

Deputy Premier
Treasurer
Minister for Infrastructure

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Mr Andrew Jenner MP
Parliament House
HOBART 7000

Dear Mr Jenner

In Parliament on 11 June 2024 you requested information from me as Minister for Infrastructure on behalf of a constituent in Orford as follows:

"This question came in to me this morning from a constituent in Orford. There was yet another incident at Paradise Gorge this morning, blocking the road between Orford and Sorell. Many of us who have to commute to work were left briefly stranded. Thankfully this time the road was cleared quite quickly. However, should this happen again and the clear-up take far longer, Wielangta Road is not suitable for smaller cars and they have to travel two and a half hours for what should be a 40-minute trip. What is being done to stop this from happening again?"

In response to your constituent's question, I can advise the following.

A small tree and some debris was reported to have fallen on the Tasman Highway at Paradise Gorge near Orford on the morning of Tuesday, 11 June 2024.

The Department of State Growth's maintenance contractor was alerted to the matter and arrived on site before 8am and quickly cleared the road with a minimal impact to road users.

While the topography of Paradise Gorge represents an ongoing challenge, the impact of the event was minor in comparison to the 2021 controlled rockfall event required to remove dangerous boulders that were identified above the road, requiring the closure of the highway and diversion of traffic through Wielangta Road.

While the Tasmanian Government has no current management responsibilities for Wielangta Road, we deployed workers there to maintain it for the residents of the Lower East Coast through the temporary closure of the Tasman Highway, spending more than \$380,000 on this task.

I have been clear that Wielangta Road has proven its importance as an ongoing access route for the East Coast.

At the 2021 election we committed \$1 million for targeted resurfacing of the 32-kilometre road.

The Department of State Growth commissioned a feasibility study for a second sealed access to the Tasman Highway through upgrading Wielangta Road to a consistent sealed travelling surface for the full length between Orford and the Arthur Highway at Copping. This study identified a range of options to seal Wielangta Road ranging up to more than \$90 million for the full length.

The sealing of the entire length would need to be staged over a number of years and is likely to involve additional works to ensure a consistent travelling surface.

I am pleased to advise that the Rockliff Liberal Government allocated \$6 million in our 2024 election campaign towards a \$32.1 million upgrade of a seven kilometre section of Wielangta Road. The Tasmanian Government's investment would seal the section most prone to damage and includes the replacement of the Griffiths Rivulet Bridge and Seventeen Acre Creek Bridges, providing a significant improvement in the event of any potential future closure or disruption of the Tasman Highway.

This \$6 million commitment is the State's contribution to this \$32 million project and is subject to the Australian Government's contribution of 80 per cent towards this section in accordance with established precedent. I note that the Federal Member for Lyons has been public in his support for the sealing of Wielangta Road.

We will maintain our efforts to attract the necessary federal funding so we can improve the resilience of the road network.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Ferguson'.

Michael Ferguson MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Infrastructure

19/8/2024