



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Hon. Felix Ellis MP

Thursday 4 June 2026

MEMBERS

Ms Helen Burnet MP (Chair)

Mr Marcus Vermey MP (Deputy Chair)

Mr Dean Winter MP

Dr Rosalie Woodruff MP

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Mr Willie

Ms Badger

Ms Butler

Ms Johnston

Mr Di Falco

Mr Jaensch

Mr Garland

Mr Mitchell

Dr Broad

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. FELIX ELLIS MP

Minister for Business, Industry and Resources, Minister for Skills and Jobs, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management

Ministerial Office representatives

Adam Foster

Chief of Staff

Rachael Murray

Senior Adviser, Police, Fire and Emergency Management

Edith Bevin

Senior Adviser, Police, Fire and Emergency Management

Mitchell Haigh

Senior Adviser, Business, Industry and Resources

Anne Fidock

Senior Adviser, Business, Industry and Resources

Jack Milbourne

Senior Adviser, Skills and Jobs

Police Fire and Emergency Management Portfolio

Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management

Donna Adams

Commissioner of Police/Secretary, DPFEM/State Controller

Jonathan Higgins

Deputy Commissioner of Police

Adrian Bodnar

Assistant Commissioner Operations

Robert Blackwood

Assistant Commissioner Specialist Support

Doug Oosterloo

Assistant Commissioner Capability

Ross Hinkley

A/Deputy Secretary

Scott Wilson-Haffenden

A/Executive Director, People & Business Services

Mandy Denby (observer only)

Director, Office of the Commissioner/Secretary

State Fire Commission

Jeremy Smith

Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner

Simon Pilkington

A/Deputy Chief Officer - Operations

Andrea Heath

Executive Director, Strategy and Capability

Mick Lowe

Executive Director, SES and Volunteers

Steve Whitely

Chair, State Fire Commission

Business, Industry and Resources Portfolio

Department of State Growth

Dennis Hendriks

Acting Coordinator-General

Michael Mogridge

Deputy Secretary, Economic Development

Vanessa Pinto

Deputy Secretary, ReCFIT and Resources

(in the room)

David Bennett

Executive Director, Investment Attraction

Andrew Crane

Project Director, Office of the Coordinator-General

Sarah Thomson

Acting Executive Director, Business, Industry and Investment\

Sarah Russell
Director, Policy

Alistair Morton
Director, Mineral Resources Tasmania

Tom Byrne
Assistant Director, Forest Policy

Travis Boutcher
Director, Finance

Forest Practices Authority

Anne Chuter
Chief Forest Practices Officer, Forest Practices Authority

Private Forests Tasmania

Elizabeth Pietrzykowski
Chief Executive Officer Private Forests Tasmania

Mineral Resources Tasmania

Ben Waining
Director Mining Policy

Skills and Jobs Portfolio

Department of State Growth

Alex Paterson
General Manager, Skills and Workforce

Peta Sugden
Senior Director, Industry Insights and Workforce

(in the room)

Stuart Hollingsworth
Executive Director, Economy and Jobs Strategy

Danielle Harris
A/Deputy Secretary, Business Services

TasTAFE

Tim Gardner

TasTAFE Board Chair

Dr Norman Baker

TasTAFE CEO

William MsShane

Chief Financial Officer

Colleen Sheehan

Executive Director, Governance and Corporate Affairs

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Police, Fire and Emergency Management

The committee commenced at 9.00 a.m.

Deputy CHAIR (Mr Vermeij) - The time now being 9.00 a.m., Estimates scrutiny will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. The time scheduled for the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management is three hours. At 10.30 a.m. we will have a five-minute break; that five minutes will be made up into the lunch hour.

Questions should be directed to the minister. The House's resolution provides for the minister to provide an additional information to a committee either later that day or in writing as an answer to a question taken on notice. To submit a question on notice, the member must first ask their question to the minister and the minister must indicate that they will take it on notice. The member must then put the question in writing and hand it to the Committee Secretary so it can be included in correspondence to the minister for answers.

I remind you that the microphones are sensitive, so ask you to be mindful of Hansard. Be careful when moving your folders, documents and water glasses around the table. It is difficult for Hansard to differentiate when people are talking over each other, so I ask members speak one at a time.

As Deputy Chair, I will be looking to ensure a fair and appropriate conduct of proceedings today and ask that all participating members do the same.

Minister, as the committee has agreed that the opening statements should be tabled rather than read, you now have an opportunity to table a statement before we proceed with questions. I then invite you to introduce persons at the table, names and positions, for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Deputy Chair. I'll just go straight into introductions if that works. At the table with me I've got Donna Adams, Commissioner of Police and Secretary of DPFEM and State Controller; Jonathan Higgins, Deputy Commissioner of Police; Adrian Bodnar, Assistant Commissioner Operations; Robert Blackwood, Assistant Commissioner Specialist Support; Doug Oosterloo, Assistant Commissioner Capability; and Adam Foster, my Chief of Staff, who won't be taking questions.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, to kick off with, I'd like to read sections of an RTI letter written from the Police Commissioner to yourself in relation to firearms management and reform in Tasmania, and I'll just read sections. The Police Commissioner says:

The total number of firearms in circulation nationally now exceeds pre-1996 levels. This moment provides a renewed opportunity to consider how we meet community expectations regarding the management and oversight of firearms. Many Australians remain unaware of the sheer number and types of arms that can be legally owned and used in this country.

As Commissioner of Police, I take very seriously my dual responsibility, ensuring the safety of the Tasmanian community and safeguarding every police officer who places himself in harm's way each day.

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Firearms present a real and increased threat to both the public and our officers. The murder of Constable Keith Smith on the 16th of June 2025 was a confronting reminder that the presence of a firearm can change the outcome of even the most routine police tasking.

That's just a section of that letter, minister.

Minister, why are you ignoring the clear advice of the Police Commissioner, who has warned of the growing risk posed by firearms, and are you placing politics and appeasing One Nation ahead of prioritising the safety of Tasmanians?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Butler. Look, I always appreciate the advice from Commissioner Adams. She's an outstanding public servant and a really fine Tasmanian. So, we take on board advice from the commissioner across a whole range of areas, and we expect that; we expect frank and fearless advice from our public servants and Commissioner Adams always delivers that.

The broader task of the minister is then to take into account the advice from our departmental officials with the lens that they provide, particularly in this case, around community safety, and then weigh up the broader considerations as well. That includes farmers, who work the land and provide the food for the other 96 per cent of us, recreational hunters, sporting shooters and a whole range of other people for whom firearms are either the tools of the trade or part of their way of life.

What we've seen really clearly from the Bondi royal commission is that the key challenge here that we have, as a country, that led up to the Bondi terrorist attacks was anti-Semitism left unaddressed for years in this country, particularly by some of the highest leaders in government, and also really deeply concerning intelligence failings.

So, if you look at the circumstances that led up to Bondi that have now been revealed over the last couple of weeks, the Bondi terrorists travelled to Uzbekistan, a known terrorist hotspot, to try and gain access to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. They also travelled to the southern Philippines, which is also a known terrorist hotspot for terrorist training that was known by the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Border Force, but that information wasn't shared with ASIO or New South Wales firearms licensing. The Bondi terrorists were also under ASIO watch in 2019 and also, it's now been revealed as recently as 2022 they were still able to get access to firearms. And there were multiple reports of concerns about the father, who became a licensed firearms owner, of a strong interest in explosives that was reported to national security hotlines. He was still able to get a licence because those pieces of information weren't adequately shared and acted upon.

So, quite clearly, the challenge that we have in this country is about making sure that firearms don't fall into the wrong hands, because one firearm in the hands of the Bondi terrorists is far more dangerous than 100 firearms in the hands of a Tasmanian farmer, including the people that you and I represent in this place. The work that needs to be done in this country is about better information-sharing. That's why Tasmania is among the nation leaders in the roll-out of the National Firearms Register, because that will enable better information-sharing between the states and the Commonwealth and the states and the states -

Ms BUTLER - Chair, can I ask -

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Deputy CHAIR - It was just on three minutes, and I'll remind you, Ms Butler, you asked a fairly lengthy first question. I've been fair with that.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you. Going back to the letter from the Police Commissioner to yourself, it states:

The National Firearms Agreement endorsed by Tasmania, all other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth makes clear that firearms possessions and use is a privilege. That is conditional on the overriding need to ensure public safety. I believe this principle must remain central to our decision-making. Public safety must take precedence over the privilege of firearm ownership.

Together with my fellow Australian Commissioners of Police, I stand ready to support reforms that enhance public safety, strengthen police safety and improve community confidence.

So, given that the Police Commissioner has supported the national firearms reform, including a firearm cap, why has your government refused to act on that expert advice? Are you more concerned with appeasing minor parties than protecting frontline police in the community?

Mr ELLIS - As I mentioned before, Ms Butler, we've got a strong focus on community safety, and the evidence from the royal commission is very clear about what will make a difference. It's better information sharing and taking stronger action on anti-Semitism. The jurisdictions around the country that have now come out clearly against caps include Tasmania, Northern Territory, Queensland and the Labor states of South Australia and Victoria. You know, if your characterisation of Jacinta Allan and Peter Malinauskas is that they're doing this to, you know, appease minor parties and, you know, the far right or whatever, I think that just clearly misses the broader point.

Ms BUTLER - I think you're verballing other members in the parliament there, minister.

Mr ELLIS - Well, I think you're verballing me but -

Ms BUTLER - This is a question to you; it's not about other premiers. If you can just stick to the question, please.

Mr ELLIS - Yes, I mean, other premiers agree strongly with our position and also agree strongly on the need to take stronger action when it comes to greater information sharing, and also cracking down on people who steal firearms and manufacture firearms in the community. We've seen some very strong success from Tasmania Police just recently shutting down an illegal firearms manufacturing facility here in the suburbs of Hobart, and those firearms are really a key risk to community safety. It's not the farmer who's managing the land, feeding us and looking after the property for future generations. It's not, you know, recreational hunters who are out in the bush teaching their kids the skills of life, or people that compete for us on the world stage at the Olympics or at world championships; it's terrorists and criminals.

Your caps don't apply to terrorists and criminals, Ms Butler. I think that's part of the reason why we've seen, nationally, the majority of states move away from the Prime Minister's

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suggestion of caps, and that's why Tasmania's taken the position that we have. We think that the key target needs to be terrorists and criminals, not law-abiding firearms owners who have done nothing wrong. I think the depth of feeling against the way that you've characterised law-abiding firearms owners in this state and the division within your party, including Dr Broad over here but Ms Finlay as well, has been on full display for everyone to see, Ms Butler. Our strong focus is on improving community safety and better information sharing, so I do that.

Ms BUTLER - I go back to the letter - and this is coming from a police commissioner to a police minister:

In terms of policy and legislative change, I reiterate my support for the national firearms reform agenda, including the proposed firearms cap. Thank you for your leadership -

Which I don't think you're showing:

and for the serious consideration you and your government are giving to this issue. I look forward to continuing to work with you towards reforms that will improve safety for all Tasmanians.

When your own police commissioner is calling for stronger firearm reforms to improve public safety, why are you choosing to ignore that advice? Everything that you have just stated just sounds like political lines. Are you putting political considerations ahead of the safety of Tasmanians and Tasmanian police officers?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, you think it's political lines that terrorists were able to go to terrorist training camps overseas known by federal agencies, it wasn't shared with other federal intelligence agencies or firearms licensing in this country, killed 15 people at Bondi? And the failings are quite clearly information sharing between our jurisdictions and the Commonwealth. You think that's political lines? I think that is an absolutely disgraceful approach to this very important discussion to try and minimise the clear failings that have happened in our country.

Chris Minns, who is one of the few people who agrees with you that caps are the way forward, has said, after the testimony at the Bondi royal commission, this, quite clearly, was a giant failure of intelligence. It's not my words. That's Mr Minns's words.

Ms BUTLER - Point of order, Chair. If I could ask the minister to answer the question, which was: why he has ignored the advice of our police commissioner.

Mr ELLIS - Again, we've taken the advice of the commissioner into account. I respect the advice that's come from Commissioner Adams, just as Jacinta Allan respects the advice that's come from her commissioner, just as Peter Malinauskas respects the advice that comes from his commissioner.

But the decision has been made with ministers and premiers looking at the broader view that firearms safety is absolutely a key priority, as is making sure that people have access to the tools of the trade as appropriate, and that we're taking action in the areas that will make most difference for keeping Australians safe. And that is making sure that firearms don't fall into the wrong hands. Ultimately, the judgement of Labor and Liberal jurisdictions around the country has been, it's not the number of firearms, it's the hands that they're in.

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In this case, the firearms were in the hands of terrorists who were known to federal agencies. And for that to be the case in this country when law-abiding firearms owners in Tasmania know the rigmarole that they have to go through to maintain, or to get and to maintain a licence, and to get access to every firearm that they have. Your characterisation around the firearms licensing system in this country shows a deep lack of understanding, because every single firearm that is owned in Tasmania has been acquired through a permit to acquire approved by Tasmania's firearms licensing system in Tasmania Police.

I think your understanding is lacking, your understanding of the broader jurisdictional context is lacking and also, in many ways, the roles of political leaders. Our responsibility is to take into account all of the advice, form the broader view and then plot a path ahead. That's what Mr Malinauskas has done, that's what Ms Allan has done, that's what we've done here in Tasmania, and we think we get the balance right.

Ms BADGER - I would like to ask about firearms crime more broadly. Certainly, in the Legislative Council hearing yesterday, there was information provided that the number of family violence offences involving a firearm had risen from 69 to 140 over the past four years, I believe. Of those 140 cases in most recent years, how many of those individuals involved were licensed firearm holders and how many weren't? And more broadly, can you present the committee with a breakdown of firearms-related offences over the past two years, including how many people had a licence and how many people did not?

Mr ELLIS - I'll pass to the commissioner.

Comm ADAMS - Thank you for the question. It's a difficult one to answer. There's a couple of parts to, obviously, what you've asked today. The first was around those that were involved in a family violence incident, whether they were a registered licence holder or not. And yesterday we weren't able to provide that information. We don't have a dataset that captures that. But certainly that might be some work that we can do in the future in relation to that. I think, the second part of your question?

Ms BADGER - Firearms offences holistically, and whether there is a dataset that's available and a breakdown of whether they are committed by someone who has a licence or not?

Comm ADAMS - We might be able to get that. We discussed that this morning. I'll look to my firearms expert, Assistant Commissioner Oosterloo.

A/Comm OOSTERLOO - As the Commissioner said, the way we capture that data, it doesn't allow for an easy extraction of whether the person charged with a firearms offence, we can't easily extract from our systems whether or not they're a licence holder or not. They're in different systems. So, our firearms database management system has licence holders, it manages licence holders. And we use that to manage whether they're suspended or cancelled or under review because of offences that have been reported in from another system. So that system also doesn't tell us whether the person being cancelled or suspended as a result of offences, or as a result of a health issue. It's in the free text field, but it's not a field that we can pull statistics out easily. Same with the other system. We can tell you how many people have been charged with storage offences, with holding a firearm without a licence, with other types of firearm offences. But our system doesn't, in a way that's able to be extracted, give us whether

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that person's a current licence holder or not. It's in the free text fields, or in the narrative, but not in a way that could be easily extracted.

As the commissioner said, it's something we will look at to improve. We have systems enhancement projects going on at the moment, including the National Firearms Register. It's something we'll look to improve in that system.

Ms BADGER - That's fantastic to hear that you're doing that work. That is also critical, the information sharing, so thank you.

Commissioner, last year in Estimates, we asked you whether the Liberal government had come to you as police commissioner and sought advice on the safety and compliance aspects of their plan to open up more public land for recreational shooting. You hadn't been approached at that point for advice. Now, we're seeing more land being considered to be opened up. That's a process that's underway, in addition to the changes for the new deer-hunting measures. Have you yet been asked to provide advice? And what is your advice?

Comm ADAMS - I haven't been asked to provide advice.

Ms BADGER - Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - In relation to the firearms cap, you've received expert advice from the commissioner regarding the desirability of having a firearms cap here in Tasmania, but that's the position you've taken. Who else have you sought advice from and relied upon to form your position?

Mr ELLIS - We have a Firearms Consultative Committee, which has been a helpful mechanism for us to discuss many of these matters. So, they include people from a broad cross section. There's people like the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, Doctors for Gun Control -

Ms JOHNSTON - They support firearm caps.

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, that's right. Doctors for Gun Control, who also do; a representative from Engender Equality. We've also, of course, got TasFarmers; the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia; hunters representatives; and the Police Association. So, that group has been quite broad-ranging in terms of its advice.

And interestingly enough, one of the things about the Firearms Consultative Committee is there's actually broad agreement on the core of the reforms that need to happen for Tasmania. So, we had unanimous support for better information sharing and accelerating the National Firearms Register, for stronger penalties for people who steal firearms and also around citizenship requirements, with particular commonsense carve-outs. There was an agreement on areas like caps. Ditto, there was an agreement on some other areas that might be viewed as, I suppose, removing some red tape for firearms owners. So, it is interesting in this discussion that most people see a broad package of reforms as the clear commonsense way forward, and then there's some discussion at the fringes, which is actually probably where the caps -

Ms JOHNSTON - Well, it's hardly discussion at the fringes minister. The Firearms Consultative Committee clearly had different views about firearms caps and particularly those representatives who have a very strong victims and community safety focus, strongly

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supportive of caps. It was only those with vested interest in keeping their firearms that have taken your position.

Mr ELLIS - And feeding our country and things like that.

Ms JOHNSTON - Who have a vested interest in keeping their firearms, who have taken that position that you have taken. I'm asking: have you received any other expert advice from any academic, in terms of a criminologist, in terms of the safety of our guns and the importance of reducing numbers in our community.

Mr ELLIS - Yes, we continue to receive a range of different submissions as part of this process. As members would know, we've had a huge number of people that have taken a really strong interest in this. There's broader work that's happening right around the country, including the rapid review of Victoria's approach to firearms licencing, which that's all publicly available, had a range of different submissions and the Victorian government's made the same decision that we have.

More broadly, in terms of the consultation process, we'll be releasing the legislation around National Firearms Register - better information sharing - and stronger penalties for stealing firearms. We'll be doing that shortly. We'll be receiving then feedback and submissions as part of that consultation process.

There's also obviously the national negotiations that are still ongoing when it comes to buybacks. Currently, none of the eight jurisdictions around the country have reached agreement with the federal government around what the buyback might look like. Certainly, there's a lot of concern that, from a Tasmanian perspective, we wouldn't want to unduly financially impact people, many of whom who have invested significant funds into tools of the trade. What we saw from the Western Australian buyback was people who spent thousands of dollars on new firearms, that are key parts of their work, being compensated a few-hundred dollars. We're certainly concerned that that would happen here.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, it was revealed under RTI your police department on 6 February issued a directive to firearm services, and I'll quote:

Can we please put a hold on progressing additional extensions to licences and permits to acquire for the next three weeks?

The commissioner wants to observe whether there was an increase in requests for both, as details begin to emerge about the Tasmanian position on firearm reform. This was described as a 'miscommunication' and reversed the following Monday. Perhaps, through you, minister, the Commissioner for Police could clarify the record and series of events leading up to the decision on 6 February.

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister, and thank you for the question. The discussion that was had amongst the corporate management group in relation to the observations that have been seen in Western Australia in relation to firearm reform, we'd received advice that, through the process that they'd undertaken, that there had been an uplift in permits to acquire, people applying to become collectors, and it would be something we may need to monitor.

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Certainly, you'd be aware, we've got resourcing issues within firearm services, and it's a constant assessment of us to ensure that we've got our staff appropriately supported to be able to assess the important applications for firearms licences. I became aware that the information or the request that we'd asked of our firearm services had been misinterpreted, I think, two days after an email had been sent, and we corrected the record with our staff and also publicly in relation to that.

I'll just quote exactly what we did put out in the public so that it is very clear, and this was two days after the email was sent:

There is no hold on firearm licence applications and permits to acquire additional firearms and they continue to be processed. New licences and permits submitted are subject to a comprehensive review to ensure applicants have a genuine reason to possess a firearm and are deemed a fit and proper person in accordance with the *Firearms Act*. Sometimes that can take a number of weeks and is undertaken on the basis of community safety.

Western Australia experienced an uplift in firearms licence applications and permits to acquire additional firearms as a result of its recent reforms. Given the discussion nationally over the potential firearm reforms, Tasmania Police sought to monitor all new licences and permits over a three-week period to identify if there was any early trends which could impact our resourcing. This monitoring will not impact processing the position as being clarified with firearms services staff.

It was very quickly rectified in that two-day period. It was certainly a misinterpretation of the discussion that was had in the corporate management group.

Mr Di FALCO - Through you, minister. So it was a coincidence the day before you sent the letter to the minister and Premier to advocate for caps?

Comm ADAMS - I'm not sure of the date of the letter when it was sent, but there's absolutely no link to my letter and the advice to Firearms Services. I had been working on that letter for a number of weeks and to ensure that the minister was provided with my advice, I'd already flagged with the minister at least two weeks prior to sending the letter that I would be writing to him to give him my position on what I view as an extremely important community safety issue for the Tasmanian community and for Tasmanian police officers. I've sent that letter, as I said, two weeks after I'd advised the minister that I would be doing so.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you, Chair. Good morning, minister, good morning to those at the table with you. With the Police Academy this year marking its 50th anniversary and with \$4.1 million of government-funded investment in upgrades, how many recruit courses are planned for 2026-27 and what is the expected graduation intake?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. So Tasmania Police continue to support recruit intake and training to meet the government's commitment to boost police numbers. Recruiting will continue to focus on meeting yearly attrition and to backfill long-term workers compensation absences. Tasmania Police continues to attract recruits despite a very competitive employment market and the attrition challenges being experienced by all police jurisdictions across Australia. The ongoing This is Tas Police recruitment campaign has proved

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successful with advertising across social media platforms, on mainstream media, bus backs, static signage and podcasts.

In 2026, Tasmania Police has continued to hold recruit courses including four recruit training courses in the Tasmania Police Academy, one recruit course at the northern campus in Launceston, and one accelerated training course at the Tasmanian Police Academy. The planned training regime will see up to 112 recruits commence their training in the 2026 calendar year. The recruit training course is 28 weeks in length, includes five-week infield training component, and this style of course maximises the on-the-job training providing recruits with an increased amount of practical experience.

As of 31 March 2026, a total of 81 police recruits had commenced training during the 2025-26 financial year. Three courses are currently in training, recruit course 1 with 20 graduates, recruit course 2 with 17 and recruit course three with 21. Recruit course 4, which is due to commence on 5 October 26 and graduate 16 April 27 will have a minimum of 20 recruits and will likely include a northern cohort. Four courses are planned for 2027, including January, March, June and October, and each course in 27 will have a minimum of 20 recruits with an additional northern course scheduled. The aim is for 120 recruits in 2027. Look forward to congratulating members that graduate in 2026 and 27 and beyond and welcome any member of parliament who'd like to attend the parade ground. It is an amazing experience to see people graduating there.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, in light of the 30-year anniversary of, or commemoration of, the Port Arthur massacre, former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, was asked for his insight into reducing firearms and he stated:

I have the simple view that if by tightening gun laws we can make Australia even safer, let's do so.

Then, asked whether he supported caps on firearms, he said:

My gut reaction is yes. That is of course a matter for individual state governments, but it seems to me to be an exercise in common sense.

Minister, as a Liberal, why are you refusing to support former Prime Minister John Howard's position that caps on firearms are simply common sense and are you choosing to ignore your own party's legacy on gun safety?

Mr ELLIS - So, I mean, Mr Howard's comments on this, again, deeply respect. He also describes the Prime Minister's attempt to focus on firearms changes as a diversion after Bondi and for the reason being that we've had, since the horrific pogrom of 7 October- the largest massacre of Jewish civilians since the Holocaust - a massive rise in anti-Semitism in this country. And it's been left unchecked and unaddressed, including the horrific protests that we've seen that have spilled over into all sorts of anti-Semitic attacks in this country. Many in our Jewish community have felt that rising sense of concern for their safety and unease, and indeed, very challenging testimony, again, at Bondi about the security arrangements that were available at the Hanukkah by the Sea event.

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It's also become really evident since Mr Howard made those comments that this has been a giant intelligence failure. That's not my words, that's the Leader of the Labor Party in New South Wales, Mr Chris Minns.

Ms BUTLER - He supports firearm caps.

Mr ELLIS - He does, but he's also said that this is actually a giant intelligence failure.

Ms BUTLER - He supports firearm caps.

Mr ELLIS - He's one of the few in the country that do actually support firearms caps, but he's now realised after the -

Ms BADGER - ACT, WA, Tasmania.

Mr ELLIS - Well, not Tasmania.

Ms BADGER - Yes, we do.

Mr ELLIS - No, we don't.

Ms BADGER - The community does. The police do.

