

**THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MET
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART, ON TUESDAY 26
MAY 2009.**

**PROVISION OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR THE
RESIDENTS OF PORT SORELL**

Mr MALCOLM WELLS, GENERAL MANAGER, LEARNING SERVICES (NORTH-WEST), DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Finch) - Malcolm, thanks very much for waiting on and taking the trouble to present to us today. No doubt, you have seen the terms of reference and you have an understanding of what we are seeking to explore. Can we hand over to you now to make a presentation to us and then at the conclusion we will go a little deeper and ask some questions?

Mr WELLS - Yes, thanks Kerry. Just by way of prefacing my presentation as such and not to put Charles in it, but my discussion with Charles was around providing an initial broad-brush picture for the group. I will probably be telling you something that members of the group already know but, briefly, I have structured that around a little bit of background and then really moved to some information about what I see the current situation to be, based, obviously, around the investigation that you are doing.

Very briefly, with respect to the background, in 1999 the department undertook a pretty extensive investigation of the issue of a school at Port Sorell and that consultation process involved local government, school councils of Wesley Vale and Moriarty primary schools, people within the department itself, the then departments of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources; Health and Human Services; and Police and Public Safety. At the end of that investigation there was a decision not to build at Port Sorell. The investigation itself considered the issue of a need for a school, existing educational services, population trends at the time, transport issues and also the public consultation that took place then. As I said, the decision was not to build.

Subsequent to that there was endorsement by the Government of the day for a \$1 million redevelopment of Wesley Vale Primary School, which, I am not sure but I think, finished around about 2001.

Mr WHITELEY - That was Federal money, Malcolm, wasn't it?

Mr WELLS - I am unsure of the source.

Mr WHITELEY - I think that was Fed money from my days back with Jocelyn Newman and I think Johnnie Watson was involved in that.

Mr WELLS - Okay, thank you for that. The other concluding comment I'd make about that background information is that when the issue was last looked at seriously - in the **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, INQUIRY INTO PROVISION OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR THE RESIDENTS OF PORT SORELL, HOBART 26/5/09 (WELLS)**

interim it has bubbled along a bit at different times - the significant factor that the investigation identified was that building a new school at Port Sorell would have affected the viability of existing schools in the area.

If you go forward to now, in many ways that fundamental issue of viability probably still remains. Maybe in slightly different language, if you wanted to use words like the most effective and efficient provision of public education in that part of the municipality, ultimately, as we shared with the community when we spoke with them, the reality is that, again, the viability issue would be one that would inevitably come up if the school was located at Port Sorell.

Mr WHITELEY - Can we explore that later, Malcolm?

Mr WELLS - Yes, certainly. The other thing I would like to share with you is the student data, the number of students that we are dealing with, and I can provide the group with some more detailed information on this. In essence, if you go back about five or six years there were around about 700 primary-aged students distributed across Moriarty Primary, Wesley Vale Primary, Sassafras Primary and Latrobe Primary.

Our department's projections would suggest that if you project four or five years forward to, say, 2013 or thereabouts that number is still around about 700 so we have, on that data, a relatively stable student population and when you look at where that population is distributed based on where people live and the schools that they are attending, an analysis of that today would show that the fundamental issue remains that if you build a school at Port Sorell there will be an immediate impact on Wesley Vale and its population and we believe, although the Moriarty community disputed this when we spoke with them, in the medium to long term quite a significant impact on the viability of Moriarty as well.

Finally, from a department perspective, going the way of building an additional school at Port Sorell probably comes down to some fundamentals around responsible use of the available funding. It would be very difficult to build a school 7 kilometres from one that already exists without in some way constructively addressing the issue of viability and appropriate provision for 700 primary-aged students who all reside in a relative close proximity to all of those schools.

I do not know if that is enough, Kerry. I also have some other information in relation to percentage distribution of students by the area in which they reside and the school which they attend. You may well have some of that information already, otherwise I can provide it for you. You are probably well aware that around about 75 to 78 per cent of students who are currently at the Wesley Vale Primary School would reside in the area that most people would accept it is okay to call Port Sorell, so including Hawley and Shearwater and Sweeping Point in that.

