



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Gavin Pearce MP

Monday 17 November 2025

MEMBERS

Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC (Chair)

Hon Luke Edmunds MLC

Hon Mike Gaffney MLC

Hon Casey Hiscutt MLC

Hon Meg Webb MLC

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. GAVIN PEARCE MP

Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Minister for Veterans' Affairs.

Primary Industries and Water portfolio

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

Jason jacobi

Secretary

Mandy Clarke

A/Deputy Secretary, Primary Industries and Water

David Midson

General Manager (Marine)

Justin Helmich

A/General Manager (Biosecurity Tasmania)

Louise Wilson

Deputy Secretary Environment, Heritage and Land

Jo Crisp

General Manager (Environment)

Lyn Albert

Director, Policy, Projects and Regulatory Services

Kris Carlyon

Section Head, Wildlife Health and Marine

John Adams

Acting Director, AgroGrowth

Deirdre Wilson

A/Chief Operations Officer

Adrian Pearce

Manager (Finance)

Inland Fisheries Services

Ryan Wilkinson

Director (Inland Fisheries)

Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Shane Gregory
Associate Secretary

Melanie Brown
Director Executive and Government Services (Acting)

CHAIR - So welcome to everyone on our final session for today of Budget Estimates. I will introduce the members of Committee B's estimates at the table, the honourable Luke Edmunds, member for Pembroke; the honourable Michael Gaffney, member for Mersey; myself, Rosemary Armitage, member for Launceston; the honourable Casey Hiscutt, member for Montgomery; the honourable Meg Webb, member for Nelson. We also have secretary of support this afternoon from Julie, and we have Gaye from Hansard. This is our team at the table, minister, and we invite you to introduce your team, please.

Mr PEARCE - Thank you, Chair. First of all, beside me, I have the secretary, Jason Jacobi. Welcome, Jason. Acting Deputy Secretary of Primary Industries and Water, Mandy Clark. Welcome to you, Mandy.

CHAIR - Thank you. If you wish to take some questions on notice, the committee will consolidate outstanding responses to these questions and provide them to you for a written response. So if you could provide a brief opening statement, and the committee will then have some short questions around the overview, perhaps, and then proceed on to other questions.

DIVISION 8

**Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
Minister for Primary Industries and Water**

OUTPUT GROUP 2

Primary Industries and Water

Mr PEARCE - I understand, Chair and committee, first-hand the vital role our primary industries play in driving Tasmanian economy and its people forward in supporting our regional communities. Tasmania's agrifood sector is a foundation of wealth, supporting private jobs and public services, and we are on target to grow the farm gate value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050.

The most recent measure in 2022-23 shows that the farm gate value of agriculture was \$2.46 billion, growing by 5 per cent on the year previous. If seafood and agroforestry were included, our total agrifood gross value would be over \$4 billion.

To maintain momentum, we are developing a new long-term strategy which will focus on boosting productivity and unlocking opportunities across freight, agritourism, education, infrastructure, workforce development. The budget includes an additional \$1.5 million over two years for the agricultural research and development fund, which is on top of core funding of around \$5 million per annum for the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture.

The Tasmanian Government continues to invest in industry relevant agricultural research to address the emerging opportunities and the issues that are likely to have a direct impact on the productivity of Tasmanian agriculture. For example, the potato mop-top virus research program to be delivered over the next 18 months.

This budget includes \$440,000 to support the ongoing rollout of the rural water use strategy. This strategy will ensure that we have a good freshwater management information, complementing other key projects like developing water security strategies for King and for Flinders Island.

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This budget includes \$2.25 million to continue delivering the government's Tasmanian Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan, which will allow further actions to sustainably manage wild fallow deer populations and place downward pressure on those numbers.

The plan includes initiatives to provide more land access for recreational hunting and to help manage deer numbers. The Budget also continues to deliver on key programs which support Tasmanian agriculture and rural communities.

This includes the Strategic Industry Partnership Program, Rural Financial Counselling Service, rural business drought resilience programs, Forum of Rural Stakeholders, sustainable wine program with Wine Tasmania, biosecurity projects with TasFarmers and Fruit Growers Tasmania, funding for land care and natural resource management, ongoing support for the Tasmanian women in agriculture.

Biosecurity Tasmania also works with government, industry and community to respond to keep Tasmania free from pests, diseases and pathogens. This includes our success in keeping a lot of the invasive pests that have plagued our mainland neighbours, such as Varroa mite and Queensland fruit fly, which we continue to prepare for high pathogenic avian influenza.

Other important projects underway include cat and dog welfare, weed traceability, invasive species and rabbit management. Biosecurity Tasmania have also worked collaboratively to respond to the salmon mortality events.

Now, we know that the primary cause of the salmon mortality was the endemic bacterium *Piscirickettsia salmonis*, and mortality events of this kind are not unexpected during summer months when warmer waters and other environmental stressors can exacerbate fish health issues. While these events can occur independently, it is uncommon to see several in close succession, which is why NRE Tas and the EPA have released the Reflections and Learning - 2025 Mortality Event Report that outlines post-event reflections, learnings and actions that have been gathered through multi-agency operational debrief processes. This leads to maintaining our waterways for commercial and recreational fishing, which remains a focus of our government.

That is why the budget includes ongoing funding of \$375,000 per annum for the Institute of Marine Research to continue its work undertaking world-class research into core fisheries. This will ensure that we maintain sustainable and productive fisheries for all sectors and for all Tasmanians.

The Tasmanian Government has also released the Tasmanian Fisheries White Paper, which outlines our pathway to modernise the state's fisheries and its management framework. The White Paper is focused on best practice management of fisheries and will ensure our legislation has the agility to sustainably manage our important fish stocks.

We have invested in jetties and pontoons around the state through our Better Fishing Grants Program with \$760,000 in funding delivered under the program as part of a \$3 million government funding commitment to our saltwater angling community. This has seen improvements from King Island to Kingsborough.

This budget includes \$40,000 as a contribution to a new fisheries digitisation roadmap to lay out the pathway to improve digitisation in managing commercial fisheries. This budget

extends for another year the commitment of \$110,000 to biotoxin testing in Tasmania through the ShellMAP program. This amount offsets the testing costs paid by the fishing and shellfish aquaculture industry to an amount equivalent to the value received from testing to recreational fishes. I'm now open to any questions that the committee may have.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do we have any overview questions, members? No.

2.1 Primary Industries

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you, minister. The expenses for Primary Industries drops off considerably into the forward Estimates. The explanation note says that there are fixed-term budget items that are presumably ending. Does this mean, however, that there is no new further investment to be had into that industry over the coming years, especially in light of mop top potato virus and the other challenges facing the industry?

Mr PEARCE - You'll see many of those line items will vary from year to year. This is one of those. In a moment, I'll throw to the secretary to give more detail as to the reason for that. One such reason for some of that adjustment is, of course, the drought resilience program that we put into both King Island and to Flinders Island. We had to get cattle off those islands. We had to get feed on them. So this, obviously, had to be funded, and subsequently that draft is concluded. We've looked after those islands and done a good job, but the numbers go down. So, secretary, if you wouldn't mind just outlining in a little more detail those numbers.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, the decrease of the primary industries, the expenses summary, the decrease in 2025-26 of \$3.49 million is due to the following. It's the updated funding profile of the Australian Government funding for the Farm Business Resilience Program, \$783,000, and the On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Scheme, \$490,000. The funding profile for drought support initiatives, including the Bass Strait Islands Water Resilience program, and it also combines rollovers of unspent funding in 2023-24, totalling \$809,000 across four different initiatives.

As the minister rightly pointed out, there's been a quite significant investment in a range of initiatives for our agricultural sector and farmers, and over the next forward Estimates, you're seeing the completion of stages of each of those initiatives. If you'd like, I can go on about 2026-27 so that you get a full picture of each year.

Mr HISCUTT - That would probably be far enough, yes.

Mr JACOBI - I'll just go to the decrease in 2026-27 of \$3.47 million is due to the updated funding profile again for the Rural Business Resilience Package, \$1.38 million. The Agricultural Development Fund, \$426,000, and the implementation of the Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan for \$676,000. And noting the announcement of \$750,000 per year over three years for deer initiatives. So that's separate to the new announcement, the new funding.

Mr HISCUTT - I guess the question is you're not expecting any new - sorry, have you finished answering the question?

Mr JACOBI - Yes, that's fine. Yes, thank you.

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Mr HISCUTT - Not expecting any new initiatives in the 2027-28 to come forward outside of those listed?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. That would be subject to the next budget announcements.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you for the answer. Regarding the culling of fallow deer, has there been any consideration of allowing noise suppressors to make this problem less challenging?

Mr PEARCE - The issue of noise suppressors, that's what you're getting at. That has been discussed. However, that would be a matter for the minister for Police, not my jurisdiction. I request that any question subsequent to that would go to the minister for Police.

Mr HISCUTT - No, that's all right. It was in relation to the effectiveness of culling of deer. It obviously could have a significant impact on that. But I'll take that another time.

Mr PEARCE - I'm sorry.

Mr HISCUTT - That's right. No, I just wasn't sure if there was another answer to that.

Obviously regarding mop-top, obviously very topical at the moment. I understand there's a fair amount of seed potato sitting in storage in both Tasmania and I believe in Melbourne. I wondered if you'd give an update on how we're going to manage what happens with that seed potato.

Mr PEARCE - Thank you. For the benefit of the rest of the committee, the potato mop-top virus was the first thing that I - in fact, it was my first day on the job. So we leapt into action when we felt that this was something that we really need to jump on quickly.

The industry is broken up into, as I'm sure the good member would understand, certain segments. About 88.5 per cent of our potatoes produced commercially in Tasmania go into produce, into chips, into production. So about 88 per cent. The rest, the remainder, is split between fresh potatoes, i.e. generation 1 seed, G1, which is not certified in some cases and very difficult to trace, both forward and trace back. So that fresh market is an issue, particularly given that they have markets on the mainland and could even be overseas.

As you rightly point out, our potato seed industry is probably the best in the country. We are renowned as the potato growing capital of the country, and there are many growers of high quality hybrid seed in Tasmania that stand to lose their livelihoods if they can't get that seed into their markets, being predominantly South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, with the CCEPP and the National Management Group putting a closure on those seed and that fresh potato produce going into their borders.

That means that we need to look at alternate markets and keep pushing the conditions that we could probably place on the import of those potatoes into those respective states. That work is ongoing.

To that end, I want to thank, and I need to acknowledge that very sincerely and very prominently, the work that BT has done, not only in the tracing, the interaction they had with

our industry and our public, but moreover the work that they've done with our interstate colleagues in trying to open those markets up and making the blow less for our seed producers. It is something that we need to keep and continue to work and it is something that we need to raise at the federal level.

I've also written to the federal minister, minister Collins, in relation to movement of seed or the lack of movement of seed into mainland states and the fact that our farmers have had to bear the brunt of that.

The other point I would like to raise to the committee is much of the seed from our seed producers is owned by the companies, i.e. predominantly Simplot and McCain's, and much of that seed has been taken up by the company. First and foremost are our producers, but certainly those two companies have stood by growers. I'd like to recognise in front of the committee the great work that Simplot and McCain's, in fact, all our industry have done with BT and with the department on getting on top of the mop-top virus.

Ms WEBB - I've got a couple just on GMOs so I might go to those.

CHAIR - That's fine. Come back to you.

Ms WEBB - Minister, Tasmania's current moratorium on genetically engineered crops and animals, which will be in place until at least 2029, I believe, was first introduced following the discovery of genetically altered canola which escaped from trial crops at secret sites around the state. The questions I have about that are: are those former trial sites still being monitored for ongoing GMO contaminated plants referred to as wildlings, and then how many have been identified over the past two years?

Mr PEARCE - I appreciate the question and your interest in this matter. Tasmania's GMO-free status allows Tasmanian agricultural produce to be differentiated in the marketplace. This complements our reputation as a producer of premium food and produce. Tasmania has a GMO moratorium until 2029. The Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania monitors developments in this area to ensure that our gene technology policy remains appropriate and that is happening and ongoing.

The *Genetically Modified Organisms Control Act* of 2004 - the GMO Control Act, I'll refer to it as - provides the legislative basis for our GMO moratorium. Tasmanian Gene Technology Policy 1929 guidelines outline the detail of how that monitoring is implemented. The policy requires the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment to undertake regular environmental scans of consumer sentiment towards GMOs and advanced gene technology.

