

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA
DEBATES OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

DAILY HANSARD

Tuesday 1 September 2026

Preliminary Transcript

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Tuesday 1 September 2026

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE - ANSWERS

No. 64 - Forest Practices Authority

Ms FORREST question to LEADER for the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms RATTRAY

[11.09 a.m.]

With regard to the funding, operations and practices of the Forest Practices Authority (FPA):

- (1) How are the prescribed fines determined; and
 - (a) If based on environmental harm and culpability, does the FPA have an internal enforcement guideline, decision matrix or policy document that sets out how those factors are assessed; and
 - (b) if so, please provide a copy of these documents?
- (2) What specific sections of the Forest Practices Act 1985, or any other legislation, authorise the use of satellite imagery, drones and aerial photography in compliance investigations?
- (3)
 - (a) What statutory provisions authorise Forest Practices Officers to enter private freehold land; and
 - (b) explain what private land holder safeguards exist regarding notice, biosecurity and privacy?
- (4) How are the prescribed fines used by the FPA?
- (5) How much prescribed-fine revenue has the FPA received in each of the last five financial years?
 - (a) Has the Minister or the FPA ever commissioned an independent review of its compliance and enforcement practices; and
 - (b) if not, why not?

ANSWER

The first answer I have, Mr President, is to question No. 64 from the honourable member for Murchison and with her consideration, and I thank her for that, I seek leave to table the answer and have it incorporated into *Hansard*.

Leave granted; document tabled and incorporated.

See Appendix 1 (page 92)

No. 41 - Ministerial Code of Conduct

Ms WEBB question to LEADER for the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms RATTRAY

Regarding the apparent misleading of the parliament by former minister Ms Ogilvie, the honourable member for Clark, during House of Assembly budget Estimates committee scrutiny hearings on 17 November 2025, in responses to questions on whether she was a subject or party to any Supreme Court matters in the prior 18 months, and which was further compounded by the subsequent deficient clarification tabled by the former minister on 20 November 2025, can the Premier confirm:

- (1) That former minister Ms Ogilvie did mislead the parliament during the Assembly Budget Estimates Committee Scrutiny hearings of 17 November 2025 regarding whether she was a subject or party to any Supreme Court matters in the prior 18 months; and
- (2) That the original and subsequent statements made by former-Minister Ogilvie during the November 2025 Budget Estimates Committee Scrutiny Hearings breached the Ministerial Code of Conduct (October 2025), including but not limited to, the following Code's sections:
 - (a) Section 9.5;
 - (b) Section 9.6; and
 - (c) Section 9.7

ANSWER

This is on behalf of the Premier, Jeremy Rockliff:

Former minister Ms Ogilvie has apologised to the House and requested that I, the Premier, allow her to move to the backbench, which I, the Premier, accepted. I, the Premier, expect all ministers to uphold the standards set out in the Ministerial Code of Conduct, and I, the Premier, acknowledge former minister Ms Ogilvie's apology to the House and the steps that she has taken in response.

No. 61 - Civics and Citizenship Education in Tasmania

Mr EDMUNDS question to the MINISTER for EDUCATION, Ms PALMER

- (1) With respect to curriculum:
 - (a) How is the government ensuring the Australian Curriculum's Civics and Citizenship strand is actively taught in all Tasmanian schools, rather than being treated as an optional or secondary topic?
 - (b) What specific initiatives are being introduced to ensure students graduate with a practical understanding of how preferential voting and the Hare-Clark system work in Tasmania?
- (2) With respect to teacher support and resources:
 - (a) What specialised professional development is available to Tasmanian teachers to help them confidently teach complex political systems and media literacy?
 - (b) Can you provide more information on how the Department of Education are collaborating with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission (TEC) to develop and distribute standardised, modern classroom resources?
- (3) With respect to practical student engagement:
 - (a) Research shows that practical experience boosts lifelong voting habits. Would you support making youth-led mock elections a mandatory, hands-on learning activity in all Tasmanian high schools and colleges?
 - (b) What targeted strategies are in place to improve civic literacy in rural and lower socioeconomic areas of Tasmania, where voter turnout and engagement are historically lower?

ANSWER

- (1) (a) All Tasmanian government schools are required to deliver the Australian Curriculum. Civics and citizenship is taught as part of the Humanities and Social Sciences Learning area from year 3, and is a mandated area of study in years 7 and 8.

Consistent with the structure of the Australian Curriculum and the flexibility it provides, schools determine how civics and citizenship is delivered in years 9 and 10. This may include offering it as an elective subject.

- (b) In years 7 and 8, students learn about democracy, voting, elections and democratic decision-making. This includes preferential voting, with Tasmania's Hare-Clark system able to be used as a practical local example. Schools may build on this learning in years 9 and 10 through further civics and citizenship study.

- (2) (a) Teachers can access national professional learning, as well as curriculum-aligned resources, through the Civics and Citizenship Education Hub and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, known as ACARA.

The Department for Education, Children and Young People's Teaching and Learning Centre also provides units and resources from organisations including our own Parliamentary Education Office, which I think we'd all agree does a brilliant job, both here in parliament and when they visit our schools. We also have resources from the Museum of Australian Democracy and the Australian Electoral Commission. These resources support the teaching of electoral systems, democratic institutions, preferential voting and media literacy.

- (b) The Department for Education, Children and Young People works with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission (TEC) as it refreshes its education resources for schools. As part of this collaboration, the department has promoted the TEC's teacher consultation survey, enabling teachers to identify which resources and forms of support would be most valuable in their classrooms. The department will continue working with the TEC to help ensure the new materials are practical, accessible and align with the Australian Curriculum.
- (3) (a) Practical activities such as mock elections can help students develop an understanding of voting, democratic participation and Tasmania's Hare-Clark system. Schools can use them as part of their delivery of the Australian Curriculum based on their students and local context.
- (b) All Tasmanian government schools can access the same curriculum resources and support regardless of their location or community. As an example, in April this year, I met with year 11 and 12 students from Triabunna District School, who were participating in the Parliament of Tasmania Education Office's school program. In addition, work is underway on 'Defining Educational Success', which will help inform our understanding of what young people want to learn, including how they can grow as individuals, achieve their personal goals and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

TABLED PAPERS

Public Accounts Committee - Follow-Up of the Report of the Auditor-General Expressions of Interest for Tourism Investment Opportunities

[11.15 a.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I have the honour to present the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts No. 53 of 2026, follow-up of the report of the Auditor-General Expressions of Interest for Tourism Investment Opportunities (No. 3 of 2020-21).

Mr President, I move -

That the report be received and printed.

Report received and printed.

Ms FORREST - Mr President, I move -

That the consideration of the report and its noting be made an order of the day.

Motion agreed to.

**Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate
Legislation - Annual Report 2025-26**

[11.16 a.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I have the honour to present the annual report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation for 2025-26.

Mr President, I move -

That the report be received and printed.

Report received and printed.

**Joint Sessional Committee on Recommendations of Final
Report of the Commission of Inquiry - Third Interim Report**

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I have the honour to present the third interim report of the Joint Sessional Committee inquiring into matters related to the Recommendations made in the Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings.

Mr President, I move -

That the report be received and printed.

Report received and printed.

Ms WEBB - Mr President, I move -

That the consideration of the report and its noting be made an order of the day.

Motion agreed to.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

TT-Line Correspondence - Fuel Surcharge July 2026

[11.17 a.m.]

Mr VINCENT (Prosser - Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) - Mr President, I seek leave to table a document.

Leave granted.

Mr VINCENT - Mr President, I table the most recent correspondence from TT-Line regarding the fuel surcharge for July 2026.

Document tabled.

With your indulgence, Mr President, I note to the Chamber that TT-Line removed their fuel surcharge this morning. The next report from them covering August will be the final one.

MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR

Assent to Bill

[11.18 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - Honourable members, I have a message from Government House advising assent to the following bill:

- Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Bill 2026 (No. 10)

Having been presented to the Governor for the Royal Assent, she has in the name of His Majesty the King, assented to the said Bill on 21 August 2026.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Member for Hobart - Ms O'Connor

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council)(by leave) - Mr President, I move -

That the honourable member for Hobart, Ms O'Connor, be granted leave of absence from the service of the Council for this day's sitting.

Motion agreed to.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS

[11.19 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - Honourable members, before I call on special interest matters today, I'd like to welcome to the Chamber the year 5 students from Lansdowne Crescent Primary School who are joining us here today on their tour around parliament. We've just gone through

our formal part of business before we move on to our special interest matters and then we move on to our orders of the day and that'll keep us going for the rest of the day. Honourable members will make contributions on various things throughout the day.

All the members here represent different areas of the state, but we work here in the best interest of the people of Tasmania. I know all honourable members really enjoy seeing students, and the honourable Minister for Education mentioned the importance of our parliamentary education program. So, on behalf of all members, thank you for showing your interest in the parliament and coming along to see the Tasmanian parliament in operation today.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr PRESIDENT - I would also like to welcome to the President's Reserve Liz Knox, Kathleen Smith, Joan Smith and Bernadette Welsh who are here at the invitation of the honourable member for Rumney, and we'll find out a little bit more about them when we get to her special interest contribution today, but our first special interest is from the honourable member for Murchison.

SPECIAL INTEREST MATTERS

Kevin Hyland Tribute

[11.20 a.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Today, I wish to pay tribute to the late Councillor Kevin Hyland, a long-serving local government representative, community leader, sportsman, conservationist and above all a person who devoted much of his life to the people and communities of north-west Tasmania. Kevin sadly passed away on 1 August this year aged 75, while still serving as an elected member of the Waratah-Wynyard Council. That means he will always be known as Cr Kevin Hyland.

Kevin's contribution to local government was significant. He first served as a Waratah-Wynyard councillor from 1999 to 2012, before returning to council in 2014 to continue serving until his passing. That amounts to more than two decades of elected public service, including serving as mayor from 2005 to 2010, providing civic leadership and representing the municipality across the region.

While the length of Kevin's service is impressive, I think it's the way he served that is the worthiest of recognition. Current Waratah-Wynyard Mayor Mary Duniam described Kevin as someone who did not seek notoriety; rather, he sought to be heard on behalf of his people. He brought extensive local knowledge, practical experience and long community perspectives to the council table. He was a consistent and passionate advocate for Wynyard, Yolla and the wider Waratah-Wynyard municipality. He believed that representing the community meant listening to people and that approach earned him the respect of his fellow councillors and the wider community, even when they disagreed. For Kevin, community service was clearly not something confined to his elected role, it was simply part of who he was.

He did seek election to this House for the seat of Murchison in 2005, running in the first election I contested. He ran a respectful campaign and was gracious in defeat. He continued to serve his community always on the understanding that good local government was not simply

about making decisions in the council chamber, it was also about building relationships, understanding the community and being prepared to get out to see things for yourself. He and fellow long-serving councillor Gary Bramich would travel around the municipality, inspecting roads, road verges, community facilities and other infrastructure. That practical approach was characteristic of Kevin; when something needed doing he was generally more interested in working out how to do it than discussing whose responsibility it was.

Kevin also served on a number of council committees including the Waratah Community Board, the Wynyard Showgrounds Working Group and the Boat Harbour Beach Master Plan Working Group. His contribution, however, extended far beyond the council chamber. He was a deeply committed volunteer and was involved over many years with organisations including the Wynyard Lions Club, Wynyard Rotary Club, Wynyard Football Club, Wynyard Show Society and the Yolla Football Club, to which he made a longstanding contribution as a player, coach, president and committee member. He was also prepared to roll up his sleeves and contribute his own time, labour and equipment to the construction of the clubrooms.

The same commitment was evident in another very important part of Kevin's life, Flowerdale's Lobster Ponds Haven. The lobster pond is a remarkable Tasmanian conservation story. Located in the Flowerdale valley, it is home to the giant Tasmanian freshwater lobster, the largest freshwater crustacean in the world, which is found only in Tasmania. The Ponds became the first place where the giant lobsters were successfully bred in captivity, an achievement of considerable significance for conservation. Kevin was instrumental in establishing and developing the facility and became deeply involved in its conservation and educational work, which also extended to the conservation of some of Australia's most threatened birds, including the critically endangered orange-bellied parrot and the swift parrot. The Ponds have become involved in breeding and recovery programs and provide an opportunity for visitors and school groups to learn about species that many people would otherwise never encounter.

There is something particularly fitting about this part of Kevin's legacy. He was a man who spent much of his life advocating for his community, but he also devoted his time to protecting the natural environment and species that were part of that community. Whether it was a football club, a community facility, a local road or a threatened species, Kevin was prepared to become personally involved. That willingness to contribute was one of the qualities for which he was so widely respected.

His passing leaves a significant gap in the Waratah-Wynyard Council, and the many organisations and community groups in which he was involved. His legacy will be seen in the people he encouraged, the community organisations he supported, the places he helped develop and protect, and the many residents who benefit from his willingness to speak up and get involved. His passing has been felt deeply across the Waratah community, no more so than by his family and friends, and by the many other organisations and people with whom he worked throughout his life. I thank him for his service, Mr President.

Vale Councillor Kevin Hyland.

Members - Hear, hear.

Recognition of Visitors

Mr PRESIDENT - As the honourable member for Rumney makes her way to the lectern, I'd just like to welcome another group in from year 5 at the Lansdowne Crescent Primary School. We're currently doing special interest matters, where honourable members of the Legislative Council talk about important things that are going on in their community. Then we move on to some more legislation. It's great to see you here today having a look at the workings of Parliament. I know all honourable members will welcome you to the Legislative Council Chamber today.

Members - Hear, hear.

Lipoedema

[11.26 a.m.]

Ms LOVELL (Rumney) - I rise today to speak about a relatively unknown medical condition, and the important work of those who are trying to raise awareness and improve access to treatments and early interventions for Tasmanians living with it. I welcome Liz Knox, Kathleen Smith, Joan Smith and Bernadette Walsh from Lipoedema Australia.

Lipoedema is a disorder affecting loose connective tissue in the body, characterised by dysregulated and disproportionate fat growth. The most common areas of the body to be affected are upper arms, buttocks, thighs and lower legs. Lipoedema results in chronic debilitating pain and mobility issues. The condition is little known and even less understood, which results in difficulty obtaining diagnosis. Lipoedema is often misdiagnosed as obesity, lymphoedema or fibromyalgia. A diagnosis can take many years to obtain.

It primarily affects women. It's believed that up to 10 to 12 per cent of women may be affected. In Tasmania, that's around 32,000 women who could be living with lipoedema. Lipoedema is usually worse during times of hormonal change and is resistant to conventional lifestyle modifications. Lipoedema doesn't just affect people physically, with a study by Lipoedema UK in 2021 finding that 86 per cent of women with lipoedema have anxiety and depression, and 97 per cent report low self-esteem.

Lipoedema is incurable, but there are management strategies that can reduce symptoms. Some of these strategies include healthy eating and weight management, physical activity and improving mobility, skin care and protection, and compression therapy. Psychosocial support is also critical, including social connectedness and the management of expectations. Sadly, most Australian women have advanced symptoms by the time they are diagnosed, and many have suffered through unnecessary surgeries, joint damage, endless diets, plummeting self-esteem, depression and eating disorders. The more we can do to raise awareness, the better.

Earlier this year I had the pleasure of meeting with Liz Knox, the Director of Lipoedema Australia, and Kathleen Smith, who shared with me their lived experience as well as much of the information I'm sharing with honourable members today. Lipoedema Australia is the national representative body for lipoedema. It began as a support group in 2012 and has since become a registered charity committed to directing and supporting research and medical recognition of lipoedema, and development of comprehensive treatment and management.

The board is led by dedicated women like Liz, who all have lipoedema and who are dedicated to improving the lives of others affected by the condition; and there are a couple of measures they are advocating for right now. As I mentioned earlier, compression garments are widely recognised as an important component of conservative management of lipoedema, helping to reduce symptoms, improve mobility and potentially slow progression of the condition. However, these can be prohibitively expensive, typically costing several hundreds of dollars and needing frequent replacement.

The Tasmanian government currently offers financial assistance to patients with a diagnosis of lymphoedema to access compression garments through the Tasmanian Lymphoedema Garment Scheme. Extending this scheme to Tasmanians with a diagnosis of lipoedema would provide much-needed financial relief and improve access to a clinically recommended treatment. It could make a real difference in the lives of women with this condition. This is just one example of a tangible, relatively low-cost action to better support those living with lipoedema in Tasmania.

In June, I wrote to the minister for Health requesting she meet with Liz Knox from Lipoedema Australia to hear firsthand about the prevalence of the condition, the challenges patients are facing and the opportunities the state government has to improve supports. I understand an adviser of the minister has met with Liz and others from Lipoedema Australia but not yet the minister herself, and I would urge her to take up that opportunity.

I would like to commend Lipoedema Australia for their work and encourage all honourable members to reach out to meet with Liz or to visit their website to learn more about the disease and what we can all do to create change for people living with lipoedema.

Members - Hear, hear.

Levi Springer

Bert and Ruth Van den Berg

[11.31 a.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I certainly acknowledge the honourable member for Rumney's contribution. I have a dear friend who suffers from that particular condition and we talk about it regularly, so thank you for sharing.

Firstly, I would like to speak this morning about a young man from Perth in my electorate, Levi Springer, who first contacted me back in 2022 at just 14 years of age after being selected to represent Tasmania in the Under-16 team at the National Indoor Cricket Championships, requesting support to assist with costs to allow him to participate. I'm pleased to say that I did so. Since then, Levi has gone from strength to strength, being selected to represent Tasmania every year and achieving some remarkable personal success along the way.

In 2024, Levi was named Player of The match twice, was runner-up Player of the Series, finished at the top of the competition leaderboard and was selected in the Australian All Stars team.

In 2025, Levi stepped up to the U18 team, where he was again named Player of the Match. He also recorded the highest individual score in a match across the championships, making an impressive 41 runs, and there is certainly a pattern of success forming here.

Then in July this year, Levi was selected in the Australian U18 indoor cricket team, and that team will travel to South Africa this month to compete in the 2026 Junior World Series. His selection followed another outstanding performance at the national championships. As a fast bowler, Levi took 16 wickets, scored 121 runs and was named runner-up Player of the Tournament.

Levi began his cricket journey at just six years of age. Today, standing at an impressive 6 foot 6 inches tall, he is an opening bowler for South Launceston and has also represented St Patrick's school at the All Schools National Cricket Championships. He's also been selected in the Tasmanian U17 cricket state team.

But Levi's achievements extend beyond the cricket field. In 2024, he was named the Northern Midlands Council Young Citizen of the Year, recognising not only his sporting achievements but also his commitment to his community, including his involvement as a volunteer at the Longford Show. It's fair to say Levi has an exceptionally supportive family, with his mum Kristy, dad Vaughan, brother Ryan, and not to leave out grandma Gayle Spikins, who always keeps me up to date on Levi's achievements.

It's wonderful to see a young person from our community achieving so much through talent, hard work and dedication, while also giving back to the community that supports him. I congratulate Levi on his achievements to date and wish him every success as he represents Australia at the Junior World Series in South Africa. I'm proud to be one of his sponsors.

Members - Hear, hear.

Ms RATTRAY - Moving on, Mr President, I would also like to acknowledge Bert and Ruth Van den Berg from Scottsdale, a hardworking couple who have dedicated decades to their business, Fernmania. This couple are long-term residents of the north-east whom I have known for a very long time and where I come from, they are often referred to as 'salt of the earth'. That certainly applies to Bert and Ruth.

Their commitment to sustainably harvesting, relocating and growing ferns has been recognised with the Environmental Excellence Award at the Launceston Chamber of Commerce CareSuper Business Excellence Awards recently. On the day of the awards ceremony, Mr President, I was chatting with Bert and Ruth at the local footy game. That's probably what you'd expect from me. They were excited to have just been nominated for such a prestigious award and overwhelmed and appreciative to be acknowledged. Then to learn they had been successful was fantastic.

This award is a wonderful reflection of the years of care and effort they have invested in their work. Every fern sold by Fernmania around the world carries a traceable tag confirming that it has been harvested in accordance with approved management plans.

Fernmania's reputation now extends well beyond Tasmania. They have recently supplied a range of ferns for the new garden at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, and their ferns can be found in some truly remarkable locations, including the Singapore airport and the

Gardens by the Bay; and, in perhaps the ultimate endorsement, King Charles is also a customer. We didn't know that, did we?

Bert and Ruth's dedication to their craft, their commitment to sustainable practices and the global reach of their work is something they should be incredibly proud of. Congratulations to them both on this well-deserved recognition.

Members - Hear, hear.

Rural Alive & Well Tasmania

[11.37 a.m.]

Ms ARMITAGE (Launceston) - Today I wish to shine a light on the incredible work being done by Rural Alive & Well Tasmania, otherwise known as RAW Tasmania, in our regional and rural communities, and the real impact they're having for the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians.

RAW works statewide with 20 staff located around the state and are embedded in the communities they work in. They truly understand the challenges and struggles people living in our regions are facing.

The RAW team travels to visit people one on one raise awareness of mental health and suicide, and provide information about what support is available. Mr President, RAW really makes a difference to people.

At the Impact Report launch a couple of weeks ago, RAW CEO Lee Whiteley said:

While non-clinical, the work is a critical link in the system, often being pivotal in building trust and connecting people to clinical pathways that they may otherwise avoid. The real value of this piece in the system puzzle is difficult to quantify because we'll never really know what's prevented.

Mr President, that really struck me, because he's absolutely right. We can never be truly sure what is prevented through efforts being made by organisations like RAW, but that makes them all the more essential.

While I intend to consider and note the RAW Impact Report in this place in the near future, I will briefly outline just some of the things they've recently done to help in our communities.

In 2025-26, the RAW Outreach Team worked with 438 participants one on one, face to face - a reduction on the year before and yet the instances of one-on-one support, outbound referrals and average months of support all increased by approximately 30 per cent. RAW's data is also revealing: 65 per cent of participants were males; 17 per cent in the 35 to 44 age group - an especially high-risk bracket for men.

Almost 50 per cent of participants were over 45 years of age, with 32 per cent being over 65 years of age - a time for many when disconnection, isolation and physical health feature

prominently; and approximately 80 per cent were self-referrals. Well, I believe that data speaks for itself.

For the benefit of those who might not have been able to attend the Impact Report launch, I will finish with a brief anecdote relayed by Mr Whiteley on the day that really emphasises the hands-on work being done by RAW Tasmania.

Back in May, during Budget week, Mr Whiteley had the privilege of attending a gathering at a small country hall where around 40 retired men, all of whom had spent their lives working in agriculture, came together for a shared meal prepared and served by members of their own community. They call it the Bandicoot Lunch. Many of these men are now in their 70s, 80s and beyond. Together with their families, they've spent decades contributing to our agricultural sector and helping to build the communities we're proud of today. They talked about the importance of connection, one of the central pillars of our RAW Fast 5, alongside mind, mood, body and meaning. In an age where we're supposedly more connected than ever, these men demonstrated something many of us risk forgetting. There is no substitute for face-to-face conversation, for fellowship and for a genuine sense of belonging.

While Mr Whiteley was the guest speaker at this lunch, he said that the truth was they could teach him more about the value of community than he could ever teach them. It was a timely reminder that community is not an abstract concept. It's built in local halls, at sporting and service clubs, around shared tables, and through the willingness of ordinary people to continue showing up for one another - a bit like how the member for McIntyre was talking about chats at the local football match.

As we consider the challenges facing Tasmania, particularly in our rural and regional communities, we should never underestimate the value of these connections. Strong communities remain one of our greatest assets, and genuine human connections remain one of the most powerful drivers of wellbeing, resilience and belonging.

MOTION

Environment Tasmania's Map the Crap Campaign

[11.41 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - As the honourable member for Huon makes her way to the lectern, just to clarify for members the word in the title that may be considered unparliamentary in other forms, including interjections, that type of thing, as it's a formal title it is within parliamentary practice. So, feel free to use the title of the document in your contributions.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT (Huon) - Mr President, I move the motion in my name -

That the Council:

- (1) Notes the concerns raised by Environment Tasmania's *Map the Crap* campaign (www.mapthecrap.com.au) about under-treated sewage released into Tasmania's waterways during bypass events, including the claim that more than 635 million litres of under-treated sewage were released during 2024-25.

- (2) Notes that the majority of bypass events involve skipping secondary treatment before discharge, and that Environment Tasmania states under-treated sewage can contain pathogens, nutrients and other contaminants that pose risks to human health and waterways.
- (3) Acknowledges that Tasmanians use waterways for swimming, paddling, rowing, boating and fishing, and that Department of Health advice states recreational waters may be a public health risk if contaminated and that not all beaches and rivers are regularly monitored.
- (4) Further notes that TasWater owns and operates 110 sewage treatment plants, and that TasWater's 2024-25 Annual Performance Report states only 10 of those plants currently meet all environmental licence conditions.
- (5) Recognises that existing EPA Tasmania sewage spill notification guidelines require notifiable spills to be reported to EPA Tasmania within 24 hours and critically notifiable spills within 2 hours, but that Environment Tasmania is calling for public-facing real-time monitoring and alert systems so communities can make informed decisions as events occur.
- (6) Affirms that Tasmanians have a right to timely, accessible and reliable information about sewage pollution risks in the waterways they use.
- (7) Calls on the Tasmanian Government to work with TasWater, EPA Tasmania, the Department of Health and local councils to:
 - (a) Consider funding real-time or near-real-time monitoring at all TasWater sewage treatment plants and key bypass/outfall points;
 - (b) Consider creating a public live map, website and alert system for bypass events, and publishing quarterly reports on bypass events, compliance, public alerts and progress in reducing bypass reliance; and
 - (c) Report to Parliament within six months on implementation, costs, timeframes and to achieve the above.

As you know, healthy waterways are of great interest to me. I'm moving this motion because I recently became aware of some excellent work that Environment Tasmania conducted, which drew my attention to the fact that in 2024-25, TasWater released more than 635 million litres of undertreated sewage into Tasmania's waterways during bypass events.

TasWater have a big task. Each year, 47 billion litres of wastewater is treated and then returned to our waterways. But the concerning part is the bypass events. A bypass event occurs when too much wastewater enters a treatment plant, usually due to heavy rain, causing sewage

to skip the secondary treatment. The motion isn't so concerned about the volume, but more that people may not know when a bypass event occurs. I have a lot of cold water swimming groups in my electorate, and you can see how this would be a concern for them, and for everybody in Tasmania using the waterways, I would have thought.

Environment Tasmania have a campaign out currently called Map the Crap, which is calling for real-time monitoring equipment at sewage treatment plants so that the public can be alerted to bypass events as they occur. This is a reasonable, practical and proportionate request. We already accept the principle of real time warnings in other areas of public safety. When there is a bushfire, people expect a warning; when there is a flood, people expect a warning. When there is a health risk in the water, people should not have to guess.

Currently, the EPA guidelines require notifiable spills to be reported to the director within 24 hours, and critically notifiable spills within two hours. But a report to the regulator is not the same thing as a timely public alert to the person who is about to enter the water.

TasWater owns and operates 110 sewage treatment plants, and its own annual reporting states that only 10 out of 110 currently meet all environmental licence conditions. TasWater is investing in infrastructure upgrades, but major upgrades take time.

