



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Hon. Eric Abetz MP

Wednesday 25 September 2024

MEMBERS

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC (Chair)

Hon Dean Harriss MLC

Hon Sarah Lovell MLC (Deputy Chair)

Hon Bec Thomas MLC

Hon Kerry Vincent MLC

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. ERIC ABETZ MP

Minister for Business, Industry and Resources, Minister for Transport and Leader of the House

Craig Limkin

Secretary, Department of State Growth

David Midson

General Manager, Marine Resources

Will Joscelyne

Acting General Manager, Agriculture and Water

Mark Bowles

Acting Deputy Secretary of Resources

Tom Byrne

Assistant Director, Forest Policy

Alastair Morton

Director Mineral Resources Tasmania

John Perry

Coordinator-General

Ryan Wilkinson

Acting Director Inland Fisheries

Cynthia Heydon

Deputy Secretary Transport

Denise McIntyre

Deputy Secretary Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning

Martin Crane

General Manager Road User Services

Lia Morris

Chief Executive Officer, Marine and Safety Tasmania (MAST)

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The Committee met at 9 a.m.

Output Group 2 - Primary Industries and Water

2.4 - Marine Resources

CHAIR (Ms Forrest) - Welcome, minister, to our Estimates committee hearings. We're starting with your portfolio of Business, Industry and Resources. We'll go to Transport after lunch. I invite you to introduce members of your team at the table. If you bring anyone else forward, I ask you to introduce them and their role, particularly for the purpose of Hansard. I ask members to make sure they've got a microphone directly in front of them so that we can accurately capture everything you say. We don't want to miss a word you say, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Hang on every word.

CHAIR - That's right. Exactly. We'll have a break depending on where we are at the time, around 11.00 a.m. There are cups of tea and that out there in the antechamber.

I invite you to introduce your team and then make an opening statement. I anticipate you might want to cross these portfolio areas and leave Transport for later.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, not Transport. We'll leave that until later. If I may, I'll invite the people assisting me at the table to introduce themselves with their correct title.

Dr MIDSON - Dr David Midson, General Manager, Marine Resources.

Mr JOSCELYNE - Will Joscelyne, Acting General Manager, Agriculture and Water.

CHAIR - Great. Over to you, minister.

Mr ABETZ - I always struggle with all their titles, so it's always easier for them to introduce themselves.

The 2024-25 Budget underpins the 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future, designed to create jobs, attract investment and continue positioning Tasmania as a global destination for business and tourism. The government is maintaining its commitment to a business-friendly environment and delivering no new or increased taxes in this Budget.

Business and industry are the lifeblood of our society and economy in providing jobs and self-reliant households. The 2024-25 Budget delivers funding for key projects that will drive investment and secure employment for thousands of Tasmanians in the coming years.

The Budget delivers more than \$5 million to supporting Incat's expansion plans with a 50-50 co-contribution to support new training facilities, equipment, production halls, growth in floor space, and Tasmania's first marine recharging facilities.

Furthermore, the Budget provides \$600,000 funding to deliver the Mt Wellington Strategic Review. The purpose of the review is to develop a long-term vision for the mountain, including Wellington Park.

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Turning to the Resources portfolio encompassing mining, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries, key pillars of our economy that underpin the prosperity of Tasmanian families, especially in our regions, the Budget builds upon the government's steadfast commitment to ensuring that Tasmania continues on its strong trajectory of economic growth and job creation.

We're continuing our strong support for our sustainable forestry sector. Our goal is to ensure the long-term future of this sector, which brings around \$1.2 billion into our economy each year and keeps more than 6,600 people in jobs, both through direct employment and through demand generated in regional economies. The Budget provides around \$70 million across the forward Estimates to build and grow our sustainable forestry sector, providing certainty and stability for Tasmanians, keeping our economy strong, and creating jobs, particularly in our regional communities. Importantly, this Budget continues the critical work of our forestry regulator, the Forest Practices Authority, and the current momentum of Private Forests Tasmania, facilitating sustainable forestry on private land, and increasing the resilience of our agricultural sector through farm forestry.

Our mining sector remains a powerhouse of the economy, supporting thousands of jobs and generating billions in export earnings. In fact, the mining and minerals processing industries employ 6,800 people, generated 64 per cent of the state's export value, and produced over \$2.9 billion worth of product. The 2024-25 Budget allocates \$3 million over the next three years to supercharge the critical mineral strategy. We are also extending the successful EDGI or Exploration Drilling Grants Initiative by a further four years, committing \$1.5 million to co-invest with industry.

Fishing is a way of life recreationally and professionally for many Tasmanians. We want to see profitable and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in Tasmania, sectors that create economic growth and opportunities right across Tasmania. This Budget delivers over \$8.6 million to support our wild capture aquaculture and recreational fisheries, in addition to initiatives that support research, stock enhancement, and protection of our iconic fisheries. We will be developing a wild capture seafood strategy in partnership with Seafood Industry Tasmania. The strategy and developmental fishery opportunities like this will guide our sustainable seafood sector into the future.

Funding has also been allocated to support the development of a sardine fishery, an exciting prospect for Tasmanian fisheries. When it comes to aquaculture, this state's salmon industry employs over 5,000 Tasmanians, with nine in every 10 of those jobs in our regional communities. We are going to continue to back this important sector, a Tasmanian success story that has grown from nothing to become the highest value seafood sector in Australia in 40 years.

With that, Chair, I open myself up for questions.

CHAIR - Minister, just before we head into Marine Resources 2.4, you mentioned Industry and that role, but there doesn't appear to be a line item allocated to you with regard to Industry. Can you indicate where that is?

Mr ABETZ - The worthy secretary of the department.

CHAIR - He may only be needed for this small part, but I'm trying to figure out where it is. You might like to introduce him, even though we know who he is.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Craig Limkin, Secretary, Department of State Growth. I know this man's title. Everybody else seems to have a terribly long title and I always get it wrong.

Mr LIMKIN - In the budget papers, under Trade and Major Investment, there is output 1.2, Industry and Business Development, and there is also output 1.1, the Coordinator-General. In output 1.2, there are a number of areas under that: Business, Industry and Resources, Housing and Planning, Trade and Major Investment. One of the things the department attempted to do during the Budget development was to work with Treasury to reflect the new ministerial arrangements and portfolio arrangements. Unfortunately, the advice we had was that was unable to happen in this Budget. Therefore, there is only a single output on the Trade and Major Investment for 1.2.

CHAIR - You're responsible for output 1.2 in State Growth, minister? Is that what we're hearing?

Mr ABETZ - No, certain elements of it.

Mr LIMKIN - Yes, there are certain elements that the minister is accountable for under that. Those elements, for example, include the kunanyi/Mount Wellington Strategic Review, the funding to Nyrstar and a few other matters. They're all contained in output 1.2 on the Trade and Major Investment's portfolio in this year's budget paper.

CHAIR - We're talking about budget paper 2, volume 1, output group 1.1, Industry and Growth, page 336?

Mr LIMKIN - Sorry, for the ease and probably the use of numbers, can I turn us to page 333? It's the Industry and Business.

CHAIR - Yeah, but obviously the minister's not going to answer all our questions on that line because that sits with the Premier.

Mr LIMKIN - That's correct, and that's where the funding is contained in this year's Budget for those outputs.

CHAIR - I want to know, if turn over to page 336, we've got a whole swathe of dot points there that relate to Industry and Business Development which the minister is responsible for in some dot points here. Which dot points is he responsible for? And how would one know?

Mr ABETZ - There are nine dot points. If I can number them: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8.

CHAIR - We can ask you a question about any of those areas?

Mr ABETZ - I will do my very best to try and answer, Chair. If not, I'll take it on notice.

CHAIR - We will come back to that, even though we don't actually have a line item that we can potentially leave open, because that sits with the Premier. We'll go to marine resources, where we intended to start under the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE).

PUBLIC

Mr LIMKIN - Before we leave that, the department will continue to have conversation with the Treasury before the 2025/26 budgets about the presentation on this. As I said at the start, this was about a timing issue. We will continue to have those conversations moving forward.

CHAIR - Maybe before the Secretary leaves, minister, I can ask why one minister wouldn't be responsible for that whole area, and the Coordinator-General? As I understand, the Office of the Coordinator-General is to work with business, not just on trade. I know the Coordinator-General's taking an active role in the King Island Dairy, for example, and the challenges that we have there. I would have thought that would have been something that you as Minister for Business and Industry would have a very keen interest in.

Mr ABETZ - I do, but the Premier has taken the lead on that, as is his right to take the lead on issues. Being in his electorate and having a very close connection - as undoubtedly you do as well as a local member - to King Island, he has taken the lead on that.

CHAIR - In any event, your title is Minister for Business and Industry. Wouldn't it be more sensible for you to have carriage of these matters, without dealing with the disasters that we see from time to time where the Premier's right to step in? I don't dispute that, he's the Premier, after all. But as a run-of-the-mill, engaging with business, engaging with industry, which is the role of the Coordinator-General, why wouldn't that sit with you?

Mr ABETZ - At the end of the day, the Premier, as you said, is the Premier. He sits on top of all of us, if you like. He steps in on issues and in matters. With the storms, he stepped in.

CHAIR - You're missing my point, minister, with all due respect. The question is: you are Minister for Business and Industry. Isn't the core work of the Coordinator-General and output group 1.2, the core business of the Minister for Business and Industry?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. That is part of my ministerial responsibility. I meet with the Coordinator-General on a regular basis to be updated on a whole range of issues including his investigations into the King Island Dairy, the opportunities for other purchases, et cetera. When there are matters of moment or special interest to the Premier, the Premier, as is his right, quite rightly steps in.

CHAIR - Which you could, even if you had responsibility for these areas. That's the point I'm making here, minister, that as the Minister for Business and Industry, managing the day-to-day work and working with the Department of State Growth with regard to these areas of your portfolio, one would think that you would be responsible for that. Yes, the Premier, rightly, as the leader of the state should step in. Whilst floods and storm damage did damage a lot of infrastructure, which is now his portfolio as well, it also damaged a lot of roads which is your area.

Mr ABETZ - No, roads is infrastructure.

CHAIR - Transport then.

Mr ABETZ - Transport.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Yes. This is the thing -

Mr ABETZ - I've been told that those things above the road and above the water are Transport and fall to me. Roads and ports are infrastructure.

CHAIR - Only things on the road. When they get stuck in the potholes, that's your problem then. Knowing how bad it is up in my electorate particularly, the roads, but I know there are problems everywhere. I don't understand how the government have made the decision to split this out so interestingly, and not have you responsible for a budget item when your title is Minister for Business and Industry.

Mr ABETZ - The Secretary has explained this, how Treasury has gone through this and how things will be different in next year's budget. At the end of the day, what I think people are genuinely interested in is the output and the outcome, rather than the process. If I were a punter on King Island, without demeaning myself, I would be very happy that the Premier was stepping into the breach, rather than a minister. I would have thought that shows the importance the state government places on a matter when the Premier takes control of a matter. I would have thought that would be something -

CHAIR - I think the community of King Island, knowing them very well, minister, would prefer the minister to be deeply engaged from the outset and the Premier to step in when it was necessary.

Mr ABETZ - You can try and read the minds of the King Islanders, and you undoubtedly know them better than I do, but you can be assured I've been briefed and talking with the Coordinator-General about matters on King Island. Just because the Premier is taking the lead on this matter publicly, doesn't mean that the Premier and I haven't spoken about these matters. We have. I am deeply involved with it and in discussions with the Coordinator-General on a regular basis.

CHAIR - Which confirms my point, minister, that you're not responsible for output group - the scrutiny that we undertake, we do it in a methodical way in this House. You'll find it a little bit different in the other place, in your own House. We go through line item by line item and try and understand if the Budget's adequate to meet the need, what the outcomes, not just outputs, of these various line items achieve. Whereas, if you're responsible for a lot of these but you have no capacity to respond to our questions because you're not responsible for the output group - maybe the Secretary can inform us as to whether - when the review that Treasury do - we'll see you're responsible for these line items. That may be the problem that needs to be solved here.

Mr ABETZ - With respect, the office of Coordinator-General does fall under my ministerial responsibility. That is why I've been actively engaged with the Office of Coordinator-General and Mr Perry about matters on King Island and the King Island Dairy. I've spoken to the Premier about it. You can be assured I am responsible in that area of government.

CHAIR - Can we ask a question about the Office of the Coordinator-General?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Okay. Aren't you crossing into the Premier's portfolio there?

Mr ABETZ - No, the Office of Coordinator-General -

CHAIR - That's 1.1. The Secretary said it was 1.2 for you, not 1.1.

Mr ABETZ - I'm not sure about that. I thought we were just talking about the dot points in 1.2. The Office of Coordinator-General is a part of my responsibility. That's why I have regular meetings with the Office of Coordinator-General discussing a range of issues.

CHAIR - Can we scrutinise you on the Budget for Office of the Coordinator-General?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, you can.

CHAIR - Yes, but that's the Premier's portfolio. That's the Premier. Most ministers are very reluctant to go into other minister's portfolios but we're happy to go there.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. Office of Coordinator-General, I'm more than happy to answer questions on that. That is my clear responsibility under the division of labour in the ministry.

CHAIR - Okay. We probably needed more time with you. Anyway, we'll go to marine resources now. We'll come back to that.

Ms THOMAS - We'll add that one in, will we? We'll add 1.1 and 1.3 into our list?

CHAIR - Yeah, we'll have to add them into our list. We'll fit them in somewhere. Dean, over to you.

Mr HARRISS - I might start with the *Living Marine Resources Management Act*. I think there was a discussion paper released back in 2022. In last year's Estimates it was mentioned that there'd be a white paper released late last year. Has that been released?

Mr ABETZ - No, it hasn't. The work on that is progressing. I don't know if staff can give us further detail, but it has been a work in progress for some time. I understand work and planning started on that before I became the minister.

Dr MIDSON - Work continues on that, thank you, minister. We aim to get advice to the minister soon so that he can consider the policy issues raised and we can prepare that white paper. It is acknowledged that it has been delayed a considerable time. The minister has made it very clear to me and the department what a priority that is.

Mr HARRISS - You don't have any timeframes on that?

Mr ABETZ - No, we don't have a specific timeframe. As Dr Midson has indicated to you, I'm coming into the portfolio and seeing some of the issues. I believe that is a matter that does need attention. If I recall correctly, I think it's nearly a 30-year-old act

Dr MIDSON - 1995.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - 1995. Given that, I think we can all be agreed that it might be time for a bit of a review. That is what I've asked the department to consider and look at for me.

Mr HARRISS - The East Coast Rock Lobster Translocation project - I note that funding goes up next year. How is that going? Do we have data that relates to how well that's going?

CHAIR - Are they enjoying their holiday?

Mr ABETZ - We would say that it's going well. We have spent quite some money. I couldn't quite believe the number of fish that have been transported over there. The program has been underpinned by science from the beginning in 2014. IMAS research workers identified the number of lobsters that are available for translocation. The figures over the period are over 800,000 to the south and west coasts and over 300,000 to the east coast. They are figures that are -

CHAIR - They're only tiny; they're only babies when they go.

Mr ABETZ - Yeah, but still, it is a lot to catch and take around. Since 2019-20, the program has focused on translocation for the east coast. There are no known sustainability risks. The program is beneficial for all east coasters. The movement of lobsters from slow-growing deep water areas in the south west to faster growth inshore east coast areas has resulted in measurable productivity and biomass gains for the fishery. Recreational catches and commercial catch rates have increased and commercial catch rates are at a 40-year high.

On the back of this program's success, the government has increased and extended funding in this Budget, with a total additional commitment of \$600,000 of funding over the next four years to support the continued rebuild of this important shared fishery.

Mr HARRISS - The sea urchin on the east coast, is that affecting any of that rock lobster side?

Mr ABETZ - As I understand it, rock lobster like to eat the young sea urchins, so that is a good thing. The long-spined sea urchin is an absolute pest. It has got that name *Centrostephanus*, if I recall correctly. That is something that we are working on, having invested \$1 million in both the 2023-24 Budget and the 2024-25 Budget. We've extended this with a further commitment in 2025-26 for \$1 million. It's very important that we try to manage this. I think we'd all like to have zero tolerance and exterminate the pest but that seems now to be highly unlikely. Therefore, management of it is what we are doing.

I recall a figure from briefings where we removed 1500 tonnes of this pest in the last three years. When you think of the size of a sea urchin, that would be quite a number of them. It was good to see a facility in your electorate, Mr Harriss, that is hoping to process them at the minute.

CHAIR - Some are being processed on the east coast around the St Helens area.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. The main harvester of them, which was a New Zealand-based company also based in our respective electorates in Margate, if I recall, stopped undertaking this task. It is hoped that the Margate facility may be taken over by the Huon processor. We

PUBLIC

are trying to make it as commercially viable as possible to help extract as many of these pests as we can from the waters to protect our abalone fishery, especially.

Mr VINCENT - I am glad you asked the rock lobster question. Flathead fishing and the numbers and the recovery over time of that 'industry', I'll call it, because it almost is to the local economy on the east coast. We've seen a dramatic reduction in the number of shack owners and recreational fishermen up and down the east coast, which has had a bit of a flow-on effect to the community. There's a business one for you, because of the limited bag catches. I'd be interested to know how that recovery was being monitored, how it was going and if there are any plans to change that catch limit.

Mr ABETZ - Early days at this stage.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, it is.

Mr ABETZ - I understand there are some 70,000 fishers that catch sand flathead each year. It is a pastime of many of our fellow Tasmanians. I would assume you might have a higher proportion in your electorate, Mr Vincent. It is important that we maintain the flathead populations. It's part and parcel of our culture. I don't think there'd be many people in Tasmania who have not had a self-caught feed of flathead or a feed of flathead caught by a neighbour or a friend or a relative. It's a very important part and parcel of our culture and our way of life. It is within our interests, both from a social, cultural point of view and an environmental point of view to ensure that this fishing population is maintained.

My predecessor announced a bag limit. That is being monitored. We are getting advice from marine police as well as to how the monitoring of that's going and how effective it is. One of the issues, which I'll be taking further advice on, is that if you fillet them out on the water, it's allegedly, and I understand that that may well be the case, very hard for the police to identify what sort of flathead - flathead ain't flathead, there are different types of flathead. If you put a bag limit on one type of flathead, and you come ashore with fillets of flathead, it's very hard for the marine police and those that monitor these things to determine whether it was a sand flathead or some other type of flathead. We have to give that some consideration as well.

CHAIR - It wasn't good to broadcast.

Mr ABETZ - These are the realities. What we are asking the Tasmanian community to do - I think most people fillet their fish out on the water. It's something that I would encourage our fellow Tasmanians, not necessarily be dobbers, but to encourage each other to do the right thing for future generations. People might have fun this season and next season going out fishing, but they may be denying that opportunity to future generations.

Mr VINCENT - I'm very pleased to hear it's being monitored and checked. Some are cheating the system, but I think the majority are respectful of what's trying to happen. It does have a flow on effect to the economies of the towns up and down the east coast.

Mr ABETZ - Having squeezed \$1.2 million in this Budget for the recovery program, it would be remiss of me not to mention it. We are putting money towards this recovery as well.

CHAIR - On that, not specifically related to flathead, but all fishery offences, how many offences or fines have been imposed? There's two parts of it. People can be caught doing the

PUBLIC

wrong thing. What sort of penalties are being applied to that? It's a big task for the marine police.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, it is. We have two sectors, the professional and recreational. Yesterday, we had figures for the professional and took on notice on the recreational.

CHAIR - We don't watch what happens down in the other place.

Mr ABETZ - Very wise that you don't. Dr Midson can possibly answer.

Dr MIDSON - In the marine resources business unit in NRE, we have a compliance team. They're largely focused on the commercial fisheries. They're looking at the reports and referring those matters onto marine police or other authorities to take action on. Marine police take the lead in enforcing recreational fishing regulations. That is primarily out on water. In matters like sand flathead where there are new regulations coming in, we take an educational approach. There's a very large recreational fisheries engagement team in marine resources. We also partner with TARFish, which the government has provided additional money to work on things like flathead stewardship and other educational measures. Marine resources don't take the lead in recreational fisheries enforcement, that is a marine police matter, because it happens out on the water.

CHAIR - The police have all that data, not you?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. I'd be happy to take that on notice. We said in the other place that we would take that on notice.

CHAIR - Could you provide that to the committee? Have you got the data for the number of fines that have been issued?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - I'm interested in what data you say you have.

Dr MIDSON - Between 5 April 2023 and 10 July 2024, fisheries officers in NRE Tasmania detected 67 cases involved potential contraventions of commercial fisheries laws that warranted further inquiries. Of these cases, 13 were referred to Tasmania Police for further investigation. Inquiries are continuing in relation to four matters. Fisheries officers in the department have served 11 infringements and 36 caution notices in relation to these matters.

CHAIR - You can get that same data from police with regard to the recreational side? Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr ABETZ - We believe we can, yes.

CHAIR - We'll take that on notice.