In terms of detections, I'll probably throw now to the secretary. They're operational matters and no one would be across operational matters like our good secretary.

Mr JACOBI - Thank you, minister.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. For reference, the questions were about whether the former trial sites are still being monitored for wildlings and if so, how many have been identified in the past two years.

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Mr JACOBI - Thank you, member, for the question. So just to be clear, there are 101 sites across Tasmania that are audited annually, and that consists at the moment of 63 statutory permits and 38 exemption notices.

We've commenced a review of the GM canola audit program and that's to ensure that after 20 years of operation it is still fit for purpose, because farmers have to bear the brunt of the responsibility for managing the wildlings as they may emerge and many have been doing that for quite a significant amount of time.

The purpose of the audit is to review each of the conditions of each of the properties and make a determination about which of the sites need to continue to be permitted. Every single site has been audited from year to year. In terms of our performance of auditing sites, I think we've got a very good record. The auditing program consists of a minimum of one and up to three site inspections per year to check for any sort of volunteers that might emerge. And they're conducted typically in autumn, winter and spring when the growth is especially likely.

The review project that has commenced is considering the current audit approach, the risks and site management controls, along with improving communication and engagement with each of the farmers that are involved. What's really important is the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture is involved in this particular program so we've engaged them as a partner in the audit.

Maintaining the integrity of the GM canola audit program is really important, as the minister pointed out, for Tasmania in terms of preserving our moratorium and our status and the brand reputation of non-GM crops and particularly animals for marketing purposes. As the audit review continues, we'll be improving the monitoring requirements and making sure that we do what we can in terms of the permitting process to make it simpler for farmers, but also to maintain our accreditation standards.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That auditing review, what was the timeline on that? Through you, minister.

Mr JACOBI - We've got a program budget of \$640,000, which is allocated to that particular activity at the moment.

Ms WEBB - In this budget?

Mr JACOBI - Yes, it's an ongoing allocation for the supervision of poppies, so it's included in the poppy and hemp crops work.

Ms WEBB - Yes. Right.

Mr JACOBI - In terms of a timeframe for the audit, I might have to call John Adams. John might be able to provide me with some detail. If you want to continue, I'll seek to get that information provided to you.

Ms WEBB - Yes, and the other thing I wanted to follow up on, because you both mentioned, obviously, the value of our GMO-free status to the state and whether that has been - is there a current estimate of what the value is to our state, in terms of our domestic food markets and export markets?

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Mr JACOBI - So through the minister, if we could call John. Two questions.

CHAIR - If you could introduce.

Mr PEARCE - This is John Adams, head of agriculture.

CHAIR - Lovely, thank you.

Mr ADAMS - Thank you, minister. Through you, minister, would you mind asking the questions again, please, just so I can be clear?

Ms WEBB - Sure, absolutely. The first one was about the timeline for the audit review that's being undertaken.

Mr ADAMS - Thank you. Through you, minister. We've been working with Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture on that review program to seek advice about global understanding of canola crops in particular and to support us with some modelling work. We're working through that process with TIA at the moment, and we'll be able to provide advice to the minister in due course once we've worked through that.

Ms WEBB - So no more specific timeline. Is it in this financial year, is it going to be completed, or does it carry over to the next financial year? What's our expectation, even just ballpark?

Mr JACOBI - The funding's ongoing, but I would expect it would carry over to the next financial year. There's a significant number of properties which need to be inspected. So I wouldn't want to commit to it within this financial year.

Ms WEBB - That's fine. I'm just trying to get a picture of it. The second question was is there a current estimate of the value of our GMO-free status at the moment?

Mr JACOBI - That's an interesting question. John, have you ever dealt with that?

Mr ADAMS - Perhaps, minister, through you, we undertook an environmental scan earlier in this year that the secretary and minister have referred to. Through that, we sought views from industry around the value of the current GMO policy to them and sought feedback on that. I don't have specific economic value of that, but I suppose there's a process there of appreciating the value of that policy setting.

Ms WEBB - In some way trying to envisage what that is.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, it's a very interesting question, and it's actually -

Mr ADAMS - It is, yes.

Ms WEBB - Well, what are we risking if it's not there? That's what we need to know.

Mr JACOBI - I think there would be a fair body of work to quantify that.

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Ms WEBB - No doubt. Thank you. So right now, we don't know, but we're pretty glad the value is there to some extent.

Mr JACOBI - The value is there. The value is recognised, yes.

CHAIR - They're just not sure how much. Thank you.

I've just got a question with regard to animal welfare in livestock processing. You might remember that was quite an issue last year, and I believe that we had together a livestock processing task force with Tasmanian guidelines. I am wondering, with that still ongoing, what's the situation there? Do they do visits? How is that actually working?

Mr PEARCE - Thanks, Chair. Our aim for Tasmanian abattoirs and processing guidelines is to meet or exceed our highest animal welfare standards applying across Australia. That is what our government is committed to deliver in partnership with industry. In response to allegations of animal cruelty in five Tasmanian abattoirs - is that what you're referring to?

CHAIR - Yes, and you've got a Livestock Processing Taskforce. Obviously, they found there was a need.

Mr PEARCE - Yes. In relation to those animal cruelty allegations made in late 2023, Biosecurity Tasmania undertook comprehensive investigations, and I'm advised that the investigative process is close to completion. However, at this stage, it is not appropriate for me to provide further comment on those specific instances.

The federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has oversight and responsibility accrediting and auditing this process for export internationally, and members would be aware that DAFF also took action. Biosecurity also undertook a program of announced and unannounced visits to all accredited processing establishments in Tasmania.

CHAIR - And they're continuing? That was really my question.

Mr PEARCE - Yes. These visits review animal welfare conditions as well as ongoing compliance, video monitoring also, which is part of that program that you speak of, Chair, and traceability requirements also.

In response to that 2023 complaint that you referred to, Biosecurity Tasmania has engaged a third-party auditor to undertake regulatory food safety audits of meat processing businesses accredited under the *Primary Produce Safety Act 2011*.

CHAIR - That's fine. I'm quite happy with that. Thank you.

Mr PEARCE - Something we take very seriously, Chair.

CHAIR - Did you have another question?

Mr HISCUTT - I did have one. I'm happy that you may say it's for the minister for Planning but, as you'd know, smaller rural farms are generationally having issues. One of those issues, I believe, is access to housing and being able to build a house for your next generation to take over the farm. I always found that seemed to be a lot of an issue in the Central Coast

region when I was on council there. Does primary agriculture, primary industries have any thoughts or processes or policy decisions on how we may be able to address that?

Mr PEARCE - The point you raise is a very salient one, and it impacts generational farmers incredibly. Aside from the fact that our Rural Business Tasmania service that is provided, you know, that we work with and fund, they deal with that in a generational business transaction and getting farmers to think more like a small business rather than simply just somebody that farms the fields.

Farming in Tasmania has never been more focused on the business aspect. If we don't have our farmers returning a bottom line and making a profit, then that's when corners start to get cut. That's when mistakes start to happen and people slacking off.

So that business focus that's done through our facility at Rural Business Tasmania is incredibly important when it comes to instilling in our farmers and getting on the right track and thinking about that business model and making sure that that's viable for a business for the next generation of Tasmanians. Aside from that, you probably need to talk to the minister.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you.

2.2 Supervision of Poppy and Hemp Crops

CHAIR - If there are no further questions, we'll move on to supervision of poppy and hemp crops and Mr Gaffney.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you, minister. I'd like to recognise Poppy Growers Tasmania and the THA, Tasmanian Hemp Association, and according to the Poppy Growers website, they represent 85 per cent of Tasmanian poppy growers.

Last year, we were told there were 291 growers. Hectares licenced, 8037; hectares sown was 5033, and hectares harvested was 4629. Could someone give me what the current - the last 12 months - have been with grower numbers, hectares licenced, sown and harvested?

Mr PEARCE - It's an excellent question. The poppy industry in Tasmania has never looked better, particularly given - you know, I mentioned the potato mop-top virus. That will mean our farmers need to fallow ground for longer. So poppies is an excellent crop to fill in that gap. It also provides medication that sits alongside many of our weight loss drugs that are used throughout the world.

In terms of your question, the number of growers in - I'll make the comparison with the 2019-20 year, and I'll compare it to the 2024-25. That's where my data sits. So in terms of numbers of growers, 2019-20, we had 354. That has grown in 2024-25 to 366. When it comes to hectares licenced, in 2019-20 we had 20,700. In 2024-25, 12,536 hectares sown; 2019-20, 11,461 hectares; and 2024-25, 7564 hectares, and hectares harvested in 2019-20 was 10,909, and in 2024-25, 7462.

Mr GAFFNEY - So if you'd used my figures from last year, it would have looked better this year because there would have been increases instead of decreases.

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Mr PEARCE - Yes, I realise that. However, this year, we're seeing maximum planting, and we're seeing that anecdotally already.

Mr GAFFNEY - The FTEs, it was recognised last year there were five: one manager; one property support person; and three regional field officers, one for each region. Are the FTEs still the same numbers?

Mr PEARCE - Yes. Total FTE is five.

Mr GAFFNEY - Its total expenses expected to increase by nearly 10 per cent over budget Estimates. Why is this for the supervision of poppy and hemp?

Mr PEARCE - To answer your question, it simply reflects indexation.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, cool. The last one is to do with the Tasmanian Hemp - I have to admit for those, the last two or three years, I've listened to the AGMs of the THA. They're quite amusing in a good way, but they do punch above their weight.

Mr PEARCE - They do. You're right, yes.

Mr GAFFNEY - They really do for a really small organisation, and they do educational work and community work. I know that they appreciate every little bit of funding that they can get from wherever. Does the government still continue to support financially the Tasmanian Hemp Association and in which ways?

Mr PEARCE - We'll dig that up for you.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, because I'm impressed with what they do.

Mr PEARCE - Absolutely.

Mr GAFFNEY - The other question there: there are regulatory and policy barriers with the Senate inquiry regarding development of the hemp industry and the association where they can't get recognised just because of the words of their product, which is quite unfortunate. What does your government do at that level Australia-wide with helping them better inform the public and the people who write the legislation?

Mr PEARCE - To get back to your question, industrial hemp is raised at our Ag ministers meetings that we have across the country - only recently had one. Hemp wasn't on the agenda for that particular meeting, but I am informed that normally that would be, and it's raised with senior officials within the department as to those who have permits currently for that industrial hemp.

Just to get back to you to give some clarity around that, the Tasmanian Hemp Association - and that answers your previous question - received \$100,000, and that's for health and wellbeing benefits for the sustainable Tasmanian hemp food and national consumer awareness campaign. In 2024, they got \$130,000.

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Mr GAFFNEY - I would have to say, after listening to what they do, that organisation runs on the smell of an oily rag for how much of what they do in the community. Well done on supporting them.

Mr PEARCE - You raise a good point. The uses for hemp now in the building industry and textiles and many other uses are incredible.

Mr GAFFNEY - My last question: back to the poppy, fluctuation in world-wide markets impacts Tasmanian growers. Have there been any barriers in recent - are you seeing that what's happening elsewhere, the cheaper products in other countries, impacting on our - or is there a greater opportunity for expansion of our market?

Mr PEARCE - From speaking with our farmers, anecdotally, the feedback that they are giving me is that the price that they're receiving in Tasmania this year is reasonably good, and that's due to the quality that we have in Tasmania. Our quality in our alkaloids are other things that put that premium price on.

Mr GAFFNEY - Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

2.3 Water resources management

CHAIR - If we have no further questions on supervision of poppy and hemp crops, we move to water resources management. Ms Webb.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I want to delve into some more detail about that line item, though. There was a matter - it may be associated to this - that you might be able to help me with, and it's to do with our Tasmania's plan for Closing the Gap 2025-2028, because there are some outcomes from that plan that sit with prime entities in water, I believe, your portfolio under the lead agency, NRE.

Mr PEARCE - Yes, you're right.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask you in relation to our plan for Closing the Gap, new action No. 60, developing a Tasmania Closing the Gap inland waters target covering access to and ownership of inland waters and enabling reforms, is scheduled to end this budget year of 2025-26. I'm checking in on that particular action about how the target's going, minister. Can you provide an update regarding a finalised target in terms of providing the Tasmanian Aboriginal access to and ownership of inland waters?