Mr ELLIS - Well, quite clearly, we've -

CHAIR - Ms Butler, let the minister finish his answer.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Chair. And so, quite clearly, we've seen Tasmania, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria oppose caps. And with the testimony that we've seen in the recent weeks, I think anyone who's paying attention can clearly see that the problem, in this case, is not the number of firearms - because there was actually fewer than the cap being carried there at Bondi, so the cap wouldn't have solved anything at Bondi. The problem was the hands that they were in. If those people, who were on ASIO's watchlist, who were travelling to terrorist training camps, and federal agencies were aware of it, were able to get one firearm, that is the problem. So, I think, you know, there's a reason why your party's divided on this. It's because -

Ms BUTLER - Chair, I think that's three minutes.

CHAIR - No, it's not.

Ms BADGER - Okay.

CHAIR - Eye on the clock, that's fine.

Mr ELLIS - There's a reason why your party's divided on this, Ms Butler, nationally and here at a state level, because quite clearly this is an intelligence failure that followed on from two years of horrific anti-Semitism that's been left unaddressed in this country. So, the royal commission's recommendations so far focus largely on intelligence-sharing.

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CHAIR - Next question, Ms Butler.

Ms BUTLER - Mr Ellis, when John Howard made it clear that governments must prioritise the greater good over political risk on gun reform, and also stated that he, in his time as the prime minister of Australia, and a Liberal prime minister at that, stated that his firearm reform was the legacy that he's most proud of, how can you fail to follow that example by rejecting the consideration of caps on firearms in Tasmania, of all places?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, I think the thing you're missing about 1996, is that it made our firearms rules some of the strongest in the world, and that is the current situation that we live in. And to try and suddenly retrofit history to say now that there's these giant problems with our firearms legislation is, frankly, wrong. It's enforcement and information-sharing that needs to be supported.

Ms BADGER - We have more firearms now than we did then.

Mr ELLIS - Exactly - and we have fewer firearms crimes. The point is that when you regulate firearms better, when you make it so that you can't just walk into a Bunnings and get access to a semiautomatic firearm, you will make the community safer. But when you try and target areas that don't make a difference, the number of firearms, rather than the hands that they're in, you will simply just penalise good, hardworking people that use them as tools of the trade. I think the data is actually very clear: we've had an increase in firearms in this country, but firearms crime is way down, compared to 1996.

Ms BADGER - No, its not. It's not.

Mr ELLIS - It is, Ms Butler, and the reason for that is because we have a licensing system, that Mr Howard brought in, that has enabled us to have a stronger approach to understanding the people who get access to firearms. People with significant mental health challenges shouldn't be able to access firearms. People that have deep criminal records shouldn't be able to access firearms. And people with intent to kill Jews in a terrorist attack, that they have foreshadowed for years and was known about by federal intelligence agencies, shouldn't get access to firearms. That's what needs to happen in this country. The laws are strong. The approach to information-sharing needs to be improved, and we need to right the wrongs that your party perpetrated in this parliament when you voted against stronger penalties for firearms theft. Because those people who steal firearms are the ones that seek to do harm, either in the moment of theft when they potentially put that homeowner's life at risk, or when they perpetrate a black market of firearms in this community.

One firearm in the black market is far more dangerous than 100 firearms in the safes of our farmers around this state. That's, I think, the fundamental thing you're missing in this discussion - our laws are strong, our information-sharing has clearly failed. We need to improve the information-sharing, rather than punishing law-abiding firearms owners, because remember, the cap doesn't apply to criminals. They can have as many firearms under your cap as they want, if there is not better information-sharing and if we're not cracking down on the theft of firearms.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, understanding that the bulk of illegal firearms were once legal firearms, can you provide information to the committee, have you met with the Survivors of

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Port Arthur group at all and explained your stance on not wanting to reduce firearms in our community and providing opportunities to have as many firearms as you'd like in Tasmania?

Mr ELLIS - Well, firstly, Ms Butler, again that shows your lack of understanding of our firearms regulation, because every firearm needs a permit to acquire and is approved by Tasmania Police. I think I understand why you think the laws are deficient if you don't understand the laws, because 1996 changed everything.

In terms of the Survivors of Port Arthur -

Ms BUTLER - Have you met with that group, minister?

Mr ELLIS - In terms of the Survivors of Port Arthur, I was at the Port Arthur 30th anniversary and also the Alannah & Madeline Foundation are obviously part of our firearms consultative committee.

Ms BUTLER - But have you met with the group the Survivors of Port Arthur group?

Mr ELLIS - I haven't personally, but I'm very happy to.

Ms BUTLER - Why not, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Well, again, as I mentioned, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation are survivors of Port Arthur, and obviously Alannah and Madeline were some of the victims of Port Arthur.

Ms BUTLER - I think that's quite upsetting that you have not met with the Survivors of Port Arthur group. That is extremely disrespectful in light of what triggered the 1996 reforms to firearm control, which the rest of Australia stood by us here in Tasmania with. These are the people that were there that day and would be able to discuss with you the importance of making sure we can reduce firearms in our community and maintain community safety. They know what it looks like, and I know that they have attempted to organise meetings with you. So, why have you not met with them?

Mr ELLIS - I would welcome the meeting, but -

Ms BUTLER - Why haven't you?

Mr ELLIS - As I say, we continue to meet with the Alannah & Madeline Foundation as survivors and victims of Port Arthur.

Probably the other point to make around Port Arthur, the key problem there was access from people who shouldn't have access to firearms, to automatic and semiautomatic weapons.

Mr ELLIS - You didn't grow up in Tasmania, did you, minister?

Mr ELLIS - No, but Ms Butler, I think one of the things you need to understand about Port Arthur as well is, your cap on firearms wouldn't have solved that problem either, because Martin Bryant didn't have more than 10 firearms at Port Arthur.

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Ms BUTLER - Will you commit to meeting with the Survivors of Port Arthur group?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, absolutely.

Ms BUTLER - And explain and apologise to them that you have ignored their requests. You have ignored them.

Mr ELLIS - Look, Ms Butler, I don't know the details of the request, but I am happy to follow up.

Ms BADGER - Through you, minister, to the Police Commissioner, I want to ask more on the reforms to the firearms legislation. I want to preface this by saying, although the debate that we're currently having across the nation has come about because of the recent Bondi tragedy, firearms reform is not a new discussion, and it's something that we have been having for quite a while due to the number of firearms in the community.

Commissioner, you've made your support for capping firearm numbers clear in letters to the Premier and to the Police minister, as others have outlined. I was hoping you could go into a little bit more detail about why you see this measure as so important to public safety, in addition to the proposed reclassification.

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister: as I've articulated in the letter, my position is clear in relation to my views on firearms reform, and it's premised on two perspectives - (1) as the commissioner, and I have responsibility for community safety, and more importantly, and as importantly, is around the safety of our police officers, who every day go to an incident that involves a firearm. And that is a potential compromise to their safety which could cause them great harm. As we have seen, we've seen the loss of an officer who was attending what, you know, we think was a routine job, and he lost his life. I see the devastation and the impact on his family every time we catch up with them.

There are more firearms in the community, there are more opportunities for those firearms to be stolen and fall into the wrong hands, there are more opportunity for those firearms to be used to, you know, perpetrate family violence. The more firearms in the community provides more opportunity for them to be either an enabler of crime or be able to be used as a threat or a weapon against police officers. That's basically the premise of the view that I've taken. I think that, you know, the support that I've had from police officers within Tasmania Police is a view that they share, that they have an expectation that we do everything we can to keep their workplace safe. That's the basis of my position.

Ms BADGER - In terms of the reclassification, which was the second part of that question?

Comm ADAMS - That's a policy position of government. I have yet to see any bill or what that would actually look like. But I guess in a general sense, if we're obviously reclassifying firearms and there are limitations on who those firearms are available to, I think from a general sense that makes sense. But again, I'd like to see what the legislation looks like.

Ms BADGER - Just as a point of clarification, based on the answer to my previous question, in terms of those jobs that you described where police are attending incidents and

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there are firearms involved, that would be difficult to quantify whether they're legal or illegal firearms primarily being used?

Comm ADAMS - Again, in terms of, like, a dataset?

Ms BADGER - Yes.

Comm ADAMS - Difficult. We get incident sheets every day on incidents that are occurring across the state in the narrative. Sometimes it'll identify whether it was a licensed firearm owner. The incident that happened at Risdon Vale this week, where there was some great work by our southern firearms and drugs team, that particular individual had a firearms licence that had expired in 2020. So, it's part of the narrative; in some of those incident sheets that detail is there. But it's not a dataset that we routinely report on.

But as I have indicated, we'll be looking to, you know, build some datasets because there has been a lot of interest in statistics that sit around firearms, so we want to be open, where we can, in what we can report.

Ms BADGER - Fantastic. Certainly, what we're hearing from the minister and the Liberal government is around taking firearms out of the hands of criminals. Minister, on the basis of what the police commissioner's outlined, what we've been hearing for a couple of years from various groups - I note there's a report from the Australia Institute. It's the only one I have in front of me, but I know you regularly disagree with them. The fact of the matter is -

Mr ELLIS - But a regular reader of their work.

Ms BADGER - there are too many firearms in the community. Do you concede to that fact? Or do you feel like it's fine with what's currently happening and the rate of gun violence and crimes?

Mr ELLIS - Again, the problem here is not the number of firearms; it's the hands that they're in. Ensuring that, for example, people that -

Ms BADGER - How are you disputing the evidence? On what basis?

Mr ELLIS - When you say the evidence?

Ms BADGER - The evidence that there're too many firearms in the community and we need to do something about that. What's your evidence that that is not an issue?

Mr ELLIS - Jacinta Allan, when she outlined her position on -

Ms BADGER - No, your evidence.

Mr ELLIS - Let me speak. Jacinta Allan, when she outlined her position on caps after doing the rapid review in Victoria that had submissions from around the country, she made the point that the right number for people who would do harm in the community - criminals, terrorists, people that have committed a range of crimes like family violence and firearms trafficking, the right number of firearms in those people's hands is zero. That's the thing that we need to remember. The right number is zero for those people.

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Now, in terms of other people, law-abiding firearms owners, they have a permit to acquire process that they go through. They have a genuine reason. So, every single firearm that they have has been approved, and it's been approved for a purpose. Because Ms Butler is right to identify that firearms ownership in this country is a privilege and that's the longstanding paradigm since 1996. And that's actually been further upheld by the changes that we're proposing.

But we also need to remember that a cap of 10 firearms for people that should have zero is inappropriate. But a cap for people with 10 firearms or, say, five firearms who actually need more to undertake their genuine reason is also inappropriate. So, finding the right balance is critical in this process.

Ms BADGER - For the sake of time, I'll just go back to the original question. I'll just get you to confirm that you're comfortable and feel like the current number of firearms in circulation in the Tasmanian community is safe and appropriate?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, so the number of firearms is not the challenge. The challenge is making sure they don't fall into the -

Ms BADGER - Do you feel it's safe and appropriate, though? I think we'll differ on what the challenge is. Do you feel that it's safe and appropriate?

Mr ELLIS - Every licensed firearm has had a permit to acquire, so it's appropriate.

Ms BADGER - I've heard your view. Is it appropriate and safe the current number of firearms in the Tasmanian community?

Mr ELLIS - Yeah. So, I'm trying to answer your question -

Ms BADGER - It's a yes or no question. 'Yes' means you agree, 'no' means you don't.

Mr ELLIS - Chair, I'm trying to answer this question -

CHAIR - Yes, we've got limited time, there's about 20 seconds.

Ms BADGER - If he doesn't want to answer it, we can probably just move on then.

Mr ELLIS - I'm comfortable with every legal firearm. What I'm not comfortable with is the illegal firearms in our community, whether they're manufactured, imported or stolen from law-abiding firearms owners, because every single one of those is a threat to public safety. So, comfortable with the legal number of firearms, very uncomfortable with every single illegal firearm. That's why it's not a 'yes or no' question Ms Badger, because there are such different circumstances when it comes to the hands that those firearms are in.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, the commissioner has just articulated, in answer to Ms Badger's question, the very difficult and dangerous job that she asks her officers to do each and every day. And it's no wonder we've seen the statistics and in the budget papers the impact it has on workers compensation.

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But it also has an impact on retired police officers. We've been talking about this for a number of years now. Back on 12 March 2025, the parliament approved a motion to support retired police officers with mental health supports in particular. That was a unanimous decision of this parliament. Since then, we've seen very little action on your part to implement that motion, that call of the parliament.

The Retired Police Association wrote to you again on 1 April to ask what you were doing after you had committed to implementing a trial at the beginning of this year that hasn't happened. And you only responded to them on 19 May. It took another prompt letter from the Retired Police Association and from me in parliament before you responded. What are you doing to ensure the mental health supports for retired police officers, in particular? And will you take up their offer to sit down with them and talk about how they can provide that in critical service to retired police officers?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks Ms Johnston, and thanks to the members here in the gallery. It was good to catch up this morning as well.

Obviously, the wellbeing of current and former Tasmanian police officers is something we take very seriously. We've had discussion with both representatives of the Retired Police Association of Tasmania and yourself regarding proposals for additional wellbeing support for retired officers, and appreciate the constructive engagement on the matter.

As members would appreciate, the government has had to make some tough decisions across portfolios in the context of the state's Budget, but that doesn't diminish the importance of ensuring retired officers can access appropriate support when they need it. We remain committed to seeing a wellbeing support pilot for retired police officers to proceed. We're currently working through the options available to deliver such a program in a sustainable way. And this has included conversation with the Police Association and looking at what other jurisdictions are doing in this space. It's important that we continue to keep an eye on that.

Our work on a trial program is ongoing. As a result, I'm not in a position to provide a definitive commencement date today. But I can assure members that discussions are continuing and we look forward to providing further information once these arrangements have been finalised.

And, obviously, our retired police officers have often given decades of service to the Tasmanian community, often in challenging and traumatic circumstances, and the government recognises the importance of supporting their wellbeing. Now, obviously there are supports that are available through the retired police network, so peer support network. And it's also - and I'm sure we'll have this discussion today - very important that we make sure that design is right when it comes to issues that can impact workers compensation. As we've seen across government, small changes can have a very large impact.

Obviously, our retired police are one of our really important State Service workforces, but we also have workforces that are as varied as firefighters to nurses to prison guards. child safety staff and a range of others, many of whom, as current serving members, don't have access to our nation-leading wellbeing support program. It is important that we get design right in this space. Appreciate the collaborative nature and the offer to continue to work together and look forward to sitting down further with RPAT and yourself.

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Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, it's almost exactly what you said this time last time in Estimates and nothing has happened. Meanwhile, retired police officers are going without mental health supports and that's just simply not good enough. Queensland have moved further on this. They've got Cop Care, which they announced recently, which is a program designed by - run by veteran police officers for veteran police officers. They're moving ahead in this.

The Retired Police Officers Association wrote to you on 1 April, recognising the budget constraints and offering a way forward that is significantly cheaper and, importantly, provides a really - removes a really critical barrier at the moment to commencing a trial. They've offered - providing up to 72 counselling sessions for a maximum of six retired police officers, up to 12 sessions per officer with the program noted variations, can be implemented, managed and reviewed without the need for a position, which is a client service manager position, particularly a level 7 classification. This role, very limited in nature, can be absorbed within current staffing levels. It's a significant cost saving. Just to keep talking about this - why can't this be implemented? They've outlined something cheaper than what you actually had on the table back in 1 January this year. Why won't she sit down with them and look at implementing this particular measure?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Johnston, I just said that I will and we're continuing to work together on it -

Ms JOHNSTON - When?

Mr ELLIS - and appreciate the suggestion from RPAT as well. I think that's a very common-sense suggestion and I noted that in the letter back to them. Also aware of the Cop Care innovation as well, and Queensland is one of the jurisdictions I mentioned we're looking at around the country in terms of the way these support services are provided.

I just want to be very cautious - we don't want to give people the impression that support isn't available to them. There is support that's available to people-

Ms JOHNSTON - Volunteer support from retired police officers supporting each other. That's not the same as important clinical health support.

CHAIR - Ms Johnston.

Mr ELLIS - Ms Johnston, the reason why I mention it, because you and I both share a very strong interest to make sure we're looking after people -

Ms JOHNSTON - Why aren't you funding it?

Mr ELLIS - and people can often feel funny about coming forward and getting support. I just want to make sure that people know that there is support available for them. I think we share that view.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, the Commissioner for Police, in a letter to you and the Premier, advocated for firearm caps, citing public safety. Would you be able to table or site evidence where arbitrary number on caps, such as five, has lowered legally-owned and registered firearm related crime in any jurisdiction?

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Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. Obviously there's been a range of testimony that's been provided in other forums. We'd expect that there would be people advocating for that position when we put forward legislation as part of the consultation process. So, perhaps that information will be coming further forward. But I might just look to the Commissioner of Police if there's anything further you wanted to -

Comm ADAMS - No, I don't have anything further.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, could you please provide the committee with an update on the trial of tasers by Tasmania Police?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Tasmania Police will commence a trial in relation to the use of tasers by frontline officers. The trial will start with a planning phase, which will include the development of policy, training and implementation strategies, along with broader community consultation. The use of tasers will provide an extra option to police officers during the high-risk situations, helping to improve safety and reduce risk. Providing more force options for Tasmanian Police is critical in allowing them to protect the community and to protect themselves. It's important that police are kept safe while they are keeping the community safe and the government welcomes the trial of taser technology by police.

Tasmania Police has signed a contract to purchase equipment for the trial. The taser trial will be conducted over 12 months and is anticipated to commence on 1 July 2026. There will be best-practice safeguards built into the trial to ensure the appropriate use of technology. The trial will incorporate a comprehensive evaluation phase, with 50 officers working in frontline positions across various geographical locations within the state.

The outcome of the evaluation will inform decisions regarding the potential permanent integration of tasers into the suite of use-of-force options available to frontline general duties officers. We look forward to the commencement of the trial and the government will work closely with Tasmania Police to monitor the trial and its outcomes.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, what is the timeline for bringing in the firearms reform bill? Also, through the commissioner, can I confirm that you haven't seen a draft of that bill? Is the minister involving the police in the drafting of the bill?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, it's probably important to note, Ms Butler, that negotiations are ongoing regarding the national buyback. Currently, we don't yet have a national process; zero jurisdictions out of eight have signed up to it, so it would be inappropriate to be undertaking -

Ms BUTLER - So, you don't have a timeline?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, it would be inappropriate for us to be undertaking legislation in that space when we don't yet have the framework for it. However, there is legislation that we can progress while the national process continues. That legislation is, as I've outlined, the National Firearms Register legislation, which will continue to make sure that we're accelerating that project while remaining a nation leader. We also have antique firearms legislation to bring forward, which will move from an exemption process to a registration process, which is good common sense, and then also the legislation to crack down on stealing firearms and manufacturing firearms.

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Ms BUTLER - My question was about the firearms reform bill. Is there a timeline for that firearms reform bill? To confirm whether or not, through you, Minister, the Commissioner has seen a draft of that bill and whether the police will be participating?

Mr ELLIS - That bill will be coming through in coming weeks.

Ms BUTLER - In coming weeks?

Mr ELLIS - In coming weeks, yes.

Ms BUTLER - Can you give us more than that? After the winter recess?

Mr ELLIS - In the coming weeks I'd expect and we will of course consult then with the community, which is really important, but we've been working in consultation with Tasmania Police. I'll pass to the commissioner if there's anything further you want to add.

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister, it's actually our team that do the work in relation to the legislative package. As the minister said, there's a range of reforms for firearms. The antique firearms reform obviously is a body of work that our team has put together, the National Firearms Register, and then obviously the reform - the national firearm reforms post-Bondi. We've done some work in relation to that. Obviously, we seek advice from the minister in terms of the nuances and the direction that we need to take in the development of that legislation. That work is underway, but I actually haven't seen the completed package.

Ms BUTLER - Okay, thank you. Minister, given the reports of gun lobby groups, including those linked to the US National Rifle Association, funding political campaigns, can you confirm whether you or your party have accepted any donations from the gun lobby? And will you rule out accepting such funding in the future?

Mr ELLIS - I'm sure all political donations to the Liberal Party would be declared in accordance with the rules.

Ms BUTLER - In light of concerns about the influence of gun lobby donations on public policy and the Tasmanian Liberals' lack of a blanket ban on such contributions, how can Tasmanians be confident that your decisions on firearm laws are not being influenced by vested interests?

Mr ELLIS - Because Labor and Liberal governments around the country have made similar decisions to what we have - that the challenge here is about -

Ms BUTLER - We're talking about you here, minister, are you being influenced by vested interests when it comes to gun laws?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, as I said, I'm sure the Liberal Party will declare donations in accordance with the rules, just as I'm sure that Jacinta Allan in the Labor Party will do the same, and Peter Malinauskas will do the same in the Labor Party as well. I think it's important in this country to have a serious debate about these issues rather than this kind of silly political discussion.

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Ms BUTLER - You're not prepared to rule out accepting donations from the gun lobby, minister?

Mr ELLIS - As I say, Ms Butler, I'm sure that the Liberal Party will declare donations in accordance with the rules.

Ms BUTLER - Are you accepting donations from the gun lobby, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, I'm sure the Liberal Party will declare donations in accordance with the rules.

Ms BUTLER - So, you are?

Mr ELLIS - As I mentioned, we take a similar position to Labor and Liberal and Country Liberal states around the country. The reason is policy. That's our focus on this and when it comes to -

Ms BUTLER - It looks like you are being manipulated by the gun lobby, minister. Minister, with parties like One Nation openly advocating for weaker gun laws and having sought support from international gun lobby groups, are you prioritising political alliances and donations over the safety of Tasmanians by refusing to rule out gun lobby funding? Are you?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, donations to One Nation are a matter for One Nation.

Ms BUTLER - Is that how you're being influenced, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, I've just said we have bipartisan support for the position that the Tasmanian government has put forward.

Ms BUTLER - No, you don't.

Mr ELLIS - We do in the other states, Ms Butler. And indeed, we actually have -

Ms BUTLER - Well, you look very much on your own, minister, because you've been really adamant about this. Are you being manipulated and influenced by gun lobby groups?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, if we are on our own, we're on our own with Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Ms BUTLER - Are you? Are you being influenced by gun lobby groups, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, you can try and talk over me all you want. The fact remains -

Ms BUTLER - Well, you're not answering my question.

Ms BADGER - I'd just like to go back to the police commissioner's description of the risks facing Tasmania Police officers due to firearms. Recognising again that you don't have a complete dataset, commissioner, could you possibly reflect in more general terms on firearms and the risk? Would you say that proliferation of legal firearms in the community is a risk to police officers? Are there cases where the presence of legally acquired firearms creates a

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greater risk to police officers? And how does that risk change if there are multiple firearms at a location?

Comm ADAMS - There's a little bit to your question there. Legal and illegal firearms pose a risk to police officers during their job every day. We are seeing those, as I said, we're either detecting those through searches while we've attended for a particular incident not firearm-related, and we've found those during the course of a search. In some instances, we're responding to matters where it will relate to a firearm, whether that's been a firearm that's been used to threaten a member of the community or is a firearm that has been disclosed or, you know, police officers are confronted with.

I guess it's only anecdotal. And I refer back to a station visit I did back in Hobart probably two months ago now, and at the end of that readout, you know, just talking to our drugs and firearms team. And their view is that most of the jobs that they attend, they are finding firearms or there is some, you know, firearm present, whether it's being, as I said, as a search or is in response to an incident. But that can be illegal firearms and it also can be legal firearms. So, it's very hard to distinguish.

Ms BADGER - Minister, in regard to the buyback scheme - and definitely appreciate this is still work underway with the federal government, as they have in the past touted being able to have a 50-50 funding agreement with various states. Obviously, the Tasmanian Liberals' position was, in some aspects, 150 per cent buyback of the market value, which I assume is a learning from the Western Australian buyback scheme. In the Budget, there is \$5 million, I believe, allocated to this. Is that hard and fast? How that's allocated? Could you talk us through that? Or is that going to change in respect to what might happen in the future with the federal government?

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, that's right, so very much a placeholder. We don't know what the cost of a buyback scheme would be because it depends on a range of different factors. First among them is, obviously, the compensation that you would provide to firearms owners. So, the WA scheme, as we mentioned, you know, people being only provided a tenth of the value of their firearm. We don't want to go down that path. That's obviously really a bad approach to public policy; it's bad outcome for those people. If you're going to undertake confiscation, there should be compensation. We haven't yet heard a final position from the federal government, but we'd be very concerned if it was WA or worse because that's a really bad outcome for law-abiding firearms owners who've done nothing wrong.

