



**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A**

Hon. Jo Palmer MP

**Wednesday 8 June 2022**

**MEMBERS**

Hon Nick Duigan MLC  
Hon Ruth Forrest MLC (Chair)  
Hon Mike Gaffney MLC (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Dean Harriss MLC;  
Hon Sarah Lovell MLC;  
Hon Meg Webb MLC



## IN ATTENDANCE

**Hon. Jo Palmer MLC**, Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Women, Deputy Leader in the Legislative Council

### **Ministerial Office**

Carole Rodger	Chief of Staff
Graham Woods	Senior Adviser, Aquaculture and Fisheries
Ben Davidson	Senior Adviser, Water and Biosecurity
Tom Jackson	Senior Adviser, Agriculture
Amy Breen	Senior Adviser, Women and Disability Services

### **Primary Industries and Water**

Jason Jacobi Tasmania	A/Secretary, Department of Natural Resources and Environment
Deidre Wilson	Deputy Secretary, Primary Industries and Water, NRE Tas
Catherine Murdoch	General Manager, Agriculture and Water, NRE Tas
Alastair Morton	Director, Forestry and Game Services, NRE Tas
Rae Burrows	General Manager, Bio Security Tasmania, NRE Tas
Bryce Graham	Manager, Water Assessment, NRE Tas
Grant Pullen	Manager Wild Fisheries Management Branch, NRE Tas
John Diggle	Director, Inland Fisheries Service
Ashley Bastock	General Manager, Marine Resources, NRE Tas
Louise Wilson	Deputy Secretary, Environment, Heritage and Land
Andrew Crane	Branch Manager, Natural Values Science Services, NRE Tas

### **Inland Fisheries**

Jason Jacobi Tasmania	A/Secretary, Department of Natural Resources and Environment
Vanessa Pinto	Chief Operations Officer, Dept of Natural Resources and Environment
John Diggle	Director, Inland Fisheries Service

### **Women's Policy**

Michael Pervan	Secretary, Department of Community Services Tasmania
Kate Kent	Deputy Secretary, Communities, Sport and Recreation, DCT
Wendy Yardy	Manager Policy and Programs, Communities, Sport and Recreation
Scott French	Principal Business Analyst, DCT – Corporate Services

### **Disability Services**

Michael Pervan	Secretary, Department of Communities Tasmania
Ingrid Ganley	Director, Community and Disability Services
Kelly Ford	Manager, Disability Services Policy and Programs, CDS
Rod Fazackerley	Manager, Finance, DCT – Corporate Services



# PUBLIC

The Committee met at 9.01 a.m.

**CHAIR** - Welcome, minister Palmer, for your first budget Estimates with us. I introduce you to our new member for Huon, Dean Harriss. I'll ask you to introduce your team and then we'll get an overview.

## **Division 9**

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much. I would like to introduce Deidre Wilson, Deputy Secretary of Primary Industries and Water, NRE Tas. At about 10 a.m. Jason Jacobi, the Acting Secretary, will be joining us. We had a bit of a conflict with where he needed to be this morning. It's wonderful to have Deidre and our team here as well. Thank you for the opportunity to make some opening comments.

As the Minister for Primary Industries and Water, it's certainly an honour to be given responsibility for this very important portfolio, and to deliver on the Government's plan. This Budget is an investment in Tasmania's future, and I'm proud of what we're delivering across agriculture, water and fisheries, and what the Government has delivered so far. Agriculture continues to show strong growth and has exceeded \$2 billion for the first time, thanks to significant contributions from the beef, dairy, fruit and field crop sectors. We are making excellent progress towards our target to sustainably grow the farmgate value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050.

We are continuing to invest in research and innovation. Yesterday I was pleased to announce three projects that received a combined \$1.36 million through the Agricultural Development Fund. This fund supports projects that demonstrate active partnerships with industry, and that have a clear pathway to deliver research outcomes for the state's farmers, and contribute to sustainable growth and jobs. Farmers are confident, and they continue to meet the growing demand for premium produce, thanks to access to reliable and sustainable water for irrigation.

The Budget continues our record investment in irrigation infrastructure across our state, with state and federal funding for Tasmanian irrigation to continue delivering water for farmers and deliver more schemes. We are balancing sustainable use of the state's freshwater resources through the Rural Water Use Strategy, and the implementation plan released in May outlines how we will deliver the strategy over the next four years to improve the security, quality and resilience of our water resources.

The Rural Water Use Strategy report card released at the same time highlights the progress made to date, and I'm pleased to say we have committed \$535 000 in this Budget and secured additional funding from the National Water Grid Authority for three important science research projects. These projects will improve evidence-based policy and decision-making in relation to climate change, monitoring and accountability.

We are also backing our balanced approach to deer management. The Budget includes \$1.9 million over four years to resource the implementation of the Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan, including support for existing deer farmers to market and showcase their products. We continue to work closely with industry members and peak industry bodies, as

## PUBLIC

well as maintaining ongoing partnerships with research bodies, such as the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture and the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies.

Sustainability in our precious fisheries resources and innovative aquaculture sectors continues to be a priority for this Government. We have already invested in a number of important initiatives that aim to support commercial sectors, and protect and promote our recreational fishers. These are continuing into the forward Estimates.

Our fisheries and aquaculture sectors collectively account for over one-third of Australia's seafood value of production. The majority value is attributable to the salmon industry, which surpassed a production value of \$1 billion last year. To support the continued sustainable development of this important industry, the Government has allocated \$377 000 to the development of the Ten Year Salmon Plan. This important project will allow industry and the community to identify new long-term actions for a sustainable industry that continues to support Tasmanian jobs and businesses across the supply chain. We are also supporting the seafood industry with \$400 000 over four years to support the government-run Shellfish Market Access Program, known as ShellMAP, through provision of a program coordinator to help ensure the quality of Tasmanian shellfish that is safe to eat.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the community and the department for their efforts during COVID-19. It's certainly been a very challenging period, and our biosecurity staff in particular have faced that at the border as the frontline of our COVID response. We continue to invest in biosecurity, and I am pleased to note that this Budget builds on previous efforts to strengthen biosecurity on Bass Strait islands. We are providing \$1.3 million to funding full-time Biosecurity Tasmania officers on Flinders and King Islands, which will ensure that two full-time biosecurity officers are based on each island to help protect our state and our primary industries.

With that, I welcome questions on the primary industries and water Budget.

**Ms WEBB** - Before we begin, can I clarify which line item would be most appropriate to raise animal welfare matters under. Is it the first?

**Ms PALMER** - It is in Biosecurity.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you.

### **Output Group 2 - Primary Industries and Water**

#### **2.1 Primary Industries**

**CHAIR** - Minister, in your opening comments you mentioned the impacts of climate change. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you were linking that to the research that is being funded. I'm wondering what work the department has done to look at the impacts of climate change on our agricultural sector broadly, if you have information broken down by dairy, beef, wine growing. It might present opportunities, as well as inherent risks.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, absolutely. The Government certainly is working with Tasmanian primary producers and agribusiness to manage the risks to our primary industries, to build resilience, and also to realise the opportunities of a changing climate. The Government is

## PUBLIC

continuing to take climate action across all sectors of the economy, investing in community resilience and supporting communities to adapt to a change in climate.

The Government's Climate Change (State Action) Amendment Bill 2021 before parliament would, among other things, legislate a new emissions reduction target for Tasmania to net zero emissions or lower. This would require the Government to prepare a state-wide climate change risk assessment every five years and a climate change action plan at least every five years; and require the development of emissions reduction and resilience plans for key industry sectors in partnership with industry which are to be updated every five years.

Now, most Tasmanian farmers have experienced some degree of climate variability, and they have plans and practices in place which help manage for this. Our farmers are amongst the most confident in Australia. However, agriculture still remains vulnerable to drought, to floods, and other extreme weather events, and, of course, to our changing climate. So building resistance to climate variability and climate change is key to sustainably growing the value of Tasmanian agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050, and reducing its vulnerability to weather extremes.

So this Government has taken actions to support rural businesses to build resistance to climate change, which is included in the 2021-22 Budget investing \$2.6 million over three years for a rural business resilience package, which included \$400 000 to co-fund the Australian government's new national rural financial counselling service program, and \$2.2 million to co-fund and deliver two future drought fund initiatives in Tasmania, the Farm Business Resilience Program and the Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program. I'll just see if the Deputy Secretary has anything she'd like to add to that.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. You asked about sectoral support. What the minister has outlined is that - and this is the case nationally - the key issue around climate change is building resilience for future planning, and which crosses across sectors. The key initiatives have been welcomed in regard to the sector saying that 'These are the things we need. We need to build resilience for the future, we need people to be adaptable and to be planning for the future.'

The Tasmanian agriculture has been successful in the \$8 million drought hub, which is located in Launceston. We also do do some specific projects through some of our funding, such as the - Dairy Tas has had an allocation under the strategic partnership program around pastures. Pastures are critical to their success

**CHAIR** - Yes, pastures can also have an impact depending on what's eaten by the cattle or as to how much methane they emit too. So is there work in that?

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**Ms WILSON** - So, yes, there is work in that. The Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture is - and, sorry, there's national work, but particularly in the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, they've been looking at seaweed. I can't say it, I'll look it up and then I'll tell you.

**CHAIR** - Yes, *Asparagopsis*.

## PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - *Asparagopsis*.

**Ms WILSON** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - We know what we're talking about.

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, we do. I'm so pleased. So we're looking at those opportunities as well.

**CHAIR** - That's feeding seaweed to cattle. I'm talking about pasture.

**Ms WILSON** - Oh, in terms of pasture -

**CHAIR** - Pasture, yes. Trying to reduce the methane-emitting capacity of a pasture.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. Look, I'm not across any particular projects. Nationally in terms of the RD&E framework wouldn't there be work around that because it would be an obvious area.

**CHAIR** - No, I'm aware of the excellent work being done with the seaweed, yes.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. I've just got a little note that there is some work on Cressy research farm around pasture productivity, so we'd need to -

**CHAIR** - That's productivity, not necessarily the nature of the pasture.

**Ms WILSON** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - This'll bring me to a few other questions in this area.

Minister, you talked - and Deirdre also spoke about resilience. I think we need to be careful not to just use a catchphrase. Everyone says, 'Oh, let's all be resilient,' and then we see land being washed down rivers - like, soil, productive soil, topsoil, which could certainly happen with heavy rainfalls and it does happen. I've seen whole hillsides washed into rivers in my electorate.

In regard to the rural business resilience package appropriation on page 208 of budget paper 2, there's a fall from this current year we're in from nearly \$13 million down to \$12 million, then down - sorry, down to \$11.3 million, then down to \$10.5 million. The footnote says it reflects the completion of the rural business resilience package. I thought you were saying that was continuing, or did I mishear you in that?

**Ms PALMER** - Just give me one moment. I might refer that to the acting secretary, thank you.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. My recollection is this: it relates to a nationally-funded agreement where we're matching their funding. There is national funding which is going to be available in the future, this is about that part of the program. So that would



## PUBLIC

be reflecting that that - that the program has an end date. We would anticipate that we'd be negotiating with the new federal government around future programs.

**CHAIR** - All right. So it reflects a non-continuation of the federal component?

**Ms WILSON** - I believe ours is matching funding at this point. It's not unusual that we match funding and then in the future outyears and future budgets we say, look, this is the new program, and then seek funding in further budgets.

**CHAIR** - If we're really serious about resilience, it doesn't end in a year's time.

**Ms WILSON** - No.

**Ms PALMER** - No.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. We also were running some - one of them, at least, was a pilot program. As you'd appreciate, you take the learnings from the pilot program and then look at what you do for the future.

**CHAIR** - Is there an evaluation process of that program to determine where the benefit has fallen and has it met the mark?

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. Yes, there would be. I'm not across the details of exactly what that looks like, though.

**CHAIR** - There's been an evaluation conducted already?

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. I wouldn't have thought so. It's in its inception. But I'll get someone - through you, minister - to just check.

**CHAIR** - Sure.

**Ms WILSON** - If I can answer that question - through you, minister - as we go through the hearing today, we'll come back to you, if that's all right.

**CHAIR** - I know it doesn't end until 2024-25.

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, that's right. So that's -

**CHAIR** - Is there any information that you can provide to the committee about where that money and that support has been provided? I'm not asking the names of the people who got money. I'm asking for sectors that have actually been drawn on this because of the impacts. I imagine it relates to COVID-19 as well as climate change, does it?

**Ms WILSON** - Through the minister. You'll need to be even more specific. I'll just check the note just to make sure I've got the right program.

**CHAIR** - For note 1.

**Ms WILSON** - But we have a number of programs.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - It's the raw business resilience package, yeah.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. We could provide details around the components of that program. I would be able to, from our notes, tell you where it generally goes, but considering the level of detail you're after, through you, minister, we can seek it while we're doing the hearing and/or, through you, minister, we could take that on notice if you wanted.

**Ms PALMER** - Let's see if we can get that information during our time.

**Ms WILSON** - I just had a thumbs-up there. We'll see how we go.

**CHAIR** - Yes, sure.

**Ms PALMER** - We can't, then that's certainly -

**CHAIR** - So there's two aspects: what sectors and also it has a broader application to both impacts of climate change as well as impacts of COVID-19.

**Ms PALMER** - COVID-19.

**CHAIR** - Which we know has had an impact on many of our primary producers, yes.

**Ms WILSON** - We'll get some information for you.

**CHAIR** - Okay. The next question is about caring for our land. There's obviously a connection with TIA, for one - with the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture. The other question I have is about the work the Prime Minister's maybe doing to attract people with agronomy skills. I'm hearing out there from many primary producers that there's a shortage of agronomists, and that's really vital to ensuring that our land's well cared for.

What are you doing, minister in regard to your counterpart with skills and training to ensure that this is an attractive career option, and generally?

**Ms PALMER** - We are continuing to support jobs and sustainable growth and development in agriculture. We have been working really closely with the sector to identify its needs and to help build a more skilled and adaptable and resilient workforce across the state. In my first weeks I had the opportunity to get out to a limited number of businesses and properties and this was something that was identified as an issue they were facing.

Some of the industry-led initiatives we have through NRE Tas include \$95 000 funding over two years to Wine Tasmania provided as part of the Strategic Industry Partnership Program that supported activities including Wine Tasmania partnering with TasTAFE in 2021-22 to offer free specialised workforce training to have workers that are job-ready for grape harvesting; the dairy farm extension funding, Grow more, Milk more, Make more, of \$900 000 from 2018-19 onwards, with the allocation of \$300 000 to be utilised in the 2022-23 time period. The funding supports dairy farmers to focus on farm productivity and profitability, farm business, and value-adding strategies and meeting processing and market demand for branded dairy products.

## PUBLIC

During the 2021-22 period, Dairy Tas was provided with \$80 000 for training 40 local artificial insemination technicians, who are crucial to the dairy industry. Funding included the purchase of a model cow to facilitate the training. I guess you have to have that. We can laugh, but -

CHAIR - Yes, and we have those things for other purposes too. It's all right. I used to help my dad with artificial insemination. I know what happens.

Ms PALMER - We also have agribusiness mentoring as part of the Taking Agriculture to the Next Level policy. Rural Business Tasmania was provided with \$215 000 over four years to deliver a program of rural business mentoring. The program was delayed for 12 months due to the impact of COVID-19 and was launched in December 2021. Interest has been strong with the next mentor program scheduled to run from April to September this year.

We are investing in our future leaders by supporting capacity-building activities delivered by organisations such as Rural Youth organisation and Tasmanian Women in Agriculture. Rural Youth was allocated \$70 000 over four years from the 2018-19 state budget for projects to develop leadership within the agricultural sector. This includes funding for training in governance and business finance basics.

During the 2021-22 period, Rural Youth board members have had the opportunity to build their skills in effective communication at media training workshops. The Government also supports rural women and community leadership development with funding of \$120 000 over four years from the 2018-19 budget to Tasmanian Women in Agriculture. The organisation pivoted during the early stages of COVID-19 in 2020 with the aim of helping members to stay connected through the challenges of that time. That was through online paddocks talks.

Topics included mental health awareness, safe farming, and brand building. During 2021-22, they have conducted governance training for members, supported members with leadership and business training and held Beyond The Farm Gate tours. They've also partnered with other organisations to support a care farm pilot project at Smithton for the therapeutic use of animals and farming practices to support mental health and wellbeing. The pilot project is to be evaluated by the suicide prevention team at the University of Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thanks. I'll go to Meg for a different line.

Ms WEBB - Thank you, Chair. This is a question I've asked each department that's appeared before us. It's just in relation to NRE Tas's preparation for implementing gender-responsive budgeting processes. This is in a broader gender analysis framework into the development and implementation of policies and programs and services. Can you describe for me any work that's already in train in that space, or planned for the coming year?

Ms PALMER - I'm probably not in a position at the moment to answer that question. Since I have been given the opportunity to be in the position that I find myself in now, this is certainly something that is a real focus for me. That's not to say it wasn't a focus for others, but for me this is something I am interested in having a really good look at.

We've already had some discussions around elements of the department's practices where we've been able to talk about how we can do things better, how we can make sure that this is

## PUBLIC

at the forefront of our thinking. Acting secretary, is there anything you would like to add to that?

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. NRE Tas's journey through inclusivity and diversity includes the elements you're talking about. You might recall that a few years back the then secretary, Tim Baker got the nomenclature of gender warrior. That was in recognition that we have a traditionally based workforce, skills based, and that NRE Tas's diversity inclusion policies needed to reflect the future.

That's led to an increase in women in leadership roles in the organisation, for example, particularly at the SES level. We continue to work through our strategic planning process to build our organisation for the future. That has to be embedded in diversity, not just in terms of gender, but also disability.

We have to think about people's different viewpoints.

CHAIR - Diversity of thinking.

Ms WILSON - Diversity of thinking. Many members would be aware that's very early. I think that's something that in the future all organisations will need to consider.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - If you want me just to add a little -

Ms WEBB - It's fine. Thank you for the update on the diversity inclusion aspects in the department. The question was mostly targeted towards preparations towards gender responsive budgeting in the department, which may well be something we're looking ahead to. I was trying to gauge where we were for this department in that aspect.

Ms PALMER - It's certainly on the radar. Even though we've only had a few weeks together, this is already something that has been raised, and when time permits will certainly be looked at seriously.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I have more questions on this, but I'm happy to share around.

CHAIR - Yes. Nick, I'll come to you and then we'll back, and then I've got another couple of questions.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr DUGAN - Thank you, Chair. Minister, what is the Government doing to encourage collaboration and strategic partnerships across our agricultural industries and the peak bodies that represent them?

Ms PALMER - Since coming into this role, I've become increasingly aware of the various ways the Government supports our agricultural industry. The Government's Strategic Industry Partnership Program, SIPP, is an initiative designed to support growth and strategic partnerships within our agricultural sectors, with key industry associations.

## PUBLIC

So I am very pleased today to announce four new and exciting projects that have been awarded funding in the latest round of this program. The peak bodies for dairy, fruit, wine and small-scale producers are the successful recipients of the new Government's grants that have a total value of \$667 000 over four years. I'll detail some of the funding for you: Dairy Tas with \$67 000 for the project Principles of Pasture, Pasture Growth Report; Fruit Growers Tasmania with \$240 000 towards its Future Fruit Development Program; Wine Tasmania with \$240 000 towards growing the Tasmanian wine sector and leadership; and Sprout Tasmania with \$120 000 for its project enabling growth in the small-scale producer sector.

I offer my congratulations to the successful recipients. Like all of our industry associations they plan a critical role in supporting the resilience and growth of the agri-food sector, and funding is provided on a co-investment basis to industry. A total of \$2.3 million has been allocated to the SIP over four years to fund a diverse range of projects that are designed to support industry growth and generate jobs in our rural communities. These projects strongly align with the objectives of the Sustainable Agri-Food Plan 2019-23, the Competitiveness of Agriculture for 2050 white paper, and the Rural Water Use Strategy. This 2020-23 Budget is about delivering for all Tasmanians and we are continuing to work with our thriving primary industries to sustainably grow the farmgate value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Which segues nicely into my next question.

**CHAIR** - Oh surprise, surprise.

**Mr DUIGAN** - If I heard you correctly, minister -

**CHAIR** - I'm sure you did.

**Mr DUIGAN** - a bold and ambitious plan to grow our farmgate value to \$10 billion by 2050. I just wonder if you could provide some further detail on how we're tracking toward that goal, and any results from the recent harvest season.

**CHAIR** - I'll come in behind that question. The minister might also just like to inform me, in responding to that question, when the next ag scorecard will be out because the last one I could find was 2019-20 on the website. So I think that feeds into the very nice Dorothy Dixier that Nick has put forward.

**Ms PALMER** - It's a great question, a very important question. I do thank the member for the question. We have a comprehensive plan to sustainably grow Tasmanian agriculture and provide opportunities for growth and for jobs in our farming communities. The Government continues to progress our sustainable agri-food plan, 2019 through to 2023, that supports our AgriVision 2050 target to sustainably grow the farmgate value of Tasmanian agriculture to \$10 billion per year by 2050.