Mr WHITELEY - Could you provide that to the committee, Malcolm?

Mr WELLS - Yes, I can provide that information for you.

Mr WHITELEY - I will give you heads up. I have some documents in front of me that would indicate precisely what you are talking about but the other members do not have it because it is just stuff I have.

Mr WELLS - Okay. I can certainly provide that for you.

Kerry, I would be interested to know what it is that the committee wants to learn from what I know but in essence, unless you want a little bit of a comment about the brief process we went through around the BER funding which I can add if you would like me to -

CHAIR - Yes. You might care to do that because we are on *Hansard* and that information would be good to reflect on as well.

Mr WELLS - I will do my best to explain this. When the Commonwealth announced the BER funding and it was clear within the guidelines that if schools chose to amalgamate, that funding could in effect be bundled up and contribute to all other remaining redevelopment on the site of one of the amalgamated schools or give you significant Commonwealth financial capacity to build a school on a greenfield site -

Mr WHITELEY - Such as Burnie?

Mr WELLS - Yes, such as Burnie, exactly.

Mr WHITELEY - So the footprint is there?

Mr WELLS - Our school improvement board had a look at that under fairly considerable time pressures. As we all know, there has not been a lot of time in all dimensions of the rollout of the BER funding. You have to get moving if you want to access and use it. We had a look at what we thought were 'the opportunities' to promote that kind of use of the resource.

Burnie stood out as the number one priority because of the over provision of public primary schools in the town and we did take the time, albeit it was very compressed, to meet with the communities of Wesley Vale and Moriarty and to a lesser and more low-key extent with Sassafras to share what we thought might be possible and to attempt to gain some sense of the strength of community feeling about moving down that track and seizing that opportunity with Commonwealth funding.

A very quick summary of those meetings - and I know people have different views about their effectiveness, how well they were communicated et cetera - would say that I attended the Moriarty meeting myself and there was a 100-plus per cent turnout of the community to make it very clear how they felt about the long-term viability of their school. The turnout at Wesley Valley was not as strong, a little disappointing some people would say. Certainly from those two meetings alone there was no real sense within the community of the degree of momentum we might have needed to move into working group phase, doing some more, especially with the time constraints we had on it.

Mr WHITELEY - Malcolm, can I make a few comments. I think this process, with great respect to the department, will be a bigger window of opportunity for people to have their view. You are quite correct, with the other one there would be a variety of views as to how well those meetings might have been communicated. This process will give those community groups plenty of opportunity to provide their say. Can I clarify for you

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and the committee that when Rene Hidding first proposed the motion, and we were thankful that the Premier very quickly gave a wink and a nod across the Chamber, the Premier extended the motion from its original intent. We have no problem with that and it is now reflected in this reference, that being the inclusion of Moriarty and Sassafras. That was never our intention, but we are more than happy for that to be a part of this process.

I want to make that clear to my fellow committee members, that as far as we were concerned that used to be in my electorate and it no longer is - it is in Heather's and so on. From our perspective we don't want to see any change at Moriarty or Sassafras. The big issue here is the discussion around the future of a school in Port Sorell and the relationship of that with Wesley Vale.

Out of the 300 students that my information says are roughly the day numbers of Wesley Vale at the moment, how many are Shearwater-Port Sorell?

Mr WELLS - Bearing in mind that where the boundary between those areas and the Port Sorell area is might be debated, our data would say that 77 per cent of the Wesley Vale primary enrolment is what most people would accept as being called the Port Sorell area.

Mr WHITELEY - I believe personally that this process should be market driven. Let us presume that a new school was built at Port Sorell. It would be fair to say that all of those students would go to Port Sorell, I do not think there would be any question about that, so that leaves about 80 students?

Mr WELLS - Possibly. Between 60 and 80 might be a reasonable assumption.

Mr WHITELEY - Which is pretty much the current number of those enrolled at both Moriarty and Sassafras?