Mr PEARCE - Yes, sure. The Productivity Commission's latest review of national water reform noted that the current water planning management and services delivery arrangements do not effectively account for the water access aspirations of First Nations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The issue of better recognition of Aboriginal access to water is being addressed through the national water reform agenda, as you rightly point out, and also action under 3.5 of the Rural Water Use Strategy that we have here in this state.

At a national level, the development of an inland water target for the national agreement on Closing the Gap is aimed at increasing the level of ownership and control of fresh water by Aboriginal people and giving them some control back for their own destinies. Once the

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national approach to an inland water target is agreed, I'll note on my notes here that it's likely to be later in 2025 or early in 2026. NRE will work in partnership with the Coalition of Peaks partner, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, to develop an approach to deliver an inland water target for Tasmania.

It should be noted also that actions to deliver an inland water target to Tasmania will be closely aligned with proposed actions to elevate First Nations peoples and their interest in water as being part of delivering a new national water agreement. Funding for this work is covered by the core business operational budgets for the water branch.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That was going to be my question about funding allocated for that, given that it is going to be worked on this year, by the sound of it, or this financial year. It is covered by core operational, but do we know how much we will be putting towards it?

Mr PEARCE - Secretary, do you have that level of detail?

Mr JACOBI - Yes. Through you, minister. There is no budget allocation specifically for this. It's being dealt with as a policy initiative, so business as usual.

Ms WEBB - Okay. I might move on to some other questions.

CHAIR - If I could just ask you why you're moving -

Ms WEBB - I've got a -

CHAIR - I was coming back to you.

Ms WEBB - Sure.

Mr EDMUNDS - Is this still 2.3? Are you still 2.3?

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - If you want to keep going -

Ms WEBB - I haven't got to the water ones yet.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. I'll come after you. It's all right.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Minister, I think you mentioned already the Rural Water Use Strategy which we've got in place, and we've got an implementation plan 2025-27. One of the things I wanted to ask about in the key deliverables list for the department, we've got on page 154 the allocation of \$440,000 for this particular financial year, nothing across forward Estimates for the Rural Water Use Strategy. Presumably, we're likely to have an ongoing allocation there, but we're keeping it conveniently blank because it looks better in forward Estimate totals. Can you speak about how that allocation is being used, and why there isn't an allocation across the forward Estimates?

Mr PEARCE - Sure. The Rural Water Use Strategy is the Tasmanian government's blueprint for managing the state's fresh water resources now and into the future. There are

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currently, as you rightly point out, 16 key initiatives being delivered under the Rural Water Use Strategy that are enhancing our understanding and management of water resources.

The total investment allocated to deliver these initiatives under the strategy since its commencement in 2001 is now \$63.14 million. The Tasmanian government has committed a total of \$9.04 million towards the implementation of the Rural Water Use Strategy to date.

This is supported by an additional \$440,000 in the 2025-26 State Budget, and the Australian Government has invested a total of \$54.1 million, including \$3.02 million to deliver five water science projects, \$26.5 million to deliver six more water infrastructure projects through connections and small projects funding pathways and \$4.58 million to develop a detailed business case for TasWater's proposed North West Water Supply Scheme, and finally, \$20 million towards the Water Infrastructure for Sustainable and Efficient Regions - WISER is the abbreviation - initiative for TasWater to upgrade water infrastructure in Bothwell, Cambridge, Clarence, Ellendale and Oatlands.

I've got Bryce Graham, the Acting Director of Water. I would ask, probably, if we could bring him to the table to clarify any further questions that you might have. Bryce.

Mr GRAHAM - Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm happy to take the question again, and be refreshed.

Ms WEBB - That's okay. I think the minister covered what I had asked in terms of that - it's an extra allocation on top of -

Mr PEARCE - The \$440,000. Yes.

Ms WEBB - Yes. And is there a particular purpose for that additional allocation?

Mr GRAHAM - Through you, minister. The \$440,000 we'll look to use that for the WIMS redevelopment - Water Information Management Systems Tasmania. It's based on some old technology we've had from 2000, so it's a little bit out of date. We are working with consultants to look at our data cleansing and bring us into the future with our Water Information Management System. That aligns with the Water Accountability Project that's under way under the Rural Water Use Strategy as well.

So how do we bring metering in? How do we bring accountability? How do we look at our allocations into the future and through the WIMS system? That's what \$440,000 is - a big part of it's being used for. Some of it is also being used for the statewide water quality monitoring program that we're looking at as part of the Rural Water Use Strategy.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. That probably ties across to the last question I had here on this one, which was around the linkage between our Rural Water Use Strategy and the State of the Environment Report recommendation 14. That notes the Rural Water Use Strategy, but recommends that the Tasmanian government, as a priority, continue to work towards a broader water resource policy approach that addresses resource allocation, water security and water quality. Can you tell me how we're tracking to deliver on that recommendation 14 from the State of Environment Report and do that broader work.

PUBLIC

Mr GRAHAM - Through you, minister. Part of the Rural Water Use Strategy, we have developed a collaborative water quality monitoring program across the state where we're looking to, with Hydro Tasmania, TasWater, IFS, Tas Irrigation - looking at industry partners to look at a broad diffuse water quality monitoring across the state at 84 sites.

I don't have the numbers right in front of me. Approximately 50 are currently existing sites across the state and we're looking to establish 34 new sites across the state, looking at biophysical - physicochemical information, so turbidity, conductivity, water temperature and the like, but also nutrients, phosphorus, nitrogen and the like across those states.

Part of the Rural Water Use Strategy currently under way, we're looking at drivers of change where we've actually been around 50 sites across the state over the last two years taking water quality samples and we're in the process of analysing those, along with our river health information that we have, to look at what are the drivers of change for river health across the state, and combined with the collaborative diffuse Water Quality Monitoring Program - trying to get the name right, they were similar in the outputs - they will put us in good stead to be reporting into the future for the State of Environment Reports.

Ms WEBB - The data that's collected under those water quality management programs, will that all be publicly reported data in an ongoing way?

Mr GRAHAM - We are negotiating that with our partners. All the data collected by NRE Tas is freely available via the Water Information Management Portal, which anybody can access. All our data also goes to the Bureau of Meteorology to be available as well. I suspect that when we're reporting through the State of Environment Report, that data will become available to the public.

Ms WEBB - If we do the State of Environment Report again in a timely way, unlike last time, it's in relation to this, from memory, we have a state policy - a water quality objective state policy, that we've never given effect to in this state since - I think it was - is it the 1990s, even perhaps. So are we going to actually have water quality objectives sitting behind all this, based on that state policy?

Mr GRAHAM - There are water quality objectives that are set through the EPA for a lot of catchments across the state already, and there has been a review of the water quality policy that you mentioned.

Ms WEBB - Yes.

Mr GRAHAM - I have to check the status of that review.

Ms WEBB - Okay, I wouldn't mind having that updated, if we could take that on notice and get some information for us about that.

Mr GRAHAM - Yes, sure.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Edmunds.

PUBLIC

Mr EDMUNDS - I have a question in this area. Through the Energy Committee, we got evidence from Tas Irrigation and they were talking about the tariff structure for the electricity was leading to adverse outcomes around the environmental management of the water. What they wanted to see was better collaboration between government and the GBEs to iron that out.

I wondered has there been - this is evidence we got - I can't actually remember; it was more than a year ago, and I know you're obviously a pretty new minister, but generally, has there been any engagement with Tas Irrigation to try to bring everyone together so that the environmental outcomes we were all talking about are ticked off? Looks like we're getting some notes. I can wrap a bit more around it if you like.

Basically, I'm saying, because of the way the tariffs were structured, they were using the water at times that weren't optimal to irrigate, and it was leading to adverse outcomes for everybody.

Mr GRAHAM - Through you, minister. The tariff, you're exactly right. So the irrigators may turn their pump on at 8 o'clock at night when it's cheap, and pump through the night to 6 o'clock in the morning. That would cause pulsing within the rivers going up and down, and when it's low flows, that causes some issues and the wetted perimeter getting small, and the critters in the river don't work too well at that stage. Then there was some work done, but I don't think it's gone too far to determine the change in tariffs across the state.

Mr EDMUNDS - Okay. Thank you.

Mr PEARCE - Thanks, Bryce. Through you, Chair. I've made a little mistake. I said that \$63 million we were talking about in the previous answer. I said that was from 2001. I was a much younger man then, Chair. I meant 2021. So if I could just correct the answer.

CHAIR - That's fine. Thank you for that correction.

Mr PEARCE - In relation, Mr Edmunds, to your question, we'll have TI in later on in the week. That might be an opportunity in that GBE to -

Mr EDMUNDS - Next week, you mean?

Mr PEARCE - Yes, next week, sorry - to clear that question up.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, I'm interested because they were looking for leadership. So, yes, we can go through that. Are you at the table with them?

Mr PEARCE - Yes, yes.

Mr EDMUNDS - Great. Well, there you go.

Mr PEARCE - As I said, we'll cover it then, if you like.

Mr EDMUNDS - Sounds good.

Mr PEARCE - Any more questions for Bryce?

Mr EDMUNDS - Not in that area, no.

CHAIR - I don't believe so, unless we have Marine 2.4, Marine Resources. Ms Webb.

Mr PEARCE - Thanks, Bryce.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

2.4 Marine Resources

Ms WEBB - Similarly in that area, back to Closing the Gap, because I wonder whether the other Closing the Gap action that sits with NRE Tas, and your portfolio sits here, perhaps. Its new action No. 59, requires a range of NRE Tas ministers working with Tasmanian Aboriginal people to understand priorities for sea country. Would that come under this marine resources line item? Could you give me an update on any dedicated funding or resourcing in the budget or in the operational funding of the department to fulfil delivering that outcome under the Closing the Gap?

Mr PEARCE - I might throw that straight to the secretary, if you don't mind, Ms Webb.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. There is no dedicated funding for that particular initiative. Again, business as usual. As a policy initiative, we work closely with our colleagues in state water portfolios to progress any opportunities.

Ms WEBB - Is there anywhere in the public domain, in terms of the website for the department or anywhere else in public reporting that's done, that I can readily see an update on the progress of these two Closing the Gap recommendations that are in your area of responsibility, minister?

Mr PEARCE - I'm happy to take that on notice and have a dig up. I'm not aware of it off the top of my head, but I'm happy to have a look for you. If there is anything -

Ms WEBB - If there isn't, could you give some thought to putting some information somewhere that people can readily see tracking and progress that sits with you?

Mr PEARCE - Certainly, and if any such information does exist, then we can certainly look at that. So thank you.

Ms WEBB - Okay, now onto the key parts of this line item, if I might. It's an active space. Again, you stepped into a pretty curly one, into this portfolio, minister, given what's happened this year. So, of course, there are some questions around that.

First, in relation to the mortality event earlier in the year, between January and April, primarily obviously focused in the Channel Huon area, but potentially, I think, reportedly in other areas as well, you mentioned in your opening remarks the reflections and learnings report. That report doesn't have essential details of the actual events, like the locations, the scale, the responses in detail at the time, like antibiotic use, or the consequences, like the morts, and how

and where they were all disposed of, necessarily. Specifically, it avoids assigning responsibilities, on my reading of it.

So focusing instead on reducing future mortalities, and the vaccinations and antibiotic use that we might need to consider going ahead, can you confirm that it doesn't consider the removal of these sites from these leases cited in the inshore areas, necessarily, where they're going to be more likely to be affected potentially by warming waters and disease spread, or reducing destocking rates in the leases? Why isn't that there, as part of the discussion?

Mr PEARCE - I thank you for your question. In relation to the matter that you raise - and to be very clear, I don't think anybody in Tasmania wants to see a repeat of last summer's mortality event. Certainly not the industry, not the community, and believe me when I say, and not the government. It's therefore paramount that we recognise the purpose of the report is to support the continuous improvement, and to strengthen the coordination across all sectors ahead of a future potential marine event.

Clearly, this has been conveniently lost in that narrative. However, the fact is that neither government nor industry have been sitting on their hands when it comes to the unfortunate event last summer. We've been getting on and planning to manage and mitigate against any future or subsequent incidents. It's important to emphasise the government has been acting proactively, with a range of measures having already been progressed.

