



# **PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

## **TRANSCRIPT**

### **HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

#### **GOVERNMENT BUSINESSES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Sustainable Timber Tasmania**

**Thursday 27 November 2025**

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Burnet (Chair)  
Mr Rob Fairs (Deputy Chair)  
Mr Vica Bayley  
Ms Kristie Johnston  
Mr Marcus Vermey  
Mr Dean Winter

#### **OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Mr Craig Garland  
Mr Peter George  
Mr Michael Ferguson  
Dr Rosalie Woodruff  
Prof George Razay  
Mr Carlo Di Falco  
Dr Shane Broad



## **WITNESSES IN ATTENDANCE**

**Hon. Felix Ellis MP**, Minister for Business, Industry and Resources

### **Ministerial Office**

**Adam Foster**  
Chief of Staff

**Anna Fidock**  
Senior Adviser, Business, Industry and Resources

### **Sustainable Timber Tasmania**

**Rob de Fegely**  
Chair

**Greg Hickey**  
Acting CEO

**Suzette Weeding**  
General Manager, Conservation and Land Management

**Chris Brookwell**  
General Manager, Corporate Services



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## Sustainable Timber Tasmania

**CHAIR** - We are broadcasting. I'm waiting for the minister. I don't think this has happened in the whole time of these scrutinies, but anyway.

**Mr ELLIS** - Rightio. I'm ready when you are, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, the time being 10.21 a.m. We were to start at 10.15 a.m., but I welcome the minister and representatives of Sustainable Timber Tasmania, along with the others at the table. The time for scrutiny is three hours. We won't necessarily take a formal break, but if anybody really needs to have a break, do let me know.

Members would be familiar with the practice of seeking additional information, which must be agreed to, to be taken by the minister or the chair of the board and the questions handed, in writing, to the secretary, who is Mary at the moment.

I invite the minister, Mr Ellis, to introduce any other persons at the table, including names and positions, and invite you to make an opening statement. Thank you very much.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. Allow me to introduce those with me today from Sustainable Timber Tasmania: Rob de Fegely, Chair; Greg Hickey, Acting CEO; Suzette Weeding, General Manager of Conservation and Land Management; Chris Brookwell, General Manager, Corporate Services; and Adam Foster, Chief of Staff, who won't be taking questions.

Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) is an integral part of our forestry sector, with the responsibility for managing the 812,000 hectares of public production forests on behalf of all Tasmanians.

Sustainable Timber Tasmania is a profitable business, recording a profit for the last eight consecutive years despite some, at times, challenging trading conditions. It's a key part of our jobs-rich Tasmanian forestry sector. In the 2024-25 financial year, STT recorded a total comprehensive income of \$4.8 million and net profit after tax of \$5.8 million, which includes considerable commitment to fire management, community engagement, research, and other critical services to the Tasmanian community and the protection of our forests.

As part of the Liberal 2030 Strong Plan, the introduction of Sustainable Timber Tasmania's new ministerial charter has helped sharpen STT's focus and help meet the evolving needs of Tasmanians. It outlines clear government expectations, with a strong emphasis on supporting multiple uses of permanent timber production zone, or PTPZ land, including for recreation, beekeeping, hunting, and cultural activities, delivering positive socioeconomic outcomes and strengthening stakeholder engagement.

Fire is a serious threat to our native forests. More than 1900 hectares of permanent timber production zone land was impacted by fire last year, which is a stark reminder of the importance of proactive fire management. Protecting Tasmanian communities, forests, and infrastructure from bushfire remains a core responsibility, critical service, and a year-round focus for STT. In 2024-25 Sustainable Timber Tasmania trained firefighters and worked with the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service to combat bushfires and to keep our communities safe. Over 70 per cent of STT's employees are trained in firefighting, and they are at the frontline every bushfire season, helping to protect life and property in our state. STT

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also conducted fuel reduction burns across the public forest estate, helping to reduce fire risk with harvested coups and regrowth areas used by the TFS as critical areas for the management and prevention of large-scale bushfire.

STT has an active research department. Within the financial year 2024-25, STT led or participated in 31 active research projects valued at \$14.2 million, in partnership with 25 leading organisations and supported by nearly 100 collaborators across Australia.

In 2024-25, the STT team was honoured with several Forest Practices awards and Tasmanian Timber awards recognising excellence in community engagement, innovation and traineeship development. These accolades reflect the talent, commitment and professionalism of the team and the strength of their partnerships across the forestry sector. In addition, STT was formally recognised as an Inclusive Employer by the Diversity Council of Australia.

Steve Whiteley retired as CEO of STT in July 2025. Steve contributed more than four decades of service to the forest industry, including 12 years as CEO, and we thank him for his service.

2025 has been a year that reaffirms STT's long-term commitment to sustainably managing Tasmania's public production forests, and to the people and industries that depend on them.

On behalf of the government, I'd like to thank STT, its board and leadership, and all STT employees for their hard work and dedication through the year in management of Tasmania's sustainable and renewable public forests.

Chair, if it works, I will pass over to the chair for some introductory remarks.

**CHAIR** - A few brief introductory remarks, thank you.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Last year was a tough year, but a good year - tough due to the market downturn and slower demand from our Tasmanian customers. I think everyone's been feeling that pinch. The export markets remain fickle, despite the fact that the outlook for demand for wood, a renewable product, is still quite strong. It was a good year because we actually made a profit. That's the eighth year in a row, and I'm very, very proud of that fact.

We are much, much more than just logs on trucks and selling wood. Our sales of wood products, along with a small amount of government funding, pays for the management of PTPZ forests, the lands of which are managed for multiple values. We have a 10,000 kilometre road network, of which we maintained around 3000 kilometres last year. We built 24 kilometres of new road, including two new bridges. That provides access to our forest for a range of uses, as the minister just mentioned, including recreation, tourism, places like Blue Derby mountain bikes and Tahune Airwalk. We have a number of ecotourism licences, 249 apiary sites and high country fishermen, all of which use our roads and access for their own uses.

We have a very strong firefighting force which is there to protect our forests and obviously retain the carbon that we have in our forest, and that's very, very important. Seventy-seven per cent, or about 130 of our 170 staff, are trained firefighters and they're always there.

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We also manage a significant area of conservation reserves - about 159,000 hectares, so not less than 60 per cent of our forest is available for wood production. We manage 161 giant trees. We found one more this year, which is wonderful.

Our 171 staff, as I mentioned, are our greatest assets and our average tenure is a bit over 12 years, which is again, very commendable and obviously means that STT is a great place to work. We had five staff members reach 40 years of service this year: Dean Tuson, Jono Rudd, Peter Moore, Phil Cole and Steve Whiteley. I thank them all for their dedication and commitment to the organisation. A special mention to Steve for the work that he's done in taking STT through a period of transition in 2016, stabilising the business, getting onto a profitable track and delivering, in many ways, for the people of Tasmania.

The future, as we work towards plantations, we're bringing these online - and we won't be able to talk about that much this morning, I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, because that's still in a commercial process - but also towards our regrowth forests and to produce what I believe is the world's most renewable product. All we need is four elements: sunlight, rain, soil and air, and we can continue to grow. We don't need a lot of chemicals for our natural forests, with wildlife all around us. Thank you very much, minister.

**Dr BROAD** - Remembering that, as per the sustainable yield review, I think No.6, the available native sawlog volume will reduce by about 58 per cent very soon, you're currently running a tender sale process for plantation sawlogs. What is the timeframe for conclusion of this process?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Dr Broad. As we mentioned, obviously we're working through a process, but we commenced stage 2 of the process to bring the plantation solid wood resource to market. The log sale process is being conducted under a strict probity plan, and Sustainable Timber Tasmania has appointed an independent probity adviser to provide oversight. Sustainable Timber Tasmania staff, departmental staff, relevant ministers, ministerial staff and customers, have been presented with a set of approved probity guidelines to consider in their communications. This will provide a fair but competitive process for all participants to secure a long-term supply of plantation logs for processing in Tasmania. The process is expected to conclude in the next financial year. I will pass over to the team from STT.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister. Yes, as I mentioned, we are in commercial negotiations with our customers for native forest contracts and we're working our way through those. The plantation process is also continuing. Unfortunately, we can't share with you all the details at the moment because it's a commercial process, I'm sure you'd understand. We would sincerely hope that in the next six months we will have those completed.

**Dr BROAD** - In addition to that, then, when would you expect to be able to notify businesses if they've been successful or not through this process?

**Mr de FEGELY** - There's a process that we are working through at the moment, which will come to the board in the December board meeting. So, the board will be reviewing those and, hopefully, early in the new year we will be telling businesses they've been successful. I'm assuming you are referring to Project Eclipse at Plantation Resource?

**Dr BROAD** - Yes. Why is it taking so long?

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**Mr de FEGELY** - I don't think it's actually taking too long at all, because we only started in May.

**Dr BROAD** - The plantation sawlog process has been something that's had a long runway. We're talking decades, really.

**Mr ELLIS** - And it's important to get it right. I mean, this is one of the most significant moments for STT, for any of the publicly-owned resources that the Tasmanian community own. This is also a significant moment in time for our customers as well. There's a process of retooling. There's a process of ensuring that there are markets for this different species of timber grown under different growing methodologies. So, we expect that we're working in a process to get things right. 2027 is obviously the time that the transition notionally happens - we're in 2025, and we've got a clear pathway to finalisation.

I don't know if there's anything further you want to mention?

**Mr de FEGELY** - No.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, new national environment laws are going to go through parliament today and they have important improvements achieved by the Greens. The Prime Minister said this morning that they are to address the fact that current laws aren't fit for purpose. These laws will remove the exemption to the Regional Forest Agreement that has allowed Forestry Tasmania to destroy threatened and critical habitat for decades. Do you agree, minister, that this will be game over for the current native forest industry in Tasmania?

**Mr ELLIS** - Certainly, we're deeply concerned; deeply concerned by the Labor-Greens deal that's been done at a federal level, and the approach from the Prime Minister to effectively put at risk thousands of jobs and the ability to fight fires in forests in Tasmania is massively concerning. Now, we will need to work through the details of this announcement. We will be doing that in partnership with industry, with businesses, with the workforce. We're seeing very concerning actions by Labor governments in other states in Australia at the moment as well.

The Regional Forest Agreement has been the underpinning of Tasmania's sustainable native forest sector for around two decades, and we manage forests better than just about anywhere in the world, Dr Woodruff.

So, as a net importer of timber in this country, the actions that could potentially be taken that will reduce our native forest sector will mean the carbon miles of shipping in timber products from Europe - that's not a good outcome - or even worse, bringing it in from countries that cannot manage their forests as well as we do. So, you can crow and dance around all you like on this disastrous decision, but there are families out there who have put themselves in harm's way to protect communities like yours and put food on their tables through the native forest sector, and they are feeling deeply worried today.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, we will talk about the transition for workers, that the Greens support, but this is evidence, at the federal level, that the Regional Forest Agreement has been utterly failing since they were introduced by John Howard in 2002. Your industry has 18 months before the exemption from federal environmental laws ends. You are currently smashing habitat for the critically endangered swift parrot. To ensure that the swift parrot is

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not logged to extinction before those laws come in, will you stop logging swift parrot forests now?

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, we manage forestry sustainably here in Tasmania. STT is really an exceptional leader in that. It's interesting, when people talk to me about the kind of forestry they'd like to see it's looking after forests that have multiple mixed species, that have natural water management, that are well managed for fire response, that have a range of different native flora and fauna that are part of them. That's our native forests.

I think any move to reduce native forestry would be a perverse outcome. It is also perverse that the Prime Minister only months ago was talking about the importance of increasing productivity across the economy and is now taking this action that will impact the productivity of a highly productive sector for the Tasmanian economy. We will need to examine the details of this Labor-Greens deal but there are some extraordinarily perverse outcomes that could be driven through this process.

I will pass over to the team from STT if there's anything they want to add in an operational sense.

**Mr de FEGELY** - I think it's all too early. We only heard about this at around 8 a.m. this morning. We haven't seen any detail, but obviously once that detail is known we will look at it and try to understand what it means for us as the forest manager of PTPZ land here in Tasmania and how we move forward.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, through you to the chair, if it's appropriate, if you think Forestry Tasmania is operating at such a high standard and is world's best practice, or at least Australia's best practice, why would you be worried about these new federal environment laws and achieving the EPBC standards, which is what you said -

**Mr de FEGELY** - Point of order, Madam Chair. I don't know who she's talking to -

**CHAIR** - Excuse me. Order. Can you allow Dr Woodruff to finish her question?

**Mr de FEGELY** - I can.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - If you think that you're operating at such a good standard, then why would you be concerned about the application of our federal environment laws, which your company has said for decades is what you uphold through the Regional Forest Agreement and the Forest Practices Authority?

**Mr de FEGELY** - We do. The thing we're interested in is to understand what it actually means, because not always some of the legislation that passes through from time to time is linked to reality as to what's actually happening in the field.

The point I wanted to make, Madam Chair, is that we are Sustainable Timber Tasmania. We have been for nine years, but Dr Woodruff loves to call us Forestry Tasmania, which is a name we've given away. So may I ask if Dr Woodruff can refer to us as Sustainable Timber Tasmania? If that's too difficult, STT is fine, but only those two names.

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**Mr GARLAND** - On Tuesday in the Legislative Council scrutiny session, STT said that if they had to honour every request to halt logging operations they wouldn't be making any money. How many requests to halt logging in a particular region of a municipality has the government or STT received in the last five years?

**Mr ELLIS** - Which particular municipality, Mr Garland?

**Mr GARLAND** - Any, for that matter. How many requests to halt logging in any municipality have you had?

**Mr ELLIS** - I am happy to pass over to the team at STT shortly. It is important to note that we get a massive number of requests across our economy for Tasmanian timber products, including from people building their homes who are able to enjoy beautiful furniture from the timber that's all around us. Every day we have more than 5000 people working in this sector and they consistently say they want it to have a really bright future. We also get people who are grateful for firefighting -

**Mr GARLAND** - Minister, you're not answering the question.

**Mr ELLIS** - I suppose it's just important context. I will pass to the team from STT to see what data is available, but certainly forestry has strong support, including in our community, Mr Garland.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Mr Garland, that's a detailed operational question because we have at least 350 stakeholders that we're monitoring.

**Ms WEEDING** - Thank you for the question. We don't have a specific number. We don't record that in our information. What I can indicate, though, is that we engage with stakeholders on all our coupes. It's part of our standard process. They're published through our three-year plan and stakeholders can register interest in particular coupes. When they come up for their planning phase, we engage with neighbours, council and other interested stakeholders around those particular operations. We regularly receive requests and information from stakeholders around coupes. Some of those contain requests to end native forest harvesting on a broad scale. We have some specific requests around individual coupes and quite a few around ending native forestry in that sort of space.

**Mr GEORGE** - Minister, I've been puzzling through the accounts of STT with a redemption, I think, of \$7.5 million in term deposits which was critical for managing cash flow in funding capex. The reported net profit after tax of \$5.8 million relies on a couple of book entries that I don't understand, or at least seem puzzling.

A non-cash biological asset valuation increment of \$7.5 million, further bolstered by \$1.4 million reversal of credit losses. Net cash from operations plummeted by over 73 per cent year on year, which misses your own target, I think, by about 50 per cent. How can STT claim commercial health when its core business is failing to generate sufficient cash to fund its ongoing operations?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr George. STT has delivered their eighth profit in a row, which is really encouraging. We want to ensure that forestry is both environmentally and financially sustainable. I'll pass to the team from STT to talk through the particulars of the finances.