TasWater said upgrades to plants as part of the Launceston Sewer Transformation Project such as Riverside, Legana and Newnham would take at least a decade to complete.

In the meantime, the community still needs protection.

Environment Tasmania have suggested the use of event duration monitors, which are digital devices used widely across the United Kingdom for the same purpose. Currently in the United Kingdom, before you head to the beach and head into the water, you can get out your app and you can see in real time if there is a bypass event occurring near you. Each device costs approximately \$5000. This motion is simply asking the government to consider the real-time reporting, and it's asking for a report to come back to us and letting us know if and how implementation could proceed.

This is a practical motion. It does not pretend that monitoring alone will fix old pipes or ageing treatment plants, but it will give Tasmanians the information they need to protect themselves and their families while the longer-term infrastructure work continues.

I thank Environment Tasmania for the work that they do in Tasmania, and I commend the motion to the House.

[11.46 a.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - I rise to speak in full support of the motion put forward by the honourable member for Huon. I will keep it brief, Mr President, but I do want to clearly outline my support for strong reporting, transparency and clarity regarding how, what and when sewage is being released into the environment. I would like to put on the record I am a supporter of TasWater and I know they get a lot of flak for lots of different reasons but having been involved in that in 2006 when it was changed from various water authorities, many councils and many communities have benefited greatly.

Although we may not always agree with the process, there have been a lot of communities that have been better served by water quality but there are still areas to go. I fully support the honourable member for Huon. I want to put it on the record that whilst we might disagree with parts of TasWater, by and large, I'm very supportive of the organisation and what they're doing for this state.

Simply put, this calls for action in this motion - one which this Council, indeed all related regulatory bodies, should be in support of. Clear and well-placed disclosure of public health concerns are being ever more requested by Tasmanians, and for good reason. Inappropriate discharges of untreated sewage pose a significant risk to our environment and water, our health and our marine wildlife.

Live reporting and proper monitoring of incidents will benefit Tasmania, and concerns regarding discharge of chemicals, sewage and other things into waters that Tasmanians use and highly value are very valid. We must protect the health of Tasmanians, our marine life, our waterways and our environments.

I understand the concerns some parties have about giving information to the public in real time. Frankly, while in some circumstances these are valid concerns, when it comes to untreated sewage, this is a matter of framing the information well and presenting it properly. I do not feel that keeping people in the dark is appropriate, nor is it necessary in today's age of technology. In the long run, live reporting and adequate waterways will have untold boons. Our environment does as well, and will continue to do so if we respect it.

Additionally, health risks arising from the release of untreated sewage include bacteria, parasites and viruses are significant ongoing health concerns. Neurological issues and lifespan concerns arise from undertreated sewage and chemicals released into our environment.

On another note, people in Tasmania are more aware of spills and that sort of thing that happens in this place because of the increasing rainfall. Bells Parade is a noticeable place in my community where often we get alerts saying that there are spills or concerns. People accept that, take it on the chin and they move on but it's keeping people informed that is really important. That's why I like the honourable member's notice of motion, because that's all it's asking to do and that's what our Tasmanian communities deserve.

Mr President, I thank the honourable member for Huon again for her work in this area and I support it in full.

[11.50 a.m.]

Ms ARMITAGE (Launceston) - Mr President, I, too, thank the honourable member for Huon for bringing forward this important and very interesting motion.

The Map the Crap campaign is something that many people might not know about but is very relevant to my electorate of Launceston and the areas surrounding it. According to Lucy Tremain at Environment Tasmania, in 2024-25 over 27 million litres of undertreated sewage was dumped above Launceston's key tourist destination, Cataract Gorge, putting locals and over 400,000 tourists at risk of exposure to harmful pathogens and toxins.

Additional information from Environment Tasmania relevant to Launceston: in addition to the 27 million litres of undertreated sewage released from Prospect Vale Sewage Treatment

Plant which flowed into the Cataract Gorge, the Ti Tree Bend Sewage Treatment Plant released over 338,980,000 litres of undertreated sewage directly into the Tamar River, and nine out of 10 sewage treatment plants are operating in breach of the Environmental Protection Notices.

The Map the Crap campaign seeks to help manage this issue to see all sewage treatment plants fitted with real-time monitoring equipment which can alert the public to the latest bypass sewage events, helping to prevent Tasmanians from coming into contact with undertreated sewage. Obviously, undertreated sewage is a hazard not only to human health, but to that of our environment, ecosystems and fauna. The honourable member for Huon's motion rightly points out that Tasmanians use waterways for swimming, paddling, rowing, boating and fishing, and should have the right to do this safely and free from contaminants, especially in waterways that are public.

Launceston and its surrounding regions and suburbs do face a unique challenge in this respect, and I recall from my time on Launceston council just what a wicked problem the combined sewer and stormwater system was, especially given that it has in fact been over 100 years in the making. We know that in Launceston a combined sewer and stormwater system services over 9000 homes - a system that was constructed as Launceston was settled as a city and grew over time. At the time it was constructed it was fit for purpose, and we obviously can't go back and change it all now. Suburbs affected include the inner parts of Launceston, East Launceston, West Launceston, South Launceston, Invermay, Newstead and Mowbray. Anyone familiar with Launceston knows that this is a very significant portion of the region. Therefore, it's easy to see why it's such a big problem and why it's so difficult to manage and fix.

We have some existing tools such as the City of Launceston Open Data mapping platform, over which you can put layers showing the locations of water, stormwater and sewer facilities. Obviously, this helps people to see how their own properties might be affected as well as public areas during storm and sewage events.

Organisations like the Tamar Estuary Management Taskforce (TEMT) I know work extremely hard to manage events and develop policy plans to address future issues. They rely on doing good research, taking care of the environment and working with the community to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to have their say and put their ideas forward. Of course, we've seen here many policies and ideas from many people for managing the Tamar generally, but I really want to commend TEMT and their team for their hard work.

I further note in the honourable member's motion that TasWater owns and operates 110 sewage treatment plants and that TasWater's own 2024-25 Annual Performance Report states that only 10 of those plants currently meet all environmental licence conditions.

As technology gets better, and better at tracking environmental events, I can see how we can use this sort of data to manage, fix and perhaps even predict these events going into the future. Where our existing facilities are not operating in compliance with our own regulations and environmental licence conditions, it's really up to us to consider how we manage our facilities and environment going forward.

The imperative here, first and foremost, is that of human health and wellbeing. These sorts of conditions in our waterways are not what you expect in a developed modern country

like ours. If we cannot completely redo our stormwater and sewerage systems in Launceston, we at least need to be able to properly manage it going forward.

Secondly, our environment depends on it. Our very precious flora and fauna, particularly our marine life, can't just up and move. They're exposed to these contaminants and hazards through no fault of their own and if we want to have a healthy ecosystem, we need to be able to provide adequate and timely policy, engineering and infrastructure solutions. To do this, we need to be able to monitor our sewage treatment plants and our sewage events. In other words, we need to be able to map the crap.

I commend the efforts being made by the City of Launceston and TEMT, as well as the many community groups and organisations who work towards keeping the Tamar River and surrounding environment clean and healthy. Clearly, there is more that needs to be done at higher levels of government, and through TasWater. But I acknowledge these problems cannot be solved overnight and will take sustained levels of interest and commitment to manage.

It would be remiss if I didn't mention some of the fixes that are in place, or slated to be implemented, to help ameliorate the undertreated sewage in Launceston. One of these measures includes the Launceston Sewer Transformation infrastructure project, which aims to modernise and consolidate ageing sewer infrastructure and improving safety and wellbeing for people in the environment. The Prospect Vale Sewerage Improvement Project is a significant step towards future proofing the city's wastewater network, by retiring ageing infrastructure and directing wastewater to the Ti-Tree Bend facility. The project will help build a more dependable, efficient and environmentally responsible sewerage system.

There's also the Storm Water Intrusion Program, a collaboration between NRM North and the City of Launceston, completed in June 2021, over two years. Detailed investigations of Launceston stormwater network identified 44 instances where sewerage had been incorrectly connected to stormwater pipes, resulting in untreated wastewater flowing directly into the estuary. Correcting these issues now prevents about 13.2 megalitres of sewage each year from entering the waterway, redirecting instead to treatment facilities. In practical terms, that's more than five Olympic-sized swimming pools of wastewater kept out of the estuary every year.

Moreover, new sewage pump stations at Hoblers Bridge will be constructed to redirect these flows, and in the future, it's planned for sewage treatment plant consolidation and upgrades for the Riverside, Legana and Newnham areas. While there's a lot of work to be done, there's plenty of ongoing work being done between the state and local governments in the state's north, as well as between environmental and public agencies. It's a difficult problem to solve, but we have lots of people working very hard to make these improvements.

Luckily, Mr President, where the Tamar River is concerned, there is no shortage of interest. I believe there is a place for the adoption and implementation of technology, and the use of existing data, to help us plan now and into the future, and encourage the government to consider what options are available to help manage the twin imperatives of human and ecological health and wellbeing. I thank the member and support the motion.

[11.57 a.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - I rise to speak on the motion before us and thank the honourable member for Huon for providing this opportunity. It might be your first motion brought in this Chamber, so congratulations on that too.

Mr President, at the outset I also need to acknowledge the initiative and work undertaken by Environment Tasmania, an excellent organisation, and their work in developing their interactive Map the Crap online tool. It is fantastic, not least because it gives us the opportunity to say a naughty word in the Chamber today. Map the Crap is designed to monitor and expose the volume of undertreated sewage entering our local waterways, which is of concern to many Tasmanians who absolutely love engaging with their public waterways and enjoying all sorts of recreation therein. The data is based on TasWater records and it's an invaluable piece of civic society work to have this work available online. It's ideally one which of course should be unnecessary, but until it is, it provides a significant and important reality check for us, and important information for making decisions about our waterways.

We pride ourselves for being the natural, clean, green state, and it's almost de rigueur for local tourism campaigns to highlight our state's pristine natural waterways, rivers and beaches. But that sort of promotion of brand may not be so effective should potential visitors hear of that shocking statistic which was cited in clause (1) of the motion before us, that apparently in 2024-25 over 600 million litres of undertreated sewage was released into those self-same waterways. This occurred during a so-called bypass event, which is an expression used to describe the situation when sewage skips the secondary treatment process, which is meant to make it safer prior to release. It's not very reassuring when a bypass event can result in over 600 million litres of undertreated sewage being released into our waterways. In fact, it's a somewhat benign descriptor, I think, for something that's really quite disgusting.

Tasmania must be unique across all our national states and territories that none of our lower House or upper House electorates are completely landlocked. Instead, every single one of our electorates has a little girting by waterway, whether it's coastal or river.

Ms Rattray - Not the proposed new Lyons. That'll be landlocked.

Ms WEBB - Well, it has river, because it has the upper part of the Derwent here, just north of the city.

Mr PRESIDENT - Which we know is the most magnificent river in the country.

Ms WEBB - Indeed. The health and enjoyment of those waterways is something very immediate to all of us here and the communities that we represent. The flip side of that is those shorelines and waterways can't be taken for granted. Well, they can be taken for granted, but if we do, we do so at our peril. Locals certainly never take it for granted, I think, when we live near these beautiful waterways and we're worried about the condition that they're in. My electorate's particular 'girt by sand' section is the Blackmans Bay area, which I share with the member for Huon as the northern end of Blackmans Bay Beach is in the electorate of Nelson and then southern end is in the electorate of Huon. I'm sure that, like me, the member for Huon often hears concerns raised by locals in that area about the condition of the water at the beach and whether they or their kids are able to swim safely.

In fact, very recently I attended a planning session that the Blackmans Bay Community Association was holding and I noted on a piece of butcher's paper with the heading, 'What are our dreams and hopes for our suburb in times to come?' Almost every comment on that butcher's paper related to wanting to be able to swim at the beach safely with their families and their kids. It was quite striking and quite sad that such a simple thing that you would think people living in a beachside suburb would be able to hope and aspire to do with their families and, far too often, they simply can't. So, these sorts of efforts to ensure that our waterways are cleaner and that we can use data and be informed to make choices and decisions about how to achieve that are really important.

I note in media reports during June this year when Environment Tasmania launched the Map the Crap online site, the Tasmanian government acknowledged the issues, particularly the public health implications surrounding the release of undertreated sewage into waterways as a concern. But, not surprisingly, we were told it is ultimately the responsibility of TasWater and not the government. I think, in some sense, that's really splitting hairs. Therefore, I support the proposal outlined in clause (7) of the motion before us, particularly its urging for a collaborative approach across key relevant responsible authorities, including the Tasmanian government, TasWater, the EPA Tasmania and the Department of Health and local councils. That call to consider real-time, or near-real-time, monitoring and a public statewide live map, website and alert system for bypass events is an incredibly sensible suggestion, and that collaboration across those agencies is of central importance to that.

I note also that the motion requests an update report to be provided to this parliament within six months of the passage of this motion. I think that's a very sensible request of the government that I hope is respected. Some may argue that six months is insufficient time but, while it would be potentially insufficient to achieve an end point in something, it should be entirely sufficient to achieve a report back on progress. I trust that the government, should this motion pass as I hope it will, won't ignore that part of the motion and will in fact bring us an update report. There hasn't been a good history of the government doing such things in response to motions passed in this Chamber, but I think this is an opportunity for the government to turn over a new leaf.

Ms Rattray - Noted.

Ms WEBB - This is essential infrastructure that we're talking about. It's public health and our beautiful, valued environment that we're talking about. We really should be able to put a collaborative response together. We should be able to report back and point to progress made.

To conclude, I again wish to express my thanks both to the work of Environment Tasmania in the Map the Crap online tool and to the member for Huon for providing this opportunity for us to acknowledge that good work and the contribution it's making to our community's health and quality of life. I also urge the government to heed the calls in clause (7) and I hope that we do receive that update report on the implementation, the cost and the timeframes for a statewide, close-to-real time public live map website and alert system for bypass events.

As Environment Tasmania's Map the Crap site states, 'Stay in the loop, not in the sludge.' I think we could all live by that motto, couldn't we? So, I commend and support this motion.

[12.05 p.m.]

Mr VINCENT (Prosser - Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I rise to make a few comments on this, having been involved - I think I was elected to local government the same year, about the same couple of months that TasWater was formed. So, it was very interesting to hear the cheers from a lot of GMs and other councillors about handballing it over. We learnt very quickly that councils, for the best of intentions sometimes, or sometimes for lack of experience, probably hadn't kept up with technology, hadn't kept up with systems and, as a community, we were paying a dear price. Most in the community believe that when they flush or pull the drain that the problem goes away, but we know it doesn't.

I've had my years of being critical of some of the things TasWater have done, but I've also sat on their board selection panel and been involved in all their meetings in my time as mayor. I've always taken it extremely seriously because, despite me having some queries about different things they were doing, they had programs in place that were improving our systems as steadily as it was. I'd be very surprised if they weren't willing to have the conversation about this because I've always found them to be that way.

At the moment they have installed alarms and monitoring systems because of the raw sewage problems they had originally, and for quite some time now, I think, all the outfalls - I believe it's all the outfalls - have alarms on them. They go back to electronic monitoring, and then immediately notify - and I've had firsthand experience of this as a mayor - the EPA and EHOs.

The EPA have all their regulations in place and because Sorell is surrounded by oyster farms, it's always been something that's been very passionate, and the consequences of not being quick enough to react has been quite pronounced. The thing I always liked about environmental health officers being notified so quickly is they can get to the beaches, or rivers in many other municipalities, and put up appropriate signage as a very direct way to tell people who are just heading down there who might not have looked at any other notifications.

I've seen improvements over the years in the way they monitor and the way that is done. There is always room for improvement and I note the good work that the Derwent Estuary Program do as well, and the difference that it is making to the health of the Derwent, and how they talked about taking that into other rivers.

I think that live reporting and notifications are very important for us all to understand. Probably one of the things I have been critical of TasWater about is that they don't sell a lot of the work they're doing well enough to us as ratepayers, taxpayers and people of Tasmania. Because when you understand the complexities - and the member for Launceston touched on some of the complexities around Launceston, which is well over 100 years old - and when you understand the work that they did to alleviate some of those problems, and that work will go on for probably another decade. It is quite brilliant engineering and clever use of modern technology that's being used. I note that TasWater's programming in all their different segments over the next 20 years, I think, runs to about \$7.6 billion that they need to continue to bring the state up. We must appreciate and understand that and work with them to do it because we all want perfect, clean waterways. It's not just TasWater, there are many other things that get flushed out. They are starting to identify, in various forms, some of the other industrial waste that might get flushed out as well. So, there are a lot of other parts of our community that need to tighten up and understand that we, as a community, should not be

putting up with what was acceptable for decades, of just flushing it out to sea or flushing it down the river. I'd really like to see this report also, I would really like to understand it more. I have had a firsthand view of the effect it's had in our communities, and on our industries, like I mentioned the oyster industry. I'd welcome to see some very sensible industry input into this and I welcome the opportunity to participate.

[12.10 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, it's been really interesting to listen to members talk about crap in this House. I've appreciated that opportunity.

Mr Hiscutt - We do it every day.

Ms RATTRAY - Just before I commence my contribution, just a tiny bit off script, swimming safety at our beaches is paramount, but I can offer many in the electorate of McIntyre. So, if anyone wants to know where the best beaches are and there is no crap in the water, just ask and I'll let you know.

I rise to speak on the motion from the member for Huon and acknowledge and restate bringing it forward as her first motion in this House. Congratulations.

It is vitally important that Tasmanians have safe drinking water, healthy waterways, and access to reliable information about environmental and public health risks. The concerns raised through Environment Tasmania's Map the Crap campaign highlight issues that TasWater, the Environment Protection Authority Tasmania (EPA), the Department of Health, councils and the broader community take seriously.

TasWater has a long-term plan to improve the environmental outcomes across the state and, after substantial investment in drinking water infrastructure, all permanent boil water alerts in Tasmania have now been lifted. From memory, at the time when those boil water alerts were on TasWater's website and information being provided, I recall six of them were in the member for McIntyre, formerly Apsley's, electorate - six of them. So, it was of concern and it was certainly one of the reasons for supporting the changes to how we delivered water and sewage services across the state. I'm very pleased to hear and know that they've all been addressed at this point in time.

TasWater's focus has turned to sewerage infrastructure, addressing the consequences of decades of underinvestment. TasWater publicly reports on the performance of its treatment plants through the Annual Environmental Reviews and its Annual Environmental Performance Report. These reports are submitted to EPA Tasmania and include information on plant performance, discharge compliance, bypass events, environmental monitoring, complaints, incident reporting and major projects. They also provide annual reporting on bypass events at individual sewage treatment plants.

In 2024-25, significant works included upgrades at Selfs Point, progress on the Launceston Sewer Transformation Project, which the honourable member for Launceston spoke about in her contribution, the completion of the Rosny UV disinfection project, aeration upgrades at Legana and Bridport, lagoon desludging works at multiple treatment plants, and the construction of a new outfall at Beauty Point.

TasWater has continued its focus on reducing sewage spills and inflow and infiltration where stormwater enters sewer systems and can contribute to overflow events. During the year, TasWater invested \$1.2 million in identifying and rectifying inflow and infiltration issues and spent \$8.8 million on network reliability improvements, sewer renewals and relining works.

The Tamar Estuary River Health Action Plan upgrades also continued and are scheduled for completion in 2026.

The Derwent Estuary Program provides a good example of collaboration between councils, the Tasmanian government, EPA Tasmania, TasWater and other partners. Through its Beach Watch program, recreational water quality is monitored and reported publicly at 19 swimming sites around the Derwent Estuary. Water samples are collected throughout the swimming season and tested for bacterial contamination, with results published online. Since 2024-25 the program has also incorporated daily pollution forecasting using rainfall data and other available information, including sewage spill notifications. This demonstrates how water quality information can be made available in a form that is accessible and useful to the public.

Importantly, sewage spill notifications are already managed under EPA Tasmania's notification requirements and following notification from TasWater, councils make decisions regarding beach closures and public advice, where appropriate. The honourable member for Prosser talked about the way that information is provided to councils and then to the environmental health officers and so on.

No one wants to see sewage spills or bypass events affecting Tasmania's waterways. Addressing these issues requires ongoing investment in infrastructure, effective environmental regulation, robust monitoring and strong collaboration between government, regulators, TasWater and local communities. Significant work is already underway, supported by record investment and ongoing programs aimed at improving environmental performance and protecting public health.

With those comments, Mr President, the government thanks the honourable member for Huon for bringing this matter before the Council. I do have a copy of the Map the Crap report, so if anyone wants me to, I'm happy to provide a copy of that.

[12.17 p.m.]

Ms LOVELL (Rumney) - I rise to make a brief contribution in support of the motion, and I also wanted to congratulate the member for Huon on her first matter she's brought before the Council - and what an important matter for us all to be talking about. We all know how important recreation in, on and around the water is to Tasmanians. I think all of us would have coastline, maybe? Elwick, Derwent River? All of us would have some kind of water line.

Ms Forrest - I have a large coastline.

Ms LOVELL - You do have a large coastline, lots of beautiful beaches.

Ms Rattray - I have a large coastline.

Ms LOVELL - You do. Come on now, it's not a competition, members.

It highlights how important this is to members in all of our electorates because we know access to safe water for drinking and for recreation is something that Tasmanians really value. This is a really important motion for us to be debating and is a really sensible approach too. I note that the motion calls on the government to consider a number of things.

The member for Huon has been really careful about how she's constructed this motion. All she's doing is calling on the government to consider funding real-time or near-real-time monitoring at all TasWater sewage treatment plants and key bypass output points, consider creating a public live map website and alert system and then report to parliament, as they should, because if parliament is calling on them to do something then it is their obligation to report back to us here about the plan to achieve what is needed.

I like the way it's been constructed because it is collaborative and it shows that the member is really just wanting the government to consider these options, come back with a plan. She's not demanding it. The member for Huon is not saying it has to be done; she is demonstrating that she wants to work with the government on this and work on a plan forward.

I was hoping to hear a little bit more of a concrete commitment from the government going away via the Leader and undertaking that piece of work. I hope that they will listen to what is likely and sounding like it's going to be a fairly well-supported outcome on this motion.

Ms Rattray - I did, by interjection to the member for Nelson, say 'noted and passed on'.

Ms LOVELL - Excellent. Thank you, Leader.

I also just wanted to touch on, and the Leader mentioned, the Derwent Estuary Program. The member for Huon has spoken about this program before in this place and it is a fantastic program that provides some really valuable information. Again, it is a program that works in a really collaborative, consultative way, is evidence based, works with science, provides information that is really valuable to people. I wanted to recognise also the work of the Derwent Estuary Program.

With that, Mr President, I thank the member for Huon for bringing the motion before us. It is an important motion to all of us, with the people we're representing and the environments we're representing and the things that are important to them, and so, I support the motion.

[12.40 p.m.]

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT (Huon) - I thank all the members. Thanks to all of you for your contributions. Clearly this motion has kind of touched something and especially recognising that everybody has those really important waterways in our electorates and how important waterways are for our communities, so thank you very much.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION

**Public Accounts Committee Report (No. 9 of 2026) - Follow-Up Report of the
Auditor-General ICT Strategy, Critical Systems and Investment (No. 4 of 2020-21) -
Consideration and Noting**

[12.21 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - I move -

That the report of the Public Accounts Committee, which is a follow-up of the Auditor-General's Report No. 4 of 2020-21, ICT Strategy, Critical Systems and Investment, be considered and noted.

Mr President, this is one of the pieces of work that the Public Accounts Committee does off the side of our desks almost with all the other things we're doing, but it's really important work. By way of information for members, every year we meet with the Auditor-General, and we discuss what reports should be followed up. Some of them clearly require follow-up, some of them perhaps not so much. Some of them are better followed up by the Auditor-General, who has some data analytics capability. Some of them require more qualitative rather than quantitative follow-up. Have the relevant departments or entities adopted the recommendations of the Auditor General? If they have, show us evidence of how they've done that. We always want to see some evidence, not just saying yes, we've done it. Also, if they haven't done it, like why they haven't done it. Sometimes there are some good reasons why a particular recommendation may not have been followed according to the Auditor-General's recommendation, but it's been delivered through a different mechanism and that was a bit the case in this report.

It is the case that the Public Accounts Committee try to review and follow up three of the Auditor-General's reports each year. The reports from the Auditor-General do date back a little bit, as this one does, but sometimes you need time for the work to be done in the department to actually enable them to show evidence of adoption of the recommendations.

This report follows the follow-up review the committee undertook to establish what has actually happened five years on to the recommendations by the Auditor-General and in this review or examination that he undertook of the government's approach to ICT strategy, critical systems and investment.

I thank the Auditor-General and his office for their work. Some may see performance auditing as a bit of a tedious job to do, but it's really critically important work to do because it's only when some of these things are really looked at specifically and sometimes perhaps a little bit narrowly, that you can see where some of the problems may occur. We know in the past, many years ago, when the Auditor-General has looked at ICT related matters, they have found significant gaps. There was one report a number of years ago where the Auditor-General delayed the release of that report to give our government departments time to actually fix some of the gaping holes in their cybersecurity. Now, that was a decision taken by the Auditor-General because he was very aware of the risk of putting out a report that showed where all the problems might be. Any hacker having a look could see, there's an easy doorway to go straight through, for example. But this was not the case here so much, this is more about the strategy. There were also critical systems and investment in that, which is obviously critical to ensure, as best we can, we have a secure and safe IT system.

The original audit by the Auditor-General was a significant one in this case as well. It found real gaps in the whole-of-government ICT governance, in asset management and in investment prioritisation. The Auditor-General made seven recommendations directed at the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Digital Services Board and agencies across government.

The committee wrote to the responsible minister in May last year after we resolved to undertake this review, seeking a written account of the implementation of these recommendations, and received a detailed submission from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) in July. We then tested that submission in a public hearing on 5 February this year with the Minister for Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy, the Chief Information Officer, Dr Justin Thurley, who's in the Chamber, and the Deputy Secretary, Ms Noeline Kelly.

The committee made 16 findings and four recommendations relating to the responses to the recommendations of the Auditor-General. I want to be fair to the government about what has genuinely improved, because there has been genuine improvement. Government ICT investment has more than tripled since 2020-21 from \$26.5 million to \$93.8 million in the previous budget, or from roughly 2.5 per cent to 11 per cent of the relevant investment, based on the minister's own figures given in evidence.

We were informed in the committee that the Digital Services Board has been replaced by the Data and Digital Subcommittees of the Secretaries Board, meets monthly, reports up through the Secretaries Board, and runs an annual work plan across five active work streams. Each agency now maintains a critical ICT asset register, a whole-of-government digital strategy, Our Digital Future, and its accompanying strategic action plan exist and are reviewed.

None of that is a small task in itself, and this is clearly outlined in the executive summary of the report and throughout the report. Obviously, the executive summary references the evidence in the report.

But I do note that we should not mistake this activity and outcomes for the things the Auditor-General actually asked for. The Auditor-General's recommendation 1 asked for a whole-of-government ICT vision informed by an understanding of each agency's key assets, their age profile, their risks, their interdependencies and a replacement timetable to be delivered within 18 months of the original report.