Mr HARRISS - I will go to the stock enhancement for the sand flathead. How's that been rolled out? In general, what is actually happening? We've got some very good waterways as well.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - With the money that we've committed, the \$1.2 million, IMAS is currently undertaking a study. We hope to have the details of that when Dr Midson -

Dr MIDSON - Towards the end of this year is when we're hoping to have it.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you. Towards the end of this year. That will then better inform the department and myself as to how we can enhance the population.

Mr HARRISS - The Better Fishing Fund mentions in there about the extending of it. Can you give me some facilities that have been upgraded through this? How's that process come about? Is there public consultation to select those locations?

Mr ABETZ - \$3 million has been committed to the Better Fishing Program through the 2021-22 Budget initiative. The program is designed to improve local community amenities and make recreational sea fishing more accessible to fishers, families and those who are mobility impaired or living with a disability. The program has provided grants totalling over \$500,000, and around four of the grants commenced on the 31 July 2024.

You've asked for examples of Better Fishing. Fish cleaning tables at jetties and bait ramps, I understand were made available to the West Coast Council, as the former general manager of the West Coast Council, who is now sitting at the table, reminds me. There have been facilities provided I think recently at Sandy Bay.

Mr MIDSON - Yes, there was an announcement around Sandy Bay recently.

Mr ABETZ - There was one at Sandy Bay. They are spotted and scattered right around the state. In the past, and now, when the grants are determined, there's a media release that announces them. Look at that from both sides: weather station network buoys to allow fishers to find information on real-time local sea conditions. That was a \$66,000 grant to TARFish. St Helens Marine Rescue got a \$15,000 grant for real-time webcams; Musselroe Bay Community Group Inc got a fishing pontoon, \$133,000; Clarence City Council; now one for you, Mr Harris, Huon Valley Council, new fishing pontoon at Shipwright's Point \$150,000; Swansea Primary School Tuna Club of Tasmania; Naracoopa Progress Association; Georgetown Council; Clarence Council; and of course, West Coast Council.

A number of grants have been made available scattered right around the state.

CHAIR - Can I just ask, minister, with the funding that the Blue Economy CRC gets, I couldn't actually find the figure in here, it may be buried somewhere, but I'm just interested in how much funding you provide to the Blue Economy CRC? What purpose is it for? Is it tied to particular projects?

Mr ABETZ - As the details are provided to me, it is for research. The Blue Economy is a Cooperative Research Centre, so it gleans money from federal government, state and private sector and research facilities. We have co-invested in that.

CHAIR - I'm interested in how much we put actually.

Mr ABETZ - The government is investing \$2 million from 2019-20 over its 10-year term -

CHAIR - That's \$2 million annually?

Mr ABETZ - Investing a total of \$2 million over its 10-year term, but this latest Budget includes an additional \$500,000 to provide targeted funding support for the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre to deliver industry-focused research and training.

The government made an in-principle commitment of up to \$2 million to support the Marine Bioproducts CRC, subject to future budget submissions. Participation in these cooperative research centres also provides a valuable opportunity to access cutting-edge scientific innovations generated by a diverse cooperation of international universities and industry partners.

The Blue Economy CRC comprises 43 partner organisations including the Tasmanian government, which through targeted research, are paving the way for sustainable offshore multispecies aquaculture and renewable energy developments.

CHAIR - The extra \$500,000 you gave them, you said that was for industry-focused research and training. Can you tell me specifically what you're talking about? I assume it's for that. It just doesn't go into the bucket; I assume it's like a tied funding. Is that what you were sort of alluding to?

Mr ABETZ - I would need to get the detail from Dr Midson on that.

Dr MIDSON - We haven't worked through the exact projects with the Blue Economy CRC yet and exactly how that funding will be split up but we work with the Blue Economy CRC on a number of projects. The offshore project in the north west is one of them, but we also have projects in relation to seaweed production and other things like that. At the moment, it is for industry-focused research and as that money gets delivered to the Blue Economy CRC, we'll work through them with exactly how that will be split up.

CHAIR - In order to get \$500,000 - because a lot of organisations in my electorate, your former patch too, would like \$500,000 - there must have been some sort of business case that was put to ask for this additional funding. Otherwise, why would you just say, 'We don't know what you're going to spend it on but we'll work that out later'.

Mr ABETZ - We are already a partner in the CRC and representations were made to us to help increase the total amount of money available to the CRC in a bid to leverage further monies from other sources, given that they hope to do some substantial research in our north-west waters. I suppose, from the government's point of view, the fact that the local government, that Tasmanian government, had confidence in it was an important factor for the Blue economy CRC to be able to go out and leverage further funds.

CHAIR - I hear what you say and I know that there's work going on, but if the government's original commitment was \$2 million over 10 years, that's not much. It's a small amount, acknowledging all the other potential sources of funding they've got. They've asked for basically a quarter of that in one hit in one year on top of what is quite a small amount, I accept, but I would have thought there would have been a direct link to something of benefit to the state.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Yes, and outputs from this work will inform future governance and policy development relating to offshore aquaculture and fisheries management in Commonwealth waters.

CHAIR - Commonwealth benefit, potentially, because -

Mr ABETZ - Well, we have, what do they call -

Dr MIDSON - Offshore Constitutional Settlements.

Mr ABETZ - Offshore Constitutional Settlements. I used deal with them when I was a federal minister. What occurs is, the Commonwealth government, from time-to-time, agrees to manage a state fishery, usually, it's the other way around, that the state fisheries agree to look after Commonwealth waters, and I understand that's the situation that we have largely in Bass Strait. That is what would occur, we believe, in relation to governance and other policy developments if we were to get aquaculture offshore and into Commonwealth waters. I think we would all know, that there is pressure from elements of the community to try to push fish farms further out, and so that's when you start looking at Commonwealth waters -

CHAIR - There are also elements you don't want them anywhere in Bass Strait, I might add.

Mr ABETZ - Look, there is that element, but like with every proposal, you've got those in favour and those against. Whatever side we land on, I think we can all agree, if we do land, on having aquaculture in Bass Strait, then the best possible governance and policy development framework is within our best interests.

Mr VINCENT - Just on recreation, minister, you mentioned about the importance of recreation as a cultural thing, and I see the benefits that come from the work done on the fishing industry, the flow on for recreation, but there is a massive amount of recreational fishes right around our coastlines. I'd like to know a bit more about how you balance that up between recreational numbers, I understand you're still doing some numbers from what the Doctor said, but it's a pretty important thing, recreational fishers.

Mr ABETZ - Look, recreational fisheries are huge in number. I dare say there wouldn't have been many Tasmanians, if any, over a certain age that have not had the experience, one, of going out on a boat, and two, pulling the odd fish in. We, as a government, recognise the significant economic and social contributions that recreational fishing provides and, unfortunately, as more and more young people sit on mobile phones and other gadgets -

CHAIR - To find where the fish are, that's what they're doing. Very sensible.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, well, if that was the purpose, Chair, then I think we would all be agreed - it must be very difficult to find because they spend hours on those damn gadgets. But getting them into the outdoors, breathing the fresh air, enjoying the ambience of the outdoors, also these sorts of events, usually, it's a family event. There's bonding, there's mentoring, there's development of relationship. Just the social good of recreational fishing and friendship bonding, just something that I don't think you can put a dollar value on.

PUBLIC

That said, Tasmania has some of the highest rates of recreational fishing and around 75 per cent of all recreational fishing in Tasmania occurs on marine waters. The other part, one assumes, is inland fisheries, but a survey conducted by IMAS in 2017-18 reported that recreational sea fishers spent more than \$160 million a year on fishing equipment and trip related expenses in Tasmania. We want to see jobs and participation in this sector grow as sustainably.

We have a Tasmanian Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy 2021-2030 and Dr Midson's provided me with a nice copy of the 22-page document which sets out what our strategy is and was developed to enhance those contributions by providing a vision, principles and actions to guide fisheries management through to 2030. The strategy aims to modernise management with a greater focus on valuing recreational fishing, engaging fishers, enhancing fishing opportunities and working with partners for more effective outcomes. I've already mentioned the Better Fishing Program and also the sand flathead issue before. Under our Strong Plan for Tasmanian Fishing in this year's Budget, we have committed a further \$1.2 million to support sand flathead stock enhancement.

Mr VINCENT - Let's finish up by saying that I understand the delicate balance between professional and recreational pressures on the industry. Going back to what I said initially, that the economies of so many of our coastal towns rely on a sensible balance between both professional and recreational fishes. I think that's important to keep in mind. Could we have that tabled please?

Mr ABETZ - Just make sure nothing's written in it.

We are similarly developing a Wild Sea Catch Fishery strategy, as well. That is underway. Those two fisheries, the professional and recreational, there are always - how can I describe it - creative tensions between the two, but they are both vital and important sectors. Sometimes you need the wisdom of Solomon to try to manage the two competing interests. I think so far, governments of all persuasions have been able to do that. That would be my ambition, to be able to continue doing that.

Mr HARRISS - If I can follow up on that, do we have numbers on both registrations? That ties into when we're talking about sand flathead and recreational fishing. I'm just wondering -

CHAIR - Some don't go out very often.

Mr HARRISS - Not in the last two years.

Mr ABETZ - Are you here this afternoon, Mr Harriss?

Mr HARRISS - Yes.

CHAIR - We stay here all day, every day.

Mr ABETZ - That falls under transport with MAST. If you were to ask that question at MAST, and if they're listening in, or if a message can be sent to them, if they haven't got an answer, I'm sure they'll get an answer by this afternoon.

PUBLIC

Grants and Subsidies

CHAIR - I assume that the grant to IMAS sits under this portfolio.

Mr ABETZ - If it's to do with fisheries, I am assuming you are correct Chair.

CHAIR - Marine and Antarctic studies. I'm not sure where that fits.

Mr ABETZ - What page are you on?

CHAIR - It's on page 221 under the grants and subsidies section that picks up grants and subsidies right across NRE. It's a little bit hard to know who's responsible for what. There's the Inland Fisheries Service government contribution, which obviously Inland Fisheries manage, but there's the grant to IMAS.

Mr ABETZ - That does not have a footnote with it. The line item to which you refer is our ongoing contribution to IMAS. I understand that the \$500,000 extra that was announced is not included.

CHAIR - That's the Blue Economy CRC. Aren't they separate to IMAS?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, they are. SMRCA funding.

CHAIR - SMRCA stands for?

Mr ABETZ - We call it 'Smirka'.

MR JOSCELYNE - It's the Sustainable Marine Research Collaboration Agreement. Often referred to as 'Smirka'.

CHAIR - Is that the funding to IMAS?

Mr JOSCELYNE - There was a \$500,000 commitment to the Blue Economy CRC. That's separate.

CHAIR - Which we've already talked about.

Mr JOSCELYNE - There was also in the Budget an additional \$500,000 funding for SMRCA.

CHAIR - Where does that funding sit? There's a grant here to IMAS which, if you read the description of it, is to assist aquaculture and fisheries research. I thought it would relate to you, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Is that Output Group 2 under Primary Industries and Water, or not?

CHAIR - No.

Mr ABETZ - All right. You go.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - First question: where does the funny acronym sit - that money?

Dr MIDSON - In the grants and subsidies. That \$2.6 million is the regular contribution to IMAS through SMRCA. There's an additional \$500,000 that has been announced in the most recent Budget that goes across four additional years. That's top-up funding for the core support. That's \$2 million over - an additional \$2 million - over four years to support fisheries and aquaculture management.

That's separate, sitting in a separate line at the moment, that additional \$500,000. The \$2.6 million you refer to is the core funding to IMAS and fisheries.

CHAIR - It's a fixed grant, obviously, there's no indexation or anything. It's the same figure over the forward Estimates. Is that a five-year grant, a 10-year grant? What is that? You're going backwards if you're not increasing it in line with - not being indexed at all.

Mr ABETZ - The figures speak for themselves, and if there is an inflation or CPI index, then clearly the real value is diminished each year by that.

CHAIR - That's right. That's my point.

Mr ABETZ - Yep, that is part of it. I can indicate that SMRCA is a significant and longstanding partnership between the University of Tasmania's Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. SMRCA enables IMAS to provide independent, world-class science and advice to government to facilitate the sustainable management of Tasmania's marine resources.

The Tasmanian Government has announced its commitment to increasing funding of the SMRCA by \$2 million over four years, taking the total commitment of core funding to over \$28 million over 10 years.

CHAIR - This is obviously the core, if you like, grant funding - the \$2,605,000. Where in the budget papers would I find the extra funding to SMRCA?

Ms LOVELL - And does that go to IMAS?

CHAIR - It does. They said it goes to IMAS, so I wonder why we don't see it lined up with this.

Mr ABETZ - The department's finding that information for you and hopefully, we'll have that shortly.

CHAIR - I'll put it on notice for now, while we move on. Otherwise, we'll be sitting here looking at each other. It's SMERCA?

Mr ABETZ - SMRCA.

CHAIR - Okay. Once you get that, you will take that information from your minister?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - There's not much in the way of capital grants here, I don't think. We might move to 4.1. You might need to change team, minister. Forestry policy. Thank you, marine people. They can go and find the answer.

Mr ABETZ - They will. Just bear with us, Chair. Sustainable Marine Research - there we go. On page 17 of budget paper 2, volume 1. Page 17, the fourth from the bottom.

CHAIR - Under the Election Commitments.

Mr ABETZ - The fourth from the bottom. The mystery is solved, thank you to the officials.

CHAIR - It still doesn't answer the question why it appears in there. That's an election commitment. Is that in the overall line item? If we go to revenue by appropriation on page 219, I assume that is picked up in there. It is because the footnote says so.

Mr ABETZ - Page 187, 7.1.

CHAIR - I found it myself, minister. I'll let you change your team.

The committee suspended from 10.01 a.m. to 10.04 a.m.

Output Group 4 Forestry Resources

Mr ABETZ - We've already introduced the Secretary and Mark Bowles.

Mr BOWLES - Acting Deputy Secretary of Resources.

CHAIR - Doing every job at the minute.

Ms LOVELL - I had a question about saw log plantations. After harvesting of plantation saw logs, will you ensure a short-term or long-term rotation?

Mr ABETZ - It depends on whose saw logs. There are private plantations and Sustainable Timber Tasmania plantations. It really depends on the private sector.

Ms LOVELL - For Sustainable Timber Tasmania, where that's a policy decision for you or for the government.

Mr ABETZ - Or for Sustainable Timber Tasmania. I would invite specific detailed questions like that to go forward to the Government Business Enterprise scrutiny hearings. That is when you'll have Sustainable Timber Tasmania and all their relevant staff who help advise and determine these things before the parliament.

Ms LOVELL - I understand the government had some concerns around potential competition issues if Sustainable Timber Tasmania were to allocate plantation resources to existing customers. Have you discussed that or sought advice from the ACCC?

PUBLIC

Mr BOWLES - We haven't spoken directly to the ACCC, but we've had some preliminary discussions with Crown law regarding that.

Ms LOVELL - Are you able to share with us what those preliminary discussions gave you?

Mr BOWLES - They're subject to legal privilege.

Ms LOVELL - Has the Huon pine heli-harvesting project commenced? There is a Budget allocation for that.

Mr ABETZ - No, it hasn't.

Ms LOVELL - Do you know when it will?

Mr ABETZ - I would direct that to Mr Tom Byrne, Assistant Director, Forest Policy.

Mr BYRNE - As you'll be aware, one of the other Budget initiatives was for a special species demand study. The recommendation we put forward was to delay the heli-harvesting study until after the completion of that demand study, which is scheduled for later this year.

Ms LOVELL - Do you have detail on how that project will roll out, as in numbers of trips or expected harvest volume? Do you have the details yet or is it waiting for that study too?

Mr BYRNE - No, we don't.

Ms LOVELL - How many FTEs work on forestry in your department?

Mr ABETZ - I am told 5.9.

CHAIR - Native forest logging has ceased in all but two states, New South Wales and here. In New South Wales the native forest is a similar size to Tasmania, approximately 1.8 million hectares and multiple-use native forests. The New South Wales Forest Corporation also has 34,000 hectares of hardwood plantations, again not all that different to Tasmania. However, in New South Wales the native forest estate is fully impaired - it has a zero value - because future returns are less than future costs. That's why it's done that way. As the responsible minister, can you tell us why our native forests are different and treated differently?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not fully aware of how New South Wales treats its native forests and the benefits that flow from them, but in Tasmania, there is no doubt that our native forests and the sustainable harvesting of them provide real jobs for many regional communities -

CHAIR - I'm asking about how they're valued.

Mr ABETZ - I put a social, economic and environmental value on our native forestry because what has happened with Victoria and Western Australia in the pursuit of certain preferences, I believe, in certain seats, or for whatever reason they've made the decision, they've now had the perverse result of hardwood being imported into Australia from South America, belching out bunker fuel from the funnels of ships as it's being brought over for material that we need for building. If you don't use wood, you use concrete, steel, plastic, aluminium, and

PUBLIC

so the list goes on. You then ask the environmental benefit of harvesting sustainably your regrowth native forests and you do the equation and, environmentally, it is a perverse outcome to put hand on heart and say, 'Look at my virtue signalling, I've stopped native harvesting in Victoria', and you get an influx of hardwood from South America. It is suspected that about 10 per cent of the wood imports into Australia is illegally harvested.

What we know about Tasmanian, and indeed Australian harvesting, is that it is all legal, that in Tasmania under a Forest Practices Plan, overseen by a Forest Practices Authority. I use a rhetorical question from time-to-time to my friends in the Greens party to mention or indicate where do they do forestry better in the world than we do in Tasmania? It's one of the few times that I get silence from the Greens. Environmentally, there's a great value in harvesting our native forests in a sustainable, responsible manner. Might I add, there is the economic benefit as well and the social benefit in our rural regional communities.

CHAIR - I'll come back to some of those points, minister. Can you confirm that future revenues from forest will exceed future costs of conducting native forest operations. I'm not talking about the possible flow-on benefits, likely to occur outside of your area anyway, it was just partly of the environment question that I will come back to. I'm just talking about the revenue and cost from the forest itself, the harvesting and the costs associated with that. The question was, can you confirm that future revenues from forest will exceed future costs in native forest harvesting? We're going to talk the economic question now, we'll go to the others shortly.

Mr ABETZ - I believe that is the case. I invite you to cross-examine Sustainable Timber Tasmania on that in the scrutiny. But what I would say to you is that Sustainable Timber Tasmania takes on a lot of community service obligations. Sure, it's provided some funding in the Budget, but they maintain bridges that give access for bush-walkers, for the bike trails around the place. Also, they have provided a lot of roading which, in the past, was designed to enable harvesting and then access for the next lot of re-growth. They've been locked out of some of those areas, which means that they've had a capital investment on which they can now no longer get a return because of, for whatever reason, governments have locked up areas from which they would have gained extra revenue, having already sunk the capital cost of putting the roads in.

I've just been reminded, Tasmania's forests and reserves are used for recreational activities such as mountain biking and bushwalking. In the 12-month period to September 2021, around 19,300 visitors participated in mountain biking at some point during their trip and an estimated 316,400 visitors engaged in bushwalking.

CHAIR - Is the mountain biking just in the forest area that you're referring to there because a lot of them go to Mount Owen and the Oonah Track which are not forestry areas. They're horrifically looking steep hills on mountains that have no trees, you run into rocks, not trees in that case.

Mr ABETZ - I am sure that there are -

CHAIR - So, let's be true with our facts.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Absolutely. Even if the figure was only 100,000 mountain bike riders or walkers, we could still see and agree that there's a huge social benefit for which Sustainable Timber Tasmania forks out money for the benefit of our community.

CHAIR - Minister, following on from some of the comments you've made, if native forests are perpetual ecosystems, I think we all agree they are, shouldn't regard be had for all the future costs when valuing the ecosystem? You were talking about the broad value earlier, so why does the entity for which you're shareholder minister, that being Sustainable Timber Tasmania, exclude some of the costs, namely, the cost of regeneration?

Mr ABETZ - I invite you to ask that question at the business scrutiny because I'm not aware - it's just been confirmed by the department that is more a GBE question.

CHAIR - So would you think, minister, then in assessing the full value and the rate of return, if you like, that you should include all costs when you're assessing that and include the cost of regeneration? If you're going to have a truly sustainable industry, regeneration's part of that.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, regeneration is clearly part and parcel of the forestry endeavours but nowadays, people don't only talk about the financial bottom line, they talk about triple bottom lines. If we want to take into account the cost of regeneration and do it exactly to the dollar and cent, which is a fair enough exercise, then let's do it on the other side as well, that when governments think it is wise to lock up areas where Sustainable Timber Tasmania has made an investment with a view to the future, the sunk costs of roading, et cetera, should then be reimbursed to that enterprise because they have made that investment in anticipation of getting a number of rotations of forest harvesting out of those particular areas.

We also then need to have the full dollar and cent figure in relation to all the community service obligations that Sustainable Timber Tasmania undertake. So, a very fair question by you but then we need to incorporate everything else as well, and I have no doubt that if all that was done, we would be getting a good return.