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**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister and Mr George. Regarding the first point you raise, the challenge for us is valuing our assets, our forests, which is done independently each year. It's used as a discounted cash flow technique, which is common for most private businesses; some larger companies like Forico use the same system. If that moves, say there's a movement in price, that will change the value. If it moves up, the value goes up, and we need to record that through our P&L.

I'll ask Chris Brookwell, our general manager of corporate services, to provide some more detail around the comments you just made.

**Mr BROOKWELL** - Thank you. In terms of our reported profit, we have non-cash items that impact the reported profit, so the forest valuation and the reversal of the credit losses are audited to comply with accounting standards. In our statement of corporate intent we include an underlying profit measure which is a better indication of the quality of the profits that we target and make. That was a profit of \$0.7 million and that was the same as FY24 as well.

The question around cash flow is a good one. In 2024 that underlying profit generated operating cash flow of \$6.5 million, and that was reduced this year. If you look at note D16, there's a payment of creditors of \$4.6 million, so we actually paid creditors to a high degree, which was a working capital movement which depressed operating cash flows. Notwithstanding that movement in working capital, the underlying profit of the business would generate a similar amount of cash to the prior year.

**Mr GEORGE** - How does that answer the question that your net cash flow from operations has plummeted by 73 per cent year on year?

**Mr ELLIS** - There's obviously commodity price movements, but I'm happy to pass to STT.

**Mr BROOKWELL** - If you look at D16, there's a line item that says we have paid creditors \$4.6 million during the year, so that's a reduction in credit. That impacts our working capital; it doesn't impact profit. Had we not paid creditors to that degree, the operating cash flows would have been closer to what they were last year.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Good morning, minister, and your team from STT. Good to see you. My question is in the context of the announcement overnight from Canberra that Labor has done a deal with the Greens to walk away from the longstanding position of the federal Labor Party that it would back in Tasmania's RFA, which as you know, minister, has underpinned not just resource security but job security right across Tasmania.

I'm very concerned about what Labor has done with the Greens and very concerned about my electorate of Bass. What impact does this decision have? Is it too early to tell, or are you able to tell the committee about the risks to Tasmania, to this business, and also the capacity of STT to staff and resource bushfire mitigation and resourcing during bushfire seasons?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Ferguson. Yes, on its face it is deeply concerning. There's a reason the Greens have been campaigning to get this deal with the federal Labor government and for the Prime Minister to make the decision to do a deal with the Greens, I think, is deeply concerning. We will need to, as you say, work through some of the detail. On its face, though, the decision to pull the rug out from under the native forest sector through the decision to phase

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out the regional forest agreements is seismic. That is the cornerstone, the underpinning, of our sustainable native forest sector here in Tasmania.

As I mentioned before, we do forestry better than just about anywhere in the world, and to wrap up forestry in red and green tape just months after talking about the importance of increasing productivity and supporting productive industries, I think flies in the face of everything they have been saying. Tasmania has had a history of being used by federal Labor governments in concert with the Greens as the whipping boy for the nation and to do this to good hardworking people is deeply concerning.

You mentioned your electorate of Bass and I concur with that. The strength, the heritage, the bright future that forestry has in Bass is enormous and that's mirrored right across Tasmania in every electorate. There are people going to work today whose futures are so much more uncertain than they were even yesterday because of this Labor-Greens deal.

You mentioned firefighting. This is one of the key areas of benefit that STT provides to the Tasmanian community. They are one of our three key firefighting agencies. There are more than 100 professionally trained forest firefighters in STT and when the bushfires were on in February and March, I didn't see a lot of Bob Brown Foundation people on the west coast. I saw a hell of a lot of STT people down there.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - What a garbage statement.

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, that is absolutely true. Those are people who earned the Operational Service Medal of Tasmania Fire Service serving through STT. These are extraordinary people who go above and beyond to care for the bush, to make sure it is regrown, and planted more than 100 million tree seeds last year. This is an exceptional industry that has flow-on effects right around our state.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Minister, will you be seeking a 'please explain' from federal forestry minister, Julie Collins?

**Mr ELLIS** - That's the thing. As a Tasmanian, I think she needs to take a good hard look at herself. When it was announced that there would be a Tasmanian federal forestry minister, I think there was some hope from the industry, because we have seen on the Liberal and Coalition side of things up there that when there's a Tasmanian in the forestry chair, that's often good for Tasmania and good for forestry. I think the industry will be thinking very differently about Ms Collins than some of the federal Liberal ministers previously.

As I say, Mr Ferguson, we're going to need to analyse this decision. This is complex legislation. It's part of the reason it's so irresponsible to be ramming it through in the way they have done with such limited consultation on this Labor-Greens deal. We'll need to work with industry, with businesses and with workers. I can tell you that my phone has been blowing up with people who were seeing a bright future and who are now seriously questioning the things that were said to them by a Labor government when they said they'd back in workers.

**Dr BROAD** - You're currently going through the process of tendering for the plantation sawlogs. If the plantation volume doesn't equal or exceed the reduction in native volume there will obviously be consequences for employment. Are you taking that into account, especially in regional areas, when determining the plantation volume process?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Dr Broad. We are working through a process. I have to say, I think you need to ask yourself whether you support this federal decision as well, because if you come in here and talk about the impact of jobs with potential reduction of supply, the number-one threat to that now is your federal colleagues. I am sure you speak to Julie Collins and your other federal colleagues. They made a deal with the Greens which they said they wouldn't do and now here we are having to see an entirely new process -

**Dr BROAD** - Sorry, Chair -

**CHAIR** - Dr Broad?

**Dr BROAD** - I know there's going to be a diatribe in my direction every time there's a question about jobs -

**Mr ELLIS** - You asked a question about supply, Dr Broad, and I'm telling you about supply.

**CHAIR** - Minister -

**Dr BROAD** - You can get as wound up as you like -

**Mr FERGUSON** - He shouldn't be wound up.

**Dr BROAD** - Well, there are other things at play here too -

**Mr FERGUSON** - Hurt our people.

**Dr BROAD** - Okay, so you're going to play politics too, right? I'm here to ask questions on behalf of the industry. I'm not here to hear a diatribe about something I have zero control over.

**Mr ELLIS** - You have zero control over people in your party?

**CHAIR** - Minister -

**Dr BROAD** - I am not the federal -

**CHAIR** - Order.

**Mr ELLIS** - You are kidding me.

**Dr BROAD** - Well, what control do you have?

**CHAIR** - Order.

**Mr ELLIS** - You're the shadow minister.

**Dr BROAD** - What are you talking about?

**CHAIR** - Order. This is a good point to stop for a moment.

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**Mr ELLIS** - Have you had a conversation with Julie Collins?

**Dr BROAD** - Of course I have -

**CHAIR** - Minister Ellis, do you mind? I'm talking -

**Dr BROAD** - and expressed my disappointment.

**CHAIR** - Order, I'm talking. I want to remind everyone at the table that there's a lot of passion in the room and a lot of interest in this topic, which is why we're here for scrutiny. I ask that everybody has a modicum of respect for each other across the table and next to each other. Thank you.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Chair. I have plenty of respect for the people but no respect for this decision that's been made in terms of a deal with the Greens. For Dr Broad to say that he is opposed to the federal Labor government's decision at this table should be recorded and noted. The fact that Labor has become divided on this and yet would still seek to do a deal with the Greens, I think is madness.

Dr Broad, you're going to have to go back to our community, to the people who work in this industry, and explain to them why you couldn't do more in this space, why you couldn't advocate further to the Prime Minister who is running your party. You are in federal administration; there are closer links now between the Labor Party than there ever have been at federal and state level. Yet they just meekly roll over and say, 'Well, you know, it's someone else's problem'. I think it's everyone's problem, Dr Broad.

Every Tasmanian who has an interest in the future of our timber industry should be involved and should be looking to fight for this industry. We saw this with salmon with the disgraceful attacks from Tanya Plibersek on another sustainable industry, and here we are now with Murray Watt. People were hopeful that there would be some kind of common sense out of this bloke, and here he we are -

**Dr BROAD** - Sorry, Chair, we're talking salmon now. I mean, seriously?

**CHAIR** - Dr Broad, have you received your answer?

**Dr BROAD** - No, I haven't; he's not even going remotely close to it.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - No, he's not really coping, is he?

**CHAIR** - Okay, do you want to ask your next question?

**Dr BROAD** - No, I want to ask the same question. It's about jobs and it's about what you have control over, which is about the log supply -

**Mr ELLIS** - Jobs and log supply.

**Dr BROAD** - especially the plantation log supply. That is actually the issue that is going to keep the industry going, because you know that no matter what happens in Canberra, the native forest supply is declining -

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**Mr ELLIS** - Are you giving up on native forestry?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It's finished.

**Dr BROAD** - In 2027 the supply drops off a cliff, whether we do anything in Canberra or not -

**Mr ELLIS** - Are you giving up on it?

**Dr BROAD** - and the future is the plantation resource -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Exactly.

**Mr ELLIS** - Rubbish, Dr Broad.

**Dr BROAD** - which you are actually tendering on right now, and you won't give me the answers.

**Mr ELLIS** - So you're saying you support native forestry but it has no future? What a load of garbage. I mean, seriously?

**Dr BROAD** - What I'm saying is your own supply is dropping off a cliff because your own reports tell you this.

**Mr ELLIS** - Because you locked it up in the 1990s.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Chair, I think this is a very long answer.

**Mr ELLIS** - This is the thing. You made a decision to lock up supply and then decades later there is a reduction in the supply.

**Dr BROAD** - I made the decision?

**Mr ELLIS** - The Labor Party, in a deal with the Greens, just like their last one -

**Dr BROAD** - Stop the diatribe and just get some answers to the questions, otherwise we're going to have three hours of this.

**CHAIR** - Order. You have one last question.

**Dr BROAD** - No, I have the same question.

**Mr ELLIS** - You just don't like the answer.

**CHAIR** - We have to move on.

**Dr BROAD** - It's about the plantation sawlog supply. What happens if the plantation sawlog supply doesn't match the reduction that you have projected in native forest volumes? Are you taking that into account when you're allocating the sawlog supply?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, we're working through sawlog supply and we've spoken about probity, Dr Broad. We're keen to make sure that we're delivering for the industry. What's also important is that the future of Tasmanian forestry will be a mix of plantation and native forestry and there is no getting around the fact that if a federal Labor-Greens deal has a significant impact on the supply of native timber, that will have enormous ramifications for jobs in our community and for our ability to even protect the forest.

Dr Broad, you can say that there is no future for native forestry -

**Dr BROAD** - I absolutely didn't say that.

**Mr ELLIS** - You did.

**Dr BROAD** - I did not.

**Mr ELLIS** - Rubbish.

**Dr BROAD** - Can you stop him verballing me, please? This is insanity. You know that this is insanity.

**Mr ELLIS** - If you think that there is a model that can protect hundreds of thousands of eucalypt forest without the native timber industry, I'd love for you to tell me, because what we're seeing in Victoria, what we're seeing in Western Australia, is the massive, unrelenting destruction of the ability to fight forest fires, because of a Labor government's decision to shut down native forestry. And I tell you what - changing lines on a map, Dr Broad, doesn't put fires out. It doesn't get dozers in the bush. It doesn't ensure that there are people on the ground.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - We'll move to the next question, thank you.

**Dr BROAD** - What's the point of this? You do have to get him to answer questions, though.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, that's not going to be possible, is it?

**Dr BROAD** - No. If he's just going to rant every time I ask a question -

**CHAIR** - Thank you, Dr Broad.

**Dr BROAD** - I know, but I didn't actually get to ask questions, because he just ranted.

**CHAIR** - Dr Broad, I gave you an opportunity. We're moving on. You'll get another chance.

Dr Woodruff, please.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, Chair. I believe what we're seeing around the table, for anyone who's watching or who reads the *Hansard*, it calls a lie to what this company has been doing for decades when we've heard repeatedly that the Regional Forest Agreement, the Forest

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Practices Authority and Forest Practices Plans are doing the job of federal environment laws to protect critically endangered and threatened species.

Clearly, the way you're going into orbit demonstrates that they're not, and Tasmania, along with other states, has been called out for this failure. What we're seeing that's happened in New South Wales when the national koala park was announced, and while laws there were being prepared to protect it, it was deliberately smashed and degraded by the state forestry company.

Minister, will you make sure that there are no changes to this company's logging schedules or practices across this period to smash-and-grab forests and get what can be done before the federal laws come into place?

**Mr ELLIS** - Have you seen the boots of timber workers in New South Wales lined up outside politicians' offices who made this decision? Have you seen all those people who were putting food on the table of their families and supporting their communities?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Point of order, 45, relevance, Chair. The minister can go into a whole rant about that. It's completely irrelevant. Can you just answer the question? Will you make sure there are no changes to logging schedules or practices?

**Dr BROAD** - Point of clarification, maybe?

**CHAIR** - Unfortunately, Dr Woodruff, relevance is not part of the scrutiny, but if you want to ask the question again?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, it's a simple question: are you going to make sure that there's no smash-and-grab of swift parrot habitat, of ancient forests?

I ask this question on behalf of people who are defending forests every day, and they're doing it because massive ancient trees are being taken out, critical threatened species habitat. Will you make sure there's no change in the practices of Forestry Tasmania during this 18-month period?

**Mr ELLIS** - We will work through a sustainable harvest schedule, as we always do, Dr Woodruff. We're going to be examining this deal.

You asked me about the koala national park and the lock-ups that have ensued and, as I mentioned, this is devastating for those communities. If you're not moved by the boots of timber workers that have been left out the front of decision-makers' offices and the pleas for help and the requests to change this disastrous decision -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, Chair. I have my next question since the minister is going onto a rant that's not at all related to the topic that I asked.

**Mr ELLIS** - You might want to shut down the lived experience of our timber workers in New South Wales who are living through the consequences of these kinds of decisions -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - No, you can talk about this in parliament. This is a scrutiny committee. I have my second question, Chair.

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**Mr ELLIS** - This is enormously, enormously impactful.

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff, just a little more time before Mr Ellis finishes his answer and then you'll get to your question.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Sure, thank you. For clarification, we are meant to be asking and getting questions answered to the questions that we ask. It's not a rant. I understand that you're hot under the collar by this shock news.

**CHAIR** - Minister Ellis, please.

**Mr ELLIS** - Would you like me to answer?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, we understand that from 1 July next year, applications for native forestry will need to be approved by the new federal Environment Protection Authority. Given that federal EPBC laws protect federally listed threatened species, are there any areas of this company's production forest that you think will not have to be checked off with the Commonwealth before logging can occur? Maybe this is a question for the Chair. In other words, are there any areas that Forestry Tasmania operates in as Sustainable Timbers Tasmania, the company, any areas, that do not involve species that would need to be checked off under federal laws?

**CHAIR** - Are you asking the chair?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It's up to the minister to decide -

**CHAIR** - No, it's not. Are you directing it to the chair?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I will ask the chair. Thank you.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. I will pass to the team from STT, but will note that we've always managed the forests, through STT, with a mind to sustainability of both flora and fauna. I will pass over to the chair.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Our staff go to work every day to take care of our forests. We do the best we can. We don't always get it right, but we do the best we very well can to provide a product, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, that just need sunlight, air, rain and soil to grow. We can do that in perpetuity, and we've been trained to do that.

The area of forest in Australia, unlike some comments that come out suggesting they're being destroyed, hasn't changed in the last 30 years. It's been around 130 million hectares since 1990, and you can check this through the State of the Forest Report.