That would have meant completion by around April 2022. The committee reported in March 2026, nearly four years past that mark, and the committee's finding 1 records there is still work to do to get there.

As stated in the executive summary, the committee also found that consolidation of asset information at whole-of-government level remains incomplete. The comprehensive view of critical ICT assets - encompassing age profile, interdependencies, risk exposure and replacement timelines - across all agencies had not yet been achieved. There may be up-to-date information the Leader may provide on some of this, because it is a little while ago since this report was tabled. Work to establish a whole-of-government critical systems register had only just been initiated, so it'd be interesting to hear from the Leader whether that has actually been completed.

I make some of these points because we're seeing such large investments now in digital transformation projects where we're seeing some pretty odd behaviour. The Bluegum Transformation Project, which we've talked about, the member for Elwick put more questions on the Notice Paper again today with regard to this.

The Human Resources Transformation Project, which was formerly the Human Information Resource Information System, was subject to an audit review by the Auditor-General as well. It showed problems. We've seen many IT systems rolled out across various government departments and GBEs that haven't worked as intended and cost millions and millions of dollars. We do need to get this right.

Shiny glossy brochures with nice pictures don't do it. I'm not suggesting that's all that's been done, but that's what we tend to see.

Additionally, the outcomes of the whole-of-state ICT vision and strategy were not systematically measured or publicly reported, but to their credit, neither Dr Thurley nor Ms Kelly tried to dress this up in the hearing. When we asked directly whether government had confidence in the whole-of-government oversight of key assets, their age and a replacement schedule, Ms Kelly told the committee: we don't have a document that would say here is 100 systems that government has, and this is the order of priority. They weren't trying to claim they'd sorted the problems out. That was refreshing, and whilst maybe a little bit disappointing we haven't seen more progress, at least it wasn't being glossed over. Dr Thurley put a number on where that work has to go, describing the current critical assets mapping exercises as about 85 per cent through. So, hopefully the Leader can provide a bit of an update on this as to where we are now.

Honesty about the progress is useful and appreciated, but it also means that the single most consequential recommendation in the original audit, the one that everything else in the report effectively hangs off, remains. On the department's own account, this recommendation was still incomplete after the six years. The government's explanation for this is that it took what Dr Thurley described as a more modern and contemporary approach than the one the Auditor-General envisaged in 2020. We know that things happened in 2021 that threw things up in the air a bit. COVID happened. There was a whole heap of pressure and requirements to perhaps do a lot more things digitally than we had prior to that. I do accept that there was a different approach taken. This was built around the data and digital subcommittee rather than a single consolidated asset document.

Mr President, I appreciate there is something to that. Technology and the government's understanding of it have moved on since 2020, and a static document would likely already be out of date if one had been created. But a contemporary government's model is not a substitute for the underlying question the Auditor-General actually asked: does government today know what its critical ICT assets are, how old they are, what they depend on, and when they need replacing? Now, there are set areas where they do know these things, because there is actually work in progress, under development now, but that question couldn't be answered. On the evidence before the committee, the honest answer is: not yet, at least not fully. I appreciate the people of power being really frank and open with the committee, but it's a bit disappointing that six years on, this is still a matter that is on foot.

The second gap the committee identified is around measurement and public accountability. Finding 7 records that it is unclear how the outcome of the whole-

of-government ICT vision and strategy are being measured or will be reported. When we put this to Dr Thurley, quoting the Auditor-General's own observation that investment evaluation can only be effective when it is based on a vision that has been clearly defined, with key deliverables and outcomes which can be measured, his answer described an evolving, largely internal tracking process, not a published set of outcomes measures. When we asked whether this information is available publicly or reported in DPAC's annual report, Dr Thurley's answer was quite direct: no. I think this is the sort of information we should be seeing. Dr Thurley indicated an intention to do so through a highlights report, and that intention is welcome. But if people knew it was going to be in the DPAC annual report, and you want to go and see what the progress is and where to find that information, you would think it would be in the annual report, not necessarily some other report.

The committee has accordingly recommended, in recommendation 2, that DPAC report these outcomes publicly through its annual report. It makes it far more accessible, in my view and the view of the committee, to have these, particularly outcomes measures, and reports of outcomes in an annual report.

On the matter of asset registers, recommendation 7 of the original audit is one of only two recommendations accepted in full, rather than in principle. It is the one where the committee can point to a genuinely promising model. While we've had lots of complaints about the Department of Health's handling of ICT projects, the example here was in the Department of Health and the work there they've done. Since 2024, mapping interlinked asset dependencies, which the Data and Digital Committee had resolved, could be extended across all of government. Credit where credit's due, the Department of Health had put in place a good system of mapping interlinked asset dependencies. It would be interesting to hear whether it has been rolled out across all other areas of government, as was suggested during the committee's inquiry into this matter. That is a sound, practical approach and I'd rather see the government build on something that already works in one agency than invent something new from scratch and potentially duplicate effort. But Ms Kelly's response to a question on notice from the committee was candid that the form and structure of these registers are not yet fully consistent across government. So, as I said, maybe there will be some further update from the Leader on this matter.

The committee's recommendation 3 asks that all agency registers be brought into line with the Health template. Recommendation 4 asks that the Data and Digital Committee continue the work already underway toward a genuine whole-of-government critical systems register.

I want to say something on the broader pattern here because the committee has now seen it across several of these follow-up reviews. The government is generally willing to accept recommendations in principle to appoint a substantially different and often reasonable alternative mechanism for achieving the same underlying intent; then, in many events, some years later they describe that alternative mechanism as having been fully adopted, rather than the actual intent. I think it's important that we enable the government to respond in the way that most fits the times, but we can't afford to lose sight of the actual intent of the recommendation. I'm not saying that's the case in all these instances, but it is a very frequent outcome where we see the recommendation of the Auditor-General agreed to in principle, but then it's really hard to line up whether it's actually been delivered in a way that responds to that intent or whether it's something else completely. I believe there can be a legitimate response to a recommendation. I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't ever see it. Reform pathways do not

have to follow the letter of an audit finding to satisfy its purpose, but it does place a particular onus on the government to be able to demonstrate, with evidence, that that intent has in fact been met. Part of the important work that the Public Accounts Committee does in undertaking these follow-up reviews is to say, 'Well, if you haven't delivered it directly, as recommended by the Auditor-General, tell us how you have and how that meets the intent.' For this review, the evidence presented to the committee on the central question of whether or not the government knows the state of its own critical ICT assets, shows that that intent has not yet been fully realised, even if some of the architecture to eventually realise this is now much stronger than it was in 2020. One would hope it is, I might add, but there's still some work. Well, I hope more work has been done. We'll hear about that from the Leader.

The committee has made four recommendations and, in my view and in the view of the committee, they are not particularly onerous. They ask the government to finish the whole-of-government asset assessment that it says was roughly 85 per cent complete; to standardise asset registers on a model in the Department of Health's approach, which was suggested because the committee was informed it had been successful, and the government's own Data and Digital Committee has already endorsed it. The third one was to continue the work already scoped toward a whole-of-government critical systems register and to report publicly through the ordinary mechanism of an annual report on outcomes against a strategy the government has already committed itself to. I hope that the Leader can not only update us on the progress on the Auditor-General's recommendations, but provide a response to the Public Accounts Committee's recommendations as I believe, when they're taken together, we'll see a much more robust and comprehensive understanding of the ICT critical assets. I hope the government can accept and implement all four of the PAC recommendations without too much difficulty, and I'll be interested to see in due course evidence that they have been.

The Public Accounts Committee has a recommendation tracker on its website, which was found by the Department of Health at one stage, and they said, 'Oh goodness, we didn't know this was here'. Well, we just published it and, to date, we have had one very welcome response to two recommendations of a committee report from the minister for Infrastructure. He's the first and only minister to respond directly to the PAC with regard to recommendations made in good faith by the PAC on any report. I thank him for that. He will get a nice little letter from us thanking him for that, because it's respectful.

Mr Vincent - I apologise, it might've been an error.

Ms FORREST - We don't do this work for nothing and, whilst the Leader for the Government can stand up and contribute on a debate such as this, we expect a formal response back from the government, which we haven't had until very recently, when the minister for Infrastructure, Mr Vincent, who sits in this Chamber, did that for at least two of the recommendations he's responsible for. The tracker has been updated to reflect that response. I encourage other departments and responsible ministers to likewise check that and see if they could perhaps update the committee. We will be writing to them in future if we don't get responses, but I wanted to make that point here and thank the minister.

I welcome the response from the Leader on this and contributions from other members. I know some of these topics are fairly dry and not everyone's main interest, but it is important work; our ICT infrastructure is critically important, we know what can go wrong. I do acknowledge the work of Dr Justin Thurley and his team in responding to these matters and being open and honest about the progress that has been made, as well as the reasons for a bit

of a change in direction in response to COVID to redirect some of their efforts and take a bit of a fresh approach to it, which was helpful.

I also wanted to thank my committee members, the members in this House, member for Elwick and member for Pembroke. It is a very busy committee and we do work really hard on that committee. So, it's great to be able to present reports, as we present another one today, another follow-up review from the Auditor-General. But also our hard-working Committee Secretary, Simon Scott, who barely raises an eyebrow when yet another thing is added to the agenda, we thank him. I thank members for their hard work, and the lower House members as well. It's a really hard-working committee and they're all very attentive and willing to turn up.

[12.43 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - I'll just seek some advice from an expert.

Mr President, before I commence the government's contribution on this important matter, I just acknowledge the work of the Public Accounts Committee. I recently looked at sending something to the committee and was told that there were 10 references on foot, so I changed my tack, and I'm not sure how that tack is working at the moment. So, I absolutely understand and acknowledge the work of that particular committee. I also do my best to get to all the Auditor-General's presentations that he has, albeit sometimes it hits into other commitments, but it's always worth heading off and listening to what is being provided.

To move on to the actual government's response, the government welcomes the Public Accounts Committee's report and supports all four of the recommendations. The recommendations recognise the significant progress made since the Auditor-General's original report, including implementation of our Digital Futures establishment of the Data and Digital Subcommittee of the Secretaries Board, increased ICT investment and the introduction of agency ICT asset registers. The government also acknowledges that this is an area of continuous improvement and remains committed to strengthening whole-of-government visibility of critical ICT assets, improving investment prioritisation, enhancing reporting and building greater resilience across government digital services.

Responding to the four recommendations themselves, recommendation 1, the government has made substantial progress in understanding key ICT assets, risks, dependencies and lifecycle issues across agencies since the original Auditor-General's report. All agencies now maintain ICT asset information and undertake planning to manage lifecycle, risk and replacement requirements. On the asset understanding, the government has since completed an agency business impact analysis, and this work maps lifeline and essential government services to the applications, support providers and hosting arrangements on which they depend. It provides the evidence base for a consolidated, whole-of-government view of critical systems, service dependencies and digital supply chain risks, and agency reports dated 31 August now show this mapping in practice. For example, the Department of Justice report links applications to priority services, primary functions, users, support providers and hosting providers, and the equivalent DECYP report map system supporting student services, child safety, referral and youth justice functions.

To recommendation 2, the government supports greater transparency of the delivery of whole-of-government digital and ICT priorities. DPAC will continue to enhance reporting on whole-of-government digital priorities through appropriate annual reporting mechanisms.

Strategic priorities are now guided by the recently released Digital Tasmania strategy and coordinated through the Data and Digital Subcommittee work program.

In responding to recommendation 3, the government recognises the value of improving consistency and visibility across agency ICT asset registers, including better mapping of interlinked asset dependencies. Significant improvements have been made in ICT asset management and lifecycle planning since the original audit, and further work will support a more consistent approach across agencies.

In relation to recommendation 4, the government is finalising work that has mapped agency ICT assets and services to critical systems and essential services. This work will inform the establishment of a whole-of-government critical systems register to strengthen visibility of critical systems, dependencies, cyber risks and lifecycle considerations. This capability will support improved investment, planning, resilience, security and evidence-based prioritisation of critical ICT assets across government, while maintaining agency accountability for agency specific systems and risks.

In closing, the government supports the committee's recommendations and will continue to build on the progress already made to strengthen ICT asset visibility, investment oversight, reporting and the resilience of critical digital services across government. I might add that it's well noted that the minister for Infrastructure has met the requirements of the committee and I look forward to being able to provide those as well.

[12.50 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Thanks, Mr President. I acknowledge the response from the Leader for the Government. It seems to me, without seeing more detail, that there's still a lot of ongoing work. This work is never going to be finished, obviously, this work, it's always going to be ongoing, I accept that, but it seems to me it's going to be a bit of a challenge to feel confident that all this work is done, unless it's clearly reported. Hopefully through the Leader's contribution we'll see it more clearly reported in the report of DPAC and whatever other mechanism there can be. Maybe that's a formal response to the Public Accounts Committee's recommendations with regard to this because there's not further work, further work, further work. Of course there's going to be further work, but have we actually adopted those recommendations in meaningful ways? Even if it's not delivered with a letter of recommendation from the Auditor-General, the intent has been met. As I said, there are huge risks in this space. There is huge expense right across various parts of government. We know it's really expensive work and these things often blow out, and sometimes they don't work as intended. It's really important those unnecessary costs can be avoided as much as possible whilst we keep our systems secure.

It's a matter of perhaps following up with questions at a later time, but it's hard to know and we're never going to get there entirely. It's always going to be work in progress. There's always going to be areas within digital infrastructure that need to be replaced, renewed, updated, all that sort of stuff, that's true. But ensuring we know where they are, we know what systems they are, we know there's a plan for it, there's funding for it, and we also have a mechanism to deliver on those things effectively and appropriately is really important, so I thank the Leader for her response.

Report considered and noted.

STATUTORY HOLIDAYS AMENDMENT BILL 2026 (No. 14)

Third Reading

Bill read a third time.

MOTION

Public Accounts Committee Report (No. 18 of 2026) - Review of the Tasmanian Fiscal Sustainability Report 2026 - Consideration and Noting

[12.53 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - I move -

That the Council note the report of the Public Accounts Committee into the review of the Tasmanian Fiscal Sustainability Report 2026.

Mr President, this is the third occasion on which the committee has examined a fiscal sustainability report, following its reviews of the 2016 and 2021 reports. I want to acknowledge the work of Treasury preparing this important document, of Mr Gary Swain, Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance, and Mr James Abbott, the Assistant Director of Economic Policy, for their evidence at the public hearing on 31 March this year.

Members will know that the fiscal sustainability report is a statutory obligation under section 14A of the *Charter of Budget Responsibility Act 2007*. Treasury is required to report on the long-term sustainability of the state's finances at least every five years, with specific regard to the policies of the government and anticipated demographic change. This year's report was brought forward to inform the multipartisan budget repair panel ahead of the 2026-27 Budget.

Mr President, we should be clear about what this document is and what it is not. It is a projection, not a forecast or a prediction. It illustrates what would occur if historical revenue and expenditure growth trends continued without corrective action being taken. It carries no judgement about how likely that outcome is. It is an apolitical document free from influence or interference of the Treasurer or the government. They report the facts.

The committee's first and most important observation is this. Tasmania's fiscal position in 2024-25 was already worse than the worst-case scenario modelled in the 2021 Fiscal Sustainability Report of that year. This 2026 report is explicit that the deterioration since 2021 has occurred at a much greater rate than any scenario contemplated five years ago.

It's really important for members to get their heads around this. When we looked at the 2021 report, thought, oh, that would never happen. That really bad, worst-case scenario. Well, it has.

The reason it was not going to get worse was because the government wouldn't let that happen. They wouldn't allow that. They'd do something. Well, they sure did. They made it worse.

This means the deterioration in our financial and fiscal position has continued under this government's watch and this parliament's watch, despite the warnings. Some of us have been warning of this for years, mostly to be ignored or told we were wrong, that it wouldn't possibly happen. Budget reply speeches are full of it. We should all reflect on our roles in holding the government to account for this failure.

Government policy decisions over the intervening period have been a material contributor to the outcome. In 2021, we were told by the then treasurer that the worst case was one the government would not allow to happen. As I said, it did happen.

Members should reflect on what that tells us about the discipline required going forward. Under the historical growth scenario with no corrective action, general government sector net debt is projected to reach \$129.5 billion in nominal terms within 15 years, with total non-financial public sector net debt reaching \$146.3 billion once the government businesses are included.

We were told back in 2021 we wouldn't allow that to happen; we will do something. We're being told that again. If we take the same approach, as a state, and this government takes that same approach, that is where we could end up.

Now we know that the current Treasurer is making a number of cuts to the public sector at the moment, which could have, some might suggest unintended consequences, some might suggest they're well-known consequences on service delivery, which then has costs of its own.

Debt servicing costs would grow from around 2 per cent of revenue today to more than 50 per cent, becoming the second largest operating expense after Health. Remember how we all talked about how Health consumed so much of the budget. Debt servicing costs would, more than anything else, other than Health.

Just let that sink in. Debt servicing costs would grow from around 2 per cent of revenue today to more than 50 per cent, becoming the second largest operating expense after Health. We are in very challenging territory.

Treasury identified two markers for when the historical trajectory becomes genuinely difficult to correct. Debt servicing costs exceed 10 per cent of revenue modelled to occur in 2029-30 - that's just literally around the corner - the point at which annual growth in debt servicing costs exceeds the growth in revenue model for 2032-33. On the strength of that analysis, Treasury concluded that for a 5-to-10-year repair window to reach peak debt is credible and achievable, while a 15-year pathway carries unacceptable risk given the compounding nature of debt and Tasmania's exposure to external shocks.

I do want to state clearly what peak debt means, because it's been subject to some public confusion. Peak debt is reached when revenue is sufficient to fund all operating expenses, including interest and capital and equity investments, so that no further borrowing is required.

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

QUESTIONS

**Provisions of *University of Tasmania Act 1992* - Government Response to
Select Committee Report**

Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for EDUCATION, Ms PALMER

Minister, my question goes to the long-awaited response to the findings and recommendations of the report of the Legislative Council Select Committee on the Provisions of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992*, which was tabled on 23 December 2024 and subsequently considered and noted by this Chamber on 1 April 2025.

Further, minister, I note that in its initial response made during the April debate of last year, the government stated it would respond formally to that report once the federal Senate Committee on Education and Employment had completed its university inquiry and the Commonwealth's Expert Council on University Governance released its principles and recommendations in October 2025 as part of the broader Australian Universities Accord reform process. Minister, months have now passed from the completion of those national reports. Can you please detail to the Chamber if and when we can expect a formal response to the select committee's 19 recommendations?

ANSWER

Thank you very much, Mr President, and I thank the honourable member for the question. I would also like to acknowledge the honourable member for Nelson as the Chair of the former Select Committee Inquiry into the Provisions of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992* and the considerable work that was done by that committee. The report represents a significant piece of parliamentary work and raised important issues regarding the governance, accountability and future legislative framework of the University of Tasmania.

Since the final report was tabled in December 2024, there has been substantial reform activity across Australia's higher education sector. Many of the matters examined by the committee, including governance, accountability, representation and transparency, have also been the subject of national reviews, new governance principles and updated regulatory requirements. At the same time, reforms arising from the Australian Universities Accord continue to be implemented by the Australian Government and national regulatory bodies.

As I've previously indicated, the government has considered it prudent to take account of these developments before settling its position on the committee's recommendations. This approach reflects the importance of ensuring that any future consideration of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992* is informed by contemporary national standards and remains aligned with the broader reform direction for Australia's higher education sector.

With the key elements of this national reform agenda becoming clearer, I have now instructed the Department for Education, Children and Young People to commence preparation of a formal Tasmanian government response to the committee's final report. It will include: a Tasmanian government response to the 19 recommendations within the final report and respond to the overarching recommendation regarding a review of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992*; an overview of how the final report, recommendations and findings align with contemporary national requirements and expectations; and an indicative timeline for

commencement of work, noting that the government's current legislative program will continue to be prioritised to deliver the commission of inquiry reforms.

It is my expectation that the government's response will be completed and made public before parliament rises at the end of this year.

Municipal Valuations - Burnie and Central Coast

Mr HISCUTT question to MINISTER for PARKS and HERITAGE, Mr DUIGAN

[2.34 p.m.]

The Office of the Valuer-General recently performed fresh municipal valuations in many councils in Tasmania. Both Burnie and Central Coast Council had their valuations issued in June this year. Could the government advise how many objections have been received in relation to these new valuations in Burnie and Central Coast?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President, and I thank the member for his question and interest in the issue of valuations. As a background, fresh statutory valuations are undertaken for each municipal area in Tasmania every six years. Adjustment factors are used to calibrate the levels of value of all properties in a municipality within a defined class of property in between fresh revaluation cycles. It's important to note that an adjustment factor is not a fresh valuation, it's just a multiplier used to adjust the levels of value of all properties of a particular class in a municipality. Adjustment factors are based on broad market movements. These factors are issued to level out the fluctuations that can occur in property markets during the normal six-year period. This year, as mentioned, Burnie and Central Coast were among the councils provided with final evaluation data. Proclamation of these valuations occurred in June, fixing the date at which they came into force on 1 July.

Now to the question of how many objections have been received in Burnie and Central Coast, I'm advised that in Burnie, of the 10,358 valuations issued, there have been 50 objections received as of last week; and within Central Coast Council, of the 11,798 valuations issued, there have been also 50 objections received. There is a 60-day period for objections to be lodged, and these will be reviewed and assessed with the valuation contractor. I hope that answers the member's question.

Bass Strait Islands Transport Strategy

Ms FORREST question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr VINCENT

[2.36 p.m.]

The Public Accounts Committee Interim Report found the *Spirit of Tasmania* failure stemmed from a breakdown in governance and coordination between government-owned entities. Minister, a similar risk now sits over the Bass Strait islands. TasPorts owns the ports of Grassy and Lady Barron, yet its Port Master Plan does not cover them and the government's

Bass Strait Islands Transport Strategy relies on their performance. This creates a need for clear coordination between the two planning processes. So, my questions are:

- (1) What formal role does TasPorts have in developing the Bass Strait Islands Transport Strategy; and
- (2) How is the government ensuring the strategy and TasPorts planning processes are coordinated so the island's ports are not planned in isolation?

ANSWER

I wanted to seek clarification on that because, obviously, there is a process that's taking place now. TasPorts is a major player in that area, on behalf of all Tasmanian people, to make sure the services are adhered but they're not directly running the inquiry itself, but obviously they're a big player in it. It's not something that they would probably prefer to be in, but they are needed there to make sure the services still apply to us, so we would expect a very rigorous program on all that.

The other fact that has come into play as a side benefit to the new CEO, Captain Allan Gray, at TasPorts is a fresh set of eyes looking through a lot of those sorts of things. But I would like to seek some more clarification on a few of those points and come back to you with a bit more definition around that so that I can make sure that boxes have been ticked as I would expect. I will confirm that and come back to you.

MOTION

Public Accounts Committee Report (No. 18 of 2026) - Review of the Tasmanian Fiscal Sustainability Report 2026 - Consideration and Noting

Resumed from above (page 33).

[2.39 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Just before the lunchbreak, I was speaking about peak debt and what it actually is, according to the definitions that have been provided, but I'll just repeat what I said as context for what I go on with. Peak debt is reached when revenue is sufficient to fund all operating expenses, including interest and capital and equity investment, so that no further borrowing is required, so we're able to pay all our bills without any further borrowing. It's a point of stabilisation, not a target for debt repayment. It doesn't mean our fiscal problems are solved and that sort of was the rhetoric being used, you know, 'Hallelujah, we get to peak debt and all the problems go away.' They don't.

The Fiscal Sustainability Report deliberately makes no assumption about paying debt down. Treasury has treated that as a matter for future governments. Three repair pathways were modelled. Reaching peak debt, and by that definition I've just provided, in five years requires a cumulative correction of \$3.3 billion relative to the historic growth scenario. In 10 years, it requires a \$6.5 billion correction; in 15 years, an \$11.3 billion correction. Treasury's new computable general equilibrium modelling found that all three pathways are consistent with positive real economic growth and that the least disruptive combination of measures is to

pursue expenditure reduction, revenue increases and smoothing of capital and equity contributions simultaneously, rather than relying on any single lever.

Notwithstanding the rigour of the analytical framework, the committee identified two significant gaps, and this is the heart of why the committee is making recommendations to the parliament.

First, the repair scenarios have not been translated into practical terms. The report does not quantify the number of full-time equivalent positions that would need to go, the specific revenue measures required to achieve the modelled revenue uplift, nor all the capital projects that would need to be deferred or abandoned. So, whilst it gives you a headline number, it doesn't tell you how many people need to be let go, what capital projects might need to be deferred or abandoned, or what revenue models or uplifts are required in revenues to deliver on those modelled scenarios. On this point, Mr Swain said to the committee that work had not been done and could not be done, given Treasury was preparing the Fiscal Sustainability Report concurrently with the revised fiscal strategy and the fourth state budget in two years. Now, I acknowledge that they've had a busy time, I think we all do and it's a reasonable excuse, if you like, for not having done that work. But members should understand the scale of what we're talking about here. Mr Swain confirmed that labour costs make up 46 to 47 per cent of general government sector operating expenditure. Any significant reduction in operating expenditure achieved through that channel alone implies a materially smaller State Service. I and the committee do not consider it acceptable for parliament and the community to be asked to support a budget repair task of this magnitude without visibility of what it actually means in practice.

Second, the committee notes that the report's methodology, while defensible, may not fully satisfy the act's requirements, specifically with regard to the policies of government. Treasury has taken the view that government policies implicitly embedded in the historical compound growth rates used, rather than incorporating the budget's forward Estimates explicitly. Mr Swain explained the reasoning to the committee candidly. It was quite interesting actually because I hadn't looked at it quite the way he did perhaps, but he said incorporating forward Estimates risks double-counting a policy response that's not yet been delivered. That is a reasonable methodological choice, but it is a choice. I think, when we're being asked to approve budgets - and this was done leading up to the election and then subsequent delivery of a budget - we need to understand the scale of the task and what it looks like in practical terms.

The committee welcomed the inclusion, for the first time, of government businesses' borrowings in this Fiscal Sustainability Report. Previously, it had just been the general government sector that was considered, but - and this is a matter we'd raised in the PAC previously, noting the previous fiscal sustainability reports - to get a true picture, you need to look at the total state sector.

TT-Line, TasNetworks and TasPorts together represent a material and growing fiscal risk. This is something that I've called for in the past and I was really pleased to see it included, to provide a better understanding of the total state sector and the task ahead. When we're relying on some of our GBEs to provide the money to do the things we like and need, others are costing us more money, hand over fist, every time we look around.

Whether that material and growing fiscal risk crystallises as additional debt on government business balance sheets or as an equity call on the general government sector, the

effect on the total state is the same. As we know, there've been times when we've put equity transfers to prop up some of our government-owned businesses. A lot of them are not meant to be profitable businesses, some of them are entirely for service delivery. That's not an unreasonable thing, but we need to be clear about it.

The report includes a \$500 million reduction in public non-financial corporation debt as a sensitivity, reflecting the commitment made during the Macquarie Point stadium debate. We've just given TT-Line \$500 million over the next few years. How they removed the \$500 million, and I spoke about this in my budget reply, was to take out the Cethana project, which was considered nowhere near advanced enough to include. They didn't remove debt; it was debt that wasn't even there in the first place.