CHAIR - Minister, can you tell us then what you're doing in your wider remit and responsibility for forests as part of the climate debate? You can't not be involved in this, as minister for forestry. Can you tell us how far you've progressed with the national capital accounting for the forest? There's a much more comprehensive picture as you've alluded to, but haven't given me any figures on. A more comprehensive picture can be presented of the value of our forests, so take into account accounting for carbon losses, carbon sequestration and habitat loss.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, there seems to be a desire within some elements of the community to ignore some of the very strong scientific advice. For example, the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land, which was released in August 2019 told us:

Sustainable forest management can prevent deforestation, maintain and enhance carbon sinks, and can contribute towards greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals. Sustainable forest management generates socioeconomic benefits and provides fibre, timber and biomass to meet societies growing needs.

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That was in chapter 4. They go on to say sustainable forest management can maintain or enhance forest carbon stocks and can maintain forest carbon sinks, including by transferring carbon to wood products. You then have Kevin Tolhurst from Melbourne University and Jerry Vanclay from Southern Cross University, both professors in fire ecology and sustainable forestry, respectively saying closing down native forest timber harvesting is likely to have a much greater impact on increasing bushfire severity and extent across the landscape than the increase in local fire severity claimed by the opponents of timber harvesting.

There is very strong evidence, from the IPCC to local academics and experts in Australia, telling us that from the carbon point of view, sustainable forest management is the way to go. I again mention, if we don't use wood products -

CHAIR - We don't need to be repetitive, minister, we understand that. I'd like to take you back to my question. What work has been done under this area for natural capital accounting? We know Forico has produced really good reports on this, valuing their own estate, which is a plantation resource. What have you done in terms of progressing natural capital accounting, which I think is going to be really important in the future?

Mr ABETZ - The Tasmanian government has made a legislative commitment to transition to net zero emissions or lower by 2030. The Australian Government has worked with Sustainable Timber Tasmania to apply a spatially explicit modelling method for estimating emissions from harvested native forests on public lands, which comprises part of the remaining forest land subcategory of the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) reporting sector. We are working with them in that regard.

CHAIR - Have you done any work on looking, from your perspective for the Tasmanian forest that you're responsible for, to do some natural capital accounting? There's a classic example, a beautiful example undertaken by Forico. They've actually valued it, put a dollar figure as well as other benefits on it. Have you seen that report?

Mr ABETZ - It doesn't immediately spring to mind. I understand STT is working on doing such a report.

CHAIR - As shareholder minister, you weren't informed of that?

Mr ABETZ - I may well have been informed, Chair, but everything I'm informed of in the variety of portfolios, I don't necessarily immediately have front of mind. If that is something that upsets the committee, I apologise.

CHAIR - That's not the point I'm making, minister. This is something that needs some government leadership. Sustainable Timber Tasmania has the capacity to assess their own asset, but I would have thought this was something that the minister would have an interest in, particularly in view of your previous comments about recognising the social, environmental, and economic contributions of this. I urge you to read the Forico report on it - it was done in 2023, it's not new - which does really do a great body of work in valuing their resources.

Can you tell us about the annual quota for the high-quality saw logs of 137,000 tonnes? Have you been asked about the failure to supply the minimum amount in recent years? We know that's been a problem. Have you been asked about that?

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - I have been asked about the saw log allocation. I encourage you to ask that question of Sustainable Timber Tasmania at the scrutiny hearing. They'll be able to tell you all the detail as to how much they've supplied over the last 12 months, any difficulties they may have occasioned in supplying that which the sector would seek.

CHAIR - You're aware that they have been unable to supply the legislated amount of timber.

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - You're aware that is the case? Are there any consequences to government? Government business is actually owned by government. I don't want everything shunted over to them. Is there a consequence? Are there penalties or any other challenges that the government needs to address in relation to this failure to meet the legislated tonnage?

Mr ABETZ - STT has been able to meet the demand requested of them. The total quota which they were to supply has not been met. The legislated amount is to make available, and what STT is to supply is a matter for their contracts with their customers. It's legislated that they need to make available, but they then have the contracts with their customers. If their customers aren't asking for more, then -

CHAIR - The question was, are there any consequences as a result of failing to meet that? Is there a monetary penalty or anything like that?

Mr ABETZ - That's not the case because they have met customer demand and requirements. That is more appropriate for the scrutiny of the business enterprise.

CHAIR - There is an independent review of the RFA going on at the moment.

Mr BYRNE - That's correct. The independent review is currently reviewing the documents produced, including the outcomes report for the 2017-22 reporting period.

CHAIR - What's the purpose of the review?

Mr BYRNE - The review demonstrates that Tasmania has met the requirements under the RFA agreement that principally go to demonstrating ecologically sustainable forest management.

CHAIR - I understand the review is having trouble getting access to data to make a proper and full assessment of that. Are you aware of that challenge, minister? Perhaps not if you weren't aware of the review.

Mr ABETZ - I'm aware that the RFA report was tabled. I'm aware that there's an independent review going on. I'm not aware - I don't know if the department had any representations.

Mr BYRNE - We're in regular discussions with the independent reviewer. He's been doing his public consultation process, but the department hasn't been made aware of any data availability issues.

CHAIR - If that's brought to your attention, minister, that data is required to do a full and meaningful independent review, would you take a dim view of that? If it wasn't made available to an independent reviewer?

Mr ABETZ - First of all, I should correct: it was a draft report, was it, that was -

Mr BYRNE - It's the final outcomes report, but there are a number of steps that continue before the review itself is finalised.

Mr ABETZ - Then that report is subjected to the independent review, which is currently taking place. I would need to be better informed on what you mentioned. I have no reason to doubt what you're asserting, but it hasn't been brought to my attention that anybody's been denied access to information.

CHAIR - Will you follow that up?

Mr ABETZ - I would say publicly that anybody who believes that they are being denied access to information can contact my office and I will seek to do what I can to facilitate access to the information sought.

CHAIR - Good. I'm pleased to hear that. Anything else on forestry you want to talk about? Down the Huon? We'll move on to Mineral Resources.

Output Group 4 - Resources Policy and Regulatory Services

4.2 Mineral Resources

CHAIR - Do you need to bring other people to the table, minister?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, I do. We need the Director Mining, Alastair Morton.

CHAIR - Going through some of the initiatives, if you like, or the descriptions of initiatives that are being funded through this output group, we know the copper mines -

Mr ABETZ - Can you just assist me?

CHAIR - It's on page 326, the description of the Copper Mines Tasmania support. Over the years there's been significant support provided whilst it remains in care and maintenance. It recently got another new owner. The description is:

This initiative will provide the final tranche of funding under a package to Copper Mines of Tasmania to undertake works to support the restart of the Mt Lyell mine.

I'd like to understand what this - I've got an actual figure, sorry.

Mr ABETZ - Is that the \$25 million figure.

CHAIR - That's probably the total figure you're looking at.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - I want to find what it is for this year. How much is it for this year? It is here somewhere I just can't put my finger on it right away. It's \$795,000. You'll find the figure on page 306. That's the last tranche of funding. Can you inform the committee what the intention or the expected outcome of this funding is?

Mr ABETZ - The \$795,000 which is allocated is that portion of the grant which remains undrawn. \$2.3 million has been provided for various flood risk mitigation projects in and around the mine.

Mr LIMKIN - The government provided \$2.3 million in previous budgets in relation to flood mitigation. The \$795,000 is the last portion of the \$2.3 million to be drawn down. It's basically the remainder of the \$2.3 million.

CHAIR - Are you aware of whether the other money, the money that's provided over the last three years, I think it was, the period that it's been provided over - has that been expended? Do we keep a check on how much is expended of the grant, or do we assume they'll just do it?

Mr LIMKIN - We do look at - there are four elements of the whole grant deed for the \$9.5 million which was the original commitment by the government. We do work through and make sure the outcomes of those areas are delivered. One of them was a pre-engineering study for the reopening, or various restarts of the mine should it occur. We make sure those are completed as part of that process.

CHAIR - What were the expected outcomes? One was that study. Do you get a copy of them? I want to understand how you track - it's not an insignificant amount of money. I'm not arguing that it was necessary to support the mine, but we can't just put money in a black hole and not see the value for it and have any outcomes. I'm about outcomes measured. How do we measure the outcomes here?

Mr LIMKIN - The department does make sure we've got outcomes for each one of those types of things. It's been allocated since 2017. It has been over a number of years - \$4.4 million was for the refurbishment and the preparation of the decline. My understanding is that this is the main tunnel used to access the mine and bring ore to the surface. The department has got various outcomes in the grant deed. My understanding has been that, since 2017, we have gone through and made sure the grant recipient has delivered each one of those individual outcomes over the time.

CHAIR - It is not that I don't believe the Secretary, minister, but how can I have confidence that you have got these reports? And you have some feedback to show that this money has been spent on what it was intended to be? I could walk down the drive and have a look, if I had the proper gear.

Mr LIMKIN - There are condition precedents for each one of the grant deeds and the release of the grant deed. If you give us some time, we will seek the information on the condition precedence for each one and how we have been comfortable that they've been met in each case.

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CHAIR - That would be good. Otherwise if we ask questions, you give us an answer, and there's no way of actually checking. You'll provide that today?

Mr LIMKIN - We'll try to do it in this session. If not, we'll take it on notice and try to provide it as quick as possible.

CHAIR - The next thing I want to go to is the Critical Minerals Strategy. That's a new initiative?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, \$3 million, is that right?

CHAIR - Can we talk about what that seeks to achieve and how the funding will be allocated for that?

Mr ABETZ - Through a grants program. Critical minerals these days has become a very important factor in consideration for the mining sector and especially for the western world, with geopolitical considerations as to who controls the vital rare earth minerals that go into mobile phones and all sorts of technology.

CHAIR - It's not just rare earth minerals, is it? Rare earth's one mineral.

Mr ABETZ - Tungsten, there are others, yes. That is one cohort of it. We as a state believe we have rich mineral resources which are worth exploring and developing to see what we might be able to contribute to that.

CHAIR - Have you got a list of what are determined critical minerals?

Mr ABETZ - I think the federal government does that, but I do have a list. If in doubt, consult the 2030 Strong Plan.

CHAIR - Please.

Mr ABETZ - That is what we promised, and that's what you're asking about.

CHAIR - I want a list of minerals. I don't really want the 2030 Strong Plan.

Mr ABETZ - We have a section in here called 'Provide \$3 million to supercharge our critical mineral strategy'.

CHAIR - What are they, which ones?

Mr ABETZ - It includes tungsten, tin and zinc. The Australian Government's recently-updated Critical Minerals List and new Strategic Minerals List includes minerals which are already being mined or processed in Tasmania, including tungsten, tin and zinc. And there are others -

CHAIR - I'd like a list of what is considered critical minerals. One of the problems, as I understood it -

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - It's a federal government list, so I dare say that is on a federal government website, a critical minerals list. My goodness, here we go: high-purity alumina, antimony, there you go, arsenic, beryllium, bismuth, chromium, cobalt, fluorine, gallium, germanium, graphite, hafnium, indium, lithium, magnesium, manganese, molybdenum, nickel, niobium - I hope my pronunciations are right - platinum-group elements, rare-earth elements, rhenium, scandium, selenium, silicon, tantalum, tellurium, titanium, tungsten, vanadium and zirconium.

So there you go. That is the list.

CHAIR - I understand some time ago, nickel wasn't on the list. Nickel has been more recently added? I'm getting a nod from the Director of Mines.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. Some countries have them on their lists and others don't. High-purity alumina is high on our list, but it's - as things are developed and qualities of particular minerals are recognised, then they may well move onto that list.

CHAIR - As I understand, when Avebury was operating and facing some challenges, as has since seen it be put back into care and maintenance, nickel wasn't on the list. Now it is, which can make a difference -

Mr ABETZ - Absolutely.

CHAIR - to the expected price points and that sort of thing. In terms of the critical mineral strategy, it talks about new geological data, seed funding for new downstream processing projects and associated evaluating opportunities. We have a lot of these critical minerals, mainly in my electorate, I might add, just so you all know. I've been down all the mines that are underground to see them. With regard to that, what opportunities will be provided through this, do you think, for downstream processing and value-adding? That's where the money really is.

Mr ABETZ - The starting point always has to be: do we have a resource? Then: is the resource of sufficient quantity to make it viable for mining? And then: do we have sufficient quantity of that resource to make it viable for downstream processing? Quite often with mineral resources, you combine from various mines into the one smelter or processing plant. That said, you can be assured that as much as this government supports that which occurs at Bell Bay and at Nyrstar, a downstream processing is something that we would encourage.

CHAIR - We were talking about new opportunities and value-adding.

Mr ABETZ - We would encourage that. This is all at the very beginning. Let's discover the mineral wealth first and fully understand it.

CHAIR - What don't we know at the moment about our mineral? A lot of work's been done by Mineral Resources Tasmania. It's also been done by CODES at UTAS. We've got a massive core library. So what don't we know? What are we looking for that we don't know?

Mr ABETZ - We need to find out what mineral wealth we do have and then the extent of that resource.

CHAIR - How are you helping with that?

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - By making funds available which will hopefully drive investment in the critical minerals sector. We'll help identify resources, drive private investment and grow jobs, particularly in regional Tasmania. We might delete 'regional Tasmania' and say, Montgomery is it?

CHAIR - Murchison.

Mr ABETZ - My apologies. Next door, Murchison. Funding will support the identification and provision of geological data necessary to support exploration, seed funding for processing, and other improvements to extract critical minerals from existing operations and support to develop the infrastructure needed to enable new mining or processing operations. It will complete a business case of on-island value-adding critical mineral processing and refinement options.

CHAIR - Do you have any vision of how much is actually spent in exploration in Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - Was it \$38.6 million in the last year? That is a figure that happens to be in front of me, but I'm not sure if that's correct because I've been inundated with figures and briefs.

I was wrong. I said \$38.6 million, it's \$38.8 million in 2023, which was a 5 per cent decrease from the 2022 record of \$40.9 million. Pleasingly, greenfield exploration expenditure has also stayed strong over the last decade. It was \$4.8 million in 2023. Brownfields is within existing mining leases or around existing mines. Greenfields is the opposite. Greenfield exploration expenditure has stayed strong, but we can always do more. As of 30 June, there were 504 mining leases, 172 exploration licences and 17 retention licences granted or under application in the state.

CHAIR - I know there's a tight budget situation, but we have a critical mineral strategy and the opportunity to extend mine lives and things like that. In the past, there has been financial support provided to encourage exploration. Is there any financial support at the moment? I was unable to see any direct financial support to promote additional exploration.

Mr ABETZ - EDGI is the \$10 million grant program for exploration drilling, the Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative.

CHAIR - Is there \$10 million there every year?

Mr ABETZ - What we announced was a \$1.5 million extension to the existing program. It commenced before my time in 2018 with funding of \$3.5 million over seven years. EDGI has now been extended until 2028 with a further \$1.5 million funding announced as part of the Strong Plan. There have been nine rounds awarded, eight rounds completed and \$1.88 million has been paid for more than 19.6 kilometres of exploration drilling. The estimated total industry expenditure is just over \$5.8 million. Round 9 of EDGI is in progress and the projects are due for completion in November 2024.

CHAIR - Could you tell us which companies have been the recipients of grants?

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - It's available online, but I don't have the list with me. Here we go, look at this.

CHAIR - If there's lots of data you could table that, minister.

Mr ABETZ - I was going to say, rather than having me stumble over all these various names and amounts, I can table this, which is the EDGI [Exploration Drilling Grants Initiative] summary 2018-2024, EDGI grants awarded by company. Note related entities are grouped together. From this table you get what rounds they were successful in, the number of grants they've been awarded and whether they have been completed, the amount paid, and whether they had helicopter support. I will table the two pages.

CHAIR - You did say there's over 9 km of drilling.

Mr ABETZ - Nineteen.

CHAIR - Oh, 19. I thought nine is not very far because some holes will go down two or more kilometres.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, 19.6.

CHAIR - In the last 12 months?

Mr ABETZ - I think that's overall.

CHAIR - Since 2018?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - Do we know how much of that was from underground already, like drilling on these current sites. That's not a long distance of drilling when you think it's over that period of time, and I know how far some holes go down. A few years ago I went to MMG, well it wasn't MMG then probably, but they had gone down 2.5 km in one drill and hit the target they were after. Incredible stuff.

Mr ABETZ - A lot of the science, geology, engineering works and all that, it's astounding.

CHAIR - In terms of the rehabilitated mine sites, how many are still actively requiring rehabilitation? And have some been completed, and need no further work?

Mr ABETZ - Rehabilitation work undertaken on abandoned mining sites in Tasmania has been funded through the Rehabilitation of Mining Lands Trust Fund since 1996. An annual work program is agreed upon by a committee of government agencies, land managers and industry representatives. Projects in the 2023-24 program include:

- Planning and analysis for remediation of the Balfour precipitates stand.
- Clear-water diversion and hydrogeology modelling at Story's Creek.
- Continuation of the adits and shaft-capping program.

PUBLIC

- Weed management, monitoring and revegetation maintenance at six sites previously rehabilitated by MRT.
- Collection of data to populate the legacy features database which will help prioritise rehabilitation trust fund activities.

The Rehabilitation of Mining Land Trust program is overseen by a steering committee comprising the following members. This is chaired by MRT and includes representatives from the Tasmanian Minerals, Manufacturing and Energy Council (TMMEC) and Cement, Concrete and Aggregates Australia (CCAA). MRT's transitioning to a risk-based approach to remediation of abandoned sites managed by the Rehabilitation of Mines Trust Fund. Sites with the highest risk to public safety will be prioritised for remediation.

CHAIR - How much is in the trust fund at the moment?

Mr ABETZ - There's no money in the fund. The trust gets \$150,000 each year from the government and they spend that.

CHAIR - That comes out of the appropriation of this line item, I assume?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - Going back to the EDGI grants and the table provided, we are up to round 9, it seems, in that.

Mr ABETZ - We're on round 9. Round 10 is about to be released.

CHAIR - In terms of what year the various rounds relate to, to make sense of the information here, is it an annual thing? For example, is round 1 the first year it started in 2018? Is that how it works?

Mr ABETZ - No. There have been nine rounds in six or seven years. It's not nicely divided up in calendar or financial year. I can't assist in that regard.

CHAIR - We don't know what year rounds 1-3 were in, or do we know that?

Mr ABETZ - We should be able to get that for you, Chair.

CHAIR - Right. Otherwise, it's a little bit hard to look at what this data means.

Mr ABETZ - We should be able to get that for you.

CHAIR - Regarding your role as minister for Mineral Resources, some of the mines are facing significant challenges at the moment, like Group 6 Metals on King Island. We know that MMG are looking to build a new tailings dam somewhere. There are projects that Renison is trying to undertake that have hit barriers because of other matters, not necessarily in your portfolio. How do you support the industry generally in this? What's your role?

Mr ABETZ - The role of the state in all this is to ensure that the resource, which ultimately belongs to the people of Tasmania, is managed for the best possible return for the people of Tasmania. When you realise that the sector provided over \$50 million worth of

PUBLIC

royalties to the state budget last year, or the year before, that is a considerable figure. It stands to reason that it's within the best interests of our state to provide the best possible support for the mining sector. That deals with all aspects that we should, as a government sector, facilitate rather than frustrate. I hope Tanya Plibersek is listening in relation to a tailings dam on the west coast. We need to make available as much information as we can through Mineral Resources Tasmania (MRT), through the core library that I had the privilege of walking through the other day at Mornington; by EDGI grants, by letting companies know that we are genuinely interested in them exploring and seeking out the potential mineral wealth. There are a whole host of ways the government can support the mining sector. We seek to do that, but we also need to ensure that we get a good return from that for the benefit of the people of Tasmania.

CHAIR - You would be aware that a review of the state's finances has suggested that mineral royalties be looked at. Mineral royalties are reported on two different components in Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, there is the *ad valorem* and the other.

CHAIR - Yes, you might like to explain that to the committee, perhaps? Members on this side of the table don't know how mineral royalties are apportioned. I'm also interested in what your views are on making it more similar to the mechanisms used in other states.

Mr ABETZ - We have two lots of royalties: one that is a percentage of net sales and profit, that is, the *ad valorem* royalties; or a specific rate royalty, which we charge per tonnage, per volume or weight. They're the two systems. There are commercial realities at play that, we in Tasmania, are not as close to the rest of the world as some other mines are and, therefore, the viability of those mines has to always be considered as to how much royalty you can charge before the mine operator says, 'look, thanks but no thanks', and leaves. So, there is that delicate balancing act. Mr Eslake's report provided very important information. I think everybody found it of interest. But, with respect, there are certain elements of it like land tax on houses, et cetera, which I don't think is a very palatable -

CHAIR - There's land tax on houses, just not on principal places of residence.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, principal places of residence. That is what I was referring to and that was what was new or suggested in the Eslake report. It's those matters where we respectfully disagree. Over the years, the royalties that have been negotiated with the various companies is something we think -

CHAIR - You don't negotiate with various companies, do you? It's a standard approach, like every company has the same approach. There're no sweetheart deals for the various companies, is there?

Mr ABETZ - It's set out in legislation, but the mineral being extracted has, what I was trying to say was, a unique royalty tied to it. So, the royalty for gold is different to zinc and tin. So, we have metallics and commodities, which are rated differently for the purposes of the revenue.