Mr WELLS - Nearly.

Mr WHITELEY - Moriarty is 80.

Mr WELLS - Moriarty would be, at first-day census in 2009, 80 students, yes.

Mr WHITELEY - And 51 at Sassafras.

Mr WELLS - Yes.

Mr WHITELEY - How many schools in the State would we have under the day number of 80?

Mr WELLS - Are you allowed to take questions on notice?

Mr WHITELEY - Yes, that is fine. I am not trying to be smart.

Mr WELLS - I was not trying to be smart in my reply, either.

Mr WHITELEY - I have a heap of questions that I want to get to.

Mr WELLS - I know that on the north-west coast we have 26 schools that would be categorised by the department as either level 1 or level 2.

Mr WHITELEY - Can you explain that?

Mr WELLS - Our level 2 schools are below 200 and I think our level 1 schools are below 100. That is a starting point, but from a statewide point of view I can find that out for you pretty quickly if you would like that information.

Mr WHITELEY - Yes, and I am sure you are smart enough to understand the context in which I ask that. If we have 50 or 100 schools in Tasmania already that are under the magical number of 100, it is not necessarily a strong argument to suggest that a school at Wesley Vale with 70, 80 or 90 students - whatever the figure is - is not any more or less viable than 50 or 60 other schools in the State.

Mr WELLS - I have a view about that which I think would be shared from the department's perspective, which was what I was trying to say, Brett, about the best use of our available resources to provide public education across the State. We have a commitment to a significant number of small schools where that is clearly, when you take into account geography, a sensible and appropriate provision. I think the debate would be about maintaining, with all of the other costs that are associated with maintaining individual sites, or having this kind of a configuration in that area, given the distance et cetera. I think it is fair to say it could be called into question as a sensible provision -

Mr WHITELEY - I accept that.

Mr WELLS - of public education from that point of view, especially when you look at Moriarty and Wesley Vale. You would have there in that scenario, I think, a school with enough room for 300 children with 75 or 80 children in it, and one that is 2 kilometres as the crow flies with initially 80. But that is the other issue with the Port Sorell discussion - that 36 per cent of Moriarty's current enrolment are Port Sorell-based students.

Mr WHITELEY - That is correct. I accept all that you are saying, and I am trying to weigh up here. I have a biased view at this point, but we are talking about the disbenefit to some versus a hugely advantageous benefit to a significant majority, and I would encourage my colleagues around the table to focus on that. Yes, it is true but, as I understand it, out of the 300 kids at Wesley Vale there are 230 that come from Port Sorell. There are only about 23 or 25 from Wesley Vale, five from Moriarty, seven from Latrobe and about 35 - in my information it says 'other'. Is that East Devonport?

Mr WELLS - It is probably anywhere other than those areas.

Mr WHITELEY - My understanding is a significant number of that 35 are from East Devonport.

Mr WELLS - I think probably more than half might be people now residing in the Devonport area -

Mr WHITELEY - Pardoe. Yes, that is right.

Mr WELLS - and there would be a smaller number who would be residing in the Latrobe area, and some of those enrolment behaviours relate to having moved. You have already got your children settled, having chosen a particular school, and you really felt so strongly about it that you ended up being able to have your child enrolled out of area, or it might relate to work commitments. People might have been working at the mill or somewhere else and it works for family reasons. I can only guess, but I think that would account for probably those 30 or 35 students you are talking about.

Mrs BUTLER - Malcolm, is there any development planned for Wesley Vale itself? The school site is quite a large site, isn't it?

Mr WELLS - Yes.

Mrs BUTLER - We have lots of evidence about what is planned for Port Sorell but do you know of anything down the track for Wesley Vale?

Mr WELLS - No, I do not, and it is not something that has come up. I am not aware that it came up at the time there was a meeting and discussions at the Latrobe Council with the school association chair, and in the work that we have done recently I am not aware. In fact the only story I had heard, which was actually the opposite, was the issues around both the mill sites.

Mr WHITELEY - Yes.