In evidence, Mr Swain acknowledged that achieving such a reduction - that \$500 million reduction in PNFC debt - given the equity and debt pressures already facing our government businesses, would more realistically require extending delivery timeframes and moderating ambition across the sector, rather than debt reduction as such. I believe this reinforces the case for a statewide approach to capital and equity prioritisation across the general government and the government businesses sectors together, rather than case-by-case decision-making. Treasury indicates it's moving in that direction.

I also note the equity requirements to keep TT-Line afloat add to this challenge, with TT-Line receiving a \$506 million equity injection over the next four years in the last budget. Of that total, \$200 million will be allocated in this current financial year, specifically with the remainder then spread over the following years to 2029-30. This is in addition to the \$75 million bailout provided in November's interim budget and the \$400 million increase to TT-Line's borrowing capacity approved during the 2025 election campaign. This absolutely highlights why state-owned companies need to be included.

The PAC report was finalised before the disruption to global oil markets arising out of the conflict in the Middle East. The committee heard that Treasury does not yet know which scenario Tasmania faces, a short-term price effect, a broader inflation risk shock or a supply constraint requiring rationing. I'm not sure anyone else knows, though things continue to change. There's many interesting things occurring around the world in this space as we speak, but I don't think anyone else knows with any certainty what this conflict will do to the world economy, as well as to our own state economy, and further Treasury analysis may be needed once the picture becomes clearer. Given the state's financial buffers have already been depleted, the committee considered this an area requiring close and ongoing attention.

The committee made two recommendations. First, that the state government request Treasury update supplementary modelling translating the Fiscal Sustainability Report's budget repair scenarios into practical terms, including the indicative workforce implications, specific revenue measures and capital deferral or smoothing requirements associated with each scenario. What we saw in the last Budget was just cutting expenditure and the FSR was really clear: you have to pull three levers if you're not going to cause harm to one part of the general government operations.

The second recommendation was that any such supplementary modelling be tabled in this parliament. I would hope that the funding is provided to Treasury to do that work well before we get to dealing with the next budget.

These are modest and, effectively, procedural recommendations. They don't ask the government to commit to a particular pathway. It's not asking them to pull all three levers, even though that's what their own Treasury said they should do. It's not asking for a particular mix of expenditure cuts, revenue-raising measures or particular decisions around capital project reprofiling or abandonment. What the recommendation asked for is only that the practical consequences of choices already described in the Fiscal Sustainability Report be made visible to this parliament and to the Tasmanian community, so that the debate ahead of us can be conducted on a more informed basis rather than in an abstract concept with no real clear understanding of what we might be agreeing to. This is needed well before we consider any future budget or other appropriation of funds. If there's to be a supplementary appropriation bill, for example, I would need to see that information before that.

These recommendations, as I said, were settled before the 2026-27 Budget was delivered as well. So, having now had the opportunity to examine the budget papers and the policy and parameter statement in detail, I want to place on the record why the correction actually offered in this Budget falls well short of what this report itself says is required and it goes directly to why the committee's recommendations matter.

The Fiscal Sustainability Report's own modelling states that even the fastest credible repair pathway, five years to peak debt as defined, requires a cumulative correction of \$3.3 billion, equivalent to 25 per cent of projected expenditure on government services. The government has instead committed to peak debt by 2028-29; that is a three-to-four-year pathway - more aggressive than the FSR's fastest modelled scenario. Yet the policy and parameter statement shows total identified savings across the forward Estimates reaching only approximately \$440 million by year four.

This is not just a shortfall around the margins; it represents a small fraction, well under a fifth, of what Treasury's own modelling says the considerably less ambitious five-year pathway requires, let alone the compressed timeframe the government has actually announced. It seems to me that the Budget was set without any consideration of Treasury's document and the clearly laid out task in the Fiscal Sustainability Report.

Nor are these savings the sound base as they are presented. On my reading of the policy and parameter statement, approximately \$300 million of the parameter expense movement is simply the reversal of last year's productivity and efficiency dividend, savings that were assumed rather than identified in the 2025-26 Budget that did not materialise and that Treasury have now had to reimpose explicitly as a policy line. Part of what is presented as a new correction is the same correction being asked for the second time. At the same time, the Budget carries unfunded and unquantified pressures that this report's own framework would treat as parameter risk rather than policy choice.

Wages are funded at 2.5 per cent, while known enterprise agreement outcomes are running around 3 per cent or higher. On Treasury's own sensitivity figures, that gap alone is worth in the order of \$235 million across the forward Estimates, equivalent to some 400 to 500 further positions before a single deliberative workforce decision is made. Non-salary indexation is capped at 2 per cent against the Budget's own economic chapter, which projects CPI at 4.5 per cent in the near term. There is no budget or provision for the cost of separating the workforce that the savings task implies. Redundancy payments of up to 48 weeks' pay, leave liability crystallisation, and the transition costs this FSR itself warned are real, even when unquantifiable or unquantified.

I know some of the people who have been let go. Some of them have been there a very long time so, whilst in the budget period we were told, 'Well, not everyone's going to get 48 weeks' pay', there will be some, but none of them are budgeted for and those who will get 48 weeks' pay are probably fairly well up the tree in their salary levels. None of it is budgeted for.

A \$7.4 million shortfall in the Tasmanian Risk Management Fund. That's unfunded.

A human resource information system (HRIS), now the Human Resource Transformation Program was the project the Auditor-General confirmed in his report on this matter will not be completed this year, is funded only until 2026-27, not the out years and that left a gap in the order of \$40 to \$50 million. This is on top of all the other gaps, now being, as I said, represented as the Human Resources Transformation Program in DPAC, but still underfunded in the forward Estimates. Doesn't make it go away.

The revenue side is no more robust. Government business enterprises' returns are down \$151 million across the forward Estimates, with Hydro Tasmania's dividend recovery from an underlying profit collapse of 98 per cent in 2024-25 to a projected \$515 million profit. That's a \$515 million profit by 2029-30 resting on Basslink, the exit of coal and wholesale prices that I'm sure are at best contestable and I'd perhaps call them fanciful.

The GST, now a soft guarantee which these reports' own sensitivity analysis shows it's worth about \$2.8 billion to peak debt outcomes is scheduled to expire in 2029-30. I haven't had a chance to fully read the Productivity Commission's report into this, as Saul Eslake says, the worst public policy decision in our history, and this is the very year the Budget's Fiscal Strategy assumes stabilisation. Well, let's see what happens because the Prime Minister has said he will not change the GST allocation for Western Australia under his watch. The next election is not till a few years away, a couple of years anyway, so something's got to give.

The headline \$500 million reduction in the public non-financial corporation debt cited by the government as delivery of a commitment made during the Macquarie Point stadium debate has been achieved not by retiring debt, as I mentioned earlier, but by removing the Cethana project from Hydro Tasmania's borrowing projections. A project that this very report, the Fiscal Sustainability Report found should not have been included in Treasury's projections in the first place. You remove something that shouldn't have been there. What a nonsense. They said this should never have been there because it had not reached final investment decision; it remains speculative at best.

This is not \$500 million of fiscal repair. It is the correction of a projection that on Treasury's own evidence to the Public Accounts Committee should never have been there. I raise this because the Fiscal Sustainability Report is unambiguous on the point that matters most to the committee's recommendations. No single class of intervention is likely to be sufficient and a combination of expenditure control, revenue raising and capital measures, reprofiling or abandonment of capital projects is required.

What was before the parliament in the 2026-27 Budget was in substance the savings target pushed through one lever: largely unidentified operational efficiencies without the workforce, revenue or capital modelling that we all need to make decisions and which this committee has recommended be provided before we make any further decisions in regard to

expenditure of public money. It's all without a margin in the budget for the unfunded and contingent costs that I've outlined.

On the figures Treasury itself has provided to the Public Accounts Committee the correction as currently constructed is not of a scale or a composition capable of delivering the outcome the government has stated or announced. That is precisely why the committee's recommendation that the government commission and table supplementary modelling related to the Fiscal Sustainability Report scenarios into practical terms is genuine and absolutely necessary. Without it, parliament has no way of testing the government's claims against Treasury's own benchmark, and on the evidence before me today, the claim does not withstand that test.

This report does not tell the government what to do. It asked for further information to help us in our decision-making.

It tells us, on Treasury's own independent analysis, what happens if nothing is done or the wrong things are done and it tells us that the window for orderly correction is measured in single-digit years, not decades.

The committee's findings and recommendations flow directly from Treasury's own evidence, based on their own report.

Mr President, while the Treasurer claims he has an appetite for 'turning the fiscal ship before it sinks', I'm not sure he has the support or courage to do what is actually needed, and I say the support; he may have the courage, but he has to have the support.

We cannot continue to gloss over the cracks and try to alter and control the narrative to things like 'it's not that bad'.

We need honesty and transparency, and this is just what this report is seeking, and I urge the government to ensure Treasury has the resources to do this work, and the government has the courage to act.

Mr President, I again thank the members of the Public Accounts Committee and our hard-working secretary, Simon Scott, for their work on this inquiry. I also commend the Secretary and his team for their candour of the evidence relating to the Fiscal Sustainability Report and his appearance before the committee.

Mr President, if members haven't read the Fiscal Sustainability Report, they should. Also, you should read it alongside the report of the Public Accounts Committee, which gives a bit more colour and movement.

We have a huge task in this state. I think the next budget will be very telling. As I've outlined in my speech here, but also in my budget reply, there are huge gaps in the forward Estimates. Next year's forward Estimate is the year we're going to be looking at the next budget. We need more complete data to enable us to make well-informed decisions, so I look forward to other members' contributions on this and particularly the government's response to the committee's recommendations.

[3.03 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Thank you, Mr President, I will seek more expert advice.

I rise to speak in support of the motion to note the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts on its review of the Tasmanian Fiscal Sustainability Report of 2026. At the outset, the government thanks the members of the committee for their work in undertaking this review. The committee has performed an important role in examining a matter that is fundamental to Tasmania's long-term prosperity and financial resilience.

The Fiscal Sustainability Report was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Charter of Budget Responsibility Act 2007* and provides a long-term assessment of Tasmania's fiscal outlook over a 15-year period. It examines what may occur if historical trends in revenue and expenditure continue, and no corrective policy action is taken. Importantly, the report is a projection rather than a forecast. It is not a prediction of Tasmania's future, nor does it assume governments will simply stand by and do nothing in response to emerging fiscal pressures.

One of the key findings highlighted by both the Fiscal Sustainability Report and the committee's review is that without action, expenditure growth is projected to outpace the revenue growth placing increasing pressures on the state's finances over time. The report identifies the risks associated with rising deficits, increasing borrowing requirements and growing debt servicing cost in historical trends if historical trends were allowed to continue unchecked. We certainly heard that evidence from the honourable member for Murchison.

The committee's report also reinforces the importance of understanding the distinction between modelling and prediction. The Fiscal Sustainability Report was designed to test long-term fiscal sustainability under a range of scenarios. It was intended to inform debate and decision-making, not to forecast a predetermined outcome.

The committee made a number of important findings through its review. In particular, it noted that while Treasury modelled three pathways to achieving peak debt over five, 10 and 15 years, the report did not translate those scenarios into the practical measures that would be required to achieve them.

The committee observed that workforce implications, specific revenue measures and capital project deferrals were not modelled and concluded that supplementary work could assist both parliament and the broader community in understanding the practical implications of the different fiscal repair pathways. The committee therefore recommended that the government consider requesting supplementary modelling to translate the Fiscal Sustainability Report's budget repair scenarios into practical terms, and that any such modelling be tabled in parliament.

The government acknowledges those recommendations and appreciates the committee's contribution to the ongoing discussion regarding fiscal sustainability and budget repair. The government's focus on budget repair is ultimately about preserving the state's capacity to deliver essential services into the future. Every dollar spent on servicing debt is a dollar unavailable for health, education, public safety, housing and community services.

The Fiscal Sustainability Report demonstrates the importance of acting early to stabilise debt and restore long-term sustainability. While Treasury's modelling indicates that it can be

achieved in a way that maintains economic growth and protects the state's resilience to future shocks, the committee also welcomed the inclusion of public non-financial corporation debt within the analysis. This represents an important development in understanding the state's broader financial position and recognising the contribution that government business enterprises make to Tasmania's overall debt profile.

One of the clearest messages arising from the Fiscal Sustainability Report is that timing matters. The report indicates earlier action to stabilise debt results in lower debt levels, lower interest costs and greater flexibility for future governments. Conversely, delaying action increases the size of the adjustment required and heightens the risks associated with future economic shocks and financial pressures. The government recognises the fiscal challenges identified in the report, and the importance of taking responsible action to address them. The Fiscal Sustainability Report assumes no government intervention and is based on historical trends rather than budget forecasts. As Treasury advised during the committee's inquiry, the report does not seek to anticipate future policy decisions or assume the full delivery of future government responses.

Importantly, Treasury's modelling also found that fiscal repair is achievable. The report concluded the 5-to-10-year repair pathways are credible and that economic growth can remain positive while budget repair occurs.

The government has already acknowledged the need for responsible fiscal management and has outlined a pathway to improving the state's financial position through its fiscal strategy and budget settings. Focus remains on maintaining essential services, supporting economic growth and ensuring Tasmania's finances remain sustainable into the future.

Ultimately, fiscal sustainability is about stewardship. It's about ensuring the government retains the capacity to invest in health, education, housing, transport and other essential services, while maintaining the resilience needed to respond to future challenges. It's also about ensuring the burden of today's decisions is not unfairly shifted onto future generations of Tasmanians. The Public Accounts Committee has made a valuable contribution to that discussion through its review.

Before I conclude, I just have a couple of responses to matters that were raised by the honourable member for Murchison. In regard to the provision of funds associated with the TNVR scheme, it is understood that these matters were raised and addressed during the Estimates process. If that's not correct, please let me know.

Ms Forrest - They were raised and addressed. There was no money; that's correct.

Ms RATTRAY - And in regard to the further question about the contributions to the TRMF, that will be considered in future budgets.

Mr President, the government thanks the members of the committee and the officers of Treasury for their work. The government supports the motion and notes the report.

[3.12 p.m.]

Mr EDMUNDS (Pembroke) - Mr President, I rise to speak briefly on this report, and I think the Chair has done a pretty good job of that. This Fiscal Sustainability Report was a bit more alarming than the tone of the debate so far, when Tasmania is being put in the same

column as Greece and Costa Rica in terms of failed states. I know this report didn't go down that sort of sensationalist path, but those were words that were used to describe our budget situation by people who are involved in government. It is really alarming.

This is a fantastic report in terms of its accessibility for members. We've talked about the FSR already in this House when we noted the FSR itself, and I think most of us put our views about the FSR and what it meant for the state on record back then. I encourage keen observers of the Tasmanian parliament to go to this report. It's pretty short and sharp, it has the presentations in it, which I think is really informative. There's no blush being put on them, it's all there for people to access and read. It's a pretty good one-stop shop for the point in time that we were at with the tabling of the report.

Both previous speakers talked about the recommendations out of the report, so I don't need to repeat that. Perhaps what I will use this opportunity for, while I'm on my feet, outside of just recommending this - look, nobody expects everybody to read every report that every committee in this parliament puts forward, but I believe this one is worth revisiting for all observers, particularly as we approach budgets that are coming up next year.

I want to express my grave and great concern about the trajectory of Tasmania's state finances. The considered analysis given by people within Treasury itself about the trajectory the state is on and to hear that government is - this isn't a 'business as usual' situation, this isn't a 'workman-like approach' to something, this is the state's finances and our trajectory as a state. And I remain concerned about warnings that the state could effectively fail and I think all members probably share that concern.

With regard to the GST, it is good to hear a change in tone from the Liberal government because when that original arrangement was put in place, I don't seem to remember too much protesting back then. In fact, I think concerns on that were coming from my own side and Independent members from within this place. That isn't a good deal for us and we'll be consistent in saying that. I couldn't believe it when I saw on social media the other week, and I don't share Liberal Party content very often, but I saw the Treasurer, Eric Abetz, holding a phone, banging on as if this arrangement had come out of nowhere and he's going to advocate for Tasmania. This guy was a senator in the Morrison government when they stitched this up. I didn't hear or see too many press releases from him back then. I believe Mr Gutwein came out and cheer-led for this arrangement when it came out - the grand economic manager himself, Mr Gutwein - seriously, the guy who walked away when the going got tough. I think we need to view the current situation around GST through that prism. The people jumping up and down, making a lot of noise about it now waved it through. They cheered it on, so let's just view it through that prism. Thank you very much.

[3.16 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I appreciate the contributions of members and the Leader on behalf of the government. I'm interested to see what we see next, but I will correct the member for Elwick on one point. When the shocking deal was made with Western Australia, our Treasury - and Fiona Calvert was really behind a lot of the work that was done on that - made a really strong submission about maintaining full horizontal fiscal equalisation. Tasmania, as with most of the other states - some of them weren't so keen on full horizontal fiscal equalisation because it benefits notionally Tasmania more - it doesn't benefit us more, it just makes it easier for us to deliver the sort of services that it's expected to enable, but they did fight pretty hard at the time because I remember when we looked at this matter

some time ago, that's the reality. But you're absolutely right. Our now Treasurer was sitting in the federal Liberal government when this deal was struck, when Mathias Cormann went over to Western Australia and said, 'Here you go,' on his way out the door and Scott Morrison was treasurer. That's when the deal was done, the dastardly deal that it is; and here we are still with the challenges.

Now, the no worse off guarantee was put in place because it was such a bad deal for every other state and Western Australia does have a short memory. They have been recipients of GST in the past but, my word, they have short memories when it's suitable. Ultimately, some other time down the track, they may well have been beneficiaries again if it had stayed at full horizontal fiscal equalisation, but the reality is now what they have is a very sweet deal and, yes, they got lucky enough to have many of the minerals in that state that this country relies on - absolutely, but that doesn't mean they should be rewarded disproportionately to every other state that does what it can in that area.

I will, perhaps, cut former premier Mr Gutwein a little bit of slack, but Treasury -

Mr Edmunds - He said it was a good deal though, I believe.

Ms FORREST - Maybe he did. I'd have to. I don't recall that, but I do know that Treasury put forward a very strong submission arguing for full horizontal fiscal equalisation. We should have stayed with that. It all comes down to politics. When you want to win seats in Western Australia, you have to pander to the West Australians. That's what happened.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION

Public Accounts Committee Report (No. 19 of 2026) - Establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office - Consideration and Noting

[3.20 p.m.]

Ms THOMAS (Elwick) - Thank you, Mr President. It's a PAC day today - lots of work that we've been doing reviewing and getting through the report.

Mr President, I rise to move -

That the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts intituled Parliamentary Budget Office Report No. 19 of 2026 be considered and noted.

This report represents a substantial body of work by the Public Accounts Committee over almost two years, although I do note we were interrupted by an election. The committee did commence this inquiry in July 2024 to consider whether Tasmania should establish a parliamentary budget office (PBO) and, importantly, if so, what form such an office should take.

I note whilst the committee did commence this work in July 2024, it has taken some time because it was a really thorough investigation and we did have that short break in between

because of the election. Obviously, the committee stopped that work during that time, but his report was tabled on 16 June in this place. I do hope members have had a chance to have a read. It's great to be finally talking about it in the House today.

The report is 108 pages and has 23 findings and 13 recommendations, and our terms of reference as a committee for this inquiry were deliberately broad. We examined the benefits, the opportunities and the challenges associated with establishing a parliamentary budget office, the most appropriate model for Tasmania, the resources that would be required, the role the Public Accounts Committee would play should such an office be developed or established, and the key legislative provisions that would be necessary to establish a parliamentary budget office.

Importantly, the work that the committee undertook was not simply a theoretical exercise, because there are already three Parliamentary Budget Offices operating in Australia, in New South Wales, in Victoria and at the Commonwealth level. The committee considered it important that we learn directly from the experiences of those jurisdictions and the inquiry involved a considerable amount of interstate evidence gathering.

In February 2025, committee members travelled to Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne to learn from the experiences of those officers. Sadly, I wasn't able to attend due to unexpected health issues at that time. The flights were booked but unfortunately, I couldn't attend, but I will say it, it certainly wasn't a holiday for the committee. I was quite frightened when I saw the flight schedule, to be honest, of every morning up early and at the airport by some ungodly hour.

Ms Forrest - Stupid o'clock it was.

Ms THOMAS - Stupid o'clock, said the Chair who set the schedule, I reckon. Hard taskmaster is the Chair sometimes.

Mr Edmunds - A couple of dodgy taxi drivers too, I remember.

Ms THOMAS - Oh dear.

Ms Forrest - Well, that was a problem, the taxis in Canberra.

Ms THOMAS - Early mornings for the committee who were hopping from city to city to take this job really seriously and gather this evidence. In New South Wales it met members of the NSW Parliamentary Accounts Committee, including its Chair, Jason Yat-Sen Li MP, Clayton Barr MP and Jenny Leong MP. In Canberra, the committee met the Commonwealth Parliamentary Budget Officer, Sam Reinhardt and senior members of their office including Karen Witham, Gareth Tunks and Chrysanthé Psychogios.

They also met the former chair of the Commonwealth Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Julian Hill MP, as well as Professor Stephen Bartos, who had previously served as the NSW Parliamentary Budget Officer.

In Victoria, the committee met staff of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, including Dr Caroline Williams and Dr Krystle Gatt Rapa, as well as the Victorian Parliamentary Budget Officer, Xavier Rimmer.

Importantly, the committee did not confine ourselves to hearing from those who administer parliamentary budget offices. We also wanted to hear from parliamentarians who actually use their services. Therefore, the committee also received evidence from Victorian Greens MP Ellen Sandell and her policy adviser Dominica Settle, and subsequently Victorian Nationals leader Danny O'Brien and Victorian Libertarian leader David Limbrick. That was useful evidence because it represented very different parts of the political spectrum.

We also invited submissions from all Tasmanian parliamentarians and received one written submission from the Independent member for Clark, Kristie Johnston MP. I think that breadth of evidence is worth emphasising. It helps to demonstrate that this report was not produced by just sitting in Hobart and designing a model based on the theory and first principles. The committee examined the Australian offices that already exist and heard from the people who run them, the parliamentary committees that oversee them and, importantly, politicians from different political parties who use them.

The committee also considered the OECD's principles for independent fiscal institutions and the legislative frameworks applying to the Commonwealth, NSW and Victorian Parliamentary Budget Offices.

Why have a parliamentary budget office? This was the starting point for the committee, a relatively simple question. What problem are we trying to solve, a question we routinely hear raised in this place. Governments have an enormous institutional advantage when it comes to developing and costing policy. They have Treasury and other government departments and access to public servants, economic modelling, data, specialist expertise, and the machinery of government. Oppositions, minor parties and Independent members simply do not have equivalent resources.

Now, I'm not saying every member of parliament needs their own treasury. That's not what this means. But it does raise a legitimate question about whether the parliament itself should have access to independent, professional and non-partisan fiscal expertise.

The OECD recommends parliaments have access to specialist analytical support, capable of providing technical, expert and non-partisan analysis for fiscal policy and budgets. Following the global financial crisis, independent fiscal institutions became increasingly common internationally, and most OECD countries now have some form of such institution.

The committee ultimately found that a Tasmanian parliamentary budget office could perform two particularly valuable functions.

First, it could independently cost proposed policies for members of parliament, improving policy development, accountability and transparency; and, second, it could independently cost election commitments, allowing Tasmanians to better understand the financial consequences of the promises being made to them during election campaigns. The committee found that those functions have the potential to improve decision-making, encourage fiscal discipline, and lift the quality of public debate about both individual policies and the state's finances more generally.

One of the strongest messages the committee received was that members who already have access to a PBO value it. That support was not confined to one political party. Members from across the political spectrum spoke positively about having somewhere they could test an

idea, obtain independent analysis and develop a proposal before announcing it publicly. That point is particularly important.

A PBO should not simply be seen as an institution which arrives during an election campaign to put a dollar figure beside political promise. Its greater value may actually occur during the years between elections, because, as we know, good public policy rarely begins as a perfectly formed proposal. It develops as questions arise about evidence, consultation, design, eligibility, implementation, likely behavioural responses and cost. A member might ask, what would this policy cost if it applied to one group rather than another? What happens if the threshold changes? What is the five-year rather than one-year effect? Does a proposal create savings elsewhere? The ability to ask those questions confidentially, before a policy is finalised, can make the policy itself better.

The committee was also very clear that a parliamentary budget office would only succeed if parliamentarians and the public trusted it. Independence and non-partisanship are therefore fundamental. The parliamentary budget officer cannot be an arm of government, nor can they be an advocate for parliament, the opposition, Independents or anybody else. Their role must be analytical. The committee therefore recommended that the parliamentary budget officer be an independent officer of parliament not subject to direction in the performance of their functions. We also recommended that the officer not be a current or recent state servant at the time of appointment, and that the appointment process reflect best practice for other independent statutory offices.

Equally important is the other side of that independence. A PBO should not comment on whether a policy is good or bad. Its job is not to say parliament should adopt this proposal or this is poor policy. Its job is to say, as accurately and as impartially as possible, this is what the proposal is likely to cost. These are the assumptions underpinning that assessment and these are the fiscal consequences. The committee therefore recommends an explicit prohibition on the parliamentary budget officer commenting on the merits of a policy.

Confidentiality was another recurring issue in the evidence, and it's obvious why: members will not take an emerging policy idea to a PBO if doing so risks that proposal appearing in the media the following morning. The committee therefore recommends strong statutory confidentiality protections. Policy costing requests, advisory requests, information supplied by agencies and draft outputs would be protected information. Outside an election period, the member requesting the costing would determine whether and when it was publicly released. Protected information would be exempt from the right to information regime and breaches of those confidentiality requirements would attract a penalty. Those safeguards are not about secrecy for secrecy's sake; they are what enables the PBO to support genuine policy development.

Of course, a PBO cannot provide credible costings unless it can access the information required to undertake them. The experience of the existing officers showed us that this can be one of the practical difficulties. So, access to information was something the committee also took evidence on.

The committee identified inconsistent access to information, delays in agency responses, protecting confidential material, recruitment and relationship building as some of the principal challenges faced by Parliamentary Budget Officers. For that reason, recommendation 8 in the committee's report proposes that Tasmania's Parliamentary Budget Officer have access to

information consistent with best practice elsewhere and commensurate with the access provided to Tasmania's Auditor-General under the *Audit Act 2008*, with agreed response timeframes.

The committee also found that formal memoranda of understanding between PBOs and government agencies can help to build relationships and facilitate the flow of information. This might sound administratively mundane, but it is essential. An independent office which has theoretical access to information but waits weeks or months for agencies to provide it will not function effectively, particularly during the compressed environment of an election campaign.

One of the most significant questions confronting the committee was what model Tasmania should adopt: a permanent or an election period budget office. New South Wales has traditionally operated what might broadly be described as an intermittent model, principally focused on election periods. Victoria and the Commonwealth operate permanent offices. We considered both approaches carefully because Tasmania is a small jurisdiction and cost obviously matters. There is an understandable attraction in saying, if much of the public attention occurs around election costings, why not establish an office only when an election approaches? But the evidence convinced the committee otherwise.