CHAIR - But all commodities and all metallics are charged the same, according to their category, not the actual mine, because some mines dig up the same stuff.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - That's right. But we do have also the Rehabilitation Rebate Scheme.

Mr MORTON - Your rent and royalty payments requirements of the *Mineral Resources Development Act*, the actual specifics are articulated under the Mineral Resources Regulations 2016. With regards to the *ad valorem* system, as the minister's already discussed, that's a system on the metallic minerals, so lead, zinc, gold, nickel, iron, et cetera. The *ad valorem* system is effectively a sliding scale for the metallic minerals. It's from 1.9 per cent to 5.35 per cent and that's set out under the regulations. As was described before, it's a profit-based system, so it will slide around that scale, depending on what that specific commodity is doing at the time. There's different regimens in all of the other jurisdictions. Some use sliding scales, some use flat rates, so it's quite difficult to compare what the other jurisdictions are doing with our regimen.

CHAIR - The question to you, minister, are you looking at reviewing the regulations at all?

Mr ABETZ - No.

CHAIR - Okay. So we're looking at the mineral royalties that are expected over the forward Estimates, which is in budget paper 1, page 115, Other Revenue. They fall away. Of course, this is based on the profitability of the mines and commodity prices and mineral prices, obviously. So, from the preliminary outcome for the last year, 2023-24, was \$51.8 million, but over the forward Estimates period, it's predicted to fall down to \$37 million. That's quite a drop in terms of our state revenues. Noting that, these things change. Mineral prices could change. Sadly, Avebury's not operating because it might have been nice to have nickel back in the mix, but there you go. Maybe that will be open at some stage. But in terms of the tight budgetary situation, it's clear this is one area that's dropping. Some would argue that you should look at the regulations and see. I'm not arguing for it. I'm just asking why you wouldn't, in light of this tight budgetary situation that we're facing.

Mr ABETZ - The *ad valorem* basis - Treasury has made an assessment that the income flow is going to decrease and one assumes - I've just had confirmed that is based on what it is anticipated commodity prices are going to do.

CHAIR - But also the mines that are operating, we've got a number that are in care and maintenance.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, but those that are in care and maintenance aren't providing us with a royalty.

CHAIR - That's what I'm saying.

Mr ABETZ - Therefore, in those circumstances, to say, 'Have we got a surprise for you', in those circumstances, we're going to try to increase the rate of royalty, I don't think would be a good long-term economic decision for us.

CHAIR - So there's the *ad valorem* component. There's also another component to the mineral royalties, isn't there?

Mr ABETZ - The commodities one, which is for the construction materials.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - I just want to understand, for our benefit, how it's apportioned, how it's made up. Who pays for what in terms of a royalty here?

Mr ABETZ - Who pays *ad valorem*? No, that's not your question.

CHAIR - How about we have a clear description of how the mineral royalty system works.

Mr ABETZ - All right.

Mr MORTON - As I said previously, it's defined under the mineral resources regulations. There's the two systems. There's the *ad valorem* system. That is around metallic minerals. If it's a metallic mineral, like lead, zinc, as described earlier, then they're on the *ad valorem* system, which is that sliding scale I described earlier.

The specific rates are for the commodities, those construction and industrial materials like sand and gravel and those sorts of things.

CHAIR - Getting out of quarries and stuff like that.

Mr MORTON - Yes, so in the regulations there's a defined flat rate.

CHAIR - It's based on the tonnage that comes out.

Mr MORTON - That's right.

CHAIR - So, those companies could be making significant profit. I know there's been challenges for some construction projects to get adequate rocks and gravel to do their work. In any market, minister, you'd be aware that prices go up when there's a shortage of supply. So even if that is the case, they're not being asked to pay any extra; it's just a flat rate based on tonnage.

Mr MORTON - That's correct.

CHAIR - Is that something that should be reviewed?

Mr ABETZ - It's not something I've turned my mind to. I'm always happy to think about things, but if you increase the royalty, I suspect one of the major purchasers of road gravel are local government and state government. If you increase the royalty take for the state government, then the construction of our roads -

CHAIR - But if it was based on profitability, rather than tonnage, then it comes back to you in royalties, doesn't it? It's a bit like the whole GBEs with the energy paying dividends. It's the same argument, isn't it?

Mr ABETZ - There's a good argument in relation to that, but all I'm saying is you would need to factor in that if you operate a quarry, you would expect a certain percentage return on your investment and if the royalty goes up, you would then undoubtedly increase the cost of

PUBLIC

the material taken out of the quarry. That will be paid for by the ratepayers and the taxpayers of the various councils, and Tasmania.

CHAIR - Which is the same argument with energy prices. It's a question when we have real serious budgetary problems. We need to be open to having discussions, shouldn't we?

Mr ABETZ - Absolutely. I don't object to your questions at all. It's important that we tease these things out and consider them.

CHAIR - We might take a break. It's a bit after 11 a.m. We'll have a 15 minute break and come back at 11:25 a.m. I'm not sure if there's any other minerals-related questions?

Mr ABETZ - I was just going to ask, have we finished minerals?

Mr VINCENT - I was going to comment that I have been surprised by some of the information on green and brownfield sites and exploration. The industry is a lot stronger than I actually was led to believe.

CHAIR - There's a lot going on, mostly in my electorate, Kerry, that you didn't know about.

Mr ABETZ - He's only got quarries in his electorate, but I think, the bauxite, is that in his?

CHAIR - No, that's not in his.

Mr VINCENT - Just out.

The Committee suspended from 11.10 a.m. to 11.25 a.m.

CHAIR - Minister, I think you have some information to provide to the committee under the previous output.

Mr LIMKIN - For the question regarding the CMT grant, each element of it - there are four elements that I talked about earlier - had conditions precedent before grant payments were made. These were provision of a project budget and provision of a project plan, and each of those had to be approved and analysed by the department. There was then a part payment upon the completion of each project. which required certification of completion. Noting this goes back to 2017, in the time available, the team have been able to obtain the independent certification for one of those. We have confirmed the certification in that case was an independent certification.

CHAIR - For which part?

Mr LIMKIN - It's an example of - there had to be certification for each one. This one is an independent certification. We will get you the answer for which part. I will confirm to the committee that certification had to be done on each part throughout the completion of the project, either by DSG or by an independent certification depending on the work required.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - I'll still send the question through for a full answer and to demonstrate to the committee that there is a paper trail here for any recipient of a significant amount of Tasmanian people's money that is accounted for.

Mr LIMKIN - On the question of which was independently certified, I am advised it was the decline tunnel repairs, which was required to be independently certified.

CHAIR - Has been done?

Mr LIMKIN - Has been completed to the standard required of that process.

CHAIR - There were three other elements.

Mr LIMKIN - Yes, North Lyell Tunnel repair, the West Queen pipeline replacement, and flooding. This is work which is not completed yet. That one has not been independently certified or certified. The advice I have on the other ones is they have been certified as being completed and meeting the requirements of the outcomes the government wanted at the time the grant deed was entered into, which was 2017.

CHAIR - I'll think about whether we need to send anything through. We will move on.

Output Group 1 - Industry and Business Growth

1.1 Office of the Coordinator-General

CHAIR - We will start with 1.1, the Office of the Coordinator-General. Do you want to introduce him?

Mr ABETZ - Mr John Perry. I've got this one - Coordinator-General.

CHAIR - If it would be alright with you, can we get Mr Perry to clearly outline how he interacts with you as opposed to the Premier?

Mr PERRY - I meet fortnightly with both minister Abetz and also the Premier. My focus with the Premier is major investment projects. For all the rest of the portfolio work, it's working with minister Abetz.

CHAIR - I'll get straight to it. You should be used to this by now even though we haven't had each other across the table for a number of years. The performance measure: I think you get the gold star every year for meaningless information. What we get here is the amount of investment facilitated and whether or not there are reports being published. There's a significant amount of money that flows through this output group, minister. For the people of Tasmania who wonder what goes on - I'm not saying nothing goes on - but how would we know what outcomes are being achieved through this department?

Mr PERRY - The metric that we report on relates to investment facilitated each year, which is a clear focus of our office's investment attraction. That's the metric that we report on and then we enlarge upon specific projects as those projects are fulfilled.

CHAIR - In the 2023-24 year there were 330 investments facilitated. Is there any visibility of those? Can we see what they are?

PUBLIC

Mr PERRY - For 2023-24, I can take you through a range of different outcomes, if you would like? For 2023-24, the number is our target, not the investment facilitated, that will be published in the annual report -

CHAIR - Here, it says 'actual'.

Mr PERRY - It is the target number.

Mr ABETZ - Which document?

CHAIR - Budget paper 2, page 337, it does say 'actual' for 2023-24 which is a lot less than the previous year, and I'm sure there are explanations for that.

Mr PERRY - Yes.

CHAIR - Slightly more than the year before. Are you saying that's not accurate?

Mr PERRY - The numbers are accurate. The figures that we show - we have a target and then a figure that is achieved once we do the true-up at the end of the year.

CHAIR - Which you would have done by now.

Mr PERRY - No, we haven't finalised that. That will be finished for the annual report that is being -

CHAIR - But the Auditor-General would already have - for the financials, anyway. This probably doesn't account for the financials. Carry on. Sorry to interrupt you, John.

Mr PERRY - The investment facilitated figure and we've talked a little bit about those before, we recognise investment facilitated when projects meet certain criteria, so that could be a DA has been approved or it could be a financing has been received, or it could be a funding agreement has been entered into. Some of the projects we provide support on that the state government is not financially interested in, but we provide support to. We measure those and as I think has been reflected to committees before, the total number of investments facilitated from our office through to 2022-23 is \$4.4 billion.

If you break that down -

CHAIR - Can you say that again? In the last 12 months?

Mr PERRY - No.

CHAIR - Oh, sorry.

Mr PERRY - The total amount through to 2022-23 is about \$4.4 billion and if you break that down into projects that are operational, so the investment has been delivered and the project is out of the ground, going from the period of our inception through, that adds up to just over \$2 billion and then the remainder relate to some projects which are in construction, some are in pre-construction, so they've reached approvals, but they're in the process of either raising

PUBLIC

capital. There are others that are in feasibility, there are a couple that are on hold and the couple that have been withdrawn. That's the mix that makes up the full list.

Mr ABETZ - Chair, if I may quickly, I might make a brave call, and Treasury will, undoubtedly, jump on me but would it be preferable to call this actual target as is the column next to it? I think that might as well -

CHAIR - Well it is just about every other performance information throughout the budget papers, minister.

Mr ABETZ - If we have a look at Footnote 2, 'investment facilitated by the Office of the Coordinator-General', that has a '2' next to it. If you look at Footnote 2 that then provides the explanation that the Coordinator has just provided to us.

I believe that that may be more accurate. I would just bounce that ball and, undoubtedly, Treasury will jump on me and say that's incorrect but that may be something -

Ms LOVELL - It probably depends on when the annual report is finalised each year and that reconciliation is done.

CHAIR - This is the point, though: with such a late budget and I know that the financials for these departments are with the Auditor-General, to suggest they're not is fanciful and disingenuous. I'm not saying you're saying that and that's why it was frustrating not to be able to get the unaudited actuals. It's another argument to be had at a different time, but we got preliminary outcomes on the line items, but some of these things which are counting numbers, that were finalised on 30 June. Court suggests that you may have had a check with Treasury as to whether that's the case. It relates to all this performance information and lots of other performance information throughout the budget papers.

Ms LOVELL - I'm curious, using the 2022-23 figure as an example of an actual figure there of, what's that, \$1.5 billion?

Mr ABETZ - Was that directed to the Coordinator-General?

Ms LOVELL - If I may.

Mr ABETZ - Absolutely. I was talking back there and I missed the question. Continue

Ms LOVELL - If you're comfortable with that, minister. I know you mentioned before, Mr Perry, that there are metrics or milestones that projects register. One of them was, for example, that there was a DA approval. I'm assuming then there's some assumptions being made about the investment that will be delivered if that project proceeds. Some of those projects might not proceed. At what point is an actual reconciliation done? That could be some time down the track, of what the actual investment generated by particular projects is.

Mr PERRY - That's an ongoing process.

Ms LOVELL - How is that reported?

PUBLIC

Mr PERRY - We report that, like I just did, to run through what have been the outcomes that have been achieved over the length of the operation of the office. It's recognised because as you point out, projects will get a DA approval, or will have some financial support. It will be based on the estimate of the costs of the value of the project that we will use at that time. That can change when the project is finalised.

Ms LOVELL - Is that recorded as part of the annual reports? You've reported it now because we've asked you the question, but if we didn't ask you the question, how is that reported?

Mr PERRY - We capture that every year.

Ms LOVELL - In the annual report?

Mr PERRY - The annual report just measures the yearly outcomes.

Ms LOVELL - My question is, if we were to not ask you that question today sitting here at the table, is that information reported? I know you capture it, but is it reported anywhere else?

Mr PERRY - I expect that it's asked every year.

Ms LOVELL - If it's not asked every year?

Mr PERRY - This is the process through Estimates that we talk through those things.

Ms LOVELL - I understand that. My question was, is it reported in an annual report or anything like that? It's only reported through this process, is that what you're saying?

Mr PERRY - In the department's annual report, we report on a yearly basis the outcome for that year, but we don't return and do a true-up later. It's just the headline figure.

CHAIR - Is there any visibility of the investments? Is there a list of them somewhere, the investments that have been assisted through the Office of the Coordinator-General, minister? This has been the devil's own job getting this information over a number of years, I can say.

Mr PERRY - We report on them regularly. There isn't one single list. Whenever we're doing reporting to different parties and when we're doing presentations, we put those in the reports that we do, but there isn't one single list.

CHAIR - Is it possible, minister, to provide a list of the investments that make up the \$1.5 billion - million, sorry - of 2022-23?

Ms LOVELL - It is \$1.5 billion, isn't it?

Mr PERRY - Yes, billion.

CHAIR - Sorry, a billion.

PUBLIC

Mr PERRY - Yes. We can certainly provide you a list of what is made up from that list. In the past we've had a couple of projects where the figures have not been released and so they're commercially sensitive, but we can certainly provide a list that make up the total and the projects.

CHAIR - I'm interested in the list of the investments without necessarily the dollar figure. I understand there could be some commercial sensitivity around some of this. Because we are well past the end of the financial year I would ask for a list for the 2023-24 ones as well.

Mr PERRY - We are doing the verification on that at the moment as I mentioned.

CHAIR - You would have a list, because the end of the year finished on 30 June.

Mr PERRY - Yes, but we are measuring different projects and truing them up and making sure we've got the right values.

CHAIR - I don't want the values. I just want the names. I'm not asking for the dollars. I'm asking for the various ones that you've worked with.

Mr ABETZ - If I may be quite unorthodox and ask a question as well -

CHAIR - Sure. Go right ahead, minister.

Mr ABETZ - to help clarify this, because it is important accountability that there would be the capacity to provide the list subject to commercial-in-confidence. That might be something that potentially could be -

CHAIR - Well, if there was a matter with that, you can provide it confidentially to the committee.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. Let's have a look at that.

CHAIR - Members of this committee fully understand the responsibilities of receiving commercially sensitive or other confidential information.

Ms LOVELL - I don't know if this is really even impossible, or how much work it would involve but I'd also be interested in those projects where it's been identified that there's an investment opportunity and they've reached these particular milestones - which ones actually ended up being delivered and delivering that investment to Tasmania. We might not know that for 2022-23 or even 2021-22 because some of those projects can take many years. I feel like that's a pretty critical measure that should be reported on and should be some oversight of that. Otherwise, we're relying on these numbers that have been in this Budget and previous budgets that may not actually have ever eventuated. Would it be possible to get some kind of reconciliation of that?

Mr PERRY - Yes, that was the point that I made before. I'm very happy to do that. Of the figure that we were talking about as the total investment facilitator that's measured on that annual basis, for those projects that have then actually been delivered and come out of the ground, that are operational, that's about \$2 billion worth. The projects include the BioMar in Ridley that's now Skretting aquafeed mills. There's the buyout that took place of TEMCO to

PUBLIC

become Liberty Bell Bay. There's a whole range of different hotels, including the Mövenpick, Vibe, Verge, Silos, Novotel, [inaudible] Farm Stay. There's a number of other processing projects like Extractas and Tasmanian stockfeed, Forager Foods. So there's a range of all of those different things that are -

Ms LOVELL - That would be helpful if you could get - \$2 billion, over what time period was that?

Mr PERRY - That's since 2015-16.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you.

CHAIR - To clarify, obviously we're going to write this down. We'll ask for all the investments that have been facilitated, and maybe some sort of symbol that says they're completed or delivered, in progress, or maybe stalled. I don't know if you assisted the Port Latta Wind Farm proposal.

Mr ABETZ - No.

CHAIR - No, okay. They've stalled. But a fully supported project, minister, it's a bit frustrating to see it's - the DA has run out. They're having some challenges with a certain other entity.

Mr PERRY - Yes. There'll be projects that won't be on the list that we've been working with for a number of years because they haven't reached one of those milestones that I described. Whatever is shown is only a proportion of the work that we're doing. If a project stalls before it reaches one of those milestones, then it'll never be recorded as a value that we've assisted or facilitated.

CHAIR - This is the other thing. I'm sure there's other work that the office does, minister, that, for want of a better phrase, doesn't go anywhere for various reasons. How do we ever see that amount of work going on? In terms of scrutinising this Budget, money goes from the Budget to this office. You probably do quite a bit of work that doesn't actually facilitate an investment because, for whatever reason, it's not suitable, not able to be funded, can't get the capital they need, whatever it is. Can't get a successful DA perhaps, whatever. Is there any vision of that?

Mr PERRY - We also report on what our pipeline is as an investment pipeline. The investment pipeline, as you would expect, is a significantly higher number than the number that is investment-facilitated, and then the number that actually becomes operational. Which is to be expected because projects fall over for all sorts of different reasons, it can be company changes hands or changes priorities or there are other approval challenges, there are all of those things. We can certainly - to give you an idea that our investment pipeline is about \$15 billion, at the moment, that we're working on.

CHAIR - You used to provide that, I think, a performance measure.

Mr PERRY - Not in this -

CHAIR - Not in this? Maybe it was in the annual report.

PUBLIC

Ms LOVELL - Minister, I had some questions about the Cradle Mountain Master Plan. These questions were referred by minister Duigan to your hearing because they fall under the responsibility of the Coordinator-General.

There were some commitments made in 2018 about significant investments at Cradle Mountain with a view to increase visitation by 60,000 visitors a year, but this Budget shows that visitation for this financial year is pretty much the same as 2018 because we've not yet had those investments delivered, can you please provide an update on progress on the Master Plan?

Mr ABETZ - We're still committed to delivering the vision of the Master Plan. During the recent election, we reaffirmed this commitment and the Australian government's decision to reverse its own commitment to provide \$30 million towards the Cableway Project was extremely disappointing, but has not deterred us from seeking Commonwealth funding and reminding the federal government of the importance of this project. We look forward to your assistance in that regard, putting a bit of pressure on your federal colleagues. We've worked hard to deliver both the new Parks and Wildlife Service Visitor's Centre and Dove Lake Viewing Shelter, that are key elements of the Master Plan, and exceptional additions to the Cradle Mountain experience. Work continues on the remaining areas, including much needed staff accommodation, the Gateway precinct development and the key sustainable transport solution in the form of a cableway.

The government, through a request for expressions of interest process, sought developers and committed up to \$5 million to help create a high-quality alpine village for the next stage of the Gateway Village precinct. Negotiations with a proposed developer and the required related infrastructure planning and development at Cradle Valley, I'm told, are well-progressed. Additional staff accommodation is an identified priority, and the office, I'm told, of the Coordinator-General is continuing its investigation and assessment of relocatable and purpose-built housing options to address this need. Are you able to confirm that, Mr Perry?

Mr PERRY - Yes.

Mr ABETZ - Good. This brief is accurate. The other key element of the master plan is the -

CHAIR - Wouldn't have thought you would have doubted that, but anyway.

Mr ABETZ - Well, just checking, always worthwhile to double check. The government remains committed to a sustainable transport solution.

Ms LOVELL - Thank you, minister. On that question of federal funding, I understand that the federal funding wasn't able to be secured because the business case wasn't submitted in time or in accordance with the deadline that was required to secure that funding from that original commitment that was made. Can you outline what work is being done on progressing a business case to secure federal government support through another process, which is what I understand needs to happen now.

Mr ABETZ - That's a bit before my time so can I throw to the Coordinator-General.

PUBLIC

Mr PERRY - I just want to correct that assertion. The proposal for funding from the federal government was that it would be funded under the Community Development Grant Program, and the federal government changed the terms and conditions for that program, which put some requirements into the program, including that projects needed to be completed within, I think it was two and a half or three years.

The Cradle Mountain Project was not able to be delivered within those timeframes that had been included and so the Premier wrote to and engaged with the Prime Minister and various ministers in relation to this well ahead of the time that the business case needed to be submitted. We had completed a draft business case based on the funding arrangements that we had assumed. In addition to that, in the work that had been done, the costing which was a detailed costing for the Cableway was at \$190 million, which wasn't covered by all of the funding that had been committed at that time. The project no longer qualified for the federal government \$30 million funding because of those changed conditions. All that engagement and the business cases being completed well before the time that the deadline was for the CDG program, but we had received advice and had engaged with the federal government that it wouldn't qualify because of those changed conditions.