Some of these measures include - and I think this is important, that we get this on the Hansard: we've increased veterinary and biosecurity compliance capability, with three additional staff. We've implemented - the implementation of the salmonid biosecurity quality certification program; planning and implementation for a 2025-26 biosecurity compliance audit program; and a marine aquaculture compliance strategy.

We've also increased multi-regulator land and water-based compliance assessment activities, and the Centre for Aquatic Animal Vaccine Health is also progressing specific diagnostic testing to target *P. salmonis* and the Tasmanian rickettsia-like organisms. I'm advised that the EPA has strengthened its focus on waste management, that you rightly brought up in your question, and preparedness across the salmon industry, with companies now required to develop and submit waste management plans to the EPA director, as set out in their environmental licenses.

EPA has also reviewed and finalised requirements for florfenicol residue monitoring programs should this therapy be administered, which it now is. Additional work which is also progressed by the EPA includes the process of varying marine environmental licences, to add new conditions around detection, containment and removal of dead fish within a specified timeframe and keeping those records to demonstrate that compliance.

Reviewing reporting templates used by industry, including for mortality weight reporting, to ensure that all relevant data is provided in a consistent manner by the companies. Liaising with NRE Tas, Biosecurity Tasmania, and marine resources and the development of health, so that - to regulate requirements are better aligned to establish data sharing arrangements.

Now, what steps has industry taken? I think this is an important aspect also. In addition to these measures that I've just detailed in the report, industry has also advised the government

that it has been proactively implementing measures to reduce the risk of another mortality event.

Ms WEBB - Not destocking, and not moving out of inshore areas.

Mr PEARCE - Efforts include advancing selective breeding programs, refining breeding practices, pioneering risk mitigation technology, such as the innovative jellyfish bubble curtain systems. Notably, government has also advised that every fish released into Tasmanian waters in the state's southeast has been vaccinated with TGVAC plus EC.

All these steps have been taken in conjunction with the cross-agency debriefing exercise, and we have, and will continue to work with industry, to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to manage any future events. We are clearly better prepared, going into this summer.

Ms WEBB - That's all very well, but in terms of responsibility for what has occurred, and actually following up on that, can you confirm that what's reflected in the reflections and learnings report isn't the full extent of the investigation that happened? Was there further findings that were actually put together as part of that, that haven't been publicly released?

Mr PEARCE - To your question, I might turn to the man who developed that. So, secretary.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. I might come back to destocking rates and ask them to come to the table in a minute, just talking a bit more about -

Ms WEBB - We've got a bit to get through. I'm mindful of time, so I don't really - if you want to have lots the information on destocking. I'd rather just get through some questions.

Mr JACOBI - So the operational debrief report is a process that we go through after any type of event of significance. Catherine Murdoch, of the independent EPA, and I decided that we needed to look into and understand what happened, both in industry and both in government, that would inform how we would respond better should there be an event in the future. It was never designed or intended to be a fully encompassing in-depth investigation into every aspect of what happened in the mortality event.

As you would have read in the operational debrief, this is clearly a complex series of interacting events that occurred over a period of time. It was not appropriate for that report to try to delve into identifying a single point source. As we know, *P. salmonis* is a broad-scale, now endemic bacterium in the south-east waters, so it gets very difficult to start to apply any blame or responsibility to any organisation. The purpose of the debrief report was to give a higher-level review of what we needed to do to prepare ourselves better.

Ms WEBB - So the full extent of the investigation is reflected in that report? There's not further unreported -

Mr JACOBI - There is no further information, no.

Ms WEBB - What legal proceedings are under way, or planned to be under way, including fines or damages in relation to non-compliance with environmental and biosecurity regulations that might have occurred?

PUBLIC

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, any investigations in relation to the Environment Protection Agency should be referred in that output group. I can't speak to those. We are still in the process of progressing a number of animal welfare-related investigations, and I can't speak to those as well, because they are ongoing.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I've got more questions, but if others want to jump in, I'm happy to intersperse with them. Okay. I'll just go for a few more. In relation to the florfenicol that's now being used, what baseline surveys have been done to establish pre-existing microbial conditions in sediments in the vicinity of the treating pens?

Mr PEARCE - Again, I think that's probably best answered by the secretary.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, that needs to be dealt with by the EPA and that output group. There's a comprehensive protocol that has been developed between the EPA and Salmon Tasmania, and that represents the work that is required and expected of each individual company in relation to the use of florfenicol, both baseline surveys, but also monitoring during the application of florfenicol.

Ms WEBB - So if I have other questions on florfenicol, you're going to refer me to the EPA, instead of this - yes? I'll move on to a different one.

Mr JACOBI - No. It depends on the nature of - that was specifically around the monitoring program, and the monitoring program was developed as a protocol by the EPA, and the EPA should talk to that.

Ms WEBB - Right. I'm going to move on to something else, then, in terms of the salmon industry broadly now being owned by three companies that are all foreign-owned, so we don't get the detailed information that we would previously have received, because the companies previously had to do annual reports required by ASIC. We no longer have that level of detail.

So in order to fill that gap, in terms of public information that we no longer have, are you able to provide the following information: in the first instance, what's been the total live biomass of salmon produced over the past three years, for the state as a whole and by region, and I'm looking there for inclusion of all categories of production, so fish for human consumption, as well as that diverted to rendering in silage and disposal. These might be things you might -

CHAIR - These might be better taken on notice.

Ms WEBB - Can I whiz through them and then provide them to you on notice?

Mr PEARCE - Might I add that that information is on the salmon portal and readily available to the public.

Ms WEBB - That particular information? Okay. What about the tonnage and proportion of mortalities during the period by region and for the state as a whole?

Mr PEARCE - I refer the good member to the EPA for full advice.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - That's fine. There are other ones there, and they're likely to be also referred to the EPA, I suspect.

In terms of the implementation of the Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan, there seems to be some confusion over where responsibility for that lies. Is it with you, minister? Should I ask questions about the implementation of the Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan 2023? Yes. Was that a yes?

Mr PEARCE - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Great. Are you the single point of accountability for delivering that plan, or are there various responsibilities under it?

Mr PEARCE - There isn't any one single point of accountability. It's spread across multi-agencies.

Ms WEBB - In terms of ministers' portfolios, is it your portfolio only?

Mr PEARCE - Not only mine, but EPA cuts into that, and there are certainly aspects of public health also.

Ms WEBB - I'm interested in a progress report on the implementation of the plan, if there were near-term priority actions set out in the implementation plan from three months to two years to be completed by May 2025 this year. So I'm looking at a box printed out from the plan that had those near-term actions, and I'm wondering is there - can you point me to where there's public reporting on the progress of those?

Mr PEARCE - I think we need some technical input into that one, so I'll refer to the secretary.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. I'll ask David Midson, General Manager of Marine Resources, to come to the table. I might also call on Rachel later, but David might be able to respond to that.

Mr PEARCE - David, how are you?

Mr MIDSON - Good, thank you.

Ms WEBB - Do you need me to repeat the question?

Mr MIDSON - Yes, please.

Ms WEBB - Okay. So Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan 2023 has near-term goals or actions, priority actions. I'm looking at a box from the salmon industry plan that outlines those for completion within three months to two years. So I guess that being out in 2023. It's now 2025. We're there. I'm wondering, is there detailed reporting somewhere on the progress on implementing those near-term priority actions?

PUBLIC

Mr MIDSON - We produced communiques from CWIG meetings that do refer to those. I'm not aware of any detailed reporting that we have put out on all the seven plan implementation items.

Ms WEBB - And the communiques are in the public domain somewhere for reference?

Mr MIDSON - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. It would appear, and perhaps you can correct me if it's not correct, that there have been no community engagement forums held. That's set out on page 8 of the implementation plan. It says, 'These forums will ensure there's at least one engagement opportunity annually for communities in northern, southern and western Tasmania'. I don't believe they've been held. When and where will the community forums be held, and how will community concerns and priorities be sought for inclusion into the next stage of the plan in the absence of those?

Mr MIDSON - Through you, minister. We've taken the approach this current period of not doing them as stand-alone events but rather going to events where there are a range of people and making sure that we have aquaculture people present and able to talk about information around the salmon industry. We went to Agfest, we went to the west coast, to a community forum, and I believe we went to a wooden boat festival as well. I just need to check exactly.

Ms WEBB - That's extraordinary to me. Where was that decision made and when was that decision made? If it's clearly the plan says that community engagement forums would be held annually in the north, south and western parts of Tasmania, it's not quite the same just to turn up places people might be who might want to have a chat, is it?

Mr PEARCE - I understand the premise of your question. Secretary, much before my time, but can you shed any light on that?

Mr JACOBI - Yes. Through you, minister. It really boils down to where is the most effective place to reach the biggest audience. As David has pointed out, some of the actual festivals and events are far more practical for community engagement rather than holding a particular forum. We also appreciate that this issue has been extremely contentious and the value of large-scale forums has been questionable, but I think it's certainly something we should take on board and consider as we - you know, in the next year how we might best conduct forums across the state to elicit the best response.

Ms WEBB - It's hardly about the widest audience, is it, minister? It's about the audience that actually want to engage on this issue from the community who have a right to be heard and have their say. I'm just going to note, in contrast to no community engagement forums purposefully held, there have been 12 meetings with the Salmon Industry Working Group since the plan came into effect, according to the NRE webpage. So you have purposefully had meetings with the industry but not purposefully had purpose-built forums with the community as recommended.

Mr PEARCE - All I can do as minister at this time is to note your point in subsequent decisions.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Thank you. Do you have any further questions?

Ms WEBB - I can keep going, but I'm mindful of time.

CHAIR - We are getting very short on time.

Ms WEBB - You might want to move on. That's fine. I understand.

CHAIR - You're good to -

Ms WEBB - Yes.

CHAIR - You can put some questions on notice.

Ms WEBB - Yes, that's fine. I can follow up through other avenues. I'm mindful we need to get through the rest.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Output group 3 Biosecurity

3.1 Biosecurity and Product Integrity

CHAIR - We have 3.1, Biosecurity and Product Integrity.

Mr Edmunds has had to leave for personal reasons, so I'll ask his questions.

Page 161, output group 3, Biosecurity - it's noticed there's a considerable drop-off in funding over the forward Estimates. Unfortunately, there's no footnote. It was a bit unfortunate that there's no footnotes in the budget papers. If you're able to explain: you start from \$53 989 000 and by 2028-29, we're down to \$38 147 000.

Mr PEARCE - Yes, I understand, Chair. If I could just - we'll start with the 2024-25 budget, biosecurity and product integrity, 40,874; 2025-26, 35,782; 2026-27, 33,059; 2027-28, forward Estimate 32,208; 2028-29, 31,234.

Now, the decrease in the 2025-26 mainly reflects the funding profile of the sheep and goat electronic identification implementation. That was \$3.24 million - yes, \$3.24 million, and the Weed Action Program, \$1.05 million. The decrease in the 2026-27 reflects the completion of the sheep and goat eID implementation with \$2.44 million in Weeds Action Fund of \$840,000, particularly offset by the provision of the 27th pay period.

The decrease in the 2027-28 reflects the completion of the 2024-25 key deliverable, additional biosecurity officers \$400,000, and reverting back to the regular 26 pay period, partially offset by the impact of indexation. And finally, the decrease in 2028-29 reflects the completion of initiatives, including RSPCA support, that was \$800,000, and strengthening biosecurity to keep Tasmania disease free, \$750,000, partially offset by the impact of indexation.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - So hopefully in next year's budget, we'll have some footnotes, which certainly makes it -

Mr PEARCE - And your point's heard loud and clear.

CHAIR - Are there any known workforce shortages or skills gaps in biosecurity operations?

Mr PEARCE - I might just refer that one straight to the secretary too.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. Can I just clarify the question again. Were there any shortages in -

CHAIR - Are there any known workforce shortages or skills gaps in biosecurity operations?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, I might refer to Justin Helmich, who is currently acting general manager for biosecurity operations. I'm certainly not aware of any particular skill shortages. We are normally able to recruit readily to, particularly, our border operations and biosecurity teams, but Justin might have something more to share on that.

Mr HELMICH - Thanks, secretary. Through you, minister. Biosecurity Tasmania is well resourced at this juncture. We've done a lot of work over the past four or five years in increasing the workforce and increasing the capacity of the workforce, in particular in relation to capacity to undertake investigations.