The impact on threatened species is a massive challenge and - there are lots of topics that we could pick up on - it's looked at in the State of the Environment Report, but also in the State of the Forest Report. If you look at the major threats to our threatened species, number-one is forest loss, which is basically due to urban deforestation to build cities, where they're clearing forest. Second one is uncontrolled wildfire. This is a massive problem, and we're seeing this post the Black Summer bushfires. The third problem is introduced species and pests. So feral pests, which all of you would be aware of, and cats are one of the worst. They eat billions of

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small reptiles, mammals and birds, every year, every day. Yet we - forestry operations - are way down the list.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Chair, to the question. Are there any areas -

**Mr de FEGELY** - I'm sorry, Dr Woodruff, I realise you probably don't like to hear this, but the facts say that this is not our problem.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It's not a science lesson.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Well, I'm sorry, it is a science lesson because we work on science.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Are there any parts of your company's land that you do not think would have to pass through the federal environment laws? Are there any parts?

**Mr ELLIS** - Are you saying you are not interested in science?

**CHAIR** - Order. Order. Thank you for responding to my call to order. Can we have your answer? We do have a limit in timing of answers, so if you could get to the point of the question.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Apologies, Chair. I realise there are some new members here and I wanted to give them some background. There are statistics that you can get, and I'm more than happy to provide those to any of you, if you wish, collected by the Commonwealth Government, which can give you exactly what is happening and what the threats are.

We are very proud of the processes that we use in Tasmania, but we're always open to opportunities to improve them and to change them. Once we know the detail, we will look at what that involves - simple as that.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Can I take that on notice? The question was: are there any areas that Forestry Tasmania manages on PTPZ lands that do not contain threatened species that would need to be checked off by federal laws?

**CHAIR** - Will you take that on notice?

**Mr ELLIS** - A lot of this is hypothetical as well, Dr Woodruff. We need to examine this legislation.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - That's a straight question. You must know, of the areas that you manage, which parts do and don't have threatened species that would need to be managed under federal laws. Maybe it's not very much of your company's land. Can I take that on notice?

**Mr de FEGELY** - I take the point, Chair. You referred to us as Forestry Tasmania again - can you please -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Oh, it was just a slip-up. Let's just talk about the company.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Number-one is respect. If you're not going up the values of this place, why are you here?

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - Chair, can I ask a question and have an answer? Would you please take it on notice if you can't tell me at the table, what proportion of land, if any, of PTPZ land -

**Mr de FEGELY** - I can't give you anything, I'm sorry, on that.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Right, would you be able to take it on notice?

**Mr de FEGELY** - No.

**CHAIR** - If they're not going to take it on notice?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, can you take it on notice? He hasn't answered that question.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Once we know the details, we'll work through it and then we'll be able to provide it through our minister.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Do you know which part of your land has threatened species or not? Do you know that and could you please provide us that on notice?

**Mr de FEGELY** - We do know and I would have to ask -

**CHAIR** - Hold on. We're almost to the nub of it, I think.

**Ms WEEDING** - In terms of the requirements to refer, as the Chair has mentioned, we will need to go through the process and evaluate the specifics in terms of what it is we need to do. Under the current EPBC rules, we wouldn't be referring all of PTPZ land. There'd be a portion of it, but we don't exactly know. We haven't done any evaluation in that space.

In terms of the process we go through from the Forest Practices system, clearly, we identify the presence or potential habitat of threatened species. That is part of our standard process, so it's something we could do. In terms of specific areas, no, we don't have that information available.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, Ms Weeding. It sounds like you do know the proportion that is currently affected. Can you provide that information - the proportion of the land that's currently affected under the current environment laws, or not affected?

**Ms WEEDING** - In terms of where threatened species occur, that information is all available on the Natural Values Atlas.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could you please tell us?

**Ms WEEDING** - We can provide a copy of the Natural Values Atlas or a link to it.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Or a summary of the proportion of PTPZ land that is not covered by federal environment laws.

**Ms WEEDING** - All PTPZ land is covered by federal environment laws. That's the nature of the laws in themselves.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - You don't have to refer to the federal laws.

**Ms WEEDING** - But we don't know what the rules are yet. Once we know those rules we'll be able to provide that information, but we don't have that information to hand.

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff, in all fairness, we have a number of people who haven't even asked questions yet, so we'll move on. Professor Razay.

**Prof RAZAY** - Thank you very much. I am new here and sometimes I get confused. I hear about all these hundreds of thousands of hectares and native protected forests, regrowing forest, and plantation logging areas. I wonder whether there is any way for a simple guy like me, whether we have maps which can show us all these areas, but the importance of that is how we can monitor it over the years and then we can look back and say, well there has been a growing of these areas.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Professor Razay. You're right, forestry is a complex area but it's important and I appreciate your interest in this. There's a range of different ways that we provide transparency around forestry. STT works through a range of different processes at a higher level as well. The State of the Forests Report is an important document for getting an understanding of Tasmania's forests.

One of the things I will say is Tasmania does forestry better than just about anywhere in the world. It's something we can be enormously proud of. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes that the best outcome for the environment and climate is a mixed strategy between native forestry - which is a natural forest, the kind of forest that uses native tree species and a mix of different species in that - your plantations, which are effectively a monoculture crop that provide important wood products in that process as well, and then conservation. Achieving all three is the gold standard that provides the best environmental outcome and the best social and economic outcome. That's what we do in Tasmania. That's part of the reason we're so protective of this system that served Tasmania so well for generations, because it is one of the most extraordinary industries.

Think about a carbon-constrained century which we're moving into and the importance of renewable products. Wood sequesters carbon naturally. It helps provide materials to build our homes and deliver the fibre for a plastic-free future. It is an extraordinary material. To then say we shouldn't use that but instead it should be concrete or steel, or putting things on a boat from Europe, or rainforest habitat in Borneo, doesn't make sense. The more that people grow to understand and appreciate Tasmania's forestry and the true nature of its forests and forest scientists, the more I think the case builds and grows for the way we manage it.

Of course we always need to continue to improve. That's something I think STT has really shown as a learning organisation that's constantly improving its practices as new science helps to evolve our understanding. That's why we need to be backing in this industry as an industry that's such a huge part of our past and such a massive part of our future. I'll pass to the team from STT to talk through some of that and provide some further detail.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister, and Professor Razay. There is a lot of good information. Unfortunately, in the emotion of the debate it often gets lost, so apologies if we're a bit emotional this morning because we weren't expecting what was coming through.

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As I mentioned earlier, our 170 staff try every day to do the right thing by Tasmania's forests for the people of Tasmania and the wildlife, to do production on one hand and conservation on the other. Both of those things are integrated, which makes it a complex business.

To understand exactly what's happening in our forests, we do periodic reporting on sustained yield. We do periodic reporting through the Commonwealth in the State of the Forests Report and State of the Environment Report which are publicly available, and we can direct you to those. There are lots of statistics to show you what is happening, as best as we know it, and where things are recorded and we're more than happy to help if you'd like.

**Prof RAZAY** - Is there anything like colour maps where it shows you?

**Mr de FEGELY** - Sure.

**Mr Di FALCO** - I was going to pursue another line of questioning, but since you've brought up fires, fine. In 2019, the Great Pine Tier fire burned out 50,000 hectares. It threatened Miena, it impacted fisheries and burnt down a number of fishing shacks. It also killed God knows how many threatened species as well. It could have been restricted to a few hectares, but the firefighters were denied the opportunity to take a bulldozer in there and push in their fire break. What is the current level of earth-moving equipment that could be utilised to push in fire breaks as we are at the moment?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Di Falco. You're right, it's absolutely critical that heavy machinery plays an important part in our firefighting. The dozer teams, the excavators, the contractors who work in forestry every day, drop everything so they can support their communities. It's of course about putting water on some of these fires, but at a landscape scale level it's often fire and heavy machinery that's used to manage out-of-control bushfires. I'll pass over to the team at STT around some of the operational information that we can provide. Certainly, during the west coast bushfires, the machinery operators were some of the real heroes of that - and noting some of the machinery operators that were operating at the Nugent fire just the other day as well.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister and Mr Di Falco. That's a great question, because fire is obviously a major issue in Australia and particularly as we go through a drying climate, they're only going to get worse. Having the capacity, the staff trained and the equipment, is really important to try to catch those fires when they're small, hence we've been investing heavily in our equipment. We've bought new tankers, we've got slip-on equipment and we keep training our staff every year.

In terms of the access, I'll ask Suzette to make a comment on that, because I remember when we were talking about it there were some issues in terms of access. I don't know the details but I was following it. Certainly I know, having endured the Black Summer bushfires in New South Wales, one of the big problems they've got there is despite the fact that the Rural Fire Service is a voluntary based system, they've got more equipment than they have volunteers to man their equipment. By having a fully manned STT firefighting contingent, that gives us the protection everyone's looking for, communities, forests and our threatened species. Suzette?

**Ms WEEDING** - I've got the answer in terms of the number of dozers that we have available. We draw on a contractor workforce around heavy machinery and utilise that, so I'll

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wait for that question to come back. I will give you some additional information around our firefighting resources and some statistics which would be useful to get on the record.

In terms of STT's resources itself, we've got 16 dedicated class 3 firetrucks; three dedicated class 4 tankers, the quite large water sources during the fire season; 14 dedicated class 5 tankers; and 92 class 5 and 6 slip-on tankers that go on the back of utes. Then we've got a range of heli-torches that we undertake for aerial ignition processes as well.

In addition to our staff and our contractor workforce, which are available and ready, we run a fire roster. All our people who are fire-trained and our contractors that are available are on a roster through the fire season running from October through to March or April, depending upon the season. They are available for firefighting and rapid response to activities.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Okay. Potentially, if forestry is knocked out of the picture, the Great Pines Tier fire could be a recurring theme in future?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes - and even road access was something we were talking about before. Because forestry operates in the landscape in this fire-prone bush - eucalyptus is some of the most fire-prone species you'll find anywhere in the world - that enables us to provide all sorts of access for all sorts of purposes and firefighting is one of them.

Look at the massive degradation that's currently occurring in Victoria at the moment with their contractors going out of business and their limited ability to do some of that work. That's a bad outcome for our forests. When you have cool fuel reduction burns that are able to help regenerate eucalyptus forests and are able to ensure fuel reduction, that's a good outcome for fire in that kind of bush. But when you have these out-of-control crown fires that wipe out tens of thousands of hectares and have no way of putting it out, that's the experience of some of these communities. South-east Australia, of which Tasmania is a part, is one of the most bushfire-prone places on earth and the risk comes from our forests.

I will pass to the team at STT if there's anything further.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister. It was a great question because the two are linked with, obviously, the equipment that our contractors have, but they have the skill. I'm sure you're aware of contracting capacity, but you can't take someone who's built dams or built roads with a bulldozer and put them in the forest and expect them to be able to perform like someone who's been there all their life.

This is a real problem we're finding in Victoria. There are all sorts of things unfolding that no-one really predicted, or didn't get an opportunity to mention to the government. Their firefighting forces have been depleted to a significant extent. One of the things that's a real problem in Victoria is, with the lack of - now that VicForests has been folded up is - they were collecting all the seed. We keep nearly two tonnes of viable seed of critical tree species in Perth. They don't do that in Victoria. So 15 per cent of the alpine ash forest, which is around 60,000 hectares, and there's only 380,000 hectares of alpine ash in Victoria, has been lost because it doesn't have the seed on the ground. It's not regrowing, so it's gone to another forest type and 25 per cent to 30 per cent of that is at risk.

I can say to members, if you'd like to watch *Landline* from the 22 June this year, it's on iView, please dial it up and have a look and you will see exactly what I'm talking about. This

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is a massive problem. Our Perth nursery, I think we carry \$2.5 million worth of seed every year. We collect annually nearly 700 kg of seed. That's for this very purpose, but also for regenerating our forests. We get over 95 per cent success in regenerating our forests into regrowth forest.

**CHAIR** - Mr Ferguson.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, Suzette, do you want to add quickly to finish off that question?

**Ms WEEDING** - I believe I misspoke earlier. The end of May is for our fire roster. We have 38 dozers available statewide through heavy machinery contracts for that purpose and it's 18 contractors who provide those sorts of resources to us.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Following on from the fire questions, minister and chair, the use of technology in better fire management, not just fuel reduction but also detecting outbreaks of fire as we approach the bushfire season. I seek your response on what your organisation, STT, is doing to invest in those new technologies, how it can support decision-making by human beings. I also seek your update because I don't get many questions from the rotation on the success of the TasGRN and I'd like to know the extent to which STT is satisfied with its performance and its ability to protect humans, critical infrastructure and, of course, the native and plantation sectors that you care for.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Ferguson, and I note your special interest and your work as a predecessor of mine as Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management in that process and your commitment to our firefighters, whatever uniform they're wearing.

I am very pleased to share that the Sustainable Timber Tasmania team has been awarded a \$1.44 million grant to lead the creation of the Tasmanian integrated fire camera network. This important initiative is being delivered in partnership with the Tasmanian Fire Service, Tasmania Parks and the Tasmanian technology company Indicium Dynamics. When complete, the network will be Australia's largest integrated bushfire detection camera system. Together with cash and in-kind support from partner agencies, the project will have a total value of \$3.62 million. It's funded through round 3 of the \$1 billion Disaster Ready Fund, administered by National Emergency Management Agency, or NEMA, with contributions from both the Australian and Tasmanian governments.

This network will use advanced AI fire-detection cameras to provide real-time monitoring and early bushfire detection. More than 30 cameras will be installed across high-risk areas statewide, with all feeds integrated into a single centralised portal. This will significantly enhance our coordination between agencies, which is some of the best in the world already, and ensure faster, more accurate decision making and improving community preparedness.

In the short term, the project will deliver around-the-clock fire detection, helping to reduce costs and lower risk to life, property and the environment. In the longer term, it will support a more fire-resilient Tasmania by providing a scalable, technology-driven detection system that protects people, infrastructure, industries and ecosystems while reducing reliance on manual detection methods.

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Sustainable Timber Tasmania and Indicium Dynamics have already invested more than four years into developing advanced fire management technologies including AI-supported cameras, the internet of things, sensors and statewide long-range communication networks. The project builds on that work and represents a major step forward in safeguarding Tasmania against bushfire risk.

I will pass to the team from STT to talk through their experiences, one of our key partner agencies on the TasGRN, but certainly this is such a huge leap forward for Tasmania, to have the first of its kind in the world, an encrypted digital radio network across multiple emergency responders and land agencies is something that all can be very proud of.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister, and I will pass to my colleagues. AI detection has been a really interesting and exciting development for us in protection of communities and forests in Tasmania. I think last year - we have been working with Indicium, and we went to market to engage with Indicium as our digital partner in this. We have won a number of awards together with them for the work that we have done. We detected over 500 fires with these cameras last year and we do lead the country, in my opinion. I'm aware of what's going on in New South Wales and they do have AI cameras; they're using a different system, but I don't believe that they are in the same league that we are in at the moment. I commend our staff for the work they have done around this. We could potentially get to the point where we don't have manned fire towers so we can actually run through.

**Mr FERGUSON** - That's great. Could I get a response on the TasGRN? Are you satisfied with it? Is it working for you?

**Ms WEEDING** - Absolutely. We're very pleased with the functioning and the functionality of the TasGRN network. It has been a sizeable investment by both the, or all the entities, but largely by the state in terms of getting that network in place. Recently, some of the private forestry contractors have got access to their network as well, in order to increase and augment our ability to both respond, but also be safe out in the fireground out in the landscape. So it's been a game changer in terms of our increased ability to communicate and to remove some of those dead spots that we have had in the past with our old radio network.

**Dr BROAD** - So, STT is currently embarking on the tender sale process for the managed plantation estate as we've discussed. Pruning is obviously a key component of the management to produce clear hardwood timbers so that we can use those plantation sawlogs potentially for furniture, joinery, floorings and so on. Can you inform us if you're still pruning the plantation estate?