The latest agri-food scorecard shows that we are making excellent progress towards this target with the farmgate value of agriculture growing by 13 per cent to a record \$2.15 billion in the 2019-20 period, exceeding \$2 billion for the first time. These outstanding results are also reflected in the recent Rabobank Rural Confidence Survey, which shows that Tasmanian farmers continue to be amongst the most confident and optimistic in Australia. We have an

## PUBLIC

outstanding agricultural sector here in Tasmania, with these results highlighting the excellent work our producers are doing with the ongoing support of the Tasmanian Government.

Under Tasmania's Sustainable Agri-Food Plan 2019-23 we are delivering over 70 initiatives to improve infrastructure, support competitiveness and maintain an effective biosecurity and regulatory environment for our \$3.22 billion agri-food sector. Our plan involves investment of \$153 million over five years to grow agriculture, and a \$26 million commitment to our seafood and fisheries sector. A further nearly \$50 million will be delivered over four years from 2021-22 to secure the future and grow agriculture through the accelerating agriculture policy, and this will extend and compliment the reach of our agri-food plans initiative. The plan focuses the collective efforts of government and the private sector on continued sustainable growth, and a central part of these efforts is our increased investment across all aspects of the agricultural industry and regional communities.

Now if you're happy, I can go straight to your question. I can tell you that the scorecard will be released in October of 2022. Is there anything that you wanted to add that, deputy secretary?

**CHAIR** - Is it every year or every two years?

**Ms WILSON** - Every year. But there's a lag in terms of the year we're reporting on. The scorecard does rely on release of ABS data, so it does link in with that reporting.

**CHAIR** - So the one that's released in October will still be for the 2021-22 year?

**Ms WILSON** - 2020-21.

**CHAIR** - 2020-21, yes, sorry.

**Ms PALMER** - So that's what you would have seen -

**CHAIR** - Yes, that's what I saw, that one. So a follow up from Meg's question, if I might, can you provide, minister, a breakdown of your staffing or the numbers of staffing across primary industries and the gender make-up. I know Deidre did mention the gender improvement, if you like, at SES level.

**Ms PALMER** - While Deidre's looking for those particular details I can certainly give you some information. Female representation within the department has increased from 47 per cent to 50 per cent year-on-year. Significant inroads have also been made in addressing the gender imbalance at the most senior levels of the organisation, with 57 per cent of SES officers being female as at 31 March 22. However, women are still overrepresented in the lower-income brackets and this will continue to be a focus for improvement within the department.

Were you after other figures as well as just the gender breakup?

**CHAIR** - The total numbers.

**Ms PALMER** - I can also advise the committee that we had 56 employees report that they identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, nine employees reported having a disability. Would you like to add to that?

## PUBLIC

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister - is it all right, because I've got different tables, can you -

**CHAIR** - So the total number - this is giving some figures about that, and I think -

**Ms WILSON** - So the total number by headcount?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms WILSON** - By headcount in March 2022, total female 769, male 768. We do have a -

**CHAIR** - That's very balanced, isn't it?

**Ms WILSON** - Did you want the breakdown between permanent full-time -

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms WILSON** - We can certainly do that. So permanent full-time - I'll do female first, male second. Maybe I should swap that around? 350 permanent female, 512 male. Then permanent part-time, 218 female, 81 male. Fixed-term full-time, 84 female, 92 male. Fixed-term part-time, 119 female, 58 male. And fixed-term casual, 20 female, 15 male. Hopefully, if the Excel spreadsheet is working, would add up to the figures I gave you earlier. Which is female 769 and male 768.

**Ms LOVELL** - Can I ask just a couple of follow-ups?

**Ms WILSON** - I didn't give you the head of agency prescribed officers senior executive, if you wanted that? Otherwise it won't add up.

**CHAIR** - All right, yes, if you wouldn't mind.

**Ms WILSON** - So there's 13 female, 10 male.

**Ms LOVELL** - That's SES level?

**Ms WILSON** - Sorry, just to be really precise it's head of agency, prescribed officers and senior executive, because we do have prescribed officers, which is under our act, some of our statutory positions.

**Ms LOVELL** - Can I ask, minister, we have the total headcount, do you have the total FTE?

**Ms WILSON** - I'll just see if I can get that for you.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you.

**Ms WILSON** - I've got to get the right one, apologies.

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - I don't really need the breakdown. A total would be fine.

**Ms WILSON** - At the last pay period in March 2022, there were 1234.37 paid FTEs, excluding the Inland Fisheries Service and the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. That's how we always report, and that's our total.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. You've given us the gender breakdown across SES positions and total. I appreciate you might not have this with you, but do you have the breakdown across lower band levels for each band by gender?

**Ms WILSON** - By gender, yes. Salary profile by gender.

**CHAIR** - This is very good. This does demonstrate the level of data that they're collecting now, which we would never have got a few years ago.

**Ms PALMER** - They've worked very hard.

**Ms WILSON** - At March 2022, less than 30 000, 4 female; 30 000 to 59 999, 88 female, 45 male; 60 000 to 89 999, 435 female, 386 male. The next band category is 90 000 to 120 000, 179 female, 228 male; then 120-plus, 63 female, 106 male.

As the minister has indicated, the proportion of women in the workforce is still overrepresented in the lower income brackets. However, you also would've noted the mix as well in terms of permanent part-time and fixed-term part-time as well. I wouldn't like to make any assumptions around that, but when you look at the trend, there is a little bit around people's work choices.

**Ms LOVELL** - Are the figures that you've given actual earnings, not the band that the position is classified at necessarily?

**Ms WILSON** - It's a salary range.

**Ms PALMER** - Is that what you were after?

**Ms LOVELL** - By band might be more helpful, because the part-time, full-time bit is not an issue, then, in terms of looking at that data.

**Ms WILSON** - We don't have that information with us here.

**Ms LOVELL** - Are you able to get that information?

**Ms WILSON** - I believe we are able to, but it can take time to extract the data. And for it to be meaningful, we need to get the data from March 2022, because obviously that's based on a pay period, which can differ. So, we could take that on notice, but it may just take some time to extract the data and get it right.

**Ms PALMER** - I'm certainly happy to take that on notice, with the understanding that we give the department some time to find that information.

**Ms LOVELL** - Absolutely, thank you. You've done very well with what you've got.



## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - The ranges don't reflect bands clearly, otherwise it would be - almost a line-up.

**Ms WILSON** - I haven't looked at the band levels for a while to be able to indicate whether this is reflective of bands. With the 120 000, I think there was a change, which might mean we have more people in that category. Where we split that into bands, it would split out into two sets of employees.

**CHAIR** - Two band levels.

**Ms WILSON** - Potentially, I wouldn't be surprised.

**CHAIR** - All right. We'll take it on notice and see what can be provided. We do certainly appreciate the breakdown you've been able to provide.

**Ms WEBB** - I have some questions about our GMO moratorium. Looking at table 8.4 on page 188 and the performance information, 100 per cent of the GM canola trial sites were audited in the last two financial years, so that's good to see. What is the routine audit schedule? Is it to audit each site once a year, or is it quarterly? What is the frequency?

**CHAIR** - Is this the biosecurity area? No?

**Ms WEBB** - Do you want me to run through the other questions I have about this, so have them as a job lot?

**Ms PALMER** - That'd be great, thank you.

**Ms WEBB** - Apart from the audit schedule, in the most recent audits, were any - I believe they're called volunteer or wildling plants - identified during the audit, and if so, how many? And were they all from one former trial site, or spread across more than one? And how are those plants destroyed? We'll go with those first, and then I have a couple of others.

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much for that question. I am going to refer this to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - The genetically modified canola trials occurred over 20 years ago, and they're managed by statutory permits in line with the state's moratorium. We operate a program to audit and monitor the sites and check compliance, and 100 per cent of the trial sites were regularly audited in 2021-22.

I don't believe I have the information on how many times we audited them, but through the hearing I will come back to that. I don't have the details about the number of sites and the plants we've found. But what I can say is progress to eradicate residual canola trial sites is slow, which is indicating we are finding volunteer plants.

The canola trials were undertaken at 57 sites around Tasmania in the late 1990s and in the year 2000, and those are the sites that are continuing to be monitored. The reason it's taking some time is the long-lived nature of canola seeds, and because most sites were deep-ploughed at the end of the trials. So you can imagine that's where we get the volunteer plants.

## PUBLIC

The advice from the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture is that we don't anticipate eradication of residual canola plants at the former trial sites for many years.

We're getting the information about the program audits for you.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Has the department undertaken a current evaluation of the value to the Tasmanian brand that our GE-free status confers? I guess that's the value in terms of our domestic and international markets.

**Ms PALMER** - Our GMO-free status is an important part of our reputation as a producer of premium foods that are safe and clean and sustainable. In 2019, the Government extended our GMO moratorium for a decade through to 2029. The extension of the moratorium provides certainty for Tasmanian businesses that rely on the state's GMO-free status to continue to invest and to develop further markets. I might refer to the deputy secretary and we can glean -

**Ms WILSON** - Hold on a second. I'm just seeing who'd be best to bring up, because we've got two people here.

**Ms PALMER** - They're all not making eye contact.

**Ms WEBB** - They're looking down.

**Ms WILSON** - Minister, I'll indicate what I'm aware of. When the last GMO moratorium review was undertaken, there was consultation with industry and stakeholders, and some work done to attempt to quantify the GMO moratorium value. My recollection was that it was difficult to get to a true value of the market proposition. The feedback at the time, particularly from our red meat producers, was that it was of value and that some producers used it as part of their marketing.

It fed into the total brand proposition for Tasmania. That's what's difficult to quantify. Our trade people, through federal trade, went into some of our key markets like Japan to see if they could get some information. It was difficult to quantify, but at the time the Government determined that the market advantage was there.

**Ms WEBB** - Is it expected that the value of that status to us has increased since South Australia is moving to abandon its GMO-free status? And that puts us in a unique position.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister, we haven't done the work on that because at this stage the moratorium is in place until 2029. If there was a review of the moratorium we'd certainly look at that.

**Ms WEBB** - The Genetically Modified Organisms Control Act 2004 automatically expires after five years. It was last reviewed in 2019. Given that the moratorium goes past the next expiration of the act, do we assume that that will be reviewed and then renewed?

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister, the act sets up a commitment to regular reviews of developments in gene technology, markets, consumer sentiments. That's the process in play.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - We would expect that before the act automatically expires then it'll be redone?

**Ms WILSON** - I'd need to look up the act to remind myself of how that operates, whether the act expires and then we have to bring one in, or whether it's a clause in the act. I'll look that up because once I have a look at it I'll recollect the mechanism we put in place.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - I don't think the act prescribes the form of the review. It's a while since we've done it. The question was asked previously about the form of the review. A parliamentary committee looked at it once. The next one, the department did it. Do we know what the review mechanism will be?

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. We haven't prescribed that, I believe. As you say, we've used different mechanisms in the past. The last review was, I believe, from the agency. That was used to support discussions in the lower House and in this Chamber as well.

**Ms WEBB** - That was 2019, wasn't it? Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Okay, we'll go back to you then?

**Mr DUIGAN** - I think I'm -

**CHAIR** - You're good. Sorry, I thought you had one. Mike?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes, I can marry my question on Primary Industries with supervision of poppy and hemp crops if that'll be quicker.

**CHAIR** - If it relates to this line, yes.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes, you'll see when I ask the question.

**CHAIR** - Ask the question, yes.

### 2.2 Supervision of Poppy and Hemp Crops

**Mr GAFFNEY** - It identifies that the increase in that is a reallocation of corporate overheads. The Poppy Advisory and Control Board is primarily a fixed cost born by government. We heard from the police yesterday and there were no real concerns in their relationship with the Poppy Advisory and Control Board.

I have a couple of questions on field officer activity and also your role as minister in this space, which might look at Primary Industries. Table 8 shows that the annual report of the Poppy Advisory and Control Board shows there were 3755 site visits in 2017-18. While I recognise there's been a decrease in the hectares there was a decrease of about 25 per cent in site visits between that year and 2021. Was there a change in the number of field officers in that time period? They can take that on notice if you like.

## PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - We would like to take that question on notice. The advice that I've been given is that there could be some complexity in that answer. To make sure we give accurate information we need some time.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - There's been a downward trend in farmers putting in poppy crops because of the market, so how does that impact on the advisory board, which is cost born by government? We should check table eight for accuracy. Over five years the number of capsules stolen was 12 239, 1430, 1957, 5245, but in 2018-19 there were 124. It is distinctly different from the others. Could you check that for me because it needs to be corrected if it's wrong?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, certainly. I'll refer that to -

**CHAIR** - Is that the annual report you're referring to?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes. That's a capsule thing, it's to do with poppy security. In the annual report there's a mistake, I think, that just needs to be looked at.

**Ms PALMER** - We do have some figures, so we can answer that for you. I'll refer that to the deputy secretary.

**CHAIR** - This is the figures for the capsules taken or removed.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes, in 2018.

**Ms WILSON** - I understand now. In 2018-19 year you are correct that it says capsules stolen 124, capsules recovered were 1058. Our notation on this says the number of capsules recovered this year exceeded the number of interferences reported by PACB field officers.

Tasmania Police recovered more capsules than were reported stolen. The PACB, as you've indicated, liaises closely with Tasmania Police, and also with industry. It ensures that growers understand their obligations in terms of reporting and that there is a safety message around not interfering poppies. The poppies that are grown are deadly. We want to ensure that people are aware that it's not safe to be taking these capsules out of the field.

**CHAIR** - The biggest body of work relates to tourists. International tourists.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - That was dealt with last week. In your role as minister, the question would come here. For many years the poppy crops have been a good cashflow for farmers. It's gone downhill. They identified two reasons which I found fascinating. Cancellation of elective surgeries during COVID-19 meant that there was less need for the raw product. And also US policy decisions. Minister, what role does your organisation play in assisting the growers or advisory body, and at what level, to attract other markets? They're growing them in Victoria and in Turkey.

**Ms PALMER** - I'm fascinated with your comment about the industry dropping with the cancellation of non-emergency elective surgery.

**CHAIR** - You need less morphine and fentanyl.

## PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - The deputy secretary looks like she's all over this.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister, production is highly regulated and demand-driven. Those two factors you've mentioned have impacted on demand. Regarding alternatives, the Government has led the way nationally in opening up hemp as food. This has allowed our hemp industry to grow, plus also our irrigation developments. Through TIA, we have worked with people on alternative crops. Industry and growers then make their own choice around their own crop production. That's probably all I can say.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - That leads into the hemp question. Funding was put aside in the three years to try to educate and attract more hemp growers. It shows that 2019-20 there were 1569 hectares grown but this last year there was a decrease of 33 per cent to 1012 hectares. I won't get into the industry agri fund stuff because that'll come up later with Mr Harriss in 90.6. Are there benefits in the Tasmanian farming community continuing with industrial hemp?

**Ms PALMER** - Tasmania is one of Australia's largest producers of industrial hemp, with an annual farmgate value of around \$5 million in 2019-20. Tasmania's industry hemp has been supplying over 30 per cent of Australia's total industrial hemp crops since 2019. In July 2021, the Tasmanian Government committed \$150 000 in partnership with AgriFutures Australia for our growers to benefit from a three-year national industrial hemp trial to identify varieties best suited to our local conditions.

Since 2018, the Government has committed over \$320 000 to support the Tasmanian Hemp Association with communications, education and marketing to strengthen and to grow the industry. The Government is also conducting a review of the Industrial Hemp Act 2015 to make sure the regulations continue to support the industry needs, which is an important body of work. You didn't want me to talk about industry funding?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - No, that's fine.

**Ms PALMER** - On the act, the production of industrial hemp in Tasmania is regulated under the Industrial Hemp Act. NRE Tas is conducting a review of the act to make sure it meets the needs of this industry, because it is an exciting industry. We're working closely with the industry as we conduct the review to make sure we're really aware of what their needs are and the direction that they are wanting to head in.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Do you financially support the pyrethrum industry? It is very popular on the north west coast. I think we produced over 75 per cent of both pyrethrums worldwide. I'd be interested to see what you do there. It is an important crop for farmers to diversify with.

**Ms PALMER** - I might refer that to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister, I'm not aware of any particular industry funding but I'm aware in the past there's been some RD&E support through the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture. I'd need to confirm that.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Okay.

**CHAIR** - I think they're pretty profitable on their own.

## PUBLIC

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I'm interested in the relationship between your office and wasabi and all of those niche crops and whether you're either helping attract markets or helping the industry grow.

**Ms PALMER** - Once I have survived the Budget Estimates process, my intention is very much to hit the road and to go from one end of the state to the other and make sure that I have those one-on-one conversations with numerous industries. Perhaps you might like to join me on the north west coast.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I look forward to a legislative tour of the primary industries. That'd be great.

**Ms PALMER** - It is a priority to make sure that as minister I am across all our different industries and how we can be there for them if they need support.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - We'll move on to 2.3 Water Resources. Nick.

### 2.3 Water Resources Management

**Mr DUIGAN** - Water resources. Liquid gold. Everyone will have seen the transformative nature of irrigation across Tasmania. What is the Government doing to address long-term water management? What actions have been taken to protect our lakes and our rivers?

**Ms PALMER** - Fresh water is arguably our most precious resource. It underpins our way of life, our economy and our environment. That is why the Government is committed to sustainable management of our water resources, both now and into the future.

We acknowledge that there are challenges in water management, such as monitoring our water, climate change and the impacts that that's having. That's why we have identified these challenges and we're getting on with the job of addressing them.

Looking at what we have done to date. We released the Rural Water Use Strategy in March 2021 and the implementation strategy in May this year. We established the rural water roundtable in August 2021 to assist in the implementation of the strategy. We invested \$1.5 million to deliver initiatives from the Rural Water Use Strategy and establish the River Health Advisory Project which has enabled the creation of three new positions with NRE Tas to manage the project and assist with the implementation of the strategy.

We secured more than \$1.8 million in joint Australian and Tasmanian Government funding for three freshwater sites projects, which will support evidence-based policy and decision making, and address climate change monitoring and accountability. We secured \$26.5 million in funding from the Australian Government for water infrastructure projects that will accelerate improved environmental outcomes for our waterways and make highly reliable recycled water available for irrigation, reducing the need to access water from our waterways.

We established the water managers and data custodians working group to enhance sharing of water information and to lead the development of a collaborative statewide baseline

## PUBLIC

water quality monitoring program. We created a water management reference group as a forum internal to Tasmanian government agencies to look at opportunities for greater alignment in resources and activities, to improve outcome for fresh water management. The sustainable development of our water resources has the potential to greatly increase opportunities in irrigated agriculture and help Tasmania realise our renewable energy future.

I have an answer to the member for Nelson's question. Is that okay if I do that now?

**CHAIR** - Sure.

**Ms PALMER** - GMO canola sites are audited three times per year. Plants are physically removed and taken to an approved disposal site. Large outbreaks are sprayed. But I'm advised this is rare.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Just a follow-up from Nick's question -

**Mr DUIGAN** - I've got a follow-up if I may, thank you, Chair. Yes, the Rural Water Roundtable, I've heard a little bit about that, and you mentioned it then in your answer. I just wonder if you could explain who is on that roundtable and what that group actually does?

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much. As I've previously stated, we recognise that fresh water is a key economic enabler and essential for maintaining our environment, our ecosystems and landscapes, biodiversity, recreation and tourism, and of course, Aboriginal cultural values. So, the Government released the Rural Water Use Strategy last year to support the sustainable use of water and establish the Rural Water Roundtable to explore greater collaboration, co-ordination and alignment of government, industry, environmental values, to improve the sustainable management of our water resources.

So, it's bringing together water managers, users and environmental organisations and the roundtable is helping to guide the implementation of the Rural Water Use Strategy with a focus on sustainably delivering water to households, to farmers and renewable energy developments while ensuring long-term river health across our state. The Rural Water Roundtable is made up of representatives from peak bodies and organisations with a state focus in this area. That includes TasWater, Tasmanian Irrigation, the Local Government Association of Tasmania, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, Hydro Tasmania, Dairy Tas, the Inland Fisheries Service, NRM North, Landcare Tasmania and the Tasmania Seafood Industry Council.

Headline activities of the Rural Water Roundtable include sense-checking the implementation plan for the government's adopted Rural Water Use Strategy, including priorities and communication and engagement strategies; improved communication, co-ordination and alignment of industry activities and responsibilities for the sustainable management of our water resources; find practical short-term opportunities for enhancing information and data sharing; looking longer-term at where there may be future projects and program alignment and opportunities for greater collaboration and co-ordinated efforts; providing a forum to enhance two-way communication and developing relationships for the benefit of managing Tasmania's water resources; providing information and input to community and stakeholder engagement approaches and community activities; and providing an opportunity to support and advise on broader stakeholder engagements.

## PUBLIC

We recognise there are opportunities to improve the way that we manage our freshwater resources and I've previously stated in the lower House, my commitment to looking at that. We want to look after our waterways as a Government and we know that co-ordination and collaboration are going to be a big part of that and we're certainly taking action.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - I will just follow-up on a couple of those points, minister. I note in your response to Nick's first question, when you talked about water quality and the new action 1.9, to undertake case study research and reporting to enhance understanding of drivers of change in river health in Tasmanian catchments.

Mr Jacobi is here, minister, you might like to introduce him when he sits down.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, thank you very much. Introducing Mr Jason Jacobi, who is the acting secretary of the department. Chair, Mr Jacobi, I'll just introduce you to Dean Harriss MLC, newly elected member for Huon.