The second element is what comes forward in a voluntary buyback. So, it's somewhat unknown about what we receive from the community. And, again, it would depend on the level of compensation. So if you provided a higher degree of compensation in a voluntary buyback, you get a higher number of firearms. There are, of course, firearms - and this is often firearms that we do see stolen and traded, that are relatively low-value firearms in the legal market. You know, the classic is granddad's old .22. That then becomes extremely valuable on the black market. Having a small dollar figure that helps a person make a decision to hand that back in may be appropriate. But you're unlikely to see other kinds of firearms that are kind of more newer coming through. There's also a range -

Ms BADGER - Sorry, financially, if that's a placeholder, obviously there are issues with the Budget and there are lots of efficiencies to be made. Is there a place where if the federal government, for example, wasn't going to contribute fifty-fifty or the buyback scheme became

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incredibly popular, that you would exceed that \$5 million?. Is that in any way a cap that you might be putting on it?

Mr ELLIS - No, no.

Ms BADGER - What would you do if the federal government wouldn't or couldn't come to the party with a 50 per cent joint funding with the state?

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, so, it'd definitely be a really challenging conversation. And because buybacks are extraordinarily expensive - the federal buyback under John Howard was 100 per cent federally funded. And the potential cost of this buyback nationally is well into the billions of dollars. It's a huge expense and there are questions of, you know, will the federal government actually prefer to allocate funds in different ways? One of the studies that was provided to the Victorian rapid review, which showed that there was for every \$100 that was spent on buybacks in some jurisdictions, there was only a \$1 return for public safety. Now, you know, those numbers are obviously contested, but there's -

Ms BADGER - It's hard to put a dollar figure on public safety, isn't it?

Mr ELLIS - And it's always just hard to put a dollar on something that's so speculative. One of the other things we saw in WA was that there's a buyback that you might think that you would get with a compulsory buyback, so a caps-based buyback. In Tasmania we estimate it'd be about 25 per cent of all firearms in Tasmania would come through a caps-based buyback, depending on the cap that you put.

But it would also then depend on firearms being shifted through licences. The commissioner mentioned before there was a big increase in the number of firearms licensees after WA put in their cap, so trusted family members or close friends, things like that. You then actually have firearms that are - the same number of firearms actually dispersed among more people, which is actually more of a regulatory challenge. In a Tasmanian context, where we have stronger storage requirements for larger holdings, that actually would reduce the storage requirements for some of these people.

There're a whole range of different complexities that come with buyback scheme design that, while we're still in negotiation with the federal government, we don't know exactly what it would be. So, the \$5 million is there as a placeholder depending on, you know, where it lands, what the legislation looks like, all those sort of things. We just don't know at this stage. Suffice to say it would be significantly more expensive if there was caps. But again, we don't really know.

Ms JOHNSTON - I want to go back to the Retired Police Association and their request. It has been going on for a long time now. It took a prompt from them as well as a prompt from myself in parliament before you actually even acknowledge the letter of 1 April. When will you actually sit down with them to discuss their proposal for 72 counselling sessions for a maximum of six retired police officers - that's 12 sessions per officer - to be implemented? There are retired officers that need their assistance now. When will you do that, because I'm really concerned that I'm going to be back here again this time next year having the same discussion over and over again?

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Mr ELLIS - Look, we're committed to it, we're working through a process. As you mentioned, a proposal has come through as recently as April from the Retired Police Association to change the scheme design in a way that might be more appropriate.

Ms JOHNSTON - Well, it's the same scheme design they proposed initially, but yes.

Mr ELLIS - But, you know, in terms of cost allocation, a whole range of other things. We appreciate their proactivity. You know, I mentioned we caught up this morning briefly and keen to meet up soon, so we'll find a time in the diary.

Ms JOHNSTON - Will you do that within the next month?

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, absolutely. That'd be good.

Ms JOHNSTON - Can you commit to doing that, because it's really important? It drags on, and the longer it drags on, the more retired police officers suffer without assistance. We're not talking about the valuable assistance they get already from the Retired Police Association. The volunteers that provide that service are really important. We're talking about clinical mental health supports here. Will you commit to meeting them within a month to be able to put in place clinical mental health supports for retired police officers?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, I've already mentioned I'm happy to meet within a month. Again, there is mental health support that's available for every member of the community -

Ms JOHNSTON - Clinical mental health support?

Mr ELLIS - Clinical mental health support is available to every member of the community, and if people need mental health support, it is available. There are services for people whatever your occupation or whatever your former occupation.

Now, there are some scheme design things that we'll work through. And I understand that you're looking for a higher degree of service, and understand that. I just want to again make the point for people who are watching this that if you do need mental health support, please reach out.

Ms JOHNSTON - This is beyond and above what you get from your Medicare plan. We shouldn't be relying on that particular service to be able to provide assistance to retired police officers. That's just completely unacceptable. This is beyond that.

Can I go, then, to the support for injured workers that has been put into the Budget - \$15 million for this coming financial year and then the forward Estimates as well. Can you provide me, please, with a breakdown of how that support will be provided, particularly with mental health support to officers?

CHAIR - Ms Johnston, this is a separate question, and you only have five seconds to answer, so we'll use that for the next one, please. Mr Di Falco.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, it's widely known that you don't have full capacity of available police officers. There are alarming reports of first- and second-year constables conducting firearm safety storage checks that have limited experience and don't have adequate legislative

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knowledge. At last year's Estimates, I was told that all officers that conduct storage checks are extensively trained. Could you state, for the record, that that is the case?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. I will pass to the Commissioner.

Comm ADAMS - Thank you, and through you minister: every police officer that leaves the academy is equipped to perform their operational duties. There is a very clear emphasis on them having sufficient knowledge to interpret the law for the first two years of their service, and also to make sure our priority of keeping them safe. Obviously, as a person goes on in their career, they acquire new knowledge, new skills, and they're provided a level of expertise across a whole range of investigative and police response functions. But our commitment, and obligation, is to ensure that a constable who graduates from the academy has the sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to do their job.

Mr Di FALCO - So, training specifically for firearms storage?

A/Comm OOSTERLOO - Through you, minister: yes, so it's part of the academy package, specific training on storage inspections. The other thing we did some years ago to really try to make our storage inspection processes consistent, and guide our officers in how to conduct those inspections, is develop a template. When an officer is issued an inspection to carry out, they open up a template, the template walks them through the requirements of the act and with references to the relevant provisions of the act related to those inspections. So, arguably, it is very difficult for an officer to get that wrong if they follow that checklist, notwithstanding that some of our officers might require a bit of extra training from time to time. When we identify those issues we absolutely take that action, and we get feedback from licence holders or other police officers around that. So, that template is really our safeguard around making sure our officers know what they're doing when they conduct those inspections.

Mr Di FALCO - You also said they would interpret that, so as an example, you can turn up to a safe inspection, the guy's got a two-tonne bank safe. It's possible for the police officer to look at that bank safe, because it's not what he's used to, and say, 'Yeah, no, that's not up to scratch.'

A/Comm OOSTERLOO - Through you, minister: So, a bank safe, if it isn't specifically compliant with the requirements of the act, the act doesn't specify the alternative arrangements for storage inspections. But if it's strongroom, for instance, I'll take a different example which is, you know, a concrete bunker strongroom with significant security measures that have been taken - that isn't provided for within the act, but there is a provision in the act that says the Commissioner may approve alternative arrangements where those arrangements are higher than the prescribed requirements. So, that is a little challenging, that one, if there's someone that has those requirements hasn't previously been approved by the commissioner, there's a requirement to come back to the commissioner and get those arrangements specifically approved. But it's a fair point to say that some of our officers who come across that might be unsure of what to do. Our Firearms Services staff - we have an operational team within Firearms Services, and we regularly communicate out to districts that if you have any questions or concerns or need advice, we've got experts within Firearms Services that can provide that advice.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, good policy development and informed public debate relies on reliable data and reporting. Can you outline initiatives that the Department of Police, Fire

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and Emergency Management is undertaking to improve data reporting and transparency in relation to firearms?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. The government agrees that informed public debate on firearms policy should be supported by timely and transparent information and data. That's why the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management has developed a new firearms dashboard, which brings together key firearms data in a single location. The dashboard provides information on firearms licence holders, firearms seizures, searches, and stolen and recovered firearms. Importantly, the dashboard allows users to query data across different time periods, making it easier to identify trends and better understand firearm activity in Tasmania.

The dashboard will be made publicly accessible through the Tasmania Police website. This initiative directly supports the government's commitments to transparency and will provide the community, researchers, stakeholders and members of parliament with ready access to reliable firearms data.

The dashboard was developed, in part, because there is significant interest in firearms information, including the number of firearms licence holders in Tasmania and the number of firearms seized by police. Rather than requiring individual requests for this information, the dashboard will provide a publicly accessible source of data that can be accessed by anyone. This initiative will not only improve transparency, but will also reduce administrative workload for the department by enabling individuals to access information directly.

The government's committed to ensuring that discussions about firearms policy and community safety are informed by evidence, and this new firearms dashboard is an important step towards achieving that objective.

Now, also, just to update Ms Butler as well, in our search of the records, we can't find the meeting request that you were talking about previously, but very happy to follow up with you specifically, and we can be in touch with the people that you'd like us to meet with.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, just to follow up, where is the dashboard accessible and how often will it be updated?

Ms BUTLER - Why are there two questions on your DD?

CHAIR - No, that was a continuation on -

Mr JAENSCH - Yes.

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister: the dashboard is on the Tasmania Police website, and it is actually an active dashboard that is live so it will be updated every day, and I think it does go back a number of years, in terms of the data.

Now, this is, I guess, our first tranche of building a dataset around firearms. There have been a lot of questions that have been asked today and also yesterday where we'll seek to build that, but this is the first tranche of data that we've provided in regards to firearms.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you.

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Ms BUTLER - Just to go back to your response to my earlier question around whether you had met with the Port Arthur survivors, I actually have met with a survivor who said he had tried to speak to you on a number of occasions and you kept saying, 'We'll catch up at some time', and you never have.

Now, in light of concerns about the influence of gun lobby donations on public policy, minister, can you answer, yes or no, are you being lobbied by domestic or foreign interests, including dealers, in relation to guns?

Mr ELLIS - So, Ms Butler, we put the firearms consultative committee together -

Ms BUTLER - Yes or no?

Mr ELLIS - that has members of various different shooting organisations from TasFarmers, to sporting shooters -

Ms BUTLER - Yes or no, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, I'm saying, of course we're speaking to firearms owners and people in the firearms industry, as we should, and we're also meeting with victims groups, the Police Association, taking advice from a range of different jurisdictions. And I think, Ms Butler, to be honest, part of the feedback that your party receives is that -

Ms BUTLER - Yes or no, minister - are you being lobbied -

CHAIR - Ms Butler, let the minister finish.

Mr ELLIS - You're not actually talking to these people. TasFarmers, these are good, hardworking people. They live in our community. They use firearms as tools of the trade and if you're trying to say that we shouldn't be -

Ms BUTLER - Point of order, relevance, Chair. I asked him a specific question, yes or no, whether he was being influenced by vested interests, foreign and domestic interests, and lobbied by gun lobby groups, yes or no? He's talking now about TasFarmers. Can you please

Mr ELLIS - TasFarmers are a domestic group that lobbies on behalf of firearms users.

Ms BUTLER - Can you ask the minister to be relevant to the question: yes or no, is he being influenced and receiving funds from vested interests?

CHAIR - I can't put words into the minister's mouth, but he's getting to the question.

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, I mean, in terms of foreign, I personally haven't met with any foreign firearms groups. In terms of domestic, of course, we're meeting with law-abiding firearms owners in this country. I know you are as well, and I think they've been pretty disappointed with the way that they've been sold out by the Labor Party.

Ms BUTLER - That's not relevant to the question.

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Mr ELLIS - You know, Ms Finlay has said herself to these groups, including TasFarmers, that nothing would change to impact law-abiding firearms owners, and then she was rolled by your leader.

Ms BUTLER - So, you won't rule that out, minister? You're trying to avoid the question. You won't rule out - 'yes or no' was the question.

Mr ELLIS - I'm saying of course I'm meeting with law-abiding firearms owners, as are you, Ms Butler, as we should be, because we are lawmakers.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, are you being lobbied by domestic or foreign interests, including dealers in relation to guns.

Mr ELLIS - Geoff Henley from Sports Hut is on the Firearms Consultative Committee.

Ms BUTLER - Yes, I know. Are you being -

Mr ELLIS - This is publicly available information, Ms Butler. If you're not meeting with people like Mr Henley and other firearms owners - I mean, I saw Dr Broad was in a firearms dealership at Agfest speaking -

Ms BUTLER - Yes or no, minister?

Mr ELLIS - with people who are apparently domestic firearms lobbyists.

Ms BUTLER - Yes or no, minister? Has the Tasmanian Liberal Party or you, specifically, ever received funds from vested interests in relation to firearms?

Mr ELLIS - In terms of funding, I'm sure the Liberal Party declares funding in relation to the rules.

Ms BUTLER - Have you, minister, ever received funds from vested interests in relation to firearms?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, as I said, the Liberal Party handles donations and I'm sure they've declared in accordance with the rules.

CHAIR - Next question there, Ms Butler.

Ms BUTLER - Still with me?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, if we can go back to my original question: has the Liberal Party and have you been lobbied by foreign gun groups, as One Nation has? And have you received any funding from gun lobby groups?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, I think you've asked the same question a number of times.

Ms BUTLER - But you haven't answered - it's a yes or no.

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Mr ELLIS - I have, and I'll say the same thing: no, I haven't met with any foreign firearms lobby groups and all donations to the Liberal Party, I'm sure, are declared within the rules. Now, as for whether Jacinta Allan from the Labor Party in Victoria, who made the same decision, did that, that's a matter for her. Ditto Mr Malinauskas, who's the Labor Premier of South Australia -

Ms BUTLER - Minister, are gun lobby groups dictating your stance on firearm reform in Tasmania?

Mr ELLIS - Butler, the man sitting next to you, in your party, was speaking with dealers in -

Ms BUTLER - Are gun lobby groups dictating your stance, as a Police minister, on firearm reform?

Mr JAENSCH - Oh dear.

CHAIR - Ms Butler, we'll -

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler -

Ms BUTLER - Because it looks like they are.

CHAIR - Ms Butler, let the minister answer.

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, of course I am meeting with firearms groups - as are you, as is Dr Broad.

Ms BUTLER - Are they dictating your stance and policy on firearm reform, as they did with One Nation, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Our policy is based on what we believe will deliver the best outcome for the people of Tasmania, taking into account all of -

Ms BUTLER - And you can guarantee you've got Tasmanians' best interests at heart when it comes to community safety?

Mr ELLIS - Absolutely.

Ms BUTLER - You're not doing the work of the gun lobby?

Mr ELLIS - Absolutely, Ms Butler.

Ms BUTLER - You can confirm you're not being influenced by the gun lobby?

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, as we've spoken about extensively, the Bondi royal commission has shown that the problem is information sharing -

CHAIR - Minister, we'll let -

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Members interjecting.

Ms BADGER - Sorry, minister, I think the time's up.

CHAIR - Yes, we'll let Ms Badger.

Ms BADGER - I just want to touch on the reportable conduct scheme and legislation. I understand there will be legislation introduced possibly in August that's intended to retrospectively cover Tasmania Police in the reportable conduct scheme. Can you confirm that - obviously, Tas Police has legal advice that they're not part of the scheme at the present - despite that advice, Tasmania Police is still collecting the full and adequate information so that if retrospective legislation comes in, all of that information could still then be properly submitted even though it's not happening now?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Badger. I'll pass to the commissioner.

Comm ADAMS - Thank you, minister, and thank you for the question. Tasmania Police is committed to child safety - it's as simple as that. We've led the way in terms of the development of training and guidance material and the policy, which the documentation that we developed has actually been utilised by other agencies.

When the *Child and Youth Safe Organisation Act* commenced in January 2024, we did commence reporting reportable conduct matters to the independent regulator. We believed that, at that time, we were an entity. We sought advice in relation to that and we were told we were an entity. Nine months later, we had cause to go and get some additional legal advice on a different matter and, in the course of getting that advice, we were advised that we were not an entity under the act and that because of the potential to breach the *PIP Act*, we needed to stop the reporting that we had been undertaken.

The deputy had been involved in a number of conversations with the independent regulator and we committed to providing de-identified material during that time. But from the outset, we have been supportive of there being legislative change to enable Tasmania Police to provide the information as per the legislation. Obviously, we've needed to stop the reportable conduct reporting to the independent regulator. The legislation, I understand is - I'm not sure where it is in the parliamentary process - but it does include a retrospective reporting, and I'll hand to the deputy because we're prepared for that and we have the documents.

Dep HIGGINS - Thank you. Through you, minister. It's not something Tasmania Police stopped recording. Through our Professional Standards Command, we take all our internally raise matters or our external complaints or our use of force reports into that command and into our operational skills unit within the academy as well to look at these types of things, which might involve youth as well. As far as reportable conduct goes - I understand the gazette process happened a couple of months ago, at the start of April - that's when we were able to start reporting again. They come through me, and I'm not aware that we've reported any matters since that time, but anything from that point in time back to 1 August, if there's anything we need to report during that time, we will have it.

Ms BADGER - For clarification, when was that legislation coming? Is it August roughly when we were expecting that?

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Mr ELLIS - We can follow up. It's one that the Attorney-General has got carriage of, but yes, we are happy to do that.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. I also wanted to ask about the training that Tasmania Police had been undertaking on identifying and dealing with coercive control, particularly in the family violence space. I understand the Small Steps 4 Hannah, the program that not just Tasmania Police, but the State Service, were going through, is no longer running the same coercive control programs. What programs are you going to be using moving forward for training and what are you also doing to build on that existing program that had been undertaken?

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister. I will pass to Assistant Commissioner Blackwood in a moment, but Tasmania Police has a raft of different training programs to ensure that whether you're a frontline officer or an officer in our recruit program all the way through to our specialist areas, there is a layered and scaffold training program so that you're acquiring the more specialised skills that you may need to deal with family violence.

Small Steps 4 Hannah was an excellent program, which Tasmania Police took the lead on in a strong partnership. It was broader than just police officers, that particular program, and I really would like to compliment Inspector Rebecca Davis who's actually led that wonderful work, and she's done a tremendous job in ensuring that not only police officers, but other key members of the community have been exposed to that training. I'll ask the Assistant Commissioner to provide some further detail about our approach to training for family violence.

Mr BLACKWOOD - Thank you. Through you, minister. Small Steps 4 Hannah hasn't completed just yet. We're actually still running it out, but I think this month we have some more training sessions planned. That hasn't concluded. That formed a raft - I suppose - of a continuum of training that we've had in previous years. We had online training particularly for coercive control. I imagine with what is proposed in terms of legislative change for the *Family Violence Act*, which has proposed changes for that, there will be a new training package that will probably come out after those changes are made regarding what's happening there. We also monitor the impact of that training as well. In terms of our reporting - what we're seeing in the reporting - it has certainly meant that training has been very worthwhile for us.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, can I please get a breakdown - as I said beforehand - regarding the support for injured workers and of the \$15 million in this budget and the forward Estimates in terms of the breakdown of that - how it's going to be expended and what particular program areas. I'm particularly interested in mental health supports for officers.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Johnston. I'll pass to Tasmania Police.

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister. That additional funding is simply to assist us in our workers compensation premium. That is a premium that continues to escalate. Last year, the premium was \$46 million. The premium from 1 July is \$63 million. That's a 37 per cent increase in our premium. We don't have funding for that. This is funding that will assist us in meeting that premium.

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Ms JOHNSTON - The funding that you do provide within your budget to well-being and support? What percentage of that is, and what are you providing for wellbeing and support?

Comm ADAMS - That's really difficult to actually answer that, because our salaries are actually, for State Service and Police, are included in output group 1, so there's components of salaries that are in there. It's very difficult to strip out and say these are the, you know, the support staff that sit within the wellbeing unit, because all their salaries actually sit within that output group.

There has been some additional line items that have been provided by the government in terms of wellbeing support. There was a recent allocation of \$3 million to support some of the expansion of some of our programs. But in essence, I can't give you a line-by-line breakdown of where the allocation of funds goes to wellbeing.

Ms JOHNSTON - So, just to be clear, that's output group 1 under support to the community?

Comm ADAMS - Yes, that's right.

Ms JOHNSTON - So in the forward Estimates that's got that reducing by about \$50 million through to between 2029-30 period. Do you predict that there'll be an impact on the number of recruits you can have within the wellbeing and support, as a result of trying to make efficiencies in that period?

Comm ADAMS - I'll make some general comments. We have to make salary reductions, and we have to make non-salary reductions. We have, you know, worked across a spectrum of our output groups to look at where those savings can be made. We certainly want to engage our staff in relation to that, and the Premier made an announcement on Monday in regards to a redundancy program. That's a program that we will elect to also run specifically for State Service employees. During the course of, obviously, identifying where we may lose staff, we will then sit down and look at the redesign, rescoping and restructuring that will need to occur. There's no, you know, there's no hiding it. Obviously budget reform is always a challenge, but we will look for the opportunities that may come through that particular process and we will need to make change to ensure that we can meet the savings.

At this stage, I want to be really cautious, because I got some feedback yesterday: we have a lot of our staff watching, and I made some comments around just the external servicing of vehicles, which my comments were actually restricted to non-operational vehicles that don't need a TasGRN (Tasmanian Government Radio Network) radio or that relate to a vehicle that are on an SES contract being subject to servicing. I didn't give that additional clarity, and I've caused some concern, obviously, in our workplace at fleet and engineering. So, I really want to be cautious about my comments.

We've got salary reductions, we've got non-salary reductions. I can give you some high-level, broad indication of how we're going to achieve those savings without giving you specific areas of saying, you know, where are the job cuts, so if you're happy for me to do that. We've got to achieve \$8 million, obviously, as a savings target for the next financial year. There's a component, as I said, which will be salaries, which we hope the redundancy program will be able to deliver the positions that we need through that program. Then we've got some non-salaries.

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Technology will obviously be a feature of what we do. So we'll be redesigning, rescoping and restructuring some of our work areas. We've got, I mentioned yesterday, which comes as great concern to all of our staff who work in the Capita building at the moment, where we've got eight floors of staff, we're moving to two floors, at Collins Street. That'll deliver an annual saving of \$1.4 million.

I won't go back into fleet, but there's some opportunities there with fleet in terms of rationalisation, dual leasing. We need to actually do some research around an owned versus leased model and actually look at, you know, whether there are savings there.

From a technology perspective, yesterday I mentioned and I'll again state, you know, they're moving from desktop phones to soft phones, which is Microsoft Teams, for those that don't know. We lease an extensive laptop and device management to support our frontline staff. Now, again, we need to look at that from a perspective of whether there's savings to be had through an owned fleet. We've also applied efficiencies to consultants, travel, communications and marketing. We've rescoped our decommissioning of the TasGRN legacy sites.

We have 30 to 40 vacancies every month, so we need to obviously apply, or manage, those vacancies, and they provide an immediate reduction in salaries if those positions aren't filled. But of course - and there'll be people listening - we are assessing those positions on a case-by-case basis and trying to ensure that we prioritise where we need our staff.

But yes. It's a challenge. A budget reform process is always a challenge, but we've got a good team that'll work together in consulting with our staff to make sure that we're hearing their feedback and we're making the decisions in the right areas.

CHAIR - Now, Mr Di Falco, it's your question, but if we want to have a break or keep pushing through?

Mr Di FALCO - Yep. I'm quite happy. Minister, I'm concerned at Labor's announced policy position to allocate more responsibilities to the Police Commissioner under exemptions. I am on the record consistently that the role of the executive should not be passing on the responsibility. What is your view on exemptions, as the outcome can change dramatically depending on the commissioner of the day? How many exemptions have been granted this year?

Mr ELLIS - I mean, there're obviously a range of different exemptions -

Ms BUTLER - That's so disrespectful. That is such a disrespectful question.

Mr Di FALCO - No, it's a straightforward question.

Ms BUTLER - I'd like to have that on the record. It is such a disrespectful question.

Mr Di FALCO - Well, it's a straightforward question. There's nothing disrespectful.

Ms BUTLER - It's very unparliamentary.

DEPUTY CHAIR - Excuse me, Ms Butler, we'll let Mr Di Falco have his answer to the question.

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Mr ELLIS - Look, I mean, I take it on face value -

Ms BUTLER - Of course you would.

Mr ELLIS - There's an exemption process that's written into the act for a range of different things. Partly that was to do with the fact that in 1996, there were a range of different areas that the parliament didn't decide on a licensing process. Currently, antique firearms are effectively operated under an exemption that was then found to be invalid because of the nature of that exemption that was granted many years ago. The task is then to actually stand up a registration process for firearms, antique firearms, so that it's clear of the rules of the road. Because currently the Police Commissioner is required to actually give people the ability to almost act outside of the law, rather than the law kind of giving clear parameters about what people can do -

Ms BUTLER - Works on risk. Does the job properly.

Mr ELLIS - Well, it's similar to, for example -

Ms BUTLER - Why aren't you standing up for your commissioner, minister? It's awful.

