lawyers need to do it. Court lists are long. The judges work very hard but these trials are quite complex as well. We need to make sure that things progress and proceed. Case flow management at the court has helped with this. Although he is now deceased unfortunately, my former stepfather Peter Underwood, when he was at the court brought case flow management in and I believe that continues to this day to keep those cases tracking.

Everybody has a right to a lawyer. This goes to my point previously about whether everyone can really afford a lawyer and that is a bit of a problem. We see that in the Family Court as well where one party might get representation and the other does not, and that is very difficult. Some of these issues traverse the Family Court and the Supreme Court when it is a domestic violence situation.

We have a bit of work to do on the substrata of how we deliver justice, but all is not lost. In general terms, we can manage this stuff. I would like to see more funding into Legal Aid-funded cases and if you were going to make some moves there perhaps treating Legal Aid more as a clearing house for funding rather than internally managed cases. That is certainly what the profession might ask for and it might be worthwhile having a bit of a think about that.



There is the right to examine witnesses, so when you are accused of something you have the right through your lawyer to examine those witnesses and we know all the law around that and it is quite complex as well, about memory and defence and corroboration and how all of that works together, but you certainly have that right. I have not had a case or been in a case or watched a case where somebody has self-represented but I should think that would be a very difficult thing to do.

More and more we see the need for interpreters in our courts and certainly I had clients who needed assistance with that. That in itself is very difficult because of some cultural elements around what people translate and how they do it and information that has been translated might be sugar-coated because that is a cultural thing to do, whereas in the legal world you really just need that information to be passed on properly. Certainly in the Magistrates Court I hear this quite a bit.

The defendant has a right not to be compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt, and we should not even have to say that but that is certainly part of it, and double jeopardy, which I am sure you have all heard about though Hollywood movies, means you cannot be tried for the same crime twice.

We are all about practical steps. The amendment to the Evidence Act and this section that has been brought in is a timely practical step. I have received a raft of letters, most of which have been read in so I will not double up on that, but quite a lot of it was compelling.

I think about some of the Me Too movement stuff, and we have seen that movement age, emerge and move into new areas. The most compelling thing about it is not the legal cases that came out of it or may still come out of it, but it is the empowerment people felt to connect and come forward to tell their stories and to ask for help. That for me is where it has made a difference to people's lives. Whilst that stuff is really good, we need to be a little reasonable.

I will be a bit boring about it and say the fundamentals of our justice system and how we run our trials, particularly around the presumption of innocence, are essential. There is the presentation of evidence, the dynamic between the competing parties of the defence and the prosecution and the prosecution not going too far. As a government they are there to achieve justice, not to necessarily win the case. There is a balance to be made there because the prosecution ultimately represents us as the community and they are there to be balanced. They need to disclose the majority of the information they have. There are some things they will not disclose necessarily but in the main, heading into court the prosecution, with disclosure, should disclose most of what they have to the defence.

I hear of problems with disclosure, given that the DPP can sometimes get a bit swamped with cases and disclosure is either delayed or incomplete, even a day or two before cases might start. This is specifically in the Magistrates Court level. Once it hits the Supreme Court it stretches out a bit more but disclosure issues there have caused quite a lot of grief to people. Clients could be turning up to the Magistrates Court and not know exactly what the case against them is. It puts barristers and lawyers in a difficult position because you are having to do the job on the fly and head in. Having said that, our magistrates are generally very good at managing these things and life is imperfect, just like our system and where the funding goes, so we cannot fix everything.

It is important to think about the burden of proof issue with these cases as well and to recognise that because it is in a criminal jurisdiction we are dealing with serious criminal matters in the main and we require evidence to be presented that meets the burden of proof. It is up to the defence to carry the burden of proof but it must meet the test of being beyond reasonable doubt. The beauty

of the beyond reasonable doubt test is that it is beyond reasonable doubt given all the evidence. In that particular set of circumstances, what makes you believe that it is beyond reasonable doubt that this crime was committed by the accused? That will be different for every circumstance.

Trials are important because they allow the ventilation of all the issues. They allow evidence to be tested. It is a little like in here when a good debate gets going. We can test each other by interjection across the Chamber about what has just been said - 'It was interesting but is it entirely correct because these other things are also happening in context?'. We often see multiple moving parts in these things.

The Evidence Act itself is a weighty tome. I still remember my law school exam on evidence and was very pleased I passed it and did not have to repeat it. I thought there was a risk but it was okay in the end.

I really want to make sure that if I can do one thing in this season of parliament it is to really get us on the track of thinking about the delivery of justice, not just processes, not just elements that are put back-to-back and then something comes out the end of a trial, but to think about things like fairness, capacity and competence of people, and the ability of people to get proper legal representation and how we structure that. Those sorts of elements are really important and could do with a bit of a push along from this House. It is certainly something I am interested in.

The legal principle that overrides all of this is innocent until proved guilty. That is why this amendment has my full support. I think the appropriate time is at the conclusion of a trial. The moment a judge hands down a judgment in public in open court convicting someone then an application ought to be able to be made. A more complex situation perhaps will arise where a victim does not get the result they think is fair and appropriate. That will be problematic and we will undoubtedly see some challenges around that.

In this age of social media, we will not be able to control everything. We will do our best, but I also suspect that the second area where we will see challenges is around suppression orders. The media already appeals suppression orders, which they would say - quite rightly, probably - that that is part of people's right to know, but I have often wondered whether in suppressing the name of the victim you ought not also to suppress the name of the defendant as a fairness measure until the end of a trial. I will leave that for larger legal brains than mine to sift through.

I will wrap up. That was a bit of a journey through the legal system, but I wanted to put into context what this section will do and how it will work, the elements I think need to be considered when an application comes forward for somebody who wants to be free to speak and the wrinkles we might find flow out of it, but also to give my support and endorsement to our judiciary and magistrates who will deal with this sensitively and sensibly, to the criminal bar, who deal with it all the time and do a very good job, but most importantly to the victims who deserve to be heard.

[5.23 p.m.]

**Dr WOODRUFF** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I will commence my second reading comments on behalf of the Greens to say that we will be supporting this Evidence Amendment Bill 2020. It is a very important change and, by and large, the many submissions that were made by individuals and bodies across Tasmanian society are very supportive of it. They raise a number of questions about things which I do not understand to have been taken up as they had asked and I will be raising those questions in my second reading comments.

I want to start off by saying that as the End Rape on Campus and Mike Lawler's submission made clear, this is a very important change to legislation in Tasmania because there is no other crime where adult victims are expected to gain a court order before they can speak out about their experiences and their real-life identities into the media. We have all heard the very powerful and sometimes very harrowing stories from women in the Let Her Speak campaign and I commend Steven Fisher and Grace and all the other people who have spoken out and brought this issue to the public and now the Government's attention so that we can correct this situation.

**Debate adjourned.**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **COVID-19 - Intensive Care Capacity**

[5.26 p.m.]

**Ms COURTNEY** (Bass - Minister for Health) - Madam Speaker, I rise to add to an earlier answer. The advice I have is that the number of ICU beds are 23 at the Royal Hobart Hospital, 12 at the LGH, and eight at the North West Regional Hospital. I would also like to advise the House that in terms of fiscal capacity, the equipment required to support more, as well as specialist clinicians, the THS is working around the clock to increase capacity as much as possible.

**The House adjourned at 5.26 p.m.**