Ms LOVELL - What work is being done to pursue federal funding through other channels, given there's a region that's heavily relying on this investment?

Mr PERRY - A lot of ongoing engagement. We have explored different funding opportunities. We've engaged with a number of stakeholders that, as I mentioned before, we had shared the draft business case with our federal colleagues to then explore different opportunities. I know there's been engagement both at a political level and also at an official level with key ministers, the Prime Minister and with industry organisations as well.

Ms LOVELL - Are we any closer to securing funding to get the project up and running?

Mr ABETZ - The Premier has written to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister made a welcome announcement about a northern heart centre. Let's hope he delivers another welcome announcement before he leaves, if he hasn't already left.

Mr PERRY - We haven't got a commitment at the moment.

CHAIR - If I just go to budget line item Revenue from Appropriation page 356, there's a significant increase in this year's budget and the footnote tells us that's related to the Northern Cities major development in Launceston. Because this is one figure for the whole office, which includes funds for particular projects, can you provide a breakdown of what this figure of \$30.808 million is made up of? Staff and those sorts of things, so I would like a full breakdown.

Mr ABETZ - I have just been provided with a table.

CHAIR - Which you would like to table.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. It should explain most of that which you are asking.

CHAIR - We just need some copies of this.

Mr ABETZ - We have an extra copy.

PUBLIC

Mr PERRY - The largest figure the footnotes suggest for this coming year is funding that relates to grant funding for the Northern Transformation Project at \$22 million. There are a range of other ins and outs which include an allocations rollover and some other funding of specific projects like the enterprise hubs, for example, investment attraction projects, startup accelerator and an allocation included that was wrongly allocated to this output group which will get reallocated. That's also in the numbers there and highlighted to make up the figures that you can see in your budget papers.

CHAIR - What was wrongly allocated?

Mr PERRY - The figure \$1.247 million. It is to do with two different projects with early childhood that were put into our budget allocation for some reason. It's been picked up as incorrectly allocated and it'll be re-journaled.

Mr LIMKIN - Mr Perry's right. There are two early childhood skills-related announcements that were incorrectly coded through the process. They will be re-recorded to the schools output.

CHAIR - How many - the office, I assume that's all people. How many -

Mr PERRY - It's operation, so yes, it's salaries as well as rental cost, any subscriptions, travel, all those things.

CHAIR - How many staff work in the office?

Mr PERRY - At the moment we have 17 physical staff. Our target is 20. We're recruiting for a couple of positions at the present.

CHAIR - Is that 17 FTEs or 17 humans?

Mr PERRY - Seventeen humans and 20 humans. Ultimately it works out to be about one less in the FTEs because we have a couple of part-time staff.

CHAIR - I note here you have, very helpfully, included your efficiency dividend. One would think that because it's mostly people, is that where you're going to make the savings? The \$348,000 in 2024-25? How do you anticipate to do that?

Mr PERRY - I think it's probably about two-thirds people, and one-third other costs. We'll be working towards that. We've got about eight of our team members specifically project-focused. They're working on actual projects. It really depends on the life cycle of those projects. We'll work across our organisation to make those savings.

CHAIR - You're putting on three new staff? Are they project-based or are they going to be - because otherwise you're putting on three new staff, you have to make an efficiency dividend, which is mostly people. Take with one hand, give with the other, or give with the other and take, whichever way you want to do it. Do you see the point I'm making?

PUBLIC

Mr PERRY - One of those staff members is for the office generally. That's been included in our projections as well. We'll be making changes to both how we do things and how we allocate.

CHAIR - The funding that comes for the specific projects, how is that determined? This is something I've always wondered. We get one line item in these things and some of it's for the office itself, the rest is just lumped in that relates to projects. What's the process for having funding allocated to these projects?

Mr PERRY - They're made up of a range of different projects that have already received funding support, and the Estimates over forward Budget. There are different incentive programs that relate to specific projects that have been operating. There are some that relate to, for example, a rebate on payroll tax for a project that has been delivered and is going to be operating over the coming years or has been in operation for some time. A good example of that would be that we announced recently, earlier this year, that we'd successfully attracted a technology maritime company, Ocean Infinity, to Tasmania. The support for them is a rebate on some payroll tax that occurs on a yearly basis. The allocations include the estimate of that over the time.

CHAIR - Do you negotiate the incentive? That's not really your area. That's Treasury, in terms of giving payroll tax relief?

Mr PERRY - We negotiate and all incentive projects are taken to the TD Board as a proposition for their review and then recommendation to government. Then the minister and the Treasurer take on that recommendation and then approve or not approve.

CHAIR - So TD Board look at concessions, if you like, as well as loans.

Mr PERRY - Yes, exactly, support. There are different incentives that are agreed with on different projects and they're based around doing benchmarking, looking at who we're competing with for that particular business, and then framing up a program that is supportive of and competing with a different location. For example, if the incentive package relates to payroll, it doesn't always but if it does, then there isn't a capability to forgive payroll tax.

CHAIR - That's what I'm saying.

Mr PERRY - They need to pay the payroll tax but there's an incentive program that provides a grant that relates to a certain proportion of the payroll tax.

CHAIR - It's the whole circular economy. They pay the payroll tax and then there's a grant through the Coordinator-General's Office that funds that. Am I correct?

Mr PERRY - Yes.

CHAIR - It makes it invisible then.

Mr PERRY - It is not invisible because whenever a project is supported it's publicly announced and the details of the support are provided. It's not invisible.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - How is it reported then? It is publicly announced, so, we get a Facebook post from the Premier saying, 'We've attracted company X to the state. We're going to give them pay relief payroll tax holiday for two years'. Is that what they say?

Mr PERRY - Normally it's more complicated than that.

CHAIR - I'm sure it is -

Mr PERRY - And obviously the Tasmania Development Board also provides updates in relation to projects that they've considered and supported as well.

CHAIR - Is there a published list somewhere of the projects that have been provided with support and what that support is, in terms of whether it's payroll tax relief, a grant? The Northern Cities project is money? It's all money I think, isn't it?

Mr PERRY - Yes. Just to be clear, in our budget there were no new allocations for this year. These are projects that are long standing projects and they're just measured on forward Estimates.

CHAIR - Maybe the list you'll give us will provide some of this as to what sort of relief was given. If there's been payroll tax relief that equates to \$3 million, let's say, that shouldn't be commercially sensitive because that's the deal they've being given, if it's talked about, everyone knows what the payroll tax rate is.

Mr PERRY - Yes, you are correct in that, but the incentive package usually has a range of different triggers that it relates to make sure that there's performance from the companies.

CHAIR - There are some requirements to get that, is what you're saying. They might have to employ so many Tasmanian people or something.

Mr PERRY - Yes. It'll relate to other outputs that they need to achieve as well.

CHAIR - We needed more time with this. We have run out of time. It wasn't on the list.

Output Group 1 - Industry and Business Growth

1.2 Industry and Business Development

Mr ABETZ - Just before we do, we have further information on the EDGI grants.

Mr LIMKIN - I would like table, through you, minister, the EDGI grants key dates, the call for programs, applications openings and the final reports. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - In terms of 1.2, just quickly because we've got inland fisheries. I think he can go. Did you need anyone else at the table minister?

Mr ABETZ - I always need help at the table, so the more the merrier.

CHAIR - Members on this side of the table have not taken the time to really look at this other than a read through of the budget papers when we get them preparing for scrutiny.

Mr ABETZ - Which page again?

PUBLIC

CHAIR - This is on page 336. The description of the responsibilities within industry and business development. Can you tell me what you've been doing in this space?

Mr ABETZ - Where do I start?

CHAIR - While you're thinking about that, I'll also ask if maybe you or someone who's supporting you at the table can provide a breakdown of the budget allocation of \$126.446 million along the lines that has been provided to the Office of the Coordinator-General. Do you happen to have that?

Mr LIMKIN - I came prepared today. Just before I table it, I just thought I'd talk it through. As I indicated earlier on, this one was under the old system and we started a conversation with Treasury about restructuring. We were unable to do that in this period of time for the Budget, but it is something that we will continue to do afterwards.

How we've broken this down is base funding, key initiatives that are included in this output, the re-profiling, similar to what we provided the committee yesterday for those ones that needed it to happen, and then we have actually provided the breakdown by portfolio of other projects that are in here. For example, Small Business and Consumer Affairs is in this massive output that we haven't been able to break down yet. We have indicated it's \$3 million, \$4 million, \$1.5 million et cetera. To help the committee understand, we've broken it down specifically to the minister's portfolio and then indicated the other ones that we will look at trying to re-allocate in the future.

CHAIR - Next year, would it be your expectation, minister, that those that are your - assuming you stay in the same portfolio -

Mr ABETZ - That's a big assumption.

CHAIR - It is a big assumption, but let's just make that assumption for the time being -

Ms LOVELL - You'd hope, that is a statement, it's not that big of an assumption to make, it's only six months away.

CHAIR - We should put that on the front page of the *Mercury*, a broad assumption.

That the matters that are currently identified as your responsibility will be under a line item that you can be scrutinized fully in the Budget.

Mr ABETZ - Ultimately, that's going to be guided by Treasury, I would imagine. From a basis of simplicity and being able to understand the Budget, I can understand the argument, but at the end of the day, that will be a matter for my colleague, the Treasurer.

CHAIR - Maybe you should have a stern word with him about making it clear and transparent.

Mr ABETZ - I'll remind him that he'll have you to deal with in the next round of Estimates.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - If he's still Treasurer by then.

Mr ABETZ - And if you're still Chair -

CHAIR - They won't be getting rid of me in a hurry. I'll still be on the committee even if I'm not Chair.

Mr ABETZ - We all live in this uncertain world of politics, that's the only thing I was trying to say.

CHAIR - Yeah.

Mr LIMKIN - Minister, can I just clarify something for the committee from 1.1. Mr Perry talked about the TDR Board. The TDR Board does provide in an annual report a list of grants and subsidies that it does provide and that is on the web. In addition, it does provide quarterly updates on programs that it's outlined and the grants that it's actually processed in.

CHAIR - Some of those wouldn't go through the Coordinator-General's Office, would they?

Mr LIMKIN - If the grants go through the TDR or if the subsidies go through the TDR, Mr Perry talked about how he brings things to the TDR for consideration and then recommendations up. If they are funded through the TDR, they also show through the TDR annual report or their regular statements.

CHAIR - They would be there but are there other things that aren't referred by the Coordinator-General?

Mr LIMKIN - There are things in there that aren't. It includes both the Coordinator-General and other matters in there as well.

CHAIR - But are the ones that come through the Coordinator-General's Office identified separately or they're all in one bucket?

Mr LIMKIN - They're all listed in one line item. We can look at how we identify them in the future.

CHAIR - Despite my very broad question, we might leave it that because we do want to hear from Inland Fisheries before we finish up.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, of course.

CHAIR - Thank you for your information on that. We tried to squeeze it in because we didn't actually have time allocated for it. Thank you.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, thank you.

The Committee suspended from 12.15 p.m. to 12.17 p.m.

Inland Fisheries Service

CHAIR - Would you like to introduce your new person at the table?

Dr WILKINSON - Dr Ryan Wilkinson, Acting Director Inland Fisheries.

Ms LOVELL - Minister, how many full-time fisheries officers do you have with Inland Fisheries at the moment and how has that changed over the last couple of years?

Dr WILKINSON - Through the minister, at the moment we have 22.2 FTE staff within Inland Fisheries. To clarify, when you're talking about fisheries officers, I assume you mean compliance? We have two full-time compliance officers and a total of seven who do compliance on a part-time basis. In total we have nine authorised officers who are able to do compliance related activities in the fishery.

Ms LOVELL - The seven part-time, have you an FTE equivalent?

Dr WILKINSON - I should clarify that they are full-time staff, but they have a broad role. They do a number of different activities and they do compliance as part of their role.

Ms LOVELL - I am trying to get a better picture. You may have seven full-time staff, but they might spend two hours a month on compliance or it might be half their time is spent on compliance. Do you have a breakdown to that level?

Dr WILKINSON - I don't have a breakdown at that level. What I can say is those staff tend to do compliance. They're often out in the field interacting with anglers, doing work in the field. If they have an opportunity to do some client compliance work, they do it at that time. We also have key weekends throughout the year where they're involved. Opening weekend is a good example of that, where they would spend the entire opening weekend doing compliance activity. I don't have a breakdown per staff member on how much time they actually spend. A lot of it is opportunistic when they're out and about doing their other work.

Ms LOVELL - Is it recorded or tracked anywhere, the level of compliance activity that's being undertaken and how that compares with previous years?

Dr WILKINSON - In our compliance statistics for last financial year, our officers undertook 3866 recreational angling checks, 189 recreational whitebait licence checks and 596 marine safety inspections. They're also authorised under the *Marine Safety Authority Act*. In the previous financial year, recreational angling licence checks were 3497, so there was an increase of 369 from that year. Whitebait checks were 119, so that was an increase of 70 from that year to last. Vessel inspections were 425 versus 596, so that was an increase of 171. I've only got the breakdown for the last two financial years.

Ms LOVELL - They have all increased.

Dr WILKINSON -Yes.

Ms LOVELL - I had a question about the funding that's provided to Anglers Alliance Tasmania, particularly around the management of webcams. Can you break that down? It looks as though that election commitment there is for a couple of different things, junior fishing

PUBLIC

education programs and the management of webcams. Have you got a breakdown of that funding?

Mr ABETZ - If I understand it, in the past you had to pay a subscription to access the webcam and that was seen as a disincentive to a lot of people to access it. It was determined we would make that free of charge. I'm assuming the uptake of accessing it has increased accordingly.

Ms LOVELL - What was the amount of funding that went towards that?

Dr WILKINSON - I don't have the specifics. The way that deed operates is that Anglers Alliance Tasmania will receive an annual allocation. As part of that they need to submit a budget and a project plan for the year. There is a component of that total which will be allocated to webcams and there's also a maintenance component. If things break down, they'll fix those webcams. I don't have the breakdown with me. I would say that the webcam component is, in terms of that funding, a small part of the entire picture. There's a whole lot of other work that AAT will do in collaboration with the Inland Fisheries Service around promoting the fishery, making improvements or making recommendations around improvements to the fishery, but I don't have that breakdown specifically. The project outcomes will change from year-to-year, so we'll track that and we have a quarterly schedule in terms of a governance committee that will track progress and decide on priorities for the out years.

Mr ABETZ - They are a helpful stakeholder group to inform that which the sector needs.

CHAIR - Can I just ask, with regard to the commercial fishery activities that, under the bailiwick, if you like, of inland fisheries, what are they? Which ones are they?

Dr WILKINSON - Through you, minister. There's a couple of main components to that. There's the regulation of fish-farm licencing, we have a role to play in terms of the freshwater fish farms and the hatcheries -

CHAIR - The hatcheries and that sort of thing.

Dr WILKINSON - that exist. As the minister mentioned, the commercial eel fishery is a big one and there are a few other bits and pieces, one of them being other freshwater farms that produce ornamental fish as well, so we regulate that activity. But they're probably the main ones.

CHAIR - It doesn't seem to be necessarily a huge part, but how big a part of your responsibility is that?

Dr WILKINSON - Through you, minister. It's reasonable - of the 22.2 FTE, we've recently employed a new commercial compliance officer to focus on that area. I apologise, I should correct my earlier statement to you, the new staff member gives us another compliance position, so I failed to mention that at the time. We have one FTE dedicated to compliance around those elements that I just mentioned. We also have a licencing officer who coordinates a lot of the permits and licencing around some of that commercial activity as well, and there's various other staff that do get involved from time-to-time. It's probably around 1.7-1.8 FTE, I guess, in total.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Sarah, did you ask about the number of fishing licences and -

Ms LOVELL - I didn't, no.

CHAIR - How many fishing licences are there at the minute, not that all of them get utilised. Recreational, I'm talking about.

Dr WILKINSON - Through you, minister, last financial year we issued 26,101 angling licences.

CHAIR - I was the one. I have got one but it might not have been me.

Ms LOVELL - Was yours the utilised one?

Mr VINCENT - You are the one.

CHAIR - I am the one, yeah.

Mr ABETZ - Chair, you do your fishing here at these committees.

CHAIR - I don't need a licence for that, though.

Mr ABETZ - No, that you don't.

Dr WILKINSON - Yeah, 26,101 from last financial year, the financial year before that, I think we were 26,165 -

CHAIR - Pretty consistent.

Dr WILKINSON - Pretty consistent, the last two years. We track licence sales on a day-to-day basis and we have a system that allows us to see licenced sales in relation to the same time last year. A lot of people obviously buy their licences as soon as they're available for the new season, but a lot just buy them through the year. I think, at the moment, we're sitting at about 13,500, and that sort of just grows throughout the season. We are tracking behind for the same time last year, which is something I'm monitoring on a fairly regular basis.

CHAIR - Do you think that's related, you might not know, but related to cost-of-living pressures. People think, look, I'm not gonna use it, but you catch yourself a feed, potentially. Do you think that's playing into it or do you have any vision of that?

Dr WILKINSON - There's probably a range of factors that are influencing the decision for people to buy a licence and cost of living is one of those. We would make the argument that there is a cost to the licence, obviously, but there is a lot of value that you can derive from an inland fishing licence, and relative to other things in life, we think it presents really good value but I do understand that the pressures that people are under in terms of cost of living. What I would say though is that the revenue that we generate from those licence sales goes directly back into to managing the fisheries.

CHAIR - Which if it drops away significantly, it could be a bit of an issue.

PUBLIC

Dr WILKINSON - It's a budget risk for us.

Mr VINCENT - I'll state the source of my next question straight up - Charles Wooley, fly fisher extraordinaire. There are two parts. The fly-fishing industry used to be huge, up around Bronte and everything like that, back in 1975, I know Malcolm Fraser used to come across a lot with his entourage to fly fish. We used to have a lot of world-class fishers come over for that time. It doesn't seem to be there any more. The second part of that question is: are we trying to attract more people into inland fishing? From my lay point of view, and then listening to Charles talk about his passion, we just don't seem to see the numbers any more.

CHAIR - How do we take the youngsters out? That's the question, is it?

Mr VINCENT - It's a whole new industry, I suppose, yes.

Mr ABETZ - Starting with yourself, with the youngsters, the junior anglers don't pay a fee. There are half price licences for 18 to 21-year-olds. It's a bit like the recreational fishing that I was talking about earlier today. Having been at the New Norfolk Anglers annual prizegiving dinner, it was good to see the family bonding and relationships and how people are spending time out and about in the great outdoors.

We've allocated \$75,000 to the waiver of junior inland angling fees for a further three years. Then, just to encourage people, we have the tagged trout promotions, et cetera. The potential for overseas visitors - overseas being both from the mainland and other countries - is quite substantial. That is something I'd like to see develop. That relates back to the actual facilities that are provided. Possibly, Dr Wilkinson can talk about the -

CHAIR - We did have one international competition a couple of years ago.

Dr WILKINSON - It was 2019.

Mr VINCENT - The water levels in a couple of the dams seemed to be an issue with the fly fishermen, from what I can gather from my source. It is fresh dollars coming into the state. It's a commercial thing that I'm probably targeting here.

Mr ABETZ - We've had some of the facilities around some of the lakes improved through our programs.

Dr WILKINSON - The previous election commitment of \$1 million over the four years for anglers' access has been for a range of projects that are rolled out to help improve the access and experience of people when they come to Tasmania, or for the local anglers.

Perhaps the heart of what you're saying is perhaps there's a view that some of the fisheries are not performing as they have been. We work really closely with water managers, trying to understand and work with them around some of the water management or water level issues, and the fluctuations that occur there.

What I would say is that there are no doubt some key waters that aren't what they used to be. If I reflect on Arthurs Lake and Woods Lake, there are some challenges there. Arthurs, in particular, was probably the jewel in the crown for a number of years. It did attract a lot of anglers and supported a lot of guiding operations just on one body of water. I would say that at

PUBLIC

the moment there are still some other waters that are performing really well. Some are up, some are down and the challenge is to work to hopefully improve some of the ones that we can get some improvement out of over the coming years.

Mr VINCENT - You mightn't be able to answer this, but you've seen the number of shacks that way. I know there are a few new ones at Arthurs. Is there any growth of people going to that area for fishing reasons that you've noticed?

Dr WILKINSON - One of the discussions I've been having a lot with both Anglers Alliance Tasmania and the Trout Guides and Lodges Association is getting the full picture of the economic activity that's generated from the inland fishery. As you've alluded to there, the shack ownership and the community in the Central Highlands is a key part of that. Over the next little while we hope to do a bit more work around that to try and get a bit more information. There's no doubt that for a lot of those shack owners, the main reason they have their shacks up there is for the trout fishery.

There was a study by UTAS that was done in 2023 that showed the, the, the value of the fishery was around \$82 million, but it didn't really pick up on those other elements. We're hoping to expand on that work and get a full picture of the economic value.