**Mr de FEGELY** - Our estate's mature, Dr Broad, so we're only establishing a very small amount of that. We will make a decision around pruning following this process to see whether it is economic to continue to do that and whether the industry wants us to continue to do it. So, at this stage, that's still a work in progress and we have our mind open as to what we will do. At this stage we've made no decision either to prune or to stop pruning.

**Dr BROAD** - Sorry, you didn't answer that. Are you still pruning?

**Mr de FEGELY** - No, because-

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**Dr BROAD** - Okay, so there are obviously long lead times with pruning before it's ready to become sawlogs. So, you are about to create an industry based on a pruned resource. How can the industry invest with confidence if there will potentially be a gap because, if you've stopped pruning, if you start pruning again then the future pruned logs won't be available for something like the next 20 years?

**Mr de FEGELY** - I will let the acting CEO answer. That's more of an operational question.

**Mr HICKEY** - Dr Broad, the current crop was pruned and is approaching maturity or is mature. That's the reason we are not pruning. It was pruned back when it was in its growing stage. The crop that we have in the ground, we are planning that on a sustainable rotation basis. Basically, if the outcome of our tender process supports pruning then when we recommence plantation establishment in a fully commercial view, we will make a decision as to whether to prune or not.

**Dr BROAD** - So, the pruned resource is ready. So it's been pruned, it's grown and it's ready. If you stop pruning, there will be a gap where there will be a supply issue because there's no pruned trees. If you're constantly harvesting a pruned resource, you will, in effect, be reducing your pruned estate with no pruned estate to fill the gap.

**Mr HICKEY** - The current estate is mature. It was pruned and is mature. We're planning to cut that estate, over a period, in a sustainable manner. If the returns from the current process are sufficient to support pruning, we will make the decision around pruning and continue pruning once the new crop is in the ground.

**Dr BROAD** - Yes, but do you acknowledge that there will be a gap, because the current pruned estate will then have to last until the next pruned estate?

**Mr HICKEY** - That's the plan.

**Dr BROAD** - There's a 20-year gap there. If you start today, it's going to take 20 years before the next lot are ready.

**Mr HICKEY** - And, as I said, we're creating the supply, over a sustainable yield, such that we will start pruning, and there won't be a gap.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, there's some out-and-out fearmongering that's happening here at the table from you and the chair, trying to pretend that there would be an increased fire risk to the state if there was no state native forestry company.

**Mr de FEGELY** - There will be. We're not pretending. We've seen it before.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's not scaremongering.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Just listen to the truth.

**Mr ELLIS** - How many bulldozers do you own, Dr Woodruff?

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - The Parks and Wildlife Service, and Tasmania, would be responsible for managing the forest estate in the absence of a native forest company.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, it would be responsible without the capability.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, are you saying to Tasmanians that your government would just let the forest burn and not protect Tasmanians if there was no native forestry industry?

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, we will do everything that we can, but unfortunately, the reality is you have a massive reduction in capability for bushfire fighting services if you remove forest firefighters, because that is where the key risk comes from. That is where the expertise is. That's the business model that pays for it. The cost of more than 100 trained forest firefighters is enormous. The cost of the 38 bulldozers, all the trucks, the roading network that we need to maintain, bushfire breaks.

Dr Woodruff, we are seeing what happens when you remove the native forest sector, when you take people out of the bush in Australia, in places like Victoria. There's nothing fearmongering about it - it is the stark and grim reality that when you sack forest firefighters and you take away the business model, it is very, very hard for anything to step into the breach.

As I mentioned before, lines on the map and good feelings won't put fires out in a eucalypt forest. It will run and run and run. That's why we're so grateful for the work of our forest firefighters and the huge capability and experience that they bring. That's why I think it's imperative for the Greens in this country to understand that locking things up doesn't protect it - it simply changes a legislative arrangement. The thing that protects it is people who care about the forests and have the ability to take action when a fire starts.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, minister, here's the fact. Last year, the government gave over \$12 million in subsidies to this company just to keep it afloat and so that it could pretend it had a \$1.8 million cash surplus. The truth is, native forestry in Tasmania has only existed for decades on the taxpayers' money. It's been on the teat for decades and it still is today. That money should be going directly into fuel reduction burns, keeping fire roads open, supporting the 100 forest fire workers who are currently working for the company but should be working for the state.

Do you agree that, whether or not native forestry occurs in Tasmania, the skills are there, the money is there, and if there is a will from the government, there is the capacity to do everything that currently happens within native -

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, the skills -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Can I finish my sentence? Within the company, that should be just taken over to the government and run by the government - which wouldn't be at a loss, which it currently is.

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, when they shut down native forestry in Victoria, it has already cost the state \$1.5 billion.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - That's because of paying out to sawmillers, and multiple payouts.

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**Mr ELLIS** - So, that is your plan? That is your plan, Dr Woodruff?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I'm talking about what your plan is, to keep Tasmanians safe with the \$12 million of money.

**CHAIR** - Order. Can we have the answer, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - My plan is to continue to deliver sustainable forestry. And because, Dr Woodruff, the community service obligation to STT is a pittance compared to what it would cost the taxpayer if it was paid through the state agencies. STT is profitable, it has been for eight years, and manages the land for multiple uses and multiple purposes. I can guarantee you, Dr Woodruff, that if you shut down native forestry, there won't be the skills, there won't be the money. These are the consequences of actions.

I know that you want to think that you can just appease inner-city Sydney and Melbourne in areas that they don't understand and that everything will be okay. But your community down the Huon is one of the most bushfire at-risk places where our forest firefighters work. My community in the north-west is the same. We have relied on our forest firefighters for generations, because they have the skills, the equipment and the business model that helps to pay for the firefighting in one of the most bushfire-prone places on Earth.

Magic fairy dust isn't going to do that, Dr Woodruff.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - How many firefighters and bulldozer operators that currently work for the company, how many of them do you think \$12 million in subsidies would buy? Do you recognise that this is a choice you're making to fund the destruction of native forest habitat that's required for threatened and critically endangered species instead of putting that into restoring forests and making them more fire-safe?

**Mr ELLIS** - We manage the forest in a way that actually reduces bushfire risk.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It increases bushfire risk; it dries them out.

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, it reduces bushfire risk across the landscape - that's well understood - and then provides the capability to do that. STT provides community service obligations across a whole range of areas - fuel reduction, bush firefighting, roading, access for apiary, and a whole range of recreational activities and research.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Great, and long may it continue. You don't need to trash forests that will drive species to extinction to do all that stuff that Tasmanians are already paying for. We pay for it to happen. Just keep it going. Just keep it going.

**Mr ELLIS** - You are in the process of trying to shut it down, Dr Woodruff, and yet 'long may it continue'. Well, I can tell you how long may it continue. If the federal Labor government didn't do a deal with the Greens to shut Tasmania down -

**CHAIR** - Order. Order. Excuse me, I'm speaking. That means nobody else speaks. We will move on to the next question. Mr Garland.

**Mr GARLAND** - Thank you. What formal consideration has been given to the Central Coast Council's request for a ban on logging in the Dial Range?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Garland. I met with the Central Coast Council in the last week or two, and appreciated their advocacy and their approach. As I mentioned then, and as I mentioned on Tuesday, forestry, mining and public recreation have coexisted successfully in the Dial Range. Indeed, forestry operators in the Dial Range are believed to have been operating in that area since about the mid-1800s. There are, in fact, tramways in the Dial Range, and the report into the Dial Range Management Plan notes that the tramway formations remain, but there's little evidence of the early forestry operations today. I think that's a real credit to the work of our forebears in forestry and the way that they manage the land. It is often noted how beautiful some of these forests are that have been planted and restored by our foresters.

We've been receiving feedback from the council. In total, the Dial Range area is about nearly 6000 hectares. Sustainable Timber Tasmania is responsible for the management of a small section, about 300 hectares, of permanent timber production zone land to the far south of the area. That equates to about 5 per cent of the total forest area, or the total area overall, and any forest activity supports the multiple-use value of the Dial Range area for the local community and the economy.

We've got a strong track record of mixed-use, including, I know, the discussion around mountain biking. STT and mountain biking have worked successfully across a range of different areas - the Blue Derby Wild projects, of course, the Wild Mersey operates in and around forestry land and, of course, the Maydena Bike Park.

I will pass to the team at STT to talk through further about consultation and that part of the state.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Yes, we have been in consultation with the Central Coast Council on a number of occasions, but I will ask my colleagues to give you a more detailed answer.

**Ms WEEDING** - In terms of broad engagement, we've been engaging with Central Coast Council and other stakeholders around coupes in the Dial Range for quite some time now. We've received their input as part of that consultation process, and appreciate that they've made us a direct request to the minister, which the minister has responded to.

**Mr GARLAND** - Has the value of the Dial report been read and considered in the context of their request, and will there be any opportunity to engage and consult with the community, or are we tied to a decision made 12 years ago with absolutely no room for movement?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Garland. I have been briefed on the value of the Dial report. One of the things that we'd note is that a diverse regional economy is the best pathway; it's forestry and tourism rather than forestry or tourism. That leads to the best outcomes for our community. Certainly the north-west coast and central coast in particular has a proud forestry industry and it's important that people are supported to go about their lawful business.

You're right, this area was agreed. Even after the TFA, which locked up hundreds of thousands of hectares across the state, this area was agreed -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - High conservation-value forests.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, much of its regrowth, Dr Woodruff -

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**Mr GARLAND** - Minister, is there -

**Mr ELLIS** - This area was actually agreed, even in that process, to be included as part of the harvesting schedule. I think it's important to note that our foresters have given up significant lands. This is an area that has been agreed for harvesting and there are many people in our community, Mr Garland, who rely on being able to work in the bush, sustainably manage our forests, and do so in a mixed way that also supports other benefits.

**Mr GARLAND** - Can I take it from that there's no room for movement, then, to respect the wishes of the community?

**Mr ELLIS** - There's many in our community who support forestry, Mr Garland.

**Mr GARLAND** - I know that, but there's a lot who don't in that area there. There's bushwalkers, there's mountain bike riders, there's old people. I was there on a Sunday morning and the place was busy for the three hours I was there. They had motorbike riders and bike riders, and the overwhelming feeling from the council and others in their community is that you should be stepping away from that and respecting their wishes.

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr Garland, I mentioned before that forestry and tourism access are complementary in many ways. Many of our mountain bikers -

**Mr GARLAND** - Many would disagree with that, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - They may do, but the most famous mountain biking that happens in Tasmania happens in areas of forestry. In a mixed, diverse regional economy, much of the road access that's provided for many of these operations is on forestry roads.

**Mr GARLAND** - They come here for our forests to ride amongst them, not to see them knocked down and burned alongside. That's the difference.

**CHAIR** - We'll move to the next question from Mr George.

**Mr GEORGE** - Thank you, Chair. Let's hope I can get something; I'd like a reasonably calm, rational response to this if possible.

**CHAIR** - So would I.

**Mr GEORGE** - The minister says it is well understood that native forest logging reduces the risk of bushfires. I wonder if he would respond to the position of the distinguished professor, David Lindenmayer, who quotes a lot of peer-reviewed studies that show that logging increases fire severity and there's a number of reasons for this. Removing mature trees leaves large amounts of debris and slash. This material dries quickly and acts as fuel, making forests more flammable. Younger regrowth forests burn more intensely. These impacts are compounded by climate change, which we all know we're suffering at the moment. He talks in his papers about the fact that logging operations are in fact unsustainable for a whole bunch of different reasons, not only for timber supply but for public safety and ecological resilience.

Here is a professor who's written more than 1000 scientific papers, 49 books and has shaped international policy on forestry debate, so how can you claim that native forest logging

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and the industry is providing safety against forest fires, when clearly it's actually increasing the danger of forest fires?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr George. There is a number of countervailing views in the scientific community, particularly in support of native forestry and the important impact it has on protecting the community and the forest from fire. I will pass to the team at STT to talk through some more of that expert advice.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, Dr George. I'm well aware of Professor Lindenmayer's views in relation to this.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's not Dr George, by the way, it's Mr George.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Oh, sorry.

**Mr GEORGE** - I didn't even make it to university so I can't be a doctor, but thank you.

**Mr de FEGELY** - As far as I'm aware he hasn't done any field trials so it's a theory.

We would love to remove more of that slash as much as we can without removing coarse woody debris or depleting the nutrient cycle in in our forest so that we can protect it. We know that at a localised level you'll get an increase in fire behaviour, but at a landscape level there's no difference. The late Associate Professor Kevin Tolhurst was at pains to explain this and he's written papers around it.

Forestry Australia has also reviewed Dr Lindenmayer's paper and don't agree. I don't know of any frontline operational foresters who agree with his view and they're the ones out there putting their lives on the ground. I've asked plenty of them if we've got it wrong and the answer is no.

In my opinion, actively managing our forest is the way to protect them in future because we have people looking and learning every day in our forests for different things.

Our greatest challenge - and this drives me - is that we have 8 billion people living on our planet who deserve three meals a day, to be adequately clothed and adequately housed. We're not doing that today. We all have to play a part in how we do that. Having a mixture of production systems - our system is done with the greatest amount of care and planning. We aim to have a production system that has plenty of wildlife around it, and we admit that; that's the point. What we're trying to do is create forests that have lots of wildlife and lots of biodiversity.

We go out there every day trying not to harm them. That's why we surveyed 30,000 hectares of forest for wedge-tailed eagles and why we know we've got 790 wedge-tailed eagle nests, why we found more giant trees. We're continuing to look in our forests to find these things.

In answer to an earlier question, if we didn't have the income from the sale of log products, the cost of maintaining our firefighting force, just the people, would be more like \$15 million to \$16 million per year. The government pays us only \$12 million, so that works out at about \$14 a hectare, or just under \$15. The last time I could work out what New South

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Wales National Parks' cost factor was, it was about \$120. I'm sure you can do the maths on that as to what that cost would be.

The problem is not only the cost to the community to manage these areas, but you lose all the skills. As I mentioned earlier, we can't take somebody who hasn't been working in the forest to put them in there in an extreme situation to fight a bushfire if they're not trained to do it.

**Mr GEORGE** - So you're saying Professor Lindenmayer is wrong?

**Mr de FEGELY** - I disagree with him.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Minister and chair, I want to take you back to the decision overnight that has been made that Tasmanian jobs don't matter and Tasmania should be the whipping boy for the consciences of mainland politicians. I want to ask about a comment you made earlier, minister, that Australia is a net importer of timber, which is an appalling statistic when you think about national policies, where the rhetoric is all about a future made in Australia and grown in Australia.

The table that we're seated at is clearly native timber. Anybody opposed to native forest production should not be leaning on this table, or using it or enjoying it or looking at it - and this will be what's denied in the future.

I want to ask you to speak to the importance of the mix of forest types that are sustainably managed in Tasmania and how we can ensure that value continues to be enjoyed by Tasmanians while at the same time being cared for responsibly as good environmental stewards.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Ferguson. You're right, the fact that we are a net importer of timber in this country is crazy. We have the third most forest per capita of any nation on Earth and yet we're importing timber. It would be different if it wasn't such a wonderful product, but we have to remember that timber sequesters carbon naturally. It is delivering all sorts of environmental outcomes. It's the thing we look to when we say we're going to phase out single-use plastics. We look to forest products when we want to build homes, when we want to do things in a way that is architecturally beautiful or just sustainable and affordable.

For the federal government to talk about a future made in Australia and then today be making decisions that put one of our key manufacturing sectors at risk is simply irresponsible. We know that if there are no RFAs there is no native forestry. We will look through the detail of this, but to knock out from the very base the foundation stone of the way we manage forests sustainably in this state and many parts of the country is deeply irresponsible.