Mr WELLS - So apart from that, and from what I know of the area, Heather, apart from the presence of the mill, I think it is pretty fair to characterise it as a rural area.

Mrs BUTLER - Yes, beautiful soil.

Mr WELLS - Yes, absolutely.

Mr WHITELEY - Malcolm, on my calculations we are talking about the fact that there are at least 270 students who live in what you describe as the Port Sorell/Shearwater area that are dispersed amongst the other three if not four schools, if you include Latrobe.

Mr WELLS - Yes.

Mr WHITELEY - I would put to you - and I know you have to watch what you say from an infrastructure capital funding point of view - that we are here to investigate not whether the State can afford it or whether there is enough money in the tin, but the issue of the benefit of a school in the Port Sorell area, which I understand is either the second or third fastest-growing population centre in the State.

Mr WELLS - Yes.

Mr WHITELEY - I put it to you that there are 270 absolutely definite kids that are travelling at the very least 10 kilometres to school, if not a great deal further than that, and that there would be a huge community of interest benefit in looking down the track to

spending some of this money, as has been the case by a decision in Burnie to move towards the planning and building of a new school in Port Sorell.

Mr WELLS - This is my first ever attendance at one of these meetings.

Mr WHITELEY - You are going well.

Mr WELLS - I respect the point of view that you are putting, Brett, but we have not shied away from clearly saying that there are enough primary-age students that reside in the area for a Port Sorell school to service. There are clearly enough there for a viable, decent-sized primary school. However, taking into account what your focus is and what the department's focus is, my issue from a departmental perspective is that counterview or at least a view alongside that, that it will have a significant impact on the provision of public education within that area as a result of taking that course of action.

Mr WHITELEY - I am sure you have wrapped your mind around this question. Tell me, if you can, what you would see as the end result. I think we are agreed, if a new school is built at Port Sorell, 270 kids, roughly, are going to turn up there. What do you see happening then? We have 47 of remaining 70 kids who would still be left at Wesley Vale who do not come from Wesley Vale. What does your crystal ball tell you would happen if you were fortunate enough to have money dropped on you or someone built a school at Port Sorell? What would happen and what would be the downside to the educational outcomes in this area?

Mr WELLS - Bearing in mind this is, as with anybody else, speculation only, perhaps only informed by working in schools and working with parents and communities over a long period of time so I would hope it is a bit of educated speculation, I would anticipate that there would be a significant decline in the enrolment at Moriarty at some point and it is difficult to know time lines. Parents who now feel that they are in a growing school where there is the resourcing and class structures that they are happy to have for their children, could be in a situation where they are starting to say, 'How come we have to have a prep 1, 2, 3, rather than the previous class structures?' I could see, over time, Moriarty's capacity to provide the current high quality program seriously compromised and the long-term viability of the school at least under threat.

I think that once you establish a school at Port Sorell, Wesley Vale would close because it just would not be viable to run that facility with what would be, in my view, a rapidly declining student population, once that decision was made. Beyond that, I think the issues for Sassafra and Latrobe as primary schools in that group of four schools would be much less significant and potentially not noticed too greatly at all.

Mr WHITELEY - I think I would agree with you on that. My question, though, to you is that, why shouldn't the market drive this decision-making? If, at the end of the day, there are, for example, 28 children at Moriarty - and my personal view is that Moriarty has a future - if 28 people choose to send their kids from Port Sorell to Moriarty and go past Wesley Vale, for whatever reason, what is wrong with parents exercising their choice should a new school be built in Port Sorell, and let their children walk and ride their bikes to school?

Mr WELLS - What is wrong with that? On one level, on the notion of completely open choice, I suppose you could argue that there is nothing wrong with it. I just think that it is compromised by another debate, which is that we are doing our best with the capacity we have with taxpayers' resources to efficiently and effectively drive public education. I think that is where the rub is, if you know what I mean.