**CHAIR** - So, we know there's been some very genuine concern raised around the river health of the Welcome River, and particularly with regard to the environmental harm that's been done to it through dairy activities carried out by Van Dairy. Are you able to provide any update on the environment area as well? I'm interested in how this fits in with this strategy and with the reporting against the strategy.

**Ms PALMER** - Just give me one moment.

**CHAIR** - We can come back to it, if you like.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, if you're happy to come back to that because of your specific connection of that particular waterway. So, we will just give Deidre some time.

**CHAIR** - That's all right. I've got another question. Do you want to go to another one while she is doing that, minister?

**Ms PALMER** - No, she has the information. Thank you, I will refer that to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - The specific question does relate to matters that sit in the purview of the Tasmania Dairy Industry Authority. Which is the -

**CHAIR** - The EPA got involved, so it got broader than that, and the council as well, yes.

**Ms WILSON** - Yes, the EPA and the council. The TDIA, issued corrective actions to all Van Dairy farms and then, as you say, the TDIA sought assistance from the EPA. On 23 December, the EPA required VDL to commission an effluent system review and management plans to address the prime areas of concern. They have been submitted to the director and are under review. Because this is under active directions and potential compliance actions, that's all the information that I can provide at this point.

**CHAIR** - It is still ongoing? We still don't have -



## PUBLIC

**Ms WILSON** - It's still ongoing, but the immediate issues were addressed in terms of the -

**CHAIR** - To stop the effluent running into the river.

**Ms WILSON** - That's what the directions were about.

**CHAIR** - Minister, you also talked about the Rural Water Strategy. You mentioned talking about the supply to households as well as farmers and the environment and others. I know that TasWater raised some concerns with the previous minister about the non-inclusion of the urban water supply with relation to the Rural Water Strategy. And when you talk about households to me that is urban. So, I'm just wondering if it has been incorporated because if you are going to look at water resources is the whole state, which includes our urban and our rural users.

**Ms PALMER** - The Water Management Act establishes the overarching framework for the allocation and management of Tasmania's fresh water resources. NRE Tas administers a range of regulatory requirements under the act, including water licensing, watercourse conveyancing, dam permitting and dam safety. The act also provides for the preparation of statutory water management plans and the establishment of water districts and trusts to administer such districts.

I can assure you that Tasmania's provision of drinking water and also environmental requirements is not secondary - certainly to irrigation works. End each water allocation that is approved is given a surety level. The highest priority is given to stock and domestic use and town water supplies. That is Surety 1 and that also includes for firefighting as well. That is followed by Surety 2, which is water for ecosystem protection. Then Surety 3, water licenses converted from old, registered rights followed by the rights of special licenses, which is Surety 4, and then irrigation and other commercial users and that comes to Surety 5 to 7.

The surety levels indicate the surety with which a water allocation can be expected to be available during the winter- and summer-take period and each surety level has an availability attached. Where water restrictions are imposed, generally water allocations at a lower level of surety are restricted before restricting the taking of water allocations at a higher surety level. So does that answer your question?

**CHAIR** - In regard to the water resource what discussions have taken place with stakeholders in the community to arrive at a decision to expand the water outtake from the Meander Dam, given the dam capacity has not been increased. That was on behalf of one of our colleagues.

**Ms PALMER** - Sure. Just give me one moment. Chair, I'm advised that that's a matter for TI.

**CHAIR** - All right. Well I'll deflect it to there.

**Ms PALMER** - I will be back with TI at the end of the year for GBEs. I will make sure that that question can be answered.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Yes, you might be asked before then I reckon in a different forum. Over to you, Meg.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Some of my questions were covered in what's already been provided. Will the roundtable be looking into the maintenance and management of groundwater sources as part of its remit?

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much for that question. I'm going to refer that to the department, just let me check one thing. And I'll refer to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - So the simple answer is yes. I'm the Chair of the Rural Water Use Roundtable.

**Ms WEBB** - Sorry, I'm having trouble hearing you.

**Ms WILSON** - I'm the Chair of the Rural Water Use Roundtable, and that roundtable is pulling together the groups, the minister mentioned, to look at a range of water-related matters. One of the projects that has been funded with allocation from this budget is a groundwater assessment project.

It will deliver a desktop groundwater risk assessment tool so we can undertake a targeted case study of groundwater research to support our understanding of groundwater use, as well as the interaction - and this is quite important - the interaction of surface water and groundwater to enhance knowledge of risks and opportunity for groundwater use and management.

**Ms WEBB** - That comes under the remit of that roundtable to be monitoring that and have that as part of its actions? Thank you. In your answer earlier you confirmed an amount of funding for the implementation strategy of the Rural Water Use Strategy. I think I missed it, but I think you mentioned a number.

**Ms PALMER** - Okay, this is what you're after. \$1.5 million to deliver the initiatives from the Rural Water Use Strategy and establish the River Health Advisory Project. Is that the figure you're after?

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Is that for this year or across a number of years? Is it 2022-23?

**Ms PALMER** - That initiative was announced in the last budget and across this year as well, and that's gone into enabling the creation of those three new positions within NRE. So \$1.5 million.

**Ms WEBB** - So the \$1.5 million was from 2021-22 and then into 2022-23?

**Ms PALMER** - Over four years.

**Ms WEBB** - It's over four years?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - So then the next two years after that, 2023-24, 2024-25?

## PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - Correct.

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, thank you. In regard to the allocations of water made, do we know how much water is being used under those allocations by various sectors.

**Ms PALMER** - I can certainly make some opening statements on that, but I will ask the acting secretary. I think we have someone here who would be very well placed to answer that question.

**Ms WEBB** - So just to clarify, because I'm mindful of time, I'm not asking about the allocations themselves. I'm asking about whether we know what the level of use is under the allocations?

**Ms PALMER** - Can we just see what we can find out about that, and I'll try and get that information back to you.

**Ms WEBB** - My understanding is we don't have a metering system in place to measure allocations. I'm just trying to clarify, is there a different way that we can measure the use of those allocations other than metering? That's the essence of my question.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. I'll refer that to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - So the department has a Tasmanian Water Accountability and Reporting Policy, which sets out our accountability and reporting obligations as it relates to water licence holders.

The principles of the policy are: all water taken from the State's water resources under a water allocation must be accounted for in relation to that allocation and any conditions it may be subject to. The method used to account for water taken should be fit for purpose, cost effective and based on a risk management approach.

That water accountability and reporting policy is supported by our Rural Water Meter Policy, the Rural Water Meter decision framework and the Tasmanian Meter Standards. The metering policy and framework set out a risk-based approach as indicated about where meters are required.

So in catchments where NRE Tas has assessed that risks associated with water use are elevated, metering of the taking of water has been required on licences. All licence holders, though, are required by The Water Management Act to keep records of water taken for a period of five years, and they also require licence holders to provide these records to NRE Tas upon request.

My understanding is that we're also going to be, through our implementation plan, reviewing our water allocation framework. We've also got our groundwater assessment project in place.

**Ms WEBB** - How many of the allocations are metered in those areas that have been deemed to have a higher risk?

## PUBLIC

**Ms WILSON** - I'll just have a quick look. As at 23 May 2022 there were 2879 water licences with 8659 primary allocations. Of those 1610 had conditions that referred to a water meter. As indicated through the Rural Water Use Roundtable and our new science projects that are funded through the budget, one of our key initiatives is the groundwater assessment project.

To understand what's happening in in regard to the risk assessment tool, and to make sure we have some understanding there. We've also got a water accountability metering and framework review. So the things which I've just talked about will also be subject to a project where we will look at contemporary policy settings for water use accountability, metering and reporting and make recommendations for change.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. Just a few questions to follow up on that then, would that process involve consulting outside of the department more broadly with other interested stakeholders when you're doing that reviewing?

**Ms WILSON** - Well certainly through the - sorry, minister, I just went to answer it automatically. Certainly through the Rural Water Use Roundtable, and the minister's indicated the groups that are involved in that.

**Ms WEBB** - So just to go back to the number you gave me around the number of allocations that have a meter requirement around them, which I think a thousand -

**Ms WILSON** - One thousand, six hundred and ten.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Can you confirm that they are all metering their water?

**Ms WILSON** - I would have to bring in our manager of Water Management Assessments to answer that question.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. So there's not a way we know for sure that the department says 'yes, we know they have a meter that they are using'?

**Ms WILSON** - We have compliance officers.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. Then in regard to the reporting that they do, or that they have to have available five years' worth of reporting, it's not a matter of course, it sounds like, that that's provided to the department.

Under what circumstances does the department require it or might ask for it? I'm interested to know why we wouldn't have that reported, just as a matter of course.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. Thank you for the question, I'll refer that to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. So NRE Tas have designed an annual audit program for water licences based on a number of risk criteria to target water usage in high-risk catchments. So, it's about undertaking that assessment. We've got six regional water management officers who work with water users and dam owners to ensure compliance with licence and permit conditions. Up to 30 April 2022, NRE Tas had conducted audits across six

## PUBLIC

catchments, leading to a total of 162 water licences being audited, and a total of 285 water meters read.

Managing restrictions is key to protecting water regimes for environmental values and water users, so we're looking at the flows to determine what water is available based on the surety levels that the minister indicated earlier. From 1 July 2021 to 30 April 2022, a total of 198 irrigation restriction and flood take-related notices were made by NRE Tas. A total of 15 535 SMS messages were sent to individual water users notifying them of water access changes. So, there is a system in place.

**Ms WEBB** - I'm pleased to hear about that reinforcement system. I'm interested about a reporting system where there's information that can then also be in the public domain, for example, if it's reported to you.

**Ms WILSON** - Minister, can we bring in Bryce Graham to the table to talk about the information that's available online for people?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - I'm happy to have a fairly brief answer to that. Essentially, I just want to know if that information is in the public domain.

**CHAIR** - Minister, if you would like to introduce the new gentleman at the table.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I would like to introduce Mr Bryce Graham. Thank you, Bryce.

**Ms WEBB** - I'm asking about situations where water is metered by those who have an allocation, and then the public visibility of the data around that the reporting.

**Mr GRAHAM** - All water licence information is available via the list, but not necessarily everybody's conditions. There is a compliance project that goes around and checks water licences and metering, and when restrictions come on, SMS messages are sent out to people who have to take their meter readings for compliance. I have to check on the reporting. That would be reported on, how many calls have been made for those meters to be called back.

**Mr GRAHAM** - Actually, the numbers are not necessarily reported annually, but they are reported and recorded in some instances.

**Ms WEBB** - What I'm looking at is public reporting of the usage - what the metering is. It doesn't seem like that's thoroughly, comprehensively available at the moment in the public domain. It is when there's a check being done or -

**Mr GRAHAM** - Yes. I will add also that all Tas Irrigation Schemes are metered, and that is reported through the Tasmanian Irrigation Scheme. All that data is publicly available, as I understand.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. What is the revenue that's collected through the water fees that we apply? While you look for that, I'm also interested to hear how the water fees are set, and when that was most recently reviewed and updated.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WILSON** - Obviously, you've been able to identify the fees and charges in the table there. My understanding is that the fees -

**Ms WEBB** - I don't need a great deal of detail. I'm just interested in the revenue, and then the other questions are about how the fees are set and when they were most recently reviewed and set.

**Mr GRAHAM** - The fees are outlined in the regulations. It's quite a complicated calculation, and it depends on which region you're in, how many dams you have, how many allocations you have. I'm more than happy to show you how it is calculated, because it is quite complicated.

**Ms WEBB** - Guided by the regs is fine. You don't need to go into more detail than that at the moment. And most recently, when that was reviewed?

**Mr GRAHAM** - I'd like to defer to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - Minister, I'm not aware of a recent review.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. Would we regard our approach to setting those fees to be comparable to modern water pricing expectations?

**Ms WILSON** - Because I've taken on this water portfolio quite recently, I'm not able to give an indication of how it matches other fees and charges in other jurisdictions. What I can say is that with the water licence fees, we do have some retained revenue that goes towards some of the services that we provide to support our water users, to regulate water. The acting secretary has reminded me that of course the fees do go up under the normal fee unit act changes.

**Ms WEBB** - Sure. I'm interested to know when we last reviewed how they are set, and how they compare with modern water pricing that would be regarded as appropriate elsewhere. It would be good for the minister to have confidence, I would've thought, that we're actually doing the right thing and doing quite well with regard to pricing our water.

**Ms PALMER** - I have been advised that it is a recommendation to progress this as part of the Rural Water Use Strategy.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. I'll move on to monitoring river health.

**CHAIR** - We need to cut to the chase, because we have other output groups to finish before 11 a.m.

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, true. I have questions on aquaculture and fresh water use. I think we'll deal with that when we get to Inland Fisheries. Or is that here?

**Ms PALMER** - I think we can deal with it here.

**CHAIR** - Ask the question and we'll see. It'll give us a better indication.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. My understanding is that the use of our fresh water for aquaculture purposes is considered non-consumptive, so it has a very low fee set in that sense compared to some other uses of water. Again, it's a similar set of questions around the setting of a fee for that use of water. When that was last reviewed and set, in terms of our formulas or calculations for that.

**CHAIR** - Okay. Are you right to answer that, minister?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I am. The department allocates fresh water for aquaculture in line with the objectives of the Water Management Act 1999 and associated policies, including the Surface Water Allocation Decision Framework. As noted, current best practice for new hatcheries is for a technologically sophisticated RAS, that have the benefit of completely controlled growing conditions and improved environmental performance and reduced water use.

**Ms WEBB** - I'm interested, though, in the fees set for the non-RAS, which is still where we're having the water use occurring, and when they were last reviewed and how much we collect in fees for that particular form of licence. My understanding is that would represent about 20 per cent of Tasmania's freshwater allocations made. Would that be a correct figure?

**Ms PALMER** - I think I'll have to refer that to the Deputy Secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - So through you, minister. Like any other user of water, the first that would apply would be those which are set by the regulations. We would have to take on notice the - based on the advice we've been provided around the complexity of the regulations and how they've applied. We would have to take that on notice the exact question of the amount that is paid for that water that's used and allocated. Is allocated I should say.

**Ms WEBB** - My question is what would be the total revenue collected through those particular licenses? Thank you. Minister, the RAS systems - the closed systems that don't use the fresh water in that same way, are we looking to incentivise the industry to move their remaining non-RAS systems to RAS? Do we have a policy or is it our intention as a state to assist the industry or incentivise the industry towards that goal?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. I can certainly address that at a very high level and say that that is certainly part of something which will be considered through the 10-year salmon plan. That will be part of that as we move forward.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay, and we'll talk about that in the next line item, I think.

**CHAIR** - Anymore on this line?

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Yes.

**CHAIR** - You have? No, we want to move onto the next line.

**Ms WEBB** - Sure.

**CHAIR** - Have you finished this line?

**Ms WEBB** - I can move on.

**CHAIR** - Okay. So we'll move onto to 2.4 Marine Resources.

## **2.4 Marine Resources**

**CHAIR** - Nick, back in the fishing.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Thank you, yes. Very interesting, a lot of stakeholder engagement on this one. Could you update me on progress with the review of the Living Marine Resources Management Act. And, could you please advise the committee of how it's going and what's been covered in that review.

**CHAIR** - Can we have a fairly succinct response so we don't run out of time.

**Ms PALMER** - I will speed up my read rate. The government is always looking to ensure we support our productive industries with appropriate rules and regulations while ensuring they are simple, fit for purpose, and provide for innovation. Based on positive input from the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council in 2021 the government established a review of the Living Marine Resources Management Act for 1995. The Act manages and regulates Tasmania's fisheries, and is more than 25 years old, and it's never actually been subject to a major review. This review was launched by the previous minister as a first step in an 18-month process to consider how the legislation operates, how it meets the objectives of achieving the sustainable development and management of our marine resources, and undertaking stakeholders' experiences of its effectiveness and practicality.

It's important to note what is out of scope of the review. Marine farming is out of scope, noting marine farming planning is dealt with under the provision of the Marine Farming Planning Act of 1995, and environmental regulations of fin fish farms comes under the Environment Management and Pollution Control Act of 1994. The Abalone Deed is out of scope as these are private contracts and exist outside of the Act. Marine protected areas are also out of the scope as they are declared under the Nature Conservation Act 2002. The government has a policy of No More Lockups that would see fishers excluded from areas. A discussion paper was released by NRE Tas in February of 2022 with forums held in March with key stakeholders representing the commercial, aquaculture, and recreational sector, the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, non-government sector, and environmental organisations and the tourism sectors.

Twenty two written submissions from stakeholders were received and I thank all those who engaged in the consultation process. This input will help inform the development of a draft white paper for modernising our legislative regime and framework for managing Tasmania's living marine resources and I expect the white paper will be released for broad public consultation in late 2022. The final report to inform government policy is expected in mid-2023.

Through you, Chair, I do have an answer to Mr Gaffney's question with regard to the poppy inspection numbers. The number of inspections is marginally down on prior years as the number of plantings in the south of the state has reduced. Overall, there has been reduction in planted areas across the state.



## PUBLIC

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes, my question was how many field officers were there in 2017-18, and how many field officers are there in 2020-21.

**CHAIR** - We'll put that on notice if we can't get it, is that all right.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes. Yes, that was my question, yes. Thank you.

**Mr DUIGAN** - I have a succinct but hugely important follow up. Minister, if you could detail what the government is doing to ensure the long-term sustainability of our hugely important recreational fishing sector.

**Ms WEBB** - Well, I had a follow up on the -

**Mr DUIGAN** - One of the best, if not the best in the world. Hugely important.

**CHAIR** - Declaring an interest, are you?

**Ms WEBB** - I had a follow up on the Living Marine Resources Act.

**CHAIR** - It's all right, I'll come back to it.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay.

**Ms PALMER** - I thank member for that question. Thank you. Recreational sea fishing is an important contributor to the quality of life for many Tasmanians. Tasmania is home to some of the highest rates of fishing participation in the world, with more than 100 000 Tasmanians going recreational fishing each year, and 75 per cent of these are in marine waters. Importantly, in October last year the previous Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Guy Barnett, announced the implementation of a 10-year recreational sea fishing strategy. Now this strategy sets out a forward thinking approach to the future of marine recreational fishers, and was informed by extensive stakeholder consultation.

The strategy recognises the social and economic importance of recreational fishing, and it guides and supports recreational fishing until 2030. It underscores the government's view that success can come from greater involvement from fishers in looking after fish stocks and in determining the future of recreational fishing. The recreational sea fishing strategy that is now being implemented is laying a foundation to protect, promote, and improve our recreational sea fishers. \$350 000 was committed to the implementation of this strategy over two years in the 2021-22 Budget. This includes \$250 000 for a Flathead for the Future program over two years to better understand and manage the stocks, and work with fishers to improve sustainability of this important resource. And funding of \$50 000 to improve access to recreational fishing for youth, women, and people of all abilities. Together with a further \$50 000 to revitalise the Fish Care Program.

I'd certainly like to acknowledge the terrific work that the Fish Care team do at shows, Agfest, Fish Care events, and fishing spots. I haven't as yet had the opportunity to meet them and I'm certainly hoping to do that at Agfest this year in August. The government's strong support for sustainability of the recreational sector is also demonstrated by additional funding allocated in the 2021-22 Budget to support the sector. This package includes investing a further \$2 million into new upgrades of facilities and amenities for recreational sea fishers. Already a

## PUBLIC

small grants program, the Better Fishing Fund, is targeting recreational fishing clubs and appropriate community organisations. Additionally there is a new large and small grants program is currently open.

There is funding of \$400 000 over three years to support the work of TARFish, the recreational fishers peak body was also announced in the 2021-22 Budget. This is in addition to the \$620 000 provided to TARFish over four years from 2018-19 to support their work in representing the interests of recreational marine fishers. I'll finish there. Through you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Good answer.

**Ms PALMER** - Mr Gaffney, I don't have the actual numbers of officers for you, but I do have information that says it's the same number and there has been no change in the number of field officers. Would you like me to still get the actual figures for you, or are you - - -

**Mr GAFFNEY** - If it's the same number, that's fine. What number is that?

**CHAIR** - She said she hasn't got that.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I don't have the actual number.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Well you can get that, yes. Yes, no, that's fine, whenever you get it. So it's the same number, so not worried about the change. I just want to know how many field officers you have.

**CHAIR** - She hasn't got that. Sarah.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. Minister, can you please explain, and I know, of course, that you weren't the minister at the time, so to the best of your knowledge, what specific advice or data was given to either the department and/or the minister at the time which led to the decision to place a 12-month moratorium on the salmon industry last September?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I can. I can tell you that primarily the reason for the moratorium was the fact that time was required to properly consult and develop the 10-year salmon plan and my understanding is that it was felt it was best to put a halt on the play to enable time to develop that 10-year salmon plan.

**Ms LOVELL** - Can you detail the advice that that decision was based on or any data to back that up?

**Ms PALMER** - I'm not able to do that. As you stated, I wasn't the minister at the time. Yes, that is my understanding of why the moratorium was put in place. Simply to enable time for proper scrutiny and proper preparation for the 10-year salmon plan.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. In regard to the 10-year salmon plan and new standards for the aquaculture industry, what opportunities are there for consultation with the industry, or what involvement is industry having in the development of that plan?

**Ms PALMER** - So in the development of the 10-year salmon plan?

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes.