CHAIR - Ms Butler, can we please - you have a chance to ask questions when you want to ask questions.

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, I think you're probably misunderstanding the legislation here.

Ms BUTLER - You're misunderstanding your job.

Mr ELLIS - Well, I'm trying to explain the legislation here. Another example of an exemption process, because we don't actually have a licensing framework, is lawful firearms manufacturing, so defence manufacturing.

In 1996 there were a range of different firearms manufacturers that could no longer operate. Now, obviously we need to defend our country and there's an important role that manufacturers play, but they have to currently operate under exemptions, and there are some challenges with that.

You know, ditto, there are some other exemptions that are written through our legislation. Sorry, there's the exemption power, and there're a number of exemptions that the commissioner is granted, or previous commissioners, under that process.

Exemptions are probably an area that you would actually look to have fewer of rather than more of, because it would give clearer parameters for everyone about what the rules of the road are, and then you can have a licensing process for the various different things that people would seek to achieve in the lawful use and possession of firearms for a range of different reasons.

Now, in terms of, you know, whether it makes sense to have a cap and then exemption process - I mean the feedback that I get from law-abiding firearms owners is, we have a Permit to Acquire process. Every single firearm is a firearm that you have to be approved for by police on the basis of your genuine reason, broadly, and then the specific need for that firearm.

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Again, I think it's sort of a misunderstanding of what the legislation is, how it works. And a far more sensible approach is the Permit to Acquire process that was set up in 1996. It means that every firearm has to have a genuine reason and a lawful need. That's, I suppose, some high-level commentary on that arrangement.

We actually, in our law, I think most legal experts would acknowledge that we actually need fewer exemptions and more clarity for administrative offices, including the commissioner and others, so that there's clearer direction from parliament, but I don't know.

Commissioner, is there anything else you want to add?

Comm ADAMS - Just a couple of comments, minister. I issue exemptions every week. I will have a raft of the exemptions that are proposed and put forward from Firearms Services, which I approve. I have asked the team to see if we can get these statistics in terms of the exemptions for you and we may be able to get that before the session's complete.

CHAIR - Do we want to have a quick little break? Okay.

The committee suspended from 10.40 a.m. to 10.45 a.m.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, I've heard Victoria Police advertising a new service whereby citizens can report minor and non-urgent crimes online anytime from their phone. Is there anything like that being considered for Tasmania?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you Mr Jaensch. Tasmanian Police has been working to implement online crime reporting.

Ms BADGER - Great Dixier.

Mr ELLIS - He's good at it. Just to save you asking, because we knew that this was an area of your interest as well.

Ms BADGER - Appreciate you saving me the question.

Mr ELLIS - I can advise that the new Tasmanian Police online crime reporting portal was soft launched in late May this year. Soft launch will now run for several weeks while the system is tested with small groups of businesses and with more formal public launch to be scheduled in late June. The portal's public facing service where community members can report several crimes online, including particularly topically at the moment, fuel drive-off, but also retail theft, making off without payment, graffiti, and certain types of property damage and theft. The Online Crime Reporting Portal is a web-based form that is accessed via the Tasmanian Police website, and provides businesses and community members with the ability to report crimes online and receive a police reference number that they can use for insurance purposes and/or to make further reports.

It's anticipated that The Online Crime Reporting Portal will reduce physical attendance and administrative tasks to frontline police, as well as reducing vehicle usage and maintenance costs generated, by multiple callouts for this type of crime.

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The Online Crime Reporting Portal will increase our intelligence gathering capabilities and give frontline officers the opportunity to prioritise other areas of policing through safe work hours. A range of resources will be available for businesses and community members at police stations across the state and via the Tasmanian Police website to promote the portal and help people submit a report online.

Resources include posters for businesses to display at contact points, fact sheets and business contact cards. Initial feedback from early adopters in the business community has been overwhelmingly positive and the online portal is expected to be equally well-received by residents and the broader community. I'd like to acknowledge the significant work of the department to get online reporting up and running, which provides another way for Tasmania to interact with our trusted police force.

Chair, we've just got a couple of answers that the commissioner would like to add to.

Comm ADAMS - Yes, thank you, minister. Just two corrections. The firearms dashboard, I'm told updates monthly, not daily. Sorry about that.

Just in relation to the question about providing advice in relation to the recreational hunters and that expansion, I took that to mean to the minister; I have written, or I was asked to provide feedback to the secretary of NRE, in relation to the Deer Management Policy Review of 2025, and I did write back on 13 April this year in relation to that, and also as part of the cabinet process, we provide a comment on the cabinet documentation.

Ms BADGER - Are we able to get a tabled copy of the letter on notice, if that's possible, please?

Comm ADAMS - I can't see why there's any reason why that could not occur.

Mr ELLIS - Do you want to take it notice, just to double-check, just in case?

Ms BADGER - Taken on notice? Yep. Thank you.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, Tasmania has the highest rate of gun theft, with more firearms being stolen per capita here than in any other state. Tasmania's statistics are the most alarming in the nation, with 29.3 guns being stolen in Tasmania per 100,000 people, much higher than any other state, and the national average of 8.4 firearms per 100,000 residents. To our understanding that between 2020 and this year, 669 gun were stolen in Tasmania, an average of 169 per year. Minister, given Tasmania already has the highest rate of firearm theft in the country, do you accept that reducing the overall number of firearms in the community is a necessary step to reduce the number available to be stolen, as nearly all illegal firearms were once legal firearms?

Mr ELLIS - So again, that last one's clearly not true because obviously the ability to manufacture, and the ability to import -

Ms BUTLER - Nearly all, nearly all.

Ms BUTLER - Well, no Ms Butler, but probably for the committee's reference, we have a problem with the theft of firearms. The solution to that could be either to blame law-abiding

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firearms owners, or it could be to increase penalties for theft of firearms, that includes the actual theft and the possession of stolen firearms. It's actually legislation that Ms Butler's party voted against when it was brought through to the parliament previously. That was a huge mistake. It must be fixed. That's part of the reason why the legislation we will be bringing through to the parliament shortly will rectify that and increase penalties because we need to have stronger deterrence.

Stealing a firearm is not like stealing a TV. It is enormously dangerous for that homeowner in the moment that someone's breaking into their property because someone then has access to a firearm and they shouldn't - that can include when children are around and others. Also, when that firearm is stolen, if it gets into the black market, there's a hugely valuable commodity for people who can't access firearms through legal means.

We've got legislation coming through the parliament. We'd appreciate your support this time, Ms Butler, and that will go a long way to addressing the serious concerns around firearm theft.

Ms BUTLER - Through the minister, if I can discuss the firearm theft issue that we have in Tasmania. If theft rates remain significantly higher in Tasmania than anywhere else in Australia, what properly funded policies and measures could Tasmania Police take to try to reduce the level of firearm thefts and do you think that a firearm cap would assist in reducing the amount of firearms in our community?

Mr ELLIS - So I think -

Ms BUTLER - To the commissioner, through you.

Mr ELLIS - Oh, sure, and I think I've just answered that in terms of the policy that we're bringing forward for firearms sector. I'll pass that to the commissioner.

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister. My position on caps is clear. I'm of the view that the less firearms in the communities, the less opportunity for thefts to occur in the community, the less opportunity for those to fall into the wrong hands and be used as an enabler of crime or used to threaten police officers or members of the community.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you. Minister, do you concede that we have the highest firearm theft in the country? And why do you consider that we have a bigger problem here in Tasmania than any other state in the country? And do you think that reducing the amount of firearms in our community might go to helping reduce the amount of firearm thefts in our community and make our community safer?

Mr ELLIS - I think I've answered this already, Ms Butler.

Ms BUTLER - No, you haven't.

Mr ELLIS - We have a high rate of firearms theft, so we need stronger penalties.

Ms BUTLER - It's the highest in the country, Minister.

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Mr ELLIS - And so we should have the strongest penalties in the country for committing the crime that you're talking about.

Ms BUTLER - Your jails are full, minister, and you have an opportunity which is presented to you, which is based around community safety and police officer safety, when you have the highest firearm thefts in the country, and you're ignoring that, with really sensible - as John Howard said, 'common sense' policies - how do you consider reducing firearms isn't going to assist with that?

Mr ELLIS - I cannot believe my ears, Ms Butler. You think that we shouldn't have higher penalties because it will mean that people will go to jail.

Ms BUTLER - Excuse me, Chair. He's verballing me. I've just stated that -

Mr ELLIS - You think we shouldn't have higher penalties because you think people go to jail for stealing firearms.

Ms BUTLER - Point of order, Chair. Point of order.

Mr ELLIS - And instead you think the answer -

Ms BUTLER - Point of order.

DEPUTY CHAIR - I'll pause there, Ms Butler.

Ms BUTLER - Very unparliamentary, minister. You are a Police minister. Your job is to put community safety first.

Mr ELLIS - That's why these people should be in jail, Ms Butler.

DEPUTY CHAIR - Ms Butler, I'll go back to what the minister was saying where you actually said that the jails were full.

Ms BUTLER - I said the jails were full. We did not say that we do not support increases in penalties. I stated that the jails are full.

Mr ELLIS - You voted against it last time.

Ms BUTLER - So can the minister please retract that comment because I did not state that and he is verballing me, Chair.

Mr ELLIS - I won't be retracting that comment, Ms Butler, but quite clearly, if people steal firearms they should be in jail.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, that is not a decision for you to make. That is the decision of the Chair of this committee.

Mr ELLIS - They should be in jail, Ms Butler, I cannot believe that your answer -

Ms BUTLER - Do you have any understanding of parliamentary process? It's the Chair.

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DEPUTY CHAIR - So, inciting each other here. Ms Butler, we will let the minister answer the questions

Ms BUTLER - Will the minister please retract the comment where he has verballed me, Chair?

CHAIR - Ms Butler. We'll let the minister answer the questions. He was talking about fines and increasing those. You said that the jails were full. He then moved on to try to explain -

Ms BUTLER - He verballed me, Chair.

Mr ELLIS - Ms Butler, if you steal a firearm, you should be in jail. That is quite clearly -

DEPUTY CHAIR - I'm not going to put the words into his mouth, but he's trying to sort of say that fines have been increased or going to be increased -

Ms BUTLER - Chair, I'm asking him to withdraw the comment because it is misrepresenting what I said.

Mr ELLIS - I've told you, Ms Butler, I won't be, because people who steal firearms should be in jail.

Ms BUTLER - Chair, I need a decision on that, please.

DEPUTY CHAIR - I won't. We continue on. We won't retract that. We'll let that continue.

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Chair. It's quite clear: people who steal firearms should be in jail. I don't think I'm saying anything particularly revolutionary or even, in other contexts, interesting, but if it's the Labor Party's policy that we shouldn't increase penalties and we shouldn't make sure that people who steal firearms should be in jail -

Ms BUTLER - Chair, the minister is misrepresenting again -

Mr ELLIS - Then you should go out and tell people that.

Ms BUTLER - and he's not being relevant to the question that was put to him, Chair.

Mr ELLIS - It's quite clear.

DEPUTY CHAIR - Minister -

Ms BUTLER - Please ask him to be relevant to the question.

DEPUTY CHAIR - We don't know, obviously -

Ms BUTLER - He doesn't know our policies.

DEPUTY CHAIR - if the Labor Party is going to sort of look at -

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Mr ELLIS - They're welcome to tell anyone.

DEPUTY CHAIR - We won't presume that they're going to do something which we don't know if they're going to do or not. We'll keep to the question.

Mr ELLIS - I'll speak in general. If people steal firearms they should be in jail, and we have a challenge with firearms theft in Tasmania. Therefore, we should increase the penalties for people who steal firearms so there is a strong deterrent to make sure that law-abiding firearms owners -

Ms BUTLER - Worst in the country.

Mr ELLIS - who are the victims of this crime. Let's remember that.

Ms BUTLER - Worst in the country. What policies do you have in place?

Mr ELLIS - These people are the victims of crime.

DEPUTY CHAIR - We'll move on, minister.

Ms BADGER - Building onto the online crime reporting discussion, obviously part of this came around as a recommendation from the Weiss review, and phase two, if you like, of the online reporting system is for sexual abuse allegations. What's your time-frame for rolling this out and how is that going look in the next couple of years?

Comm ADAMS - Again, minister, thank you. Thank you for the question. I'll actually ask Assistant Commissioner Blackwood to talk to this. It is a project that's well advanced and he will be able to provide you with an update on that.

Mr BLACKWOOD - I'm pleased to say we have procured a product from Western Australia Police that they have run out, who have been a leader in this area. It's a product called Safe to Say and it's been developed by Crime Stoppers. It allows reporting of sex crimes both anonymously and also identifying yourself.

There are a lot of caveats in there and certainly if someone is in immediate danger or a child is in immediate danger, we don't take the report and call 000 or contact police, but it allows for people who aren't sure at the time whether they actually want to report to police something or not, to have something documented there, so if they choose to do so six months down the track or further on, there is an initial recording of them. We'll provide advice to the victim/survivor as well about what they might need to do to preserve evidence should they want to do that.

It also has a feature that is really useful that Western Australia report: it allows anonymous two-way communication between an investigator and that victim/survivor as well so they don't have to be identified, but once the detective receives the report, they are actually able to start that communication. What we've seen in the ARCH is, that time it takes to build up trust in process and systems - this will allow for this while the person still might want to protect their identity.

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We're going through the initial testing of it at the moment and consulting with the stakeholders about how we actually roll it out, but certainly in the coming months it will be live.

Ms BADGER - Great. That's fantastic to hear. Thank you.

Minister, on 15 March this year, ABC journalist, Emily Baker, published a report about the killing of a Launceston woman by German backpacker, Tobias Pick. That report said that German authorities had initiated proceedings to examine this matter again over in Germany. To date, have any German authorities be that, you know, police, their prosecution services or another authority, essentially anyone that's not the media, for example. Have any of those German authorities been in touch with Tasmania Police about this matter specifically?

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister, I look to the team because I certainly haven't had any contact. Not our crime and operations? No.

Dep HIGGINS - Certainly when that article came out we made inquiries whether that was the case and it wasn't the case at that time, and I'm not aware that it's happened since either in Germany.

Ms BADGER - From no authorities whatsoever. Police or otherwise?

Dep HIGGINS - Not that I'm aware of, no.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, if I understand correctly from the commissioner's answer to my question previously about the \$15 million for support for injured workers, that's to go to the premium for workers compensation, additional cost, and it's \$15 million in the forward Estimates every year. Is that now going to become the usual practice; it doesn't seem to me that this is going to decrease any time soon. So is this \$15 million, the fact that it's highlighted as a key deliverable become a business-as-usual deliverable?

Mr ELLIS - We'll need to continue and monitor this. The commissioner has highlighted the growing challenge with workers compensation premiums. I mentioned that before. We've seen other jurisdictions - the Treasurer and the Attorney-General both flagged this. We've seen other jurisdictions the need to make significant change to the way that their workers compensation schemes are structured up, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria.

It's important that we need to get the balance right. We need a system for workers compensation that's fair, that's affordable and that supports injured workers, including supports them to return to work where appropriate. That's an important balance and of course the laws apply in the State Service, but they apply in the private sector as well. There's work that's looking at that sort of interjurisdictional scan, because really our workers compensation premium is set up for physical injury, it's set up for broken bones, but with the emergence of psychosocial injury as a growing, I suppose, presentation, because it's always been there - psychosocial injury's always been something that's been impactful - but the way that it's treated and supported is different. We need to make sure that our systems are still fit for that purpose and our legislation more broadly so.

DPFEM is one of the agencies that are facing challenges with increasing workers compensation premiums on the basis of psychosocial injury. Justice, DECYP and others are

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also seeing this in different parts of their workforce, and we're seeing it in those kind of frontline agencies around the country. So it's something that we'll need to continue to work through so that we get the balance right, but we'll continue to engage closely with Treasury when it comes to payments for the premium for our frontline agencies. I'll pass to the Commissioner. Anything further?

Comm ADAMS - Just a couple of comments, minister, and through you, we did do some work with Edith Cowan University to actually try and provide us with some forecasting on where we thought the premium might land. Unfortunately their estimation was that we would hit a premium of around \$80 million, but the actual time-frame for that is becoming a lot closer than actually what they anticipated. It is a challenge. Each time the actuary does a risk assessment, certainly of our department, the increasing number of mental health-related claims, the cost to settle those claims, is having a factor obviously on the premium and we obviously anticipate that it's going to continue.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you for that. So it certainly seems that this is a line item that's going to be there permanently in terms of additional support for the premium. Minister, in your answer there, you referred to the Treasurer, who's obviously doing some work around this, and indeed he did say in his Budget speech that:

Legislative review is clearly needed and other states have tackled or are tackling this issue, so must we.

His words. What are you doing in terms of representation to the Treasurer to ensure that police officers are adequately protected? And what legislative mechanisms are you looking at implementing as a government to reduce that premium, or to reduce the impact of workers compensation, without impacting on workers' rights?

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, it's very important we get the balance right with this. We'll be doing the review process, that'll be across the whole of government. We'll obviously play our role in that and suffice it to say that the government as a whole is very conscious of making sure that we're supporting our injured workers. There are potentially some win-wins in the process as well.

Ms JOHNSTON - What kind of things are you are you thinking about? Can you give me some specifics about what you're looking at?

Mr ELLIS - Like I said, there's a whole range of different areas. Obviously the Attorney-General has carriage of the workers compensation legislation himself. I'll allow him to speak more specifically about that. We welcome the review, obviously, and it is really important that we get that balance right with making sure that the scheme is fair, that it's affordable, and it's supporting injured workers. That'll be key for us to work through, noting other jurisdictions have been able to achieve bipartisan support in the end for the different frameworks that they've brought in to make changes here.

We definitely do have a situation where our system is structured for physical injury and it's not taking into account the changes in terms of psychosocial. That'll be broadly a key theme of the review so that we can get the balance right.

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Mr Di FALCO - Minister, we've heard today a lot of credible evidence that we can't track legally held versus illegal firearms in crime statistics. How can the public be convinced that a cap or reclassification will do anything to reduce firearm crime?

Mr ELLIS - Sorry, Mr Di Falco, cap or reclassification?

Mr Di FALCO - Yes, and/or.

Mr ELLIS - Certainly, from the government's perspective, we've weighed up a range of the different views in the community and like most other jurisdictions in Australia, decided that a cap isn't the way to go because obviously it won't apply to the criminals and the terrorists, the people that clearly are the problem and the risk for our community. Instead, our focus is on taking strong action so that we can crack down on firearms theft, which even the opposition now acknowledges is clearly a problem, and deliver better information sharing -

Ms BUTLER - Worst in the country.

Mr ELLIS - Which is quite clearly - just the harrowing and horrific evidence that we're hearing coming out of the Bondi royal commission. Frankly, I expect that there will be more revelations along those lines.

In terms of reclassification, the government's obviously made the commitment on reclassification and welcomes the consultation when we do get to that process, noting that while broader national negotiations are still underway regarding buybacks, it's premature at this stage. It's important, with classification in general, that every firearm should be in the right category. I think that's a fair enough statement, and making sure that we're looking really closely that if, as technology changes, certain kinds of firearms need to be in a different category, that's a piece of good housekeeping that all governments and all firearms regulators should undertake in the process. How we do that is important and we welcome, obviously, the feedback from a whole range of groups across our community, including licensed firearm owners.

I had the opportunity to do a bit of firsthand consultation with some owners of straight-pull firearms the other day; it wouldn't be a firearm that would be reclassified because it was a rimfire straight-pull firearm, but just an opportunity for myself as a licensed firearms user to get an experience of straight-pull versus your typical bolt-action firearm. That's, I suppose, a general comment that it's important that we're working through this process, that we're consulting, and that we're giving everyone an opportunity to have their say.

One of the reflections that has been quite clear from other jurisdictions is that taking the time to get it right is important and many jurisdictions are now choosing a similar path to Tasmania, having taken the time to get it right.

Mr Di FALCO - Thank you, minister.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, following on from our discussion about online reporting of crimes, our community is familiar with and used to the Crime Stoppers Tasmania avenue for providing information and reporting crimes as well. Could you please update us on what support the Tasmanian government is providing currently to Crime Stoppers Tasmania and can you comment on how someone who wants to report a crime decides whether they go to Crime Stoppers or they use the online portal? Or do the two systems talk to each other?

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Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Firstly, can I acknowledge the important role Crime Stoppers Tasmania performs in providing a valuable community service and as a trusted partner of Tasmania Police? A big shout out to Dickie Daniels, an icon of community safety in Tasmania, and just such a wonderful community member. I have appreciated his many, many decades of service to the Tasmanian community. Information provided by Crime Stoppers is not only used by Tasmania Police but also by other compliance areas, for example, the Department of Natural Resource and Environment and the Australian Border Force. Crime Stoppers is to be commended for its ongoing advocacy and its support of community safety.

The Government committed funding of \$160,000 over four years towards Crime Stoppers commencing 2024-25, and \$80,000 has been distributed so far from Tasmania Police to Crime Stoppers in accordance with this commitment. In addition, a further \$50,000 was provided to Crime Stoppers in November 2025 by the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management, taking the total four-year financial contribution to \$210,000. This funding enabled Crime Stoppers' important work to continue in building community engagement in reporting and uncovering crime.

Tasmania Police also provide support and administration to Crime Stoppers which is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding. This includes office space, logistics such as telephones and power, and staff supporting within DPFEM.

I've already thanked, I should call him David Daniels - that is his legal name - but everyone knows him as 'Dickie', and Deputy Chair Katherine Halliday for their continued leadership and advocacy for Crime Stoppers.

I might pass to Tasmania Police if you want to talk through around the different approaches that people might take to reporting through Crime Stoppers versus our portal.

Comm ADAMS - Do you want to do that, as a board member of Crime Stoppers?

Mr BLACKWOOD - Through you, minister: if a person has information about a crime that they are not the victim of, that's where they would provide that information to Crime Stoppers. Obviously they have the choice whether they want to remain anonymous or provide their details. If you're a member of the public who are actually the victim of a crime, you've had your letterbox stolen, that's where you'd go to the new online crime portal and report that as a crime. That's the difference between the two.

Mr JAENSCH - And if someone reports through Crime Stoppers a crime, is their information -

Ms BUTLER - That's enough. I think that's a second question, isn't it, Chair?

DEPUTY CHAIR - It's relevant.

Mr BLACKWOOD - Correct.

Mr JAENSCH - It ends up in the right place, either way?

Mr BLACKWOOD - The two would get linked up.

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Ms BUTLER - Minister, you are cutting the Police, Fire and Emergency Management budget significantly, and we already know that you won't be honouring your election pledge of 50 new police officers, which will place more strain on an already strained workforce. I'd like to, through you, minister, ask the Police Commissioner how the budget cuts to DPFEM over the forward Estimates, which is around \$72 million, will impact service delivery and keeping the community safe?

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister: the aim is to ensure that we keep our police numbers at 1459. We've had the opportunity of, I think, building quite a level of trust with the community in relation to the service that we have been providing, and we are very committed to maintaining that high level of service.

What that will mean, unfortunately, is we're going to have to look at what we do in the State Service support areas and business areas, and look at ways in which we may be able to do our business differently. But as I said earlier, the savings requirements or targets that we have will include salaries and obviously non-salaries as part of that. I want to be given the opportunity to be able to work through how we might achieve that, and the areas that will directly be impacted by those savings targets, with our leaders and managers, and also getting feedback from our staff before we're able to give you any further information as to what the specifics are of how we will achieve those targets.

Ms BUTLER - Just going back to that part of my question, minister, do you consider that there will be an impact of service delivery and being able to keep the community safe with a \$72 million cut to the DPFEM forward Estimates?

Mr ELLIS - So, obviously there's growing funding in the forward Estimates.

Ms BUTLER - That's what the Treasury document states, the Budget states, that it will be cut.

CHAIR - Ms Butler, can we let the minister - please let him answer.

Mr ELLIS - I think I got three words out, you know. I can answer questions if you give me an opportunity to do that.

So, there's an increase in funding in the forward Estimates compared to what was budgeted for this year, but obviously, every agency has a share of the task of making sure that we're responsible stewards of taxpayers' money. Now, the commissioner's outlined some of the strategies that we're going to be undertaking so that we can do that. There's a range of emerging technologies and other different opportunities so that we can do our business better while supporting the frontline. But commissioner, I don't know if there's anything you want to add?

Comm ADAMS - We'll certainly be looking at every opportunity across the department. One of the things I haven't touched on so far is just even the revenue opportunities that the department has. As commissioner, I have an opportunity to charge a fee for a service that we provide. Other states charge for police presence at AFL games. Obviously, that would be an example of something that we would look at.

I've talked about restructuring. We've already taken a decision to amalgamate our Community Engagement Command with our Education and Training. That wasn't necessarily

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driven by budget. There was a lot of synergies in terms of the community events that we were going to through the Community Engagement Command that had a real direct link to recruiting, so we saw the opportunities to be able to do that. But as a result of that, we've reduced our commanders positions by one.