A temporary model means losing institutional knowledge between elections, it means repeatedly recruiting staff and rebuilding systems, and requires a significant amount of work to be compressed into the busiest possible period. Critically, it removes the ability of members to use the office throughout the parliamentary term to develop policies in the first place. The committee's finding was that an intermittent office limits the service largely to election costings and does not support ongoing policy development and public accountability. It also carries repeated recruitment and establishment costs and significant time pressures.

The committee therefore recommends a permanent full-time parliamentary budget office operating continuously throughout the parliamentary cycle, supported by additional surge capacity during election periods. Personally, I think that is one of the most important conclusions of this report. If Tasmania proceeds with the PBO, it should establish an institution which provides meaningful value throughout the parliamentary term, rather than an office which is recreated every four years.

The committee also turned its mind to what the office would actually do. Under recommendation 2, its functions would vary somewhat between election periods and the ordinary parliamentary cycle. During an election period, eligible parties and independent candidates could submit election commitments for confidential costing. The PBO would also monitor publicly announced election commitments and report either the cost of those commitments or, where appropriate, that no costing request had been made. It would then prepare and publish a post-selection budget impact report. Outside election periods, every member of parliament would be able to request confidential costing of policies they were developing. The office would also provide economic and fiscal advice to parliament and parliamentary committees and publish an annual report.

Recommendation 3 of the committee is particularly important in the Tasmanian context: that is that the services of the office would be available to all members of parliament. Because any Tasmanian office will necessarily be comparatively small, there would be a published framework for prioritising requests, with priority given to matters currently before the parliament - and that is sensible. Demand will inevitably exceed capacity at particular times

and the solution should be a transparent prioritisation framework rather than decisions made behind closed doors about which member receives assistance when.

The committee was conscious throughout this inquiry that Tasmania cannot simply transplant a Commonwealth or Victorian institution and assume the resources appropriate to those jurisdictions are appropriate here. Of course, the Tasmanian model needs to be proportionate, but it also has to be properly resourced. An office which exists on paper but lacks the economics, accountancy and public policy expertise or analytical capability to do its job would achieve very little. The committee therefore recommends adequate base funding, together with specific capacity to increase staffing and operational resources during election periods. It also recommends the office make use of parliament's existing ICT, human resources and payroll systems, rather than unnecessarily duplicating back office functions. The legislation should facilitate secondments, including from the public service and other organisations, and allow specialist consultants to be engaged where expertise is not available internally.

Perhaps most importantly for a small jurisdiction, recommendation 13 proposes that Tasmania actively explore partnerships with the Commonwealth and interstate PBOs. That could include staff secondment, shared systems and analytical support, particularly during the establishment phase and during elections. That strikes me as an especially pragmatic recommendation because Tasmania does not need to reinvent every model, dataset and analytical tool from scratch. We can learn from institutions who have spent many years developing that expertise.

The committee also considered what role the Public Accounts Committee itself should have. Experience elsewhere demonstrated that a parliamentary committee can play an important governance role without interfering in the operational independence of the office. Our recommendations, therefore, envisage the Public Accounts Committee endorsing the appointment and removal of the parliamentary budget officer, being consulted on the annual operational plan, considering the PBO's budget request and making a recommendation to the Treasurer, reviewing its annual report and performance, and participating in periodic independent statutory reviews. But the committee would be specifically prohibited from directing the parliamentary budget officer in the performance of their functions and that distinction is important. Parliamentary oversight should protect independence, not undermine it.

There are 13 recommendations in this report and I will not read every subparagraph into *Hansard*, but taken together they provide a fairly comprehensive blueprint. They recommend a permanent office, clear statutory functions, access for every member, operational independence, a rigorous appointment process, appropriate and financially independent resourcing, efficient shared-service arrangements, strong information gathering powers, strict confidentiality protections, appropriate parliamentary oversight, comprehensive legislative safeguards, clear election costing rules and collaboration with the Commonwealth and interstate officers. These are not recommendations made without reference to practical experience. They draw directly upon the evidence the committee took from the Commonwealth, Victorian and New South Wales officers and the legislation; the experience of their PBOs and associated parliamentary committees; the members who have used the officers, and the OECD principles governing independent fiscal institutions.

I know the Leader will have the opportunity to outline the government's position in response, but for completeness in my contribution, I'll place on the record my understanding of the government's commentary on this issue to date. The concept of a parliamentary budget office previously received a positive response from the government. Following Saul Eslake's independent review of Tasmania's state finances, the government's fiscal strategy material included the investigation and establishment of a parliamentary budget office among measures intended to improve fiscal accountability.

In the 2025-26 Budget, the then treasurer, the honourable Guy Barnett, allocated \$100,000 to the Legislature-General to investigate the establishment of a Tasmanian PBO, including its possible structure, scope, resourcing and cost. The then treasurer told the House of Assembly that he had a positive disposition towards the proposal, that the government needed to do the work necessary to establish the office and that he believed a parliamentary budget office would be of considerable merit. That budget, of course, did not pass before the 2025 election was called.

When the interim budget was subsequently delivered in November 2025, that \$100,000 allocation was no longer included. Instead, the interim budget acknowledged that this Public Accounts Committee inquiry remained underway and identified future PBO funding as an unquantifiable budget risk until the committee had determined its recommended scope, model and resourcing. We saved the government \$100,000 - PAC.

Ms Forrest - Good value for money, I say.

Ms THOMAS - Well, that work has now been completed. The committee's report has been tabled. The recommended model, scope and functions and governance arrangements have been identified, and the legislative framework required to protect the office's independence, confidentiality and effectiveness has been comprehensively considered. I hope the government will now give this report very careful consideration or has already done so. The committee has done much of the work that the government itself previously indicated needed to be done, so I very much hope we'll be able to have another report by the chair of the government responding and that we've updated the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation tracker with a record of the government's response to each of the 13 recommendations.

Establishing a parliamentary budget office will come at a cost. The committee does not pretend otherwise, but the relevant question is not simply whether an independent fiscal institution costs money, the question is whether the benefits it delivers to parliamentary scrutiny, policy development, fiscal responsibility, transparency and public confidence justify that investment. The committee concluded that they do. At a time when Tasmania faces significant fiscal challenges and trust in governments and politics is dramatically declining, there is considerable value in improving the capacity of this parliament to understand the financial implications of the decisions put before it. There is value in allowing members to test policies before announcing them. There is value in giving Tasmanians greater confidence that election promises have been independently costed. And there is value in having an authoritative, independent and nonpartisan institution capable of contributing factual analysis to debates about Tasmania's finances. As the report observes, a parliamentary budget office would particularly assist non-government and independent members who do not have access to Treasury resources.

Ultimately, however, its beneficiaries are broader than individual members or political parties. The beneficiary should be the parliament itself and through it, the Tasmanian people. A PBO will not settle political arguments, nor should it. It will not determine whether a policy is desirable. That remains a matter for elected representatives and, ultimately, the people who elect us. What it can do is ensure that those debates are better informed, that assumptions can be tested, that financial claims can be independently examined and that policy development across this parliament is supported by credible professional analysis.

I acknowledge the considerable work undertaken by the committee secretariat in supporting this inquiry and I thank Simon and Ally for their support. I also acknowledge the generosity of the parliamentary budget officers, the parliamentary committee members and parliamentarians in New South Wales, Canberra and Victoria, whom I've all named already, who shared their experience with us. I also acknowledge the work of my fellow committee members in considering what is a significant institutional reform for this parliament.

The committee's recommendations offer the government a considered and practical pathway for establishing a PBO suited to Tasmania circumstances. I strongly encourage the government to take up the opportunity to carefully consider all 13 recommendations and to move toward their implementation. And with those comments, Mr President, I commend the report to the Council.

[3.44 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I wish to speak on this report. I first want to thank the member for Elwick for tabling the report and for making a very substantial contribution to the content of the report. I will cover some of the same territory, but Ms Thomas has done a very comprehensive job of reflecting accurately the findings and the recommendations of the committee - and a hard taskmaster I was when we were setting that schedule. I know some of our committee members found that to be a bit of a challenge to keep up with.

This report is really an important body of work and, as the member for Elwick alluded to, it's potentially saved the government above about \$100,000 because we've done the work to investigate whether we should have a parliamentary budget office. If we do, what should it look like? What are the important legislative provisions that need to be included in any drafting instructions? And how should it be resourced in terms of, not the dollar amount, but how could you limit the resourcing requirement and manage it more effectively? I will note, without revealing any committee deliberations, every matter in this report, every recommendation, every finding was robustly debated.

There wasn't always broad agreement initially about which way to go and we worked our way through it to try to find how we could make a PBO work for Tasmania, noting that it has been a Liberal government policy to implement a parliamentary budget office, particularly since the independent assessment of the state's finances undertaken by Saul Eslake.

It has been really thoroughly canvassed and robustly debated. As the member for Elwick has alluded to, we sought the views of a variety of people who have engaged with and been directly involved in parliamentary budget offices to understand what was really critical if you're going to have one, what the most appropriate model was and how to actually operate it and what the limitations should be on a parliamentary budget office.

It is all contained in the report. If members want more detail, it's all there. I won't obviously be reading through the whole thing, but it's really important that members take the time to look at this particularly, hopefully if the government will proceed. I'm personally very happy to work with the government working on legislation to bring forward a parliamentary budget office, because this is something I've been advocating for about 15 years now in various times. It might not be quite that long. When the PBO was established in Canberra in the federal parliament and I saw what it did, it became really apparent that we needed a little Tasmanian model that was similar to achieve the same thing.

As the member for Elwick pointed out, we did travel with a pretty gruelling schedule to Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne to meet various parties where they are, parliamentary budget offices. If members are interested, you should go to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Budget Office website. Even though it is obviously a much bigger scale, they're dealing with Commonwealth matters, not state matters, but they've got a really interesting interactive tool on that website where, if, you were thinking as a federal member you might want to look at let's just say a change in some tax level, for example. You can go in and say, if we raise this tax rate by 1 per cent, what will the impact be to phase it out; and it tells you exactly what the impact will be. What if we apply it here and not there and things like that. It was really interesting to actually go in and have a fiddle around with the model. I'm not suggesting that Tasmania have that, it's just that the Commonwealth PBO is a much larger office obviously, it has many more staff, and it has resources that are really valuable. Whilst those things are not necessarily applicable for us, it does help you to see what can be done and how a parliamentary budget office can assist the parliament but also the people of Australia from the Commonwealth's perspective.

Mr President, the inquiry was formally resolved by the committee in July 2024. This matter had sort of been sitting on our agenda for some time before that, but we had all these other pressing matters coming in and sort of pushed it to the side because it wasn't a critical matter that we needed to determine right then. It had been sitting there for some time before we resolved to progress the inquiry in July 2024.

We also know that this is something that Saul Eslake has recommended in his independent review of the Tasmanian state finances report and it also makes it clear in his report that a PBO is needed in Tasmania. Mr Eslake recommended that Tasmania follow the Commonwealth, NSW and Victorian parliaments in establishing a parliamentary budget office in order to enhance the capacity of this parliament to comprehend and discuss fiscal issues and to formulate policies that will have an impact on the budget.

It's not just about assisting members of parliament; it's about assisting the public. It's about assisting the public about making decisions, about voting intentions when they fully understand the costing of a policy. Any member of parliament, any member of a party can go out and say if we're elected, we will deliver this shiny thing over here and it's only going to cost \$3 million. Who are we to judge that or criticise it if it's an opposition party? The government had access to Treasury, so they have more capacity to formulate proper costings, but the opposition and minor parties don't. During the election period there's an expectation that Treasury will cost election commitments, but often they're not provided or they're not provided in time, and how do you cost a policy when you don't have all the details or the time to pull it apart? That's what a PBO does. I'll come to that a bit more in a moment, but it's to assist the public as well as other members of parliament.

In recent times and in recent budgets, there's been a commitment, as the member for Elwick alluded to, from the government to establish a parliamentary budget office. This report is intended to provide the important matters that need to be addressed in legislation to establish a parliamentary budget office because the committee found that we definitely should and supported the government policy position to establish one. This, as the member for Elwick rightly said, was based in the evidence we collected, and the evidence we collected clearly made the case for a full-time parliamentary budget office, not one that's only established around election periods. I'll come to that a bit more, but first the background.

The OECD recommends that parliaments have access to specialist, nonpartisan financial analysis. That's for the benefit of all of us. When we come into this place, very few of us have the financial skills to fully understand what a budget is telling you, what it's not telling you, and whether this is a reasonable costing for that particular policy. So, the OECD makes a very clear recommendation for that access to nonpartisan specialist fiscal analysis. Since the global financial crisis, most OECD countries have established an independent fiscal institution. That's what they are called internationally. In Australia, three parliamentary budget offices have been established: one in New South Wales in 2010, the Commonwealth in 2012, and the Victorian Parliament in 2017. As the member for Elwick alluded to, only the Commonwealth and Victorian offices operate on a full-time basis. New South Wales's did at one point, but it reverted in 2013 to a time-limited election-only model, despite the evidence from their own committee to continue it as a full-time model - a political decision that one.

A PBO has the potential to significantly enhance this parliament's capacity to scrutinise fiscal policy, to improve the quality of policy development across all parties, and to provide Tasmanians with credible, independent information about the financial implications of election commitments. Taken on their own, any one election commitment may seem like a good idea, but when you add it all up and look at the whole impact, it can paint a different story, but only if you have accurate costings to make that decision. For members without access to Treasury resources, minor parties and Independents in particular, and the opposition party, a PBO levels the playing field and everyone can then be held to the same standard.

The committee did not just rely on desktop research. We did some of that - we looked internationally and around the country and, as the member for Elwick pointed out, in February 2025, a delegation travelled to Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne to hear directly from the three existing Australian parliamentary budget offices and their oversight committees, because they do all have oversight committees. The New South Wales Parliamentary Accounts Committee, we met with them, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Budget Officer, Ms Sam Reinhardt and her senior staff, the Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit, the former New South Wales Parliamentary Budget Officer, Professor Stephen Bartos. I say 'former' because I think he's done the last two or three New South Wales elections as the PBO, and he's just reappointed. I'm not sure how much longer he will do that. They'll eventually have to find somebody else once he retires. It is a very intense period, so it's handy to have someone back who has a bit of the corporate knowledge, but he still has to recruit all his own team again to undertake that work when an election is called. New South Wales does have fixed elections, fixed four-year terms, so it is easy to do it because you know when the election is going to be, you can set it up, you can get the office in place. Imagine what that would have been like in the last three years here, in Tasmania? It would have been impossible to have an intermittent PBO that would have to be stood up very quickly in an election without the time to actually get the people in to do the work and to then get properly costed policies.

We also spoke to the Victorian Public Accounts and Estimates committee secretariat and Victorian Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr Xavier Rimmer. He was a wealth of information and really happy to assist the committee however he could.

I also want to note the three parliaments that provided some support with the recording of our meetings with these members and the other representatives we met with. It meant we didn't have to travel with Hansard, which reduced the cost. But also, the Victorian parliament particularly gave us access to their Hansard recorders, which was really very generous of them. We also had further briefings later, and some were online with the Victorian crossbench members and the Nationals', Mr Danny O'Brien and the Libertarians', Mr David Limbrick. They were very generous with their time as well. We appreciate that.

The committee's work was then interrupted by the calling of the state election in June 2025 and then we resumed the committee after it was re-established in September 2025.

As it's been noted, there was the \$100,000 in the budget to investigate a Tasmanian PBO; that was then removed from the budget noting that the PAC was doing this work.

As the member for Elwick noted, too, we did get only one submission from a Tasmanian sitting member, which was Ms Kristie Johnston, Independent member for Clark. She was quite strong in her support for a Tasmanian PBO, but noting it should be small and capable, independent of the executive, answerable to parliament and mandated to serve all members, especially those without access to the party apparatus or Treasury's resources.

The evidence from those who actually use PBOs was consistent and compelling across party lines. Ms Ellen Sandell MLA, the Greens member for Melbourne, told the committee that Victorian PBO provides a critical service to crossbench members who lack policy staff, enabling policy costings and through the office's standing ongoing character, as well as public education work that they do that the time-limited office could never sustain. She was very clear that having a full-time office to allow that work to occur away from the pressure of a looming election, develop your policy up and then get it costed, and if you find that actually, no, that's just not going to work, that's going to cost far more than we thought, you can rethink your policy and come back with something that may be more in keeping with the philosophy or the intent of your policy.

Mr Danny O'Brien, the Leader of the Victorian Nationals, described initial scepticism from the opposition giving way to consistent use once the office had proven its independence. Remember, the Labor Party were in power at the time - and still are, actually - so, initially, when it was introduced, there was a degree of scepticism and suggestion that they wouldn't use it until it was there and they did. I think it's been proven, from the evidence we heard, that the independence of the office is sound and reliable, the quality of its work, whilst noting the office's own persistent difficulty in securing timely cooperation from some government departments made their job a little bit challenging. We did hear that both in Victoria and also in the Australian Government, the Commonwealth's PBO, to the point that they had to enter into memoranda of understanding with some of the departments generally to ensure that they could access this information. That was one of the questions we asked witnesses about what should be in the legislation. It was pretty clear that you need that in the legislation - the access to information piece.

Sitting suspended from 4.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

MOTION

**Public Accounts Committee Report (No. 19 of 2026) - Establishment of a
Parliamentary Budget Office - Consideration and Noting**

Resumed from above (page 55).

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Before we stopped for that short break, I was just talking about some of the other representatives from various other parliaments we've spoken to.

As I mentioned, we did speak to Mr David Limbrick, who is the leader of the Victorian Libertarians, and he put the case for independence quite clearly. He said minor parties and oppositions face a structural information asymmetry against government and even a well-resourced private consultancy would lack the PBO's credibility. He called the Victorian PBO invaluable for exactly that reason.

I think that's the key thing, that the independence of the office is critical and credible and gives everyone a degree of confidence in a policy costing.

Professor Stephen Bartos, the former NSW parliamentary budget officer I mentioned previously, identified two underappreciated benefits. He stated that the elimination of post-budget black holes because costs are known in advance - wouldn't that be a welcome thing? - and a disciplining effect on all sides of politics because all parties know their costings will become public, and so that holds all people, parties and individuals making election commitments accountable for that.

This was mentioned by the member for Elwick - if a party or individual chooses to put out a policy that hasn't been costed during an election, the PBO should be able to - and in other jurisdictions can - put it out in the public by some form, a media release, statement in the media, media coverage. The PBO can keep a record of that and then say but that policy has not been requested for costing, so, then, anyone in the public looking at that can say, 'Oh, well, they've said they're going to do x.' You could use TasInsure as an example, and there is absolutely no costing and no idea here what that might cost. But the Premier, at the time, who was proposing TasInsure could have sent that to the PBO and got a costing and then we would have had some credible information on which to base whether that's a credible policy position or not. Without that, you've got really no idea.

Professor Bartos recalled a New South Wales election in which both parties competed to present a more fiscally responsible bottom line. Wouldn't that be nice? Each backed by independent PBO costings rather than mere assertion. So, that's the benefits I'm talking about.

Mr Clayton Barr MP of the NSW Public Accounts Committee made a point as well relevant to this parliament. He said Treasury, however professional, works for the government of the day, and are poorly placed to cost an opposition or minor party proposal without compromising that party's confidentiality. That's not a reflection on Treasury. It's just saying that if you're being asked to do the government's work and then you suddenly have to down tools, if you like, in caretaker period and then go to costing opposition parties, if there was some concern about it getting out, it may not have, it got released inadvertently by Treasury but somehow came across, it can reflect poorly.

Ms Webb - You can't work for two masters, can you?

Ms FORREST - Sorry?

Ms Webb - You can't work for two masters anyway, can you in that sense. You don't want to have split loyalties.

Ms FORREST - No, you don't. And their loyalty is for the government of the day, that's their job, they're there for that purpose. It does put them in a somewhat difficult position. You can't really push back and challenge an opposition party, and particularly when they've landed, you know, perhaps 100 policies on your desk in one day. A PBO removes that structural conflict and I think that's really important as well.

To summarise the findings, the committee made 23 findings organised under five headings. It's easily accessible in the report, and I urge members to have a read of it. On the background and rationale, the committee found that the OECD recommends specialist nonpartisan analytical support for parliamentarians and notes that most OECD countries have established an independent fiscal institution since the global financial crisis; and that a Tasmanian PBO could cost both proposed policies and election commitments, with the potential to inform decision-making, enhance fiscal discipline and raise the quality of public debate. I think members of the public really want this. They want to know what their party is intending to deliver, what it's going to cost, and what it means for the state budget.

Other benefits and opportunities and challenges the committee found included strong support from members of parliament with lived experience of a PBO. They all spoke positively, as the member for Elwick mentioned, and none of them said it was ineffective or too costly or had an adverse outcome.

The other finding on that was: independence and nonpartisan partisanship, including a parliamentary budget officer who is not a current public servant, are essential prerequisites for success. So, if you're setting up one during an election period, just pull someone out of Treasury to do that job, again, that conflict and that problem arises. So, have an independent parliamentary budget officer. I'd like to snaffle the Victorian one when he finishes his term because it's a bit like the Auditor-General, and they have fixed terms. That said, he'd be excellent for the job.

A memorandum of understanding with public sector entities supports both relationship building and access to information. So, it needs to be well understood across the whole-of-government structure that there is an expectation of provision of information to support the budget costing. That's all held confidentially obviously. It's not a free-for-all, there are strict confidentiality provisions.

The common challenges include inconsistent access to information, which can be addressed through legislative mechanisms; protecting confidentiality - obviously critical; managing misrepresentation, and there is the opportunity for the PBOs that we met to correct a misrepresentation. They're prohibited from speaking about policy, or should be, but if someone misrepresents the report or the findings or something that the PBO has put out, they can correct the record, which is really important they do that. It was interesting, the member Pembroke might remember this, after we finished with our hearing in the Victorian Parliament, we thought we'd pop into Question Time, because we were in Parliament House. And the first

question asked by the leader of the opposition was about the Auditor-General's report - effectively they were having to go at the Auditor-General, and I said to the team that was with me, 'I hope we won't be doing that in Tasmania.' We respect our Auditor-General and the office. The next question was having a crack at the PBO, along the same lines. It was like, seriously guys, you know? This is not how we should be behaving. So, if there was a misrepresentation to occur, I think it's only right they can correct the record. Recruiting skilled staff can be a challenge, particularly around elections when you need to ramp up a little bit, but a permanent PBO makes it much easier to do that. Many of these challenges can be mitigated through effective legislation.

On the most appropriate model, the committee found that an intermittent election-only PBO of the New South Wales kind, supports only short timeframe election costings, at the cost of lost corporate knowledge, repeated recruitment and re-establishment expense - so, it ends up being just as expensive almost - and no capacity for ongoing policy development support when members value it most, when they have time to build their policy decisions to ensure that they have put them properly costed, and understand what they're putting forward. This intermittent approach did not support longer-term policy development and costing that could assist policy refinement and adjustments, as it was only available during the election period. That was a matter raised as a concern by the current members in the New South Wales Public Accounts Committee, but there was the full-time PBO sometime before and then it had been wound back. It hadn't necessarily delivered what they believed it could, or should - not to say it's not valuable at what it does do, it's just a very constrained process. A full-time parliamentary budget office resulted in policy development costings occurring over the whole term of parliament and more fully considered policies for costing, rather than just a rush through - you know, 'We need to get this off and costed' - they're much better developed by the time they were properly considered for costing. Ultimately, this led to more robust policy development and accurate policy costings.

With regard to resourcing - and this is a really critical issue in the budget-constrained situation we're in - the committee found that a PBO requires appropriate resourcing and access to a mix of professional skills, economics, accountancy and public policy expertise, with the capacity to engage specific experts as required to respond to different areas of policy. It's unreasonable to expect that you'd have all the skills you might possibly need in the PBO, unless it was a very large PBO. When you get an energy policy, you may need to engage an energy expert, or for an education policy you may need someone who can really understand the educational policy matters.

With regard to governance, the committee found that in other Australian jurisdictions the relevant parliamentary committee holds statutory responsibilities for parliamentary budget office oversight, but may not direct the officer's work - which is a distinction this committee regards as fundamental to preserving the officer's independence. The Public Accounts Committee equivalents in the various jurisdictions had the role that we have, overseeing the audit office. We can't direct the Auditor-General, but we oversee his budget requests, look at his reports, et cetera.

To summarise the recommendations - and these flow directly from the evidence received, we didn't make anything up that we thought was a good idea, it's all based in the evidence - the committee made 13 recommendations addressing six key areas. The first recommendation is a permanent full-time parliamentary budget office operating continuously across the

parliamentary cycle, with surge resourcing for election periods. The committee concluded that the evidence strongly favoured this model over the New South Wales intermittent alternative.

Recommendation 2 was to ensure the legislation to establish a PBO - there's far more detail in the report, saying this is just high level - needs to clearly define scope and functions; provide confidential policy costings and advice to members throughout the term; provide election commitment costing and monitoring; and provide post-election budget impact reports that will be available to all members on a published transparent prioritisation framework, which is covered in recommendation 3. That's so it's clear to all members how they prioritise requests, because they can get a lot and they have a system of prioritisation which is covered in the report, and how they manage that.

Recommendation 4 refers to the need for legislated robust independence provisions of the parliamentary budget officer, who should be appointed as an independent officer of the parliament and not a current or recent state servant. It needs to be a parliamentary budget office free from direction, and a parliamentary budget officer free from direction. A parliamentary budget office empowered to correct public misrepresentations of the officer's work is expressly prohibited from commenting on the merits of policy and, as noted in recommendation 5, appointed through a best-practice statutory process.

Recommendation 6 makes it clear that adequate and protective resourcing is critical to the success of a PBO. Such funding should be considered by the relevant oversight committee, a bit like we do with the audit office. We don't make the decision about the budget; that's entirely for the government to do, but we make a recommendation to the Treasurer. We also would expect that if the Treasurer didn't agree that the request was to be complied with, as requested by the PBO and supported by the committee, that the Treasurer would issue a statement of reasons as to why they declined to accept that recommendation.

Staffing and back-office functions could be delivered through parliament potentially rather than the State Service to avoid duplication and preserve the independence, as noted in recommendation 7. These are mechanisms to try to keep it lean and try to keep the cost as minimal as possible. Obviously there would need to be resourcing for the parliament to do this and the parliament is not resourced adequately in some areas already, and we do acknowledge that.

Recommendation 8 highlights the importance of access to information commensurate with the Auditor-General. That would need to be a legislated provision as well.

Recommendation 9 adds this matter recommending confidentiality protections that exempt costing requests and outputs from the right to information disclosure with penalties for a breach. That's to ensure that matters can remain confidential and not be used for political gameplay.

Recommendation 10 makes it clear that a clearly bounded oversight role for the oversight committee is important in the endorsing of appointments, being consulted on operational plans and budgets, and agreeing on the terms of reference for statutory five-yearly independent reviews but expressly without power to direct the parliamentary budget officer. As I said, this is very similar to the role PAC plays with the Audit Tasmania office.