CHAIR - We might leave it at that, being conscious of the time. Thank you for your time with Inland Fisheries and thank you for hanging around.

The committee suspended from 12.32 p.m. to 1.15 p.m.

Output Group 2 - Infrastructure and Transport Services

2.2 Road User Services

CHAIR - Thank you, minister, for coming back. It's always a good sign.

Mr ABETZ - I had no choice, did I?

CHAIR - Not really, no. We could have spoken to your people, though. We're now into Transport, so if you'd like to introduce the people at the table and then I assume you'd like to make some opening comments with regard to this area?

Mr ABETZ - I would.

Ms McINTYRE - Denise McIntyre, I'm deputy secretary for Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning.

Ms HEYDON - Cynthia Heydon, deputy secretary for Transport.

Mr CRANE - Martin Crane, general manager, Road User Services in the Transport group.

Mr ABETZ - Our transport sector continues connecting Tasmanians with the people and the places most important to them. That's why we are delivering a connected public transport network across the state and bringing improvements that will help passengers use the network easily and seamlessly.

PUBLIC

In getting on with the job of addressing cost-of-living pressures, and as part of our 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future, we've halved all public transport fees through to 30 June 2025. This will also attract new public transport users and help drive down congestion on our roads.

Speaking of reducing road congestion, I'm pleased to share that as of 30 June 2024, approximately 385,000 passenger movements have been recorded on the Derwent River ferry service since its launch. Popular from the outset, it serves as an alternative route for pedestrians and cyclists, and provides fast access to the city for eastern shore commuters. We're excited to expand this service along the river with a \$20 million infrastructure commitment. We will build three new terminals over the next four years, commencing at Lindisfarne, Wilkinsons Point, and Sandy Bay.

As part of our broader transport improvements, I was pleased to announce on Monday that we have locked in market-leading provider Cubic to deliver Tasmania's public transport smart ticketing program. This is a significant milestone in our program to deliver smarter and more convenient public transport for all Tasmanians and visitors to Tasmania.

In the meantime, real-time monitoring will be rolled out from December this year. This will enable passengers to track their bus arrival times, resulting in less time waiting at the bus stop and more time at your destination or in the comfort of your own home.

We know that a reliable passenger transport system is critical for the Tasmanians who rely on it to get to school, work and out in their community. That's why we're continuing to work with Metro to improve operational outcomes, including \$14.1 million over four years in the Budget to support Metro driver recruitment and retention. We know that when we combine the reliability of services with our improved public transport offerings, Tasmanians will vote with their feet. Approximately 50 per cent of Huntingfield's car parks are used each weekday, and around 80 per cent of spaces are regularly used at Firthside, easing Southern Outlet congestion. This year's Budget includes funding for new park-and-ride facilities in both the north and the south of the state, designed to deliver congestion relief and encourage public transport uptake. We look forward to further improving Tasmania's transport network and making public transport an attractive option for all Tasmanians.

CHAIR - I'm on 2.2, Road User Services. I note in the budget allocation, there's a larger amount in this forward budget. The footnote tells me, at the risk of gagging as I say it, it includes the Strong Plan for safer roads.

Mr ABETZ - Can you say 2030 Strong Plan with more emotion?

CHAIR - It hasn't got that in there, the 2030 is not there.

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, what page are you on?

CHAIR - The actual Budget line item is on page 357. In terms of that additional funding, what's the actual allocation of the additional funding toward that plan, the program? I'd also like some detail about how it's likely to be expended.

Mr ABETZ - Extra funding under Road Users?

PUBLIC

CHAIR - There's two components to it. It's the Safer Roads and the Tasmanian Transport Association. I'm talking about the smaller amount. The Safer Roads Program would have a larger amount, so I'm just interested how much that is and for what purpose?

Mr ABETZ - The Safer Roads Program is designed to -

CHAIR - It will deliver nation-leading comprehensive driver education program, for one thing, to every school. If that's the sole purpose. I'm not sure. I'm just trying to understand how much it is and what purpose.

Mr ABETZ - Mr Crane will be able to break that up for us.

Mr CRANE - In this year's Budget, the government, through the election commitment, made a commitment for next year of \$1.6 million for the partnership with RACT and working with the Road Safety Advisory Council on creating a package for young drivers through the schools. There's also funding in that and it's over five years, so it's \$1.6 million over five years. We started working with the RACT on developing a program that would support young people getting safer into driver licensing. It also includes some money to support people with disadvantages to access driver licensing services in that program.

CHAIR - \$1.6 million over five years. Is that evenly spread?

Mr CRANE - According to my information, it is. There's also funding in the allocation, as you mentioned, for the Tasmanian Transport Association (TTA). That's to support a creative initiative we've got with the TTA around improving access to heavy-vehicle driver training and some other about emissions. I think there's a mental health program for heavy-vehicle drivers that will be worked through with the TTA. It'll be a grant for those. We've started training with some operators, staff members, so that we will increase the number of people available to train people in heavy vehicles. It will be industry-based and it should help us make sure there's access to heavy vehicle training services as we require.

The other element in the Budget for this year under Road User Services is a \$1.2 million allocation for some upgrades of some component parts of the motor registry system. The motor registry system came into place in 2008. I was here when that happened.

CHAIR - You're going to retire soon, probably, like everyone else seems to be.

Mr CRANE - You never know. A number of the components of that system, as you could appreciate, are out of date and we're trying to make sure the system is available and maintained. As you would have seen in the KPIs, we've got a pretty good result in terms of access to that system. It's pleasing that we've been able to secure, through the government, some money to upgrade some parts of the system to make them more contemporary. That will also assist us as we work with DPAC on providing more services through the Service Tasmania portal.

CHAIR - Okay, so the \$1.6 million over five years is not a lot of money.

Mr ABETZ - It's \$8 million over five years, I think it's \$1.6 million each year over five years.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - For the RACT program?

Mr ABETZ - Yeah.

CHAIR - Oh, sorry, I misunderstood. Thank you for that clarification. Is this in addition to the Learner Driver Mentor Program's funding? That's not part of that?

Mr CRANE - No, the driver mentor program is funded out of the road safety levy and a number of other initiatives. What we will look to do is not duplicate existing services. That's one of the reasons we'll work with RACT. There's a number of aspects and already programs in place to support people getting into licensing, such as the Learner Licence Assistance Program for those people who have English as a second language or have literacy challenges. We support them getting their Ls. The Learner Driver Mentor Program supports them getting up their hours, so we will want to -

CHAIR - I was on the steering committee for the very first one in the state in Burnie.

Mr CRANE - The allocation from the election commitment includes some funding for supporting those people who may have challenges accessing a vehicle and a supervisor, like the Learner Driver Mentor Program. That's very welcome. We'll work through RSAC and RACT to come up with a program that is a great opportunity to support young Tasmanians get into driver licensing.

CHAIR - This was raised with me by the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) which has a great interest in in this area. TasCOSS said:

Prior to the state election, DMT (Driver Mentor Training) has been funded only to 31 December this year. There does not appear to be any government commitment to ensure that people can access driver mentoring service or private driving schools.

Is this replacing that or is this still being funded out of the road safety levy? And where would that appear in the Budget?

Mr CRANE - Due to the timing of the election, we ran out of time to do our normal grants program for the LDMP, so what we've done is provided six months' funding. I'm about to provide the minister with some further advice. The funding is still available as part of the Road Safety Action Plan for the LDMP.

CHAIR - They can be assured of funding until the next budget?

Mr CRANE - Yes. Well, subject to the minister's approval.

CHAIR - What do you think, minister? Do you think they should be funded?

Mr ABETZ - Is there a review being undertaken, given the retirement of one of the individuals who, if I can use the term, was the driver of the program?

PUBLIC

Mr CRANE - Yes, minister, we are looking at a review and some opportunities to support the very important role that volunteers play in the program. That's one of our challenges with that program. It is a program that a lot of people want to access, so we're trying to maximise how we can use those resources to get through that. We will provide the minister some advice on that.

But in terms of allocation, the six months was really a consequence of the election and getting approvals through. We will be coming back to the minister seeking his consideration of the funding for the rest of this financial year. The money hasn't been removed from the levy for that program.

CHAIR - Will DMT be engaged in those discussions?

Mr CRANE - We regularly meet with DMT on the performance of the program. As the minister alluded to, Gary, who's been a driving force in the DMT is transitioning to retirement. We'll look at how DMT works, we'll look at who's eligible for the program so we can get as much value for that money as we can, and what other supports we can put place to fund and continue to support people who have challenges accessing driver licensing.

Mr ABETZ - With that program, we also have a relationship with the Migrant Resource Centre for new arrivals in Tasmania to assist them gaining drivers licences.

CHAIR - Regarding one of the performance indicators, vehicles found to be unregistered of those checked, I assume it's the actual for last year, 2023-24? That is 0.46. We do have a target of 0.65. It would have been good to have a target lower than that. The footnote says:

This data is based on five automatic number plate recognition cameras installed on Transport Safety vehicles with a target of collecting 50,000 images per month. The 2023-24 actual was 0.46. However, in the last quarter of the financial year there was a notable increase, an upward trend in unregistered detections.

It was tracking well, obviously. We know that the cost of living is becoming a major issue. When these are detected, there's a process that's undertaken there, but is there any indication of why this might be happening?

Mr ABETZ - I assume the department doesn't collect data on that, or do you get feedback from staff or police?

CHAIR - It would go to the police, I imagine.

Mr CRANE - We don't have specific reasons for why people aren't paying. What we are pleased with is the result because, as you pointed out, Chair, we collected more than 50,000 a month because it's an accident. It's kind of like something we do when we're out on the network, so we get two for one, kind of thing. Anecdotally, we assume it was a response to cost-of-living pressures. But I would point out that I've just looked at some of the numbers and the previous initiative we did when the government introduced quarterly payments, that's been a very popular payment method and takes a little bit of bill smoothing, if you like. In fact, 43 per cent of all registrations are now done through quarterlies, with 38 per cent on the 12-month and a few on the six-month. As you'd recall, as part of that initiative, it's basically

PUBLIC

the same cost now to do quarterly or 12 months. That's working well. We also provide, I think, about 50 per cent of people that have registered vehicles have got an SMS reminder service. We all get busy, as I know. I've put the registration renewal on the fridge and I've -

CHAIR - We don't have the stickers on the car any more to remind us.

Mr CRANE - I've answered a few questions in my time over that. With those supports, we're also working closely with Service Tasmania on the Service Tasmania portal, which allows you to view your registrations. We're looking to be able to introduce a renewal notice process there, a safe renewal process where you can go into the portal and see your renewal notice, which will assist hopefully in that. That's what we've observed. I think more recently, it's still pretty low and, as you point out, it's a lot lower than the KPI. We'll look at the KPIs next time.

CHAIR - It would be interesting to see whether that trend continues in the first quarter of this year. We're only early into that, but have you got any indication of where that's at? Is it still tracking higher than you'd expect?

Mr CRANE - I'd have to check.

CHAIR - It's not that long to the next budget.

Mr ABETZ - If I may quickly add to that answer, if a car remains unregistered for more than three months, then it has to go over the pits again and that has a separate cost associated to it. I have recommended to the department and I understand that is now going to be happening or has happened.

Mr CRANE - The change in the notification?

Mr ABETZ - Yeah, the change in the notification. We'll have that if you delay for more than three months, then there'll be this extra cost to get yourself re-registered and -

CHAIR - Getting a vehicle check?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. Hopefully, that will remind and incentivise motorists that -

CHAIR - Or disincentivise them if they can't afford that either and so just continue on.

Mr ABETZ - That might be a real problem but, hopefully, it will incentivise them to get the registration done before that three-month lapse. I understand that in the registrations, Mr Crane, and correct me if I'm wrong, there's sort of a spike a day or two after the registration expires, where people are paying it at the very last minute or a little bit past the last minute.

Mr CRANE - That's correct. We don't get a lot of pre-payment. We get a lot on the day and just after the day. As the minister pointed out regarding the 90 days, we also see a spike at day 88 and 87, where people realise that they've got that other expense involved in the assessment. We also provide SMS services for those who have signed up, which is a useful reminder. We get a lot of people being able to just pay. You can do that nearly any time then. We'll be encouraging people to do that. It's a growing and popular service for people because everyone gets busy.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - With the number of serious casualties from road crashes, which includes fatalities, we did have a couple of horror years. The numbers are down a little bit in the actuals for 2023-24. In trend terms, what's happening here? We have had some pretty unfortunate serious crashes. While you're looking for that, do we have a breakdown of motorcycles as opposed to motor vehicle and heavy vehicle drivers? Pedestrians, too, is the other category.

Mr ABETZ - I think Mr Crane has those numbers. Whilst he's looking for it, I don't want to in any way take away from the Towards Zero campaign. That has to be our effort, our focus, to try to get the road toll down to zero. The numbers are expressed in raw numbers. Each fatality or injury -

CHAIR - Is a person and a family.

Mr ABETZ - Exactly, is a person, is a family. There are now more people on the roads and driving more. You can, should you wish to, try to say that the percentages mightn't be as bad as they have been in the past because of airbags, seatbelts, et cetera. With these statistics, I happen to be of the view that the raw number is the raw number that we should deal with, but others have said to me, put it into the context of -

CHAIR - Per population.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, more population, et cetera. Those tasked with trying to improve road safety in our state, that should be acknowledged from their perspective in the percentage terms. I don't want to in any way say that - each number is, as you said, a person, a family and a community.

Vehicles found to be unregistered of those checked in July 2024 was 0.61, and in August it was 0.54.

Ms HEYDON - The trend up is still continuing.

Mr ABETZ - From July to August it was lower, but the actual trend is still up.

Ms HEYDON - We also have the information on all group use of fatalities. As at 19 September, all road user fatalities in 2024 was 21. This is down 8.7 per cent on 2023 at the same time last year, and down 25 per cent on the five-year average from 2019-23, which was 28 per cent. We're getting the motorcycle breakdown for you.

CHAIR - It is trending down, even though there are some years more tragic than others.

Minister, I note your point about looking at a statistic and a performance indicator that reflects on percentage of road users. Pretty much everyone is a road user in this state, whether you're a baby or a 90-year-old who may no longer have your driver's licence. You can also be killed by a car.

Mr ABETZ - If you're walking across the road, on a footpath.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - That's right. Would it not make sense to also look at that figure to guide the investment in road safety?

Mr ABETZ - For pedestrians?

CHAIR - No, per population. The serious casualties from road crashes by population as well as the raw numbers.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. Doing it by percentage it might be seen as diluting the actual issue, but I thought I would mention it.

CHAIR - I'm asking whether it's worth considering reporting both, particularly if you're going to make comparisons. We're not comparing people's lives, we are comparing some of the interventions that a state may take to try and reduce this road toll. We saw the intervention, the point where seatbelts came in, a massive drop away. There are points in time where you've seen this. We are now at a point where there are no more silver bullets, if you like, that will result in a sudden drop. It's more a gradual progression. To get a really good vision of what intervention may be having the most impact, you need to have a range of data to inform that. Not removing the raw numbers because they're actual people. Having that information as well, if you're going to do comparisons.

Mr ABETZ - That is why I mentioned it, especially out of consideration for those that are tasked with providing us with road safety initiatives, et cetera, to try to reduce the road toll. They are doing a good job. They're always interested in how they can improve and further reduce the road toll. In fairness to them, when you do it in a percentage term of the number of people on our roads, that should be recognised. That percentage figure would be a good one to be included for the future.

Ms HEYDON - I can provide the motorcycle data. For 2024, as of now, there's been two motorcycles fatalities. This is up 100 per cent on 2023, which was one, but it is down 56 per cent on the five-year average, which from 2019-23 is 4.6.

CHAIR - Do we have the full breakdown for the different categories?

Ms HEYDON - We can get that for you.

CHAIR - Can you get it during the day or do we need to?

Ms HEYDON - We'll try and get back in session.

Mr VINCENT - I was talking about motorcycles with some of the young people down home. I understand the AGL, the training provider, is no longer in the state or is moving out of the state. Are there any plans for the replacement of that service?

Mr ABETZ - We are committed to improving the safety of motorcyclists through best practise training and assessments services. The department has successfully transitioned the new provider, Stay Upright Pty Ltd, a good name, into motorcycle training and assessment of three regions across the state. This company has extensive experience in providing motorcycle training across Australia.

PUBLIC

They are currently operating out of Launceston, Hobart, and the new north-west site at Latrobe Speedway. The motorcyclists are overrepresented in our statistics, mainly because they don't have much around them should there be an accident. I understand motorcyclists account for 29 per cent of all serious casualties, and they only make up 3 per cent of the motor vehicle fleet. AGL training the exclusive provider of motorcycle training and assessment since 2017 ceased operation on 30 June 2024. State Growth has appointed Stay Upright, and that's effective from 1 July 2024, from this year. I hope they seamlessly took over from the previous provider.

Mr VINCENT - I think Stay Upright used to have it some years back.

Mr CRANE - That is correct.

Mr VINCENT - That is who I did more training through.

Mr CRANE - They are a well-recognised training provider. What we hope is, and through discussions with them, that they'll be able to provide some other training services that were more challenging to deliver before. There's a growth in things such as trikes and other things where you need to do different training. They also offer, for those that are able and interested, one-on-one training sessions to support people getting into licensing. We're pleased that we have them in the state and, as you say, they were here before.

CHAIR - We'll move to 2.3, passenger transport.

Ms THOMAS - Minister, I have some questions about the proposed passenger transport service along the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor. Particularly, I have some questions about the \$106.5 million over four years for the Urban Congestion Fund that's listed on pages 141 and 142 of budget paper 1. The notes say that this includes a state and Australian Government contribution of \$52 million for Hobart public transport infrastructure planning.

Is this \$52 million, as part of that \$106.5 million for Hobart infrastructure planning, referring to funding for the activation of the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor, which all three levels of government committed to delivering between 2024 and 2029 in signing the Hobart City Deal? I understand that amount of \$52 million has long been allocated to the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor project. I want to get clarity that that funding is still specifically for that project.

Mr ABETZ - To your specific question, that has now been broadened out to the Rapid Bus proposal as well, I'm advised.

Ms THOMAS - It's referred to as Hobart infrastructure planning rather than Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor. That Hobart infrastructure planning refers to a Rapid Bus Network. Is that including along the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. Planning for the corridor is being progressed as part of the proposed Greater Hobart Rapid Bus Network, for which a strategic business case is being developed to examine the benefits, costs and risks. Rapid buses have the potential to deliver direct, frequent and high-quality public transport across greater Hobart and stimulate urban renewal. That is why that has been incorporated.

PUBLIC

Ms THOMAS - Can the people of the northern suburbs be assured that the \$38.5 million that was contributed by the Australian Government for the purpose of the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor will be used for a passenger transport solution along this corridor and not repurposed to a Rapid Bus Transit Network more broadly across greater Hobart?

Mr ABETZ - We're doing a study of the situation at the moment. Officials might be able to assist me in more detail, but at the end of the day, what we want to see is passenger movements, ease of transport and speed of transport. That's why this is all being put together. Deputy?

Ms HEYDON - We are undertaking a strategic business case which looks at Rapid Bus and also the broader use of that transit corridor. That has included looking at previous studies of other modes and including traditional route buses as well, but the intention is that it is actually used for public transport.

Ms THOMAS - And it will include the section of the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor?

Ms HEYDON - That's included in the study and the work that we're looking at.

Ms THOMAS - From Hobart to Glenorchy is included in the study, but certainly the people of the northern suburbs and perhaps some in greater Hobart more broadly feel like the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor is the most over-studied piece of infrastructure or project in the history of transport projects. There is a fear that we see this money spent on more plans and more studies, and we don't actually see a solution.

I'm seeking from you, minister, an assurance that this \$52 million that's been promised by the state and federal governments combined - we know it's not going to be enough to deliver a transport solution along that corridor - won't be frittered away on endless plans and studies to add to the long list of studies of the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor. We want to know that it will be spent on contributing towards delivering a solution when it comes to services on the ground.

Mr ABETZ - That's what the study's trying to achieve, and that is find a solution that will be of benefit to especially the people in your electorate of Elwick.

Ms HEYDON - That is why we are actively looking at what we can do around public transport improvement, but we're also going to be undertaking a greater Hobart bus network review, which is looking at the opportunities to improve the whole network.

We're looking at it as PT system as part of an active transport system as well. You've seen some of the things around what rapid bus does or could do, but underlying all of this is that the existing bus network and those bus services are foundational. That's why that bus network review will involve engagement with the community and engagement with stakeholders to see what we can be doing to improve that.

Ms THOMAS - Is that bus network review coming out of that \$52 million?

Ms HEYDON - No, that's coming out of our operational budget.

Ms THOMAS - That \$52 million is for the delivery of a solution?

PUBLIC

Ms McINTYRE - Yes, it will be. The northern suburbs transit corridor is a key component of the rapid bus network study that is being undertaken, and is obviously a priority project. The Commonwealth have changed their funding requirements, so we need to go through a strategic business case approval process and we need to go through several levels before we are able to obtain funding for actually delivering. This is part of that process.

Ms THOMAS - My understanding is that the strategic business case is underway. Do you know when it will be completed?