In terms of the increase in staffing for traceability and product integrity, at this point in time there are no known gaps within biosecurity operations or Biosecurity Tasmania more broadly. There are some initiatives, or quite a number of initiatives that are ongoing within Biosecurity Tasmania, including implementation of x-rays within airports on our borders. We're continually looking for opportunities to improve biosecurity operations and biosecurity throughout Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you. My final question in this area, has the government conducted any risk assessment on how productivity measures could impact Tasmania's biosecurity capability?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. Can I ask, please, Ms Armitage, that you're more specific about what you're particularly looking for.

CHAIR - It's a little difficult when you're listening to Mr Edmunds' questions.

Mr JACOBI - Because, as I understood the question, was that how would productivity -

CHAIR - What he said to me is, 'Has the government conducted any risk assessment on how productivity measures could impact Tasmania's biosecurity capability?'

Mr JACOBI - Productivity measures. I don't know what he means by -

Mr HISCUTT - Does he perhaps mean the budget dividend?

Mr JACOBI - Okay. Yes.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. That's what he means.

CHAIR - Yes. What case, he says.

Mr JACOBI - Yes. Got you now. Thank you for that. He's referring to the budget efficiency dividend target.

CHAIR - I would say so, yes.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. Our target last year was \$1.7 million in efficiency measures and we met that target. Our efficiency measure for this financial year is \$3.4 million. So that is another \$1.7 million on top of the previous \$1.7 million. We are still working through the exact details of how that \$3.4 million - how the additional \$1.7 million will be met, but I remain confident that we are on target and on track to do that.

We're doing that through a whole suite of different themes, and those themes cut across savings in our fleet, savings in travel or accommodation, leases, particularly. Also simple things like printing and consumable costs. If you look at those targets that we set ourselves last year against some of those themes, we weren't able to make savings, but again, some of them we were able to make quite substantial and significant savings. So particularly in terms of advertising and printing costs, for example, and that aligns nicely with our strategic plan about being a sustainable department.

The key measure that helped us to achieve our efficiency dividend target last year, and will again this year, is around vacancy. So savings in vacant positions when they are not filled, and that relates to - it doesn't mean that when a position becomes vacant that we're not recruiting to it. We are often recruiting to the position as quickly as we possibly can, but the period of time between when it's vacated and when it's recruited to translates to a saving. Those savings across the entirety of my organisation, which is over 1500 people, are quite substantial.

We've established a recruitment management review committee, which is essentially my executive. We are informed by a steering committee about each individual position across the entire department, and we make an informed decision about how critical is that position to servicing the needs of the Tasmanian public. How long can we afford to have the position unfilled? What are the impacts of not filling the position immediately? Because, as you can probably appreciate, some positions, you cannot afford to not have a person in the role at all times, for example, border control, as an example, whereas there are other positions that you might have some flexibility. It might be a program position which somebody else could step in to support for a period of time while you recruit to the role and get the right person. That is a very measured and practical approach that we have adopted across the entire department to achieving our budget efficiency dividends.

In terms of your specific questions in relation to biosecurity, my understanding is that over the period of the 2024-25 year and at 30 June 2025 - and this is a moving feast, you know, that we had approximately, I think, just a little over 20 positions that were vacant during that period, which translates to about 8 per cent of the biosecurity product integrity workforce, which is actually quite a manageable vacancy rate, to continue with operations.

Ms WEBB - Twenty per cent?

Mr JACOBI - No, 8 per cent.

Ms WEBB - Eight per cent.

CHAIR - Thank you. Do we have any further questions?

Ms WEBB - Yes. Can I ask - feral cats, cat management in this line item? Can I have a couple of questions on that?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Minister, we know stray and feral cats pose serious and ongoing biodiversity biosecurity threats to our wildlife - and primary producers as well, actually. Have there been any identified cases of toxoplasmosis in stock reported? If so, how many instances in the last year? Then I'm going to ask you also about whether your department's quantified the potential cost of toxoplasmosis in the state's primary industry sector, and if you're collating data on the number of stray or feral cat specific or caught and destroyed statewide.

Mr PEARCE - To answer your question, toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite called - you're hanging on - *Toxoplasma gondii*. Cats can carry this parasite and a vital link in its life cycle. Toxoplasmosis is often fatal in infected wildlife, and is the most common cause of infectious miscarriages in sheep. Humans, particularly those with lowered immune systems and pregnant women, are also at risk of toxoplasmosis, which can affect the brain, the eyes and the lungs. Infection during pregnancy can cause miscarriage and health problems for the infant.

A vaccine is available in some countries to protect against toxoplasmosis in sheep, but this is not currently registered in Australia. The use of veterinary vaccines in Australia is regulated by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, the APVMA, and manufacturers of veterinary medicines can apply to the APVMA to have a product registered for use in Australia. If that authority approves the registration of a toxoplasmosis vaccine in Australia, it can be permitted for use in Tasmania.

Ms WEBB - Thank you for that. None of which was the question, but I appreciate the work that goes into preparing the folders and the information that's there. So thank you to the staff who have done that. Can I go to the question again, which was about, have there been any identified cases of toxoplasmosis in stock reported? If so, how many instances in the last year?

Mr PEARCE - To my knowledge, no.

Ms WEBB - Okay. Have you quantified the potential cost of toxoplasmosis to the state's primary industry sector?

Mr PEARCE - No.

PUBLIC

Ms WEBB - Okay. Is your department collating data on the numbers of stray or feral cats sighted or caught and destroyed statewide across our prime industry sector or other areas? I've just been informed that at this stage, those such numbers have not -

CHAIR - We're not collating the data?

Mr PEARCE - We're not collating that data.

CHAIR - Okay.

Mr GAFFNEY - Following on from that one, I'm not even actually certain that farmers are required to - if they destroy a cat which is on their property that they have to report it, do they?

Mr PEARCE - On the legal stuff, I'll refer to the secretary.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, in terms of if a permit is issued to a landholder to have an exemption for shooting a cat on their property, yes, that would require that to be reported or compliant with the permit, but, generally, no. We don't have any data on the numbers of cats that are caught and rehomed through our cat management facilities or destroyed through the cat management facilities that I'm aware of.

I can check with Justin, but I don't believe we capture that data. We do, however, have data for specific pest programs. In the cases of where we're using and trialling Felixer as a potential control mechanism, I do believe that we are collecting data on the numbers of cats that are - for that process.

Ms WEBB - Can I ask about a cat management plan? We used to have one, 2017 to 2022. I don't think there's a current one. Are we consulting or looking to develop a new Tasmanian cat management plan at this point in time or soon?

Mr PEARCE - The government is taking a targeted approach in focusing activity in areas where feral cat control can be most effective. In terms of the cat management plan that you speak of, the government has also commenced the development of a new Tasmanian cat management plan. We will shortly be releasing a discussion paper for public consultation as the first stage in the development of the new cat management plan. The new plan will provide a revised framework for cat management, including feral cats in Tasmania, and we'll build on the achievements of the Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017-2022.

Ms WEBB - Great. And so that discussion paper shortly, is that this year, then, or next year, do you think? Just for clarity.

Mr PEARCE - It's under development, and we should see that in the subsequent year, not this year.

Ms WEBB - In terms of enforcement of cat control laws currently, because the *Cat Management Act* and the regulations of 2022 under that are, I think, your portfolio responsibility. Are we investing resources in compliance, monitoring and enforcement of the current compulsory microchipping and dissecting model cat permits, the breeding, selling and

buying of cat regulations, and how many infringements have we recorded over the last year in those areas?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, I'm going to refer to acting general manager of biosecurity, Justin Helmich.

Mr PEARCE -Thanks, Justin.

Mr HELMICH - Through you, minister, Biosecurity Tasmania is the primary regulator in relation to cat management, but councils also have responsibilities in that space. Biosecurity Tasmania does undertake regulatory activity in relation to multiple cat permits, and there is also a transition of cat management funding that will be occurring in the next 12 months which will allow a shift from what is, effectively, an education-based system at this point in time into a compliance and enforcement system. That will be undertaken by Biosecurity Tasmania.

Ms WEBB - So that's shifting currently, and then at what timeframe does it flip over into that compliance and monitoring rather than education?

Mr HELMICH - Through you, minister, there's a component of \$360 000 a year which is allocated to Biosecurity Tasmania that will be shifting away from the education model we've got at this point in time and coming to Biosecurity Tasmania to deliver those in the next period.

Ms WEBB - In the next financial year?

Mr HELMICH - In this period coming.

Ms WEBB - In this financial year.

Mr HELMICH - Correct.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. So the infringements, any infringements that we're aware of in the last year, or too hard to know because it's local government?

Mr HELMICH - Through you, minister, we don't have data specifically on that. As I said, there's multiple regulators in this space.

Ms WEBB - Yes, I understand. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 7

Environment

7.3 Natural Values Management

CHAIR - Just looking at that area, minister, another one without any footnote, unfortunately, page 158, revenue from appropriation goes from \$12 935 000 in 2024-25, continually going down to 2028-29, \$9 434 000. Can you advise the reason for the decline over the next few financial years? A slight increase in 2028-29, but certainly nowhere near what we have in 2024-25.

PUBLIC

Mr PEARCE - I understand, Chair. The decrease in the 2025-26 reflects the funding profile of the Natural Resource Management Bodies Initiative, \$1.4 million. The decrease in the 2026-27 and the 2027-28 reflects the funding profile of NRE Management Bodies Initiative.

CHAIR - So none of these decreases will affect any staff who work in the area?

Mr PEARCE - My advice is that it won't, Chair.

CHAIR - It won't. Are any of the forward Estimates contingent on any government funding or any Commonwealth funding? Are any of the forward Estimates contingent on Commonwealth funding?

Mr PEARCE - I might just throw to the secretary. I'm not aware of the exact arrangements around that.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, there are a number of fixed funded grant programs from the Commonwealth in relation to natural resources management, and they relate to a whole range of different activities. I don't know if Jo Crisp has come to the table, general manager of Environment. Jo, can you talk specifically, please, to any particular funded programs that would be ongoing in the forward estimates?

Ms CRISP - Yes, thank you. Through you, minister, I draw your attention to the National Soil Strategy and Action Plan, and there is federal funding through the National Soil Strategy and Action Plan which is providing for funding to support from June 2024. There's \$2,343,940 over four years for the Tasmanian High Soil Carbon Landscapes Project.

CHAIR - Thank you. My final question, minister, in this area, in the event of an extreme event in the next couple of years, like bushfire or natural disaster, how will Natural Values Management cope and be funded? Are there any financial contingency plans in place for this possibility?

Mr PEARCE - Secretary, have you got that at hand?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister, in terms of fire management, probably the most significant is the allocation of funding to continue the bushfire winch insertion capability in the Parks portfolio, through minister Duigan.

CHAIR - Right. That's fine. Ms Webb, you have a question?

Ms WEBB - Yes. I wanted to follow up on the answer provided to you earlier, Chair, because you can read in page 164 about the decrease in that output, that line item reflecting that the Natural Resource Management Regional Bodies Initiative coming to an end, by the sound of it. What was being funded by that, and are the activities that were being funded by that, if there were activities, going to stop now, or what's happening?

Mr PEARCE - Yes, I understand the question. Jo, you might be able to cover that in more detail.

PUBLIC

Ms CRISP - Through you, minister, thanks. This is complicated because there was an election commitment in 2021 for natural resource management organisations, an election commitment in 2024, both of which have got grant deeds and funding, and so there's cash flow of funding and grant deeds that goes across various years. The difference between 2024-25 and 2025-26 is related to just that cash flowing and grant deeds that are going off because of a previous commitment and -

Ms WEBB - I presume it's the 2021 election commitments that are dropping away. That seems to be the case in a lot of portfolio areas.

Ms CRISP - That's right.

Ms WEBB - Was that the Natural Resource Management Regional Bodies Initiative?

Ms CRISP - That's right.

Ms WEBB - My question was about - what was that funding, and is it stopping now?

Ms CRISP - So it's supported the three Natural Resource Management Organisations, the NRMs, south, north and Cradle Coast.

Ms WEBB - So are they now all - sorry to interrupt you. I know we're short on time. What's the consequence for those NRMs, then? Are they going to be having to reduce the scope of what they're doing? Will there be people who will have to step away from roles? What's the consequence of that coming to an end?