As I said, it's not a direct result of the budget reform process, but they're examples where we might look at how we might do things a little bit differently but with an expectation that what the community sees will, you know, still be a high level of service.

Ms BUTLER - Okay, thank you. Minister, is it true that Firearms Services staff have not received the back pay that they have accrued for work undertaken before Christmas? I know how much you've been talking about how you're going to be able to maintain proper staffing in Firearms Services, and that's because of staffing issues, such as a lack of staffing and high turnover because of the payroll department. Is that true, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Ask the commissioner.

Comm ADAMS - Again, through you, minister: that's the first I've heard of that. Firearms Services does have high turnover of staff, but I've never heard any, haven't received any feedback in regards to not receiving what their entitlements are and, in fact, I'd be concerned as well if that was the case.

Ms BUTLER - Can I put that question on notice, minister, for you to chase up?

Mr ELLIS - I think it's been answered, but happy to follow up further if there's any change.

Ms BUTLER - And, minister, can you confirm that you have not yet approved the onboarding of additional necessary staff in Firearms Services to deal with next year's predicted surge where three-year and five-year permit renewals align? It's our understanding that the staff needed will take up to six months to train up to full capacity, and that without these additional staff, the backlog of renewals could blow out from two weeks to six weeks or even longer.

Comm ADAMS - Again, through you, minister: absolutely, planning is underway to manage the licensing renewal, which will happen in 2027, and there are a number of ways that we will look to staff that area. Obviously, bringing on short-term staff is one of those strategies, but we've also got other strategies internally within the department.

I might ask the Assistant Commissioner Oosterloo, who has a lot more detailed information and who could tell us the status of where we're at with that planning.

A/Comm OOSTERLOO - Through you, minister: as the Commissioner said, there's been significant planning done to prepare for the 2027 year based on our experience in previous peak years - so, the last one was 2022. We've developed a plan that effectively mimics what happened in 2022 because that worked quite effectively and minimised, sort of, processing delays in Firearms Services. I guess the important thing to note is that increased licence applications then increase revenue, and that increased revenue can be used to fund the additional staff that are needed. So the proposal is progressing through at the moment and we expect to be able to recruit the additional staff needed to have [inaudible] things in place, as the Commissioner said.

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Ms BADGER - Minister, on the Tobias Pick matter, again, it's our understanding that under Tasmanian law, a person can be tried for murder but found guilty for manslaughter instead, if the evidence does not provide the intent to kill or cause serious harm that's required for a murder conviction. Nonetheless, in this matter, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) decided not to attempt to progress a murder charge. Now, I do recognise that this decision on the charges ultimately does rest with the DPP, but did Tasmania Police provide any advice to them on how to approach this matter in court?

Comm ADAMS - Again, through you, minister: I'm not aware of any information that we were specifically asked in relation to that matter. You are correct that the DPP does have sole prosecutorial discretion in terms of how he manages matters that go before him. There are examples where we might charge an individual with a specific crime and the DPP might use his discretion to change that charge to something that he believes is better suited to the circumstances. I don't have any information on hand regarding the matter that you're raising today.

Ms BADGER - It might be one to take on notice, but based on Tasmania Police's investigation, did Tasmania Police have a view on whether or not Ms Zhang consented to application of some form of pressure to her neck?

Comm ADAMS - Again, that's a very operational question relating to a specific investigation. I'd have to take some advice and perhaps it is probably not one to discuss in this environment, I'd suggest.

Ms BADGER - Can you take advice to take it on notice or get back to me specifically?

Comm ADAMS - I'll take some advice as to whether I can, given the nature of the question.

Ms BADGER - Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Back to workers' compensation, minister. We clearly hear that the pressures for the department are going to be ongoing. I think the commissioner is indicating \$80 million in the forward Estimates. That's significant and certainly in the context of the broader whole-of-government budget, the pressures on workers compensation are acutely felt with your department.

I want to know what representations you're making to the Treasurer and the Attorney-General in relation to workers compensation and any legislative changes to be made by your government and proposed and what the specifics of them are and how they relate to your department. What work have you done specifically, given that this is where the pressure is really felt in your department? What are you saying to the Treasurer and the Attorney-General in that regard?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, first a few things to clarify. The main agencies that are facing pressure are DPFEM, also DECYP and the Department of Justice. Also, Health as well. It's a range of different frontline agencies. Obviously, you wouldn't expect me to talk about Cabinet processes, but more broadly, there'll be a review undertaken and we'll work through that. We appreciate feedback from right across the community, including workers, representatives,

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individuals who might have experience in this space as well - lived experience - and a whole range of different areas.

It's really important that we get this right. Certainly, this will be a paradigm shift so that we can take into account better psychosocial challenges that people face at work because we have a system that's designed for broken bones. That'll be important work. The government will provide further update on that, and I'm sure the Attorney-General can provide some more specifics about the work as it's ongoing.

Ms JOHNSTON - What processes or framework is there for consultation? Specifically with the Police Association, for instance, in terms of being able to make representations to you to then put that into the mix for the Treasury and for the Attorney-General.

Mr ELLIS - We discuss matters with regards to workers compensation and also well-being support regularly with the Police Association and continue to welcome their advocacy directly to me but also directly to the process.

Ms JOHNSTON - Is there a formal consultation process either underway or proposed?

Mr ELLIS - I'm sure the Attorney-General can provide more updates in terms of what's available to people. I'll just look to the commissioner as far as their role as secretary, if there's any further information that might be appropriate to share at this stage.

Comm ADAMS - I note the process and it's obviously managed by the Department of Justice. I guess there are two key issues for us that we would like to be considered. One is a change that would help support those who are actually in the frontline areas that have part of their team absent because they're on long-term workers compensation claims. We're unable to permanently backfill someone into those teams. We have some strong feedback from our staff that they don't feel supported in that they're operating at a level below what they would expect. The legislation is very clear that we cannot permanently backfill a position under 12 months.

The second one is that only in very rare occasions can we settle a claim inside two years. Often, we have people approaching us wanting to settle their claims and the legislation essentially prevents that from occurring. From our perspective, there are some things that we can do to improve the legislation. We have some challenges in how we support people who have a mental health-related illness. It's very rare for someone to come back to work. We would like to have that considered in the context of what might be some legislative changes that may well be considered.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, your government has committed to raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 by 2029. I'm curious to hear from the police on what concerns they have, and what increase in offending and seriousness offences that they see between ages 10 and 14.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks. Mr Di Falco, this was a recommendation of the commission of inquiry and we're working through to deliver all the recommendations. It's well-known, and be fair to say that there are some real practical implementation challenges, when it comes to raising of the age of criminal responsibility, and how we work through that well, but I'll pass to the commissioner to discuss further.

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Comm ADAMS - Thank you, minister. This is a priority for the Department of Children, Education and Young People. As the Minister says, it's a recommendation from the commission of inquiry that the government has accepted and it's due for implementation in 2029.

I've been very public in terms of my view that the community does need to be engaged in a conversation on this issue. We're currently involved in some scenario planning with DECYP to actually work through what the practicalities will be when we are confronted with a whole range of various situations that we are daily, you know, we're confronted with on a daily basis. Things such as custody and use of force will be a challenge, and we need to really clearly understand who's responsible; what is the role of police in the event that a young person has been involved in what is at the moment a criminal offence, we need to clearly understand what our responsibility is and make that very clear that there's a clear framework for our operational police officers to work within.

We're part of a consultation process with DECYP; they have the lead on it. We've still got till 2029 to get that right and we'll continue to work in a collaborative way to have our concerns appreciated.

Ms BADGER - Chair, can I seek advice? Some of us have some rapid fire questions for the gentleman up the back.

Mr ELLIS - Fire and Emergency Services?

Ms BADGER - Thank you. If you want to swap everyone over at the table like you did last year, which takes a bit of time. I just note Mr George is here; he's got a question for police. Ms Butler still has some, but we're running out of time for a change over. So can you please advise as Chair and minister, how you want to facilitate those questions, or if we could just call the appropriate person up?

Mr ELLIS - I'm easy, I'm in your hands. We could maybe call the commissioner up. We've got another seat, if that would work, and we might call others as we go, depending on their operational knowledge.

CHAIR - Yes, just squeeze up, that's probably easier.

Mr ELLIS - Commissioner of Fire and Emergency Services, Jeremy Smith.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, can you please provide the committee with more detail on recent exercises undertaken to strengthen TasPol and emergency services preparedness to respond to major incidents in crowded public places?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Recent high-intensity crowded places police training exercises were conducted at both UTAS Stadium and the Cat and the Fiddle Arcade. I may get a prize if I say Exercise Profugio correctly, but I'm not sure if I have, but that was part of the national tiered Australia and New Zealand Counterterrorism Committee exercise program with funding provided for all jurisdictions to deliver crowded place exercises following the Bondi Junction attack in 2024. The exercise explored Tasmania's readiness to respond to active armed-offender terrorist incidents in a crowded place. The exercise reinforced the importance of adopting a worst-case scenario approach to fast moving unpredictable

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incidents while strengthening Tasmania's alignment with national counter-terrorism and crowded-place protection frameworks.

In the context of a 'probable' threat level, it underscores the need for coordinated multi-agency responses, consistent application of escape, hide, tell principles, and a sustained focus on community safety, resilience and public confidence across diverse environments. Two functional exercises in both the north and the south tested emergency service responses in complex crowded environments, focusing on interoperability, operational command and control and communications during a rapidly evolving incident, while enabling retailers and owner operators to test their own arrangements and strengthen the understanding of emergency response complexities. I'm happy to add further for any other members that may have questions, but in the interests of time, we'll move on.

Ms BUTLER - Welcome to the table, commissioner. I will ask a question of you just in case we run out of time, through the minister, of course. Minister, Building Safety Unit reform project Tasmania Fire Service, a significant reform project within the Tasmania Fire Service, has now been discontinued, despite substantial public expenditure and minimum implementation outcomes. Given that more than \$500,000 of taxpayer funds has been spent on the Building Safety Unit reform project, why did the government allow the project to be abandoned with 29 of 31 recommendations left unimplemented?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks Ms Butler. I'll pass to the commissioner.

Comm SMITH - Thank you. Through you, minister: certainly that body of work that was undertaken as an independent review and provided those recommendations, a number of those recommendations from that review were implemented, and we endeavoured to get that into business as usual as quickly as possible. There is definitely some ongoing work, and we're working through that with the team to establish that next body of work to ensure that those recommendations are completed.

Ms BUTLER - Okay. So, through the minister, what accountability measures has the minister put in place to investigate how a fully endorsed reform program, with dedicated funding and staffing, was allowed to collapse after key personnel departures were not replaced?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Butler. Obviously we work closely with the commissioner and his team, but anything further you might want to update, commissioner?

Comm SMITH - I think I'm going to have to take that on notice to get the formal response back to you.

Ms BUTLER - We know that this project represented a significant opportunity to address longstanding structural and operational issues within the Building Safety Unit and to modernise a business area that has experienced limited investment in reform - sorry about this, my computer just turned off - and change management over the past two decades. In its current state, the discontinuation of the project represents a considerable loss of time, resources and public funding over a period exceeding two years. How does the minister expect already stretched operational staff to deliver complex reforms, including a new business management system and revised fees and charges, without dedicated project resources or ongoing funding?

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Mr ELLIS - So the commissioner has taken it on notice, but I don't know if there's anything further you want to add, commissioner.

Comm SMITH - Through you, minister: we'll just have to obviously take that question on notice, but it's important that we need to go through the State Fire Commission to get additional resources reestablished in this field. There's no doubt there's been some employment issues and industrial issues with getting sufficient staff into that group. There's some industrial imbalance between the Tasmanian Fire Fighting Industry Employees Award (TFFIEA) and also State Service positions.

Mr ELLIS - And Commissioner, TFFIEA?

Comm SMITH - Is the firefighting award that the United Firefighters' Union (UFU) and our career firefighters work under.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, were you aware of any of those -

Ms BADGER - Minister, we've spoken about this in the last year's Estimates as well around the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) review into the devastating 2025 bushfires that ripped through over 100 hectares of wild landscapes on the west coast. Where are we up to with the recommendations that were a part of that review that are being implemented? Where is the, I guess, detailed public response for Tasmanians to be able to go to see what the government is committing to off the back of those recommendations, noting a lot of them are repeat recommendations that we see after every major bushfire?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Butler, and can I just thank the service from all three fire agencies - Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT), Parks and Tasmania Fire Service (TFS), on their work at the west coast complex, bushfires. I'll pass over to the Commissioner to talk through the recommendations

Comm SMITH - Thank you for the question. Through you, minister: that AFAC independent review provided 20 recommendations for STT, Parks and ourselves to work through. Of those 20 recommendations, every one except one has been supported, endorsed or supported in principle. The other one is under assessment currently and that refers to aerial capability and improving that capability for remote area firefighting.

The review itself is overseen by the Strategic Coordination Group, which I chair, and we have representation from STT CEO and Parks Deputy Secretary. There's a group that has been assigned to work through the recommendations, it's a multi-agency group again, and they provide written reports to the SCG on a quarterly basis, and they're tabled through to the Commission and they're expecting the first updated report for September of this year.

Ms BADGER - Is that report, just for clarification, going to be a publicly available document for people to go and see how that's unfolding?

Comm SMITH - We will probably - I shouldn't say probably. We'll make it available through the Commission. It'll be up to the Commission to determine how it's communicated from there.

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Ms BADGER - Thank you. Minister, something else that we've discussed in the last couple of Estimates is the potential use of drones for firefighting, it's something that we've seen rolled out recently in Victoria. Is that still something that Tasmania is working towards to be able to do to increase our aerial capacity? If so, how would that then be funded, given the current funding situation? Is that, you know, if we were to go down that path, is that sort of machinery something that would have to come out of the TFS's general budget pool?

Comm SMITH - Tasmania participates in the National Aerial Firefighting Centre. We rely on them to provide the, I suppose, the most up-to-date capability for states and territories in their aviation space. Currently we are not aware of any aviation drone to deploy bulk water to any fire in Australia.

Certainly, drones are used for intel gathering and reconnaissance, and we've just recently completed a program to develop in-house drone capability within the Tasmanian Fire Service. We have now 24 drones available for us to undertake reconnaissance and survey of fire-affected firegrounds. Certainly, this is going to be a valuable tool for our incident management teams and crews on the ground going forward, both from an operational awareness, but also a safety aspect for our firefighters.

Ms BADGER - Yeah, absolutely. Just for clarity, TFS own the drones?

Comm SMITH - Correct.

Ms JOHNSTON - Through you, minister: can I have an update on the Respect 360 culture review within TFS - specifically, what's been achieved since the review was announced? How has it been measured, and what metrics are used to measure that? How is it being resourced? I appreciate you might need to take those on notice, but if you can provide a broad overview now, that would be great.

Comm SMITH - Thank you, and through you, minister: in 2024 the Tasmanian Fire Service, in conjunction with Elizabeth Broderick consultancy, undertook a cultural review both into SES and TFS. Through that review there were 26 recommendations made. A steering committee has been established to oversee those 26 recommendations. We are going through a process to identify the lead manager for that program of works. In fact, I'm shortlisting tomorrow for that lead position.

There are a number of aspects of the review that have already been either established, implemented or in the process of that. Things like visibility on selection panels, because there was distrust in some work areas within the organisation about the independency and transparency of our selection panels. So every selection panel now goes through a rigorous process where they're endorsed and feedback is provided to ensure that it is a transparent process. That is also recorded and provided as a document to the executive to ensure that it's reviewed and is up-to-date and current.

Other things like listening tours, so our executive getting out more often to be visible within our work areas right around the state, that's occurred and is occurring on a monthly basis, where the executive gets out and about. Obviously, with 230 fire stations and roughly 40 SES units, it's extremely difficult to get around those work sites, but certainly it is a focus of the executive and the regional management to get out as much as possible.

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Other work areas include our processes for grievances and ensuring that we follow a consistent approach right across the state. That's been established and has been working well within the regions and also business executive services.

Ms JOHNSTON - Chair, I appreciate there's a lot of information there. Would it be okay for the minister to put that question on notice, so he can answer all aspects? You did say there were 26 recommendations - you've touched on a number of them. Would that be okay, minister, if I put that on notice?

Mr ELLIS - If that works for the commissioner? Yes.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, through the Commissioner of Police, if I may. I'm informed that 30 per cent of police in southern command are either on long-term compensation or permanent impairment, meaning that in the southern Tasmania command there are actually 20 per cent fewer police on the beat than advertised. Further, there is a number of those on some form of leave who live in police housing. Can you tell me what is the annual cost to the police budget of Airbnb-style and other forms of rental for officers sent to replace them?

Comm ADAMS - Thank you, minister. There's a lot in that question. I'll start in terms of those that are actually off work. I don't know if I have a southern district breakdown. I'll let the team have a look at that. I can say we have 98 police officers permanently incapacitated. That means that they're not at work and that's across the state - that equates to 6.7 per cent of our total workforce. Hopefully the team's having a look to see if we have the numbers for the southern district, which I don't have before me.

In terms of police housing, if a police officer is entitled to a house because they're attached to a country position - whether they're at duty or not at duty - that's still an entitlement that they're obviously able to have as part of their employment conditions. We do have a country relief backfill policy, which I'll ask Assistant Commissioner Bodnar to talk about in a moment.

In relation to the policy, it has evolved over a number of years. We initially agreed to backfill country positions if an absence was longer than four to six weeks, we'd backfill that position. We found that what that was doing is causing a lot of disruption within the organisation trying to backfill country positions. What we did - and again through funding provided by the government - we actually allocated an additional police officer to each of our country clusters. I think it was probably the first time, certainly in my time, that we've actually added people to country areas. By having an extra person in the cluster, that then cuts down the need for relief.

When we do hit the thresholds of an absence being longer than a certain period of time - and I said that the assistant commissioner can talk about that in a moment - we do bring people in to backfill and support the staffing of that cluster. When that occurs, we do use various methods of accommodation to support those individuals in those clusters. I'll hand over to you assistant commissioner to give some different, additional details.

A/Comm BODNAR - Thanks very much, commissioner. Through you, minister. In relation to the country relief policy, we have placed an additional FTE on each of our nine

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country cluster areas. That was through agreement with the Police Association of Tasmania and also our members. Those positions have been established. I understand members are in place. In relation to our backfill arrangements, again, by agreement with the organisation and the Police Association, we reached a position because of the fact that we've created the additional positions, those members that are additional now working within a cluster group - so, as an example, Mr George, a cluster group might be Hamilton, Bushy Park, and Maydena - that is a cluster group in the Derwent Valley. There's an additional member that's gone in there. With that additional member, when someone's on leave now - planned annual leave - we don't need to provide a replacement member because of the additional person we've put in there. That additional person also covers things such as secondments, professional development, and things of that nature.

However, what we have done, when there are two or more unplanned absences within a country cluster, there is a requirement that an additional person must be made available from about the sixth week. Even though that's set in policy, it doesn't preclude a divisional manager - an inspector of police - putting somebody into that division earlier to that if there's a need to. It depends upon what's going on in the community, potentially what upcoming events there are, what time of year it is. Potentially on the east coast, we know there's an influx of people up around Triabunna, Orford, Swansea, Bicheno, so potentially a person could be put in there earlier if we need to.

In addition to that we also have other business units within the organisation that can police those areas as well, such as road policing when they're performing their additional duties up around say, whether it's the east coast, whether it's the Fingal Valley, whether it's the Derwent Valley as well. In essence, we have shifted our position on the policy. I think we're better off than where we were prior to that shift, and again, that's an agreement through a consultation process.

Mr GEORGE - Minister, that doesn't answer the specific question. Would you take that on notice and I'll provide the detail that I'm looking for?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, happy to follow up on the particular data if that wasn't available for us, and probably the other thing to note, Mr George, before you got here, there are some actually current legislative restrictions when it comes to backfilling workers compensation positions, and so as part of the review, that's something that will be examined closely as well.

Mr GEORGE - Okay, thank you for that. I'll make a written request as per.

CHAIR - Mr Di Falco?

Mr Di FALCO - I'll relinquish the question.

CHAIR - Mr Jaensch?

Mr JAENSCH - I'll pass too, in the interest of time.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you. Minister, in the election, your government committed to wellbeing roster reform for all 24/7 stations. We understand that, due to your budget cuts, this is going to be difficult for you to roll out, and also because of the loss of 50 new police officers.

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What measurable progress in the last year demonstrates that you will be able to honour that election pledge you made?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Butler. The work that we've done with the Police Association and Tasmania Police leadership show clearly an interest among members of supporting greater retention rather than recruitment at the moment. So the decision was made to reprioritise -

Ms BUTLER - Because of budget cuts?

Mr ELLIS - No. So, the decision was made to reprioritise funding. It was made available for the growth in numbers towards a growth in higher salaries and that's been part of what's -

Ms BUTLER - Because of budget cuts.

DEPUTY CHAIR - Ms Butler, can we let the minister get on with answering the question please?

Ms BUTLER - He's not being very honest, he's being tricky in his language.

Mr ELLIS - No, the money is available.

Ms BUTLER - The money is not available. You're cutting \$72 million.

DEPUTY CHAIR - Ms Butler.

Mr ELLIS - The money is available and it's being used to pay for higher salaries for Tasmania Police. That agreement was agreed last year, and that's - so I appreciate the collaborative nature in which the PAT, our members and police leadership have worked through that -

Ms BUTLER - You've put them in a very difficult position, minister, PAT - you slashed the budget and then now you're trying to make this their fault.

Mr ELLIS - The funding has been made available, it's delivered higher salaries for Tasmania Police -

Ms BUTLER - \$72 million?

Mr ELLIS - Particularly in those frontline areas, and more broadly, we're working through roster reform process, this is a reform that's been going for a number of years, but recently we've had some really good breakthroughs. I'll pass to the commissioner to talk through further.

Comm ADAMS - Thank you, minister and through you. I will hand over to Assistant Commissioner Bodnar. I'll just make a couple of quick comments. The six-and-six roster that we were trialling actually presented a number of work health and safety risks, and fatigue was identified as being the significant risk that we needed to manage. We were calling people back on their days off to work additional shifts because we couldn't meet our minimum staffing numbers. That's unsustainable. It's not the purpose of what we need to have in terms of a roster

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that supports our members and their well-being, but also conversely gives a high level of service to the community.

We've established a Roster Reform Working Group. I'll hand over to the assistant commissioner; it is a success story in the work that has been undertaken and I do compliment the AC for his leadership in this space, and he can tell you where we've landed with that work.

A/Comm BODNAR - Thank you, commissioner, and through the minister. Briefly, about August last year, we established a Police Roster Reform Working Group. The beauty of this is, is we've got good representation from our seven 24-hour police station. We have two members attached to Bellerive, Devonport, Bridgewater, Burnie, Glenorchy, Hobart and Launceston. They make up the nucleus of the working group.

As the commissioner said, it's chaired by myself. I'm supported by a geographical police commander and two inspectors as well. Through our terms of reference, we set the domain that any roster reform needs to be able to be managed within our current workforce allocation for the stations, and there are some variances in numbers, but the key thing as well is we have to meet, and where possible exceed, our frontline staffing number. We have a frontline staffing protocol that all the staff have agreed to.

With that in mind, there's only a certain number of rosters that we can actually work through this working group - and we've met five if not six times since August last year - we've considered in excess of about a dozen rosters, I suppose. In addition to that there's been some non-award-compliant guidelines developed as well, where certain criteria need to be met for different workplaces. So, on a 24/7 station, you need to have a five-team roster or a five-line roster. That's because you have to work within that allocation. And even though we have an allocation, that may not be what we have, because we're always going to have people on rec leave, other forms of leave, courses, developments, et cetera.

The good news story out of it is the fact that the staff at Glenorchy put forward a minute requesting to trial a six-on four-off roster, so to shift from the current award-compliant roster they have been working, and that's pursuant to those non-award guidelines I spoke about. Now, as I sit here today, they're probably around about week nine, 10 or 11 in that trial. It's a 30-week trial. There will be an evaluation and, thus far, the feedback seems to be quite positive. So, effectively, it's two days of day shift, two days of afternoon shift, two nights of night shift and then four days off. Whereas on the award-compliant roster, they would have been working seven nights of night shift.

To change and trial that roster there had to be a workplace ballot, pursuant to the award, which there was - and the voting rate there in the affirmative was about 87 per cent, so the majority of the staff were very supportive. As I say, that's underway.

In respect to Bridgewater, Bridgewater have recently had a workplace ballot as well. Again, a very high percentage of the workforce wanted to trial a roster, and it's the same as the Glenorchy one. So, they'll move to that trial roster very shortly. In respect to the other five stations, it's really going to be driven from the ground up as to what rosters they might like to consider moving into the future. But as I say, there's only a small number we can work, because we have to work within the allocation knowing that we have to allow people to have leave - and we want them to, from a fatigue and a wellbeing perspective.