**Ms PALMER** - Certainly. Well there's certainly been quite extensive consultation for some time and we are moving through that at the moment. My understanding is that in September we will have the draft salmon plan. A discussion paper's being prepared now. I've gone too fast. The discussion paper is being prepared now and that's going to be released shortly. That's going to be released shortly, which will certainly start those conversations with key stakeholders, obviously inclusive of industry. Then in September we will have the draft plan which, of course, will again have that consultation process at the beginning of 2023, we will release the 10-year salmon plan.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. Then for the development of the new standards for the aquaculture industry, are those standards being developed in consultation with industry as well?

**Ms PALMER** - My understanding is that the three standards are already out for consultation, and for more on that, I might refer to the Acting Secretary.

**Mr JACOBI** - Thank you. Through you, minister. Yes, the standards are out for consultation. All of the companies are aware of the three standards and have been actively engaged in the consultation on those documents.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - That's it?

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes. Meg.

**Ms WEBB** - I'd like to just follow up on some of those matters. I'll come back to those ones in a moment. In regard to the Living Marine Resources Act review, the white paper - I think it had initially been flagged as an issues paper in June, has that been delayed to later in 2022. Can you confirm that?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll just refer that to the Deputy Secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - The final white paper is due out next June 2023. So there's steps to get to that point.

**Ms WEBB** - So the minister mentioned a paper, which she referred to as a white paper, coming in late 2022.

**Ms WILSON** - So we've already commenced consultation, and there'll be a draft of a paper later this year.

**Ms WEBB** - So my understanding is, a first round of consultation has occurred earlier this year. That's finished. A paper from that is going to be prepared. That's this one we're talking about coming out later this year. There'll be consultation on that paper.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay, and then the final one, middle of next year.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WILSON** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. I just had some confusion around that timeline.

**Ms PALMER** - Mid-2023, that final report.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. I'll just follow up on a couple of the other matters. Firstly in relation to the salmon plan, with the discussion paper due out shortly, a draft plan for September and the beginning of 2023, is the final plan timeline, as you articulate. Who's undertaking that work? As in, are we doing it internally in the department, have we contracted somebody in to do it? I note the \$377 000, I think, allocated in the Budget for it.

**Ms PALMER** - That's correct, yes. Thank you for that question. I'm going to refer that to the Acting Secretary.

**Mr JACOBI** - Thank you. Yes, it is being undertaken internally in the department. We also have the Blue Economy CRC engaged as a partner to deliver the symposiums, the salmon symposiums. The first symposium has already been held and the second symposium is scheduled, I believe, in July/August.

**Ms WEBB** - So the \$377 000 allocated is to cover internal costs and the Blue CRC element, or how is that funding required?

**Mr JACOBI** - The \$337 000 is mainly to cover internal costs.

**Ms WEBB** - Right. In regard to the 10-year plan, when it gets to the final stage, can you just talk me through where the decision lies to determine the final plan? Is it a political decision that lies with you, minister?

**Ms PALMER** - I've been advised that the final decision around that 10-year salmon plan will rest with the government of the day.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Talking about the environment standard now, and also rolling alongside that, the biosecurity regulations that are also in train, it was mentioned in a previous answer that the environmental standard is out for consultation. What is the timeline for the delivery of that and also for those other biosecurity regulations?

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much for the question. I'll refer that to our Deputy Secretary.

**CHAIR** - I'm very conscious we've only got five minutes left for this whole Output. So brief answer.

**Ms WILSON** - I was going to read the long version for you, minister, I can do the short version.

**CHAIR** - Do the short version.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WILSON** - The three have different pathways because they sit in different portfolios. So the standardised marine farming management controls are aiming for quarter 1, 2023. The biosecurity program which has standards regulations its estimated completion is the end of this year, subject to the consultation process of course. The environmental standard requires some amendments to EMCA, and that's sitting in another portfolio so I'm not going to give an indication of an endpoint but it's looking like they would like to get the EMCA amendments through first and then the timeline will be determined based on that. Still we are aiming for that to be done as quickly as possible.

**Ms WEBB** - Broadly, is it this year or is it a pushing out beyond this year?

**Ms WILSON** - I believe this year but, as I say, it's not in our - ultimately that's not sitting in this portfolio.

**Ms WEBB** - I understand. So given the rationale that you provided in regard to the moratorium that was applied in September last year for 12 months, that it was to allow for the

**CHAIR** - Let's get to the question.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Given that and given that we've still got a number of other things in play that won't be finished until likely the end of the year.

**CHAIR** - So the question, please.

**Ms WEBB** - What consideration has been given to extending the moratorium given the rationale will stay in place through till at least January.

**CHAIR** - The question is? Can we just have the question?

**Ms WEBB** - To extending it till then. I put the question. I put the question.

**Ms PALMER** - I think the question you're asking is about when the moratorium finishes.

**Ms WEBB** - No. It was, what consideration has been given to extending the moratorium through to the beginning of next year when the things that are open will come to a close?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, absolutely. You're correct, the moratorium does expire in September. However, the first principle of the 10-year plan in relation to no net increase in leasable area for fin-fish farming will still apply, as will the remaining three principles, until the plan is finalised and takes effect at the beginning of 2023.

**Ms WEBB** - So, effectively, that moratorium is in place through until the new plan takes effect?

**Ms PALMER** - The moratorium will end in September this year. However, the first principle of the 10-year plan in relation to no net increase in leasable area for fin-fish farming will still apply, as will the remaining three principles, until the plan is finalised.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - When you're talking about those three principles being part of the plan, do you mean the previous plan, or the one that is in development but not yet adopted?

**Ms PALMER** - The 10-year salmon plan.

**Ms WEBB** - The one that's coming in development. I'm just trying to clarify that we're applying principles from a plan that hasn't yet been finalised and adopted.

**Ms PALMER** - No, that's not what I've said. I just want to make it very clear that the moratorium will be ending in September and that the principles - one of which relates to no net increase in leasable area for fin-fish farming will guide the development of the 10-year plan. I think I've answered the question.

**Ms WEBB** - A guiding principle for the plan, not in the plan.

**Ms PALMER** - I have answered the question.

**CHAIR** - The question has been answered. Is there anything urgent on this? Otherwise we'll move to a break and come back. We might have to quibble a bit on inland fisheries.

**Ms PALMER** - Big call, Chair.

**CHAIR** - I know. I've suffered the wrath of the member for Windermere.

**Ms PALMER** - It's the highlight of his week.

**CHAIR** - We will have a 15-minute break. If there are any urgent questions on this, they will have to be really short and succinct, and then we will go to biosecurity.

**The Committee suspended from 11.02 a.m. to 11.17 a.m.**

**CHAIR** - Thank you. In trying to get through as much as we possibly can, I remind the committee that the procedure for this process is that consideration for proposed expenditure and Estimates Committees follows as far as possible the procedure observed in the Committee of the Whole House. The committee shall consider expenditures on an output-by-output basis, including grants, subsidies, loans and capital investment program.

The committee may ask for explanations from the minister related to the outputs and there's an expectation that questions will be concise and not contain statements of facts, names of persons unless they are strictly necessary to render the question intelligible and so on. Arguments, emphasis, imputations, impetus, ironical expressions or expressions of opinion are not part of the question. I will point that to myself as well.

Minister, I think you may have an answer to provide, is that correct?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I do, thank you, Chair. Because we are a bit pushed for time, if the member for Nelson is happy, I will table the answer to her question around the review of the GMO Control Act.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Just one copy is fine.

# PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - Chair, if I could just introduce Rae Burrows, who has joined us at the table. Ms Burrows is the general manager of Biosecurity Tasmania, NRE Tas.

**CHAIR** - Sure, thanks. If there are other pressing questions from the previous response, they can put it on notice in other forums. We'll move to Sarah in biosecurity.

## **Output Group 3 - Biosecurity**

### **3.1 Biosecurity and Product Integrity**

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. I'm just looking at that line item 3.1. There's a decrease in funding after 2022-23 and I understand from the footnote that that's partially attributable to completion of a weeds program. The Weeds Action Fund. But I was just wondering if that explains all of that decrease or are there other decreases that also contribute, given that we've had in recent years incursions of fruit fly, blueberry rust, and myrtle? I'm just concerned that if we reduce resources in biosecurity that will put our biosecurity workers under increased pressure.

**Ms PALMER** - The increase of \$6.28 million in 2022-23 reflects additional funding for COVID-19 and biosecurity control costs, the Bass Strait Island biosecurity officer and travel management systems, increases in expenditure associated with various retained revenue agreements, including the Securing our Border program, the Australian Government-funded quarantine activities, and research projects funded by industry and the impact of indexation.

The subsequent decrease in 2023-24 of \$6.5 million mainly reflects the completion of the COVID-19 border and biosecurity control costs - that's 3.5 million, traveller management system, which was \$150 000, and movement in funding for the Weeds Action Fund, \$1.54 million including the expenditure of the rollover in 2022-23. Ms Burrows, did you have anything to add to that? Sorry, deputy secretary?

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister, the offs relate to programs that are finishing. The core budget through to Tasmania to undertake its activities is still provided for in the allocation. In 2022-23, the retained revenue fees for quarantine service to fund initiatives to improve the security of Tasmania's borders is sitting at \$3.25 million, which is part of the Securing our Borders program which this Government introduced.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. I'm mindful of time.

**CHAIR** - Are any biosecurity staff still working within the COVID-19?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll refer that question to Ms Burrows.

**CHAIR** - Or to Mr Jacobi, perhaps, first.

**Mr JACOBI** - Yes, I can answer that question.

**Ms PALMER** - Certainly. Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - He looked like he wanted to say something.

## PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - Sorry, Mr Jacobi.

**Mr JACOBI** - No, that's absolutely fine. I just have to find my right folder.

**CHAIR** - While Mr Jacobi's looking for the right folder, are there any other questions?

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, two quick ones. The first one is about a 2021 election policy to assist in developing a wildlife impact action plan in conjunction with the TFGA. Wildlife in that instance being problem native browsing species like wallabies. There's nothing I can find on that online. Is there funding in this Budget for it and are we progressing that plan. Will there be consultation?

**Ms PALMER** - The Government has committed to assist in developing a new Wildlife Impact Action Plan in conjunction with the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association. This was part of our policy on protecting the Tasmanian way of life of recreational hunting. We also committed to commence discussions with the TFGA on this plan as part of our first 100 days plan. Those discussions were held.

The new Wildlife Impact Action Plan will aim to help manage the impact of browsing animals on agriculture, encompassing property-based game management plans, existing control techniques and management options, and improved wildlife monitoring. This will provide an overarching action plan that documents Tasmania's approach to managing browsing animal impacts. It reflects the range of practical actions that farmers and other land owners can take.

**Ms WEBB** What's the timeline on that being developed and when will there be broader consultation in its development.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, and I'll refer that to the deputy secretary.

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. Catherine Murdoch can answer that question.

**Ms WEBB** - I don't require a full suite of explanation or detail.

**Ms WILSON** - It's just she can answer the question.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you.

**Ms PALMER** - Catherine Murdoch is the general manager of aquaculture and water for NRE Tas. Apologies, Chair.

**Ms MURDOCH** - In regards to your question, I can confirm that the development of the wildlife impact plan is being led by the TFGA. NRE Tas is supporting them in that process. So far we have met with them three times. The TFGA is considering what the scope, the content of that plan will be. It's looking like deer, wallaby, possums, birds, and potentially they've put on the table feral cats. We're waiting for the TFGA to come back to us once they've consulted with their groups in regards to this. Once they've determined the scope of that we will sit down and are ready to work with them to finalise what the wildlife impact plan will be.



## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - Will there be a broader public consultation element beyond the TFGA and its members?

**Ms MURDOCH** - At this stage, we're working directly with the TFGA, and that broader consultation is what the TFGA is bringing to the table. I can't answer that question at this point.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. Is it possible to get detail about whether there's broader community consultation as part of that plan process? Is it going to then be a plan that's adopted by the Government as a Government plan, even though it's being developed by the TFGA?

**Ms WILSON** - Through you, minister. Because the TFGA both proposed this plan and are leading the development, it's likely that it'll be an industry-led plan. Having said that, often when we work with industry on plans, they'll put something forward which has elements relating to the Government and relating to industry. Like the biosecurity continuum, it's around everyone having a role.

It's too early to say how that plan will be implemented. The Government is partnering with them and once it's developed, we'll determine which elements Government will support. We are at that stage. Some of our most successful plans are those that are driven by peak groups and industry groups who then have ownership.

**CHAIR** - Okay. Has Mr Jacobi got his answer yet?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, Chair, he does.

**Mr JACOBI** - Through the minister, 298 border staff were employed when the borders opened on 15 December 2021. We've scaled back those positions since 26 January when the border processing requirements ceased. We're presently working with 34 remaining border staff to redeploy them through interoperability and other meaningful work opportunities in the department. I'm committed to honouring the existing contracts and working with those employees to find them meaningful work.

**CHAIR** - Within the department still?

**Mr JACOBI** - Within the department, yes.

**CHAIR** - Sure.

**Mr JACOBI** - Or potentially through interoperability across other departments.

**CHAIR** - Sure.

**Ms WEBB** - I've got the second short one, if I can.

**CHAIR** - I think this'll be the last question on this line.

**Ms WEBB** - So this is in relation to the fact that the RSPCA has highlighted shortcomings in its powers under the Animal Welfare Act 1993 and has some examples that they've provided about that. The previous minister for Primary Industries and Water committed to putting forward some amendments to the act to strengthen the powers of the RSPCA

## PUBLIC

inspectors. They were supposed to be tabled for debate in early 2022. It doesn't appear to have occurred. I'm looking just for an update on the progress of that.

**Ms PALMER** - I am actually progressing those at the moment.

**Ms WEBB** - And are they expected to be brought forward this year?

**Ms PALMER** - That is my goal.

**CHAIR** - Okay.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you.

### **Output Group 7 - Environment 7.3 Natural Values Management**

**CHAIR** - We'll try to keep this really succinct and tight.

**Ms WEBB** - I'm happy to carry those and pursue them in other avenues, Chair, if you would like to move on.

**CHAIR** - If no one else has any questions on 7.3, Natural Values Management?

**Ms WEBB** - I have a set of questions, but I'm mindful that we're waiting to get to fisheries.

### **Output Group 90 - COVID-19 Response and Recovery 90.2 Seafood Industry Growth and Recovery**

**Mr DUGAN** - Minister, the fishing sector was impacted heavily by COVID in various ways. Can you please provide an outline of the ongoing support the Government is providing to our fishing sector, which in a lot of ways is still impacted by those changes.

**Ms PALMER** - Certainly. As we know, the seafood industry has been one of the sectors of the Tasmanian economy hardest hit by the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 in both overseas and domestic markets. With ongoing lockdowns, access issues in key export markets such as China have only deepened and exacerbated these impacts.

The Government has continued to actively engage with all sectors of the seafood industry and recreational fishers since January 2020, when the Chinese market abruptly closed, and it has continued to provide timely and targeted relief to enhance the long-term recovery and resilience of the sector. The state Government has been a strong supporter of our seafood industry through COVID-19, with \$5.5 million in relief provided directly in 2020.

Around \$3.5 million went to the rock lobster industry, with refunds provided on payments. In early 2021, an additional fee and levy relief program of \$650 000 was provided to the catching sector, including rock lobster fishers. Other business support packages also assisted the fisheries sector. Most recent commitments include a \$3 million package to support the seafood sector to help secure its future, and the Government will continue to engage with industry in appropriate responses into the future.

I certainly want to thank the sector and key individuals who have worked tirelessly to support sectoral adjustment and build resilience and capacity for fast recovery as the world has changed in recent years. The Government has invested significantly in efforts to assist the seafood sector, with wider whole-of-economy programs also being available to the sector, and I want to thank the TSIC and others for their effective representation, and recognise TSIC for its lead role in responding to these issues, and its ongoing advocacy on behalf of the broad seafood sector.

A key part of our response is \$1 million each year for two years for a Wild Fisheries Action Plan to support the sector, make boat improvements, adopt new technologies, reskill and upskill workers, value-add and diversify, and develop markets and supply chains. As part of this plan, the Tasmanian Seafood Processor Grant Scheme was announced in August 2021, valued at up to \$700 000, with grants available of up to \$80 000 per applicant. This scheme was expedited at the urgent request of industry to allow the processing sector to realign their business operations to meet immediate and future processing needs associated with changed market requirements.

I'm delighted to announce that a second round of funding under this scheme to the tune of \$500 000 will soon be made available. Applications for the second round of funding will open for four weeks from 15 June, and individual grants can be valued up to \$80 000, as I mentioned. I'm confident that through this scheme we will continue to increase resilience across the seafood industry and help future-proof businesses against potential future market disruptions.

Thank you for the question.

## **90.6 Agricultural Workforce Resilience**

**Mr HARRISS** - Minister, as there's no appropriation in this Budget on this line, my question seeks information on what has been delivered in FY 22 as part of that \$1.2 million.

**Ms PALMER** - Our two-year \$1.9 million Agricultural Workforce Resilience package has helped industry prepare for the 2021 and 2022 harvest, and supported longer-term initiatives for industry resilience into the future. That has included:

- the Tassie harvest jobs Take Your Pick local worker campaign, which has resulted in more locals expressing interest in seasonal agricultural work than ever before
- a two-year boost to Safe Farming Tasmania, including the appointment of a second senior safe farming work health and safety adviser to help make Tasmanian farms safer and ensure that COVID-safe measures are in place
- an extension of the FarmPoint hotline and employment of an agri-growth industry engagement officer to provide a single contact point for primary producers to access information, and
- co-investment with industry bodies, including Fruit Growers Tasmania, Wine Tasmania, the Tasmanian Hemp Association, Sprout Tasmania, Dairy Tasmania and the Livestock Transport Association of Tasmania, for COVID-19 resilience and recovery activities as part of our two-year extension to the Strategic Industry Partnership Program, SIPP.

## PUBLIC

Chair, I do have an answer to the question on gender pay by band level, if you would like -

**CHAIR** - You'll have to table that. Mr Jacobi.

**Mr JACOBI** - Thank you. This is in response to Ms Sarah Lovell's question about the band and the gender breakdown. Would you prefer this tabled?

**CHAIR** - Just in the interests of time, with all due respect, are you able to table the table with the information?

**Mr JACOBI** - That's absolutely fine.

**CHAIR** - That would be great. Thank you.

### Grants and Subsidies

**CHAIR** - No questions on Grants and Subsidies? We'll go to Capital Investment.

### Capital Investment

**CHAIR** - Just one quick question on this. Where are the biosecurity risk management truck and machinery washers to be located?

**Ms PALMER** - A new truck wash will replace the one operated at Smithton by TasWater. That has been developed under a formal partnership between NRE Tas, the Cradle Coast Authority, TasWater and the site owner. It will be the second of the new washdown stations following the successful implementation of the first facility at Powranna in the Northern Midlands. That facility has been in full commercial operation since March. Is there any more to add to that, Deputy Secretary?

**CHAIR** - Any other questions on Capital Investment? No.

### Inland Fisheries

**CHAIR** - We'll move to Inland Fisheries.

**Mr DUGAN** - Minister, could you please outline what support the Government has provided in this Budget to improve the all-important facilities, so people can access Tasmania's fabulous inland fisheries?

**Ms PALMER** - I certainly can. Thank you for the question. Tasmania has some of the world's best wild brown trout fisheries, and our lakes and waterways are enjoyed by thousands of Tasmanians and their families. In recent years, as part of our plan to encourage more people to go trout fishing, we've built and upgraded amenities at popular inland fishing locations, expanded our Anglers Access Program across high-priority waterways, and supported angling events and clubs.

## PUBLIC

Building on these successes, this Government is continuing to deliver. We are implementing a \$1 million election commitment, with \$250 000 allocated each year over four years, commencing in the 2021-22 Budget. This will enable a continued focus, improved access to anglers, and on new and upgraded facilities.

The Inland Fisheries Service (IFS) and Angler's Alliance Tasmania are jointly undertaking angler's access projects around the state. The IFS negotiated arrangements with the Crown for access across reserves and over private land under licence agreements. Anglers Access projects now cover over 300 kilometres of river through Tasmania and the IFS produced 29 Anglers Access brochures and maps and 10 fact sheets for distribution through visitor information centres, tackle shops and electronic media. Anglers Access projects have been implemented on Brumbys Creek and the rivers Derwent, Leven and the Macquarie, Lake, Huon, North Esk, Meander, Tyenna and South Esk.

The projects delivered in 2021-22 include: new signage and track markers installed on the fishermans trail at Pumphouse Point at St Clair Lagoon; at Pet Reservoir the southwestern access has been improved with a new parking area, widening of the gate for foot access and upgrade of the path to the reservoir; at South Riana Dam an easement has been created over the carpark and access area, and a new path and gate installed; at Talbots Lagoon the access for kayaks has been widened to 1300 millimetres, and the kayak launching improved; with assistance from MAST navigation lights have been replaced at 30 inland boat ramps statewide; the carpark access road and boat ramp has been upgraded at Swan Bay; the four-wheel drive track to Pillans Lake in the Western Lakes has been improved; funding support for \$20 000 towards the Northern Midlands upgrade of the Tooms Lake camping facility; and finally, improved access at Camden Dam, including tracks and stiles.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Thank you. I'm pleased about to hear about the road into Pillans, the world's worst road.