The remaining recommendations 11 to 13 set out the detailed legislative drafting principles required. So, as I said, the work is there; it's pretty clear drafting guidance for election period costing provisions and a recommendation that the parliamentary budget officer actively pursue secondment and shared service arrangements with the Commonwealth and interstate counterparts during the establishment. This recognises that Tasmania, as the smallest jurisdiction to consider this, cannot and need not build every capability from scratch.

I note, for the record, that recommendations 1, 3 to 11 and 13 were accepted unanimously by the committee. Recommendations 2 and 12 are adopted by majority, with Mr Roger Jaensch MP dissenting on matters of application rather than principle. His dissenting statement is attached to the report. His dissent does not detract from the intent of the report or its recommendations; rather, a differing view on adoption of some aspects of the legislative approach.

The establishment of a parliamentary budget office represents a significant and lasting investment in the quality of Tasmanian democracy. For members of parliament, particularly those from minor parties and Independent members without access to Treasury resources, it levels the playing field, enables more rigorous and credible policy development throughout the parliamentary term, not merely at election time. For the broader Tasmanian community, which is perhaps even more important, it provides assurance that election commitments have been independently scrutinised, that fiscal claims can be tested against an authoritative and impartial source, and the public debate around the state's finances is better informed not just by members in the parliament but by the general public.

The experience of other jurisdictions is that a PBO encourages all sides of politics toward more fiscally responsible policy - and isn't that really what we want to see precisely because those costs will be independently verified and made public? In a state with well-documented fiscal challenges and a strong public interest in the sustainability of government finances, those benefits go directly to public trust and confidence in this institution.

I recommend the report and all 13 recommendations to all members and look forward to the government's response and hopefully action on this very important report. Should a PBO be established, it will lead to enhanced policy development, it'll actually save money in the long run more than likely, and we'll have a much better and well-informed public when they're voting. As I said earlier, I'm really happy to work with the government, if they wish to, to see this legislation developed and delivered because, to me, that's one of the things that I'd really like to see before I finish in this place, whenever that might be, and I'd rather it happen sooner rather than later, acknowledging the resourcing challenge.

[4.49 p.m.]

Mr EDMUNDS (Pembroke) - Mr President, I rise as the third member of this place on this committee to speak to it, but also as a member who was fortunate enough to be able to hold those hearings with the other jurisdictions, so maybe just to add a bit of context. I don't think there's heaps of detail about the recommendations to add to the previous two speakers other than to say, yes, I support the recommendations of the report.

Outside of some prorogations, this report is our committee system in this parliament working at its absolute best.

It's taken evidence from a broad spectrum of people from all political persuasions, both within the elected member sphere and the operational side of things with the parliament and the officers who have been involved in delivering this. We've taken evidence across jurisdictions and indeed with the federal parliament.

The question wasn't asked which type of parliamentary budget office we should have. It was, 'Do we require a parliamentary budget office and, if so, which type would we like to see established?'

I'd like to thank the secretariat for their support. There was a lot of logistics at different times to get through on this report. I'd also like to thank our witnesses, who gave up their time and gave serious consideration to what Tasmania was considering through the Public Accounts Committee.

It would be easy to get a bit of lip service from those jurisdictions, but I think the passion shown by all showed the benefit that they had seen from their own PBOs, whichever operation they had.

I'd also like to thank the members of the committee both past and present, especially Mr Behrakis, who was a brilliant participant, especially in those hearings on the mainland, but also through the process when he was here and the candour and the way he took on being part of this as a member of government. So, I really appreciate him and gained a great deal of respect for him through that. Again, that is the committee system of the parliament working at its finest.

A parliamentary budget office wraps context around the policy. It's brain explosion insurance, often from opposition. We've seen it, and we deal with the legacy of it in this parliament and others, when people have things that might sound all right but cost a fortune or they win an election, then they have to deliver them when promises are made.

To get a clearer picture before going to the polls, yes, it helps the people of Tasmania who are the number one show. They're the people who send us off to work every day in this Chamber, Mr President, but to inform politicians, whether they're parties or independents, that this idea or policy that they might have when considered by a respected Independent authority such as a trusted PBO has to be grounded in reality, I suppose.

It's easy to make promises that sound good no matter who you are, but if the rigour that is applied to them by a PBO shows that actually that's going to have a massive or far greater economic impact on Tasmania or the budget - have you considered x , y and z as the consequences of that? - I think is really good feedback and I think that privacy condition that we recommend in this as trust is built in an organisation like this, where there can be a bit of back and forth with an authority like this, can actually lead to some much better policy outcomes for Tasmanians, and also a better budgetary position.

I know there's a phrase that says you have to spend money to make money, but in this case it might be you have to spend money to save money, to ensure that we don't end up with legacy challenges from empty election promises. TasInsure was raised by one of the previous speakers. I think that's a pretty obvious example.

It is about exposing - 'expose' might not be the right word, but good and bad ideas and placing some rigour on those - and, if somebody has come forward with a good policy

suggestion from whichever party or Independent or crossbench or whatever and it stacks up and there's a PBO report about it, well, it might get broader support. If that's in the interests of the rest of the state, then who really cares where the ideas come from?

Obviously, it's essential that this body would sit independently of the parliament and the bureaucracy, so they could, indeed, act impartially. I think we saw from the other jurisdictions that they had good blueprints for how you could do that, and the accountability piece for all members is important when we're talking about informing Tasmanians.

I acknowledge that there were two recommendations that previous speakers spoke about where there wasn't necessarily a unanimous position, but I think in part some of that came from the change in the committee without verballing anybody. There was a lot of evidence gained and then we had turnover in members of the committee, so, we were sort of starting from scratch with some of the concepts there. I look forward to the government's contribution, but I believe the support is still there for a parliamentary budget office. It certainly is supported by my own political party as something that should be established in the best interests of Tasmania.

I was going to go through the recommendations. I don't really see the point after the previous two speakers' summing up, but I think the question you've got to ask yourself - and this is the question that people who aren't necessarily in a political cut and thrust who might see that this is a cost or are just interested in the topic, I suppose, ask: why do you actually want to have this parliamentary budget office? The reason why I would say to those people is yes, like I said, sometimes you might have to spend money to save money. I think it's a massive truth and transparency measure for Tasmania if one was established and was established as per the recommendations of the report. I think I'm quoting the member for Elwick, it's a considered and practical response to the budgetary challenges we have in Tasmania.

Also I think it's a way to combat populism. Every decade that goes past, it seems to be more likely that somebody is going to offer an easy way out to electors, and that can sound good, but placing rigour around some of those commitments, I think, can only be a good thing when people have to go to the ballot box and you can call BS on ideas that clearly won't stack up, but really, when you've got something to actually back that it is a good thing.

Ms Rattray - Did you just say we're going to the ballot every 10 years - to the box?

Mr EDMUNDS - No.

Ms Rattray - Oh, I thought that was a great idea.

Mr EDMUNDS - I said that it seems with every decade we lose the easy way out gets presented to people and we've all got a role in -

Ms Rattray - I thought you'd come up with a fantastic idea.

Mr EDMUNDS - Yes, perhaps. Most people think our terms are already long enough, honourable Leader. But I think it's good to expose ideas for debate and, if we can get as much truth in the public discourse as possible and evidence and reason around policy when we're deciding who's going to run this state, I can't see how that is a bad thing for anybody and, as I said, it's almost like an ideas insurance. A lot of stuff sounds really good, but if it's going to have a \$40 million impact on the bottom line, then people might think twice about that or they

might think twice about another way to tackle that problem. I think that's where the confidentiality element is really important. People should be coming forward with ideas and this is one place they can take them and get a bit of feedback and go, 'Okay, I might park that.'

And we had evidence given to us, particularly in Victoria, about some policy ideas that were raised and red-flagged and people actually backed off on them. I think it's really good to hear that that's occurred, because it shows that in practice this is working. If somebody was to go, 'No, I'm just going to crash through anyway,' well, there's going to be a release of the document because when it's in the public domain, then there is a role for the PBO to explain its position. I think it's actually not a handbrake on democracy at all. In fact, I think it's a really good transparency measure in terms of informing the Tasmanian public when they go to the ballot box.

So, we'll see what the response is and what pathways or timelines we might have. I don't think it's the last we'll ever hear of this, because I'm sure, when we eventually go to a downstairs ballot box at some time in the next three years, it will certainly be a policy from the team in red. If we don't see it from the team in blue, I guess that's its pathway forward. I commend the report. Thank you very much.

[4.59 p.m.]

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT (Huon) - It was really great to have a read of this report and learn all about parliamentary budget offices, or PBOs. I think a PBO would address a real gap in our parliamentary system. One of the challenges of non-government members is that we don't have access to the same level of fiscal expertise and analytical support that is available to the government via Treasury.

What appeals to me most is that the committee has recommended a permanent office that would operate throughout the parliamentary cycle rather than only during elections. Good policy development does not only happen in the weeks before an election. Members are constantly developing ideas, considering reforms and trying to understand the budget implications of proposals. Having access to independent advice throughout the term would help us do that work more rigorously.

I also think this would be particularly valuable for Independents. A PBO would give independent members access to credible analysis and confidential policy costings, allowing us to test ideas properly before bringing them forward. For example, just this morning I brought forward a motion calling for real-time monitoring for sewage bypass events, and my motion asks for a report to come back with costings. A PBO could do that work directly for me. That is exactly the kind of informed oversight that strengthens our role. I think this is a great proposal that would assist the capacity of all members to do their jobs, and help ensure debate about Tasmania's policies is based on robust and independent analysis.

I congratulate the committee. There's clearly been a lot of work that has gone in to considering all of this. Thank you very much for bringing it to our attention, and I look forward to hearing the outcome.

[5.01 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, it's such a pleasure to rise to make a contribution on noting this report from the Public Accounts Committee. I would begin by congratulating the Public Accounts Committee, the members in this place and the other place who participated in

the inquiry and delivered the report to us for consideration. It's such an interesting topic and one that's been thrown around and discussed at different times over the years that I've been here and no doubt before that. I think it can be really appealing to do inquiries into matters that relate to the mechanisms for how this place can work better and how we can do our roles better. I recall early in my time here being part of an inquiry into the production of documents, another sort of technical matter about how we do scrutiny and our role in parliament better. Those are always really educative inquiries to be part of and, as the member for Pembroke mentioned, often you can do really good cross-parliamentary work together in those sorts of inquiries. This one looks like a really interesting topic, a thorough process undertaken and a thought-provoking report provided.

I agree with the statement in the executive summary on page 5 where it says, 'The Committee notes the establishment of a PBO represents a significant and lasting investment in the quality of Tasmanian democracy.' I agree with that completely. I absolutely squarely support the establishment of a PBO. It goes on to say:

For Members of Parliament, particularly those from minor parties and/or independent members who lack access to Treasury resources, it levels the playing field, enabling more rigorous and credible policy development throughout the parliamentary term.

That's absolutely correct and that's reflected in some of the commentary during these contributions - the member for Huon was speaking just then about the ability she would have had to potentially access costings delivered through a PBO on putting forward her motion this morning. That builds capacity across the parliament, not just in the traditional parties of government, but across other members as well. That is something that means we will function better as a parliament if we're building that capacity on an ongoing basis.

I also note, and I think we all had this brought to our attention and had our mind sharpened around the issue when Saul Eslake put out his Independent Review of Tasmania's State Finances back in 2024. I agree with the way he described it in that report. It's page 117 where he said:

The Review considers that the establishment of a Tasmanian Parliamentary Budget Office would significantly enhance the effectiveness of Parliament's role in scrutinizing fiscal policy decisions, and in promoting more informed debate both in Parliament and within the broader Tasmanian community of budgetary and fiscal policy issues.

Absolutely. Not just building the capacity within this place, but having that flow out into the community to help build understanding and build a fluency when we're having public discussion around budgetary and fiscal policy issues is really important. It's particularly important in a small parliament, too, I think, to think about how we build capacity here for us to undertake the core roles; those core roles being scrutiny of the executive and our ability to do that, but also our roles putting forward legislation and policy as well in our own ways, as members of this place, and doing that in an informed, transparent and accountable manner.

I think the member for Pembroke was absolutely spot-on in his contribution where he posed the question of why would you want to build this capacity and have this resource available, and that there's an incredibly good argument there that it makes our parliament

function better and in doing that, we get better governance of our state, which is going to have positive impacts flowing through in terms of policy, in terms of budget out into the community. I think that's absolutely correct.

It can be very difficult for members of small parliaments - and we're certainly a small parliament here, compared to other jurisdictions - to really be as supported as they may be. The resources we put into parliament and whether that's, for example, the Parliamentary Library and Research Service, whether that's access to OPC services, whether that's our committee system and the staffing and resourcing of our committee system, all of those things are really important components to sit behind us, as members, to give us the ability to do our jobs better when we know we're quite stretched to cover the roles we need to undertake here.

The fundamental that I absolutely agree with from this inquiry report is that we should have a parliamentary budget office. I think excellent thought has been put into some of the administrative matters that need to be considered in establishing and legislating a parliamentary budget office described in a range of the recommendations in the report; things in there that deal with the necessity to have independence from government and for this entity to be established to have an independent role and not be directed or influenced by the government of the day is important. The measures around confidentiality protections are really important considerations; I appreciate the consideration that's been given in the report to those. Administrative matters around appointment to roles and those sorts of things - very thorough and covered off in the report and I am really supportive of those. It's good to see that such clear thought has been put behind each of those elements there about what would be required in order to put a legislative foundation behind this entity being established.

I absolutely agree that a parliamentary budget office, if it was established here, should be a full-time ongoing entity rather than a periodic one stood up for certain periods of time around elections. I agree with the arguments around that and won't go into too much detail to restate them here, but to me it makes sense. Certainly, for me, the main role that I think the PBO plays is to deliver the ongoing capacity while we are doing our job here during a parliamentary term. So, standing up an entity just around election time I think misses the most important part of the role of a PBO, so that simply wouldn't fly in my mind.

I agree with the findings and the discussion in the report around the fact that the PBO should be established in a way that's connected and part of parliament as a service of parliament and not as part of, say, a department or a separate government entity of any kind. Because it naturally becomes part of the foundational services that support the work here in parliament, I think that that's correct, and there's a lot to be said for the way that shared services can occur then and that can alleviate some of the potential costs involved in establishing a PBO.

However, it's interesting in saying that it should be part of parliament, I think that that gives rise to then some questions and that leads us to some of the areas that I'm a little less sure about in terms of things recommended in the report. If you have an entity established that is of the parliament and part of parliament, you then have to be clear about how it's being used and by whom and towards -

Ms Forrest - It was really around the payroll and things like that. It's wasn't any more than just some of those back-office things.

Ms WEBB - Sure. But anything that's an entity of the parliament I think leads us to questions about how it is being used and by whom it's being used. And, for me, establishing it in that way fits with the way I imagine a PBO best functions and most appropriately functions, which is to support the work we do here during parliamentary terms, building our capacity for our scrutiny role, for our policy and legislative role, exploring those elements, and improving those elements of our work. I think it then potentially poses some questions, when we look at the other aspect that's proposed for the role of the PBO in the report, which relates to election periods. I'll speak a little bit more about that because I think it's a really interesting area and one to continue to grapple with, for sure.

I appreciated the scrutiny of, or the look around at, other jurisdictions with PBOs and how things are dealt with there. It's clear that the model for Tasmania that's proposed in the report isn't entirely replicated in any of the other jurisdictions. And that's fine. We should design something that's fit for purpose for Tasmania, drawing on and learning from other jurisdictions the way we would for other policy areas or other reforms that we might be looking to do. But I did think it was interesting to see that, in terms of the mix of roles of PBOs, and if we think about them as being two very clear, sort of separate roles, one being the supporting of the ongoing work of MPs and the parliament during parliamentary periods and the second area being matters to do with elections and election commitments and promises. There were no jurisdictions that have those two roles fully present in the same way that the model suggested in the report for Tasmania does, and I think there are probably good reasons for that. That's certainly an area that I felt was potentially problematic and that definitely requires some more thought towards landing on the right mix of roles, and how we deal with certain risks inherent in that.

I did note that in terms of the federal parliamentary budget office, its key role was responding to requests made by senators and members for costings and policy proposals, or for analysis of matters relating to the budget. So, that's obviously during the parliamentary period and that's fine. It does publish and present information to enhance public understanding. That's fine. And it does a report after every general election that provides the transparency around fiscal impact of election commitments of major and minor parties, and Independents who choose to be included. So, that's a post-election role for that federal PBO, not a 'during the election period' role. So, it's not designed to inform votes in the moment, but it's designed to provide a public record about what was promised in those election commitments, which becomes a point of reference I imagine going forward, which is very valuable. I would agree with that. I would absolutely agree with the value of that role. So, it's not a 'during the election period' role.

I saw too - of course the federal one is an ongoing one - the Victorian one is an ongoing one, not just periodic. The Victorian PBO provides ongoing policy costings and advisory services to members of Parliament of Victoria to inform policy development and public debate, which is fine. That's the 'during the parliamentary period', which is I think really essential. I think in Victoria, they have an arrangement that's involved with elections. And I'm sorry, I can't recall now - I seem to have misplaced my notes about it - how they deal with the election period matters. I think they do an impact - actually, it's in here, is it? Excuse me, Mr President, I'll bring up the page that I had here. Victoria, in terms of election services, has prepared reports aggregating the impact of party election platforms before an election, which is broad but voluntary, in terms of participation. So, that does have some 'during election' role but also does that impact of party election commitments work after the election. That's the part I think is

consistent and works without risk or potentially problematic areas with it. But they do some during election work as well.

Then of course we have New South Wales that stands up its PBO during the election periods, instead of having the ongoing one. That model makes much less sense to me. And it does say the parliamentary budget officer provides costings of election policies in response to requests by parliamentary leaders, together with budget impact statements for all costed policies. So, again, I think they stand it up during elections but not for everybody involved in the election. Sounds like they've got a much narrower focus to who is able to put forward their election platforms and policies for costings there in New South Wales than we are proposing here.

I'm just sharing in my contribution the things that have jumped out at me and really got my thought processes rolling around the merit of what is the appropriate role for a PBO during an election period if we were to have one in place.

I'm very interested because, of course, we have a process in place at the moment where policy commitments and things can be put through from major parties to our Treasury for, I think, acknowledgment and some slight oversight of costing, but the costing itself, I think, is done by the party putting forward the policy to Treasury. Treasury then just says essentially, 'That looks about right,' or perhaps, 'That doesn't look about right.' I don't think they do a full overhaul, and they certainly don't necessarily have time to do a full overhaul. I am interested to understand, if we were to stand up a PBO that also has a role in this area during an election period, does it replace the Treasury one we have now? Is it in addition to it? Is there a way we'd look at harmonising them? Or perhaps I've misunderstood and there are distinctly different roles that need to stay.

My main concern around it is the practicality of it. The election period role that's being proposed in the recommendations in the report and the risk of politicisation, on those two matters, we don't have fixed terms, so we don't know when elections are going to be called and they can be called, as we are all well aware in recent years, quite abruptly and when an election is called, there's actually a very short timeframe between the parliament being prorogued, the election being called and then the election being held. At the most it's six weeks typically.

Then there's a period of time before nominations are due and then what we've seen is a pattern in recent elections is that nominations close on a Thursday, a particular date on a Thursday and pre-poll opens the following Monday and we have three to four weeks of pre-poll prior to an election. So, people are already voting three weeks out, three or four weeks before an election. If you see an election called, six weeks later, it's going to be an election. People will be voting for the second half of that six-week period at pre-poll.

I think the idea that a PBO costing election platforms and commitments from the breadth of potential candidates outlined in this report is problematic, is probably not realistic, and I don't think it necessarily would be able to fulfil the intent. I understand the intent there. We do want people to go to elections with the best information possible to inform their vote. I absolutely agree with that intent, and, of course, interestingly, through another committee of the parliament, the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, doing reviews of elections currently, it's interesting to address matters that have come up there in evidence that relate to people going to an election, going to vote in elections, with the best opportunity to be as

informed as possible and as accurately as possible. So, I really have sympathy for that intended outcome and how to achieve it.

Whether it's realistic to have things put forward to a PBO, perhaps with no notice whatsoever, potentially a couple of weeks into an election period, because that's how long it might take for people to get up and going with their platforms or their commitments, and then have that turned around and delivered into the public domain in a way that's meaningful for a substantial amount of the voting, knowing that in pre-polling at the moment we're sitting at about 30 per cent of people pre polling, it's an open question that warrants more consideration and more of a look.

I also note there the potential risk of politicisation, and I know that in the report there's some consideration given to that. I really appreciate that consideration given, and I'm in no way dismissing the worthwhile consideration that's been given, but I think more consideration is warranted around it because, while there is the recommendation that points to the publishing of a prioritisation framework, the way that reads to me in the report is that in a way that framework would relate to the work of the PBO during a parliamentary term and how we as members in the course of our work can access the PBO and have work done. It makes sense to me that a framework would be developed to determine how access to that, and how the resources of that are allocated, absolutely. It would have to be an entirely different framework that described how that process of prioritisation and allocation of resources would work during an election period for the role the PBO had then, because it's a very distinct and different role and environment during that period compared to the parliamentary period.

So, you're talking about two frameworks that would be required here to be transparent about how prioritisation and resource allocation was going to happen. We would have really clear questions then about who develops the frameworks, who has input into that and, importantly, who approves the frameworks that describe how the PBO would do that prioritisation and allocation of resources. None of these things that I'm raising are to suggest that it's not possible to arrive somewhere on this question. I just don't think we've quite given it the full consideration needed yet in this report. We've got a starting point -

Ms Forrest - It wasn't intended to.

Ms WEBB - That's exactly right, and that's why I'm trying to be very clear that I'm not being negative about the work done in this report. I think it's taken us well down the track. Lots of the elements of it are very well developed in this report, and I thoroughly agree with them. I'm just spending a little bit of time talking about this area, which I hope that we would see further work done now to build on this very worthwhile foundation that's begun.

So, that's interesting in a way - funnily enough, I probably find myself to some extent in agreement with the dissenting report of Mr Roger Jaensch MP, member for Braddon, which I'm sure he'll be most surprised to hear if he hears of it. His dissenting report does not in any way take away from the very vast bulk of the recommendations in this report and the intent of the report and the very clear fact that it thoroughly recommends a PBO be established. He doesn't take away from that with his dissenting report, and neither do I in my consideration of this good work. But he does raise some of these similar concerns. So, I was interested in the fact that these were already things I was giving consideration to, only to then read his dissenting report and see some similarities of concerns raised.

He also primarily has an issue around the role proposed in recommendations here for the election period of time. I appreciate in his dissenting report he's provided some information there, for example, looking at the 2025 state election, seven registered political parties, 45 Independent candidates, 239 policies published during the election period, which excludes policies of unsuccessful candidates. So, there were more in the public domain, in a short time of that election period. It was announced fairly abruptly, on 11 June, and was held on 19 July 2025. A very short period of time. That's a really big ask to turn around substantial bodies of work to cost policy platforms and commitments from a broad range of participants in the election. You do risk advantaging some parties and candidates from that process and would need to be incredibly robust around how that is dealt with. It's very difficult to avoid entirely the risk that the PBO, in that role, could be seen as influencing the political process, the electoral process and outcome, which is concerning to me.

It's interesting because I stand here raising these concerns and these thoughts that I've had about it, very much aware that in most other instances and on many matters relating to the our electoral system and our democracy, I'm always very careful to want to see a level playing field, and to want to see non-major party candidates, particularly Independent candidates, treated as fairly as possible and the capacity for them to contest as candidates in our elections be boosted and made available as best as possible. That's certainly a fundamental principle that I adhere to. Yet, here, I'm concerned about the inclusion of everyone having access here and what that means to prioritisation and to allocation of resources and to practical reality.

I think it was interesting in the dissenting report that Mr Jaensch put some suggestions for consideration. Some of those things I may agree with, others I may not. What that does, though, is point to probably where I had landed, to what a great foundation from which to do more work on this specific area of the proposal.

What I would want to be very careful and clear about is that I wouldn't want the potential matters that could be requiring more work on that area to hold up the idea that we would establish a PBO in the first place. Absolutely, there is no reason, even if there are more questions to answer in that area, to not proceed with establishing a PBO and, hopefully, Mr Jaensch landed in that space as well that we could implement a PBO initially, certainly to fully cover the role it would play during a parliamentary period for members of parliament and all the excellent recommendations in the report that relate to the administrative arrangements around that and the appointments, the confidentiality matters, the independence from government situated with shared services with parliament - all of that is well and truly there to be picked up and brought forward. And perhaps the elements relating to a role and how that role looks and is undertaken during election periods could be something for further consideration to be added potentially later, once that further work has been done.

The thing that really gets my goat is when the government might use something like that as an excuse not to proceed holus-bolus, and that would be a real shame, because we've had two years' worth of work here from PAC. We have a really robust report in so many ways with a really clear core recommendation that has been endorsed by a cross-parliamentary committee, and I think it would have the support in a broad sense from most members of the parliament in standing up and establishing an ongoing full-time PBO as a resource for us all.

I hope that that does come to pass. I encourage the government to take on board that recommendation. I congratulate PAC for this inquiry and the power of work done in it. It's really interesting to read through and to see the different consideration that's there.

Even though I have put on the record here my reservations around just some very small elements of the recommendations in that one particular area relating to the role at election time, I agree with the vast majority of them straight out of the gate.

I do agree with that comment that this encourages all sides of politics towards fiscal responsibility and, in this state, at this time, in this financial fiscal environment, we really desperately need that encouragement. So, thank you to PAC for providing us with this opportunity to become better educated around this and for the excellent work and core suggestion there that this parliament do establish a parliamentary budget office.

[5.29 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - I rise on behalf of the government to note the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts into the establishment of a parliamentary budget office, the PBO that's been referred to quite regularly today.

At the outset, the government thanks the committee, its chair, members and all those who have contributed to the inquiry. The report reflects a substantial body of work examining a matter of importance to many in the community and this parliament.

The question of whether Tasmania should establish a parliamentary budget office has been the subject of discussion for some time, and that's also been noted a number of times during the course of the debate.

As the report notes, the establishment of a parliamentary budget office was recommended as part of Saul Eslake's Independent Review of Tasmania's State Finances, and the committee's subsequent inquiry has contributed significantly to the consideration of how such an office might operate in Tasmania.

Permanent full-time parliamentary budget offices already exist in Victoria and the Commonwealth, and it is also noted a parliamentary budget office exists in New South Wales in a part-time form that provides independent costing of election commitments.

The experience of these jurisdictions demonstrates that there is no single model for a parliamentary budget office. Victoria and the Commonwealth have adopted permanent offices with broad advisory and analytical functions, while New South Wales has adopted a more targeted, election-focused model. These examples provide useful guidance for Tasmania as it considers what arrangements are best suited to our parliament, our fiscal circumstances and needs of members.

The report outlines a broad range of functions that such an office could perform. These include providing confidential policy costings for members of parliament, undertaking election commitment costings, delivering fiscal and economic analysis, supporting parliamentary committees, and providing post-election reporting and advice.