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I'm pretty pleased with how it's going. I'm pretty pleased with the discussions we're having and sort of where we might be headed to in the future.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you for that, and through the minister, of course, just to acknowledge the amazing work that the Bridgewater team does, as well as the Glenorchy team - well, all police officers, but those two that you mentioned there.

Will you be monitoring that rostering system, through the minister, ensuring that it minimises stress and strain upon those serving police officers and that they are in the best interests of their wellbeing?

A/Comm BODNAR - Certainly. Through the minister, the key change around, I suppose, roster reform, it's around the health and wellbeing. It's around providing the service to the community that we need to, and it's about ensuring that we can maintain a roster without having to regularly roster people on overtime, because that's not healthy. So having the five-team roster, for want of a better term, means that where we had our six-on six-off roster we had six teams. Going back to five, effectively you've got more people over those five shifts. So, as the work comes in you've got greater capacity and capability to deal with the work, so we'll certainly look at that.

Again, from my perspective, I need to make sure that the staff also have the time available to do their mandatory training. We have mandatory online training, we have mandatory training for firearms and operational skills, and this roster doesn't have a training day built into it. But there are hours built into the roster where that training can be facilitated. That's one of the things we'll be monitoring as well, just to make sure our people are up-to-date with where we need them to be.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you. Minister, do you acknowledge the benefits of Tasmania Police conducting wellbeing checks for all police officers? If so, what, aside from funding, is preventing you from directing Tasmania Police to implement the coroner's recommendations around that?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Butler, so -

Ms BUTLER - Is it due to funding?

Mr ELLIS - No. We covered this in yesterday's committee hearings, but really, it's taking advice from our nation-leading wellbeing support programs that we're providing a tailored response on the basis of the particular needs of our members, given that this is such a hugely diverse role. I'll pass over to the commissioner to talk further.

Comm ADAMS - Thank you, minister. If we had the funding, this wouldn't be the approach that we would take. We don't want wellbeing to be a tick-and-flick - someone turning up to a wellbeing check and just going through the motions. The advice that we got in relation to how we might best equip that recommendation - and, again, obviously provide the necessary wellbeing to our staff - is to have a range of different interventions so that we've really got the police officer at the centre, and a number of strategies that sit around. I talked yesterday about our critical incident stress debrief program. We have mandatory incidents where a police officer has to be subject to a wellbeing check as a result of attending one of those particular events.

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There are areas within the department that police officers are required to undergo mandatory wellbeing checks, an example being crash investigation services and our forensic areas.

Obviously we have My Pulse, and the minister provided some statistics yesterday which, again, I can do if you would like.

Ms BUTLER - I can pull them from yesterday's *Hansard*.

Comm ADAMS - There's significant uptake, and My Pulse allows a member to do that themselves. So, when you actually start to look at the system of support around a frontline responder, it's quite comprehensive, but it's also a whole range of different interventions, and it's not just seen as a process of a tick-and-flick. There is a lot of active thought that's gone in to ensure that a police officer, firefighter, ambulance officer is getting the right level of support from a wellbeing perspective.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you, because that was my next question, to see whether or not that's right across the board.

Comm ADAMS - It's a whole-of-agency, and the initiative included Ambulance Tasmania when we first announced it.

Ms BADGER - In some of the submissions to the 'Strengthening our response to family violence' discussion paper, an issue that was raised was with victim-survivors being misidentified as predominant aggressors in regard to PFVOs.

Minister, how many family violence orders in the last three years were later revoked due to misidentification concerns - if that's data that you have? I know this is an area that Tasmania Police have been working on, particularly recently, so what more are you doing to help ensure that there isn't further misidentification and we're seeing that rate reduced as much as possible?

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister: I'll make a couple of comments and then pass to Assistant Commissioner Blackwood. Every police officer that gets called to a family violence matter wants to ensure that those that are involved in that incident are safe. And it is extremely difficult, on occasions, for our officers going into an unknown of, yes, the pressure around their decision-making, sometimes alcohol and drugs, sometimes mental health-related issues. It's very complex, and I know you are aware of that. And nine times out of 10 our police officers will do an outstanding job in trying to work through complex family situations and what may be some really challenging circumstances that they go into.

We are aware, obviously misidentification is something we would like to reduce to zero, and there are a number of components to the system in terms of checking and safeguards that, if we do make a mistake and misidentify that we've got the earliest opportunity to make changes and to ensure that that is rectified.

I'll see if the Assistant Commissioner can make any additional comments and whether there are any statistics in there. He might also be able to give an idea of what we're doing in that misidentification space.

A/Comm BLACKWOOD - Family violence is probably the most scrutinised piece of police work that we do. I think I've explained that to you before. And every incident is reviewed

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by the sergeant as the supervisor and then sits with our Safe Families Coordination Unit, who review every new report.

It does happen, at times, where there are incidents of misidentification. The key is to correcting that really quickly, which is actually part of the proposed legislation change. At the moment, police at the level of inspector can vary an order, but it requires the consent of both parties to do that. So, if there's a case of misidentification, sometimes that matter will have to go to court, so the proposed legislation is looking at allowing an inspector of police to change an order where we believe misidentification has taken place.

In terms of actual numbers, it's hard to provide because some orders may be revoked through the court system, not through the police system. So they may go through to have them vary that way. It's not really possible to give you anything that says 'this is how many cases of misidentification that there are'.

Ms BADGER - Great. Thank you. My second question is in regards to the SES, we heard in the Parks hearing at the start of the week that there were three SES positions that actually fell under them, or under NRE, which obviously doesn't make -

Mr ELLIS - Are you saying State Executive Service or State Emergency Service?

Ms BADGER - Well, they say, this is we're a little bit confused. Let me rephrase, I'll start again and rephrase the question: Is it part of the tri-organisation involved in firefighting, TFS, SES, Sustainable Timbers Tasmania and Parks, has there been any reduction in the number of paid employees from the TFS and SES position in the last 12 months?

Comm SMITH - Through you, minister. Can I please clarify that? Is that career firefighters?

Ms BADGER - Yes.

Comm SMITH - From career firefighter point of view, we've increased the last three years by approximately 20 firefighters, so roughly around 320 to 340 career firefighters.

Ms BADGER - Including in, and what are the statistics on that for the remote firefighter capabilities?

Comm SMITH - From a TFS point of view, for a career and volunteer, we have approximately 110 remote-area trained volunteers and career staff, for a TFS perspective. I won't comment on what the numbers are in the Parks.

Ms BADGER - No, no, absolutely, and that's maintained you're expecting over the forward estimates as well, if not increased?

Comm SMITH - It's subject to volunteer putting their hand up and participating we'll work through the recruitment needs and numbers.

Mr ELLIS - Commissioner, do you want to talk through maybe the arduous classification we've just announced as well that might be helpful for the increase?

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Comm SMITH - Yeah, there's pretty much three classifications now for firefighters: normal, tanker-based firefighting; then we had the remote, that needs specialist aviation skills and specialist training; arduous now allows us to have that tanker-based volunteer in career, but also allows them to participate in deployments both intrastate and interstate, so to the mainland. Other agencies from the mainland stipulate that they must have arduous, and that really limits the number of volunteers, who really want to participate, but it limits the amount of volunteers that can.

Mr ELLIS - If you like bushwalking but hate helicopters, this will be the classification for you as a firefighter.

Ms BADGER - Perfect.

Mr JAENSCH - Everybody loves helicopters.

Mr ELLIS - They are the worst.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, through you to the commissioner. I want to go back to an issue you raised beforehand, around revenue raising opportunities within the Budget. Obviously, the more revenue you can raise, the less that you need to cut in terms of service delivery. I'm keen to understand a bit more about where you see opportunities for fee-for-service, and you mentioned AFL games as an example. What would be the other examples where you see an opportunity to have a fee-for-service where perhaps you haven't previously?

Comm ADAMS - Through you, minister. I haven't turned my mind to anything broader than the AFL. It's certainly a provision on the *Police Service Act* that we've not utilised before, and as part of just planning for the budget reform process, it was about looking at all tools and levers that we might have. That one was an obvious one, because other jurisdictions obviously manage AFL public order issues in that way, and that said that's the limit of our planning in relation to it at the moment.

Ms JOHNSTON - You could be invoicing other agencies, for instance, for the services you provide, for instance, or external parties?

Comm SMITH - I don't know that that would be of benefit to anyone to go and do shifting of costs, but I'd be keen to see what other jurisdictions do, and I've asked our policy team to actually do that to have a look at what is the you know, do other jurisdictions have fee for service -

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is Skills and Jobs. Could members and officials please be quick as lost time needs to be made-up.

The witnesses withdrew.

The committee suspended from 12.05 p.m. to 12.08 p.m.

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Skills and Jobs

DEPUTY CHAIR - Thank you. The time now being 12.08 p.m., the scrutiny for the Skills and Jobs portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names, and positions for the benefit of Hansard. The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Minister for Skills and Jobs is two hours. There will be a break around 1.00 p.m. for roughly one hour. Minister, as the committee has agreed, the opening statements should be tabled rather than read. You now have the opportunity to table a statement before we proceed with the questions.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Chair. I'm happy to introduce the people at the table: Tim Gardner, TasTAFE Board Chair; Dr Norman Baker, TasTAFE CEO; and Alex Paterson, General Manager, Skills and Workforce, Department of State Growth.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, are you planning to increase TasTAFE course fees by 7 per cent starting from 1 January 2027?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie. Obviously, we're working through course fees, but I'll pass to Dr Baker to talk through that further.

Dr BAKER - Thank you, minister. We do review our prices on an annual basis. Last year we increased our fees by 1.7 per cent, which was the Hobart CPI for 2025. At the moment we're right in the middle of looking at the fees for next year, so they haven't been confirmed, but we're looking across all of our delivery from both our subsidised fees, fee for service, and international fees.

Mr WILLIE - I have a right to information request here, minister, that was released to my office. It says pricing changes of 7 per cent across all products effective from 1 January 2027. Is that what you're considering?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie. Obviously, we're working through pricing, but I'll pass that over to Dr Baker.

Dr BAKER - Yes, that's correct. That's what's currently in our calculations, but we haven't finished our governance processes through our board for approval for next year's prices yet.

Mr WILLIE - Is that wise, minister? It's above inflation at 4.2 per cent. It's above education services inflation at 2.3 per cent. We need to skill up Tasmanians, not make it harder. Why are you going to increase fees by 7 per cent above inflation?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie. Obviously, you know, we're working through a process. But let's see if Dr Baker has any -

Dr BAKER - We're not immune to inflation, like the rest of the economy. We've seen significant increases across a range of our consumables - think copper piping for plumbing, food for our chefs and the like. So, an above-CPI increase is what the executive will be looking to recommend to the board.

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Mr WILLIE - It's just going to make the barrier harder for Tasmanians to enter TAFE. We're in a cost-of-living crisis, minister. Will you review this decision? I don't think it's wise.

Mr ELLIS - It's not a decision; it's a review process. So, we're working through that process and we'll have further updates, but I'll just see if there's anything further Dr Baker wants to say.

Mr ELLIS - Chair, I'll just double-check if there's anything further -

Dr BAKER - No. Just a reminder, I guess, that we've got a few thousand learners that are part of the fee-free TAFE initiative, so they will still have zero course fees, and the concession fee for students that are eligible for concession will still remain in place.

Ms BADGER - In the last budget, there was \$450,000 to look at the future of automotive in the south of the state. In this Budget, there's no specific line item, but there is a paragraph in the Budget that talks about ongoing automotive fit-out expenses. Can you please detail for us whether the \$450,000 was spent to look at the future of automotive in the south and what outcomes that was, and detail what those expenses highlighted in the Budget regarding the fit-out referred to?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Badger. We have an invitation that should be coming your way to an opening of a brand-new automotive training facility in the south, which is really exciting, and any other members are, of course, welcome. But I'll pass to Dr Baker to talk through.

Dr BAKER - Minister, with your approval, I wouldn't mind asking our CFO to the table to talk specifically around the \$450,000. Thank you.

Mr ELLIS - Chair, we've got Will McShane, Chief Financial Officer, TasTAFE.

Mr McSHANE - Thank you. In regards to the \$450,000, the \$450,000 was not used on the fit-out for the Cambridge facility. It's been -

Ms BADGER - That wasn't my question either. It was for the future of automotive in the south, so if you can explain if that was done. So, that's post the Automotive Centre of Excellence, I believe, from 10 years after that lease. Yes.

Mr McSHANE - Yes, that is post. So, our priority has been setting up the facility in Cambridge. The \$450,000 is for our future automotive facilities, and it has not been used as yet.

Ms BADGER - And the paragraph in this Budget about the automotive centre fit-outs was, just for clarity, the second part of that question, if anyone's able to identify what that is?

Dr BAKER - So the fit-out is complete. We commenced operations about two weeks ago. We're looking to maximise the facility. We've got about 130-odd apprentices that are scheduled in the first tranche to flow through, and as I say, we're looking to maximise that to catch up on the apprenticeships that were delayed through the flooding event, and anticipate that having been completed by the end of the year.

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Ms BADGER - So, in terms of the centre, it's leased out by TasTAFE, the fit-out was paid for with public funds. At the end of the tenure, what happens, or what's in the contract for that agreement? What happens with the fit-out, with that equipment? Does it stay with the private owner? It's public money - does it stay with TasTAFE?

Mr McSHANE - Happy to answer that. With a commercial lease there are, of course, make-good provisions in nominal leases that you would undertake. We would say we've got a 5-plus-5-plus-5-year lease, so with two options on that. At the end of the lease, a decision would be made, in conjunction with the landlord, as to the future of the use of whatever is remaining.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, I had a meeting with TAFE last week to discuss the Firearms Safety course. I requested this meeting to get an understanding of the curriculum and the completion rates and wait times. I was hoping you could provide the failure rate of the course and an understanding of their requirements to allow multiple attempts to complete the theory component?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Falco, and can I just say a big thanks to the TasTAFE staff delivering that course. It's one I've done myself in recent times, and just really appreciate the way in which they went about things. There are also some opportunities to provide further choice for learners and we made an election commitment about considering whether there are potential other providers who might want to also deliver that safety course in Tasmania. That's a process that's ongoing. But in terms of TasTAFE specifically, I'll pass to Dr Baker.

Dr BAKER - Thank you, minister. Thank you, Mr Di Falco, for the question. In 2025 - I might start with answering your second question first.

According to the Australian Qualifications Standards, registered training organisations (RTOs) are obliged to provide learners with multiple attempts at any one assessment. The assessment policy for TAFE is that we provide three attempts at any assessment, should a student not be successful in their first pass. If they are unsuccessful in the first pass, we provide some extra learning opportunities for them to help them get through a second and or a third attempt.

The enrolments in 2025: we had 1196 enrolments, and after students attempting their assessments up to three times we had one student that did not complete and was not issued compliance against those units of competence. Year to date in 2026, we've had 1044 enrolments and so far we haven't had anyone fail.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, I understand that TasTAFE's current registration with the Australian Skills Quality Authority expires around the end of this month. Can you please provide an update on the re-registration process and confirm how TasTAFE has performed in the audit process so far?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Jaensch. I'm pleased to advise the committee that TasTAFE has successfully achieved re-registration for the next seven years, following an audit by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). This is a terrific result for TasTAFE, for staff and its educators, and for Tasmanian students and employers. It's a significant endorsement of Tasmania's public training provider and it gives students, employers, industry partners and broader community strong confidence that TasTAFE is delivering high-quality, nationally

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recognised and compliant training. It's a result worth celebrating, and I commend the board, senior management and all employees at TasTAFE on achieving this important outcome.

The Tasmanian Government's made a very substantial investment in TasTAFE, because we know how important it is to Tasmania's future workforce, our economy and our regions. That includes continued operational support, investment in new and upgraded training facilities and major capital projects that are helping to modernise TasTAFE's training delivery and better align it with the needs of industry. We're investing in the skills Tasmania needs for the future, whether that's in clean energy, construction, health and community services, advanced manufacturing, tourism and hospitality, or the many other industries that rely on strong vocational education and training.

The ASQA outcome reinforces that investment. It shows that TasTAFE is not only a trusted training provider, but a provider that's meeting national standards and delivering training that employers can have confidence in. TasTAFE plays a central role in building a skilled workforce in Tasmania, particularly as we continue to deliver major infrastructure, housing, energy and economic development projects across the state.

This result also reflects the work of TasTAFE educators, support staff and leadership team, who work every day to support learners and deliver training for Tasmanian jobs. The government will continue working closely with TasTAFE, industry and the broader training sector, to ensure that Tasmanians can access the skills they need for jobs and that employers can access the workforce they need to grow.

Mr WILLIE - Thank you, Chair. To be clear, minister, the 7 per cent increase in fees isn't a proposal - it's budgeted for?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie. I think Dr Baker mentioned that it hasn't yet been to the board yet, but I'll pass over to Dr Baker.

Mr WILLIE - But it is budgeted for in the next financial year.

Dr BAKER - Yes, I think that is correct.

Mr WILLIE - So, not only are you going to increase fees by 7 per cent, you're also going to axe jobs at TasTAFE, including 50 teachers, over the next four years - 118 staff. Are you able to outline which courses and which teachers are going to leave TasTAFE?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie, I'll pass over to Dr Baker.

Dr BAKER - Thank you for the question. So, over the last few months we've been undertaking a very thorough review of all of the courses and products that we deliver. That review has been done through the lens of about 15 different criteria applied at every single course, and I'm really thrilled - and made an announcement with staff just on Monday or Tuesday this week - that there will be no more significant changes to our course profile. I'm very happy, as is the board, that our course profile - the courses that we offer across the state - are strongly aligned with the workforce needs of all the regions that we serve and, indeed, aligned with the deed of funding that we receive through Treasury and Skills. So, other than small changes that are as a result of changes in industry or needs of industry, changes and

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processes by industry, and/or consumer demand, there aren't going to be any significant changes to our course profile in the near future.

Mr WILLIE - But 118 staff, minister, is a significant change at TasTAFE - 118 jobs axed. That is going to have an impact on service delivery.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks for the statement, Mr Willie. I'll look to -

Mr WILLIE - It's not a statement. It's here in a document.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Willie, it didn't actually have a question on the end of it, but anyway -

Mr WILLIE - The question is about service delivery. If he wants to dismiss that, that's up to him.

Mr ELLIS - I'm just making a point that you didn't ask a question, but I'm happy to respond to it and pass over to Dr Baker to talk through it further.

Dr BAKER - Thank you, minister. The document that you're referring to, that we released in the RTI, was developed back in January and it was a forecast of the thoughts and ideas and initiatives that we had at that time. Whilst there are some numbers in there around FTE, I think the important thing that my executive and I are driving towards is making sure that we achieve the financial outcomes that we need to achieve - not so much driving our FTE outcome. So, if we can actually achieve our financial outcomes by reducing less staff, that is definitely the principle upon which we're operating.

We're looking at all sorts of other initiatives around where we might be able to save extra money or, indeed, grow extra money. So, a big focus for us as a strategic objective is to grow our fee-for-service income. Approximately 75-80 per cent of our income comes through federal and/or state funds, but about 20-25 per cent, depending on the year, is derived through our own entrepreneurial activities. So, I'm really keen that we grow those non-government revenue streams over the coming years to support, you know, addressing our budget deficit.

Mr ELLIS - Probably the other thing to add, Mr Willie, is that obviously in terms of the Skills and Training budget where there's shared stewardship between the state and the Commonwealth, that there is a range of potential future payments under the National Skills Agreement that we can't yet budget for, but that may potentially come into TasTAFE or broader skills and training system in the forward Estimates. So, you know, there's a range of different payments that we've unlocked recently through the Commonwealth, and some of those things we'll actually even need to work through our current budget year. We'd see that there are some opportunities for additional revenue to come in from the Commonwealth, and Dr Baker talked about the potential commercial opportunities as well.

Mr WILLIE - So, you're hiking fees by 7 per cent, you're axing 118 jobs, which will impact service deliveries. Why are you asking Tasmanians to pay more for a poorer service?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie. I think Dr Baker has outlined some of the misconceptions that you've got there. I don't know if there's anything further that you want to add?

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Mr WILLIE - You've budgeted for this, minister.

Dr BAKER - At the moment, our financial position is very strong. We have lots of cash in the bank.

Mr WILLIE - Which you're going to deplete.

Dr BAKER - The issue we're trying to resolve is making sure that in about three years' time, we're not going below the line, so we need to address those expenditure levels now. We've launched a number of savings initiatives over the last few months. You'll probably be aware that there's a couple that are still in the consultation phase around our AMEP delivery and our international delivery, which are both fee-for-service activities and good revenue-generating opportunities for us in terms of fee-for-service, non-government revenue. But we need to get our costs under control and deliver those two programs in a financially responsible way for the citizens of Tasmania.

Ms BADGER - I just want to state those FTEs are not just numbers on a page. They're people's jobs. They're Tasmanian jobs. The minister tabled in parliament, as requested on a motion, what were around \$20 million worth of cuts. You've touted that there will be \$45 million. Given that this RTI document, it appears, was also drafted prior to that motion - so it's curious it didn't come back as part of it - can you detail for us where the other \$25 million is going to come from? Including course fee increases other cuts to staff, wherever they might be from? Are you then ruling out any other course cuts, based on your announcement earlier this week?

Mr ELLIS - So, obviously, Ms Badger, the forward Estimates will be something that we'll work through, and that includes savings in the forward Estimates but also potential revenue opportunities I mentioned before -

Ms BADGER - Great. If we could see those, that would be awesome.

Mr ELLIS - Unfortunately, say, for example, Commonwealth funding and those kind of things is not something that we can provide great clarity on until we're closer to the date, but I'll pass over to Dr Baker if you want to talk through further?

Dr BAKER - Nothing further to add, minister, is probably my response.

Ms BADGER - So you have no idea, then, if this is just a figure that you've pulled out, where those people would be coming from? You've just identified that roughly that number of positions could be cut for savings to be made?

Dr BAKER - Yes, what we know is on our current expenditure levels, if we keep at that rate and don't change the revenue, that will be \$45 million in deficit in about four years' time. So, we've introduced a range of changes that gets us to about halfway of that \$45 million, which buys us another two or three years towards that four-year budget Estimate. So, in that time, I'll be driving extra revenue growth and we'll be looking towards both the state and Commonwealth for any other opportunities as time goes by. At the moment, we don't have a plan to cut more jobs.

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Mr ELLIS - Probably the other thing, Ms Badger - and this applies across State Growth - is that because the agency itself won't exist very shortly, the allocations are provisional. It's noted in the DSG chapter, at the very start, they're provisional allocations. As we work through the Building Tasmania reforms and the shift to DPAC for skills and things like that, we should have a better understanding next year of what the closer allocation actually is, taking into account all of the different particulars of the broad DSG portfolio that's moving into different parts.

Ms BADGER - I might just, in the interests of time, minister, sorry, just jump back to the other part of my question, which is off the basis of your announcement, are you then ruling out any other course cuts at TasTAFE?

Dr BAKER - Thank you. I fully expect, like with any business, that we are continually reviewing our products and services and that there, normally, should be some change. But what I've announced to staff, and I'm happy to confirm with this committee, is that there are no wholesale changes to our training profile. It'll just be things on the edges that should change and will change, due to changes in industry and changes to consumer demand.

Ms BADGER - Would you consider lab tech and screen and media as fringe changes? Because they're quite substantial to a number of people, and they've been cut.

Dr BAKER - Look, I'm happy to support the decision that the previous chief executive and team made around creative industries. I've seen the enrolment figures over a number of years, and with the current group of, I think it's 12, off the top of my head, eight of them are international students that will go home. So it doesn't seem to me like there's a strong demand for lab techs in the state.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, I'm slightly concerned with the previous answer - 100 per cent completion rate on a vitally important course. I'm not sure what the learners test is for driving, but it isn't 100 per cent. Minister, as you know, firearm knowledge and safety is paramount. Does this need a review?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. I mean, obviously there's the Tasmanian Police licensing process that then people go through, so it's not a 100 per cent, you know, complete the course, get a firearms licence. But I'm happy to pass over to Dr Baker to talk through further.

Dr BAKER - Look, I'm confident that our systems and our processes and the delivery of all of our courses, as indicated by ASCA - so we've had that third-party support just in the last couple of weeks - indicates that we're a high-quality provider and that the training that we're doing across all our areas is not only compliant but of a high quality.

Mr ELLIS - I'll just quickly update the committee on another matter from the previous portfolio. In 2025-26 to 31 March, female offenders accounted for six of the 10 police family violence orders revoked compared to seven female offenders of the 15 police family violence orders revoked the same duration last year.

In 2025-26 to 31 March, female offenders accounted for 15 of the 80 family violence orders revoked, as opposed to police family violence orders, so family violence orders. The numbers revoked were very small and do not demonstrate substantial misidentification of offenders by police officers. Thank you, Chair.