That's what happens when you make dodgy deals with the Greens. The Labor Party will need to be taking a good, long, hard look at themselves and how they let this happen.

In terms of that mix, Mr Ferguson, you're exactly right. We need that right mix between native forests, between plantation and then our comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system - our permanent native forest estate policy that we have in this state that helps us to ensure that the forest that we're conserving is actually being conserved, while we're able to create jobs in other parts of our production forest. The timber that we use in our homes will often come from native forestry. The beautiful Tasmanian special species that I know almost

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every Tasmanian you talk to is absolutely so proud of, Tasmanians need to know that comes from sustainably managed native forests. People love it all around the world, whether it's wooden boats, architectural features, or some of the amazing craftworks that Tasmanian craftspeople have been putting in homes around Australia and across the world for generations.

On the other side of things, our plantations are helping to provide an income for small-scale farmers and improve animal husbandry and other opportunities there, to our industrial growers that make sure that there's enough fibre for the things that we need in product classes as broad as paper to chipboard to a whole range of other important areas. It's why we need a diverse forest sector. That's what we have in Tasmania at the moment. That's what we won't have if we shut down native forestry and if there are no RFAs in this country then there is no native forest sector.

That is what the federal Labor government is potentially putting at risk. So, we will be working closely with the industry, with unions, with businesses to understand exactly what has been decided in this deal with the Greens.

**Dr BROAD** - Lost time injury frequency rate for contractors was 15.01, I think, in 2024-25, well above the target of less than or equal to 10, and significantly worse than employees at STT. What specific actions are being taken to address this issue amongst the contractors and why do you think this is happening?

**Mr de FEGELY** - Safety is a critical issue for us and, as a board, it is the first report we look at every board meeting as to how safety is performing and what the trends are. Our contracting workforce has been a challenge in terms of safety, but we have been working very hard on it. Unfortunately, some accidents have happened, not necessarily all of them in the forest, which I'm sure you're aware of. We do take it very seriously. We have a dedicated team led by Theresa Weller up in the north-west, who I'm sure you know, and we work on that every day. I will hand over to the acting CEO who might like to give you a bit more detail on that.

**Mr HICKEY** - For quite some time we have had a very intensive program with our contractors around safety in the leading safety circle. It is a program which has been part of our staff processes for some 20-odd years now and we made a decision a couple of years ago to extend that to our contractors. That involved closer working relationships with the contractors around safety. These initiatives have improved the processes and the activities on site and led to better outcomes for safety than we had in previous years. So, while we missed the target this year, there were a couple of significant incidents in relation to that, but most of them were minor incidents, we continue to work closely with the contractors on their safety through forest operation safety plans, through learnings from accidents and incidents and those sorts of things to assist them to perform and to make their worksite safer every day.

**Dr BROAD** - Are contractors under significant financial pressures at the moment?

**Mr HICKEY** - We've had a downturn in production and I think it would be fair to say that there are some contractors who are finding it financially difficult.

**Dr BROAD** - There were a number of Victorian contractors who came into Tasmania and began operating. Are they still in Tasmania or have they exited Tasmania? If they have, why do you think they've exited Tasmania?

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**Mr HICKEY** - There was one contractor from Victoria who was successful in a transport tender with us two to three years ago. They do not operate here now. As to the reasons that they left, that's really a matter for them. They were operating with sufficient quotas and things. That was a decision that they made, I think, in managing from Victoria.

**Dr BROAD** - Do you think that STT is paying contractors at a level that allows them to continue to operate?

**Mr HICKEY** - In terms of the rates that we pay contractors, they are negotiated with the contractor and it's an offer-acceptance agreement that forms part of the contract. So those rates aren't prescribed by STT. They're negotiated with the contractors and would be acceptable to the contractor in entering the contract.

**CHAIR** - Final question, and then we will get to Dr Woodruff.

**Dr BROAD** - Are those contractor rates also based on a production model the STT has?

**Mr HICKEY** - They're based on a model the contractor puts forward. We have a similar model, which we compare, and there is a negotiation to establish the rates.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Chair, you mentioned in your opening remarks that your company found one giant tree this year.

**Mr de FEGELY** - One additional one.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - One employee from the Wilderness Society who's in the room with us now has submitted data for over 60 giant trees this year alone - extra giant trees. Can you explain that difference and why your employees only found one when citizen scientists have found more than 60 on their own?

**Mr de FEGELY** - No, I can't personally because I'm not in operations. I will ask my colleagues as to understanding that. We have a definition of what a 'giant tree' is and where we measure them, so there could well be a difference in how they're actually assessing them.

Suzette, do you have a view?

**Ms WEEDING** - It depends on where they're looking and where they're evaluating in terms of undertaking those assessments. It's certainly a standard process that we undertake in evaluating trees as production coupes are being evaluated. My assumption would be that they're probably getting ahead of us in terms of looking at our three-year plan and going out and assessing those coupes ahead of time. We welcome that information. We absolutely take into consideration the information. We will go out and further validate information that we receive in relation to giant trees and confirm them or otherwise, as part of that process.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Through you, minister. Will you get back to the person who provided that information with the results of your assessment?

**Ms WEEDING** - We can do if they request it. Usually, it's sent to us as an FYI-sort of thing; the information that we receive. Certainly, we maintain a register of giant trees on our estate and we undertake that evaluation process.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, the current high-quality sawlog contracts expire in 2027 and as a result of decades of overlogging there is a predicted supply cliff fall at that time. It's an open secret that discussions are occurring to lock in native forest high-quality sawlog contracts to 2040 - and with the RFA exemptions now ending, there's a high risk that -

**Mr ELLIS** - An 'open secret'? We announced it in an election campaign. Far out.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, minister, I can't hear the question. Continue.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I will go back.

With the RFA exemptions now ending, there's a high risk that Tasmanian taxpayers would be liable for millions of dollars of contract payouts if contracts are signed but native forest logging is not viable because it wouldn't be getting approved by the new federal environment laws. Minister, will you pause any negotiations about extending contracts to protect taxpayers?

**Mr ELLIS** - There's a whole bunch of things that are wrong in your question, Dr Woodruff, and I'm happy to work through that.

On its face, the first one is the claim around transparency on this supply project. We have announced it at election campaigns. I've spoken openly about it. I mentioned it two days ago and we want to lock in certainty for our native forest sector. We've said that we're looking to do that out to 2040. We think that's a great opportunity and it's really important as well that it's noted that the reason there's a reduction in high-quality sawlogs in 2027 is because Labor and the Greens locked up a whole bunch of timber in the early 1990s, which is why they then went and planted -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Because Forestry Tasmania has been mismanaging forests for decades.

**Mr ELLIS** - plantation trees to then provide the high-quality sawlog through that process. So it's a reduction based on deliberate government decisions that were made in the early 1990s under another Labor-Greens deal.

I think for the Tasmanian timber industry, it's part of the reason there is such concern about the decision that was made this morning because we've seen this movie before. We've seen communities dislocated, schools shut down, people thrown out of work, and businesses destroyed. It happened in the 1990s, it happened in the early 2010s, and I think there were a lot of people in our community who voted for Labor members on the basis that they thought their jobs were going to be safe with them. Now we're seeing you crowing about the shutdown of native forestry based on the deal that was signed this morning. So, in terms of -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Do you recognise the risk to taxpayers if you go ahead with signing contracts that may not be viable.

**Mr ELLIS** - Absolutely we recognise the risk. No, Dr Woodruff, this is an enormous risk to taxpayers. The decision that Mr Albanese has made with the Greens is an enormous risk to taxpayers. It's an enormous risk to business. It's an enormous risk to regional communities -

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - It's protecting our environment. Just to the question, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - and it will have a crazy outcome where we will need to import even more timber as a country because, if you shut down RFAs, you will shut down the native forest sector in this country. So, Dr Woodruff, absolutely there is a massive risk that's come from what you've just done.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Are you going to pause or stop the contract negotiations in this space?

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, we are going to be working through this process. We want to provide certainty to our timber industry and the regional communities that it supports. We will be working very closely with industry -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Make sure that \$300 million goes to workers -

**Mr ELLIS** - businesses. Oh, Dr Woodruff.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - and not to industries that have been getting paid out so many times.

**Mr ELLIS** - \$300 million of go away money. It is a disgrace, and it cost \$1.5 billion already to shut down the Victorian native forest sector.

**CHAIR** - Minister, we will go to Prof Razay, thank you.

**Prof RAZAY** - In Tasmania so many businesses are struggling; they require high-quality sawlogs. I have two questions here. My first is, what proportion are low-grade logs and what do we do with them, do they turn into chips? My second question is, our silvicultural regeneration from the 1970s, when are they going to be contributing to sawlog supply? I think that is important for the sustainability of our businesses in the future.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, Prof Razay, that's a really good question. We can give you a breakdown of high-quality, low-quality sawlogs, they're regarded in categories. But, the regrowth topic's a really important one. We have done some trials in our 1970s regrowth and those trials of trial thinning, and the log production from those has been very promising. We have sent those to our customers and they have felt that they met standards, which is wonderful to know. We're continuing to do that and look at how we might actively manage those regrowth forests and that is part of our future.

I can pass to the acting CEO to give you some more detail on the breakdown. Mind you, this last year has not been a good indicator; because of the housing downturn, everything's down.

**Mr HICKEY** - Professor, I will go back to 2023-24 as it's probably a more representative year. In terms of high-quality sawlog, there was about 108,000 cubic metres for that year. In terms of the low-quality sawlogs, which are category 2 and category 8 specifically, there were 73,000 of those for the year. We also sold in the order of 30,000 tonnes of peeler logs. Partly they are for supply to Ta Ann for turning into veneer, but also they were supplied into the pallet market. So, again, another low-grade sawlog. In addition to those we also supply poles for

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Hydro. We supplied Koppers with around about 3800 poles a year to support our electricity transmission around the state.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - You didn't answer the question about how much of it gets turned into woodchips.

**Mr HICKEY** - In terms of woodchips, it's about on average about 75 per cent.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Seventy-five per cent of ancient forest gets turned into woodchips. High conservation value forests, habitat for critically endangered species.

**Mr HICKEY** - Seventy-five per cent of all the wood we harvest.

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff, I understand you're interested in this.

**Mr ELLIS** - What's your house made of, Dr Woodruff? It probably doesn't sequester carbon.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Eighty-two per cent in the last year.

**Mr ELLIS** - Eighty-two per cent of it is what?

**CHAIR** - Order. Enough. Please, can we have a little respect for each other around the table.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, over a decade up until September 2020, the Sustainable Timber Tasmania website provided hunting access maps showing that the majority of the PTPZ public land that you managed was allowed to be hunted on. Why was this area suddenly reduced to just a fraction of what was previously available? Since then, for the past five years, there has been almost no improvement to access, even though, during this time it states on your website that you're working on new maps?

**Mr ELLIS** - This is certainly an important area. I think there's some good opportunities for us to work even more closely with some of the other public land managers to improve the hunting experience for people. We manage the land for multiple uses and there's a real Tasmanian way of life element to this. People have hunted on these lands for generations and there are ways in which to appropriately access that land, through a valid game licence or permit, firearms licence and permission to shoot from Sustainable Timber Tasmania. They're undertaking an operational review into recreational hunting with a focus on future areas and map accessibility. I will pass over to the team at STT to talk through further.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister. Great question because I mentioned earlier that the feral deer are a challenge, as all introduced species are. So, how do we go about managing that? I have some good experience in New South Wales of how they manage it, which I'm hoping we might be able to reproduce here. For example, the central west region, which is just west of Sydney, during peak periods they will record over 300 hunters a day logging on to hunt in state forest. That's a massive challenge and it is done through the game licencing authority.

I think there are lessons that we can pick up from there. There are also good lessons from New Zealand and how we would work with the Department of State Growth and NRE and others to ensure that we have a safe environment for hunters: how people know where people

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are, where our operations are, what is proficiency for hunters to ensure that animal welfare is maintained and to ensure that we have a process whereby it's managed and controlled, which I'm sure would be in your best interest.

Suzette, you know more detail of this than I do.

**Ms WEEDING** - I think it's part of the complexity of managing forests for multiple use with multiple users and we are finding more and more the demand on the forest from a whole range of users is increasing. I guess that's reflected in the areas that we currently have available for hunting on permanent timber production zone land and the maps that you would find on our website for that availability.

We are undertaking a review, as was indicated there, and it's an ongoing process. We've recently engaged with the NRE around some areas that they have identified or are in the process of identifying, as potential additional deer-hunting areas, particularly in the north-east, but some in the south, on some of their conservation tenures that allow for hunting to occur. Part of that is looking at the adjacent permanent timber production zone land that we manage and seeing where we can maintain some synergies and potentially provide larger areas in that space.

Part of our evaluation process is looking at - I mean, our forestry operations are obviously a key part of that, but - what other users are using those areas. We do have forestry right holders, we have lease licence holders across that land. It's a complex evaluation process as you might imagine. In addition we look at the natural and cultural values that are in those areas as well and how we manage those, for instance, the existence of wedge-tailed eagle nests and the like.

So, it's a complex process, but we are open and engaging in that space. We have 12 areas that we are currently evaluating, so we are working through that with NRE and we can hopefully come forward with some additional areas consistent with the government's indications.

**Mr Di FALCO** - You mentioned safety. Have there been any instances of safety incidents recorded involving members of the public, such as bushwalkers or forestry workers, due to recreational hunting on this land?

**Ms WEEDING** - None that I'm aware of.

**Mr Di FALCO** - So, basically, hunting is a pretty safe occupation or recreation that's not really much of a threat to the public?

**Ms WEEDING** - No. I agree, and that's part of why we work through this process.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, shooting guns off at random, people could be walking around, nothing to - no problems there.

**Mr Di FALCO** - I live in a rural area and I hear gunfire all the time, and I have done since the beginning of the 1990s. That's never been an issue to me. I tell you what is an issue to me: the 2013 big fires down at peninsula -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Chair, is this a statement from the member or a question?

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**Mr Di FALCO** - No, well you asked about - hang on, you asked -

**CHAIR** - Order, can we just let Mr Di Falco finish and then we will move quickly on to Mr Ferguson. Thank you.

**Mr Di FALCO** - You asked about fearmongering or genuine danger; in 2013, the Dunalley bushfires started 500 metres away from my front door. In 2014, another bushfire came over the top and almost reached my property -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Chair, this is not an answer to a question, with respect.

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff, please, can we let him finish, then we will move on to Mr Ferguson, but it is a statement, Mr Di Falco.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Okay. Last year's season I was at Ouse and I heard on the radio that there was a fire at Forcett as well. Then there was the Nugent fire. As soon the wind stopped blowing, my whole house was covered in [inaudible]. Those are credible dangers.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. We understand that. We're moving on to a question from Mr Ferguson.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Minister, I want to go on to the apiary industry and beekeepers. Lindsay Burke AM is a member of my electorate; he's an upstanding Tasmanian -

**Mr ELLIS** - And former firefighter, believe it or not. He's a man of many talents.

**Mr FERGUSON** - He's a man who has given much to Tasmania, and his wife, Yun Soon [TBC], in establishing their apiary business. He's one of many and often represents the sector. Noting that there's been a cutting of red tape in a different portfolio, NRE, which has been welcomed by Mr Burke and his sector, what is STT specifically as an enterprise doing to support this important sector so that we can enjoy yet another product from our native forests: honey, not just domestically, but also for our exports?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you Mr Ferguson. I had some beautiful leatherwood honey on the oats yesterday morning.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I'm not aware of any good honey from plantation forests, but I'm open to the challenge.