Mr WHITELEY - Yes. I accept that these smaller schools would certainly face a bit of a challenge in relation to the retention of some of their Port Sorell students but I would then put the other side of the argument. Data shows that 270 primary school-aged children could go to a school in their own neighbourhood, walk it, ride their bikes, could become a part of the community there which, as I said, is either the second or third-fastest growing area, and not have to necessarily get on buses and travel - it is not a goat track but it is not the best road going around. How do you weigh up that argument? Two hundred and seventy students out of - if you take 700 less 240 at Latrobe, take off another 270, that is 510. That only leaves about 180 students in the other three schools. How do you explain that to the parents and children in a built-up community like Shearwater and Port Sorell?

Mr WELLS - I do not know if I am answering your question. I am really trying to.

Mr WHITELEY - You are doing well.

Mr WELLS - All I can say in response to that is that, if that is the course of action and there is a school at Port Sorell and it is a public school then I don't think it is responsible for us to maintain 7 kilometres down the road a site for 300 children.

Mr WHITELEY - Yes, I accept that.

Mr WELLS - If that is accepted then a consequence of the decision is that Wesley Vale would close and then allied to that - and I know that there are some different views and you have expressed one yourself - is the potential impact on Moriarty Primary School in the medium to longer term as well.

Mrs BUTLER - Can you tell me what Wesley Vale was promised under the BER?

Mr WELLS - Heather, you could end up at around about \$2.5 million. Mind you, my understanding of the BER guidelines is that it is not so much a guarantee that you get all of that but they would be eligible for up to that amount based on their student enrolment. I think that is both the Primary Schools for the 21st Century component, which is the major part, and also the National School Pride funding which is a separate element within the BER.

Mrs BUTLER - Do you know what projects they had in mind with that money?

Mr WELLS - I think it is classroom refurbishment. I will have to have a look. I do not have that in front of me at the moment. I think it is certainly driven by catering for their enrolment. It is a bit of a squeeze there at the moment.

Mrs BUTLER - Yes. And they wanted to fit out the new buildings out the back, didn't they?

Mr WELLS - I think so, yes.

CHAIR - Malcolm, could you tell me, just in respect of the BER for Wesley Vale, has that been put on hold while this inquiry takes place?

Mr WELLS - I don't know about that, Kerry. I think that there are three rounds. The major component, Kerry, is the Primary Schools for the 21st Century funding, which would be in the \$2 million-plus category. We prioritise the release of groups at schools to match all the stuff about building contractors and all that sort of stuff. I would expect that we put any schools, going back a few months, that we thought might be considered - and I would stress *might* be considered - to be interested in amalgamating to be announced in the third round rather than in the first round to give us the maximum amount of time to conduct some form of community consultation and discussion. It's not on hold but I would suggest it's been determined that it would be best to be a third-round announcement just the same as the three schools in Burnie. They would be third round to give us the maximum amount of time to engage in community discussion et cetera.

CHAIR - Malcolm, could you tell me the time lines for the three rounds, please?

Mr WELLS - I would have to get Andrew Finch to provide you with that information.

CHAIR - That would be good.

Mr WELLS - I think the time frame to indicate to the Commonwealth first, second and third round, I actually believe that has passed but I would have to check.

Mr WHITELEY - Just off the top of your head, Malcolm, because I know you have been intricately involved: the Burnie time frame on the Parklands site - is that not for opening possibly in the first term 2011 or 2012?

Mr WELLS - Yes, it is 2011. First term, 2011. That ties into the requirements of the expenditure and the building time lines set down by BER, as I understand it.

Mr WHITELEY - That is a 10-month build sort of time, is it not?

Mr WELLS - We are probably not far away from beginning work on that site.

Mr WHITELEY - I think it is fantastic.

Mr WELLS - That is right. I had hoped that by the end of the year there would already be signs of work on that site.

Mr WHITELEY - You know you made a mistake there though, don't you?

Mr WELLS - No.

Mr WHITELEY - I am only half-serious.

Ms FORREST - It's Brett Whiteley's school.