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Mr JAENSCH - Minister, can you please provide an update on the implementation of TasTAFE's new student management system, which I am aware has been a priority for the board for many years - congratulations - and how it will support better outcomes and training experiences for learners and employers.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Jaensch. So, TasTAFE is replacing its core student management system, or SMS. In March 2025 TechnologyOne was the selected vendor to provide the new student management system. This is a \$23.8 million project that will provide a significant capability uplift for TasTAFE.

The investment will provide TasTAFE with rich information to support business decision making and provide educators and administration staff the tools they need to maximise learner success. The new system will allow learners and employers to self-serve information and request the support they need to enhance their experience with TasTAFE.

The implementation phase of the project commenced in June 2025 and is currently in the user testing phase, with the roll-out to be live for TasTAFE from 2027.

A wide range of TasTAFE staff informed the requirements and attended configuration workshops to ensure the new system puts the learner at the centre.

The system will provide TasTAFE with much stronger visibility of training activity across the business and allow for improvements across a range of areas including, importantly, better timetabling capability, which will benefit both learners and employers. I look forward to the new system being in place for the 2027 learning year.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you went to successive elections promising 100 new TasTAFE teachers, and you never delivered that. Now you're planning to cut 63 teachers. How do you plan to cut 63 teachers from TasTAFE and not impact course delivery or the number of courses on offer?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie. Again, there are a few misconceptions in there, but in terms of the 100-teacher commitment, we funded that commitment and delivered 70 teacher equivalents. Then, given that nationally there was a stabilisation of apprentice numbers compared to the big COVID stimulus boom that happened while we made the commitment, we obviously haven't been employing teachers for positions that aren't necessarily required. What we've done instead is made that funding available, and it's become a structural part of the budget, and look to opportunities.

If there are specialist teachers or teachers that are in hard-to-recruit areas - electrical is a classic for this - then of course that's available. It's also been a key, you know, because that funding is still available with the reprioritisation, we've said, well, rather than employing to the 100 when we've already largely acquitted with the teachers we need, let's focus on other areas of business that we can improve. The student management system is a classic for this. That will make such a big difference to learner experience, for employers, and for the broader business as well.

So, as we mentioned in previous years' committees, you know, we consider that commitment acquitted and delivered based on the funding that's available and the teachers that we actually need, given the stabilisation nationally of apprentice and learner numbers. We then

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work through for opportunities with that additional funding, including major technology roll-outs like the student management system.

Mr WILLIE - To be clear, you didn't deliver the commitment, which was 100 teachers. What are these 63 teachers you're planning to cut from TasTAFE currently doing?

Mr ELLIS - Well, Mr Willie, as I said, we've acquitted it. We've announced that. This has been on the record for years now. We've employed the teachers that we needed for the numbers of students -

Mr WILLIE - You over-promised and underdelivered.

Mr ELLIS - No. We made the commitment during the peak of COVID stimulus. Mr Mitchell's government previously then took away the support for apprentices.

Mr MITCHELL - We delivered free TAFE.

Mr ELLIS - Apprentices don't use free TAFE, Mr Mitchell. They use a totally different system, and we have seen nationally a reduction in apprentices, so obviously we wouldn't be employing teachers where that doesn't necessarily meet the demand. What we have done since, after delivering the commitment that we made, is use the money that we provided, that's now structurally in the Budget, to deliver a student management system and other major capital upgrades that have delivered a huge benefit to the business. So, as I said, there's some misconceptions in your question.

I'll just look to Dr Baker if there's anything further you want to add on teacher numbers.

Dr BAKER - No, I think you've highlighted the key points there, minister. We did engage Harrison McMillan, a national recruitment company, to help us get some extra resources in specific areas like plumbing, electrical, the care industries, like nursing, community care and aged care. That equated to around about 50 of the 100 that was promised. And then, of course, our conditions have changed and the demand for those extra teachers no longer there.

Mr WILLIE - And the 63 teachers you're planning to cut from TasTAFE now, what are they doing right now? It's going to impact course delivery, it's going to impact the number of courses on offer. We've seen that with the creative industries and the number of teachers you cut, which is much smaller than that.

Dr BAKER - The only thing I might add is that, whilst there's a number there around 63, and it's equating to a budget number, again, focusing on the dollars, which is the really important thing, and getting increased productivity from the existing workforce, which might be equating to a good chunk of that number, is where our key focus is.

To give that some flavour for you, at the moment, our teachers can teach up to 800 hours a year, and we know that we're below that benchmark, so we're looking to increase productivity by ensuring our teachers are teaching up to the maximum amount of hours. So, we won't be employing the casual sessional teachers that would otherwise be doing those hours where our full-time people are under hours. I hope that makes sense.

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Mr WILLIE - You're also going to be depleting your cash reserves. I've got here on this RTI document as well that TasTAFE requested funding from the state government of \$27.4 million for the 2026-27 state Budget to support 'significant structural change to enable the organisation to meet its requirements under the Statement of Ministerial Expectations with a lower cost base'. I assume that wasn't granted, because over the forward Estimates TasTAFE will be depleting its cash reserves by about that amount.

Mr ELLIS - Obviously we want to be making sure that when cash is going into a government agency, they are delivering a service for their learners. You know, we don't exist just to accumulate more and more cash. In this case, we're delivering major capital roll-outs that spend cash on delivering better services for learners and better facilities for teachers and industry. Obviously, those kind of investments, we use cash to pay for them, just like any other business. And as the Budget out-years identify and then our cash reserves stabilise as we work through future funding opportunities. But I don't know if there's anything the team from TasTAFE want to add?

Dr BAKER - No, just in the out-years, though, there is an investment of an additional \$13 million for the Centre of Excellence in clean energy, which will be a great resource for the state and particularly for the Burnie campus and the north-west, as we look to train people for all of the clean energy jobs that will be coming on.

Ms BADGER - In the past, there's been talk in RTIs that have shown investigations into the possibility of leasing out various TasTAFE facilities. We've heard about that possibly being to private RTOs, and certainly there's been concerns raised around the Campbell Street campus. Can you outline exactly which TasTAFE facilities you are currently looking at leasing out to private RTOs?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, getting better utilisation of our facilities is something that we actually should be doing, particularly with -

Mr WILLIE - Gutting TasTAFE.

Mr ELLIS - Well, no, I think we're about -

Ms BADGER - Privatised it, like you promised you wouldn't.

Mr ELLIS - No, but -

Ms BADGER - Yes.

Mr ELLIS - No. But if there are opportunities for us to work closely with industry, particularly these industry-aligned trainers, then that is a good thing and that's something that we should do. I'll pass over to the team from TasTAFE to talk through.

Dr BAKER - I mean, recently we've disposed of an old site in Queenstown. I think it was being leased by the Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation. Almost finished completing sale of the Malangenna childcare centre to the owners of the Malangenna childcare centre -

Ms BADGER - Just in the interests of time, we've heard the minister talk about what's been done previously. What are you looking forward to doing?

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Dr BAKER - Well, in essence, we're looking to maximise the use of all of the resources that we've got.

Ms BADGER - Which ones specifically?

Dr BAKER - Campbell Street. We have some opportunities for free space in Campbell Street, and we will look to better utilise that space. There's no decisions yet on the outcome of those conversations. I can't think of any others, really, where we've got active -

Mr ELLIS - North-West Clean Energy Centre of Excellence with some of the industry.

Dr BAKER - Yes. So, as we establish -

Ms BADGER - Can you elaborate on that?

Dr BAKER - As we establish the centre of excellence in Burnie, we do want to work very closely with complementary providers and industry associations, and so if they could be co-located or housed with us, that would be a good thing.

Ms BADGER - Is it the case with the new automotive centre of excellence, given that acquiring that location wasn't put out to public tender and it's been fitted out with public funds, that essentially the private landholder has secured themselves a free automotive centre?

Mr ELLIS - I think you're talking about the lease arrangements for commercial buildings, but I'm happy to pass back. The other thing to clarify - it's not a centre of excellence. They're quite a specific thing. This is more just a regional training facility for the south.

Ms BADGER - I was too optimistic and excited about what you were going to deliver in that space - you've underdelivered again.

Mr ELLIS - That's okay. Fit for purpose has been a key focus for that. I'll pass back to the team to talk again through the commercial leasing arrangements.

Dr BAKER - If you don't mind, minister, I'll pass on to Will, who manages our leases.

Mr McSHANE - Sure. I guess this is further to my previous answer about a make-good. A make-good allows you the opportunity to remove the items from the leased premises and return it back to its previous state. It's not a case of us looking to surrender any assets that are there, but rather meet the make-good provisions of the lease.

Ms BADGER - So I guess we're just looking for a guarantee on the record that that's what you will be doing, given it was public money to fit it out and it didn't go through any public, open transparent process.

Mr McSHANE - Our lease is a commercial agreement that says there's a make-good provision in there that we would look at the make-good provisions of the lease when that occurs.

Ms BADGER - You would look at it at the time but -

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Mr ELLIS - Can I also thank the Tasmanian Automotive Chamber of Commerce as well, who've been a great partner with us to deliver that facility, and again, I think the partnership with industry is actually what's going to drive some really great outcomes with TasTAFE, and that's a great example of it.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, have you considered offering a voluntary firearm course additional to the mandatory one, centred around safety and legislation, particularly on storage?

Mr ELLIS - I haven't considered that, Mr Di Falco, but I'm happy to work through on that. And we don't have the Tasmania Police team at the table, but I know that there's a range of different fact sheets that they make available for firearms licence holders on their website and others so that they can get an understanding of that. There are also significant legislative requirements outlined in the course. But I'm always happy to keep working to make sure that our firearms safety course is fit for purpose.

Certainly, I know when there was a change to storage requirements in previous years, there were some people that, knowingly or unknowingly, were caught up in the infringement process there. The more we can do to educate people about their requirements for storage, the better safety outcome we get and also the more compliant people will be, particularly as most people want to be compliant.

Mr Di FALCO - While I appreciate there are budgetary constraints in relation to TAFE, perhaps if there's a voluntary system at gun ranges or gun clubs?

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, I'm happy to take some further feedback on that. I know that there's a range of different sporting shooting and other bodies that take a high degree of interest in how they can support their members to comply with different requirements and, you know, sending out regular newsletters and things like that. So, I'm always happy to work with people about opportunities to make sure that there's an educative process as well as a compliance process that we work through.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, tourism and hospitality employ around one in every six Tasmanians. How is the government working with the industry to build a skilled workforce needed to support that demand? What role is TasTAFE playing through its School for the Visitor Economy?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. The visitor economy is one of Tasmania's most important industries. It underpins regional economies, and employs Tasmanians in almost every community across the state. As we head into the next tourist season, Tasmania's visitor economy and the world-class experience we offer will again be in strong demand. The demand needs to be supported by skilled, confident, and a job-ready workforce, and the government's continuing to support training through TasTAFE and other training providers in areas such as accommodation, food and beverage, cookery, tourism operations, events, and visitor services.

TasTAFE's School for the Visitor Economy is working hard to ensure we have a job-ready skills pipeline for the sector, secures strong support from industry partners, and is positioning TasTAFE to respond to opportunities identified in the state's 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy.

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The government also supports a number of other initiatives to build the visitor economy workforce. Part of that work is our investment in the Hospitality & Tourism Academy, with \$850,000 over three years to support industry-led non-accredited training. The academy is industry-led, being jointly owned by Hospitality Tasmania and the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania.

As we prepare for another busy summer season, we'll continue working side by side with TasTAFE and industry to build the workforce it needs and ensure Tasmanians can take up opportunities created by this important sector.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you, minister.

Mr WILLIE - This document I've got, minister, says that:

TasTAFE is currently on a path of significant cost-saving initiatives, decreased workforce, reallocation of unspent committed funding, as well as pursuing additional revenue opportunities offset by structural costs such as redundancies.

The net impact of these initiatives, the Deed of Purchasing Agreement remains below what is required to allow the organisation to meet the Ministerial Statement of Expectations, and TasTAFE project the depletion of cash reserves by 2027-28.

What requirements under the Ministerial Statement of Expectations is TasTAFE now not meeting?

Mr ELLIS - Look, I think the CEO outlined before, with the review of the course offerings, that they're in strong compliance. Well, maybe not compliance, because it's not a compliance document, but strong alignment with those expectations, and we'll obviously continue to work through the budget process in the future and the modernisation of TasTAFE.

I'll pass over to the team from TasTAFE. Is there anything further?

Dr BAKER - No, just that the board and executive are very much strongly aligned to ensuring we achieve the Ministerial Statement of Expectations. It's not a question that, you know, one or two of the dot points will fall off the list. We'll still be addressing all of those statements, those ministerial expectations.

Mr ELLIS - So the request of government was denied, minister, so what's changed? They're clearly saying in this request that they will not meet the Ministerial Statement of Expectations if this funding is not granted.

Mr ELLIS - So, Mr Willie, as we've we've outlined already in the House, TasTAFE have been working through a savings -

Mr WILLIE - This is on top of that.

Mr ELLIS - When was your RTI from again?

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Mr WILLIE - This is from January.

Mr ELLIS - So January, and then so we've provided the information to the House in March.

Mr WILLIE - You budgeted for this. These numbers are budgeted for.

Mr ELLIS - TasTAFE have obviously been working through savings strategy, working through some of the opportunities and further discussions around revenue, particularly with relation to the National Skills Agreement with the Commonwealth. All those things are things that we're working through. I mentioned before to Ms Badger -

Mr WILLIE - I understand that, minister. It says that in the document which I read out to you, but the \$27.4 million is on top of all of those things.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Willie, TasTAFE's obviously working through its savings strategy. It's important that they continue to live within their means and, you know, the government's provided more than \$100 million -

Mr WILLIE - The question is, Chair: what requirements under the Ministerial Statement of Expectations is TasTAFE now not meeting?

Mr ELLIS - I think we answered that at the start, Mr Willie, and said broadly they're well aligned, and the course review demonstrated that quite strongly. I don't know, Dr Baker, if you've got anything further to add?

Dr BAKER - No, nothing specifically.

Mr MITCHELL - Is this minute to the minister a lie, is it?

Mr ELLIS - Well, Chair, I think that's unparliamentary language and I ask -

Mr MITCHELL - Is it untruthful? Is it an untruthful document? I'll withdraw the line and change the language.

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Mitchell. I'll pass over to the team from TasTAFE.

Dr BAKER - I might have to take it under advisement. I'm not sure what document it actually -

Mr WINTER - This is a minute to the minister dated - it's in February, actually, 9/2/2026. It's a request for \$27.4 million. It talks about the initiatives that the minister's highlighting, but this \$27.4 million is a request on top of all those things. It outlines that they won't be able to meet their Ministerial Statement of Expectations, and I don't think the minister has answered that question.

Mr GARDNER - If I may, further, so firstly, it's incumbent on us always to seek whatever avenues, pursue whatever avenues, for revenue and cost improvement and continue to ensure that the organisation is financially as strong as possible. Then, when we're looking at that, looking at our ability to meet the Ministerial Statement of Expectations, we're looking at

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the four-year forward Estimate and saying over that period of time with the current depletion of cash, we won't be able to do that. So, now what we're doing is working through - and the minister has already outlined - that we continue to work with the minister and with Skills Tasmania around all those opportunities to close that gap. Right here, right now -

Mr WILLIE - Hiking fees, cutting staff.

Mr GARDNER - we meet the Ministerial Statement of Expectations, and that is our job and we'll continue to.

Mr WILLIE - So, it means higher fees and more job cuts to meet the ministerial expectations.

Mr ELLIS - Or additional contributions from the Commonwealth as part of the National Skills Agreement or, you know, the finalised allocation from the Department of State Growth, noting that these are all provisional numbers for Department of State Growth entities. So, there's a range of different things that we're working through in terms of the out-years of the forward Estimates, Mr Willie.

I think it's been noted in all the Department of State Growth hearings that further understanding of what those allocations will be will become clearer in the next Budget, because we're currently budgeting for a department that won't exist at some point during the financial year in which the Budget year is actually contained.

Mr WILLIE - You're talking about funding opportunities that probably won't materialise over the next financial year, and you've got budgeted here to cut 41 teachers over the next financial year.

Mr ELLIS - So, that's actually wrong, Mr Willie, because there's actually financial -

Mr WILLIE - Apart from your fee hikes.

Mr ELLIS - there's actually financial contributions from the Commonwealth that have come through between when the Budget was developed and when it was printed. So, not only is it very reasonable to expect that in three and four years' time we'll receive money, but even in the current financial year. I've actually just signed off on some payments from the Commonwealth that are not budgeted even for the financial year that's coming up. So that's the nature of the National Skills Agreement. You're very pessimistic about the federal Labor Government supporting TAFE. I'm not.

Mr WILLIE - No, don't verbal me, that's not true. They've been a strong supporter of TAFE, unlike him.

Mr ELLIS - Well, I'm glad to hear you now have more faith in your colleagues, and certainly, that's what we see every year with the Skills budget, because there is a shared stewardship arrangement and funding that gets unlocked as part of a progressive process.

We unlocked significant funding for the north-west Clean Energy Centre of Excellence through the National Skills Agreement, about a \$13 million uplift. That's the nature of how that

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agreement works, and with some of the major funding that we've unlocked over the journey, we'd expect that there'll be future opportunities through that as well.

Can I also just thank the federal minister Mr Giles, who is a very proud Tasmanian originally, and appreciate his work with us in the Tasmanian state context.

Ms BADGER - Minister, as a part of the TasTAFE cuts we have seen a decrease in training at Risdon Prison, notwithstanding that is part of the federal agreement that you have. Obviously, this week there was a lot of very shocked people in the Meander Valley to hear the government announce on Facebook that it would be looking at training facilities to repurpose the Ashley site as a farm.

How much is that going to cost, minister? What's the plan being rolled out there when we're seeing some training being cut across our prison systems and then we've got a new proposal up and running? How many staff is it going to be? How many courses? Which ones? What's the plan?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Badger. Obviously, the minister for Justice could probably talk through more around the specifics of that project, noting that there's a consultation process to work through and some other opportunities. I would have thought you'd welcome the future prison farm arrangements at the current Ashley site, because it does provide a more, kind of, minimum security opportunity for people to be rehabilitated and I think -

Ms BADGER - What training is going to get rolled out?

Mr ELLIS - I think the closure of the Hayes Prison Farm was a huge mistake, and it's good to see that -

Ms BADGER - This is actually not relevant to this portfolio, Chair. I want to hear about the training that you're going to provide there.

Mr ELLIS - You asked it, Ms Badger. I know it's not relevant. I am trying my best to answer your question that's not relevant.

Ms BADGER - Yes, I asked about the training. Are you not providing training at this facility that you've announced now, minister? Is that what you're telling us? Or you don't know?

Mr ELLIS - Let me try and be relevant to the question as best as I can.

Ms BADGER - Which is about training, to be clear.

Mr ELLIS - So, about training - obviously we'll work through those arrangements. There are a range of different training providers that we work with. The Civil Contractors Federation actually is working in a new partnership with Risdon Prison. They have a new earthworks academy that's just about to be established in the broader Meander Valley region at the Quercus Park site, so potentially some good opportunities there as well. But that'll be one that we'll work through because we're still in the early consultation phase of that. But I'll pass over to the team at TasTAFE to maybe talk through the change at Risdon, particularly given that was a bi-mutual agreement with the Prison Service as well.

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Ms BADGER - I'm just also more interested in what the plan is for training at the proposed repurposed Ashley site, not so much the cuts at Risdon, if you can provide that.

Mr ELLIS - As I say, it's very early days. There's consultation that will be undertaken. It will depend on the partnership arrangement, so it could be TasTAFE, it could be the Civil Contractors Federation, could be a range of different providers, but we'll work through that process.

Mr MITCHELL - Just issue a press release and don't do any work.

Ms BADGER - I thought you put it up on Facebook. That's what the other minister did. I look forward to that post.

Mr ELLIS - Put what up on Facebook?

DEPUTY CHAIR - Any other questions there, Ms Badger?

Mr ELLIS - I haven't put anything up on Facebook about it.

Ms BADGER - No, no. You haven't.

Mr JAENSCH - Never heard of it.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. In addition, I'm wondering if you could please provide us some statistics. We're just wondering if there are any unfilled TasTAFE teacher vacancies that currently exist? What is the current total FTE of TasTAFE teachers employed between May 2024 and May 2025?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Badger, I'll pass over to TasTAFE.

Dr BAKER - I'm just trying to find it here. Sorry, Ms Badger, would you mind repeating the questions?

Ms BADGER - Yes. How many, if any, unfilled TasTAFE teacher vacancies currently exist? How many FTE teachers were there for the last 12 months?

Dr BAKER - Seven. Currently there are seven vacancies for teachers at TasTAFE.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. How many FTEs, for teachers specifically?

Dr BAKER - Teachers specifically: 440.85 at March 2026.

Mr MITCHELL - March 2026, so March to March?

Dr BAKER - Well, it's a point in time.

Ms BADGER - Have you got March 2025, then, to provide us the other point?

Dr BAKER - I do. March 2025 was 456.46.

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Mr Di FALCO - Minister, could you provide the completion rate for Certificate IV in Commercial Cookery, and how does that compare nationally?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. I'll pass that to the team from TasTAFE.

Dr BAKER - Sorry, Mr Di Falco, we'll definitely have to take that one on notice.

Mr ELLIS - One of the good things about Tasmania, though, is we have one of the highest completion rates in the country across all skills sectors, which is great. Something I think the Leader of the Opposition even praised us for, which is nice to see, a bit of bipartisanship in that space.

Mr WILLIE - I value TasTAFE, not your government's treatment of it.

Mr ELLIS - Well, we delivered after 12 years of Liberal government, and we actually had to put TasTAFE back together, because under Mr Willie's colleagues, they blew it up. There wasn't actually a TasTAFE.

Mr WILLIE - You inherited TasTAFE. Don't make things up.

Mr ELLIS - You blew it up and everyone knows it.

Mr WILLIE - You didn't put it back together. That's a mistruth.

DEPUTY CHAIR - Order.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you, Chair. I hate it when they fight. Minister, can you please update the committee on how the government's Industry Partnerships Program will help ensure training is better matched to current and emerging workforce needs?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. The Industry Partnerships Program is a very practical way the government's making training more relevant, more modern, and better connected to the needs of industry. Since 2024, the program has funded projects that improve access to the right equipment, technology, and resources needed to deliver high-quality, government-subsidised training.

To date, funding has been awarded to 16 projects across a wide range of sectors. These projects have supported the purchase of things like computer-based training simulators, specialised tools and machinery, an augmented reality training facility, a mock hospital, and real-world simulated aged-care training environments.

For example, some of the projects included \$50,000 for a trade-ready trailer with the Master Builders, \$40,000 to deliver Certificate III in Process Plant Operations with Nyrstar, \$35,000 for forest machine operator simulator training equipment with Arbre Forest Industries at Invermay, and \$250,000 for an immersive skills training lab with Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing Zone at TasTAFE's Alanvale Campus. To clarify as well for colleagues, that's also, I suppose, a sub-lease arrangement, which is really effective with industry. This is exactly the kind of investment that makes training more hands-on, more industry-relevant, and more attractive for learners. In 2026 the round is now open until the end of the year, with \$2.3 million available. The program been expanded to support training-related equipment and resources,

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contextualised training products, and projects that help grow Tasmania's VET trainer and assessor workforce. Grants of up to \$250,000 are available.

Our focus is simple: stronger partnerships, better equipment, more relevant training, and better outcomes for learners, employers, and industry. By backing industry and training providers to work together, we're making sure that Tasmanians can train on the tools, technology, and resources they'll actually use in the workplace.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you, minister.

Mr WILLIE - Minister, you're budgeting over the next financial year for a cut of 41 teachers and 89 staff. How do you expect to deliver that without impacting course delivery?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie. I think we've spoken extensively about this already, but I'll look to Dr Baker.

Mr WILLIE - That's a lot of staff in one year.

Dr BAKER - Again, if we focus on the dollars, some of the areas outside of the teaching where we've saved significant dollars including a reduction in the executive team at TasTAFE from seven down to five, in our marketing and communications area, in our learning design team. And, of course, we've got the change initiatives that are open at the moment around our AMEP program, our international program and the prisoners. So, non-teaching.

Mr WILLIE - That's not going to achieve 89 staff.

Dr BAKER - Well, at the moment we've solutioned about \$22 million worth of savings, and over the next few years, as the minister highlighted, we'll be generating more income and always looking to be more efficient in our delivery, as well as a productivity uplift in our current teaching workforce.

Mr WILLIE - You're hiking fees, you are depleting your cash reserves, and it's inevitable that you're going to have to cut staff. So how are you going to cut 41 teachers and 89 staff over the next financial year without impacting course delivery?