The committee has also considered the governance and institutional arrangements that would be required to support such a body. Its recommendations address matters including independence from the executive, appointment arrangements, funding, staffing, information-gathering powers, oversight arrangements and confidentiality requirements - certainly not insignificant matters.

A parliamentary budget office is not simply an additional advisory service. It would involve the creation of a new and independent parliamentary entity with ongoing responsibilities, dedicated staffing requirements, and access to significant amounts of financial and policy information. For that reason, it is important that any proposal be carefully assessed to ensure the model adopted is fit for purpose, appropriately resourced and capable of meeting the expectations placed upon it.

The committee's report recommends a full-time parliamentary budget office similar to those operating in Victoria and the Commonwealth. This is considered to provide the broadest range of services and the greatest ongoing capacity to support members of parliament and parliamentary committees. At the same time, such a model would require new legislation, dedicated funding, specialist staff, and appropriate mechanisms to obtain, manage and protect information.

The government appreciates the broader objective underpinning the committee's work. Members of parliament seek access to high-quality information and analysis that assists them to understand the fiscal implications of policy proposals and contribute to informed public debate.

Strong institutions play an important role in supporting transparent government, responsible financial management and community confidence in public decision-making. The committee's report makes a valuable contribution to that discussion. The government is currently considering the report and its recommendations and will provide a response in due course, noting members' interests.

Again, it's acknowledged the individuals and organisations that participated in the inquiry process. I commend the committee for its work and note the report.

[5.34 p.m.]

Ms THOMAS (Elwick) - I certainly appreciate all of the contributions that honourable members have made on this report and the engagement of honourable members in what is a really significant reform and an important discussion to have. Clearly that's been articulated through the comments that members who have spoken have made, and I'm sure members who haven't spoken, I trust they, too, do have an interest in this area. But clearly a number of us were repeating things from the report and I found, as the debate was going on and even when I was speaking, I felt like sometimes we were all making contributions that in some ways could reflect second reading speeches on a bill to establish a parliamentary budget office. I was certainly conscious of that as I was preparing my contribution and as I was speaking. I think the fact that was occurring indicates the level of support around this Chamber particularly for it happening and the fact, as the member for Murchison said, that this has been a conversation that's been ongoing for a number of years.

I know I said that our esteemed Chair, the member for Murchison, the Chair of PAC, can be a hard taskmaster, but I say that with the utmost respect, as I'm sure the member for Murchison knows, because she is an extremely hard-working member of this parliament and has been over a number of years. To be so persistent over 15 years to be continually advocating for this, that just deserves to get to this point and then to continue, to progress, given the level of support that we hear around the Chamber for it. So, I acknowledge the persistence of the member for Murchison in advocating for this over time and in getting it to this point where we have a really well-researched and well-considered Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on

Public Accounts report on this. I think the member for Murchison also said that the members of the public want this. In saying that, when I reflected on the member for Murchison saying that it's not necessarily that they want a Parliamentary Budget Office, most members of the public, with respect to them, wouldn't necessarily know what a parliamentary budget office is - I certainly didn't before coming into this place. But what they do want to know is what policies really will cost. They want to make more informed decisions and I think that's what we've heard come through the tone of the debate here today.

The member for Pembroke spoke of the contribution of the committee members and some of the committee members who were on the committee at the time that the evidence was gathered, and he mentioned Simon Behrakis. I, too, echo my thanks to Simon Behrakis and also to Mark Shelton, who was a committee member at the time. They're obviously both no longer committee members but they were very good contributors. I wholeheartedly agree with the words that the member for Pembroke said, and the sentiments, that this is evidence of committees doing great work, and of a willingness of members from across different parts of the political spectrum coming together to work collaboratively and have robust debate and deliberations around the committee table to develop sometimes what can be middle-ground recommendations in the interests of Tasmanians. I think this particular exercise, this inquiry, was a really good demonstration of that.

Yes, there was one dissenting report and a lot of the time, again, as the member for Murchison said, not going into detail on committee deliberations, but we found ourselves getting caught up in the detail sometimes. That goes to some of the points that the member for Nelson raised in that we had to sort of remind ourselves sometimes that we're not drafting the legislation here; we are making recommendations that can help inform the development of legislation to establish a PBO, but we don't need to get caught up in the detail and it will be important for consultation with all members of parliament and broader stakeholders. Of course, it'll be important to have consultation on what a draft bill would look like to establish a parliamentary budget office, for some of those details to be further fleshed out and debated and different views to be brought to the table on those. So, I certainly understand where the member for Nelson is coming from in some of the questions that were raised and note that, particularly in wanting this to progress, how our minds go to those details, and we found ourselves doing that in the committee as well.

The member for Pembroke also said you have to spend money to save money in this case and I agree absolutely. I think that was on the money, that comment. In some way I found myself reflecting that, in this case, we would be spending money to safeguard Tasmanians. The last three elections surely are all the evidence we need to demonstrate why these safeguards are important; where we had Saul Eslake suggesting that unfunded promises just from the 2018, 2021 and 2024 elections account for more than \$9 billion of the rise in general government net debt - \$9 billion. So, those cash splashes have really impacted Tasmanians, and the government can't seem to tell us what the 2025 election commitments will cost yet, so who knows what it is beyond that \$9 billion. We ask those questions in Budget Estimates and other forums and can't seem to get an answer. So, that's why there'd be protections for Tasmanians through the measures provided through a parliamentary budget office.

I appreciate the comments from the member for Huon, who, as a relatively new member to this place but not to politics, appreciated the work of the committee and could very much see the value of a PBO and how it would assist us here as members in this place to better perform our role and, ultimately, to serve Tasmanians.

I'll wind up now by reflecting a little on the government's response. I appreciate that the government is considering the committee's report, noting it was tabled over two months ago now. I know the government is very busy, but this has been in the making for some time, and I was, therefore, a little bit disappointed that there wasn't more in the government's response in terms of: does it still support the establishment of a PBO; what commitment is it giving to or what expectations does it have in terms of when it will provide a more fulsome response on the recommendations made by the committee?

This was a substantial body of work, and a light-touch response like that from the government does feel like a little bit of a kick in the guts, if I'm to be honest. They've had plenty of time - this has been on the Notice Paper for quite some time - to prepare a response. So, a little bit disappointing. But that's the government's prerogative, I guess.

I just feel buoyed by the fact that there is such a level of support in this Chamber for the concept that it's not going to go away. So, the government can choose to respond in that way, but unless a more fulsome response is forthcoming in a relatively timely manner, I think the government ought to expect to hear more from members about this - and even potentially, as the member for Murchison indicated, she'd be willing to work with the government on drafting legislation.

So, we're all here to help with this. It's something that there is broad support for and that the Tasmanian people deserve. I do hope the government will really hear that that is the mood here. Thank you.

Motion agreed to.

**STATUTORY HOLIDAYS AMENDMENT (CENTRAL COAST
MUNICIPALITY) BILL 2026 (No. 24)**

Second Reading

[5.43 p.m.]

Mr HISCUTT (Montgomery) - Thank you. I move -

That the bill be read a second time.

Every Tasmanian municipality enjoys a prescribed local show public holiday except one. That is the Central Coast municipality, in my patch of Montgomery, where I was a councillor for seven years. An unintended injustice has occurred here, and today I propose the Statutory Holiday Amendment (Central Coast Municipality) Bill 2026 as a solution to the problem once and for all. The people and workers of the Central Coast have fallen through a legislative gap that nobody intended, and this deserves to be corrected. This solution is hopefully made in such a way that it could also solve other potential situations into the future.

For the benefit of *Hansard* and the public, I'll explain how this situation arose and how this bill resolves it, but, with the indulgence of the Council, I would first like to tell my own story and that of a few others before I get into the details.

I first entered employment within the Central Coast municipality working for a company called Tongs Sheetmetal, in Ulverstone. My uninformed understanding at the time was that, as a rule, people from Penguin and farther west took Burnie Show Day off and people from Ulverstone and farther east took Devonport Show Day off.

However, things were not so clear-cut at my new workplace. While it was understood that there was a public holiday to be had, the company did not shut on a specific date. Instead, employees were afforded the opportunity to individually choose a date, essentially as an extra annual leave day, sometime in the October to November time period. This worked quite well.

After five years of this, I got out my passport and crossed the border to begin working for a Penguin-based company. This company took the Burnie Show Day off as a whole company. However, since Burnie Show Day occurs in early October and Devonport Show Day occurs in late November, and I transferred in late October, I missed out on both. But at least the precedent was set here: Burnie Show Day, full company closure.

A few years later, I was drawn back to the sheet metal industry and transferred back to another Ulverstone-based company. November rolled around and I looked to my colleagues for advice. This company previously had given their workers Devonport Show Day off, but, having recently made some enquiries with WorkSafe and some other HR sources, they found that it was not required to give employees a Central Coast show day at all, and, so, that year it didn't. Until the following year, when the owner's wife graciously said, 'The workers deserve a day off, give them Devonport Show Day.' And so, that year we did.

As you can see, this is not only inconsistent but also confusing as well. There are examples from other businesses and individuals that are very similar to my own story. I recently spoke with a representative from the SDA unions alliance Tasmania, who represent workers in retail, fast food and warehousing. They've been having this debate regarding Central Coast nearly every year. The stories are quite interesting. One of the major supermarkets provides the public holiday, the other does not. Another major retailer had historically always provided the holiday, but with a change in management is potentially no longer going to honour it into the future. Once again, the confusion was evident and this was just within the township of Ulverstone.

SDA Tasmania has the following to say in support of the introduction of this bill.

The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employee Association (SDA) Tasmania strongly supports this bill as an important and long-overdue measure to deliver fairness and certainty for workers in the Central Coast municipality. For many years, the SDA has represented retail, fast food and warehousing workers across the region and can attest that the current arrangements create ongoing confusion for both employees and employers. Different businesses, often operating side by side in the same town, have adopted different interpretations of their obligations, leading to inconsistent outcomes where some workers receive a local public holiday and others do not. This uncertainty has generated repeated disputes and enquiries from our members, employers and delegates, particularly in Ulverstone and the surrounding communities.

From the SDA's perspective, the fundamental principle is simple. Every Tasmanian municipality has access to a recognised local public holiday, except Central Coast. Workers in Central Coast should not be disadvantaged because of a historical oversight or legislative ambiguity. The SDA have consistently advocated for equal treatment and fair workplace standards, including through our recent campaigns highlighting public holiday and award inequities affecting Tasmanian workers.

This bill provides a practical solution that delivers clarity, consistency and fairness for local workers and businesses alike, and we commend its intent to ensure that the Central Coast workers enjoy the same recognition and entitlement available to workers in every other municipality across Tasmania. We commend the Honourable Casey Hiscutt for advocating on behalf of workers in his electorate and introducing this important reform to ensure Central Coast workers receive the same recognition and public holiday entitlements as workers elsewhere in Tasmania.

I've also had correspondence from a constituent who had contacted me about this issue. She wanted me to read the following to you:

Dear Mr President,

I started my employment within the Central Coast municipality, working in a retail shop in Penguin in 2012. When I first started, we had the public holiday for Burnie Show. After working a few years, it became knowledge that the Central Coast municipality wasn't listed on the public holidays act for Burnie or Devonport show. In Penguin, this was discovered by the Commonwealth Bank, and, as the only bank in town it was soon knowledgeable to all the retailers that the public holiday was not required.

In 2020, I decided to leave the retail industry and join the aged-care sector, still working in Central Coast area but in Ulverstone. The company still awarded staff with a show day holiday. Being we were west of the Leven River, we received the Burnie Show Day.

In 2024, I returned to retail, and luckily enough to get employment back in Penguin. With knowledge that retailers had learnt from a few years ago, there is no public holiday for Burnie Show. My daughter currently works in Ulverstone area in the childcare sector, and her employer does not offer the public holiday either. I'm not sure how the Central Coast municipality was missed from the list when the act was written, but I'm hoping the issue can be fixed to make it fair for every employee in the Central Coast area.

Thank you.

It is worth repeating again that every Tasmanian municipality has access to a local public holiday, except Central Coast. So, now that we see the problem, how did this happen? Well, it's a story that goes back a long way, back to the distant year 2000, when this parliament was debating a new bill. That bill was called the *Statutory Holidays Act 2000* and was replacing a much older bill, the *Bank Holidays Act 1919*, which was to be repealed. At that time, public

holidays in Tasmania were mostly set out in local industry awards and the municipal show days were no different. An excerpt from the Tasmanian Metal and Engineering Industry Award 2008 stated the following:

All employees (other than casual employees) shall be allowed the following days as paid holidays:

New Year's Day, Australia Day, Hobart Regatta Day (south of Oatlands), Labour Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, ANZAC Day Queen's Birthday, Show Day (as defined), Recreation Day (where Hobart Regatta Day is not observed), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

It went on to define the Show Day as:

'Show Day' means not more than one local Show Day observed on an employee's ordinary working day, other than a Saturday or Sunday, in the city, town or district in which the employee is employed; or such other day which, in the absence of such a local Show Day, is agreed on by the employee and the employer, therefore making a total of 11 public paid holidays per year.

And so it was written in many other Tasmanian-based awards and is still evident in current public service awards that are still Tasmanian based. For example, the Teaching Service (Tasmanian Public Sector) Award defines the public holidays that those under the award entitled to and it includes a show day. The award defines a show day as:

All employees are entitled to receive one local show day. It is to be observed on a day other than a Saturday or Sunday, in the city, town or district in which the employee is engaged, or in the absence of a local show day, any other day that is agreed to between the employer and the employees.

This is the current award that teachers employed in the Central Coast region currently sit under. The historical details matter here as they clearly demonstrate that it was the norm for a show day to be given Tasmania-wide.

If we now turn our attention to *Hansard* and examine debate on the *Statutory Holidays Act 2000* when it was introduced 26 years ago, we see even more revealing information. The bill as introduced included a Schedule 1 - statutory holidays. This list included Tasmania-specific holidays such as the Royal Hobart Regatta Day, Recreation Day and local show day holidays for many municipalities. Central Coast was not included in this list and I'll now explain why. I quote a few excerpts from the debate, one from the former member of Derwent, Michael Aird, who during the debate said the following: 'Mr President, there will be no change in the status quo of employment entitlements resulting from the introduction of this bill.'

Ms Rattray - I believed him.

Mr HISCUTT - Some of us may have been here. 'There will be no change in the status quo of employment entitlements resulting from the introduction of this bill.' There was also an interaction with the member for Murchison at the time, Tony Fletcher. I'll point out at this

moment that the Circular Head Council was not included in the initial list as well. I'll come back to that later. The interaction went as follows. Mr Fletcher said:

Is there anywhere that shows that Circular Head is statutorily entitled to a day? Where is the source of that holiday and where is the legal justification for it?

Mr Aird replied:

We probably could have dealt with this in the Committee stage, but the fact is that it will happen by default. It is agreed that the awards take care in that area for a holiday to occur and the agreement is to align that holiday with Agfest. If in fact, there was a reason that fell over and it did not happen then the minister has the power to issue an order which would protect that interest for that area, but it is not in the legislation.

The conclusion of my earlier point is that on 11 April 2002, by a government notice, Circular Head was added to the *Statutory Holidays Act* with it receiving Agfest as a show day, after much community consultation. It was clarified even further in the debate when the former member for Montgomery, a woman well known by some in this Chamber, Sue Smith, said the following:

The Leader was quite right in his explanation earlier that if you look at the award, it says that if there is not a show day in your area, you have a day in lieu of it.

These quotes make it quite clear that the intent of the bill was not to remove a public holiday from Central Coast. However, this bill did enshrine specific show days for the other municipalities and allowed Central Coast to be picked up in the awards. I repeat, it was never the parliament's intention to remove the show day public holiday from Central Coast.

This worked perfectly well until 2009 when a decisive federal act was debated and came into being, namely the *Fair Work Act 2009*, and everything changed. The *Fair Work Act 2009* introduced the concept of the National Employment Standards, also known as the NES. The NES described what standard employees should and shouldn't expect when entering the workforce. As this was now a national document, most awards were required to adopt this and so most awards became nationalised. The NES prescribes its holidays in Division 10, section 115. This includes all the normal public holidays like Christmas and Australia Day and the like and also includes the following statement, and again I quote:

any other day, or part-day, declared or prescribed by or under a law of a State or Territory to be observed generally within the State or Territory or a region of the State or Territory, as a public holiday, other than a day or part-day, or a kind of day or part-day, that is excluded by the regulations from counting as a public holiday.

Now, that is a wordy piece of legislation, but essentially this is saying that any holidays that are under our state *Statutory Holidays Act* are also required to be public holidays under employment agreements. This is where the disconnect happens because, as we know, Central Coast was not included in the Tasmanian act, not because it shouldn't have a public holiday,

but because it was assumed that it would be enshrined in the awards. Now that those awards have been nationalised and changed, this assumption has seen an injustice or an unintended consequence occur. This was the crucial change. When the *Fair Work Act 2009* was introduced, once awards became nationalised, the safety net that parliament had relied upon disappeared. Central Coast lost the mechanism that had always protected its local holiday. Nothing in Tasmania changed, but Commonwealth reform exposed a gap in our legislation. This leads us to our current situation: a mess and an unfavourable outcome for my region. That is what we are here today to hopefully fix.

I decided that my evidence and the anecdotal evidence of others perhaps might not be enough to sway some opinion, so, to test whether my experience reflected that of the broader community, I commissioned independent polling. I engaged the EMRS to perform some polling in the region and it revealed some interesting results.

One thing that I found most interesting was the awareness that people had regarding the lack of a prescribed public holiday, yet there were still many people who received the holiday who were shown that although three-quarters of people knew that they were not legally entitled to it, half of the people polled still received the public holiday. This surprised me as I thought the awareness would be a lot lower and that the number of people receiving the public holiday would be higher. This presumption was based on my own experiences of receiving the holiday most of my working life. However, I think the issue is about expectations. Local business owners and longtime residents knew intrinsically that offering the public holiday was the right thing to do, not necessarily the legal thing to do. However, as business owners moved in from other states or from other regions, they checked the laws, which is their right, and the law stated that they were not required to pay a public holiday, so they didn't.

Although there was still an overwhelming majority, around 65 per cent of people supporting the concept, I was surprised that this wasn't higher. However, if you delve further into the data, it is revealed that 74 per cent of those currently working in Central Coast do support the inclusion of the public holiday, and it increases for people aged 35 to 54 to 83 per cent. To me, this means people who have already received this entitlement for their working life are the ones who are less likely to support it for our next generation.

Another aspect of the polling that presented a challenge was a preferred date for the public holiday. Three main contenders presented themselves: Agfest, 29 per cent; Devonport Show Day, 27 per cent; and alternatively, a day in lieu or a day to be decided by the employee and the employer at 21 per cent. Through discussions held with local businesses and considering historical arguments when this issue was previously raised, I determined that to share a public holiday with Devonport was not beneficial for businesses. Often, on this day businesses in Devonport are closed and people come to Ulverstone, especially, to shop. It was determined that this option would not be preferable.

I think either the option of Agfest or an alternative day would have been acceptable, but I chose to introduce this bill with the alternative day option. This gives employees and employers flexibility to work around the agreed upon public holiday. For example, if a business intends to showcase at Agfest, then it would not be preferable for this day to be a public holiday. However, if an employee of a different business intends to travel to Agfest, they can negotiate with their employer to have the day off as their public holiday. This will also allow businesses which already operate by allowing a day in lieu, or businesses that allow Devonport or Burnie Show Day off, to continue their current practices without interruption. It causes much less

disturbance to the status quo and allows much greater flexibility. This flexibility also helps families that live outside the municipality but work within Central Coast. For example, if you live in Devonport and your children go to school in Devonport, then currently the children will have the Devonport Show Day off, and you will not. This bill could fix that scenario.

It also already has precedents in the public sector awards, which are applicable in Central Coast. This seems to be the best solution to the issue, but I welcome further debate and I'm open to constructive amendments if an argument can be made. In fact, an argument was made quite well this morning, and I have already flagged but I will mention to members that this amendment has been circulated that I intend to move in the Committee stage. This will see if an agreement cannot be made between the employer and employee that Agfest will be the day considered if it cannot be agreed upon. I'll have more to say on that in the Committee stage.

I have had very constructive conversations within the community and have brought this up over many years. On the topic of consultation, I have tempered broad-scale approaches. This is because if this change is unsuccessful, I did not want to be seen as the person who informs the 25 per cent of people who are unaware of this situation, and then be the person who takes the public holiday away from a whole cohort of people. However, I've expanded my consultation over the past few months. I'm confident that this has been broadcast upon the region, and I have had very few concerns raised.

Regarding formal consultation, as I've already said, I had an EMRS survey done. This was an n=500 survey, which, considering a population of around 20,000, is quite a statistically significant achievement. I've also sought the opinion of the local Central Coast Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I attended a workshop and presented the bill to the Chamber, and at the meeting they were generally supportive. They decided to canvas their full membership to be sure of their position, and this survey also came back with a positive response. Considering this, the Chamber formally wrote to me with the following message:

After a majority show of support from the Central Coast Chamber of Commerce and Industry Committee, and a favourable survey of Chamber members, we are supportive of your proposed amendments to the *Statutory Holidays Act* to bring Central Coast in line with the rest of Tasmania.

The Chamber represents close to 150 businesses in the region. I did not reach out to any state bodies, as this is a local issue which should have local input. Since proposing the bill, I've also had the SDA reach out to me to offer support, and they are happy with the position presented representing their base. Central Coast councillors and CEO - and I'll just pause for a moment, speaking of the Central Coast Council, to acknowledge that today is National Wattle Day. Many members here are wearing a pin supplied by the Wattle Day Association and delivered to us by the Mayor of Central Coast Council, Cheryl Fuller. I thank her for her advocacy of Wattle Day in Tasmania.

Central Coast Council and CEO have been kept abreast of the conversation, and I had asked them to inform me if there are any conversations that they are having with their constituents, and at this point they have not let me know of anyone who has reached out to them with concerns. I feel confident, with the lack of any real divided opinion, that I have struck the balance right with this bill.

Ultimately, this now brings us to the bill before us. Previously, I've spoken about the history of how we got here, the problems faced and how I approached the solutions, which has led to the creation of this bill. It is a simple document only a couple of pages long, so I'll keep the explanation simple as well.

My bill restores what parliament intended. The first three clauses are procedural in nature. In clause 2, it states that it will commence on 1 January 2027, to allow for a new calendar year to be the starting date. In clause 4, it introduces a new definition of an 'agreed day', and the agreed day will apply to a person who is employed by an employer to work within a municipal area and does not currently receive a show day under Schedule 1. The decision was made to make this generic in nature and not council-specific. This means if other municipal areas wish to adopt this measure in the future, they can. For example, if another municipal area no longer has an agricultural show, it may wish to change this option.

It then goes on to explain that the agreed day means a day other than a Saturday or Sunday or any other holiday that will be agreed upon by the employee and employer that this day will be considered a statutory holiday. This definition also makes it possible for different employees from the same employer to take different days off, meaning that businesses can continue to remain open if they wish to. Once again, I'll comment that there is an amendment in the Committee stage.

Section 5 then adds the municipality of Central Coast to Schedule 1 of the current act and sets its day to be the aforementioned agreed day and the occasion to be the Central Coast Show equivalent.

Section 6 is only administrative in nature.

Mr President, I hope that I've been able to prosecute the case for this bill. It is essentially fixing an unforeseen consequence or oversight from the past. It is not seeking to do something radical, but instead to enshrine what is actually the status quo for most people. It also ensures equality for all people of Tasmania.

This issue has been a point of contention in my patch for many years, and every year a new debate is started. Most people are working on hearsay or rumour or tradition, and I want to enshrine in law what most reasonable people within Central Coast expect to be the case.

Whether you work in manufacturing, retail, hospitality or construction, where you happen to work within Tasmania should not determine whether you receive one fewer public holiday than your neighbours. People living only a few kilometres apart can receive different entitlements simply because a historical assumption disappeared 17 years ago.

This legislation will not affect the majority of Tasmanians. In fact, it will probably affect very few people who members in this place represent, but it is important to the people of my region. The effect on businesses will be minimal, given that many businesses are already working in union with the intent of the bill anyway, but the effect of cohesion and rightfulness will have a major, positive impact on the tight-knit community.

This bill does not create a new entitlement. It installs ones that parliament never intended for the people of Central Coast to lose. It provides certainty where there is confusion, it provides

consistency where there is inequality, and ensures that workers in my community are treated no differently from workers anywhere else in Tasmania.

This is a practical, modest and fair reform, and I commend the bill to the House.

[6.07 p.m.]

Ms LOVELL (Rumney) - I'll just make a brief contribution in support of this bill. I wanted to thank the member for Montgomery for bringing the bill to us in the parliament, but also for his really well-researched and thought-out second reading speech. This is a change that, as the member said, will very much benefit his electorate, and I think his electorate will be really pleased. They couldn't ask for much more from their member of parliament than this kind of initiative. So, congratulations to you on that.

This is a really sensible legislative change. As we've heard from the member for Montgomery, and as others have no doubt looked into themselves, the way that things are operating in the Central Coast was never the intention originally. It would be quite absurd if it was the intention that one municipality would miss out on a public holiday that the rest of the state is entitled to, so this is a matter of fairness. As we know from the debate just last week, we already get less public holidays in Tasmania than any other state and territory, so it would be ridiculous to think that part of our state would get one less again than people just down the road from them. This is a matter of fairness and really just fixing an anomaly that was never intended.

As the member for Montgomery has outlined, lots of employers manage this already in that municipality. This bill is not going to change any of those practices that are already in place. It will just make sure that this anomaly that's been in the legislation for a number of years now is fixed, and that that no longer is open to interpretation or open to members of that community missing out on a public holiday.

I know that the member for Montgomery also has an amendment that he intends to move and has circulated. Just for the sake of brevity, I'll put on record now that I intend to support that amendment. Again, I think that's a really straightforward and sensible amendment that will strengthen the bill. I said I'd make a brief contribution. This is so sensible and so simple that I don't think it needs much more to be said, so I wholeheartedly support the bill and congratulate the member for Montgomery.

[6.09 p.m.]

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - A minor and brief contribution, but as a neighbouring elected member, I think I should say just a little few more words supporting this. I rise to speak in support of the Statutory Holidays Amendment (Central Coast Municipality) Bill 2026, and its straightforward intent to put right a striking anomaly for the residents of the Central Coast municipality, and I thank the honourable member for Montgomery for bringing it on.

Show days have long been part of our history and come from a time when the local show was an annual event that brought people together to competitively show their stock and produce, and maybe to enjoy the trade stands, refreshment and entertainments that came with it. Perhaps Agfest is the modern embodiment of that history. Each municipality has, or had, a version of its show day that brought town and country together at a regular time of the year. The really traditional part of a show day which has evolved into a thing of its own is the ubiquitous show bag. Originally a sample bag given out by trade stands, it's now a profitable

and welcome sideline for patrons of all ages. I remember the Cadbury one as being particularly good.