**Mr ELLIS** - I think I'm going to disappoint you.

You're right, Tasmania's apiary sector is a vital part of our state's environment and economy. Sustainable Timber Tasmania is committed to supporting its growth and its resilience.

First and foremost, STT facilitates access to public production forests for beekeepers. These forests are home to key floral resources such as leatherwood, which underpins Tasmania's world-renowned honey industry. By maintaining and managing these areas, STT ensures that beekeepers can continue to access these areas essential to their livelihoods. Currently, STT leases 249 apiary sites to 61 local beekeepers and manages approximately

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139,000 hectares of leatherwood resource, a bit less than 13 per cent of the total accessible leatherwood resource across the state.

In addition to access, STT is investing in infrastructure improvements. This includes maintaining roads and tracks that allow beekeepers to reach remote sites safely and efficiently, and ensuring apiary sites are managed in a way that supports long-term sustainability.

Technology also plays a key role. STT is working with industry partners to explore digital mapping and monitoring tools that help identify and manage floral resources more efficiently and effectively. These innovations include improved planning, reduced conflicts over site use and ensure that apiary resources are managed in line with broader forest management objectives.

Community engagement is another important aspect and Sustainable Timber Tasmania consults regularly with the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association and individual apiarists to ensure their needs are understood and incorporated into forest management plans. This collaborative approach builds trust and ensures that apiary operations can coexist with other forest uses.

Together, these measures - access, infrastructure, technology and collaboration - demonstrate STT's commitment to supporting the apiary sector by protecting floral resources, improving site management and embracing innovation, they are helping to ensure that Tasmania's honey industry remains strong and sustainable.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister. I will pass to Suzette; but obviously, Mr Ferguson, as I mentioned earlier, we have about 249 apiary sites, we support about 8000 hives producing around 220,000 kilograms of honey, which we assess is around about \$4 million worth of value to the Tasmanian community. Suzette, would you like to make some comments?

**Ms WEEDING** - Thank you for the question. We work collaboratively with the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association and beekeepers in and around - in relation to our harvesting operations, but also, more generally, in relation to our land management activities. In 2024, in addition to what the minister has already spoken about, which I won't repeat, we reissued the apiarists with new 10-year licences as well, so they have that surety in terms of the sites that they're managing and the resources they have available to be able to continue their very important industry.

**Dr BROAD** - You would be aware of this document that I have from Hamilton Calvert Advisory, who are chartered accountants, forensic insolvency and turnaround small business specialists, that reviewed a contractor's arrangements with Sustainable Timber Tasmania. Part of the issue talked about the negotiation with volumes and pricing. This advisory says:

We note that the amounts provided are based on a model that returns to a 70,000 tonne whole wood target volume. However, it is critical to acknowledge that the business was reduced to 50,000 tonnes in October 2023 without corresponding adjustment to rates.

Why haven't you adjusted your rates to take into account the reduced volumes that weren't in your cost model?

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**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, Dr Broad. I'll ask our Acting CEO to make a comment around that.

**Mr HICKEY** - Dr Broad, that was an oversight, to start, in terms of the reduction of the volume from 70 to 50, which wasn't recognised either by the contractor or my staff for approximately 12 months. In relation to that oversight, we have provided an additional payment to the contractor, based on what was calculated as an interim rate and what was the rate applied. That's already been paid to them in compensation for that difference.

There was a process in place, finally, to try to establish - because it concerns one component of that contractor's operations - to establish the rates for those. In the end, we couldn't agree on those, so that component of the contractor's operations has been suspended, with their agreement.

**Dr BROAD** - Sorry, if you could clarify what component that is, in your answer to this as well. This document also says:

Certainty in scheduling and volume is essential if the business is to continue investing in specialist equipment and retaining critical skills. Now, as the only cable logging operator in the state, the expectation that this business should continue to shoulder the risk of reduced volumes, alongside environmental constraints, market volatility and scheduling changes beyond its control, is prejudicial to the business, unsustainable and untenable. So, how can this business survive?

**Mr HICKEY** - To correct you, Dr Broad, it is not the only cable operation in Tasmania. We have one other, which operates in the native sector, and there are others in other parts of the industry. I'm sorry, I missed the rest of your question.

**Dr BROAD** - Well, this document says, 'How can this business survive?' It says as well:

The expectation that this business should continue to shoulder full risk of reduced volumes, alongside environmental constraints, market volatility and scheduling changes beyond its control, is prejudicial to the business, unsustainable and untenable.

So, how can this business survive?

**Mr HICKEY** - There's always a choice in entering into these contracts. The contract was entered into in 2022. There was no coercion on the contractor to enter into the contract that was offered. It has those conditions. Those conditions have been in all our contracts for many, many years.

We have, in good faith, tried to negotiate with the contractor for a successful outcome for the cable component. We haven't been able to do that. We have successfully negotiated with them for a ground-based component, which they are operating, and we accepted their rates. The cable remains suspended. They're not incurring costs on that operation.

**Dr BROAD** - This document also says:

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Furthermore, it must be stated unequivocally that the income currently being received does not cover fixed costs, let alone variable costs.

Do you think, in the current contract that you've just mentioned, that this has been rectified?

**Mr HICKEY** - We've agreed with the contractor for a rate they specified, which we were happy to accept.

**Dr BROAD** - When was that?

**Mr HICKEY** - July. It's now operating - one part of the contract, not the full contract - at the rates which the contractor offered and we were comfortable to accept.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, you've been trying to say two things to the committee today at the same time. You've been saying that we need to be worried about timber imports coming in from elsewhere, and you're also saying that native forestry makes all these products that we use in Tasmania every day. In reality, Tasmania exports the majority of its native forest products. We export hundreds of thousands of tonnes of woodchips overseas and we give thousands of cubic metres of peeler logs to companies like Ta Ann, who leave them to rot in their yards.

Can you tell us, in all honesty, what the amount of timber from native forests in Tasmania is that is being exported?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Dr Woodruff. In Tasmania we're fortunate, we are actually a net exporter of timber. That's part of the reason why we are so concerned that federal government intervention could make Tasmania like the rest of the country, where we are importing our timber products to meet timber demand. That's the thing that you and the other Greens don't seem to understand: you won't stop demand for timber, because people love and value timber. They understand it's sustainable, it's renewable, it captures carbon naturally, and it can be grown right here, it can be processed right here. We have a strong future -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - To the question.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, your question was about exporting, we're a net exporter of timber in Tasmania, and that's a good thing.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could you give me the number, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - Happy to follow up. Obviously, STT is a part of our timber industry, it's less than 50 per cent, and we don't have our forest policy people here at the table with us.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Can the company tell us what percentage is exported?

**Mr ELLIS** - Look, happy to pass to STT.

**Mr de FEGELY** - From our operations?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Yes.

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**Mr de FEGELY** - Yes, that's all, because we can't talk for the private sector.

**Mr HICKEY** - The most obvious one is the woodchips. Last year it was around 750,000 tonnes. We sell all our wood to local processors. They source the markets. In terms of whether any other product gets exported, that's entirely a business decision for our customer.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you. You have confirmed that 82 per cent, last year, of the company's native forest timbers were exported as woodchips?

**Mr HICKEY** - Not just the native forest, the 748 contains plantation logs as well.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Okay. What percentage of production is high-quality sawlogs? I have the figure of 1 per cent, could you correct that or tell me another one, if that's not correct?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm happy to pass to the team from STT. It is important to note that fibre has a range of different uses; a lot of it's used in our homes. As you plan to phase out single-use plastics, I'm not sure how you plan to do that, other than timber products, and those timber products go through the cycle as woodchips. That's the amazing thing about trees is they can be used for a whole range of different purposes. I will pass to the team from STT to talk through the breakdown, if it's available.

**Mr HICKEY** - Sure. So, 130,000 cubic metres of high-quality sawlogs were sold this year, nearly 200,000 cubic metres in total sawlogs.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Can you just give me the percentage of product that represents?

**Ms WEEDING** - We don't have that information.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could I take that on notice, please?

**Ms WEEDING** - I'm sure you could calculate it based on the annual report.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could I take it on notice so you could provide me with the correct figures, in case I make a mistake?

**Mr HICKEY** - If you look at our annual report, the figures are there.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could you show it in the annual report, please?

**Mr HICKEY** - It's a public document.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Okay, so could you read it out to the committee? What percentage of high-quality sawlog timbers does the amount that you read -

**Mr HICKEY** - I read the figures. There's no percentage there, but the figures of each of the products that we sold are there for everybody to see.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Are you trying to hide something?

**Mr HICKEY** - I'm inviting you, Dr Woodruff, to make the calculations yourself.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could you just provide the percentage to the committee so that people who are on the broadcast can understand what it is? Can you just provide it for people who are on the broadcast, so they don't have to get their own calculator out. A simple question: you're the company, what proportion is high-quality sawlogs?

**Mr HICKEY** - Nearly 200,000 of our total product was sawlogs.

**CHAIR** - We will move on.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - You're still not answering the question.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's not 1 per cent.

**Mr GARLAND** - STT's communication and stakeholder engagement policy states that STT will obtain valuable feedback and input which will be considered in decision-making. Your ministerial charter also requires you to build and maintain trust and support by acting in a socially responsible manner.

Over 100 people have registered as stakeholders with STT for the Dial Range coupe. Hundreds more have spoken against these logging plans, and 73 per cent of stakeholders interviewed for the Value of the Dial Range report believe that forestry cannot coexist in the Dial Range. The Central Coast Council has taken the unprecedented step to request logging be banned in the Dial.

My question to STT, through the minister, is, how is this demonstration of opposition featuring in your decision-making around whether to continue to log in this area and what are the countervailing considerations, if any?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will pass to the team from STT, but, as I mentioned before, this was an area that was agreed to be on the harvest schedule even after the Labor-Greens lock-ups of 2012 or so. It is important that the parliament's decision is recognised. I will pass to the team from STT about community engagement.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister, and I will pass to Ms Weeding for a comment.

We are working with the coupes that were provided to us from the Tasmanian Forest Agreement, which was settled under a previous government, and we have had the commitment via our minister and via our charter that they are the coupes that we have to work with. We are always happy to look around, but we have commitments to industry and to jobs in Tasmania to ensure that we maintain supply and that's in legislation. So, we don't have a lot of opportunities to move around in different places.

The minister, to his credit, opened up FPPF for comment a bit over 12 months ago, prior to the 2024 election. No-one supported him to look at that where there is regrowth that could have swapped some of those coupes. Unfortunately, that support didn't happen but if people want to produce areas that can replace those coupes, as chair, we'll certainly look at them. But there is a process which has to come through both Houses of parliament to ensure that that can occur. We do not have a lot of flexibility, I'm sorry to say, but we don't have a lot of flexibility.

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**Mr GEORGE** - I think whether you're green, red or blue in this state or, increasingly, independent, the majority of Tasmanians are actually focused on and concerned about the logging of old-growth forests - those primary forests that have never been logged before. I'm wondering if you can tell me what percentage of forests in the current three-year plan will be old growth?

**Mr ELLIS** - Probably worth mentioning as well, Mr George, that that's not quite right. Old growth is different to virgin forests and -

**Mr GEORGE** - Maybe you could split it into the two for me then?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, and because forestry happens on such a huge amount of our landscape it's such a credit to our foresters that people think that harvested areas are actually virgin forest. I think that is a real credit to our foresters in times gone by and continue to operate.

Currently, Tasmania contains 1.2 million hectares of RFA-mapped old-growth forest. Eight per cent of old-growth is on permanent timber production zone land managed by Sustainable Timber Tasmania. Of this, 4 per cent, or less than 26,200 hectares, is available for harvest in provisional coupes. In 2024-25, 360 hectares of old-growth was partially harvested on permanent timber production zone land. Eighty-five per cent of Tasmania's old-growth is in the comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system that I spoke about before. I will pass to the team from STT if there's anything further.

**Ms WEEDING** - It is a great question. One of the things to be aware of in our three-year plan process is that there is what we term 'provisional coupes,' so they're much larger than the areas that we will actually harvest at the end of the day. It's an area identified that we may harvest over the next three years. The three-year plan is, essentially, a view of three years, but it's updated annually and we work through that process.

We don't have a figure specifically on, I guess, the amount of old-growth in those particular coupes, but recognising that we work through quite a comprehensive system evaluation of each of those coupes when they come onto our production schedule - even before that - part of our planning schedule, we work through an evaluation. We look at the values in those coupes and old-growth and mature forests are a key consideration in that space. We work through, I guess, our policies, our procedures, the requirements of the forest practices system to come up with the final harvest area from which we will harvest, which will be much less than the actual provisional coupe area.

**Mr GEORGE** - I think you should be able to provide some sort of guidance about the percentage? I mean, of what you have planned and of the complete areas you're talking about and then the areas that you would plan to log. It's a major focus of almost everyone I talk to.

**Ms WEEDING** - I think one of the key components to it - as has been run through in terms of the figures - is what we actually harvested. The areas that we harvested in the last financial year which, as the minister mentioned, it was partially harvested - 360 hectares. It's a fairly small proportion of old growth that is actually harvested, at the end of the day.

**Mr GEORGE** - Looking forward over three years?

**Ms WEEDING** - I don't have that number.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - Conveniently, don't have numbers.

**Mr ELLIS** - You're not listening to the answer.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It's interesting for a company that should be on top of the figures.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Minister and Mr de Fegely, the report talks about harvest and regeneration. The report says:

We are committed to ensuring that harvested areas are regenerated or reestablished so forests can regrow for future generations. In 2024-25, harvesting operations occurred on less than 1 per cent of the land we manage.

It goes on to talk about some of those statistics. In the same page or the next page, it deals with a couple of other statistics: 100 million locally sourced native seeds sown, and a statistic that we're not hearing in the news - 99.5 per cent regeneration success rate achieved.

The question goes to asking how you will inform the committee of how STT has performed those outcomes, and how can STT, in partnership with government and its pro-forestry minister, do a stronger job of helping the community and even federal politicians to understand the success of regrowth in our native forests and regeneration?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Ferguson. I think it is timely. Obviously, Mr George, I think it's an opportunity to reconsider regarding the quality of the regenerative work that's done.

People often mistake regrown forests, at whatever stage they are - mature, old growth, regrowth - for virgin forest. We have extraordinary capabilities in terms of regeneration here in Tasmania, and that's a real strength. STT has an excellent record in ensuring that our forests regenerate after harvesting, and the work is central to the commitment to sustainable forest management. In 2024-25, STT harvested less than 1 per cent of the land it manages for wood production, covering approximately 5804 hectares.

Every hectare is regenerated, either through reseeded, planting, or natural regeneration methods, to ensure forests return to production condition. The results speak for themselves. As you mentioned, Mr Ferguson, in 2024-25 STT sowed over 100 million native seeds across harvested areas - 100 million - and achieved a 99.5 per cent regeneration success in its assessed sites. This is clear demonstration of their commitment to sustainable forestry and ecological resilience.

In short, STT has performed strongly in regrowth and regeneration. The work ensures harvested forests are returned to productive, healthy conditions, supporting both the environment and the industries and communities that rely on them. It's a clear demonstration of Tasmania's leadership in sustainable forestry, as well. Importantly, regeneration is not just about trees; it's about restoring healthy ecosystems. STT invests in monitoring soil health, biodiversity, habitat values, and to ensure regrown forests support wildlife and maintain ecological balance.

Tasmanians can have confidence that STT's forestry activity is carried out to the highest standards, including its commitment to regrowth and regeneration.

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I will pass to Mr de Fegely.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Chair, if I may, before the question or the answer passes across, the question also was how we can do a stronger job of the communications here? Clearly, federal politicians, some state politicians, and a whole lot of confused mainland voters, don't know this. How can we get the message through?