**CHAIR** - We could all claim that I reckon.

**Mr DUIGAN** - It helps in some ways to protect the fishery. Now, as mentioned, Tasmania has some of the world's best - if not the world's best - brown trout fisheries. Could you provide some information on recent initiatives to encourage new anglers to take up the sport on offer here in the state?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. Thank you very much for the question. Building upon the policy commitments of 2018, this Government is providing \$1 million over four years for new and upgraded facilities and amenities for inland fishing and improved access to encourage and attract freshwater anglers. The Government is also providing free inland angling licences for junior inland anglers and will continue to do so for the next three financial years. This initiative has proven to be very successful, with a significant increase in junior licence holders in 2021-22 to-date, up 49 per cent on the previous year, to 1501 junior anglers. And we're offsetting the cost of this commitment by providing the Inland Fisheries Service with \$75 000 to cover the cost of this initiative.

The Tasmanian Government, with the Inland Fisheries Service, is also continuing its highly successful promotion to encourage trout fishing and support regional economies, the Tasmanian Tagged Trout promotion. Before the start of the 2021-22 inland recreational angling season, 50 tagged brown trout were released into 15 waters around Tasmania. Many

## PUBLIC

young anglers - and for that matter, many mature-aged fishers - have actively pursued these elusive tagged trout, and I understand two of the seven tagged trout were caught by a family group including young anglers. Thanks to the Tasmanian Government's policy commitment to double the amount of funding for the Tasmanian tagged trout promotion, a further 50 trout will be released this year, with each tag worth \$2000 for the lucky angler who manages to make the catch.

**CHAIR** - If Mr Duigan catches one he'll have to hand the money back.

**Ms PALMER** - The fish that weren't caught this year are added to the 2022-23 promotion. Our junior anglers from 14 up to and including 17 years of age are required to hold an inland angling licence, but they can now fish Tasmania's inland lakes and waterways with a free angling licence available online and through agents.

Through you, Chair, I have this for tabling for Ms Lovell.

**CHAIR** - Thanks very much. Meg's got a question on inland fisheries.

**Ms WEBB** - It's one I didn't ask earlier, actually, and I wonder whether it could fit here, it's about monitoring river health. Could that fit into this one or not this one? No. Then one final tiny one on this one.

I've been reliably informed that there's been a very successful carp eradication program that someone wanted me to mention as being successful, and wondered whether further funds are being allocated to continue that work.

**Ms PALMER** - I thank the member for the question. European carp - which has a name I'm going to attempt just once, *Cyprinus carpio*, but we're going to call it European carp - is an invasive species of freshwater fish widespread on mainland Australia and is a controlled fish under the Inland Fisheries Act of 95. This Government is continuing to implement a successful eradication program for carp in Tasmania. The carp management program commenced when carp were found in Lake Crescent in February 1995, and the carp management program successfully eradicated carp from Lake Crescent in 2007.

The only known carp population present in Tasmania is in Lake Sorell, where extensive fishing under the eradication program in 2021-22 resulted in only four carp being caught. So it's now estimated that few, if any, carp remain in this lake. Based on the continued success of the carp management program, eradication is expected to be confirmed in 2022-23. The program has developed and implemented techniques that have enabled carp to be continued to Lake Sorell, and to-date 41 503 carp have been removed from the lake.

If carp eradication is confirmed it will certainly be fantastic, welcome and a world-leading result. I am glad to see the enthusiasm from the member for Windermere for the eradication of carp.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, minister. We'll close off the primary industries portfolio. You've survived that one. You've got an answer to provide first, before we do that?

**Ms PALMER** - Through you, Chair, if you're happy for me to table this answer which was in regard to Rural Business Resilience Package.

# PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Sure, thank you. So thank you to your team. You can let them loose to carry on working.

**Ms PALMER** - Chair, I acknowledge the fantastic effort of this team. I certainly appreciated the committee's comments around the data, in particular, that was able to be provided at the table today. They've worked extremely hard with not only a new primary industries minister, but also a brand new rookie minister as well, so I've appreciated their patience and commitment to the process as well.

**CHAIR** - We'll take just a short break while we change over and bring your new staff in, so we'll just stop the broadcast.

**The Committee suspended from 11.49 a.m. to 11.52 a.m.**

## **Division 2**

Department of Communities Tasmania  
Minister for Women

**CHAIR** - Welcome back, minister, and welcome to your women's portfolio area. So, I invite you to introduce your team at the table and make an opening statement with regard to women's policy.

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much, Chair. I'm joined today by Kate Kent, the Deputy Secretary of Communities, Sport and Recreation, Communities Tasmania. Thank you, Kate, for being here.

Chair, the Tasmanian government is committed to creating a more inclusive Tasmania that empowers and enables women and girls to fully participate in our economic, social, political and community life and I'm certainly honoured to be here today as the Minister for Women. The world in which we live and work is changing rapidly, particularly over the last two years, and I believe we are at a pivotal moment where we have the chance to effect real change in our society. It's important we ensure that the way we operate as a government reflects and supports contemporary standards and expectations.

Our work to achieve gender equality in Tasmania is guided by the Tasmanian Women's Strategy. We are currently finalising the next iteration of this strategy and we have consulted extensively over the past 12 months. What we have heard clearly from the community is that it wants to see cultural change led by the government to achieve gender equality in Tasmania. It's exciting and it's a critical challenge. Stepping into this portfolio, I've certainly been pressed with a range of work underway, particularly in partnership with industry and the community to support opportunities for Tasmanian women and girls. As a minister, it is a privilege to, on one hand, see the strategic discussions that will effect cultural change and on the other hand, see the real impacts these plans and strategies have in the community.

Since 2020, we have committed over \$4 million to strengthen the recruitment, retention and advancement of women in sectors where they are traditionally underrepresented. This includes the \$2 million Supporting Women to Succeed Program which aims to support women's employment rights across the economy with a particular focus on sectors traditionally dominated by men. This program provides grants of \$10 000 to \$200 000 to companies and

## PUBLIC

organisations across the state during 2021-22. Over the last year, we have seen the programs from these grants rolled out and this includes programs that recruit and mentor female apprentices in the building industry, upskilling females to become qualified to take on civil construction jobs and providing leadership training for its female employees.

Because we don't just want to support women in these industries, we want to see them thrive and succeed. We will make sure these efforts are strategic and ongoing. In partnership with industry, we are developing a Women in Building and Construction Strategy through a \$75 000 commitment and our work to support women in leadership roles is working. It was certainly a pleasure this week to announce the 2022 recipients of the Women's Leadership Scholarship: Board Diversity Scholarship Program. The 10 scholarship recipients for 2022 join 87 women who have previously undertaken these courses to help them further their careers in and take on leadership and board positions. In going forward, we will build on this work and take it a step further.

The Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27 will have a particular focus on gender equality. Under this strategy, we've proposed some important initiatives that will integrate gender impact assessment into the work of government. This includes a gender impact assessment process, comprising a toolkit, resources and training, to help agencies integrate gender impact assessments into the development of initiatives, projects and policies. We plan to make this publicly available so the resources can be used by other organisations. We are also planning to develop an evaluation framework so we can better measure our work to achieve gender equality and this work will feed into the further development of our gender budget statements. The first of which was released this year. We're serious about this work. In the 2022-23 budget, we committed \$800 000 over four years to implement initiatives of the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27.

Since becoming Minister for Women, I have also been impressed by the support from fellow women who want to work together to improve outcomes for all of us. I'm advised in this portfolio by an outstanding group of women in the Tasmanian Women's Council and I would like to thank them in particular for their work feeding into the development of the Tasmanian Women's Strategy and I know that this includes some past members as well. I would also like to acknowledge fellow parliamentarians who have shown their support for gender equality. And my predecessors in this role who have overseen the development of the important initiatives that are coming to fruition today. Our work to achieve gender equality would not be possible without strong collaboration across government through my cabinet colleagues and the Tasmanian Women's Council. Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, minister. It wasn't that long ago, I sat across this table and there was not even an initiative or need for gender impact assessments and that sort of thing. It is really pleasing to see we've made some real progress in that. I would like us to look at budget paper 2, page 40, which is the appropriation for this line item and just ask a few questions around this. So, it talks about the budget allocation. In my mind, for the measly amount for an enormous part of work you're going to have to do, and I'll come to that.

This 2021-22 budget was \$2.45 million, this year it's \$1.4 million. Dropping away \$745 000. Just under \$400 000, \$290 000. A lot of money to do the work. I note the footnote refers to the decrease. Primarily reflects one-off funding in the 2021-22 for the Tasmanian Women's Strategy of 2018-21 and then partly offset by an increase for the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27. I'll just ask, minister, if you could outline what that funding was delivering



## PUBLIC

and how the ongoing work of the office is going to be met in the outyears, from 2023-24 onwards? Does that include some information about the number of staff in your office in this area which actually provide the service.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, certainly. Thank you very much. I will refer this to Ms Kent, but I will just say that the changing funding profile for the COVID-19 response for the Women's Policy of \$0.9 million. Sorry, this is in looking at the budget output group expense summary, and this output - the decrease of \$666 000 from 2.7 million. So the changing funding profile for the COVID-19 response for the Women's Policy is reflected in that, offset by additional funding of \$200 000 for the 2022-23 Budget decision Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27. I will ask the acting secretary if she could add more to that.

**Ms KENT** - Thank you, and through you, minister. There was the \$2.5 million for the Supporting Women to Succeed Grant, \$2 million of that has been expended - or has been provided to those organisations that were successful. So that accounts for a significant amount of that funding.

In regard to the resources which we put into this portfolio, which I think has been a question in previous hearings as well, this work is done within what we call a policy and programs branch. We have two dedicated positions which focus on just on women's policy. Across that branch of around 12 to 15 staff, gender, women's policy, and other policies that interrelate are all worked on by other staff as well.

One of those particular positions that I mentioned was the Industry Liaison Officer, that was also funded by the government as part of the 2020-21 Budget. We work closely with all agencies. We have what we call the Women's IDC, Strategy IDC. So that's chaired by myself, includes deputy secretaries from all agencies. I have to say I think they're all women, that bring to the table all of the policy and programs that are worked on across every portfolio. So the resourcing that goes into looking at women's policy and women's issues is substantial, as well as the individual staff that we have working on it as well.

**CHAIR** - I was pleased to hear reference to a focus on gender equality. The gender impact assessment process that you're seeking to implement, that you will make publicly available. How is that progressing? I know it's in my budget reply, there are - it might've been another thing I was speaking about. That there's a number of tools that have already been well established, well tried, robust in various other jurisdictions around the world. Are we looking to recreate the wheel, or we're going to adapt and modify some of the very successful tools and processes that are out there already?

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much. I'm going to refer that to the deputy secretary.

**Ms KENT** - Thank you, again. Just going to keep this mask off. Through the work of that group that I've just referred to, and all of the people that have been involved as the minister said in the consultation and development of the new version of the strategy - we've looked at various tools that are used elsewhere, across other jurisdictions in Australia, but as you say also internationally. That evaluation framework will be developed building on that. We would always utilise the resources of others where we can, we don't try and duplicate.

**CHAIR** - Most of them are really happy to share. Like they're not - they don't -

## PUBLIC

**Ms KENT** - Exactly. We've had great discussions with organisations such as Our Watch who again have done a lot of work in this area. That's the approach we're taking as well as to continue to find the models which would work best here in a smaller jurisdiction. Flexible and adaptable.

**CHAIR** - So do you have a time frame for having something that will be publicly released? You're working to a bit of a time frame there, minister?

**Ms KENT** - As the minister said, the Women's Strategy will be due to come out in the next short while. Then the next step is to develop the implementation plan for that. So again, through the Tasmanian Women's Council who want to take an overarching guiding lead in that as part of their work plan for this year, is to drive that - the consultation and engagement around the actual implementation, including around the evaluation strategy approach to it as well. So this year. Really this 2022.

**CHAIR** - This calendar year, or?

**Ms KENT** - This calendar year definitely is where the key part of the work will be in this second half of this year really from - we've got our timetables from June to December as a key part of that.

**CHAIR** - Minister, I assume from Ms Kent's comments earlier that the policy unit that does a lot of this work, would be working with other departments to ensure that their assessment process and framework is rolled out across those others areas? Who will lead that work?

**Ms KENT** - Through the minister. Would you like me to touch on - our structure going forward as well as part of the change to Communities Tasmania?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms KENT** - Because I think it'll provide you with that picture.

**CHAIR** - So are you going to DPAC, or where do you go?

**Ms KENT** - I'm going to State Growth.

**CHAIR** - Right.

**Ms KENT** - However, my colleague - so the policy and programs part of my division, and other parts of the Department of Communities Tas including community services area, will be moving to Department of Premier and Cabinet. You will know Mel Gray who's the current dep secretary, also been working closely on - leading the work on the Child and Youth Wellbeing framework. So it will become part of a division led by Mel Gray, so you can appreciate Mel comes with a strong background in many of these policy areas as we all have through different times in our careers worked together both through Premier and Cabinet and in other agencies.

So we're really confident that this work going forward will be really well integrated with all of the other work that we're doing across government in these policy areas. Touches on in the feedback we got through the strategy, the consultation, was that intersectionality and the

## PUBLIC

links to other cohorts in the population and what their issues are, and what that means. We're confident that the work will progress without any pause, and in a really proactive way to bring all those areas together.

**CHAIR** - What I'm hearing I think is there'll be a consistent approach across all departments in regard to preparing gender impact assessments and gender budgeting approaches. It'll be available for me to go online and have a look at it, anybody else, to see the framework and the process for that? All right. Yes?

**Ms KENT** - Yes.

**Ms PALMER** - I'll follow up on that a little. Thank you. It's really pleasing to be here talking about this. We certainly wouldn't have been here doing this a couple of years ago. So that's excellent. The toolkit and the resources and the training that are being developed as part of one of the actions of the Women's Strategy Implementation Plan by the sound of it. Then made available publicly and to agencies. Just to pick up I think a little bit more directly on where the Chair was going with her question, will there be an expectation then that those resources will be applied and used from a particular timeframe by each agency?

**Ms KENT** - Through you, minister. I think that's certainly the intent. We haven't got down to talking about a timeframe or when that - that's the advice - we then would provide back to the government and through the minister, and have those discussions as well through cabinet. But that is what it is all about having everyone engaged in the process and being consistent in how they apply tools and to build on that, how they might use it most effectively in their agency. The intention is that all agencies work with that information - with that tool, and use that to develop their information. I think it's an intuitive and evolving process in policy development, just as it is everywhere. I would also like to reiterate; I think being led Department of Premier and Cabinet as a central agency gives it good impetus as we know. And additionally working closely with our colleagues in Treasury and Finance who have been -

**CHAIR** - Hold the purse strings.

**Ms KENT** - we would work closely with in terms of developing up this first version of the gender budget statement for example. Everyone comes with different analytical skillsets and assessment which is really valuable, so -

**Ms WEBB** - Will somebody who's part of the team who are working on this then putting together this toolkit, resources, and the training that go with it, will there be someone involved in that who has that specific treasury training, you know, who can be talking the Treasury language and bringing those particular aspects of this work, this framework, together?

**Ms KENT** - Through you, minister, every time we develop programs and policies we do try to bring people together that have the skillsets and are able to work on that effectively. Where you identify you don't have that skillset, then you look at getting it so you ensure that you bring people onto the team or as part of the program and the project to have that.

There are good people now in Government who have good analytical skills either through that approach and others. Treasury people have particular analytical skills, people from a service delivery agency can put that approach to it. You bring policy people together and you'll get a good set of skills through a project.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, thank you. As a very good resource I'd point to the recently tabled Victorian parliament inquiry into gender-responsive budgeting. It is particularly useful, I think, in our local context.

**CHAIR** - Sarah, we'll go to you.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you, Chair. Minister, I have some questions about women on boards. Last year, the Women on Boards report said that women comprised 56.4 per cent of board membership. The minister at the time advised in last year's Estimates said it was up to 47.9 per cent but expected that it would reach 50 per cent by the end of the year. Did it reach that 50 per cent measure?

**Ms PALMER** - No we didn't. Not through any lack of trying. The last two quarters saw the percentage of women on boards decrease. A number of factors have contributed to that. The number of positions held by women on Tasmanian Government boards and committees was 47.2 per cent in the December 2021 quarter. There was a slight drop in the September and December quarters of 2021, but each drop was less than one percentage point and can be attributed to changes in the number of positions, restructures of boards and committees. These are very small changes, and overall the percentage of positions held by women remains steady.

The early reports of March 2022 data show that it is at 47.7 per cent for the quarter. It remains steady. So, 50 per cent is still the target. We don't shy away from that. We continue to invest in the area of encouraging women to step up and for departments to ensure that they are looking for women, and also making sure that we are empowering women and helping them to be in a position where they can do that. I wish it was at 50 per cent, but we continue to strive for that goal.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. We have the March 2022 percentage, can you provide the head count of women on boards, a breakdown between paid and unpaid positions and the number of discrete women on boards - women who might be sitting on more than one board, if there's a breakdown.

**CHAIR** - Don't count them twice.

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes, exactly.

**Ms PALMER** - As at 31 December 2021, there were 929 filled board positions which were held by 823 individual board members, 439 women and 490 men. Of these individual members, 33 women and 34 men held two or more board appointments. In total, these 33 held 88 of the 439 positions held by women; that is 20 per cent of the positions. It's worth noting that 33 is down from 47 last quarter.

**Ms LOVELL** - Sorry, can I just ask, so 33 women held two or more appointments? I heard 34, but 33?

**Ms PALMER** - So 33 women and 34 men held two or more board appointments.

**Ms LOVELL** - Oh, thank you, thank you.

## PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - I have some more information here from our most recent Women on Boards quarterly report. There were 109 active government boards and committees. Women held 439 out of the 929 positions. Women held 31 per cent of chair positions, so 32 out of the 102 positions were held by women.

**Ms LOVELL** - Did you have a breakdown of, sorry, paid and unpaid positions?

**Ms PALMER** - I believe so. Ninety boards and committees provided payments to their members. Women held 50.3 per cent of positions paid through annual fees or sitting fees. That's 266 of the 529. Women received a total of \$4 million - is that right? \$4 096 527 in annual fees, while men received a total of \$4 064 429.

A regional analysis shows that people from southern Tasmania make up 68 per cent of board members. The second-highest percentage of board members reside in the north of Tasmania at 18 per cent, followed by the north west, seven per cent, and interstate, five per cent. The percentage of women on boards and committees does fluctuate month-by-month, as I have said, in response to changing board appointments.

**Ms LOVELL** - One last question which you may or may not have. The 266 positions that are held by women on paid boards, do you know if any of those are multiple or duplicate appointments, distinct women?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll have to seek advice on that. It's not in the information I have here. Okay. I'll refer this to the acting secretary to explain.

**Ms KENT** - Through you, minister, we have collated the names of all of the people, both men and women, who are on more than one board. That can be tabled.

**CHAIR** - We have had that tabled with their names in the past, because they're all listed in the annual reports.

**Ms KENT** - Yes, so we have got a table that we're happy to table here today. We would have to take on notice to cross-reference the paid positions.

**Ms LOVELL** - That's fine, thank you.

**CHAIR** - To follow up on a couple of those points. From memory, minister, it was 31 per cent of women who were chairs?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. Women held 31 per cent of chair positions. So 32 out of 102 positions.

**CHAIR** - Yes. That's an area where more work is needed. Chairs get paid more, for a start. What targeted approach are you using to try to encourage that elevation from a regular board member to a chair?

**Ms PALMER** - I believe one of the key tools we have in our toolbox to ensure women in power increase that percentage of women who are chairing boards is our Women's Leadership and Board Diversity scholarships. They've been running since 2015. The point of those scholarships is to help Tasmanian women to be more confident when applying for board

positions and to enhance their skills when working in a range of government, commercial, or not-for-profit boards.

The scholarships are part of the Government's plan for gender equality in Tasmania, empowering women to advance into leadership positions in their chosen fields. Through the priorities set out in the Women on Boards strategy and the Leadership and Participation Action Plan for Women 2021-23, the Tasmanian Women in Leadership Scholarship has expanded from board diversity training to industry-led approaches in advancing women. So, that is a really clear strategy.

In 2021-22, we have seen some funding split between two organisations that are particularly trying to target this issue. Tasmanian leaders have been allocated \$50 000 to deliver the Tasmanian I-LEAD Women in Industry program, which has been developed by industry, for industry. This funding will enable Tasmanian leaders to focus on supporting the leadership skills of women, particularly those working in non-traditional fields. The I-LEAD program will run from 6 September this year to 8 November.

The Australian Institute of Company Directors is recognised as a leader in the provision of directorship training, and \$46 840 was allocated to fund 10 AICD scholarships for Tasmanian women -seven scholarships for the Foundations of Directorship course, and three scholarships for the Company Directors course. That will bring the total number of recipients to 97. And we know this is something women want, because for the 10 scholarships to be given out this year, over 100 applications were received just in this year, and from a really wide range of industries.

I had the pleasure of making that announcement on Monday, I think. Emma Bennison was one of those women who has been given the opportunity and received one of those three scholarships for the company directors course. I certainly see that as a clear strategy in trying to see change in the statistics of women chairing our boards.

**CHAIR** - Sure. Have you done any work on the gender pay gap with women on our government boards? We know that some, like the energy entities for example, are paid a lot more than some other government boards, and even when you look at the three energy entities, the one that does have a female chair is the lowest paid. So, has any work been done on identifying what the gender pay gap is?