Times have changed and we've seen a number of traditional and longstanding shows cease to be. The loss of the historic Devonport Show with the sale of the showgrounds for development has been a particular blow, and that's a show with 108-year history that finished up 10 years ago, as the costs made running it prohibitive. We've also seen the Launceston Show fail to get up over the last three years for similar reasons. The irony is that we still have show day holidays on those dates that correspond to traditional timings of those shows as, or as we now call them, 'no-show day' holidays. That's not to say there aren't other highly successful community events. If we look to the Devonport region, we have the hugely successful New Year's Eve event, the Devonport Jazz and Blues Festival, the Regatta, Devonport Junior Soccer Cup, Devonport Eisteddfod and the Devonport Motor Show, all of which attract high attendances and keen local interest. If we look further into my municipality, we have the Latrobe Chocolate Winterfest, the Henley on the Mersey and stretching into Central Coast we have the new and highly successful two-day Ecofest at Camp Clayton. What we have is a general public interest in supporting a wide range of community events across a wide variety of dates and venues.

Perhaps that's where the honourable member's bill has a particular strength in the amendment to introduce the concept of an agreed day to be decided by employees and employers to best suit their circumstances. That's rather than the traditional fixed and inflexible day in the calendar. As the honourable member suggests in his speech, it offers a future flexibility of other municipal areas to opt for the same option, if they so choose, at any point in the future. The other strength in this is it foreshadows any complications that may arise if the government is successful in its desire to see fewer councils. The amendment automatically gives the opportunity to avoid a potential conflict of dates in a merger if the show days differ. In the case of Central Coast municipality, that's never been an issue, as it's never had a show day holiday. The bill makes a great deal of sense and it has perhaps been remiss of us all not to have picked up on it sooner. I, again, thank the honourable member for wanting to put it right, and I fully support the bill. Like the member for Rumney, I agree with the amendment, I think it strengthens the bill. So, I'll be supporting the bill and the amendment.

[6.13 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I rise to support the bill but I have a few questions for the member for Montgomery. I congratulate him on seeking to address this confusing situation, in some respects, and correcting the intent of the parliament at the time, noting that when the original position was put it was picked up in awards, et cetera, which has since changed through federal legislation. I mentioned this to the member for Montgomery in the briefing. I did wonder why it wasn't dealt with under the process that was used for Circular Head to be given the Agfest public holiday, which is not called the Agfest holiday. It's on the Friday before the weekend in May when Agfest is always scheduled. He explained that in the briefing and I'd like him to put it on the record here, because I think that would perhaps have been a quicker, tidier and easier way to do it, in some respects. I think it is about fairness and equity, there's no two ways about that, and to correct what's now become not being in line with the intent of the parliament originally, and that's appropriate to do.

I see this in two ways. The flexibility that's been proposed in this approach could be a little bit confusing for employers coming into the region - that sort of thing. How does this actually work? It's a bit different, a bit unusual in some respects. It has been operating for some

time under that arrangement currently with a degree of uncertainty and a lack of full awareness, perhaps, in the community already. I think that some confusion may persist, but the flexibility is an interesting concept in that the members in that broader community may live in that community but may work in another municipality outside the Central Coast area, which may make it more convenient for that person to take or not take a public holiday on a set day in that circumstance.

When we look at Circular Head, it has a different day from the Waratah-Wynyard and Burnie areas, which have the Burnie Show Day, which still does have a show. It has moved up the hill into the windiest place on earth, but there you go. It means that there's a different approach taken in different municipalities - which, again, brings us to that point. In my view, we really need to have a broader discussion about statutory holidays. What is the right approach for these regional and different holidays? When you're working in the north-west and you're trying to get some answers out of Hobart and no-one responds to anything, you think, 'Is it a public holiday down there?' Possibly it is, which means we work on the public holidays that Hobart has in our electorates. We come down here and we work on public holidays in our electorate, so you work both. Not that it matters to us because our work is regardless of public holiday status in many respects. Many of the public holidays outside of Easter and Christmas we work on anyway in many respects, supporting our communities. On Anzac Day and at other events like Australia Day and other statutory holidays, we have roles on those days that are important to support our community. It's just an observation about that.

I think there does need to be a broader body of work on that to try to reduce the burden on our business communities. Where they operate in more than one part of the state, it must be a challenge at times and we should have a broader conversation about that, but that's separate to this bill. It's separate to the issue that is correcting an anomaly, I guess, and a matter that's arisen through the introduction of a federal piece of legislation that effectively removed a public holiday that every other Tasmanian gets statutorily outside of the Central Coast municipality.

I appreciate the member's response to the approach that was taken and why, but in broad terms I support it. I note that the amendment that has been proposed makes sense because you can't always assume that every employer and every employee will find a mutually agreeable date and there needs to be some sort of circuit breaker when that occurs.

[6.19 p.m.]

Ms THOMAS (Elwick) - Mr President, I rise to speak in support of the Statutory Holidays Amendment (Central Coast Municipality) Bill 2026, and I congratulate the member for Montgomery for bringing what is a relatively simple, practical and, importantly, fair piece of legislation before the Council.

At its heart, this bill addresses an anomaly, as we've heard. As things stand, the Central Coast is the only municipality in Tasmania that does not have a prescribed local show day or equivalent statutory holiday. And, having considered the history outlined very well by the member for Montgomery, it seems quite clear that this was never a deliberate policy decision that workers in the Central Coast should receive one fewer public holiday than workers elsewhere in Tasmania. Rather, it appears to be an unintended consequence of the interaction between Tasmania's legislation and changes to the industrial relations system at the Commonwealth level. I won't go into the details as it's been very well outlined by the member for Montgomery.

The member for Montgomery makes a compelling case that what we have before us is not the creation of some entirely new entitlement; rather, it's correcting an unintended gap and restoring the position that was historically understood to apply. I support that simply on the basis of fairness. I don't see any reason why someone working in Ulverstone or Penguin should have one fewer statutory public holidays simply because of this historical legislative anomaly. It's particularly difficult to justify when workers covered by Tasmanian public sector awards in the central coast continue to receive a local show day while many employees covered by national awards do not. This produces an inequity not only between municipalities but potentially between people working alongside one another in the same community.

I was also interested in the evidence of how inconsistently the current arrangements operate, where we heard that some businesses in the Central Coast continue to provide a show day or equivalent holiday while others do not. The SDA describes situations where businesses operating side by side have different arrangements, creating uncertainty for employees and employers alike. This is hardly an ideal situation.

I also note the polling commissioned by the member for Montgomery which provides useful evidence of community sentiment on this. It found that 48 per cent of workers were already receiving a show day-equivalent holiday, despite there being no legislative entitlement, and 74 per cent of people working in the central coast supported the inclusion of a public holiday. I think that reinforces the point that this bill is, to a significant extent, formalising something that many employers and employees already believe should exist.

I also think the way the member has structured the bill is sensible. Rather than imposing a particular day upon every employer and employee in the Central Coast, the bill provides for an agreed day, a day other than a Saturday, Sunday or other statutory holiday agreed between the employee and employer. We've heard the reasons why that flexibility is important: because it recognises that businesses operate differently and there may be good reasons why a particular business does not want to close on Burnie Show Day, Devonport Show Day or Agfest.

Further to that, I applaud the member for Montgomery for taking on board and responding to the questions raised in the briefing this morning, with amendments that appropriately address the concerns raised about what happens if an agreement is not reached. Will it be sent to arbitration, to Fair Work? That could become a real burden on employers and employees from a cost and relationship perspective. We had a good discussion in the briefing and I appreciate the member responding with amendments that I will definitely support that mean that if an agreed day can't be reached, then it goes to being the day that Agfest falls. But it's not worded as Agfest, and the member will read in the wording which makes complete sense in case Agfest, like shows, God forbid, at some point doesn't exist, touch wood.

As the member has pointed out, there may be commercial advantages for businesses in Ulverstone remaining open when businesses in neighbouring areas are closed. This model allows those businesses to continue operating while still ensuring employees receive the equivalent public holiday entitlement. It also means existing arrangements can continue where they are already working well. I think that's important, given there are so many existing arrangements already in place. Rather than unnecessarily disrupting business and employees, the bill establishes the entitlement while providing the flexibility about how it's exercised.

I've spoken previously in this place about the importance I place on public holidays. We live in an increasingly 24-hour, seven-day-a-week world, and there are fewer occasions when people are encouraged to stop, spend time with family and friends, participate in their

community, or simply have some time away from work. There will always be legitimate discussion about the impact of public holidays on businesses, particularly small businesses, and I don't dismiss these concerns. But in this case, we're talking about ensuring workers in one Tasmanian municipal area have access to the same basic entitlement enjoyed by workers elsewhere in the state. Doing so through a model specifically designed to provide flexibility to employees and employers strikes a reasonable balance. This bill provides certainty where there has been uncertainty, consistency where there has been inconsistency, and fairness for Central Coast workers.

While I agree with the member for Murchison's comments, and I, too, put my view on the record when we had the debate on a public holiday for Easter Sunday, and I spoke in support of Labor's bill on that matter, that we do need a broader review of statutory holidays in Tasmania. But that's not what we're here to debate today. I do hope that the government has heard that message and that that will be considered.

For now, I congratulate the member for Montgomery for identifying this issue and achieving change, hopefully, for his community should this bill be supported tonight, for researching its history, for consulting his community and for bringing forward a practical solution. So, I support the bill. Thank you.

[6.25 p.m.]

Mr EDMUNDS (Pembroke) - Thank you. Very briefly, just to put my thoughts on the record, I congratulate the member for the thorough, well-thought-out, well-researched and well-articulated second reading speech about why we should support this bill. Of course I support it. It's about fairness and workers' rights.

This morning, Mr Premier, er, Mr President - one day. Ah, I nearly fell into the - there's a meme page that suggested that too, isn't there? Mr President, you told the students who are in the Chamber that we all come from our electorates but we make decisions in the best interests of the state. And certainly, clearly from the comments and the briefings and all the other research provided by the member for Montgomery, for too long, too many people in Ulverstone, Penguin and surrounds have missed out. Well, not anymore, hopefully. So, well done, Mr Hiscutt. And I certainly commend a yes vote.

[6.27 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Thank you. The Central Coast is presently the only municipal area without a separate show day or equivalent entitlement, and this bill seeks to correct that inconsistency by establishing a Central Coast show-equivalent holiday. It would allow an employer and employee to agree on a weekday other than a Saturday, Sunday or existing statutory holiday to be observed as the employee's local statutory holiday.

This flexibility recognises the circumstances of Central Coast, which sits between the Burnie and Devonport show day areas. It's noted the proposal is supported by the Central Coast Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Many Central Coast businesses already allow employees to observe their either Burnie Show Day or Devonport Show Day, as we've heard from the honourable member presenting the bill. The bill would place the existing practice on a statutory footing and ensure Central Coast employees receive the same regional entitlement as employees elsewhere in Tasmania. Importantly, the bill would not create an additional

statewide statutory holiday. It would correct a specific regional inconsistency affecting the Central Coast municipality.

In 2021, the Census recorded 5428 employees working in the Central Coast municipality, while the latest ABS business data identifies 612 employing businesses in the municipality. The impact of the bill would, therefore, be confined to those employees and businesses rather than applying across Tasmania. The bill instead provides Central Coast employees with an entitlement already available to employees in every other Tasmanian municipality.

The government acknowledges that businesses operating on the regional holiday may incur public holiday penalty rates and other employment costs under applicable awards and enterprise agreements. These are the same types of costs already borne by businesses in other municipalities when observing their local statutory holiday.

The honourable member for Montgomery has conducted detailed research and has engaged with business and worker representatives. He is to be congratulated on this bill. The government, therefore, supports the bill.

[6.29 p.m.]

Ms ARMITAGE (Launceston) - Thank you. Just a brief contribution. I also thank the member for Montgomery for bringing this forward and for all the work that he's done. The briefing this morning was really great. For many years we've heard that the Central Coast area has missed out on a public holiday that other communities enjoy. This simply isn't about having an extra day off; it's about recognising the community and ensuring that people who live, work and contribute in the Central Coast receive equitable treatment.

As mentioned by the member, many businesses already provide this but it needs to be consistent. Public holidays provide an opportunity for families to spend time together, for communities to celebrate what makes them unique, and for local businesses and organisations to participate in shared events. When one area consistently misses out while others receive these opportunities year after year, an inequity develops.

Introducing a public holiday for this area would acknowledge that history and help address that imbalance. It would send a clear message that every community matters and deserves the same recognition and opportunities as others. This is not about taking something away from anyone else; it's about creating greater equity and recognising a community that's been overlooked for far too long. After many years of missing out, it's time to put fairness into practice and give this community a public holiday of its own.

I thank the member and certainly support it, and I also support the amendment that he's putting up.

[6.30 p.m.]

Mr HISCUTT (Montgomery) - Thank you very much for the support around the room from honourable members. I appreciate that significantly and the kind words said.

Through those comments, I picked up only one main question and one main concern that I'll address. The member for Murchison asked why this was not done through the public notice.

In the *Statutory Holidays Act 2000* there is section 4 talking about local statutory holidays. It does say that the minister, by public notice, may amend Schedule 1. Before he is

to do that, he is to consult with the Tasmanian Trades and Labor Council, the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and any other employer organisations that the minister considers appropriate. If he is to amend Schedule 1 by public notice under subsection (3), the minister is to table the notice in each house of parliament within five sitting days after it is published.

A little bit of history on that. I think I originally approached the former member for Montgomery Leonie Hiscutt, in 2023 -

Ms Rattray - Over dinner?

Mr HISCUTT - No, formally. There is a letter.

Ms Lovell - I hope she responded.

Mr HISCUTT - She did and, at the time, it was not a government position to pursue that.

On commencement of my activities, which commenced when I had a letter from a lady in Penguin who raised this bill with me in November last year, and I said, 'That's been on my mind for a long time. Hey, I'm in a position where I can do something about that. Let's do it.' So, that's where this originated.

I then took that position to the government of the day and I think - given this was before I had found all the historical information that really solidified what this bill is about - the government of the day at the time said that they would not pursue it with this but encouraged me to pursue this through a private member's bill and to see what information was gathered and maintained, and I think it got to a point where I was happy that this was the way that would achieve the result with less potential concern to get the will of the parliament. It means that all the people of Tasmania through their elected representatives have their say. Certainly, it was attempted in that way first, but, respectfully, to the government, they had a position, they proffered a solution for me to take it through as a private member's bill and thankfully I have now received that support. So, I appreciate that immensely.

The other comment that was made in a few areas was, 'Could it be confusing?' And that's true. I would argue that our employment/employee/employer relationships are already confusing in a lot of matters. What are our minimum wages? That often gets missed. What are the entitlements required? As you can see, it's already confusing in Central Coast because some people enjoy this entitlement that they're not even entitled to anyway. I don't think this adds to the confusion. It still is confusing, I admit that, but I think that to try to bring this to a day would actually make it more confusing because there'd be people who say, 'Well, for the last 40 years I've worked at this company and I've had Devonport Show Day off and now I've have to change to Agfest. That's the day that I go and do this, that or the other.' I think it would cause more confusion to try to change the status quo than to keep the status quo for the majority of people within Central Coast.

It's also hard to agree on a solid day, as we've seen with other public holidays around Australia that have had conversations about changing their day. The problem is always: what should that day be?

For the completeness of the survey, we had Agfest at 29 per cent; Devonport Show Day at 27 per cent; the agreed option at 21 per cent; Burnie Show Day was at 10 per cent. Some

people still said the Ulverstone Show, even though we don't have one, at 1 per cent; 5 per cent of people said they didn't want one; 2 per cent said 'other'; and 5 per cent of people said 'unsure'. So, there was a broad range of things and I decided that wasn't going to work that well if those other majorly selected holidays didn't work. I think the amendment, and I thank the members for their comments to come to that amendment, with having Agfest as the fallback day, suits both the information and the research, as well as providing a solution to the problem that's been raised.

I concur with the statement that has been made that we need a review of the statutory holidays. I think that's a fair and reasonable assumption to make and I've put that to the government as well. But let's fix this first, then have that conversation, which I think was the agreed-upon message around the table. I'm happy to proceed with that.

I'll finish with one story from a local Ulverstone electrical company that employs a number of people. I heard this while I was in the Chamber of Commerce briefing. They said, 'We know that we don't have to provide this date, but we do, we give the employees an extra day.' The ones from Devonport take Devonport Show Day, the ones from Penguin may take Burnie Show Day. They said, 'We see significant productivity improvements from allowing these days. Everyone's come out of a long winter, they can go away on a three-day weekend. We give them a couple' - I think Recreation Day falls somewhere around there, then they have this show day. He said that gets them through to Christmas and the productivity they get from their work because of those days is probably worth more than the loss of time they get from having their workers at work. I think that summed up the values that some employers also place on public holidays for their employees. I'll leave it at that, and we'll go from there. Thank you, everyone.

Bill read the second time.

**STATUTORY HOLIDAYS AMENDMENT (CENTRAL COAST
MUNICIPALITY) BILL 2026 (No. 24)**

In Committee

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 -
Section 3 amended (Interpretation)

Mr HISCUTT - I move the following amendment in my name -

Clause 4, page 4, proposed new definition of *agreed day*.

Leave out that definition.

Insert instead the following definition:

agreed day, in relation to a person who is employed by an employer to work in a municipal area that is not entitled under Schedule 1 to a statutory holiday for a show day, means -

- (a) a single day that is -
 - (i) a day other than a Saturday, Sunday or other statutory holiday; and
 - (ii) agreed by the employee and the employer as a statutory holiday for the employee; or
- (b) if no such agreement is reached between the employee and the employer, the Friday following the first Thursday in May.

Thank you, Madam Chair. That may seem like a weird mouthful there, the 'employee employed', 'the Friday following the first Thursday in May', but I will just refer members as to why. The purpose of this clause - I don't have a prepared speech for this, I'm just winging it here - is to give a fallback measure if an agreement cannot be reached between an employee and employer. The original bill as it went through had an agreement that had to be reached. Obviously there are circumstances, and I thank members of this House who raised that during the briefing, there would be times when an agreement could not be reached, so this is a fallback measure.

As I was trying to say, 'the Friday following the first Thursday in May' reflects the current *Statutory Holidays Act*, which is the same date as for Circular Head. This area of Circular Head has in its part (1) of Schedule 1 'Friday following the first Thursday in May' for its occasion Agfest, and applies to the municipal area of Circular Head. So, this amendment would mean that, if an agreement can't be reached, then the public holiday for that person would be Agfest, which I think solves the issue.

Mr GAFFNEY - Madam Chair, it is to support the amendment as read, but my question would be, as was raised this morning here and I think it's good to have it tabled here, I'm assuming that 'agreed day' would mean it would be a yearly agreement that would be made by the employer and the employee? So, if there was an arrangement that they wanted to change it from one year to the next year to an agreed day, that would be the case. So, an agreed day doesn't have to be the same day every year if the employee wants to have a discussion with the employer?

Mr HISCUTT - Just seeking some advice.

Mr Gaffney - You can phone a friend. Ring Mum.

Mr HISCUTT - I realised I'm sitting in the seat she was in for a long time. Thank you to the member for Mersey for that question. Yes, there would be an agreement. It is worded in such a way that could be the case. I did receive a little bit of legal advice on this that said it would probably be advisable for businesses to nominate an agreed day into the future from when this act comes into effect. So, it'd be advisable to say the day will be 18 February or Agfest or Devonport, which is described as the Devonport Show Day is the Friday nearest the last day in November, but no later than the first day in December, so it could be one of those days. However, there is nothing within the legislation that would stop that agreed day being changed each year if it was so required. I hope that answers the question.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

Ms RATTRAY - I just rise to support the amendment, as the member for McIntyre, and just appreciate the fact that there is that flexibility around the way that this has been put forward. I think the questions that were raised in the briefing this morning were quite relevant and well done.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 4, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 5 and 6 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment.

[6.44 p.m.]

Mr HISCUTT - Mr President, I move -

That the bill, as amended, be taken into consideration tomorrow.

Motion agreed to.

SENTENCING AMENDMENT (PUBLICATION OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY) BILL 2026 (No. 29)

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Assembly and read the first time.

[6.45 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the second reading of the bill be made an order of the day for Tuesday next.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

[6.46 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until 11.00 a.m. on Wednesday 2 September 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Ms RATTRAY - Mr President, I move -

That the Council do now adjourn.

The Council adjourned at 6.46 p.m.

DRAFT

Appendix 1

Forest Practices Authority
QON 64

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Tania Rattray

Tabled & Incorporated into Hansard

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Question 64 of 2026

Legislative Council

Tania Rattray
Leader for Government
Business
01.09.2026.

ASKED BY: The Hon Ruth Forrest MLC, Member for Murchison

ANSWERED BY: The Hon Tania Rattray MLC, Leader of the Legislative Council

QUESTION:

With regard to the funding, operations and practices of the Forest Practices Authority (FPA)

1. How are the prescribed fines determined; and
 - a. If based on environmental harm and culpability, does the FPA have an internal enforcement guideline, decision matrix or policy document that sets out how those factors are assessed; and
 - b. if so, please provide a copy of these documents?
2. What specific sections of the Forest Practices Act 1985, or any other legislation, authorise the use of satellite imagery, drones and aerial photography in compliance investigations?
3.
 - a. What statutory provisions authorise Forest Practices Officers to enter private freehold land; and
 - b. explain what private land holder safeguards exist regarding notice, biosecurity and privacy?
4. How are the prescribed fines used by the FPA?
5. How much prescribed-fine revenue has the FPA received in each of the last five financial years?
6.
 - a. Has the Minister or the FPA ever commissioned an independent review of its compliance and enforcement practices; and
 - b. if not, why not?

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ANSWER:

1. Under section 47B of the Forest Practices Act 1985 (the Act), if the Board of the Forest Practices Authority (the Authority) is satisfied that an offence under certain sections of the Act has been committed, it may offer a prescribed fine in lieu of prosecution.

The Authority takes its enforcement decisions seriously and each matter is considered on its own merit, taking account of a wide range of factors that may be general or specific, to the matter at hand.

The following information is therefore general in nature, as any matter may raise additional considerations that fall outside the scope of general considerations outlined here.

In each case, consideration is first directed to making good or mitigating the damage done to the extent that mitigation may be reasonably likely to succeed.

In cases which involve a breach of a forest practices plan, a section 21 offence, then the primary considerations regarding penalty relate to the severity, extent and duration of the impact and the nature of the failing. Less significant or one-off breaches may be dealt with through a remediation or a letter of advice. In cases where there has been an intentional breach, system failure or substantial impact then a prescribed fine may be offered, taking into consideration ongoing impacts such as habitat degradation, soil loss, or persistent water quality degradation.

If the offence relates to clearance and conversion of a threatened native vegetation community or clearing trees without authorisation, a section 17 offence, then the impact of the offence and nature of the failing are again primary considerations, but the area of land or amount of timber involved will also typically impact the prescribed fine as will the culpability of the responsible persons.

Where the offence is one that would not ordinarily be authorised under a Forest Practices Plan, such as the clearance and conversion of a threatened native vegetation community, then the offered prescribed fine is generally higher than an offence which would ordinarily be authorised had a plan been applied for.

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2. The Authority has express statutory responsibilities to monitor compliance and investigate suspected non-compliance, and an express incidental power to do all things necessary or convenient to perform those functions.

Specifically, section 4G(1)(a) expressly makes the Authority "responsible for monitoring the degree of compliance with the Act and the Forest Practices Code." Remote sensing imagery is commonly used as a form of available information to identify or investigate potential non-compliance and may form part of the evidence for an investigation. The use of remotely sensed imagery, such as imagery available on the Tasmanian government's List Map, is a lawful means of carrying out the Authority's statutory functions relating to compliance monitoring and investigation and is widely used by other regulators and in other jurisdictions.

3. Entry onto private land is authorised by section 40(1) of the Forest Practices Act. On production of his or her warrant of authorisation, a forest practices officer may at any reasonable time, and with such assistants as the officer considers necessary, enter and remain:

- on land on which forest practices are being carried out, to ensure they are being carried out in accordance with the certified forest practices plan and the Act, section 40(1)(a)
- on land on which, in the officer's reasonable opinion, forest practices appear to have been carried out, to determine whether they were in fact carried out and, if so, whether they complied with a certified plan and the Act, section 40(1)(ab)
- on land that is a private timber reserve, to ensure the land is being used for establishing forests, growing or harvesting timber or other forest practices, section 40(1)(b).

Section 40(2) of the Act allows an officer, again on production of the warrant of authorisation, to request a person associated with the forest practices to answer questions and produce records relating to those practices.

A number of safeguards apply to the exercise of these powers.

The Act requires that entry occur only at a reasonable time and that the officer produce a warrant of authorisation. In addition, Forest Practices Officers are subject to a Standards of Conduct.

The FPA takes entering land seriously, for both the disturbance and risk it places on the landowner, but also for the safety of the FPA officers.

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Prior to entering land, the FPA will make multiple attempts to contact a landowner, including phone calls where phone numbers are available and letters with warrants attached sent by registered mail.

Forest Practices Authority staff are required to follow relevant biosecurity requirements and operational procedures when undertaking field inspections, including measures designed to minimise the risk of spreading pests, weeds or diseases between properties.

Any personal information collected in the course of inspections, investigations or compliance activities is managed in accordance with applicable privacy legislation and government information management requirements. Information collected is used only for lawful purposes associated with the administration and enforcement of the Forest Practices Act 1985.

Landholders may also raise concerns regarding the conduct of Forest Practices Officers through the Authority's complaints processes and other available review mechanisms.

4. In accordance with section 47B(3) prescribed fines are used for the costs and expenses of the Act, as listed in s. 44(1) or for repairing damage or rehabilitating land to which the offence and the fine relates.

The Authority does not receive income from any penalties imposed by a court.

To manage any perceived conflict of interest associated with receiving prescribed fine revenue, the Authority maintains a separation between compliance and enforcement decision-making and financial management, with oversight provided through independent governance, external audit processes, and public reporting in the Authority's Annual Report.

5. Financial Year	Amount
2021-22	\$ 214,670.00
2022-23	\$ 260,500.00
2023-24	\$ 596,140.00
2024-25	\$ 96,200.00
2025-26	\$ 129,050.00

6. The Forest Practices Authority's compliance and enforcement activities are subject to established oversight, audit, reporting and review mechanisms that support continuous improvement and accountability within the forest practices system, including the Forest Practices Advisory Council.

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The FPA has had components of its investigation procedures reviewed by other regulators and is a member of a professional regulator network which provides information, training and tools for best practice regulation.

The Government is aware of feedback regarding experiences of agricultural land users with the FPA. Recent meetings have been held with TasFarmers, the FPA and other stakeholders to consider feedback from the sector and improvements that can be made to regulation practices. This work is continuing in parallel to broader consultation on the forest practices regulations which is currently underway.

Stakeholders also have the option of raising complaints regarding any experiences of poor regulatory compliance or enforcement practices with the Integrity Commission or the Ombudsman which have the power to independently investigate such claims.

The Government is continuing discussions with stakeholders regarding approaches to ensure that the compliance and enforcement practices of the FPA are contemporary and fit for purpose.

APPROVED


Felix Ellis MP

Minister for Business Industry and Resources

Date: 31/8/2026

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