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, Mr Ferguson. It's a great question. Unfortunately, the very good example of this was a comment by Dr Woodruff that our forests are being destroyed. Well, if you pick up any dictionary, you can find out that 'destroy' or 'destruction' means gone - lost forever.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - That's true. That's exactly what I meant.

**Mr de FEGELY** - That's not the case, Dr Woodruff, that's not the case. Our forests still exist and they still stand. Harvesting changes a forest - it changes the structure, but it does not destroy them. What really destroys them are out-of-control wildfires, and they were destroyed all over the country following the Black Summer. We are working on developing a process around our communications to improve that so that people understand the broad range of things we actually do to manage our estate. If we did not have the income from log sales and wood products, then the cost to this state to manage PTPZ alone would probably be well over \$100 million a year - to do it well and to do it properly. I'm sorry, Dr Woodruff, I realise -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - You don't stand on your own two feet.

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff, can we -

**Mr de FEGELY** - Dr Woodruff, sorry, can you show some respect, please? I'm answering a question from Mr Ferguson. Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Yes, if you continue to answer the question and address it to Mr Ferguson.

**Mr de FEGELY** - As I mentioned, we are working on our communications to help people to understand. As was mentioned earlier, forestry is complex, so there are lots of variables, lots of things. Humans understand complicated things better than they do complex things. Where you have lots of variables, they're not particularly difficult to understand, but how they interact is. Our forests have many variables that go into making them work and the dynamics that they have in them, and we try to manage all of them. It is not always easy to do, but we have computer systems now that allow us to do that, to do our planning.

I'll hand over to Suzette, but I think our results stand for themselves. Our forest estate is still there and still intact, and it's continuing to grow, which it will do. Thank you.

**Ms WEEDING** - Thanks for your question. In terms of engagement and communications, it is clearly an integral part of what our organisation undertakes.

This past year we launched our Take a Closer Look campaign, where we've encouraged stakeholders to actively engage in and around our operation on the sorts of things that we do, and to ask questions. The portal that we have set up, which is still available on our website or

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through our website links, enables stakeholders to ask questions about our particular activities, and we provide responses to those questions.

It's been part of our broader collaborative stakeholder campaign around building trust and strengthening relationships, enhancing that transparency, which is really important in terms of what we do, and promoting a deeper understanding of what it is we do and why we do it, how we manage the forests, and all the various things that we undertake on permanent timber production zone land, of which harvesting is a small but very important portion of it. We manage 800,000 hectares. There's a lot of land out there that's managed for a whole range of uses. It's something that we need to continue to promote, and we will continue, through our communications campaigns.

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr Ferguson, probably on the specifics of your question at the back end there, I believe Tasmanians do understand forestry really well, which is encouraging. That's why we often see strong support for forestry supporters at elections. In inner-city Sydney and Melbourne, it is a challenge. I often reflect that *Clarkson's Farm* has done a lot to educate people about farming. I wonder whether something like a 'Clarkson's Forestry' or something like that might be helpful. As for Tasmanian politicians who have sold out forestry, I think they do understand, but I think this is a cynical decision based on trying to play up to inner-city Melbourne and Sydney.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Chair, this has been an already very long answer from that side of the table to a Dorothy Dixier.

**Dr BROAD** - In August 2024, STT provided advice to government through the FFAP that the volume of Cat 4 and utility Huon pine in the stockpile was 320 cubic metres. What is the current volume of Cat 4 and utility sawlogs in the stockpile?

**Mr de FEGELY** - I'll ask my colleagues to answer that, thanks, Dr Broad.

**Ms WEEDING** - We have about 260 cubic metres of Category 4 and utility sawlog maintained in that stockpile.

**Dr BROAD** - When was the last time that Cat 4 and utility sawlogs were added to this stockpile?

**Ms WEEDING** - It's been some years. Three, four years, something in that realm.

**Dr BROAD** - Given the average yearly release of sawlogs from this stockpile, how many years' worth of supply of Cat 4 and utility sawlogs remain in the stockpile, as of today?

**Ms WEEDING** - To do the math, it's another percentage question, I think, from that side of things. In terms of the sales, we've had a number of small sales of resource from the stockpile in the last couple of years to local sawmillers. I'd have to do the numbers and come back to you on that one.

**Dr BROAD** - So, you have no idea of how many years' worth is left?

**Mr ELLIS** - I think that's a bit unnecessary, as far as verballing.

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**Ms WEEDING** - The important thing is it's upon request of those sawmillers, so it's not being released as such, it's available resource. We look at it on request from those local sawmillers and make it available through that mechanism. It's not a supply over a number of years, if that makes sense, in terms of a sustainable eking out of the wood resource. It's as they've requested it, we've made that resource available. It's generally related to particular projects or things that they want to obtain that resource for.

**Dr BROAD** - What is the total dollar amount earned from this stockpile sales by log category in 2024 and 2025?

**Ms WEEDING** - Just the category 4 and utility, in the order of \$67,000.

**Dr BROAD** - Do I have one more?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Dr BROAD** - In August 2024, STT advised the government that, despite the value of the stockpile being \$2.75 million, no documented management policy existed for this asset. Did any sales or policy rules exist for this asset? Has the policy for the stockpile management or sales been developed since that advice? If so, can the policies please be provided to the committee?

**Ms WEEDING** - No, there's been no change.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, yesterday polling confirmed that only 12 per cent of Tasmanians support native forest logging. Do you concede the industry does not have the confidence of the support of the community?

**Mr ELLIS** - Look, Dr Woodruff, I mean, Wilderness Society push polling - I don't hold a very high stock in it. If you do, that is your right, of course.

The Tasmanian people have been very clear at election after election there's strong support for the native forest sector in this state and consumer choice as well. We see the desire for Tasmanians to have Tasmanian timbers is huge and growing. We think that that's a clear demonstration of the support for the sector. Obviously, you can wave around all the Wilderness Society polling that you want as far as push polling, but I think the results speak for themselves. Tasmanians love Tasmanian timber. They support the people who work in the industry, and they want to make sure that the bush is looked after in the way that sustainable forest management does at a landscape scale.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It's interesting that you continue to live in a delusional bubble.

The Lonnvale area -

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, I don't know how much support you got at the last election, Dr Woodruff, but it wasn't 88 per cent.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - We got an increase, you didn't.

Minister, the Lonnvale area -

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**Mr ELLIS** - I'm sorry, Dr Woodruff, I think we had the biggest swing towards us.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - You didn't.

**Mr ELLIS** - Man, you're having a bad committee today, far out.

**CHAIR** - Order. Let her finish the question please.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - The Lonnvale area was listed as a swift parrot breeding area until 2012 when the overlay that designated that status mysteriously disappeared. The Forest Practices Authority was forced to intervene in 2021 after citizen scientists recorded swift parrots in these forests. Instead of reinstating that swift parrot important breeding area, the state's forestry company has approved new logging plans for the area. Did the company request that the swift parrot important breeding area not get reinstated because it was going to hurt the financial bottom line?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Woodruff, I will pass to the team from STT.

**Mr de FEGELY** - I will ask my colleagues, it is an operational question.

**Ms WEEDING** - I don't know if that's true in terms of the removal of the swift parrot important breeding area. I know it was proposed, but I don't believe it was ever put in place in that area.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I understand it was.

**Ms WEEDING** - Okay. Subsequently, it has been put forward as a swift parrot important breeding area and that's been evaluated by the state. In terms of the area itself, the adaptive management system of the forest practices system provides for management of values in the forest. That is what we apply in relation to our harvesting operations in those particular areas. It's probably more of a question for the Forest Practice Authority in terms of the specifics, but that's the process that we go through in terms of harvesting operations in that area.

Each of them is evaluated on a coupe by coupe basis. There is consultation that is undertaken subsequent to initial planning evaluation on those coupes in terms of assessing habitat and potential habitat values for not only swift parrot but a whole range of other species. That is a quite a comprehensive process - that evaluation, in terms of developing a forest practices plan, includes relevant consultation, as required by the forest practice system with the Forest Practices Authority who engage with other experts and as required.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - There's one coupe in that area, DNO23H, that included provisions for retaining swift parrot habitat. Can you tell me why hundreds of hollow-bearing trees over one metre in diameter were logged in that coupe, contrary to the Forest Practices Plan and what is the status of the ongoing compliance investigation from the regulator about that breach?

**Ms WEEDING** - I am not aware of that one.

**Mr HICKEY** - Is there an investigation?

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - I understand there is. Can you explain why so many hollow logs were clear-felled in that coupe?

**Ms WEEDING** - I am not aware of that investigation or that accusation being put to us or to the Forest Practice Authority.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Hundreds of hollow-bearing trees over one metre and you're not aware of this in the swift parrot breeding area? Can I put it on notice, please?

**Mr de FEGELY** - Yes, you can.

**Mr ELLIS** - Chair, just before we do, can I note as well our Chair, Mr de Fegely will have to head off at 1.00 p.m. but we're happy to answer questions for the rest of the committee. Everyone else will still be at the table, but just our chair.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister and chair, I share your deep concern on today's federal government announcement putting jobs and livelihoods at risk. I completely understand the emotional levels. Tasmanians in regional communities whose jobs, small businesses and family incomes depend on a stable forestry sector, let alone the bushfire risks. What concrete steps will you take to ensure that Canberra's decision doesn't come, once again, at the expense of regional Tasmanians' livelihoods and long-term economic security?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Di Falco, I really appreciate the sentiment there from you and I know that there are many people in your electorate of Lyons who would appreciate that as well. It's important that we have champions for people who don't necessarily have the loudest voices that aren't connected to the media class and that sort of stuff, people who are just going to work every day supporting their families and communities, so I appreciate the sentiment.

As far as government, we're strongly supportive of our forest sector. The RFA has been the underpinning for native forestry for decades. If there's no RFA, there's no native forest sector, and that means there's no jobs in it. We will be working closely with industry, business and workforce to understand exactly what is being proposed at a federal level. You can expect very strong advocacy from team Tasmania and I encourage everyone with an interest in this to be part of team Tasmania. This won't be just a Liberal thing or it won't just be a large company thing, it will be something that will be important for so many people - everyday mums and dads and people across this parliament - because forestry gives so much to this State of Tasmania. It has done for over a century and it's uncertain times.

People will remember, even just the mental health strain of what happened a little over a decade ago under the last Labor-Greens deal and the impact that that had on good people all around our state who suddenly had their lives upturned in ways that, hopefully, many of us can't even imagine.

I will pass to the team at STT. If there's anything that you can say that's appropriate, I understand there's limitations.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Obviously, we need to see more detail, Mr Di Falco, and I appreciate your sentiment. We are working with a natural resource and aiming to combine our operations naturally with conservation and production. We are at the forefront of that, therefore, we bear,

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probably, an unfair burden in relation to that. Very few people take the time to come out and have a look at some of our regrowth forests and you're most welcome to do that.

We will put through our team and the rest - and I agree with the minister, across government - through the departments, to understand what these new rules and regulations will mean. I have every confidence in our regulatory system, which the minister's already mentioned is probably one of the best in the world, certainly the best in Australia, and I've worked in every state, and our systems for management, mapping our forests, and the way in which we go about caring for them and protecting them.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Just a follow-up question. Can you assure us that it will be possible for our unique special timbers to continue to be available to our boat builders, furniture makers, wood-turners and musical instrument makers?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. This is the thing - a *Nitens* plantation is not going to make any of those things, and *Radiata* pine is the same. These special species are an important part of Tasmania's intangible cultural heritage. The way that the community flocks to the Wooden Boat Festival, I think is a demonstration of the overwhelming support. When Tasmanians give each other Christmas presents, they give each other Tasmanian timber, and particularly the species that you mentioned. These are often species that come from old forests, because they take a long time to grow. Then even to the extreme, Huon pine, which is only now a salvage resource and is something that we need to work extremely hard to find, that timber that's able to be taken away and milled.

We have an important overall picture for special species - we have a management plan and a special species working group that's important to work through. STT has been a long-term supplier of special species in the past, and as the model and the landscape that STT has to manage has changed, that has put a lot of that volume into different land parcels, things that are managed by Parks and others, but we do still have an important role to play.

I will pass to the team from STT to talk through special species.

**Ms WEEDING** - It's an important part of our ongoing resource base and obviously something we're very aware of, in terms of stakeholder interest in this space. We have recently been working quite collaboratively with special species stakeholders and are currently looking at a number of coupes to undertake a trial around individual selective special species harvesting in those operations. That will hopefully add to supply and availability of those important timbers.

**Mr GARLAND** - Through you, minister, I would like to hear from STT directly as to what efforts they have made to reopen the track to Wes Beckett Falls since it was closed in 2016. It has been closed for nine years now, yet the images of Wes Beckett Falls are still used for tourism promotional purposes of the north-west. You have a statutory role to ensure your land continues to be accessible and available for multiple uses to support economic growth, which includes tourism.

Could you identify the cost of works to this point, and table any cost estimates for clearing the section of the Mount Bertha Road to get access to the falls?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Garland. I note we've corresponded on this as well, but happy to pass to the team from STT in terms of further detail.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Earlier we talked about the \$12 million that we get each year - \$4 million of that goes to fire prevention and the other \$8 million we try to spread across all our 800,000 hectares. We do work on roads and tracks, and a couple of years ago we worked on, I think, the Mersey Road out to the Walls of Jerusalem to repair some bridges there so people could get access to that area, because of stakeholder feedback that we wish to do. Wes Beckett track has some challenges, and we have a very small amount of money to spread around the whole estate to do it. I will ask my colleague Suzette, or Greg, to make a comment. Thank you.

**Ms WEEDING** - Thank you for the question. We appreciate the continued interest in access to the falls. The information I have is that we've invested considerable resources into reopening Mount Bertha Road, access to the Wes Beckett Falls from Tarkine Road is closed from the junction of Sumac Road and Mount Bertha Road.

In the interest of public safety, the track remains closed and should not be accessed. This is due to the high risk of branch and tree fall in the area and the location of the track adjoining several cliff edges. Unfortunately, we don't foresee safe access to the reserve and access to the falls, and we visited it recently, in 2024, and it confirmed that the conditions aren't changed. So, we don't intend to undertake anything further in that area.

**Mr FERGUSON** - A question on research, please, Chair. Minister, in your opening statement you referred to, I think, 31, or some number like that, research projects that STT is currently involved in. It is 31?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, that's right.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Thank you. I'd like to hear how important the research is for the future of the industry. The second part of the question is, what's the current arrangement between STT and the University of Tasmania's Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) on forest value and the extent to which that is the basis for those 31 projects?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will pass to the team from STT shortly. We certainly recognise the importance of scientific rigour in fostering effective conservation and biodiversity outcomes, meeting the demands of society, maintaining sustainable practices in forest harvesting, and improving operational efficiencies. Well, it's actually mandated in the Ministerial Charter, which we've just recently updated, and it says:

The following core activity should be performed by the Corporation:  
land and native forest management, comprising research and development to support ongoing forest management and wood production activities.

Research at STT is supported by adopting research, partnering with research agencies and other land managers to deliver research, delivering and facilitating research projects, funding projects through both cash and in-kind contributions, providing access to field sites and experienced employees, supervising and supporting postgraduate students, assisting with

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university undergraduate teaching and other activities, and helping set sector-wide research priorities.

We proactively contribute to a range of research projects in collaboration with industry and research partners. I will pass to the team to talk through some of those specifics and any further areas that you'd like to add.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thanks, minister. Again, it comes back, Mr Ferguson, for the question, being part of our limited funds as to how much we can spend each year on research. There's lots we'd love to do, but we do try to prioritise, and partnering is an important part of what we do. I will ask the acting CEO or Suzette to make a comment on where we are up to on those.