Ms HEYDON - We are due to deliver that to government in early 2025.

Ms THOMAS - The \$38.5 million that the Australian Government has committed to the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor will be used for the purpose of a passenger transport solution? We can be assured it won't be repurposed and we're not at risk of losing that funding that the Australian Government has promised some time ago?

Ms McINTYRE - That is correct.

Ms THOMAS - Included in this Urban Congestion Fund is \$22 million for an intelligent transport solution. Can you provide an update on that project, minister?

Mr ABETZ - The greater Hobart overhead traveller information system, lane utilisation management system, Hobart public transport infrastructure planning, transport decarbonisation and Derwent Ferry infrastructure is all part of the Urban Congestion Fund. The government through that is continuing to deliver those initiatives that I've just mentioned, together with the Greater Hobart Rapid Bus Network planning, which we've just discussed. That includes Macquarie Point Northern Access and the greater Hobart Cycling Plan.

Ms THOMAS - My question was about the \$22 million for the intelligent transport solution. What is this project? Can you please provide an update on what this project is and where it's at?

Mr ABETZ - I am told that the Overhead On-Road Traveller Information System is the intelligent transport system to which you're referred. I'm still getting my head around all these programs and projects. This project will provide overhead variable message signs to advise road users in real time on changing traffic conditions such as weather, crashes or other unplanned incidents across greater Hobart.

Two signs have already been installed near the Hobart Airport and were delivered as part of the Hobart Airport Interchange Project. There are eleven additional variable message signs being installed on key arterial routes around greater Hobart, including three on the Tasman Highway to Cambridge; three on the Brooker Highway; two on the Huon Highway for you, Mr Harriss; one on the Southern Outlet, possibly for me; and one on South Arm Highway for you, member for Rumney.

Ms LOVELL - Correct.

PUBLIC

Ms THOMAS - That amount - \$22 million - is a significant amount of money to spend on signs. How is that determined to be a priority when there are other road safety or other projects that funding could be allocated towards?

Ms HEYDON - To confirm some points on the OTIS project and funding commitment, there's been \$6.34 million spent to date, and the Budget allocation for this year, which will see the completion of it, is \$2.51 million. That is the cost of that intelligence system, which is a subset of that budget line item.

Ms THOMAS - Two million?

Ms HEYDON - This financial year is \$2.51 million.

Ms THOMAS - But overall, that is going to cost \$22 million.

Ms HEYDON - That line item had a couple of things, and this is one of those initiatives. Let's see how good my math is - \$6.34 million past actuals, and the \$2.51 million for this year, so that's \$8.85 million.

Ms THOMAS - Of that \$22 million? It's an intelligent transport solution. I am trying to understand what the Tasmanian people are getting for that \$22 million spend and how it is determined to be a priority of all the things we could be doing in transport. How is this signage determined to be the greatest benefit of all the things we could be spending \$22 million on?

Mr ABETZ - Signage and telling motorists that they might encounter delays or whatever helps inform the public. I don't know what all the thinking is behind that, but one assumes if you can reduce motorist uncertainty, anxiety, et cetera, then there may be less road rage et cetera - I don't know, I'm just surmising.

CHAIR - Surely you don't participate in that, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Road rage? No, that is why I am only surmising. It is so foreign to me.

Ms THOMAS - I'm sure there is more rationale behind it, but I look forward to being convinced at another time. I have questions on other things.

CHAIR - Keep moving, you're right.

Ms THOMAS - I'll keep moving on why that is an important use of taxpayer money. I have a few questions about Metro bus services. In February this year, then transport minister Michael Ferguson announced that a re-elected Liberal government would take more control and responsibility for timetabling of Metro bus services, particularly in the Hobart network. In a response to a question I recently asked about this on the floor of this House, the Leader advised that the government will be undertaking a review of the greater Hobart bus network, which I think has been alluded to. It is expected to result in the delivery of new routes and timetables in the second half of 2025. I wondered where this review is at, when it will be completed and how will the public be able to have a say in the review?

Mr ABETZ - You might like to take yourself to Metro as well, in the Government Business Enterprise scrutiny, but I can advise that the government -

PUBLIC

Ms THOMAS - Sorry, with respect, minister, Michael Ferguson, the then-minister announced that the Liberal government would take more control on responsibilities so I am asking it of you rather than Metro for that reason.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, and I'm about to answer, but I'm just saying if you want more detail on that you might take yourself there, should you wish to.

Previously, Metro has been responsible for undertaking network reviews in the major urban locations of Hobart and Launceston, while State Growth has always planned the routes and timetables of services delivered in peri-urban and regional parts of the state. Metro will no longer undertake reviews of its urban services. State Growth, as the network owner, is the authoritative planner and data source for all operators going forward. This will involve working in partnership with operators to achieve better public transport for Tasmanians.

The first example you will see of this is through the Greater Hobart Bus Network Review being led by State Growth. This is in its early planning stages and is scheduled for delivery in the second half of 2025.

In addition, State Growth undertook a preliminary review of Metro's Hobart services in late 2023. This review was undertaken following Metro's decision to implement consistent drop trips from late August 2023. The outcomes of this review were provided to Metro earlier this year. Metro is using the outcomes of that review to identify how it can best plan for the reintroduction of services. So that is where you can go, should you wish to find out how Metro is dealing with the reintroduction of services. If you go to the scrutiny hearing, they might be able to provide you with further information.

Ms THOMAS - Yes. I was asking specifically about the review that the government is undertaking. What I heard was Metro is no longer doing the review. The government is, which is why I was asking you the question.

So, it's scheduled for delivery in the second half of 2025. Is that when the review will be done - in the second half of 2025? Or the actual delivery?

Mr ABETZ - It is for delivery.

Ms THOMAS - What will be delivered in the second half of 2025?

Mr ABETZ - The Greater Hobart Bus Network Review, which is being led by State Growth. Metro was using the outcomes that were provided earlier this year to have a plan for the reintroduction of services.

Ms THOMAS - So the review will be completed in the second half of 2025 or staffed in the second half of 2025.

Mr CRANE - We've started work, as the minister pointed out, on a short review of looking at the Metro network in the south. We've done a little bit of work and provided that advice to Metro. We're now going to be looking at the network. It's been some time since the Southern Network's been reviewed.

PUBLIC

The government has made commitments around additional services in this election commitment. We now have other things that we need to consider. There are new subdivisions that are growing across the community. We'll take those on board.

What we're trying to do is make sure the network delivers a reliable public transport for the most people in the south. So we'll consult with our operators. We'll also be talking to the community about how that network could be designed. Once that feedback and development of the network has been looked through, we'll come back to government and say this is what we think we could do to change the network.

Obviously, changes to networks and the rationale for those things need to be well communicated to the community, so we'll work through those discussions about what we plan to do to the network to make it a more efficient and attractive offering for the people of Hobart.

Ms THOMAS - Thank you. This may be a question for Mr Crane.

Do you have a project timetable that outlines the time lines for the project and when the community consultation will occur?

Mr CRANE - We do have an overview of the objectives which we wish to achieve from the review and that's looking at time frames and some key milestones, and we'll continue to work that up as we go through. We'll be using some experts in network planning to ensure that we get the most efficiency out of the network. It's a complicated business - network planning. What you want to do is avoid as much as possible, for example, dead running, which is when you have to move buses around to get them in place for the next service. You want to minimise that kind of capacity. You want to make sure that you've got buses in the right place at the right time for high frequency on the network.

We'll certainly be talking to the community through that process, but we'll do an initial piece of work around what we can think we can do to improve the network. Then we'll go and consult with the community and get their feedback on those other issues as well. It's an important piece of work and a priority piece for us.

Ms THOMAS - Still on Metro buses, the government has engaged transit officers on Metro buses to provide security services. However, they are not yet authorised to exercise powers under division 3 of the Passenger Transport Regulations, which is necessary if they are equipped to adequately respond to antisocial behaviour on buses. In response to a question I recently asked about this in Question Time in this House, the Leader advised the department is developing a training program that transit officers will be required to undertake before they are able to be granted these powers. It's expected that this training program will be rolled out in mid-2025. Other jurisdictions have transit officers that have these powers. Has the government explored adopting the training programs from other jurisdictions so that this training and authorisation of what are currently effectively security guards, as transit officers can be provided sooner?

Mr ABETZ - Mr Crane, are you able to assist?

Mr CRANE - Most jurisdictions have transit officers some form. All the mainland jurisdictions usually have light rail as well - passenger rail - which is a big focus of the work in those areas. When looking at other parts of that training package, we always leverage off

PUBLIC

other jurisdictions, but there are some specific things that we want to make sure that our transit officers have in training. We will develop a training package and leverage off other jurisdictions. We've said early next year and understand the importance of that. I would point out that this is a new stream of work for us and we're building some knowledge.

That's one of the reasons why we've piloted. We've established a very good working relationship with Tas Police in terms of escalation of those matters that are of a matter that should be working with Tas Police. They respond as quickly as they can, when they can, subject to their resource availability. We're very responsive to our operators, including Metro and our other GA providers in terms of where we focus those resources in terms of activities on our services. Over our pilot, we've realised that there's a lot less activity on Mondays and Tuesdays, for example, so we're moving our resources to later times and putting them on weekends. We were involved in some support at Brighton when there were recent issues out there.

We work in a collaborative arrangement with our providers and police. That's the model we're trying to build. What's the role for police for those more serious issues? What's the role for our transit officers? What's the role for operators? That training package will enable the Transport Commission to authorise those people to take on those additional powers.

I would also point out that in those powers we provided operators the ability to introduce a six-month ban for people if it was a subsequent offence. That's something operators can do now.

In our school space we've got a very comprehensive code of conduct that is working very well between operators, ourselves and DECYP to provide support where there are issues of behaviour of students on buses that either puts people at risk or is inappropriate.

We've engaged a provider to develop the training and we've now got resources fully allocated to support that. We're going to be working at pace on that as quickly as we can. I would acknowledge that it's probably taken a little bit longer than we would have liked.

Ms THOMAS - So you have engaged a provider to develop the training from scratch rather than adopting what's been delivered in other jurisdictions?

Mr CRANE - Just about in all the work we do, as a small jurisdiction, we always look to other jurisdictions in road safety, PT registration, licensing. We'll look at materials that they have, and part of the engagement with the provider will be to look at other existing training packages we can adopt and adapt to meet our needs.

Ms THOMAS - Through looking at what other jurisdictions do, it wasn't determined there was a ready-to-go package that we could just adapt to here?

Mr CRANE - There are elements we believe we can use, but we've got specific requirements in terms of the regs, in terms of training someone in to giving them a direction and other things. There are some specific things. There'll be some general things that we'll certainly adopt and adapt around training, but there are a couple of requirements that we've developed as part of our model that we would like to ensure help our transit officers fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

PUBLIC

Ms THOMAS - Thank you. Minister, what is the weekly cost of security officers on Metro buses? Do you know what the weekly figure is?

Mr ABETZ - I don't. I will be able to get that number.

Mr CRANE - This is the cost of our transit officers per month? I will try and get that.

Ms THOMAS - Per week. What do the transit offers cost per week?

Mr CRANE - I will aim to get you that number and pass it back through the minister.

Ms THOMAS - Thank you. Just to be clear, minister, what power do these transit officers currently have, and has there been any review of their effectiveness if their powers are currently limited in terms of addressing antisocial behaviour?

Mr ABETZ - They have limited powers, but I have been told that their mere presence has helped overcome antisocial behaviours on a number of occasions.

Mr CRANE - They do have limited powers, but when they're on buses, they have been very successful on occasions in de-escalating issues. A lot of the issues on buses are related to young people vaping, yahooing - that's a term I don't often-

Ms THOMAS - Sometimes 'nuisance' behaviour is the term I use.

Mr CRANE - Yes. There's a difference between antisocial behaviour that disrupts the journey and makes it unpleasant for fellow travellers and vandalism. We've had some of our operators reporting slashing of seats and things like that, which costs money. There's that element of the process. Some of that is youth, and dealing with youth is a different arrangement in terms of the youth justice system, and that's an important part of it.

Our transit officers look at what's going on on the bus. They do de-escalate and get in between people who have brought their fights onto the bus. Usually that's what happens. They also deal with things around behaviours like fare evasion. Sometimes they can be involved in those discussions. They work very closely with the bus drivers in terms of reporting things back through to the control, in the case of Metro, and then police.

We have escalated a number of incidents that we've identified on the bus, as I mentioned before, that go to police. There is a scale: antisocial, annoying, vaping. Then if it gets to a certain point it does require police involvement with the powers they have.

The right model we're trying to build is, have our resources deal with things on the bus. Malls and things like that - and as you'd be aware, police have been very active in the bus mall in Glenorchy. We want to work with police to target where they need to work, and where we need to work. That's part of the program we're developing.

Mr ABETZ - It seems that all our constituents, other than the chairs in the (2:16:03), is when I read examples of focus areas they have included Rokeby, Glenorchy, Kingston, Sorell and Huonville.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - (2:16:16) does not know about my people? We don't have any Metro services there. We have a few but not many.

Ms THOMAS - And still on buses. What was the cost of half-price bus fares in 2023-24 and what is the expected cost in 2024-25?

Mr ABETZ - We have budgeted for \$9-point-something million, if I recall correctly. We budgeted \$8.685 million for this Budget and \$7.69 million for next year for that 30-month period.

Ms THOMAS - What was the cost last financial year, 2023-24, and what's the expected cost?

Mr ABETZ - There was no cost because we announced it in this election.

Ms THOMAS - You were already doing it though, right?

Mr ABETZ - No.

Mr CRANE - The election commitment started on 1 June and our payments started rolling out, or the cost of those payments - topping up operators - was first paid in July. It's a 2024-25 expense, just a cashflow type thing. We could provide a limited budget, potentially.

Ms THOMAS - That's okay. If the total cost will be incurred in this financial year and \$8.685 million is the figure -

Mr CRANE - It will be incurred in this financial year. That is what we estimate will be the cost.

Mr ABETZ - There is \$7.69 million for the following year, which will be the final.

CHAIR - Especially if the revenue is all gone.

Mr CRANE - That is an estimate and it will depend on the take-up of the number of people on buses.

Ms THOMAS - Following the 12-month period, will the government try to review? Are there any measures of outcomes? Are you aiming to see an increase in the number of people using public transport? Is there a particular increase that is hoping to be achieved? Will there be any review? Will the government consider extending half-price fares beyond this 12-month period?

Mr ABETZ - This measure was introduced as a cost-of-living measure - number one. That was the main purpose of it. However, we can hopefully learn things from it. We'll see how many extra people use public transport. I understand that in some of the more regional areas it has seen an uptake, whereas in Metro around the city there has, in fact, been a decrease in the number of passengers.

It's still early days, but we will look at seeing what this measure has done, first of all, with cost of living. Two, whether it has reduced congestion on our roads and whether it has

PUBLIC

attracted more people into the usage of public transport. At this stage, there is no plan to extend it, but we will have a look and see what we learn from any of the information we can glean from this trial.

Ms THOMAS - A cost-of-living measure, to save people money, was the main purpose of the half-price bus fares. Secondary, increasing public transport usage to try to reduce congestion, save the environment, those sorts of benefits. I hear that was a secondary aim here, but does the government have any other ambitions or measures to try to convince more people to swap cars for buses and ferries?

Mr ABETZ - We're trying to make it more attractive. That's why we've got the common ticketing proposal that I announced on Monday, the bus tracking that we hope to have starting to operate at the end of this -

Mr CRANE - Beginning of December, late November is what we're aiming for.

Mr ABETZ - End of this year. We also have a program of more bus shelters, which also makes life a lot easier, especially in the Tasmanian weather. We are looking at park and ride facilities. The ones down my way at Huntingfield and Firthside seem to have worked quite well, with a car park at Huntingfield estimated to be 50 per cent full and Firthside 80 per cent full. We're looking to Claremont, Midway Point, I think Legana, and Rokeby. There are a number of measures. We are also planning with the councils, aren't we? For Legana?

Mr CRANE - Yes.

Mr ABETZ - The immediate rollout is the three that we've mentioned, but we are planning further ahead and Legana on West Tamar was another example of that. We are trying a whole host of initiatives to encourage people to use transport. If I recall correctly, the extra lane on the Southern Expressway will be for buses, et cetera, and passenger vehicles with three or more people in it. That will hopefully encourage car sharing.

Ms THOMAS - You mentioned the park and ride facilities. Are the project timeframes and when those projects will commence and be completed up on the State Growth website?

Mr ABETZ - I'll flick to the department for that.

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister, I'll check if they are online, but all of those are expected to commence construction early next year, with completion in the 2025 calendar year.

Ms THOMAS - All three?

Ms HEYDON - Yes, and we will make sure those updates are on the public websites as well.

Ms THOMAS - I'll move away from buses and onto ferries. This may be an infrastructure question in terms of ferry terminals and new ferry terminals that are to be constructed. You did mention in your overview the three -

CHAIR - Is this under general access services or passenger transport? Just checking.

PUBLIC

Ms THOMAS - Oh, is it? Not passenger transport? Maybe I can't keep going.

Mr ABETZ - From my perspective, that doesn't matter. We've got the relevant officials at the table.

CHAIR - It's more for our record keeping, but that's alright.

Mr ABETZ - I don't want to disrupt the committee's work.

CHAIR - No, don't do that.

Ms THOMAS - The two are interlinked because I want to ask not only about the infrastructure, but also the operation of services once that infrastructure is up and running. Do you have project timeframes for when the three new ferry terminals are expected to be completed? How is the order of development determined for Wilkinsons Point, Lindisfarne and Sandy Bay?

Mr ABETZ - I think it's Lindisfarne, Wilkinsons Point and Sandy Bay.

Ms THOMAS - I'll always say Wilkinsons Point first.

Mr ABETZ - Of course. It wouldn't be in the electorate of Elwick, would it?

Ms THOMAS - Elwick Bay, in fact.

Mr CRANE - Through you, minister, as you'd remember, the federal Labor government gave a \$20 million commitment for infrastructure and those projects and that infrastructure - we are working closely with the project team - is being delivered by councils that \$20 million from the federal government. We're working with them on their timeframes.

My understanding, in discussions with them, is that they anticipate that all of those three sites will be finished by 2026 as per their grant requirements. We have progressed a lot of work in terms of Bellerive and will be discussing that at a future time. We're working closely with the project team on Lindisfarne. Obviously, there's media about the Natone Street site. Our responsibility is to ensure that any site selected, such as Natone Street, is a safe and appropriate site to deliver ferry services. We're working with the project team because that's a different site that's got a little bit more exposure to it, there are some other factors involved in that, so we'll work with them about how the council's going to deliver the infrastructure there. We've shared our designs that we're proposing for Bellerive so that hopefully we'll have a consistent look and feel for our ferry infrastructure across the river. It's a collaborative approach from our point of view, but the money for the initial \$20 million is provided to the council to deliver those ferry services and, as I understand it under the grant arrangement, councils need to look after those facilities for up to five years.

Ms THOMAS - Thank you. You say it's a collaborative approach, which is fantastic, but someone's got to take the lead role. If councils have \$20 million, the state government has \$20 million, who's actually taking the leadership on each of those projects?

Mr CRANE - Through you, minister, we have a steering committee with me and officers and the four GM CEOs of the councils to drive that program of work. We'll be meeting with

PUBLIC

that committee shortly. They have their own project manager and we've got our own project delivery manager and we're working together. We will be looking at upgrading Bellerive as the government's announced. We'll be working with the project team on Natone St. Although the council, through its consultation with community about Natone St was positive, we just need to make sure that that is a location that we can safely and consistently deliver services and that it has a good attractor, so, that's what we're working through. Once we're satisfied with that and the information the project team provides us, we'll provide advice back to our minister on Natone St and then, hopefully, that will go into construction.

We're sharing things like the development application processes we've worked up for Clarence, so it is a collaborative approach. We are trying not to run parallel processes where we can, but, obviously, different funding sources sometimes make it a little bit challenging. We're trying to share our experiences, our documentation and our approach so that it looks as joined up as possible in terms of look, feel and outcomes for the seafaring travellers of Hobart.

Ms THOMAS - Thank you. There will, obviously, need to be one organisation managing the tender process and procurement of contractors to deliver the infrastructure. Will that be the Department of State Growth or will it be the individual councils?

Mr CRANE - Through you, minister, we've had some discussions at that steering committee about that and we would like to make sure we're applying as streamlined a process as possible instead of duplicating effort. We still haven't quite landed that, but what I can say is that the state government owns Bellerive Wharf and we will be putting through a DA for the development of that in due course and we're sharing all that information with council, including tender documents. Council will be driving - as they've been given the money from the federal government - the procurement of the infrastructure as per their grant. We'll continue to work through that. They have a project manager involved in working those up for the infrastructure.

What we're interested in and what we're responsible for is delivering the services to sites. Our interest in the sites is that they are the most appropriate and safe sites that make it as easy as possible for the most people to get on ferries. That's our role. That's why we need to be satisfied that Natone Street, which is an option that came up out of other processes, meets all these requirements that we identified through our master planning exercise, and we're working very closely with that project team to be able to give confidence to both the councils and government that that is an appropriate site to run a service.