Ms CRISP - Through you, minister. The 2024 election provided top-up funding to actually provide for 2024-25 and 2025-26 additional funding for those NRM bodies. The result was that they were receiving additional funding. We do settle back down in 2026-27 to pre-24 top-up funding, but as this is an interim budget, I'm sure they'll be putting their case.

Ms WEBB - Keen to know what happens in May, no doubt.

Ms CRISP - Yes.

Mr PEARCE - Could I just add on that, the core funding is being maintained.

Ms WEBB - The Landcare Action Grants program that comes to an end, by the look of it, in 2027-28, was that also an election commitment?

Ms CRISP - That's right. That was the 2024 election commitment for Landcare, which had Landcare Action Grants, Landcare core funding, volunteer supports, conference awards. The core funding is in the forward Estimates.

Ms WEBB - But the extras drops away, right? It will be interesting to hear from those groups what the consequence of that will be when the time comes.

CHAIR - Thank you. If we have no further questions in natural values, are there any questions in grants and subsidies or capital investment from members? Grants and subsidies, any questions?

Mr GAFFNEY - No. Capital investment program.

CHAIR - You're on capital investment. Anything in grants and subsidies? No. Okay.

Capital Investment Program

Mr GAFFNEY - Given the Next Iconic Walk project started years ago in a completely different economic situation, does the government see a need for an updated feasibility study to ensure the investment is being best spent? According to the 2021 feasibility study, the projected price for 100 per cent occupied bunk-style stay is \$576, while the tent site accommodation is expected to be \$288 per person.

Does the government stand by these projections as accurate? Is such high pricing for what is a hiking and camping trip realistic? Given the cost-of-living crisis in Tasmania, is the government concerned that only tourists and not locals will have reason and be able to enjoy the benefits of the now-doubled investment of \$40 million? With the above considerations in mind, will this price point provide appropriate revenues for the time and money invested?

Was the price point and broader feasibility of the program possibly originally chosen on an ambitious assumption of the Tasmanian economy which has not come to pass, which is a very long-sounding question, but there it is in case you can break down or provide us answers later?

Ms WEBB - Pass it on to the Parks minister.

Mr GAFFNEY - I don't mind.

CHAIR - Perhaps you might like to take that on notice.

Ms WEBB - That's for the Parks minister.

Mr PEARCE - It needs to go to the Parks minister, this one. Could I refer you to the Minister for Parks, minister Duigan.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay. I thought it was in the Next Iconic Walks in your capital investment -

Ms WEBB - No. There's only three items here in capital investment that I can see.

Mr GAFFNEY - Okay, sorry.

Ms WEBB - The V1 research farms and ag precinct preparedness.

Mr GAFFNEY - CIP? Okay. My apologies.

CHAIR - Any other questions from members on capital investment?

Mr HISCUTT - If I may.

CHAIR - Yes, Mr Hiscutt.

PUBLIC

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. An update on the Tasmanian Agricultural Precinct preparedness, what that looks like, and do we have a location of that? That's obviously a significant funding outlay into the forward estimates.

Mr PEARCE - Secretary, can you tell us about that in your own words?

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. This has been a long journey and a long process to understand and quantify what a shift from our existing owned property at Mount Pleasant to the Newnham campus would look like and what it would cost.

The bottom line is that, if we were to forgo the Mount Pleasant office and land facility which the Tasmanian government owns and move all of those facilities and rebuild and reconstruct at Newnham at UTAS, we're looking at a likely cost in excess of \$300 million.

As you can probably appreciate, in the current environment, investing in Mount Pleasant as our owned facility which requires investment - some of the facilities and services there are nearing end of life, and we need to invest in those regardless.

At the moment, we are refocusing on what is the total cost and benefit of staying at Mount Pleasant and reinvesting that facility, because it's likely that we might be able to continue our very fruitful partnership with UTAS, particularly through the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, but have a much better standard of equipment and laboratories at Mount Pleasant. That work is still ongoing. We haven't made an absolute decision on the Tasmanian Agricultural Precinct, but I can communicate to you that, if we were to do a complete shift and a rebuild, it comes with a very expensive price tag.

Mr PEARCE - Can I also add, the work that is done at Mount Pleasant is absolutely paramount; it underpins a number of industries. I only recently visited with the secretary and met with our veterinary specialists and scientists, the work that they're doing around vaccine development is absolutely world-leading, and in no way is this an insignificant priority for government. The work that they do will stand Tasmanian agriculture in good stead for decades to come.

Mr HISCUTT - I'll have to do some more research into it. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - The TIA is involved in that, is it, with UTAS?

Mr PEARCE - We've got an element there, yes.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. We have a partnership with TIA. I sit on the board and chair the board, and we have a very strong working relationship with TIA across a whole range of agricultural activities and issues.

Ms WEBB - Is that staffed out of the UTAS TIA cohort that's in Launceston or Hobart or both?

Mr JACOBI - Both, but they obviously -

Ms WEBB - Conveniently midway between the two.

Mr JACOBI - They are looking at a gradual, ongoing shift to have a strong northern presence.

Ms WEBB - If they can convince them all to move north, yes. At the moment, I don't think that looks like happening, does it?

MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND WATER

Part 3: Statutory Authorities

Inland Fisheries

CHAIR - Thank you. If we could move now to inland fisheries. Do you need to bring anyone to the table?

Mr PEARCE - Through you, Chair. I've just got some feedback on Ms Webb's question on water quality objectives. It says here that that question needs to be directed to the Minister for the Environment. These are questions for the EPA. Just getting back to you. That's all.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I appreciate that clarification. Thank you.

CHAIR - If you could introduce your new member who has arrived at the table.

Mr PEARCE - We've got Ryan Wilkinson from Inland Fisheries.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Hiscutt.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you. If I could open by asking how is the government managing the cormorant invasion, which are the bane of recreational fishers, taking the lion's share of the fish and disrupting recreational fishers in Tasmania?

Mr PEARCE - Can I just start by saying the cormorant issue is a cyclic issue. It flares up from year to year, and I'm sure that Ryan will elaborate on that, but this is nothing we haven't seen in previous history.

Mr HISCUTT - It's particularly bad at the moment.

Mr PEARCE - Yes, exactly. Ryan, I'll hand over to you.

Mr WILKINSON - Yes, thank you. Through you, minister. The cormorant issue has been a really challenging one for us. Obviously, our legislated scope of responsibility covers fish. It doesn't cover birds, so that's a bit of a challenge for us. We've got four species of cormorants here in Tasmania. They're all protected under the nature conservation legislation.

As the minister alluded to, we have seen cormorant fluctuations in the past. We've got records going back right back to the 1950s. We've got good evidence from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s. There was a particularly bad one probably about 2010-11 and, as you mentioned, the one we've had - I think they turned up in about December 2023. We think that came on the back of three really wet years on the mainland.

PUBLIC

The great cormorant - the big, black ones - bred up in big numbers on the mainland and then came south, looking for food. Those wet years that we had coincidentally resulted in really good breeding conditions for both trout and native fish, so we had a bit of a perfect storm. We had lots of food, lots of birds, and we also had very dry conditions at the back end of 2024 as well, so lower water levels. So it was a bit of a perfect storm.

We've undertaken a number of actions in relation to cormorants. In the last 12 months or so, we've undertaken a lot of what we call fisheries performance assessments. We've been quantifying the impact of those predation events, and all of the result from that work is available on the IFS website. I think in the 2024-25 financial year, we attended around 54 angling events, so talked to clubs, the angling community. We attended a number of Anglers Alliance Tasmania meetings. We talked to Trout Guides and Lodges.

We've been communicating a lot about the impact of the birds, what we've been seeing in the fishery, and getting the feedback from the anglers as well, about what they've been seeing. In October 2024, we also prepared a webpage where we tried to outline some of the historical context about cormorants, what we'd seen previously, what we think might happen in the future.

I'm pleased to report that this season - and this is from talking to a lot of anglers and talking to the guiding community that are out on the water most days - that the numbers appear to be less this year, and certainly, there's a bit more positivity in the anglers right now.

What we're seeing, we've had reduced fish numbers, but the quality of the fish that are coming through the anglers' catches are improving. So there's more space, more food available for the remaining fish. So if there is an upside to cormorants, that's probably one of those.

Mr HISCUTT - Thank you very much for a comprehensive answer. If another event like what happened last year happens again, do we have any - is it just, deal with it, or can we - obviously we have native species of cormorants, that are protected, but the species that are coming down from the mainland are only - it's only a matter of legislation that they're protected as well. Do we have any policy positions or anything like that that we could -

Mr WILKINSON - Through you, minister. I guess the question around bird management is probably one for, I guess, the environment department within NRE, which manages those types of issues. I've been on the public record in saying this as well, in a Leon Compton interview a little while ago, that when we look at the evidence of culling programs overseas, there's not a lot of evidence to suggest that they're entirely effective. They may have short-term benefits, in shifting birds from one location to another, but they're a very difficult thing to control and manage. What we've seen with some of the work that we've done, and I think some of the - this would be reflected in some of the anglers' observations as well - that when you have environments that have had good habitat and good environment for the fish, they're less susceptible to cormorant predation.

My personal view is, if you were looking at making a big investment in a program, I'd like to have the conversation about what would that look like if we actually looked at trying to make our fisheries a little bit more robust and resilient for future impact. I know there are very polarising views on that.

PUBLIC

Mr HISCUTT - A pretty exciting opportunity for something in that space, yes. Secretary, do you have anything to add on?

Mr JACOBI - No, nothing. I agree with Ryan's comments.

Mr HISCUTT - I wanted to know, in regard to compliance checks, whether they've increased or decreased since previous years, or how that's trending.

Mr WILKINSON - Through you, minister. Yes, I've got our compliance figures for the 2023-24 financial year and the 2024-25 financial year. In terms of recreational angling licences checked in 2023-24, we had 3866. In 2024-25, that was 2787. So there was a decline there, but I'll come back to that in a moment. Recreational whitebait licence checks went from 189 to 109. Our authorised officers are also authorised under MAST legislation, so we also do boating safety checks when we're out there in the field.

So 2023-24, that was 596, and 401 in 2024-25. There has been a decline, and when we look at the - there's also been a decline in licence sales over those two years. As a combination of the challenging conditions that we had on the back end of the 2023-24 season, the influx of the cormorants, we saw a decline in licence sales. In looking at these numbers, that decline in compliance checks I would suggest is not through lack of effort; it's lack of opportunity. So our officers were going out, but people were just not angling to the same extent as they were in previous years. I think that was a big part of those statistics.

Mr PEARCE - Can I just, off the back of that answer, we've only got three full-time fisheries officers, two in New Norfolk and one at Liawenee. There are a further five fishery officers who undertake angling and boat safety compliance as part of their duties. Fishery officers are authorised to enforce other legislation as well, such as the *Living Marine Resources Management Act*. I think there's a litter act or something. My point is, that I really would like on Hansard, is, they do a tremendous job. They go well above and beyond the call of duty, and I'd just like to, on the Hansard, recognise our great staff that we have at inland fisheries, including Ryan. So thank you.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes, that's correct. Just to confirm that, so there's three full-time, five that do other duties, and 2787 checks. That's nearly 350 each.

Ms PEARCE - It's a big job.

Mr HISCUTT - Yes. That's worth commending, 100 per cent. On the back of that statement, that licensing is down, is that decreased revenue, affecting - how does that affect the sector, the department?

Mr WILKINSON - Through you, minister, yes, that is a significant risk to us. That is a challenge for us that we're looking at. I think that that might dovetail nicely into the new budget provision that has been provided in the budget, this year's budget, so the \$208,000 for this financial year and the \$258,000 for 2026-27. That's providing us with some operational support. We've seen this downturn in licence sales.

We did a little bit of a forecasting exercise last year. We looked at the 2023-24 licence sales, which were quite strong. We took about a 7.7 per cent drop last year. We did a bit of forecasting and thought, well, we might have a cumulative - we might be about 15 per cent

PUBLIC

down this year, and we're tracking at about that now. That's where that 208 comes from. Then we predicted another slight drop next year. We're optimistic, as the fishery recovers from the cormorant events, that we can hopefully start to see an increase again. I'm also conscious that cormorants are not the only pressure that we face.

We get some feedback from time to time about the cost of our licences, and I think that we're starting to see some challenges there, with cost-of-living pressures. But equally, for some anglers, particularly the more experienced anglers that have travelled overseas, they look at our licensing structure and think that it's extremely cheap.