Mr WHITELEY - It is my old school actually. I do accept that you needed to do it. I think it is a great result and I congratulated you on it. I think, though, in hindsight, if we had had four years to spend the money, the possible merging of those schools onto the Parklands site itself with some refurbishment would have been a good option and then a new high school built at Burnie High which you know, as well as I do -

Ms FORREST - This is off the terms of reference.

Mr WHITELEY - That is okay, it is off the terms of reference but I am allowed to say that, aren't I, Malcolm?

Ms FORREST - I might ask about Waratah while we are at it.

Mr WHITELEY - You have put your case and I accept that. I am aware that negotiations are still continuing about the possibility of a non-government school moving into Port Sorell and Shearwater on the back of the Education department's decision over a period of 10 years not to build there. What do you think the impact of that would be on all of the four public schools in the area should it not be a public school, which I think it should be?

Mr WELLS - I would qualify my response by saying it would depend on the kind of private school and I think specifically there I am wondering whether it would be low or higher fee-paying -

Mr WHITELEY - As I understand it, it would be a lower fee.

Mr WELLS - There would be some potential to vary there but if it is a low fee-paying primary school, if you project forward and say whoever the proponents are have decided that they will build a 250- to 300-student primary school then perhaps over four to six years to get to that point or four years or three years, we would see a significant decline in Wesley Vale's population and a smaller decline in Moriarty's population and less of an effect, I think, on Sassafras and Latrobe primary schools and we would have some significant challenges ahead of us.

Mr WHITELEY - Right, so what is your ideal as a good educationalist and what is your ideal situation? Would the community not be better with a fully functioning new 2009 built public school in Port Sorell or allowing a non-government school to take advantage of what is a growing discontent in that area to send their kids in their own neighbourhood?

Mr WELLS - I work for public education for a reason, Brett.

CHAIR - And do you like your job?

Laughter.

Mr WELLS - I like my job and I have a strong view about the importance of public education.

Mr WHITELEY - You love my question, don't you, really?

Mr WELLS - If I could answer it by saying to you that we shared with both Wesley Vale and Moriarty a proposed future model for the provision of public education in the area. We were suggesting a school of around about 300 - and this is a primary school; we are not talking secondary, there is only one and that is Latrobe High - we were talking about a primary school at Port Sorell of around 300, maybe a tad more but we think that is about the right number; the Latrobe Primary School at around about 300 and one small school, we have nominated Sassafras but that was not necessarily the view of Moriarty -

Mr WHITELEY - No, of course it would not be.

Mr WELLS - a much smaller school of around about 75 or 80 and when you put those numbers together you get very close to the figure of 700. We said that that was a potential model and it was based on the view that once you put that large school in at Port Sorell, you would significantly impact on Wesley Vale's viability and our view is in the longer term Moriarty's.

Mr WHITELEY - I think you have summed it up pretty well.

CHAIR - Could I ask a question, please, not knowing the district very well, Malcolm. Tell me about the Andrew Finch you threw in there. I am still wondering whether we have to deal with Finchs in this equation. One is enough. I am wondering about travel. How do the kids get to school? What sort of transport do they use?

Mr WELLS - The overwhelming majority of students would travel by bus to Wesley Vale Primary School. I understand there is a bus run - and there would be several - that starts near Hawley, comes through Port Sorell and Shearwater, collects students and takes them I think from Port Sorell to Wesley Vale Primary School which is a 7 kilometre journey but my guess - it is more than a guess - is that the overwhelming majority of students would catch the bus to Wesley Vale. There would be very small number who would be able to walk but the rest would go by bus or parent transport.

CHAIR - Thanks. Is there anything else, Brett?

Mr WHITELEY - We can always get you back, Malcolm.

CHAIR - Malcolm is coming back after we take evidence up north.

Mr WHITELEY - Malcolm - and I am not trying to trap you here, genuinely, I am not; I have been before, but not now - you did admit that despite a variation of opinion of how effective the short consultation period was; you had your meeting at Wesley Vale, you recall -

Mr WELLS - Yes.