**Ms PALMER** - Not by me in the last six weeks. But I will refer that to the acting secretary, for a department point of view.

**Ms KENT** - Certainly, the 2020-25 strategy talks about increasing the representation of women in board positions and refers exactly to that language about improving the gender equity. Our approach has been to try to build, informally at this stage, but to look at the benefits of things such as networks, mentoring opportunities and so forth. As you know, the report we put out flagged some women across our sector who are now on boards, and what it is that they do and what brings them to be in board positions - and to encourage women to take up those roles of deputy or chair and not think that it's somehow out of their reach, but to say that's actually part of your board experience.

**CHAIR** - When we last had TasNetworks, for example, across the table, from memory they had a pretty even gendered workforce and at senior levels. In the past I've constantly have

## PUBLIC

heard, oh, we can't attract women into this sector, blah blah blah, in terms of industry sectors. I note there's work being done on attracting women into those sectors, but in some of these traditionally male-dominated areas we still don't see them rising to this position - with the exception of Rebecca Kardos, who is a CEO, and I think Aurora still has a female chair as well. But, I mean, it just doesn't seem to flow through, so I appreciate the work that's being done.

You mentioned the regional breakdown. I'm not going to turn to the member for Launceston on this one, but I think it was only seven per cent from the north-west, and I'm just interested if you have a gender breakdown of that seven per cent. You may not have.

**Ms PALMER** - Let's have a look. The regional analysis, north of Tasmania, 18 per cent, followed by the north-west, seven per cent. I don't have a further breakdown on men and women in that.

**CHAIR** - Are we able to get that? I think it might help identify where you need to put in effort encouraging women to stand, particularly across the regions. I'm happy for that to be provided at a later time.

**Ms PALMER** - If we don't, I think we have it in our quarterly reports.

**CHAIR** - We'll go to other questions and if it's available, you can provide it, but otherwise we can take it on notice.

**Ms KENT** - As the minister already answered before, the quick facts are that women are 18, seven and 68 per cent.

**CHAIR** - It was the regional breakdown of the members. Geographic breakdown. By gender. So we have a breakdown of that seven per cent and the other two.

**Ms PALMER** - Sure.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Great to hear we've got women filling roles in the leadership areas of some of our boards. Can the minister explain how the Tasmanian Government is supporting women into industries where they are traditionally under-represented?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, absolutely. Since November 2020, we've committed over \$4 million to strengthen the recruitment, retention and advancement of women in sectors where women are traditionally under-represented and industries critical for Tasmania's recovery from COVID-19. So, this is a win-win.

From the women's portfolio perspective, this is part of our work to achieve gender equality and effect cultural change. From industry's perspective, many of the industries we're talking about are currently facing skill and labour shortages - so increasing the skills and capabilities of females in Tasmania enables these industries to leverage more of the working population. Anything that we can do to support and improve the economic security of Tasmanian women and girls is fantastic and certainly worthwhile.

At the 2021 state election, the Tasmanian Liberal Government committed to a range of programs that aim to make real changes to workplaces now, as well as targeting more strategic and cultural change. These include the Supporting Women to Succeed grant program. In 2021,

## PUBLIC

we provided \$2 million to 20 organisations across Tasmania to boost attraction, recruitment and retention of women in non-traditional fields. We've also committed an additional \$350 000 per annum over three years to continue this program.

We're partnering with all industries to develop a Modern Workplaces Framework, to be a toolkit for industry to provide safe work spaces for women. We doubled the funding for the Women in Leadership, Board Diversity scholarship program, which I've just spoken about, to \$100 000 per year for 2024-25. For the International Women's Day Small Grants program, we're also providing \$20 000 each year over four years from 2021 to support more events; this funding has been expanded from \$7000 per annum up to \$20 000.

We committed \$75 000 to develop a Women in Building and Construction strategy, in partnership with the industry, to help raise awareness of career options in the building and construction industry. We have the Girls in Property pilot program, and we committed \$25 000 to work with the Property Council of Australia to assist more women to consider work in that sector.

We've committed \$150 000 to the Tasmanian Mineral and Energy Council Diversity Action Plan, we've committed \$150 000 for TMEC to increase the gender and cultural diversity of the resource sector; Tasmanian Forests and Forest Product Network Diversity Action Plan, we've committed \$300 000 to this organisation to increase the gender and cultural diversity in the forests and forest product sector.

So these are just some of the initiatives which are being rolled out. As a result of these programs, particularly the Supporting Women to Succeed grant program, we are seeing female apprentices being recruited and mentored into trades. We're seeing female employees of various organisations being qualified in executive leadership and given career mentoring. We're seeing females being targeted and given pre-employment training to take advantage of many opportunities in civil construction around the state. This is really great work, and I certainly look forward to working with the department as we continue with these programs.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Thank you. I can keep going, if you would like, or -

**CHAIR** - Meg's got one, then I can come back to you, if that's all right.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Sure.

**Ms WEBB** - Oh, thank you. It probably follows on quite well, actually. We know from data published by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency in February this year that the gender pay gap in Tasmania is 9.1 per cent, which is less than it is in some other jurisdictions but still regrettable. So noting what you've described already in terms of those allocations to focus on women moving into male-dominated areas, so noting those and not needing to revisit them, what's the Government doing to address the structural elements contributing to the current gender pay gap as we see it now in this state to close that gender pay parity gap within the Tasmanian workforce, particularly for those sectors that do have female domination or more equitable membership already, so we're not sort of trying to move more women into it, including the state sector?

**Ms PALMER** - Okay. There's a few different questions in that. I will start by saying, yes, it is good to see that the gender pay gap here in Tasmania at 9.1 per cent is below the



## PUBLIC

national average, but that doesn't make it acceptable to any of us. Whilst it is good, you know, it's still not where it should be by 2022.

So removing barriers to women seeking and gaining employment in stable, high-paying, and diverse industry roles, including in regional areas, is, you know, going to be really critical here. I think the strategies that I was just talking about where we're trying to see women move into these industries that don't have -

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, but I did specifically say -

**Ms PALMER** - No, sorry, I'm still - I'm trying to answer your question. In trying to see women move into these industries that haven't - you know, are not traditional women's industries, we look at that and we see that there's an opportunity for the greatest gain in doing that. So we have had a real focus on moving through there. I don't know if there's anything that the Deputy Secretary would be happy to add to that.

**Ms KENT** - So through you, minister, and I think the minister's covered it, because that was the approach that we have taken was to look at where those industries are that we know are generally high-paying and get women into those industries. In the consultations and feedback through both the Tasmanian Women's Council and the submissions that came to that as well, people recognise that there still needs to be a strong focus on the industries that women are also traditionally employed in.

**Ms WEBB** - Or already are equally employed in.

**Ms KENT** - Are equally employed in.

**Ms WEBB** - But suffering a gender pay gap.

**Ms KENT** - That's right. So to look at all of those and to look at, then, you know, women's involvement in those and ensuring that they're also continuing to gain the skills and opportunities and have workplaces where they can be in senior roles in those areas as well. So all of those programs that the minister outlined and others with our colleagues in Skills Tasmania, for example, around the work they do for education and training through the Training and Work Pathways Program and the issues around when women lose their employment, so rapid response skills initiatives and others. It is a combination and a collation of all of the work that gets done across areas.

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, that's fine.

**Ms KENT** - As well as working closely with Australian government agencies that have programs in these areas too.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. I was also looking for particularly anything that you could mention - and it's fine if there's not something to mention, 'cause you've got the other areas of focus. The things I was looking for were to address the structural elements. So it's not about skilling women or somehow making women more of something, but about - 'cause we know that it's not necessarily about women's insufficiencies that they're experiencing a gender pay gap, it's because the structural elements -

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Is there a question coming?

**Ms WEBB** - So I was looking for things that pointed towards addressing structural elements. That's fine. The other question I had that is related to that is about opportunities for the government to help do that. Is there any - when applications are made from the private sector for grants or other forms of assistance such as subsidies are made to government - due diligence assessment processes to check the applicant's track record on gender pay parity and potentially have that be a criteria looked at for consideration when assessments are made of where to provide government assistance or government grants or supports?

**Ms PALMER** - I would need to refer that to the Acting Secretary. It's a really good question.

**Ms KENT** - Thank you, minister. We can use the example, then, of the Supporting Women to Succeed grant program which was a significant program and a big investment by the Government, their focus has been in that program. The concentration on projects that will focus on attraction, recruitment, and retention of women in those particular industries. We will work to and provide for the Government to back this program and we focused on this grant round as being in those sectors we just talked about.

What was the other ask? So we saw that was a program that was hugely subscribed to from a range of the - right across the economy. So our analysis to the minister and advice will be, when we both evaluate those projects that have been funded, we'll also look at what didn't get funded, if you understand what I mean.

**Ms WEBB** - Yes.

**Ms KENT** - Does that take -

**Ms WEBB** - So my question wasn't really - it wasn't about the grants that are provided towards women's success, not the grants provided in this portfolio. When government broadly is looking to allocate public money towards things, whether it's grants or whether it might be subsidies to industry or whatever else it might be, my question was about the opportunity that's there when assessing that to consider the gender pay parity of applicants and have that be something that's taken into consideration in assessing their grant application success.

**Ms PALMER** - I don't know that I can specifically answer that question today. I've appreciated the question and I would certainly like to further explore that with the department. I think you've made a very good point.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you, I appreciate that. I've got something else, but you can go back to Nick if you like.

**CHAIR** - Nick, you go, yes. It's good to see a man asking questions in this portfolio, I must say.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Indeed, it is, yes. Minister, this question is about the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27. I understand there was a large piece of consultation, large body of work and consultation around that, and I wonder if you could perhaps provide some of that feedback and what the community was saying.

**CHAIR** - That's a very good question.

**Mr DUIGAN** - A great question.

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much. I thank the honourable member very much for his question. Consultation has been a very important part of the development of the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27, as you would expect, particularly because of the last two years where the landscape in which we live and work has changed so rapidly. We want to make sure the strategy reflects contemporary expectations and standards, which is why we released the final draft for public consultation on 26 March 2022.

At the close of public consultation, 16 submissions were received from individuals and organisations in the private community and government sectors. I understand there were submissions from two members at the table here today. Yes. In fact, I would like acknowledge the two members from this place; the member for Murchison and the member for Nelson who both provided well thought out submissions, and I do thank you for that.

Of the general comments, there was strong support for the strategic framework, including a gender assessment impact process and evaluation framework, and a gender budget statement. It also indicated that broad consultation is needed prior to the development of the gender impact assessment process, the evaluation framework. This includes hearing the needs of diverse individuals and those with lived experience in intersectional disadvantage.

There was strong support in the submissions for acknowledging the importance of men also taking responsibility for gender equity goals. The strategy should clearly articulate that men play a really important role in achieving gender equality, and that embracing equality improves outcomes for everyone in the broader community, including men. For example, all men deserve access to paid parental leave, and policies are needed to ensure that all genders can access it. However, there remains a need for cultural change, as men are often reluctant to take it, even when it's available.

There was a suggestion to strengthen the focus on intersectionality. For the benefit of people who are watching and may not be familiar with that term, it refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. It was recommended that by adopting an intersectional approach to gender equality, policy measures can be more readily identified and support the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised women, girls, and gender-diverse Tasmanians. An intersectional approach should be embedded within the gender impact assessment tool.

Multiple submissions stressed the importance of ensuring data collection is comprehensive, particularly measuring outcomes for disadvantaged women. Data on men should be incorporated such as the proportion of men who use parental leave, or proportion of employers offering access to parental leave for men.

Two submissions called for stronger governance to ensure accountability in how the strategy is implemented. Many submissions made recommendations for specific strategies that will fall under the strategy outcome areas of economic security, leadership and participation, health and wellbeing, and safety. Issues raised included cyber safety, affordable housing, the superannuation gap, cost of living, health, aged care, and safety in the community.

## PUBLIC

And I would like to thank everyone who took the time to provide feedback. It's been a really valuable process for us and we are now integrating the feedback into the final strategy which will be released soon.

**CHAIR** - Just following up on that, can I ask, minister, how many men did actually participate in the consultation? Do we know that or not?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll refer that question to the deputy secretary.

**Ms KENT** - One submission out of those 16 was from a man.

**CHAIR** - Okay.

**Ms KENT** - But having said that, some of the organisations that made submissions had men involved in those submissions. Carers Tasmania is a good example of that with David Brennan and others in his team that would have put together that submission.

In the first draft of this late last year, there were over 500 submissions - I don't have the details in front of me around a breakdown for those - and there were a number of workshops and other forums. As the minister said as well, the intersectionality of it has meant we've also drawn on other consultations that have been under way so as to not duplicate those. Things such as COTA's consultations on active ageing and others would have involved men and women. The Youth and Wellbeing Strategy clearly involved young people of all genders, and multicultural communities have contributed. So we know that there have been people across those communities of all genders have been involved. It hasn't just been focused on women.

**CHAIR** - No, that's fine.

**Ms WEBB** - Can I follow up?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - It's not necessarily a follow up, although the intersectionality, a little bit touches into it. The team that's responsible for progressing the Women's Strategy, and this is going to be situated then in DPAC once the change is made amongst that larger team, is that also where work is going to be undertaken on the Wellbeing Framework? So there will be some natural synergies there between work that's done on the Women's Strategy to feed through into the Wellbeing Framework as it's developed up?

**Ms KENT** - Minister, I'm not exactly sure how DPAC will structure all of those large strategies as well, but I certainly that, again, Mel Gray has been involved in some of that work and I know that's being developed, and certainly being in the agency, I'm sure there will be a chance to influence and engage in how that will also be developed. So we're hoping that we'll be able to contribute quite significantly to that work, but I don't have the details around what the process is they're planning.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Nick, have you got another one? We've only got a couple of minutes left, so yes, you go. Yes, that's right.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Yes. I was just wondering if the minister might be able to provide an update on the Tasmanian Honour Roll for Women.

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much. The Tasmanian Government is committed to recognising and celebrating the achievements of women in all aspects of Tasmanian life, and I believe very strongly that it's so important to celebrate and recognise the achievements and the contributions of women and girls so that others can be inspired to strive and achieve. I've personally been involved with the Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women for many years. I think I was at the first one which went for about five hours. In fact, I wasn't able to read the news that night as I was still in Hobart announcing the first Honour Roll of Women. So it's quite an honour for me to be here now in the role of the Minister for Women and be involved in a different way.

Before I continue, I would like to recognise the contribution of Linley Grant OAM. Linley was inducted into the Honour Roll in 2007 for her lifelong community service. Amongst her many community commitments, she served on the Tasmanian Women's Council and she was also on the judging panel for the Honour Roll. Sadly, Linley passed away in April this year and she will be missed by many in the community. Linley embodies what the Honour Roll is really all about, which is recognising and celebrating the contributions and the achievements of Tasmanian women.

There are currently 343 women and 12 women's organisations on the Honour Roll. It is a biannual event with the next induction to be held in March 2023, which will coincide with International Women's Day and nominations for the next intake will open later this year. I encourage the community and all of us to start thinking about inspirational women, whether they are quiet achievers or women whose names we know, and I look forward to celebrating these women at the induction in 2023 and hearing their stories, which is perhaps the highlight of the whole event is that you get to hear about women whose achievements and names you may not have heard of before, but you certainly don't forget them once you've been at the event. I thank the member for the question.

**Ms WEBB** - Even women from back in history too, it's really lively to look back.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, it is.

**Ms WEBB** - And recognise women from our past who didn't perhaps get recognised then.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. And some of their stories are phenomenal.

**CHAIR** - Minister, that brings us to a close. Thank you. We'll be back after lunch for Disability Services, which is your last portfolio area. Anyway, we'll break now and be back at quarter to 2 o'clock. Thank you.

**The Committee suspended from 12.49 p.m. to 1.48 p.m.**

**DIVISION 2**

Department of Communities Tasmania  
Minister for Disability Services

**Output Group 4 - Disability Services and Community Development**

**4.2 Disability Services**

CHAIR - Welcome back, minister, you're on the home stretch. I know you wanted to table something before you start this portfolio area. After you've done that I'll get you to introduce your team and make an opening statement.

Ms PALMER - Thank you, Chair. This relates to the Women portfolio that we were in before the break. It's a breakdown of women on multiple government boards and committees.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms PALMER - I'm delighted to introduce the director of Community and Disability Services, Ms Ingrid Ganley to the table. I thank her very much for being here with me today. I'd like to start by saying what an honour it is to take on the role of Minister for Disability Services. Since I've stepped into this role, I've had many people in the community reach out to me. People with disabilities, parents caring for their children, and young people with disabilities. People have sought help for difficult situations they are facing and I will always do my best to assist them when I can, not just as the Minister for Disability Services but also as the local member for Rosevears.

Others have really inspired me with their optimism and their vision for the future for people with disabilities in Tasmania. There are some really important initiatives happening in our state right now that will have a really significant impact for the future, and improve the lives of Tasmanians living with disability.

The first is the review of the Disability Services Act 2011. This act has provided a strong foundation for the provision of disability services in the state. However, the act is 10 years old and in that time many things have changed, the most notable being the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

There's been extensive work and consultation undertaken using a range of different approaches to ensure that people with disabilities have been able to provide information in a way that best suits them. The next stage of the review will be for the Government to consider the consultation and determine what amendments are required.

This work has been happening in concert with the scoping of the role of Tasmania's first ever disability commissioner. The establishment of this office was a commitment in the 2021 state election and is a key priority for the Tasmanian Government. The 2022-23 Tasmanian Budget committed a further \$400 000 over four years to this initiative. This is additional to the \$1.2 million over four years that was committed in the 2021-22 budget.

While there is still some important work to do to establish the legislative framework, we know that the disability community is keen to see this role progressed as a priority, which is why we will begin recruitment for an interim disability commissioner. The aim of the interim

## PUBLIC

disability commissioner will be to activate the role of the commissioner. This includes a no-wrong-door complaints approach, where they will begin to take complaints and make referrals.

The second purpose is to continue to scope the role and responsibilities of the disability commissioner. This is important, as the disability commissioner will need to work alongside other existing bodies in Tasmania, that people with disability can go to for help to resolve complaints or address discrimination.

The Government has been working closely with the Ministerial Disability Consultative Group, as well as other key disability stakeholders and the community to seek further feedback on this important role. I have been heartened by the support that there is for this role.

The introduction of the NDIS has changed the lives of many Tasmanians with a disability. At 31 March 2022 there are now more than 11 991 Tasmanians being supported by the NDIS, including early childhood early intervention support. This financial year Tasmania's contribution will be \$274.6 million.

Tasmania's NDIS cohort includes more than 7400 people who are receiving support for the very first time. This is remarkable and a testament to the positive difference the NDIS is making. We want to ensure more Tasmanians are able to access the service and support they need following the broader rollout of the NDIS, which has changed the lives of so many Tasmanians with disability.

I'm looking forward to engaging with my state and territory colleagues through the Disability Reform Ministers' meeting. Particularly meeting the federal minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and advocating for Tasmania's disability community.

The Government will continue to provide support to meet the growing demand on local autism diagnostic services, which we know is the largest proportion of NDIS users. This year's Budget continues the \$1.4 million over four years to assist with additional assessments to meet demand and help support more Tasmanians to access necessary supports. This is so important, given that 129 Tasmanians identify as having a disability but are not on the NDIS.

We will also continue funding for National Disability Services, the local peak body for service providers, as well as continued funding of more than \$1 million for advocacy services and support for local programs to promote participation in sport.

We are committed to continuing these investments to provide more support for our community, while we also undertake the significant initiatives to support Tasmanians with disabilities, to help ensure people with disability and their families receive the inclusive and accessible supports and services that they need. I welcome questions.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, minister. I'll go straight to Meg.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you for that, minister. You mentioned a couple of numbers there. One of them you might have potentially misspoken. I'll clarify it, I think. The number of Tasmanians who identify with a disability who aren't currently accessing the NDIS?

**Ms PALMER** - It's 129 000 from memory.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - Thousand, yes.

**Ms PALMER** - Did I say hundred?

**Ms WEBB** - You just said 129.

**Ms PALMER** - Oh, my apologies.

**Ms WEBB** - Would that that were so.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. It's 129 000.

**Ms WEBB** - In terms of the spread of people who would fit into that category, do we know what that looks like regionally in the state?

**Ms PALMER** - We don't have that information with us. We'd need to do a data analysis to get that information.

**Ms WEBB** - Are we able to put that figure out there? We know from ABS statistics what the total number is, and we take the number who are in the NDIS off that number and then what we're left with is the 129 000?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, that's correct.

**Ms WEBB** - But we don't cross-correlate the NDIS figures with the ABS figures to get regional breakdowns?

**Ms PALMER** - Sorry, are you asking for the regional breakdowns for NDIS participants, or for the 129 000 or both?

**Ms WEBB** - I'd like to know more about the 129 000 and where they are in the state, what the spread is. That's cross-correlating, now that I understand how we arrive at that number. That would mean putting two different datasets together and having to crunch numbers, which we probably don't do as a matter of course.

**Ms PALMER** - That's correct, we don't.

**Ms WEBB** - It would be interesting for us to understand that. You mentioned in your opening statement about the advocacy role that we play as a state - or that you play for us on behalf of the state - as a key stakeholder of the NDIS.