Again, we're getting it sort of from both sides. But in terms of our forward Estimates and our revenue, around 35 per cent to 40 per cent of our operating budget comes from those licence sales, so that is a risk we're looking to try to manage.

Mr HISCUTT - I'm feeling guilty that I didn't go fishing this year.

Mr WILKINSON - Still time.

Mr HISCUTT - I'm one of those numbers. Last year, sorry. Just a particular anomaly I noticed in the statement of cash flows that I wouldn't mind advice on or explanation for, in regard to that. This is on page 75, the GST payments. There's no substantial change to total cash flows or cash flow inflows or outflows. But the GST payments in the cash outflows sit steady - 80, 82, 85, 87 - but then, in 2028-29, go out to 438. I'm wondering if there was any explanation for that discrepancy.

Mr WILKINSON - Through you, minister, no, I don't have an explanation for that. I might have to take that one on notice and talk to my business manager.

Mr JACOBI - We'll get back to you. We'll take it on notice.

Mr HISCUTT - That was all I had. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - No, that's fine. I have a couple of questions on our lakes. I've been advised that Arthurs Lake used to be a local interstate and overseas favoured destination to fish, especially by the fly-fishing fraternity, but it's now regarded as redundant to people wishing to fish the lake. A couple of questions I have here from people who actually fish up there.

I was told that based on the records from the Inland Fisheries Service stocking database, 2024-25, it was calculated that 9800 fish were destocked; Arthurs Lake, 2555; Salmon Ponds fish farm, 3500, with all other spawning lakes, rivers, canals, and creeks, 3745, which means Arthurs Lake provided 35 per cent of the destocked fish from all spawning lakes and rivers. Given the size of Arthurs Lake, do you consider that's a reasonable percentage?

Mr PEARCE - Yes. Would you mind running through the restocking program as well for the Chair?

CHAIR - Would you like me to put these questions on notice, given the time and that we do have another line item coming up? I can certainly put them on -

Mr PEARCE - We've got the subject matter expert here.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - You've got the answers? Okay. That's fine.

Mr PEARCE - And the restocking program is the important part of this.

CHAIR - It is, and what you're actually taking out of Arthurs Lake.

Mr WILKINSON - Yes. And through you, minister. As you pointed out, we have three spawning traps on Arthurs. One of those has been in operation since the 1970s, and then there were two which were constructed in 2014. Those wet years that we took - so we've done a lot of thinking about Arthurs, and when we look at our lakes, it's probably -

CHAIR - Could I add one more question to it while you're looking at the questions? Were several thousand extra adult trout taken from this lake last season and over the previous season?

Mr WILKINSON - In 2025, so the current season, the three traps combined, we trapped 7517 fish. We removed 3744, and we returned 3773 above the trap for them to go on and spawn. The previous year, we trapped 5792 in total, we released 1263 above the trap, and transferred 4529 above the trap. Sorry, transferred to other locations. I've got a - I could keep going. I've got a five-year total.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr WILKINSON - So when we look at the last five years, we trapped 52,215 fish from Arthurs in those three traps, and we released 38,853. So 74 per cent of those were released back into Arthurs to spawn. When we look at the fishing performance of Arthurs, so we've been looking at - we've been running a postal survey of anglers since the 1980s. I've got information here which I'm happy to share -

CHAIR - Yes, of course.

Mr WILKINSON - which shows catch rate from Arthurs Lake from 1985 to 86. So this was really the - and when we get into the early 2000s, this was really the heyday of Arthurs, where I think some of the people you're talking to will probably remember fondly of how well that it fished.

CHAIR - They do have shacks up there, and they're finding that it's not worth going fishing.

Mr WILKINSON - Through this period here, so through the mid - so we've got 2006, 2007, 2008, we had some extremely dry conditions. The lake level went to an extremely low level. We lost a lot of the weed bed habitats from Arthurs Lake, and in the subsequent years we had a very rapid rise in water, and those weed beds never recovered, and you can see how the catch rate has dropped off through that period.

In more recent years, so 2021, 2021-22, we're starting to see an increase again in catch rate. It does bounce around a little bit, but last year in 2024-25 we had a bit of a drop-off, which we think was the cormorant impact again.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Would the cormorant take large fish though? I would assume they'd only take small fish.

Mr WILKINSON - They comfortably take anything up to about a kilogram. What we're also seeing with Arthurs, so when we do our annual electrofishing survey, we're seeing a declining size, average size of the fish in Arthurs. When you've got a situation where you've got less fish in a lake and a declining size, it points to a productivity issue in the lake. If we had less fish and a very productive environment, we'd start to see an increase.

We think the primary driver of what we're seeing with Arthurs in terms of its angling performance is the downturn in the productivity in the system. We were starting to see an upwards trend in that performance, but we fell off a bit of a cliff here in the last year. We're heading up there in December again to do another monitoring round with our electro boat, and that'll give us a bit more information about how the fish stocks are going.

Interestingly, this year as well, something we did, we did a little survey. When people renewed their licences at the start of the season, we asked them a few simple questions of where they were hoping to fish this year. By far and away, Arthurs is still number one in terms of a destination where people want to go. So people still want to go there.

Talking to some people who are having success there, but others I know are struggling to find fish. But we strongly feel that it's - what we're seeing here is not a consequence of fish being removed, it's a lake productivity issue that we're hoping to do a little bit more research on, working with UTAS and Hydro and Anglers Alliance Tas.

CHAIR - One last question. What's the maximum drawdown level on Arthurs Lake for irrigation purposes? I'm assuming there's still a maximum drawdown level?

Mr PEARCE - When you're talking those sorts of numbers, I imagine we'd have to take that on notice, Chair.

CHAIR - I'm happy for that.

Mr PEARCE - I was wondering, Ryan, Lake Sorell's going well, though?

Mr WILKINSON - Yes. Lake Sorell is, I guess, a positive story in recent years, and obviously on the back of the carp management program. Carp has been functionally eradicated from there, and we're starting to see the fishery improve. And yes, we've got some high hopes for Sorell over the coming years. Its neighbour, Lake Crescent, continues to be the home of big trout in Tassie.

CHAIR - Okay. Thank you.

Ms WEBB - You asked your own dorothy dixer, minister. Well done. It's good to share the information.

Mr PEARCE - I didn't mean to.

CHAIR - I let it go seeing it was late. Do we have any further questions? No. Thank you very much.

PUBLIC

Mr WILKINSON - Did you want a copy of that? I am not sure if that is appropriate.

CHAIR - Yes, that would be great if we can table that. Thank you very much.

Mr PEARCE - He's a legend. Thanks, Ryan.

DIVISION 7

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Output group 1

Policy Reform and Government Priorities

1.5 Veterans' Affairs

CHAIR - Our next output group, our final group for this evening, is Veterans' Affairs.

Ms WEBB - Can we have a break in the broadcast?

CHAIR - We could have a five-minute break. Could you stop the broadcast, please.

The Committee suspended from 8.27 p.m. to 8.32 p.m.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, and we're now onto our final line item for today, Veterans' Affairs, and I have the first questions. Can you please provide an update on the implementation of veteran hubs across the state.

Mr PEARCE - Did you want me to - am I allowed to put an opening statement in, Chair?

CHAIR - If you'd like to. Okay.

Mr PEARCE - I've got one prepared.

CHAIR - As long as it's not too long.

Ms WEBB - It's probably going to answer your question, I reckon.

Mr PEARCE - It's not too long. It's two little pages. They're wee little ones. It's important, Chair. It's important for me.

CHAIR - All right. Seeing it's late.

Mr PEARCE - Today, more than 17,500 veterans and ex-service personnel call our state home. Their service and their sacrifice are recognised, honoured and must never be forgotten. Our state has an extraordinary legacy of service. Fifteen of Australia's 101 Victoria Cross recipients hail from Tasmania, which is more per capita than in any state or territory in the nation.

We are demonstrating our commitment by delivering on a priority recommendation of the Royal Commission in the Veterans Employment. Throughout our Veterans Employment

PUBLIC

Strategy 2023-2027, the Tasmanian government delivers practical, targeted support for our veterans through the Tasmanian Veterans Employment Strategy, which is designed to support veterans and to explore roles within state service.

Our Veteran Wellbeing Voucher Program encourages healthy and connected lifestyles for our veterans and their families and active engagement with veterans reference groups to ensure that policies are informed by lived experience.

Our government supports the RSL as the peak body to represent and advocate on behalf of the veteran community. The final report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide was released on 9 September 24, a landmark moment in advancing veterans well-being. Chair, I'm proud to say that I was instrumental and demanded this Royal Commission into veteran suicide, as it meant the world to me to have that line drawn under this very serious subject.

The report made 122 recommendations for meaningful reform, which included the establishment of new structures to better support veterans and their families. We finally acknowledge the important role that the state government plays in advocating to the federal government regarding the provision of appropriate supports and initiatives to ensure that our veterans are supported with meaningful, tailored and adequately funded programs.

As a veteran myself, I know that our government recognises the important role that our veterans play in our community and I'm proud that we are delivering an increase in funding for our veterans this budget. Happy to take any questions.

CHAIR - Thank you. If I could ask you for an update, please, on the implementation of the veteran hub across the state and perhaps whether the office has been staffed, how many staff are employed.

Mr PEARCE - I had a brief the other day, the week before last, from the president and the CEO of RSL Tasmania and they stepped through the progress that they're making with the veterans hubs. I will say that I was part of the federal government, and in fact, was responsible for providing that, or getting that \$5 million for veterans' wellness centres approved for the state of Tasmania. When we did so, then we did that with the aim that that would be not only aimed at the veteran but also the veteran's family.

I personally believe that our veterans families play an integral role in making the transition from the big army family, navy family or air force family into their new family and their new community and their new role and their new employment. If we can look at that transition in a more seamless and holistic strategic way, then I think we'll go a lot further as to helping that veteran and their family with the integration back into civilian life.

CHAIR - So what's actually happening with the veteran hubs across the state?

Mr PEARCE - The RSL at the moment is working on a hub and spoke system of support to our veterans. As well as that, I also, from the federal government perspective, funded a \$2.6 million north-west veterans hub in the north-west, of which I'm extremely proud.

CHAIR - So that's operational at the moment?

Mr PEARCE - Yes, it's operational.

CHAIR - It has staff?

Mr PEARCE - It's staffed. It's staffed by an ex-serving member who was a former bomb technician, an explosives expert. He's now a GP. So he's got that lived experience, he gets it. He's got that sort of tough love mentality. He doesn't handle them with kid gloves. He tells them that they need to take the first step, get off the couch and he's there every step of the way with them. It's one of the only veterans hubs that has clinical support wrapped around it with integrated services from Open Arms, from Soldier On and many other - the special forces, the Wandering Warriors.

There are clinical psychologists as well as one clinical psychiatrist who visit that particular hub. As well as that, we've also funded out of the federal coffers, a vehicle. So a Land Cruiser-type vehicle with an all-terrain caravan. They drive around because quite what we often find is veterans won't go into town to seek help. We've got a coffee machine in the back of that and it goes to Queenstown and all sorts of places.

CHAIR - Do we have anything in the north or the south or are we planning to?

Mr PEARCE - Yes, good question.

CHAIR - I notice it's anticipated that 90 per cent of Tasmanian veterans and their families will be within a 50-kilometre radius of a veteran hub.

Mr PEARCE - Yes. Operational hubs and spokes include Hobart, which is a hub; Launceston, which is a hub; Huon Valley, East Coast, Queenstown, Georgetown, Devonport and Wynyard. They'll all be linked and interlinked into that service.

The other thing I will make the point of, Chair, and committee, is, it's important for a holistic service delivery to be provided to our veterans. The worst thing we can say to them when they are suffering from PTSD or whatever, is that 'You've got to go and see me, and then you've got to make an appointment to see that person, and then a subsequent appointment to see somebody else.' This is a one-stop shop where we can look after them medically, psychologically. We've got OTs and social workers that work in our north-west veterans' hub.

CHAIR - In each of them, or only the north-west?

Mr PEARCE - The north-west, but it branches out and helps the other spokes and hubs across the state.

CHAIR - Are the others going to have these facilities?

Mr PEARCE - Some of them do, some of them don't, but we will -

CHAIR - So will they?

Mr PEARCE - We think we can cover it with, and stretch that service as much as we can, by sharing ourselves in the south.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - From the north-west to the south?