Mr WHITELEY - Would you accept, though, from a wider consultative window of opportunity, that this committee does have a good opportunity to have that consultation probably more detailed, more consultative, I suppose is the word, over a longer period of time, for us to cross-examine? Would you accept that the findings of the committee would be relevant?

Mr WELLS - I would certainly accept that the committee has the time that we did not have to fully engage both communities in consideration of the proposal and think about its impact and consequences. I would certainly agree that you have that time and that capacity to do that.

Mr WHITELEY - Terrific.

Mr WELLS - I do not think I will comment on what your findings are in advance.

Mr WHITELEY - No, I just wanted to hear that you would at least accept that they are -

Mr WELLS - We were very open with both communities out there that we knew that time was a challenge for us and we tried to say to them that we still felt that it was important to be there to raise the issue because the demographics are powerful and the issue has been there for a long time and the Commonwealth resource provided us with a window of opportunity. Unfortunately, the time frames were a challenge but we are here and we want to get a sense of what you are thinking about it now. We were not able, as we pointed out at the start of this discussion, to get as far down the track as we did with Burnie, perhaps because this might be a slightly more complex issue for some.

Mr WHITELEY - My personal view is that once we take the evidence then it probably will not take us long, Mr Chairman, with respect, to formulate a paper. Would it be advantageous then, given that there are funding constraints and we have a 31 October reference date, if this could be tidied up two or three months earlier than that?

Mr WELLS - In relation to accessing BER funding?

Mr WHITELEY - Or at least for the Education department to be informed by this committee. It could not be anything other than advantageous, could it?

Mr WELLS - I think the difficulty I have in responding to that is that if it moved away from BER funding into a broader consideration of our priorities on our capital works program for the provision of education right around the State then I am not in a position to make a comment about that at the moment. One of the drivers here was the capacity to utilise the BER funding to support an amalgamation within their guidelines.

Mr WHITELEY - That is right.

Mr WELLS - If we are unable to access that money then we are looking at making a decision about a brand new school, 7 kilometres away from an existing, very good school in the broader context of our overall capital works priorities throughout the State.

Mr WHITELEY - Okay. What is the cost estimated to be to build the new 450-student school at Burnie?

Mr WELLS - The generally accepted figure for a 450-student-sized primary school was in the \$10 million figure. A lot depends on related costs, depending on the site and services, so it is very difficult to say a specific figure until you have done the assessment but generally speaking, from the start, our department were happy for us to speak around

about the \$10 million mark for a school of that size, subject to those sorts of variable things that you do not quite know until you really get right into it.

Mr WHITELEY - But an infant school start under the BER funding at Port Sorell is not out of the question, is it, for \$3 million or \$4 million?

Mr WELLS - No. I am not sure where that was raised but it has been raised before. My view about that here on the north-west coast is that you would think about that but you could not think about it without your longer-term strategy -

Mr WHITELEY - I do accept that.

Mr WELLS - and liability across the other group of schools at the start.

Mr WHITELEY - I do accept that. Thanks, Malcolm.

CHAIR - Malcolm, I have a general question. Is there property earmarked at Port Sorell? Does the Education department own property there?

Mr WELLS - No, the council, Kerry, in their strategic plan initially identified two sites in the Port Sorell area and I think they have now settled on what they call the Camp Banksia site.

Mr WHITELEY - Boomerang.

Mr WELLS - Okay, Boomerang; thanks, Brett. They have settled on that as the preferred location in their strategic plan for the area and I understand that is their land.

Mr WHITELEY - Yes, it is terrific land. Thanks, Malcolm, you have been terrific.

CHAIR - When you send your other material down, if there is anything else that you come across that you feel might be relevant for our considerations you might shoot that down as well, please?

Mr WELLS - I have made a note, Kerry, to send you a package of material; it is basically the enrolment distribution information, the statistical information, and I would suggest, with respect, that the specifics with respect to the implementation and time lines of the BER are not things that I have in full detail in my head and so regarding some of those BER time line comments that I make I would really ask that they be cross-checked with someone in the department who is project managing that whole very challenging task for us.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. We appreciate your time and the information that you have given us.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.