What are the priority areas that the Tasmania Government and you, in that role, are currently advocating for on behalf of Tasmanians when you engage with the NDIS?

**Ms PALMER** - I haven't attended one of these meetings yet. It is 17 June that I will be heading to Melbourne for the first of those meetings. I have locked in a telephone appointment with the new federal minister for the NDIS, Bill Shorten, which I think is early next week.

There are a number of things I'll be wanting to really put forward on that agenda. I'll be doing that by working with Ingrid to make sure that I'm across the main issues. I want to talk



to him about the ILC funding and how, in my humble opinion, I'm not sure it's working particularly well for us in Tasmania.

**Ms WEBB** - I would agree.

**Ms PALMER** - There was a report from the Swinburne University about looking at other ways that could be better distributed. That's something high on my agenda. That's impacted on some of the amazing organisations, many of them volunteer organisations, that support people with disabilities.

That would be one of them. Another we'll be looking at, which is not only a Tasmanian issue but an issue right across Australia, is people who are on the NDIS not spending all their plan because they live in a part of Tasmania, or Australia, where they just don't have access to services.

We need to look at how can we do that better. How do we make sure they are able to have the full benefit of an NDIS package? So they're two issues I feel are really important.

Then again, Ingrid and I probably need to have some time together where she can let me know from her perspective perhaps of issues and matters where she feels Tasmanians with disability really need a bit more advocacy at that federal level. I'm really excited about that, and am certainly looking forward to that opportunity in the coming weeks.

**Ms WEBB** - Indeed. I think you'll find the new federal minister in that space very enthusiastic and well informed on it too.

**Ms PALMER** - I certainly hope so.

**Ms WEBB** - Given his role back in the day putting it together. Can I move onto the Disability Services Commissioner and ask some questions around that? Just to understand, the first allocation was made last year I think for that. What has been spent to date and delivered for the funding to date, and then what is the funding profile given the extra money tipped in this year? For this year, next year, and the year after.

**Ms PALMER** - So the initial commitment from the last budget was \$1.2 million.

**Ms WILSON** - Over four years.

**Ms PALMER** - Over four years.

**Ms WILSON** - I'm asking about what was spent last year then?

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you. In this year's Budget another \$400 000 was added to that over four years. So the four year investment is \$1.6 million. I will have to refer to Ms Ganley with regard to what has been spent so far.

**Ms GANLEY** - Sure. I haven't got an actual figure, but it's a very small amount which was involved on the consultancy that we've been doing in parallel to the Act with a view to carrying forward the funds that were applied this financial year to next financial year to help us with the establishment of the role.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. So any funds not expended per the 2021-22 year are being carried forward?

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - Minister, what was the correlation between the consultations being done for the Disability Services Act review, and the disability commissioner role? Was there some correlation in that consultation between those two matters? From Ms Ganley's answer it sounded like there was a connection.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, thank you.

**Ms GANLEY** - So, yes, through the minister. As part of the discussion paper for the Act review we were consulting on what should a disability commissioner do. Not whether we should have one or not, but what is their scope. That included consultation with people with lived experience, but also with other government agencies so the children's commissioner, the opportunity commissioner, and other commissioners.

**Ms WEBB** - Fantastic. Let me just put on the record that I'm delighted to see the disability commissioner coming forward, absolutely. It's something that's been called for for a very a long time. I remember at least a decade ago putting that into BPSs. So really good to see. Can I ask a little bit more though about the interim commissioner that's been put in place? Now that won't be a legislated role of any kind? Will it have legislative basis to it?

**Ms PALMER** - Can I refer that through to you?

**Ms GANLEY** - Sure, absolutely. So it won't be legislated but we will look at what powers it can have under our Current Disability Services Act. It will be able to take complaints and have limited of powers and will certainly be able to operate within the current Disability Services Act. One of the key things we want the interim commissioner to do is work out their patch basically so that there's no duplication with the other authorising bodies.

**Ms WEBB** - If you could clarify this for me, what I'm imagining is that the interim role is still relatively internal because it's still doing that developmental work for the ultimate role. Do you envisage that ultimately the disability services commissioner will be a thoroughly independent entity from government?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, it will be when we actually have our disability commissioner. It will be.

**Ms WEBB** - Sorry, I'm just going to check another question on that. Do we have a timeline about when we expect that that full role will be ready to hit the ground and begin?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll hand that over to Ms Ganley. Can I just clarify, is it the - once the legislation's through in the full - yes. So that will be - we're hoping to get some initial legislation in late this year, early next year. So it'd be 2023.

**Ms WEBB** - Are we expecting the model to look something like a similar entity in other states?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes. We've done a jurisdictional scan so we're aware of what other states have in place, and we're looking at what's working and what's causing a few challenges. So, yes.

**Ms WEBB** - What might fit this - our circumstances I suppose.

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Has there been a close involvement with say the Disability Voices group, or people with lived experience of disability informing this disability services commissioner role specifically beyond the Act review for this part of it?

**Ms GANLEY** - We've consulted closely with the minister's disability consultative group who has - and there is a rep from Disability Voices on that group and other representatives. They've been the key stakeholder in the commissioner consultation, as well as the voices of other people which has come through the Disability Act review. We've specifically asked the consultative group about the commissioner position. Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. Thank you. In regard to the autism diagnostic services which we've got in the performance information table, the number that we have there across previous years and going forward, is that a number that's set because that's what we're able to achieve with the funding we devote to that space? The number of autism assessments completed. Is the scope of that defined by just getting enough funding?

**Ms GANLEY** - Through the minister. Yes, so it's the FTE. It's the number of available - or the clinicians and the amount of assessments they can do.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the waiting lists that there might be for that service? That diagnostic service?

**CHAIR** - And time as well.

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, I've got three questions on that. So I'm just in the waiting list. I'm interested in how many are on them, and the regional breakdown for that. How much time they're on the waiting list for.

**Ms PALMER** - Okay, so how many are on them? The region breakdown.

**Ms WEBB** - Regional breakdown.

**CHAIR** - The waiting time.

**Ms WEBB** - And the waiting time.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. Yes. So we can see an unprecedented demand for services for children across Tasmania. I've got some figures here to reflect that. St Giles having approximately 411 people waiting to access services. The number is broader than just autism

diagnosis, but inclusive of those awaiting diagnosis assessment. TADS having a waitlist of 630 people as of 31 March 2022 with an average wait time of 18 months. This figure is inclusive of both assessments in progress and those that are awaiting commencement.

Now I do have some figures here based on the regions as at 31 December 2021. So in the north there were 139. In the north-west, 184. In the south, 276.

**Ms WEBB** - Can clarify the figures you're referring to there are they in relation to waiting for an autism diagnostic service, or waiting for a combination of diagnostic and then therapeutic services?

**Ms PALMER** - Okay. So I'm advised just diagnostic.

**Ms WEBB** - Are the waiting times different across the regions, or are they similar waiting times where they're looking at that 18-month mark?

**Ms PALMER** - Okay. So I'm advised it's similar waiting times.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay, thank you. The role that the Tasmanian government has to play in the availability of services once people have - once a child's undergone the diagnosis and been assessed as ASD, then the - obviously the lack of allied health really is - essentially it's speechies and OTs and things around the state is what is holding us up. What's the Tasmanian Government role in that? You mentioned it's part of your advocacy when you go to the national sphere, what else is in our area of responsibility to provide for that need?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. So certainly advocating on a national basis. But as you say there is a shortfall with some of those Allied Health positions. It's been encouraging to see what UTAS is doing.

**Ms WEBB** - They have been training people to make a difference.

**Ms PALMER** - I'm really hoping that will make a difference and we will see Tasmanians being trained and moving into this.

**Ms WEBB** - Do we have a target, minister, across those key service areas to meet the need particularly for children and particularly in that autism spectrum disorder space? We need X number of speech pathologists, Y number of OTs?

**Ms PALMER** - No, I'm advised that we don't.

**Ms WEBB** - Obviously the answer is more.

**Ms PALMER** - But more than we have.

**Ms WEBB** - It would be interesting to know what would be required to meet need.

**Ms LOVELL** - Minister, yesterday in the Estimates hearing, you recorded that 344, I think it was, NDIS participants are on a housing wait list in Tasmania, with 229 of those listed as priority applicants. As we know from the dashboard statistics priority applicants are waiting on average more than 90 weeks for housing. You mentioned that a roundtable with other

## PUBLIC

ministers was due to take place. Can you provide any further information about this, such as when it will be, who will be included?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I can. Roundtable was my way of describing what was happening. The Minister for Housing, Guy Barnett, has reached out to me and the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, Jacquie Petrusma. As colleagues, with her portfolio and me as the Minister for Women and the Minister for Disabilities we feel it would be really beneficial. It was the Housing minister's initiative for us to come together and have some frank discussions about what is happening. Housing is impacting numerous levels, whether it is women, family violence situations, people with disabilities and just everyday Tasmanians. The minister thought it would be good for us to come together and have a joint focus on how we can move forward.

**Ms LOVELL** - I know you'd be feeling the same as many of us about that number. It's pretty heartbreaking and unacceptable. What is the Government going to do about those figures and those NDIS participants particularly who are waiting for housing?

**Ms PALMER** - It is a really clear focus. It doesn't matter what side of politics you are on, we are very concerned about the situation that Tasmanians find themselves in.

I have some information about specialist disability accommodation with regard to Tasmania's Affordable Housing Action Plan 2019-23, known as Action Plan 2. Action Plan 2 commits an additional \$125 million for affordable housing. From that \$125 million, \$20 million is dedicated over three years to provide more suitable homes for people with disability, and with at least 70 homes to be allocated to applicants from the housing register who are NDIS participants. In 2021, the Government made a record election commitment of \$280 million to extend the building of new public housing for Tasmanians in need. A high proportion of public housing tenants have disability needs which require homes with good accessibility and special features.

It's a priority for me, it's a priority for this Government. That's why we've seen record investment in it. It's important that the different portfolios - Women, Disability, Housing and Prevention of Family Violence - can come together and workshop how we can move forward. I don't know if Ms Ganley has anything further to add with regard to housing and disabilities. It's really a matter for the Housing minister. Is there anything you would like to add?

**Ms GANLEY** - Through the minister. We haven't had a chance to brief the minister, but the Disability Reform Ministers' meeting also has housing as one of its agenda items.

**Ms LOVELL** - Can I clarify in the action plan, minister, 70 homes to be allocated to NDIS participants on the wait list. Is that 70 homes over three years? Is that linked to the \$20 million over three years?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I am advised it is.

**Ms LOVELL** - Do you have any data on how many NDIS participants are already without a home? Living with homelessness?

**Ms PALMER** - We don't have that information here. I'm advised we would need to talk to Housing to get that information.

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - Are you happy to put that on notice?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, we can.

**CHAIR** - It's not really reasonable to ask a minister to take something on notice when it's not their portfolio.

**Ms PALMER** - I don't think I can do that. I do have some information here that's just been handed to me. There are 348 active applicants on the housing register who are NDIS participants, of which 299 are priority applicants. That is at 31 March 2022. That represents 6.8 per cent of all active applicants on the housing register. As at 31 March 2022, 44 NDIS participants have been housed in new social housing under Action Plan 2. This equates to 7.8 per cent of all allocations into new homes under Action Plan 2.

**Ms LOVELL** - But you, as the minister for Disability, don't have the data on NDIS participants who are homeless already?

**Ms PALMER** - This is what I have. These are the active applicants on the housing register who are NDIS participants. So, 348 and then priority applicants, 299. That is the information I have.

**Ms LOVELL** - And hopefully, they are still in homes and are applying for housing?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**Ms LOVELL** - Okay, thank you.

**Ms WEBB** - I have a short one on the same area. This may not be something you have access to, but as minister for Disability are you aware of those tenants currently in public housing who have a disability? You mentioned that there was a relatively high proportion of public housing tenants with a disability. Are you aware of how many of them have been waiting for a transfer to a property that's got better accessibility for their needs? Where we would acknowledge that their current public housing or social housing property isn't appropriate for their disability needs?

**Ms PALMER** - I think that question would be better put to Housing. I don't have that information.

**CHAIR** - We need to remember what this portfolio is covering.

**Ms PALMER** - Just let me seek some advice. Peter White is the deputy secretary for Community Services. He may be able to give some more information.

**Mr WHITE** - Thank you, minister, I think the question was in relation to how many?

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, I was interested in those current tenants in public and social housing who have a disability who may be waiting to move to a property better suited to their needs.

## PUBLIC

**Mr WHITE** - I don't have that specific information in front of me but within our portfolio of social housing that the Director of Housing owns, 59 per cent or 7375 properties incorporate some modifications to support people living with a disability. So we do have a fairly high proportion of the homes that either we own and are managed by us, or the community housing providers do provide for modifications.

The other thing I'd point out is that we were involved in 334 new social homes or social housing units being developed over the 12 months to April 2022 and 78.4 per cent of those homes, 262, met the silver standards under the livable housing guidelines, and 21.6 per cent met the gold or platinum standard under the livable housing guidelines, which is an Australian Standard. Those ones, for example, incorporate bathrooms to AS 1428 and design to AS 4299.

**Ms WEBB** - This is a process question; it might be straying too far.

**CHAIR** - We need to remember what output we're in, and we're in disability services.

**Ms WEBB** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - And we're addressing the budget that's before us, which is the disability services budget. So, with all due respect -

**Ms WEBB** - That's fine.

**CHAIR** - I appreciate that information, but it is a different portfolio.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Sarah, did you have another question?

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes. Mindful of what you just said, I think it's still relevant. Minister, do you know what percentage of State Government procurements are from Australian disability enterprises?

**Ms PALMER** - No, we don't know that, so we would need to take that question on notice.

**CHAIR** - Minister, in the information provided here, you talk about the Government providing funding for advocacy for the children's therapy mainstream component, mainstream services such as health, education and justice, and continuity of support for people who are eligible under the Tasmanian Disability Services Act but not for NDIS. Can you give us a breakdown of the funding for each of those areas?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I do have a breakdown here in front of me. Looking at 2022-23, the CDS directorate is 798; the NDS funding, 216; Tas Disability Services Commissioner, 700; the CDS disability services policy and programs, 767; Disability Act Review, 427; the CDS office of the senior practitioner, 525; CDS specialist accommodation and support, 152; continuing support for NDIS participants, 1500; NDIS state contribution, 255 735; Tas Autism diagnostic system, 1367; Tas Autism diagnostic system contribution from Department of Education, 275.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - So that comes into this - yes, sure.

**Ms PALMER** - Disability services grants, advocacy and children's therapy, 4939.

**CHAIR** - Can I just clarify? I'm sure in your opening statement, minister, you talked about Tasmania's contribution to the NDIS, and I thought you said it was \$276.4 million. Is that what you said then?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Okay, sorry. I must've written it down wrong.

**Ms PALMER** - \$274.6 million.

**CHAIR** - Oh, okay.

**Ms PALMER** - Would you like clarification on the difference between that, because of what I've just said there about the 255 735?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms PALMER** - I can refer to Ms Ganley for that.

**CHAIR** - Sure.

**Ms GANLEY** - The difference is we get contributions from other Government agencies that have contributed towards the NDIS, so Health, Education, and Transport, which show in their budget. So our budget shows our contribution, and then the total contribution is the 276.

**CHAIR** - All right, okay.

**Ms PALMER** - 274.6, that's your total.

**CHAIR** - Yes. Have you got a follow-up on that, Meg?

**Ms WEBB** - I just wanted to clarify the final number that you read out. It was a number of things together in a category, I think. Do you mind reading that one out again?

**Ms PALMER** - Disability services, grants, advocacy, and children's therapy. Is that -

**Ms WEBB** - Can I ask how much the advocacy component of that is if you're able to give me a more granular - because that's one of my questions that was coming later.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, certainly. I will refer that to Ms Langley. For the 2022-23 Budget, it's \$1 149 012.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Can I just ask what services are provided under the children's therapy maintenance component of that?



## PUBLIC

**Ms GANLEY** - Through the minister, so what services?

**CHAIR** - Yes, what -

**Ms GANLEY** - They provide children's therapy services that would not be funded through the NDIS, so similar acts. It's usually short-term health-related therapy needs across the state or across the north and the south sorry for St Giles.

**CHAIR** - And does that also rely on -

**Ms GANLEY** - The north-west is done through the health system.

**CHAIR** - So that money's not in - that's in health, you said?

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes. So for the north-west it's in health, but for children's therapy in the north and the south it's with us in the St Giles contract.

**CHAIR** - Okay. So if we provide the funding mainly to find the staff, is that how it works?

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Okay. Because if there's shortages of OTs and other therapists in a whole range of allied health services, that could impact on their capacity to deliver that. So do you monitor the delivery of the services, and are we seeing that they're meeting their expectations with the funding?

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes, we do, and yes, they are, and they do raise similar issues around recruitment and retention, but they're sort of flexible around how they work. They do have close working relationships with a range of other health services, which I think all the OTs and physios are doing.

**CHAIR** - So in collaboration.

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - It's probably slightly off the track here but we heard in the rural health inquiry about a number of allied health professionals, particularly OTs and that, start work in the department perhaps in various parts of the departments, whether it's disability or health, and can find it much more lucrative to be in private practice. So St Giles, through their contract, are they some of the people they would contract, the private-practice OTs? Okay.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Thanks, minister. Nick, have you got a question?

**Mr DUIGAN** - I do, thank you, Chair. Minister, the Australian Disability Strategy was released late last year. Are you able to tell the committee or provide the committee with some information around that strategy, please?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I can, and I thank the member for the question. Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31 was released on 3 December 2021. The ADS sets out a vision for an inclusive Australian society, where people with disability can fulfil their potential as equal members of the community, and focuses on all 4.4 million people with disability in Australia. It recognises that all levels of government are responsible for supporting people with disability to reach their full potential as equal members of the community.

This includes providing good employment opportunities, high-quality inclusive education, and making homes and communities safe, inclusive and accessible. It will drive change over the next decade to uphold the rights, inclusion, and participation of people with disabilities in all areas of Australian life. The strategy was developed by all levels of government along with people with disability, their families, carers, and representatives.

Targeted action plans sit under the ADS to drive action, initially focusing on employment, community attitudes, early childhood, safety and emergency management. These plans include practical and focused initiatives to support better outcomes in these areas with annual reporting on progress on the actions.

It has a strong implementation and evaluation focus, including an engagement plan that sets out how governments will continue to focus on the voice of people with disability, informing implementation and monitoring. The next iteration of Tasmania's Disability Strategy, Accessible Island will be developed in the context of the new Australian Disability Strategy. Thank you.

**Mr DUIGAN** - That brings me to my next one, and I note that Accessible Island finished in 2021, so I wonder if you could potentially flesh out the plans for the next iteration of Accessible Island.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. Thank you very much. As you mentioned, Accessible Island: Tasmania's Disability Framework for Action 2018-2021 was Tasmania's implementation plan for the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. Now at full rollout, the National Disability Insurance Scheme is one of the most complex and important reforms seen in Australia in recent years, with the potential to transform the lives of people with disability and it cannot be overestimated.

Accessible Island is important because the majority of Tasmanians with disability, 140 100 individuals, rely on mainstream services as opposed to the 11 832 Tasmanians who were active participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme as at 31 March 2022. Accessible Island complemented the initiatives identified in the Disability Justice Plan for Tasmania 2017-2020, and the State Service Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Framework 2017-2020.

On 3 December 2021, Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31 was launched. The next iteration of Accessible Island will be developed in the context of the new ADS and the current review of the Disability Services Act and work to establish Tasmania's first Disability Commissioner. Planning has commenced to inform the implementation of the next iteration of Accessible Island, and this will include extensive consultation across the community and sector, as well as through the Premier's Disability Advisory Council and the Minister's Disability Consultative Group. Thank you.

## PUBLIC

**Mr DUIGAN** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Doesn't lead you to any others? No?

**Mr DUIGAN** - I mean, of course I have others.

**CHAIR** - We'll go back to Meg, and I've got one after you, Meg.

**Ms WEBB** - Picking up a few other points. Can I go back to the figure you gave me for the advocacy services allocated there which was \$1.149 million. How many services are funded under that parcel of funding, and where are they located, or where is their remit to deliver services?

**Ms GANLEY** - I do have a breakdown here, and the organisations that I'm speaking to with those figures are statewide, so they deliver services across Tasmania. So 2022-23, there is Speak Out, with \$363 408. Advocacy Tasmania, \$379 791. Association for Children with a Disability, \$405 813. That gives you that total of \$1.149million.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you, and do we know whether those services are meeting the need with that funding envelope, minister? Or do they have any waiting lists or unmet need that they've identified?

**CHAIR** - Maybe if I just add to this question while you're looking at it, minister. Have they put in budget submissions that haven't fully been met, particularly Advocacy Tasmania and organisations like that.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, if I can refer that to Ms Ganley too.

**Ms GANLEY** - Advocacy, we've agreed, is a joint state and Commonwealth responsibility, so those organisations also receive some Commonwealth funding. We do collect activity data and we are aware that at times there might be surge issues where they have a number of people seeking supports and they have to manage the access to advocates, but they haven't approached us specifically for additional funding.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. In your opening statement I think, or earlier on, we were discussing the fact that a key issue that's not unique to Tasmania is people who have an NDIS package but aren't able to utilise their full package of funding because of the lack of services. Have we quantified that in Tasmania, in terms of you mentioned 11 991, I think, Tasmanians are on the NDIS. Do we know how many of them and what proportion of them aren't fully utilising their funding package?