**Mr FERGUSON** - And, while looking for the notes, how UTAS fits into the mix of institutions. No doubt there are others.

**Ms WEEDING** - Our collaboration with other research providers is a particularly important component of our research strategy and our research approach. The vast majority of research undertaken, I guess, at a national level by the forest industry, is undertaken in collaboration with research institutions and researchers. Very few organisations actually have their own internal capacity to undertake research in their own right anymore. It's devolved to that model. That model has provided that additional surety and that academic rigour in terms of the research and the extension work that's undertaken in that space. Certainly, that's something we've captured within our research systems and our processes in working in collaboration with those researchers.

As the minister mentioned, we've got 33 research projects currently underway, at a total value of \$16.3 million. We don't fund all of that, of course. That comes through a range of funding sources, through Forest Wood Products Association (FWPA) and others, who provide for industry-based funding for research projects. We collaborate and work through those research priorities from an STT or from a public forest management perspective, both plantation and native forest.

**Dr BROAD** - Getting back to the Huon pine stockpile, once the stockpile has exhausted Category 4 and utility logs, what's STT's plan to continue to supply Huon pine?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Broad. This is certainly a challenging area, because Huon pine can't be harvested as live trees, and so it's a scarce, rare and extremely beautiful and sought-after resource.

STT has, in previous years, facilitated the salvage of small quantities of Huon pine from the Teepookana Plateau on Tasmania's west coast, and the availability of accessible resource on the Teepookana Plateau is largely depleted. It's also available in stockpiles at Island Specialty Timbers in Strahan, and small quantities are available as wooden boat boards through the Wooden Boat Board Bank. Huon pine, largely speaking, is salvaged from logs discarded during harvesting activities in the 19th and 20th century, because, of course, we don't do those live harvesting activities anymore. Sustainable Timber Tasmania does not harvest those, other than in rare cases, to facilitate access, or for safety.

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There is a trial that's being funded through an election commitment that we've made - \$50,000 for heli harvesting. It's important to note that there's a range of different opportunities that exist outside of land that STT manages. Of course, some of it is not on land, it's under water. I will pass to the team from STT to see if there's anything further.

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you, minister. Again, sort of very operational, so I will ask my colleagues to provide an answer for you.

**Ms WEEDING** - I think the clear answer is that the additional resource will probably come from tenures other than what STT manages. We will manage the stockpile, we will have opportunistic salvage of Huon pine as it comes up, so occasional turn up in rivers and some of the lake areas where we have salvage rights. Otherwise, there's no current intention to recommence activities up on the Tikkawoppa Plateau. It has a whole range of challenges associated with areas up there. We have probably one small area, so it's largely exhausted in terms of the accessible area up on the plateau, and it has a whole range of access issues in getting back out there. At this stage, there's no intent to recommence activities on the plateau itself.

**Dr BROAD** - Did Island Specialty Timbers make a profit or loss, and if so, what was it for 2024-25?

**Mr BROOKWELL** - In the last financial year they made a small loss of \$21,000.

**Dr BROAD** - Recent announcements on social media by non-government organisations claim that a number of forest coupes in the Styx area appeared to have been removed from the harvest schedule. One of those coupes, which is TN 050G, is a special timber management unit rich in celery top pine and scheduled for selective harvesting. Can you please advise the status of this coupe? Has it been removed and, if so, is that a permanent removal?

**Mr ELLIS** - Just to confirm, that's TN 050G?

**Dr BROAD** - Yes.

**Ms WEEDING** - No, it hasn't been removed from our harvesting schedule, as such. It's a coupe that still requires roading. It's partly regrowth and partly rich in celery top pine, so there are two components to that coupe. It's one that we are still working our way through.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I'd like to provide an opportunity for, perhaps it was Ms Weeding or someone else, to correct the record on the question I asked before. We have advice, in writing, from the Forest Practices Authority that there is a current investigation underway for coupe DN023H for the clearing by the company of swift parrot habitat. I'd like confirmation that you're not aware that you're currently being investigated by the Forest Practices Authority, because that's what I took from your answer? Also, have any fines been paid by the company to the Forest Practice Authority for breaches to forest practice plans for the past five years?

**Ms WEEDING** - As I mentioned, I wasn't aware of their investigation for Denison 27H. My team has told me that -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - 23H.

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**Ms WEEDING** - Sorry, 23H. My team has told me that it is with the Forest Practices Authority and that there is a complaint that has been made to the Forest Practice Authority. There is a process that the FPA works through. No breaches have been substantiated. We've been asked for additional information, and a complaint has been put to the Forest Practices Authority that they will work their way through. I suggest the questions are probably best faced for them, in terms of that component.

In terms of the fines, we will try to come back to you before the end of scrutiny.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Otherwise, I will take it on notice if you don't, is that okay?

**Ms WEEDING** - It's on the public record through the Forest Practices Authority annual report.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thanks, but if you can come back, that would be great. Through you, minister to the chair, who looks like he's about to leave, so perhaps there's someone else who can answer the question. Does the company supply logs from Tasmanian forests to Victorian companies as whole logs, and does it sell to any Victorian government-owned or partly owned enterprises?

**Mr de FEGELY** - Thank you. Dr Woodruff, I will hand that over - that's an operational question. There have been logs sold to Victoria, but most of that's come from private property. We've sold trial loads to Victoria in the past, but that was some years ago now. Our aim and definitely our policy, which was very clear in our log contracts that we will provide Tasmanian-based businesses with log supply. We are not intending to supply Victoria, New South Wales or Queensland with any logs.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Is that a definitive none at all? Or you will pass it to Ms Weeding?

**Mr HICKEY** - The chair is correct. Our logs are sold to companies here in Tasmania.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - None are sold to a Victorian company and none are sold to Victorian-owned or partly owned government enterprises? There's no supply going from Tasmanian native forests to Victorian companies or Victorian government-owned or partly owned enterprises.

**Mr HICKEY** - All the logs are processed by companies here in Tasmania.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's also worth mentioning, Dr Woodruff, that your question makes clear the point that I was making before, that you can ban native forestry, but you can't stop the demand for timber. The approach is clearly a dud in Victoria because there's still very strong demand from Victorian consumers and businesses and it simply doesn't work. The massive unintended consequences that they are having to work through currently, still means that they are importing timber.

**CHAIR** - Final question, Dr Woodruff.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I talked about whole logs. Does Forestry Tasmania sell any native forest from our state forest to companies in Victoria? Do logging and cartage companies from Victoria book the ferry to cart logs or any other product from Tasmania across the Bass Strait?

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**Mr HICKEY** - As I said before, Dr Woodruff, all our logs are sold to customers here in Tasmania. We are aware that there have been sales to Victoria from private, where the ferry would have been booked to transport those logs, but in terms of STT sales, they are all to customers here in Tasmania.

**Mr GEORGE** - This question is for the minister. I think it's unwise for you to reject the recent polling about native forest logging as 'push polling', particularly since it comes from a company that your government relies on a great deal for its own polling -

**Mr ELLIS** - But, those who commission the polling - those who pay the piper call the tune, Mr George.

**Mr GEORGE** - Well, let's face it, if you use that polling company, I assume that you assume they're ethical. Anyway -

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr George, if we paid for the polling, you'd probably disagree with it as well.

**CHAIR** - Minister, can we hear the question, please?

**Mr GEORGE** - I hope you don't take this as a Dorothy Dixier.

Your blanket support for this industry rings hollow when back in August you referred to rolling back the so-called 'wood bank' because that was 'in line with community expectations'. They're the words that you used yourself. You were accused, at the time, by the Labor Party of being cynically political to get back into government. Where does the decision to roll back the Future Potential Production Forest Fund or the wood bank fit with your blanket support of the industry now?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr George. It's important that the Tasmanian native forest sector has a bright future and it will be on the land that -

**Mr GEORGE** - And community support, which is what I'm asking about.

**Mr ELLIS** - We've already spoken about some of the reasons why we are seeing significant and strong community support over generations for forestry in Tasmania -

**Mr GEORGE** - Which is now collapsing.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, look, that's your assessment, obviously.

**Mr GEORGE** - We know it is. It's not an assessment. We know it is.

**CHAIR** - Mr George, can you please give the minister the chance to answer the question?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. I'm not trying to be combative. I'm just stating the facts that parties that support native forestry are the ones that have received the lion's share of the vote over decades in Tasmania.

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Are there always opportunities for us to improve? Absolutely. I think some of the testimony today from our team has really shown how forward-looking and ambitious Tasmanian native forestry is to make sure that we're continuing to deliver the products that Tasmanians are demanding and needing, and also do so in a sustainable way both environmentally and financially.

In terms of the strategy that we spoke about after that decision, we made it really clear we want to grow the forest sector. It will be on the public footprint that we have currently and then looking to increase value-adding in the sector. That's something that I hear consistently in our community that they are looking for a greater value add from our forest products. I think even the Greens have notionally suggested that that's something they would support.

Also, the opportunity to unlock further value on private land, because when you look at private growers in Tasmania, they already provide the majority of timber products, which clearly shows that this is a strong and financially viable industry for our state and there are also opportunities to unlock further. On one hand we have our public forest manager, STT, which provides an exceptional amount of timber and does an exceptional job. On the other hand, you have our larger industrial plantation growers, and they are also very competitive in the market playing the export space and do an excellent job.

Then, in the middle, there's an opportunity for particularly our smaller landholders - our farmers and we're working with TasFarmers and Private Forest Tasmania - to really unlock some of that value creation for those local farmers and local communities around our state. You and I both represent a significant number of people who have opportunities on their property for greater timber production and also silviculture.

One of the things that many farmers have started taking up is the opportunity for thinning in their forests that they own that can actually improve forest health and deliver a timber product that the Tasmanian, Australian and world markets want and need.

I think it's important that we get the balance right. That's why we spoke before about the mix that we have with native plantation and reserve tenures. We'll continue to work through -

**Mr GEORGE** - Where does that fit with the decision to roll back the wood bank, the 40,000 hectares?

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned before, we think that that the opportunity for growth in forestry is around value adding on the land that we currently have access to and then supporting private growers to bring more timber to market and improve their value adding as well.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Minister, and in the chair's departure I might ask if the acting chief may be able to respond. I want to draw the discussion to a focus on safety and worker safety. I noticed that the annual reports last and this financial year indicate an improvement for both employees direct and contractors and improvement in lost time, injury frequency. Whereas the improvement for employees was significant, it was halved. The injury rate was halved and came in under the target, but not so for contractors.

The question is twofold. First, what is it that STT has been doing as an employer that you believe has made worker safety a priority and has led to that improvement? By the way, very pleasing to hear the board reviews that matter first on its agenda every meeting, as it should,

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so well done. What is it that STT may be able to contribute to the contractor community to help it also to improve continuously its regime for worker safety so that everybody is taken care of?

**Dr BROAD** - I already asked that question.

**Mr HICKEY** - Thanks Mr Ferguson. It's pleasing the improvement we have seen in safety over quite a long period of time. As mentioned earlier, we have spent an enormous amount of resource in both funds and staff time with Safety Circle bringing their programs to bear not only on our own staff, but also the with the harvesting and transport contractors and now more broadly with our silvicultural and roading contractors as well. We're working closely with them to improve operations.

One of the things that we have done recently in response to an incident, as an example, was around fatigue and how we're now approaching the contractors to be more focused on fatigue, alterations to their work hours, those sorts of activities, to bring them more in line, make their operations safer, and continue to improve as we go along.

It is a dangerous activity. As I said earlier, most of the incidents that make up the five LTIs in this current statistic are minor in nature. Unfortunately, there have been two major ones. We're pleased that the severity of the incidents is decreasing, as well as the improvement in the target and our current contractor statistic is 10.69, which is just outside our target. On the basis of continuing to work with them, we expect this year that the contractor target will be well and truly met.

**Dr BROAD** - STT has carbon sequestration projects registered under the Carbon Farming Initiative. Are these projects on private land, in partnership, or are they on public land? How are these agreements established and contracted?

**Ms WEEDING** - Our carbon projects are on permanent production zone land, so undertaken in accordance with the appropriate regulator.

**Dr BROAD** - Is there intent to expand the use of carbon sequestration projects in the future?

**Ms WEEDING** - We continue to look at them on a case by case basis. The ability to generate carbon credits on permanent production zone land is fairly limited based on the methods that exist. So, it's a conversion of short rotation to long rotation plantation or an avoided conversion mechanism by which we can generate those rights. We also have a reforestation on Bruny Island, which is also generating carbon rights. On a broad scale, it's fairly limited, but it's something we will continue to consider as part of our operational strategy.

**Dr BROAD** - Can you estimate the proportion of your workforce - FTEs, for example - who are engaged in these projects in terms of establishing, monitoring, reporting and so on?

**Ms WEEDING** - It would be a couple of people in terms of that have at least part capacity in that space. We have a team that heads up research in that area. That is essentially two FTEs in that sort of space, but they cover a whole range of aspects.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, if Forestry Tasmania employees identify or observe a threatened species in PTPZ land, are they obliged to report it via the Natural Values Atlas as

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soon as possible? Could you tell me what the timeframe is and whether Forestry Tasmania has a policy to ensure that that occurs?

**Ms WEEDING** - It depends on what the value is. Individual sightings are not necessarily recorded on that Natural Values Atlas, but certainly key indicators such as wedge-tailed eagle nests or swift parrot nests that we identify on permanent production zone land are reported to both the Forest Practices Authority, if it's in relation to a harvesting operation, or to the Natural Values Atlas.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you. Why are individual sightings not recorded, especially if they're not just like flying overhead.

**Ms WEEDING** - Depends on what it actually is. If it was a devil den, something that is, I guess, a long-going use of the land, then absolutely that's recorded and kept. Largely opportunistic sightings of animals, we don't specifically have a requirement to report those through. We can, but we don't have a specific requirement.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Did you have a policy?

**Ms WEEDING** - No, we don't have a policy.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - You don't have a policy about how to upload or record things to the Natural Values Atlas?

**Ms WEEDING** - No.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Why not?

**Ms WEEDING** - Because we don't.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - When citizen scientists provide information to the company, there's no process - there's nothing to tell people who are working in the company what to do with that information, whether to leave it on their desk or to upload it, or whether it's passing through or whether it's a nest - like all the things that you've just said - that's not written down anywhere?

**Ms WEEDING** - No, it's absolutely - so, in terms of a policy or procedure, it's not a specific policy. It's certainly part of our process in terms of evaluating information that becomes available in relation to particular harvesting operations to evaluate all the information that we receive. If we get updates of information, we absolutely take that into consideration as part of those activities. So, it's part of the planning considerations that our people undertake.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I see. So there is a process. Could we have a copy of the process please so we can understand what the practice is?

**Ms WEEDING** - We don't have a written down process for that element. It's part of our planning process.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - How are you training employees if they don't have anything written down? How do you make sure that it happens consistently every time?

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**Ms WEEDING** - It's part of our planning processes that we undertake on a routine basis.

**CHAIR** - We have one minute, so I'm moving on to Mr George, thank you.

**Mr GEORGE** - I will pass, thank you.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - During the summer of 2023-24, Forestry Tasmania employees set acoustic recorders inside the Logging Coupe, KDO 22C and the Bob Brown Foundation also set acoustic recorders in the same area during the same period and detected swift parrot calls. However, Forestry Tasmania didn't report any observations of swift parrots based on their own forestry recorder in the coupe at the same time.

**CHAIR** - The time for questioning has finished, I'm afraid. Thank you very much, everybody, for keeping it together for the whole session.

**The witnesses withdrew.**

**The committee suspended from 1.15 p. m. to 2.15 p.m.**