Ms THOMAS - Thank you. Minister, what oversight or role do you see yourself having in this really important infrastructure and passenger transport project? What we're hearing is there's a role for State Growth, there's a role for councils. The last thing we want to see is more controversy over wharf infrastructure, be it on perhaps a smaller scale but what I'm hearing is it is still not clear on who's going to manage. I know you talked a lot about Bellerive Wharf and State Growth will manage Bellerive Wharf because the government owns that. There is a steering committee together, there's discussions being had. Minister, what role would you have in ensuring that these projects don't end up at risk and Commonwealth funding doesn't end up at risk when there's negotiations ongoing and there's still no certainty about who is actually managing the projects here?

Mr ABETZ - I have regular meetings with the departmental officials in my office, and we have agenda items and this is one of them and, if it isn't, it will now become a regular agenda

PUBLIC

item because you mentioned one other project which has made me very conscious of the importance of timelines and keeping up to date with development.

At the end of the day, you rely exceptionally heavily on departmental officials and I don't sit down with pen and paper and design these things, nor do I get a hammer and nail or whatever you do to build these facilities, but I will have -

CHAIR - A welder probably.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, welding would undoubtedly more in use there.

I do have the oversight role to try to protect Tasmania, albeit with federal government money. When the federal government does provide us with its largesse they will see that we get value for money. It's largely a local council responsibility but still important that there is oversight. With that said, there was another little facility down my neck of the woods at Kingston at the interchange that the local council undertook and did not listen to departmental advice as to design et cetera, and, it now has to be - what's the term? - redesigned, repurposed, whatever, at a cost. That is where local government, no disrespect to former mayor sitting at this table, but they have to take responsibility as well, but, as much as I can without making a nuisance of myself, I will seek to have oversight of these projects.

CHAIR - You won't make a nuisance of yourself if you turn up and see if the work's going on through, which could have been with another port, a berth that, if someone had turned up and had a look, they might have seen that nothing was going on, right?

Mr ABETZ - That is another topic, albeit, I don't want to say too much about that at this stage but when assurances are provided on a regular basis and you're dealing with - and this is another area of state-owned corporations - then this is where our state-owned corporations and end-of-government business enterprises really do need to consider their responsibility to the people of Tasmania and not just be narrowly focused on their area of endeavour.

Ms THOMAS - Minister, you are talking about local government needing to take responsibility. I think the way I would frame it because local government, in my view and experience, does take responsibility where it's clearly the responsibility of local government, and one area where we've seen conjecture, and it's still not resolved, is bus stop infrastructure and ownership of bus stop infrastructure.

I know the state government has a firm view that bus stop infrastructure on state-owned roads is state government responsibility; on local roads it is local governments responsibility; but certainly, speaking from my experience at the Glenorchy City Council, we don't have bus - I still keep saying 'we'. I have only been here three months.

CHAIR - You still represent the area.

Ms THOMAS - Yes, I still represent the area. The Glenorchy City Council does not have bus stops on its asset infrastructure, and I don't want to go into that now. I know it's still something that's been trying to be worked through, but what I will ask is: do you have that front of mind in the governance when it comes to these new ferry terminals?

PUBLIC

I know Mr Crane did suggest that councils will be required to look after them, I think you mentioned, for five years - so, will that be something in terms of governance and responsibility for those assets ongoing that is determined and there's some agreement clearly documented between state and local government at the outset so that we don't, beyond that five-year period, get to another point where we're arguing over who's responsible for the ongoing maintenance and redevelopment of those assets, like we are with bus stops with the new ferry terminals.

Mr ABETZ - Well, that is where the funding has been provided on that basis and, what the future holds, Mr Crane, do you have the crystal ball?

Mr CRANE - No, I don't, minister. However, I would say that the steering committee, which has the four GMs and CEOs and myself and other working people, have identified the need to clarify or make sure we understand asset ownership.

The reason I mentioned the five years is, through discussions, I understand that as a regular requirement from the Commonwealth when it provides grants for infrastructure. They want to ensure that as it's moved on to others when they've funded them.

We have that as a discussion point and that steering committee so that we could provide advice back to, from my point of view, my minister on what those options and ramifications mean for ongoing maintenance of those facilities going forward.

The councils will do the same back through to their elected representatives. I acknowledge and I agree, based on the experience of discussions around bus stops that we continually have, and I feel in that space it's a challenging one because, at the end of the day, we have put our grant programs for bus stops and they haven't been taken up, which is a bit disappointing because the only people that miss out are the people -

CHAIR - Standing in the rain.

Mr CRANE - But in this case, I agree with you, we do need to have clear line of sight and clear accountability so we don't have that ongoing discussion that we do have on bus stops. That's being raised in that steering committee for that very reason, because as we've all acknowledged it's not a place you want to be.

Ms THOMAS - No, absolutely. As you say, people are the ones who miss out, but there were reasons why councils weren't prepared to take up those grants when they - the condition was assuming ownership, so, make that clear on the record - when ownership hasn't been illegally resolved.

My final question is, in terms of the ferry service, we're going to have these fantastic new ferry terminals. Is there any funding in the forward Estimates for the operation of an expanded Derwent River ferry service - given, I think you mentioned, that's expected to be completed by 2026 - so, is there any funding in the forward Estimates for a ferry service?

Mr CRANE - We've got funding to continue the delivery of Bellerive and additional funding looking for Lindisfarne, initially, and we'll go back to government once Lindisfarne will be the first of the new ones delivered, and we're working up what that kind of ferry service offering would look like. We need to understand whether it's Natone or Lindisfarne, but there

PUBLIC

is funding in the forward Estimates for services that we believe we should be able to cover off Bellerive and Lindisfarne.

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister, there is actually \$9.3 million across the forward Estimates to support, this is on top of the existing funding of \$6.5 million that's across this financial year and the next to support the upgrade of the Bellerive Wharf and provide ongoing operation of the existing Bellerive to Hobart service and enable the future service increases over the FEs.

Ms THOMAS - For the actual service?

Ms HEYDON - Yes.

Mr CRANE - Through you, minister, I think it would be fair to say, initially, once Wilkinsons Point is up, it'll be more of an event-based service to start with. It doesn't have the caption areas, you know better than I do. But it will be there available to support movement of people for events at the DEC and other facilities going forward.

Ms THOMAS - My understanding is the reason that it isn't being planned as a commuter service is that the travel times aren't any quicker, so that it's not going to be - it's not expected there'd be much incentive for people to use the ferry rather than car.

Mr CRANE - You're exactly right. You need to have a travel time advantage, and that's one of the reasons why we're looking at things like priority lanes and things like that. You need to be able to provide all the things the minister talked about in terms of ticketing, real time information.

They're all important to encourage people participation, but reliability and reduced travel times is pretty important to get people. It's a pretty hard task to get someone out of a car into a bus, and that's right, you've got to make sure that the offering is an attractive one that will get that movement.

Mr VINCENT - Minister, I draw your attention to the bottom of 339 - wheelchair accessibility taxis. That's something that we discussed with the Disability Service minister the other day. I noticed the declining numbers here and invite comment on that, seeing it's a growing part of this government's focus on disability services.

Mr ABETZ - I had a roundtable with the Minister for Disability Services, Ms Palmer, relatively recently. She had the roundtable to talk about all matters disability. I was there from the transport point of view. That is important. What have we done? We've provided an increase to the incentive payment per job, which I think is \$20 on top of the fare that the government provides as an incentive. We went through the numbers of taxis available. I can't remember the exact number, but we've increased the minimum number of wheelchair jobs that must be completed by each WAT each month. WAT is the wheelchair -

Ms THOMAS - Accessible transport?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, wheelchair accessible transport. Thank you very much, member for Elwick. Very helpful. I had a mental blank there.

We've now made a requirement that there be a minimum of 30 such jobs per month. If they are to remain eligible for that, they have to undertake at least 30 trips per month to encourage that. The data has shown that since these changes were introduced, a 5.1 per cent overall increase in wheelchair hirings were completed since the introduction compared to the previous year. A 12.3 per cent increase occurred in the peak month of February 2024.

Anecdotally, it's reported the taxi networks are having more success allocating wheelchair jobs in a shorter timeframe. The number of wheelchair accessible taxis operating in Launceston has increased. There were seven active vehicles in Launceston prior to Taxi Combined purchasing the service. Now there are nine. The data today shows that these nine vehicles are each completing more wheelchair trips than the average statewide. That seems to be working well.

In this area, like with so many other areas, more can always be done, but I think through -

CHAIR - More could be done in the north-west.

Mr VINCENT - The spread or the coverage of the accessible taxis is going to be the biggest challenge.

Mr ABETZ - That is a real challenge which is recognised. It's the provision of the higher capital cost of these vehicles. In Launceston and Hobart, we're requiring a minimum of 30 trips per month. If you have a taxi of that nature with an extra capital cost, they may well not be able to reach that 30 minimum because of the lack of demand. As a result, the government support, which - 20 times 30 - is an extra \$600 per month. If you multiply that out by 12 months, that's an extra \$7000 or so for the actual service.

If there isn't a passenger demand in the regional areas, then that makes the equation exceptionally difficult. That is something that the government will need to continue to work with to see what can be done. We do want to provide services for all sectors in all areas of Tasmania, but it comes with a cost attached.

Mr VINCENT - The Disability Services minister will work on that. Thank you.

Output Group 6 - Subsidies and Concessions

6.1 Shipping and Ferry Subsidies

CHAIR - Output 6.1 is shipping and ferry subsidies, which is basically an allocation for subsidies for those on the islands, et cetera. There is \$1.5 million extra in this year's Budget and then it evens back out to the normal level. Why is that? There's no footnote, no explanation anywhere.

Mr ABETZ - I hope it is all for the Bruny Island ferry service. Is that right, member for Huon? A bit of self interest on our part. Allow me to try to get you a genuine answer.

CHAIR - I hope it's all for King Island. I think it might account for the money provided to King Island.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Yes, for the fodder and need for feed, as well as getting stock off the island, drought support, Bass Strait Islands and the mainland of Tasmania additional sailings. I don't have the page number, but it is under 6.1 Shipping and Ferry Services. It says that the base funding -

CHAIR - How much was provided for that in total?

Mr ABETZ - \$1.5 million.

CHAIR - Oh, that is the entire amount.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. We missed out Mr Harriss.

Output Group 6 - Subsidies and Concessions

6.2 General Access Services

CHAIR - We've covered a fair bit of this with the ferries.

Ms LOVELL - I have a question about the more bus services funding. I understand there is \$3.75 million each year for more bus services, but not a great deal of detail about what 'more bus services' means. Can you provide some more detail for the committee on what that funding will be going towards?

Mr ABETZ - In general terms, that is for restoring some services that have been dropped, establishing new services in some of the new areas like Olive Grove, Spring Farm and other places that are making bids for public transport services. That's the money that's been allocated and the department will undertake an analysis of what the most important areas are where we can provide the most support to the communities.

Ms LOVELL - Those dropped services, they were the Metro services that were dropped?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms LOVELL - Will that funding for restoring dropped services all go back to Metro?

Mr ABETZ - That will be some of the consideration.

Ms HEYDON - The funding that you referred to is also to deliver the specific election commitments, service improvements such as Sunday Brighton services and expansions of school services. On the Metro funding and the dropped services, we have withheld funding due to the failure to deliver those kilometres subject to Metro looking at their return to service. They will get funded back for delivering service kilometres from our overall.

Ms LOVELL - You mentioned there was an analysis being undertaken as to what that might look like. At this stage, do you have an idea of how much of that funding will go to Metro and how much of it will go to private operators?

Ms HEYDON - We don't have that breakdown at this stage.

PUBLIC

Mr CRANE - There are two new schools coming online next year at Brighton and Legana in the north-west, I believe.

Ms LOVELL - North.

Mr CRANE - Sorry. Yes, north and we've started planning and working with the Department of Education on how we provide services for those new schools. Some of that funding I would anticipate would go to providing those services to those new schools to ensure we get good takeup and get kids in those schools.

Ms LOVELL - Do you have a breakdown of that amount at this stage?

Mr CRANE - We're still in the planning processes in terms of what the service level needs and that's part of the work we're doing with DECYP, to understand the catchment area and those students who are eligible to get a bus service.

Ms LOVELL - Minister, do you know when that analysis might be complete at least for this financial year and coming year, when you might have an idea of what that breakdown will look like, and where that funding will be diverted?

Mr ABETZ - Allocated rather than diverted, but same difference.

Ms LOVELL - Maybe, depends where it's going, I suppose.

Mr CRANE - We did talk about the Southern Network Review and that's probably the the mechanism which we will look to include those things that the government has identified as areas that it would like us to look at, such as Olive Grove Estate at Risdon Vale, I think, the services at Brighton. That process will start to give a bit of an understanding of that in the first half of next year, and then we'll finalise that through discussions, consulting with communities and others, but we will be starting to spend some of that money on those school services I mentioned and responding to any other school issues that arise. There was a bit of a changing piece with new school years as people move between schools, so we'll look to that as well.

Ms LOVELL - You talked about the Southern Network Review, is there a similar review or analysis being undertaken in the north and the north-west, north-east, anywhere else?

Mr CRANE - There will be at a time, but we're concentrating on the south due to the challenges we've got in providing constant, reliable services.

Mr ABETZ - Just to correct the record, I know I said that it included the Metro services that had been dropped and that is incorrect. It was only for new services, not for the dropped services.

Ms LOVELL - So, the funding for the restoration of those dropped services comes from a different -

Mr ABETZ - Yes, because Metro has money allocated to it and it's been cropped at the moment for dropped services, but if they restore the services, the funding comes back to the -

Ms LOVELL - Is it possible that they could receive additional funding from this pool of money as well, with any of those new services?

Mr CRANE - It is possible because the review will look at what the service needs are and if it's part of the network, but we'll work through that process. There's no reason why Metro wouldn't give the additional services, but it also depends on where the demand is. For some of those services, we'll need to look at how we test the market in terms of that, to make sure we get value for money.

Output Group 6 - Subsidies and Concessions

6.3 School Bus Services

Ms LOVELL - I had one question on school bus services and it was about capacity. We're more than halfway through the school year and still - are we? Term three, I'm losing track of how many terms we've had. Three-quarters of the way through the school year and we're still hearing quite a number of stories about concerns from parents around overcrowded services, services where students have to stand or sit in the aisles. This isn't a particularly new issue; this has been an issue for some time. What is being done to increase capacity other than those new schools that we've touched on already? Is there more investment in increasing capacity around school bus services?

Mr ABETZ - The difficulty with school bus service delivery is that it fluctuates throughout the year. At the start of every school year, bus networks generally experience an increase in demand, which typically remains high for the first two months while students establish travel patterns and start engaging in after-school extracurricular activities. Bus operators must report to the department if these services are routinely close to capacity or if passengers have been advised they cannot board. If capacity issues do arise, the department works with operators to monitor services and vary contracts where appropriate. In such cases, the department may explore options to procure a larger bus or excess capacity on other existing services.

Ms LOVELL - From what you've just said you would expect, if anything, that capacity or the number of people using those services would decrease as students established other travel patterns and after-school activities and things like that. Have you had many reports of services that are over or close to capacity that need that sort of consideration? Do you have numbers around that?

Mr ABETZ - There was the one down Dover way.

Mr CRANE - Through the reporting requirements under our contracts, we're currently monitoring four services that we believe are getting to near capacity and have triggered our requirements to report that they are getting close to that capacity area. One of those, as I mentioned, is in Woodbridge.

One of our perennial challenges is the number of kids who go through Taroona High School and into South Hobart and that occasionally reaches capacity. Often the capacity issue arises. There is another service that students can catch up to South Hobart, but, as we all probably can remember, you like to get the bus with your mates and, therefore, they tend to all

PUBLIC

get on one bus and another one comes right behind pretty empty. That's one of our challenges in that space sometimes.

There's one from New Norfolk and there's one in the north-west, the Tullah-Rosebury one, which you may be aware of which we are constantly monitoring. The other four that have triggered reporting requirements we're actively looking at and working with operators to deal with those challenges and that's how we monitor those. As the minister points out, our responses can vary from larger buses to additional services.

CHAIR - We'll need to keep moving.

Mr ABETZ - If I may quickly respond to the intelligent transport solution asked by the member for Elwick?

My confusion arose that the intelligent transport solution has \$22 million allocated to it. The Overhead Traveller Information System (OTIS) of which we spoke was \$8.8 million and then there is the lane utilisation management system on the Tasman Bridge, for which \$13 million has been allocated. That is where we then get the round figure of \$22 million, so there were two elements to the intelligent transport solution.

CHAIR - I won't ask any questions on the Warratah-Wynyard Coastal Pathway Project because it's progressing nicely after a few little delays, but we'll move on from there.

The airport infrastructure, is there anything pressing there?

The grants and subsidies, unless there is anything urgent there, they're listed in the budget papers without any indexation but similar to before, I assume.

We will go to MAST, minister. I know Lia has been waiting over there.

I presume you'll need to let some people go so we'll stop the broadcast before we invite MAST.

The Committee suspended from 2.59 p.m. to 3.00 p.m.

Marine and Safety Tasmania

CHAIR - Thanks, minister. Would you like to introduce Lia?

Mr ABETZ - This one is easy, Lia Morris, CEO at MAST. It's not a long title, like some others.

CHAIR - Thank you. We'll go to Sarah.

Just while you are getting to yours, there was a question asked at another committee about the number of registered boats. I'm sure Lia would have the answer for us.

Ms MORRIS - As at 30 August 2024, there were 30,578 recreational boat registrations in Tasmania.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - I don't know how many sit in the garage or in the shed?

Mr HARRISS - Do we have it for the last few years though?

Ms MORRIS - It is slightly down on June 2023 figures. It's down by less than 1 per cent though, so it's not hugely down.

The question was raised in the context of the fishing rules. I don't think that the slight decrease can be directly attributable to the flathead fishing rules. I think there are changes in the economy that could be impacting that at the moment as well.

CHAIR - I also note MAST has already, in a timely fashion, tabled its annual report.

Mr ABETZ - To be commended.

CHAIR - They are to be commended.

Ms LOVELL - Chair, I have some questions about the agreement between MAST, TasPorts and the EPA around regulation. I understand that agreement is due to expire in just a few days. TasPorts has raised concerns in another hearing concerns around potential conflicts of interest surrounding some of the regulatory functions they're required to undertake as part of that agreement. I was wondering if you had a view on that and if you could provide an update as to how those negotiations are progressing?

Ms MORRIS - The deed was due to expire on 30 September 2024, but we've negotiated a 12-month extension.

CHAIR - Another extension!

Ms MORRIS - It's a 12-month extension.

CHAIR - This is not the first extension.

Ms MORRIS - No, it's not. There is good reason because we're currently working with TasPorts and the EPA through the Department of State Growth to reassess the allocation of those regulatory functions with the view to provide recommendations to government on future port governance. We understand TasPort's concerns; we fully support the reform process.

Ms LOVELL - If this is an extension for 12 months, could you please step back through the original term of the agreement and how many extensions were granted?

Ms MORRIS - The deed has been in existence since 2008, so it has been in existence for a long time. Through that timeframe, port practices have changed. It was fit for purpose until recent times, in essence, but the port processes have changed and it is no longer a reflection of contemporary port regulatory frameworks. That is what we are working towards.

Ms LOVELL - The reason for the extension and not being able to land on a new deed, is that because that review is still underway or is there some hold up in the negotiations? Why have we not been able to land on a more ongoing deed?

PUBLIC

Ms MORRIS - We have landed on a really good 12-month extension. I'm confident that we can deal with the issues at hand within that 12-month timeframe. We need time for an orderly transition of regulatory functions and there has to be a cabinet decision relative to it.

CHAIR - Wasn't there an ALTA review of port regulation?

Mr ABETZ - You're clearly better informed than I am. I don't know if the CEO can assist.

Ms MORRIS - The Department of State Growth undertook a port services regulatory review.

CHAIR - Does this feed into this work?

Ms MORRIS - Yes, it does.

CHAIR - That was supposed to be finished two years ago, from memory.

Ms MORRIS - It was finished a while ago. That's a question that only State Growth can answer. I can't answer.

CHAIR - Sure. I'm wondering why it's taking so long to get to a resolution here. It's not because of MAST?

Ms MORRIS - No, put simply.

CHAIR - I'm conscious of the time and appreciate you waiting around all day. Are there any other pressing questions for MAST? Thank you for your appearance.

Minister, is there anything you want to provide to the committee before we wrap up?

Mr ABETZ - I'll quickly table the fatalities from 2014 through to 2024, all-terrain vehicle, bicycle, heavy vehicle, light vehicle, motorcycle, and other pedestrian. They are different.

CHAIR - Different years perhaps?

Mr ABETZ - One of them is just the fatalities and the other one has fatalities and the serious injury admitted to hospital for 24 hours or more.

CHAIR - It was the definition of serious injury.

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister.

Mr ABETZ - No, thank you. It was a pleasure to appear.

CHAIR - We will have a short break and then return for another minister.

PUBLIC

The Committee suspended at 3.06 p.m.