Mr PEARCE - In the south, certainly we'd have to have separate services.

CHAIR - So that's likely?

Mr PEARCE - That's likely, yes.

CHAIR - Do we have any plans for it? Any money?

Mr PEARCE - That's done through RSL, and RSL certainly has plans around that service delivery.

CHAIR - And they've got funding for it? They've been given funding?

Mr PEARCE - Well, they've got the \$5 million worth of funding that the federal government provided. In terms of what the state's doing, my vision for Tasmanian veterans is that, often with filings of the royal commission, that will end and there'll be a service delivery gap that will need to be plugged by state governments, and that's where I shed, certainly, my experience and my priority.

CHAIR - Okay. I'll go to something that I know is state, definitely. The veteran wellbeing vouchers have been around for a number of years, and my understanding is they weren't terribly well picked up. I'm not sure whether they have now. I'm interested in how successful they've been, and how many were redeemed. I've spoken to many people at RSLs. I was previously, until they disbanded, the patron of the northern National Servicemen, and people didn't seem to be aware of it, or if they were, didn't really seem to pick it up. I'm wondering, how is it actually going?

Mr PEARCE - I'm going to refer to Shane on this one, Chair. He knows the full history of this. So if you wouldn't mind.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. We did have an issue previous financial year that there was a slow uptake with the veterans' wellbeing vouchers, and we did find that they probably weren't as well known as they might have been in the veterans' community and it was also - it could be a bit challenging to actually access the vouchers. We have made a few changes. We've been promoting them much more heavily.

We have now made them available to veterans' spouses so that they can access as them as well. The most important thing we've done is we now make them available through Service Tasmania. So a veteran can go into Service Tasmania, show their veteran's card and they can walk out with a voucher, and that's made a significant difference. So we've had quite an uptake.

CHAIR - So when you say walk out with a voucher, because previously - and I used to talk to some of the - particularly the bowls clubs in my electorate who weren't aware and that they could sign up and then encourage their members. So when you say sign up with a voucher, who's the voucher made out to? Do they have to say, 'I want to join', or, 'I need a voucher towards the Kings Meadows Bowls Club or the Eston Launceston Bowls Club', or what's on the voucher?

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Mr GREGORY - I don't know the exact detail. They can redeem the voucher at a number of participating groups, and we are trying to get more groups, more organisations.

CHAIR - I need a bit better explanation, if I can. If I'm going to talk to the groups in my electorate and tell them they can go into Service Tasmania, I need to be able to explain to them that - do they need to go in with a membership form from somewhere, and they'll get a voucher towards that, or can they just go in and say, 'I'm planning'?

I would have assumed they would have to have some commitment to a club, or I know previously they did. I'm curious about what the voucher is without me having to go into Service Tasmania and ask.

Mr GREGORY - I think the best thing is if we can take that on notice, and we can get a package of information and provide to you.

CHAIR - Yes, a package of information would be very useful.

Mr GREGORY - I think that would be the best way, and obviously, going into Service Tasmania, you get the information on how to use the voucher as well. So we'll take -

CHAIR - I wonder what the - yes, who the voucher is made out to because obviously in the past, it was a matter of the sporting club signing up and then the person actually had to then - it was quite involved.

Mr GREGORY - The sporting club or the organisation that provides the services has to register, yes. They have to be registered on the program.

CHAIR - Yes. How are you getting it out to clubs? Are you advertising to the clubs about it? The ones I've spoken to in the past have not been aware. Is there an advertising - some sort of marketing to let clubs - particularly bowls clubs and the clubs that older people and veterans might be joining up to?

Mr GAFFNEY - I think there's a difference, though, here with the veterans' voucher and also the older persons voucher that -

CHAIR - No. I'm talking about the veterans. I've been dealing with the veterans in the past.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes, but when you talk about bowling clubs, and so a lot of people there are not veterans, but they can still access \$100 to go out of pocket, and that's run out.

CHAIR - The veterans one was the one that I've been actually been dealing with in the past. So I wondered how are you actually marketing the veterans' vouchers for people to actually register and sign up.

Mr PEARCE - Chair, just if I might add, it came across my Facebook feed this morning, the veteran - the wellness voucher program, and the issue that we've got is many of our older veterans, particularly in the Vietnam era, they refer to it as, 'the Facebook'. So it's not something that they're familiar with. You're right, what you're saying, and probably something like a poster probably in RSLs or something like that.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - No. I'm not actually talking about the members themselves either. I'm talking about the actual clubs. A simple email out to clubs can actually promote to their members who would be veterans. I know some of the bowls clubs have veterans, and when I've mentioned to them, they haven't been aware that they could have actually had some money off their fee.

Mr PEARCE - General community groups you're talking about?

CHAIR - General community, not just a Facebook for the members, but I'm talking about the actual groups that need to be registered to actually let them know that it's available for their members.

Mr PEARCE - That's a good idea, and I think we should take that on board.

CHAIR - I've mentioned it in the past.

Mr PEARCE - Well, no. I'm -

CHAIR - No, not to you. You're obviously new.

Mr PEARCE - I'm committing to looking at getting that information out to community groups.

CHAIR - Because that would help, to the groups. Thank you.

Mr PEARCE - Yes, I agree.

CHAIR - Thank you. Anyone have any questions?

Ms WEBB - Yes. I can pick some up, if you like. Minister, risk of homelessness in veterans is a concerning issue. We know that Tassie's got quite a high per capita rate of veterans, and they're likely to be at risk of homelessness probably to a greater extent, potentially, even than the regular - the general community. I'm wondering about supports the government's providing for veterans experiencing housing insecurity, particularly, say, in connecting with housing agencies or making housing applications and that sort of practical assistance at that stage of vulnerability.

Mr PEARCE - You're right, what you're saying, veterans are supported through Tasmania's Mainstream Housing Program which assist those in greatest need as well as targeted Australian government programs for veterans. At the election, we committed to partner with RSL Tasmania to build additional crisis and transitional housing for veterans right across the state.

Our \$1.8 million investment matched the Commonwealth's \$1.8 million committed under the Veterans' Acute Housing Program which will provide RSL Tasmania with \$3.6 million to deliver additional homes that meet the needs of veterans and their families' experienced risk of homelessness. New homes will be delivered under the RSL's Veterans' Acute Housing Program which provides transitional accommodation for veterans for up to two years.

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Our government is committed to delivering in practical and meaningful ways the support for veterans and ex-service personnel aimed at achieving measurable improvements in their wellbeing and life, and speaking with the RSL, with the president and the CEO only last week, there's only a limited time that they'll put the veteran on a support program so they get them back into standing on their own feet.

It's not simply plonking them in the house for the rest of their life. It's getting the veteran back into employment and get them earning a dollar, and hopefully they'll be able to afford their own house one day.

Ms WEBB - We'll see how that goes. That's the theory of all our transitional housing in the state across mainstream services.

Mr PEARCE - No, I understand.

Ms WEBB - All completely blocked up because there's no way to get people into affordable housing out the other end, even if you have got them a job, but on that, then, that acute transitional housing and the federal and state money towards that, where is that up to in terms of delivery? Are there properties that have been secured for that? Are there properties in development? What's the timeline?

Mr PEARCE - That's done through RSL, and RSL at the moment is looking at, first, land to put these houses on. So they're at that sort of stages of development in building that acute housing plan.

Ms WEBB - In the meantime, are there services and supports that are being put in place, particularly for veterans, maybe through the hubs, in relation to accessing the mainstream services? Often it's the navigating to those mainstream services and then helping access them and be shepherd through that can be something that's required for particular cohort groups. Is that something that's in place or done through the hubs?

Mr PEARCE - I can speak first-hand on the established Northwest Fitness Hub which will - they'll get a caseworker that will step them through that. They'll also get an advocate to help them with, and we've only recently synthesised the changes to MRCA, DRCA, and SRCA, the changes to the federal act around DVA pensions and the like. That's a new system, a new act, and now we're going through the process of training our advocates in the new acts so that they can apply that to our veterans.

The advocates play an important role as well as the caseworker. So you're right, what you're saying, and it's navigating through that system because if you don't provide that navigation, then, often, you know, they walk off the trail, and they'll never get back on it again. So yes, you know, you're dead right.

Ms WEBB - You referred to as hard-to-reach populations, but, in fact, it's actually the services that don't present in the right way to the right places or with the right support.

Mr PEARCE - That's right, yes.

Ms WEBB - Can I also ask about the Veterans Employment Strategy 2023-27. Looking to promote employment outcomes for veterans, is it still being funded in this budget that we've

got here and across the forward Estimates? If so, can you quantify that funding in terms of this budget and across the forward Estimates?

Mr PEARCE - That is funded. The employment strategy is funded across, you know, this 2025-26 at 240; 2026-27, 144; 2027-28, 148; and 2028-29, 151.

Ms WEBB - Why does it drop away after this year?

Mr PEARCE - Shane is across that.

Mr GREGORY - Through the minister, this year, we've got specific funding to set up. We'll be launching a portal which will connect to a range of different employment resources, including veteran hubs, including - RSL Queensland have a very good set of resources around employment.

A big part of what we're trying to do with establishing that portal and all of that network is to aid the transition of veterans from - serving members from the defence forces into employment, and to help - do the translation between how defence talks about skills and experience and types of jobs, and how we translate that into a civilian environment, in particular into the State Service, and trying to translate.

We've also connected - we've created a network within - we've reached out across the State Service to ask veterans who might be working in the State Service whether they're prepared to be part of a network where veterans who are seeking employment in the State Service could have someone to talk to, to find out what it's like, working in the State Service, what's different, and how they need to translate, and how they might be assisted to do that.

We put the call out, and I think we had 200 responses within a week, of people already serving in the State Service, who were prepared to have their names and contact details put out for current serving members and ex-service members to talk to.

Ms WEBB - That sounds really positive. Can I ask a question about the portal?

Mr GREGORY - Yes.

Ms WEBB - From what you said, it sounds like we're implementing that in this financial year.

Mr GREGORY - Yes.

Ms WEBB - Is it a product that we're buying in from another jurisdiction - because you mentioned some other states that have already got something like that in existence - or are we purpose-building it for here?

Mr GREGORY - When we talk about a portal, it's essentially a website that then provides linkages. Our aim is not to spend a lot of money recreating resources and recreating a presence.

Ms WEBB - Which is why I thought you might bring something in that was similar from elsewhere.

Mr GREGORY - Within the State Service, we have a standard approach to websites. We take that structure and we work off the existing infrastructure that we have with websites. But what we're really trying to do is then provide those linkages out to other resources. So, for example, providing linkages to the veterans' hubs and providing linkages to the resources, RSL Queensland, and we're also looking to provide connections into DVA resources as well.

Mr HISCUTT - I'm going to follow up on the employment, unless you want to move on to something else.

Ms WEBB - Yes, please.

Mr HISCUTT - In regard to the veterans' employment strategy - I admit I'm not across it - are there linkages to advanced manufacturing? I know that having a security clearance often gets you a long way, so smaller businesses are looking for people in that. Is that a linkage we're trying to make?

Mr PEARCE - Yes, and you raise a very good point. The north-west veterans' hubs, for instance, have a similar employment package to the one that's described here and the one that Jane has been speaking of. The biggest problem we find is the translation of skills and qualifications from military speak into civilian speak. The facets of Defence are incredibly diverse, and it's often very specific to Defence.

If I went for a job interview and I said to you that I'm a Sergeant-Major, then that would mean absolutely nothing to a civilian employer, nor should it. The fact that I'm using that language indicates that I need education also, because I've got to meet that language barrier. So the transition of skills, knowledge, attitude, core skills, and also those principal skills that we learn in the military, and how we translate that.

The other thing is, I make the message every time I speak publicly to all our businesses across the country, is, employing a veteran is good for your business. Give them a go. It's a two-way education process, and sometimes it needs to be demonstrated. They need to see somebody else do that. That's why I don't mind talking about that, even if they see me probably in this role, and then, if I can change, so can they.

Mr HISCUTT - Okay. Thank you.

Mr PEARCE - And I'm changing.

CHAIR - Did we have any further questions? No? Well, thank you very much.

Mr PEARCE - No, thank you, committee.

CHAIR - It is 8.57pm. We're actually three minutes early. I appreciate the time, coming in. Thank you. If you could stop the broadcast, please.

The Committee adjourned at 8.57 p.m.