**Ms PALMER** - I am advised that that information is publicly available in the NDIS quarterly report. We don't have that information with us at the table at the moment.

**Ms WEBB** - That would be broken down for Tasmania. Would it be broken down regionally for Tasmania also?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. I'll just refer to Ms Ganley.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - No doubt, minister, I can go and look myself now you've pointed me to it.

**CHAIR** - I don't know that Hansard would have picked that up, so you might need to repeat so that Hansard can hear it.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - Minister, from what I gather, I could readily go and have a look and check for myself. I was only asking if you could be provided to me off the top of your head, but that's okay.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, okay.

**Ms WEBB** - Thank you. Can I have one more?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms WEBB** - I wanted to also understand a bit more about the process of formulating a Disability Services Commissioner role and who will be dealing with complaints. We've made progress towards an interim Commissioner who can begin to start dealing with complaints. What do we know about complaints to date? Just say across recent years. Where have those relevant complaints that will ultimately end up with Commissioner, interim or full, where have they been directed now? What do we know about the profile of those complainants, or whether there might be a need there? Or what's the scope of the need, I suppose, for the Commissioner to begin addressing?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. I will refer to Ms Ganley for that.

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes. So we haven't got explicit data at this point in time, which is what we want to start collecting. At the moment, people with disabilities have a number of avenues. One of the main ones around service delivery is obviously to the NDIS, so the NDIS has its own Commissioner and a complaints process. One of the things we want to look at is what goes there, and then where is the gap, which is probably in some of the non-NDIS spaces, and a lot go to the Equal Opportunity Commission around discrimination. So that's where people would be going at the moment, yes.

**CHAIR** - They'd also come to our offices.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, they do, and to the department.

**CHAIR** - And to the minister's office too, I'm sure.

**Ms PALMER** - Once the Commissioner is there.

**CHAIR** - We'll have somewhere to refer them.

**Ms GANLEY** - That's what I was saying; won't it be lovely to have somewhere to refer them.

## PUBLIC

**Ms PALMER** - That's also part of why we're having the interim Commissioner position, because it is really important that the Disability Commissioner does work alongside existing bodies in the state that people with disabilities can go to for help. The Public Guardian, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, The Ombudsman Tasmania, Health Complaints Commissioner, Equal Opportunity Tasmania, Office of the Antidiscrimination Commissioner, and part of what we're trying to do is work out where are those gaps where complaints are not dealt with in the manner that they should be.

That's part of the important work that's being done to make sure that we find the gaps and we plug them with this new position.

**CHAIR** - I hope you'd try to avoid duplication in that process.

**Ms PALMER** - That's the point of it.

**CHAIR** - Minister, I know you've only been the Disability minister for a short time and you may not have met one of my amazing constituents, Chris Symonds, who's on the Premier's Disability Council. He's been winning awards all around the world for his parasailing. He's currently overseas pushing Back the Bid. This is a bid to include parasailing in the Paralympics in 2028.

You probably haven't had a representation directly from him but you will. What's the department's view and have they been proactive in backing such a call. We have an international champion in our home state, based in Wynyard at the Wynyard Yacht Club. He's won many national awards. I've spoken about him lots of times here. What is the Government doing around advocating for inclusion of parasailing in the Paralympics?

**Ms PALMER** - I haven't heard from Mr Symonds but if he's overseas and I only just got here.

**CHAIR** - Very busy in boats, yes.

**Ms PALMER** - But I certainly would love the opportunity to meet with him and to have discussions about that. I'll ask Ms Ganley if she can add anything further to that.

**Ms GANLEY** - I know Chris, but it'd probably be more for our sport and recreation area. They're doing the work around access to sport and recreation and the support for Olympians, both mainstream and Paralympics.

**CHAIR** - I'll ask Mr Street when he's here. When you're up in the north west, I'll make sure you meet him. He's a champion.

**Ms WEBB** - In terms of the location of this area, once the Department of Communities Tasmania no longer exists, could you talk through how that's going to look once that transition occurs?

**Ms PALMER** - Are you talking about the transition from Communities into DPAC?

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - Yes, because currently we're looking at you in the Budget papers in relation to Department of Communities Tasmania and then the intention is next year that department doesn't exist.

**CHAIR** - And DPAC will be a bigger area.

**Ms WEBB** - That's right. So could you just talk us through the relocation of this area into DPAC?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll make some opening statements and then I'll refer to Ms Ganley. This change is not about reducing services and it's not about reducing resourcing. I'm advised that not one person will lose their job as a result of this change. Shared capabilities will be realigned to strengthen strategic outcomes including disability services. Women, Family and Sexual Violence, Veterans' Affairs and Community Services and Development are moving into DPAC by the end of July this year.

The transition is one of the steps in the Government's staged approach to improving outcomes for Tasmanians. It's not about reducing services and it's not about saving dollars, it's about building on the successes achieved by the staff of the Department of Communities in recent years and aligning services to best meet the ongoing needs of the Tasmanian community.

Through the transition period, there continues to be a focus on the delivery of important community focused services and on the skilled staff who deliver them. The transition will be undertaken in stages between July and October. For Disability Services, shared capabilities will be realigned to strengthen strategic outcomes. Is there anything you would like to add to that, Ms Ganley? No. Okay.

**Ms WEBB** - Perhaps you could expand on that final comment, shared capabilities will be - what was that final comment you just made?

**CHAIR** - Minister.

**Ms PALMER** - For Disability Services, shared capabilities will be realigned to strengthen strategic outcomes.

**Ms WEBB** - Perhaps a little bit of commentary on that.

**Ms GANLEY** - So at the moment, disability has a bit in the Community Development portfolio which while it's in Communities Tasmania is in a different area. There's obviously a bit in DPAC with the national agreements. We work closely with them around the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We'll be able to bring that all together and be working under dep sec, so we see some good synergies in that space.

**Ms WEBB** - Okay. Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Nick, did you have another one?

**Mr DUIGAN** - Minister, you spoke about the consultation undertaken as part of the review of the Disability Services Act and the role of the disability commissioner. Can you

## PUBLIC

explain more about what role the disability community has had in that consultation? How they've been engaged?

**Ms PALMER** - This is a really important piece of work because it will inform two significant initiatives for disability services: the review of the act and the establishment of Tasmania's first disability commissioner.

One of the key things I've personally heard from talking to people with disability over the past two months is they want to be asked what they need. The community wants to be involved in these big decisions that are going to impact them. It was really important that we got this part of the work right.

The review is overseen by a steering committee, which includes members with lived experience of disability and a representative from the disability services sector. The review has used a range of different approaches to consultation to ensure that people with disability can provide information in a way which best suits them. Expert assistance was sought to ensure the consultation was appropriately designed and inclusive. In addition to people with disability, the consultation included families, carers, advocates, peak groups, providers of disability support, both registered and unregistered NDIS providers, members of the Tasmanian community and stakeholders from within the Tasmanian and Australian governments.

Engagement in the review has been really pleasing. Nineteen written submissions were received from individual organisations or Tasmanian government agencies. We had 153 people engaged through the disability expos, which were 9 November through to 17 November. Online forums were held with the Premier's Disability Advisory Council members and the Ministerial Disability Consultative Group on 2 December 2021. Fifty-eight attendees registered for seven online forums between January and February. Speak Out association and Association for Children with Disability hosted in-person sessions to engage in the consultation.

Additional individual consultations were undertaken at request and they were conducted by phone or Zoom meeting or in person. The Ministerial Disability Consultative Group is a key stakeholder for the project and has been included and consulted at all stages. This has included input during redevelopment of the review discussion paper, involvement in the design of the consultation and in a targeted conversation about the role of a disability commissioner.

The review of the Disability Services Act 2011 discussion paper and an easy-read version of the discussion paper were released on 3 October. A targeted advertising campaign was undertaken to promote participation in the review and the campaign included promotion through stakeholder groups, print, radio and social media advertising. The project team has initiated individual meetings with key government agency stakeholders to ensure a broad range of views and possible interface issues with the act are captured and documented.

The final report on the consultation has been compiled. I look forward to receiving it in coming weeks. The next stage in the review will be for the Government to consider the outcomes of the consultation and determine what amendments are required to the act or, indeed, if an entirely new act is required. That's a fairly extensive consultation process. Thank you for the question.

**CHAIR** - Sarah, I'll come to you.

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you, Chair. Minister, we've recently had the report from the disability services inquiry that was conducted by parliament, and one of the findings of that inquiry was that there is less resourcing for disability policy and practice within government since the introduction of the NDIS, and that the capacity for disability policy development within the department is very limited, with only a handful of people tasked for that work.

I've got some questions about your workforce. How many staff do you have in your department, and of those how many are dedicated to policy? We might start there.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, certainly. I was looking forward to and was pleased to see the tabling of that inquiry and we are looking at the findings and the recommendations now.

**Ms LOVELL** - Hasn't been tabled for long, so -

**Ms PALMER** - No, it hasn't.

**CHAIR** - No-one's been very busy in the meantime.

**Ms LOVELL** - Plenty of time.

**Ms PALMER** - I was excited about it being tabled. With regard to staffing numbers and numbers of people in policy I'll need to hand that over to the director.

**Ms GANLEY** - Thank you. Yes. So we've got 30 FTE in the community and disability program area, and of that 5 FTE are specifically the disability, policy and program team although we do operate as a bit of a collaborative group in terms of working on projects or initiatives, and then there's obviously my time as the director that goes across various portfolios.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you, and minister are the five FTE policy team responsible for policy across whole of government, that's to do with disability policy? Do they work with other departments, is that specifically within your department? How does that work? What role do they play?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll ask the director to speak to that please.

**Ms GANLEY** - At this point it's not responsible across whole-of-government, but for particular elements. So we take the lead role across government agencies around the National Disability Insurance Scheme and operationalising that, and working around the mainstream interface issues. But then we work with other elements of government on their own projects, so they do their own sort of disability planning and may come to us for advice and assistance. And then there's the DPAC role as the sort of the central whole-of-government policy area.

**Ms LOVELL** - Five doesn't seem like very many, how does that work capacity-wise?

**Ms GANLEY** - We are able to achieve the outcomes that we need to achieve.



## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - So with the restructure - I think you mentioned this, minister, or Ingrid may have - when it's taken into DPAC there'll be more people working in that space, as I understood?

**Ms GANLEY** - There won't be more people but we'll have a bit more collaboration of other areas. So there are people for example in the community services space working on the Disability Premier's Advisory Council. So we'll be able to sort of collaborate a bit more closely.

**CHAIR** - You work in policy?

**Ms GANLEY** - We work in policy, so we might be able to reduce some duplication and things like that, yes.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. And, minister, if we could go back to the staffing numbers. You said there were 30 FTE in community and disability. Can I ask for the same breakdown that we asked for earlier? So headcount of those staff, and then a breakdown by gender as well, please.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, we certainly can. Can we take that question on notice?

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes, of course. And are you happy to take on notice the gender breakdown across bands again?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. I just had one further question. It's been this way for a while, but there's a shortage in disability workers across the state, and allied health -

**CHAIR** - Just before you go off that, do you mind if I just ask a question with staffing? Of the staff that engage in this area, how many actually have the lived experience of disability?

**Ms GANLEY** - I'm not sure. I'd need to talk to the individuals really. So there's -

**CHAIR** - Okay. Some may not identify.

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - But I think it'd be safe to assume there are people in the department who have the lived experience to give -

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. I think that that question's been answered respectfully.

**CHAIR** - Yes, I mean we asked this about like in women's policy. If we had all men working in women's policy that wouldn't be such a good look either.

**Ms PALMER** - Yes. It'd be interesting.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you, Chair. So, minister, I was talking about the shortage in disability workers and allied health professionals, and that contributes to unacceptably lengthy wait times for support. I know the sector has been calling for a targeted and specific disability workforce strategy to address this significant shortage. You're a new minister in this role with

## PUBLIC

this portfolio, I know this is a portfolio that is important to you. What actions are you willing to commit to ensure that this can be resourced and there can be a disability specific workforce strategy?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, thank you very much for the question. This is an issue that's not specific to Tasmania. This is an issue that we are seeing across Australia, that's for sure, and it's something that I would anticipate will be raised, or I'll be raising it, at the disability reform ministerial meeting that I'll be attending in Victoria in the coming weeks.

So working with the Commonwealth through the Disability Reform Minister's Forum, Tasmania has contributed to a national NDIS workforce plan that recognises the growing demand for a stronger care and support workforce. Significant Commonwealth funding has been invested in a range of priority areas to ensure that people are attracted to the workforce, training to skill the workforce is available and meets the needs and providers of care and support. It's important that they have information that helps them to understand the market.

In all, the Commonwealth has committed around \$70 million to date in recognition of the importance of a skilled care and support workforce, and in addition to this Tasmania has progressed its own industry plan and invested to meet the growing workforce demand across the care and support sector, including mental health and age care workforce demand as well.

Skills Tasmania also invests in the Tasmanian care and support workforce, recognising the increased demand for a well-trained and skilled workforce. This includes a specific allocation of \$200 000 for national disability services to deliver a new Disability Employment Pilot Program Pathways from School to Work. This is another program focused on empowering participants, ensuring more Tasmanians can grasp the opportunities to get into this work.

**CHAIR** - That's you, Meg.

**Ms WEBB** - I'm just going to return to where I was previously asking a question around the transfer from the Department of Communities into DPAC. I know that there has been some concern expressed about that move and the fact that children and the youth services area is going to the Department of Education and creating a new department there, and whether for children with the disability that is in fact putting the two areas away from each other. Children and Disability will now be in different spaces where they had been in the same space in Department of Communities Tas.

Can you provide some guidance on how it's going to be ensured that children and young people with disabilities, once those two things are sitting in different departments, will in fact be still well served under the model?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, I'm going to refer that question to the director, thank you.

**Ms GANLEY** - I think going forward, we'd continue the collaboration that we already have. We already work quite closely with the Department of Education around children with disability now and we have quite strong relationships because of the NDIS and how that works across the group. We also have strong relationships with Health and within our own CYF programs. My expectation would be those forums, meetings, collaborations that we continue to work on would continue via a different agency structure.

## PUBLIC

**Ms WEBB** - Is there any indication at this stage in terms of the Disability Services Commissioner when that role is in place, either interim or fully, whether matters that connect into the education space, complaints that might be coming forward, whether that would be dealt with by the commissioner, or would that be dealt with through departmental complaints processes?

**Ms GANLEY** - We are really wanting that to be part of the scoping of the Commissioner's role. That would be their remit, and where do they stop and start with collaboration in communities.

**Ms WEBB** - So, you haven't landed anywhere on that one yet. I understand that, then.

**Ms GANLEY** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, I thought I heard you say, or the director said, minister, that the collaboration which currently occurs with children within communities, but also with health, which is not in communities, would still continue the same, effectively. So, we don't expect that to be getting more complicated or difficult than it is now.

**Ms WEBB** - It's across three departments now instead of two in that way. It was three before. I guess it's just moving the furniture around within three.

**CHAIR** - Just moving the deck chairs, yes. Nick, did you have another one, did you say?

**Mr DUIGAN** - Yes, indeed. Around COVID-19, I guess. I don't think there is a COVID-19 funding provision in this line item. Could you please inform the committee about the ongoing support provided to people with disability in relation to COVID-19?

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much for the question. The past two years throughout the pandemic have been unprecedented, and I would like to acknowledge the anxiety that this has caused throughout the community, and in particular for some people in the disability community, including workers and families and carers.

As part of our ongoing response to COVID-19, the Tasmanian government remains committed to supporting people with disability, their families, carers, and support workers. Communities Tasmania continues to take the lead to work with the Australian government, the National Disability Insurance Agency, and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, the disability sector, and advocates to ensure people with a disability and their families continue to receive the information and support that they need. The NDIS Coronavirus Information and Support webpage is updated regularly as new measures are required or new information is available.

As at 31 March 2022, current measures included a temporary increase in some NDIS price limits in recognition of the cost of support worker PPE, access to low-cost assistive technology to support non-face-to-face supports is ongoing, more flexible support regarding meal preparation and delivery for NDIS participants. One-off deep cleaning of a house after a support worker-related COVID-19 diagnosis is ongoing. Cleaning services and additional self-isolation and COVID-19 diagnosis supports in supported living, independent living are

## PUBLIC

ongoing. National clinical first response service is available for supported independent living providers to respond to critical COVID-19 incidents and is available Australia-wide until 30 June 2022.

National COVID-19 provider workforce support arrangements to support disability service providers that may be experiencing workforce disruptions to maintain and/or recover their services. Supports for providers, enabling COVID-19 vaccination for participants and workers. The Tasmanian government's Coronavirus website has information and assistance specific to the disability sector, including our Coronavirus COVID-19 disability service providers' preparedness and response plan.

The Disability Emergency Operation Centre works with the Public Health Emergency Operation Centre to support the disability sector with public health related matters such as outbreaks, advice on testing, definitions of close contact and the interaction with people with disability with the COVID at Home program. More information about COVID-19 for NDIS participants, their families and carers is available on the NDIS website. Now, the website also includes easy-read fact sheets to support providers, families, and carers to respond to COVID-19.

The Disability Gateway can also provide support to people with disabilities, their families and carers who need help because of COVID-19 and this is available for all people with a disability, not just NDIS participants, and for any members who are interested and may want to jot this down. The Disability Gateway can be contacted on 1800 643 787. All information sources are updated regularly. We are certainly committed to ensuring people with disability and particularly children at this stage in the rollout, their carers and support workers are prioritised to receive COVID-19 vaccinations, which is our best protection against COVID-19. Thank you for the question.

**CHAIR** - Just one matter. I appreciate there was a number of challenges around vaccination for people with disability and their carers and the disability carer workforce. Did the state have to step in and assist in that through either health or through collaboration with Disability Services to ensure that people weren't left out?

**Ms PALMER** - I'll refer that question to the Director.

**Ms GANLEY** - In terms of vaccinations?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms GANLEY** - In terms of the vaccination rollout, there was particular work between our Tasmanian public health and the Australian government and identifying NDIS participants and follow-up, and the running of various clinics, and working with the Australian government to provide that in-reach into disability houses, which was either done by the Australia government's provider or the public health picked up some of that.

**CHAIR** - People with a disability that aren't NDIS participants, were they assisted similarly through the same process? Or was it the same process, was it?

**Ms GANLEY** - Yes.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - We know that influenza is also a really frightening illness for older people and other vulnerable groups. Is there a targeted approach through your department or with health focusing - it's all with health?

**Ms PALMER** - Yes, it's all with health.

**CHAIR** - Sure, that's fine.

**Mr DUIGAN** - Minister, we have spoken quite a bit today about advocacy services. I'm wondering if you could tell the committee a little bit about the support for National Disability Services?

**Ms PALMER** - The government is focused on helping more Tasmanians with disability to access the support that they need, and there are so many organisations in the community doing fantastic work, and it's vital that we support those organisations to make sure they have effective representation and support from the professional perspective. This year's budget continues to provide funding certainty for National Disability Services and that's the Tasmanian branch of the national organization.

National Disability Services, or NDS Tasmania, as it's commonly known, has worked in close collaboration with the government for many years. As an organisation, it is focused on ensuring disability service providers are in the best possible position to ensure people with a disability continue to receive the essential disability support that they need. NDS Tasmania represents over 50 non-government service providers, and the funding provided by the Tasmanian government supports key activities such as representing the interests of its members and their clients to government, regulators, and the broader public, providing advice to government on issues affecting the sector on behalf of members, encouraging members to engage in innovative service delivery practices, and supporting member service providers to comply with legislative funding requirement agreements.

So, in the 2022-23 budget, we are continuing our commitment of \$660 000 over four years to support the NDS's work as a peak body for local disability providers. This is made up of \$116 000 per annum to undertake core peak body activities, as well as \$100 000 over two years to build on existing projects that aim to address workforce planning, including emergency scenario planning and business continuity planning. This work is supporting important regional and state-wide conversations between disability service providers to support greater coordination, preparedness, and management of emergency situations, including but not limited to the current pandemic.

NDS Tasmania has also been funded to coordinate infection prevention control and PPE training for Tasmanian disability support workers. This training is in addition to the resources and training on IPC and PPE that disability support workers already receive. I know NDS Tasmania has an important working relationship with the government, and has provided incredible support during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular. I certainly look forward to continuing and strengthening this important partnership into the future. I thank you for the question.

**CHAIR** - Right. Nick?

**Mr DUIGAN** - Thank you, Chair, yes.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Meg, you had another one? No? Did you have another one, Nick, at all?

**Mr DUIGAN** - No. I think we're good.

**Ms PALMER** - Extra break, extra time?

**CHAIR** - Well thanks, minister. I think we've come to the end of your session. So thank you very much for your first estimates with us. I had another day of it yesterday, but you've survived.

**Ms PALMER** - Thank you very much, and I have survived due to an amazing team around me, which of course includes the director in lieu, and I want to thank her very much for being here today.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, and we'll have a break now and we'll stop the broadcast, and then you're free to go. And we'll welcome a different minister at half-past 3.

**The Committee suspended from 3.11 p.m.**