Mr ELLIS - Mr Willie, I think we've broadly answered this and it's probably, I suppose, part of the situation when you use documents that are for consideration at a point in time.

Mr WILLIE - It's what you budgeted for in your budget.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Willie, a document for consideration at a point in time. And we're working through future opportunities in the broader context that we've outlined with the State Growth changes and the Commonwealth funding and a range of other opportunities that we're looking to pursue in the future. So, I think we've answered it pretty extensively and repeatedly.

Mr WILLIE - Are you saying the Budget figures can't be believed? Because these are the assumptions you've made in it.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Willie, if you look at the first couple of pages of the Department of State Growth commentary, it says these are provisional allocations on the basis that this is for a

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department that won't exist during this financial year. We also note that there are significant funding opportunities that come through each and every year for Skills and Training and TAFE from the federal government. So the Budget is, of course, a point-in-time allocation, and we'll look for future opportunities in the out-years so that we can continue to deliver the services.

And I note your glowing praise of the Liberal Government's delivery of skills and training at TAFE over the last 12 years in op-eds and in parliament. TasTAFE already has the facilities, expertise, and it already has the connections with local employers. Tasmania actually has some of the best post-training employment outcomes in the country -

Mr WILLIE - It needs support from the government.

Mr ELLIS - Apparently that's not true now, but it's there in black and white, Mr Willie, for everyone to see. Those are your words, not mine.

Mr MITCHELL - Don't verbal.

Mr ELLIS - That might be upsetting to you, but I think it's something we can all celebrate.

Mr MITCHELL - Staff are working in very challenging conditions.

Mr WILLIE - Chair, if I could direct him back to the question: The job cuts are part of the reality, I'm not hearing the minister deny that. He's budgeted for 41 teachers to go and 89 staff to go this year. He can talk with fancy words about funding opportunities; it's not going to offset those job cuts. I want to know how it's going to impact course delivery?

Mr ELLIS - So, Mr Willie, additional funding is not fancy words. Additional funding is something that we work through with the Commonwealth, and also, obviously I mentioned before around the provision allocations from State Growth. That's well canvassed. I don't know if you've been paying attention to other hearings or not, but -

Mr WILLIE - You are going to be cutting staff and that's going to impact course delivery.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Willie, maybe if you listen rather than interrupting, you might understand this, because you should have, over the last four days, understood this from various different State Growth portfolios. But I'm happy to update you now, on the afternoon of the last day.

Now, obviously we'll work through a process. The TasTAFE team have done an excellent job in terms of identifying some savings, making sure that we're doing our share of the task that's relevant across government.

Yep, I'll look to the TasTAFE team if there's anything further to add, but I think we've answered your question that you keep repeating.

Ms BADGER - As a part of the savings that TasTAFE are trying to make, other government departments are rolling out AI, which we've seen strategically placed in the

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Budget. What is TasTAFE looking at in that space? Are you looking in that space to save money or to roll out courses differently?

Dr BAKER - Thank you for the question. So, at the moment, we've funded two positions in our digital services team looking at the roll-out of AI. It's a new initiative for us so we're very low on the maturity around the use of AI. At the moment we've had success using it in our teaching spaces, predominantly around developing assessment tools and recognition of prior learning tools. That's creating significant time savings for those teachers in the development of those assessment instruments. We've also started using it through our corporate areas, well some of the corporate areas, just for taking minutes and summarising action notes out of our minutes. So, again, being used very much as a time-saving tool.

Ms BADGER - Do you have any specifics on exactly what programs you're rolling out or affiliations with different specific -

Dr BAKER - The team are looking at a platform called The Foundry, and I think we're about to go through a procurement process around that.

In the meantime, we're also developing up - As part of our digital strategy, a pillar of that digital strategy will be specific to AI to inform what we will do with AI in the future. It's a very new entry for us.

DEPUTY CHAIR - It being 1.08 p.m., the committee will now break and resume at 2.00 p.m.

The committee suspended from 1.08 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.

Skills and Jobs

DEPUTY CHAIR - It being 2.00 p.m., Skills and Jobs portfolio scrutiny will continue.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, how in this Budget is the government ensuring that we have the workforce needed to deliver the homes and major projects that Tasmania needs?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Tasmania's building and construction sector is vital to delivering the homes, infrastructure and major projects our state needs. The industry is already the third-largest employing industry in Tasmania, with more than 26,000 workers. But with a \$30 billion infrastructure pipeline over the next decade, we know we need thousands more skilled workers.

That's why the government's backing the sector through the 'high-vis army'. Today the high-vis army members have delivered career promotion at more than 650 school, industry and job seeker events, reaching over 62,000 people. Round 1 delivered 45 additional apprentices in rural and regional areas, more than 4300 learners in 442 accredited courses, 43 job-ready programs supporting more than 500 Tasmanians, and a new Master Builders training facility at Cambridge which has already trained more than 280 students.

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We've backed that success with a further \$6 million for round 2, a focus on expanding training, lifting participation and building the workforce needed to deliver more housing and infrastructure. We're investing \$4.3 million in the Quercus Park Earthworks Academy, a live civil construction training site where Tasmanians will get practical experience on real plant and machinery - and I understand that includes our Premier, as one of his post-politics to-do lists.

Apprenticeships remain at the heart of this work. In 2025, 79 per cent of government-funded building and construction enrolments were apprenticeships and traineeships. For major projects like Macquarie Point multipurpose stadium, the procurement process is being used to drive strong local outcomes, including commitments to Tasmanian workers, businesses and apprentices.

Our approach is simple: promote the industry, train more Tasmanians, back apprentices and make sure our major projects create local jobs and local skills. Building Tasmania's future means building Tasmania's workforce, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Chair, if I can just add to an answer that was taken on notice in response to Mr Di Falco: TasTAFE Certificate III in Commercial Cookery in 2025 had 283 enrolments and 77 completions, noting that we have persons that enrolled in the second half of the 2025 year still undertaking their training.

Mr MITCHELL - Chair. Minister, many higher-level qualifications available for free elsewhere in Tasmania are charged at full price here in Tasmania. Victoria offers the Diploma of Nursing as a free TAFE course. It's also available free in South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. But a Diploma of Nursing costs \$20,000 in Tasmania. Victoria is already the primary destination for young Tasmanians who leave our state, and free TAFE courses there that charge full fees here are a big financial incentive to leave.

Minister, how do you determine which courses are offered as free TAFE courses? And when Tasmania needs more nurses, early childhood workers and carers, why are you sending our best and brightest to Victoria, instead of making those courses free here?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. We're actually oversubscribed in the Diploma of Nursing, but I'll pass to TasTAFE to maybe talk through some of the specifics there, and I'll pass to Ms Paterson to talk through some of the broader fee-free TAFE design and some of the key issues that we're working through. But I'll pass to you, Dr Baker.

Dr BAKER - Thanks, minister. In essence, we have a negotiation with skills every year around the priority courses that we're going to focus on for this current year, which I can talk to. The focus has been on increasing pathways into further training and into apprenticeships. So there's been, as a strategy, a focus on the sort of lower-level qualifications, and I guess to your point around nursing, we have around about three times the number of applications for nursing than we do actually have places. So, the price doesn't seem to be a barrier for entry into that course.

Mr ELLIS - I'll just pass to Ms Paterson in terms of some of the design work in Australia we've got around the allocation of fee-free places.

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Ms PATERSON - Thank you, minister, through you: the Australian Government agreement in terms of fee-free TAFE lists a number of priority cohorts for delivery of that initiative. So, as Dr Baker has mentioned, we have selected pathway courses because they are the courses that are most in demand by the cohorts that are listed in the agreement.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you, Chair. Through you, minister, to Dr Baker: you're saying you've got three times the applications than you have places for the Diploma of Nursing. Isn't it an indication that we should be training more nurses here in Tasmania, rather than sending them off to mainland?

Dr BAKER - Yes, it's a very good point. Our biggest barrier in Tasmania actually is not so much the capacity of our RTOs, including TasTAFE - it's our ability to get work placement places. We're really, really active with the Tasmanian Health Service, GP clinics, aged care clinics, anywhere we can find places. But, you know, it's a competitive process with UTAS also requiring them for all of their medical students, including their nurses. So it's really the lack of capacity in the work placement sector that is the barrier for us growing our delivery in nursing.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you. My third question: the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care is another course that other states offer for free, but it costs almost \$10,000 here in Tasmania. Would you consider changing that? And can you provide the enrolment numbers for the past three years in the both the Diploma of Nursing and the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. Probably important to note as well, there's Vocational Education and Training (VET) fee help for these particular areas. I'll pass over to Ms Paterson maybe to talk through the early childhood scholarships that are available for people. Then we'll come back to TasTAFE on some of that data that you requested, Mr Mitchell.

Ms PATERSON - Yes, thank you, minister, through you: so, just to also note that in terms of the fee-free TAFE qualifications, some of the most popular qualifications delivered under that agreement in 2026 were the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care.

As the minister mentioned, in relation to scholarships, the government has a commitment, through its previous election, to deliver scholarships to the early years workforce. So we have an agreement with Education and Care to deliver scholarships to support students in the early childhood and education sector and incentives for relocation or retention in rural and isolated areas. We have received a number of expressions of interest in terms of those scholarships at the moment.

Mr MITCHELL - Could you say how many, sorry?

Ms PATERSON - Yes - 101.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you.

Ms PATERSON - They're being worked through by Education and Care at the moment, and we expect to have the outcomes of those applications in June.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you.

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Mr ELLIS - Just to TasTAFE on some of the other data.

Dr BAKER - To your other question: Certificate III Early Childhood Education and Care was offered through the fee-free TAFE program. There were 175 places in 2024 and 2025, and we have 150 fee-free places on offer in 2026. In terms of the enrolment numbers, we've got a total of 454 enrolments in 2025 across the Certificate III and the Diploma. And this year, we currently have 122 enrolments across those, with an additional 60 enrolments planned for our enrolments in July.

Mr MITCHELL - Sorry, just for clarification, would you mind breaking down the numbers for both the Certificate III, which I didn't ask about, and the Diploma of ECE?

Dr BAKER - I'll have to take that on notice. I don't have the breakdown in front of me.

Mr MITCHELL - Are you happy to take that on notice, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Yes.

Ms ROSOL - Minister, were you at any point involved in the decision to allow former minister Ms Ogilvie to use public funds to pay for her legal costs?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Rosol. Obviously, the Premier's answered to that already and I've got nothing further to add.

Ms ROSOL - Well, when were you first made aware that legal costs incurred by former minister Ms Ogilvie were to be paid with public funds? Like, were you made aware at any point in your capacity as a Cabinet minister that former minister Ogilvie was involved in Supreme Court proceedings?

Mr ELLIS - Oh, Ms Rosol, you wouldn't expect me to talk about Cabinet deliberations, but, you know, the Premier's already responded to this matter and I've got nothing further to add.

Ms ROSOL - Not expecting you to talk about Cabinet deliberations. I'm just asking when you were made aware about Madeleine Ogilvie's use of public funds to pay for Supreme Court proceedings.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Rosol, and as I said, the Premier's responded to this and I've got nothing further to add.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, alongside building skills locally, skilled migrants are helping to fill job vacancies in areas of critical skills needs in Tasmania. I hear stories of people who have the skills we need who want to make Tasmania their home as well. What's the government doing to ensure Tasmania can benefit fully from the migration system and attract and retain skilled migrants?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Building local skills will always be our first priority, but skilled migration also plays a critical role in helping Tasmania meet workforce shortages.

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Tasmania's Skilled Migration State Nomination Program is consistently oversubscribed, reflecting the strength of interest from prospective migrants who wish to call Tasmania home. In 2024-25, Tasmania received more than 4200 registrations of interest for 2860 places. This year we've been allocated 1850 nomination places by the Commonwealth and we expect to see a similar level on the demand side. That shows that there are skilled people who want come here, work here and make Tasmania home. Most migrants nominated through the program are already living in Tasmania and already contributing to our economy. Healthcare and social assistance is a major beneficiary, with workers in those roles making up to 47 per cent of all nominations this program year.

Tourism and hospitality also continue to benefit from skilled migration, including international students and workers filling important workforce gaps.

But we know Tasmania needs more flexibility from the national migration system. That's why the government is working to finalise a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) for Tasmania. The Tasmanian DAMA would give employers access to more overseas workers than standard employer-sponsored visa programs and provide greater flexibility to respond to Tasmania's unique workforce needs. Industry groups and unions have been consulted on the roles that should be included and that feedback has informed discussions with the Department of Home Affairs. We're aiming to have this new program in place this year.

We're also continuing to advocate to the Australian Government for longer-term migration planning, more stable nomination allocations, and sensible changes to programs like working holiday visas, so they better support Tasmanian businesses to address seasonal skill needs.

The government's approach is balanced: train more Tasmanians, lift participation and use skilled migration strategically where local supply cannot meet demand.

We want skilled migrants who choose Tasmania to build a career, contribute to our communities and stay for the long term.

Mr MITCHELL - Minister, nice segue into my question. Why did TasTAFE's expenditure costs to deliver the Adult Migrant English Program increase by \$709,306 between 2022-23 and 2023-24? That's a 23.69 per cent increase in costs. What caused this massive rise?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I'll pass over to TasTAFE.

Dr BAKER - Thank you for the question. My understanding is that when we exited the public sector we were required to make all of the staff in there permanent staff. So, as the revenue has declined over that period you mentioned, and continuing to now, we've been stuck with those ongoing costs. The reviews that I've launched in the last few months on the AMEP program is looking just simply to match our expenditure on the AMEP program with our revenues.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you. Minister, my figures indicate that in FY22-23 TasTAFE's AMEP revenue was \$3,117,321 and expenditure \$2,993,982 and the next year, I think from memory reading it, the revenue was down about \$100,000 or so - that's about right, maybe it was \$150,000 - but your expenditure had gone right up by \$700,000. Revenue was fairly static, but expenditure increased massively. Would you mind just reconciling that for me?

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Mr ELLIS - Yes, thanks, Mr Mitchell. It's obviously, as I've stated a number of times, important that we live within our means and that includes when we receive commercial contracts like this, that we're able to deliver within the funding envelope. But I'll pass over to Dr Baker, if there's anything further add.

Dr BAKER - With your permission, minister, I might refer to the CFO if he's got any recollections of what happened during those periods.

Mr McSHANE - I would suggest when we had, of course, enterprise agreements that required increases in those staff. There were components of that. There would be - I probably can't give you the number off-hand, but there was also progressions within that for teaching staff and other staff. I probably would have to come back with some more detail.

Mr MITCHELL - Can I ask that question be taken on notice and it'd be provided, Minister?

Mr ELLIS - Just double checking - happy with that? Yes.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you. Well, I won't belabour the point on that. I've got another matter.

Minister, the response to Notice of Motion 80, which was tabled on 15 April this year, listed two property assets in quotes 'under consideration for disposal' - end quote. Documents released under RTI show that the TasTAFE board endorses to proceed with the sale of Malangenna Childcare Centre.

Seeking approval of the minister. Minister, given Malangenna is not included in the tabled NOM80, can you confirm that this property asset is no longer under consideration for disposal?

Mr ELLIS - No, I think that's probably more the case that the House had been updated substantially on that as well as the Queenstown property that we've talked about with the Abt Railway. Largely speaking, that process is substantially advanced and complete from what I understand.

Mr MITCHELL - For clarification, Chair. Minister, the response to Notice of Motion 80, which was tabled on 15 April, listed only two property assets under consideration for disposal. Is it your evidence that you only had two property assets under consideration for disposal? Or were there more assets under consideration?

Mr ELLIS - No, I think from the question there, we responded about what's under consideration as opposed to what's been effectively done. I'll look to the team from TasTAFE if there's any further clarification, we might be able to provide.

Dr BAKER - Are you asking specifically in relation to our childcare facilities?

Mr MITCHELL - No, at the direction of the parliament, the minister was ordered to provide a response to a certain question, and the response was that there are two property assets under consideration of disposal. Malangenna was not one of those properties. I'm asking - and clearly Malangenna is still being considered, or a decision has been made, whichever it is.

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Mr ELLIS - Less under consideration and more of a decision was made.

Mr MITCHELL - If a decision was made, when was that decision executed?

Dr BAKER - I attended the Crown Solicitor's office to sign some selling documents approximately two weeks ago.

Mr MITCHELL - Can I ask for an exact date, if possible?

Dr BAKER - I'll have to take that on notice, minister.

Mr ELLIS - In terms of when it was approved by the board, it might have even been substantially earlier.

Dr BAKER - Well before that period.

Mr GARDNER - 17 November.

Mr ELLIS - The House was already aware of these things and same with the Abt Railway property. We provided that information previously.

Mr MITCHELL - So, it's your evidence that the board approved the sale of the asset in November? Is that right, minister?

Mr GARDNER - Obviously, we subsequently require ministerial approval, but the board -

Mr MITCHELL - Is it your evidence, minister, that even if the board makes a decision to dispose of an asset, that means it's no longer under consideration for disposal? Or do you believe that the decision has been made legally?

Mr ELLIS - When we provided the information, I think we were providing an update on things that people weren't already aware of.

Mr MITCHELL - That's not what - sorry, I don't mean to enter into a debate.

Mr ELLIS - Sounds like you are, Mr Mitchell. I'm happy to just provide the information.

Mr MITCHELL - These details are important. At the direction of the parliament -

Mr ELLIS - I'm trying to answer your question, Mr Mitchell. We provided lots of information about Malangenna in the parliament. The same with the Queenstown property. I think maybe even around this table previously. That was very well known, already in train, and understood, including working with your federal colleagues. Then this further information has been provided in terms of what's under consideration for the future, but I don't know if there's anything the TAFE team want to add.

Mr MITCHELL - So, why were those properties not included in the notice?

Mr ELLIS - They were already well understood, Mr Mitchell.

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Ms ROSOL - Minister, I know AI is a hot topic at the moment and AI use is increasing. I have a question about AI use by students at TasTAFE. I'm just wondering what ethical guidelines there are for use of AI by students and does TasTAFE have a standalone policy around this?

Dr BAKER - Thanks for the question. Our entry into the AI field is very immature. We're just starting our journey. We've got two resources recently employed in our digital services team to assist our staff, train them, and ethically use AI tools. A policy and a digital strategy are under development at the moment. Some of the examples where we've started to dip our toe in the water include using AI for automation of meeting minutes and action items, from a corporate administration efficiency perspective, and teachers are predominantly using AI at the moment in the development of some of their learning checklists and observation checklists, as well as the development of RPL tools - which are recognition of prior learning tools - which they use to assess someone who's been in industry for a long time but doesn't have a qualification. Those are predominant areas where we're using it. The policy and the guidelines and our framework are still under development.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. Appreciate that answer. But just my question was specifically around ethical guidelines for use by students. If students are using AI in their work, do you have guidelines around that that you've developed, I hear you're still developing the guidelines for staff use. Is there a guideline for students? Is it in development?

Dr BAKER - The policy covers both staff and students, the scope is for all TasTAFE users.

Ms ROSOL - Do you have a timeline for when you would plan for that to be finished?

Dr BAKER - Would have to get back to you on that.

Ms ROSOL - Okay, thank you. Just a question now about the laboratory technicians courses, Minister. The peak association for laboratory technicians has stated that it is aware of no local provider of lab tech qualifications, following the scrapping of these courses by TasTAFE. You've repeatedly claimed that there are lab tech qualifications available in Tasmania. Can you name the government's new preferred provider for these qualifications?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Rosol, and we've actually already provided evidence about this yesterday, but there's three and they're currently meeting demand, but I'll pass to Ms Paterson that provides more detail.

Ms PATERSON - Yes, thank you minister, through you. So yes, as the minister mentioned there are three providers currently providing an apprenticeship pathway for lab tech, and there is a funding program available through Skills Tasmania's funding arrangements for non-apprenticeship pathway with providers are interested in that. We know that there is at least one provider lab tech that is looking into that at the moment and working with employers, including BSIP, to look at interest to be funded for delivery of a non-apprenticeship pathway.

Ms ROSOL - You're saying interest for the providers, or interest in the courses?

Ms PATERSON - Interest in the courses.

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Ms ROSOL - In the courses, so does that mean that you believe there hasn't been interest in these courses?

Ms PATERSON - Historically the enrolments in the non-apprenticeship pathway have been low, yes.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, increasing workforce participation is fundamental to lifting Tasmania's productivity. What is the government doing to increase workforce participation, particularly amongst young Tasmanians?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Our low unemployment is a sign of a strong economy, but it also means that we need to work harder to connect people with the jobs that are available. That's why the government's focused on lifting workforce participation, improving productivity and creating clearer pathways into work. We've committed to lifting Tasmania's participation rate to at least the national average.

Since 2021, we've invested significantly in Jobs Tasmania and the Regional Jobs Hubs Network, which connects local people with local employers, training and real job opportunities. The model's working. An independent evaluation found that the Regional Jobs Hub approach is nation-leading. We're also delivering Tasmania's first Youth Job strategy, focused on helping young Tasmanians engage in employment, education and training. This is critical because we need more young people moving into the workforce with the skills employers need. We're also backing employers through the Employer of Choice program, which had recognised more than 140 employers collectively employing more than 20,000 Tasmanians.

Our approach is practical, connect people with jobs, support them into training, back employers and target workforce gaps in key industries. This is how we lift participation, address skill shortages, and help more Tasmanians share in the opportunities of our strong economy.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable Minister, small businesses are really concerned about shortages of skilled workers. At the same time, we one of the highest dropout of student after year 10. We have only 31 per cent of our student get an ATAR. According to research on the Census in 2021, they showed that people aged 20-to-29 who, when they left Tasmania, compared to those who stayed in Tasmania, were likely to have higher level of education, more employment in skilled jobs, and they're paid better.

An Australian Government 2024 report, the AGOR, says that 80 per cent of all jobs will require tertiary education or TAFE by 2050. How are we going to motivate our students to continue after year 10, or at least do a TAFE course, so we can increase our skilled workers?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Professor Razay. I might invite Mr Stuart Hollingsworth. What are we calling you, Mr Hollingsworth? It's got a very long title these days. Used to be just Director of Jobs Tasmania but now it's Executive Director of Economy and Job Strategy. We'll talk through the youth job strategy, but certainly, Prof Razay, you're right to identify that there are some big opportunities to grow vocational education when people are going through schools - school-based apprenticeships and other opportunities.

That being said, if someone does leave school at year 10 and takes up an opportunity for an apprenticeship and completes, that's actually a great outcome for those people as well. We need to make sure that we're supporting pathways that support young people to attain higher

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education, even if year 12 isn't the pathway for them. I'll pass over to Mr Hollingsworth to talk through the youth job strategy and some of those other opportunities.

Mr HOLLINGSWORTH - Yes, thank you, minister, and through you. The youth job strategy is really our key instrument in partnership with the Department for Education Children and Young People as a joint initiative between the Minister for Skills and Jobs and Minister for Education. That is quite unique in terms of that focus between the two portfolios and making sure we're bridging that gap and making sure we're catching young people as they transition through various points of school and education, and ensuring that there is a connected pathway for them.

The strategy was released after extensive consultation with young people, et cetera, in September 2024, and we've been working really hard to deliver the strategy, not only a raft of a number of programs that are through the Education department - a number have been mentioned today - Skills Tasmania and TAFE working with the school system to connect those to alternative pathways as opposed to academic and making sure they're all visible, and trying to ensure that there is a connection between all the different and complex parts of the system, ensuring that we don't lose young people through the gaps. It's all about lining up that effort. We're having a number of successes and we have a number of really innovative interventions in Tasmania that are showing signs of making sure young people don't fall between the gaps.

The minister mentioned the regional jobs hub. So, if young people aren't connecting with school, there's somewhere to go, or for their parents to connect them to a pathway. In outer-regional areas that is critical.

We are working - there are some very significant reforms happening at a national level, that Ms Paterson is involved with, in tertiary harmonisation to address that skill target that's required, that you mentioned before, about the uplift about tertiary qualifications and a combination of higher-ed and vocational learning.

Then there's one of the critical things that we've been developing. We're in the process of testing and refining a universal career framework that every young person should be able to find their way to have a minimum-standard of a career conversation and find themselves connecting to a pathway. We have that on our youth job strategy website at the moment. It's called the Life, Learning and Work Framework. We are looking to test that with stakeholders across the state. What's unique about that one is that we're trying to make it very simple language so that parents can use it; anyone can pick that up and then find their way for a young person to connect to an opportunity. That includes community organisations like Homebase, Launceston City Mission or Youth, Family and Community Connections in north-west, to provide the wrap-around support to connect them to a pathway. There's a whole range of other things I can keep talking about, but I'll pause there.

Prof RAZAY - I am absolutely delighted to hear that [inaudible] to address the highest dropout is to motivate kids at schools and create pathways for them to progress - whether it's university or TAFE and vocational training. Thank you.

Mr MITCHELL - Minister, I just want to come back to the NOM80, because if a property is in government hands and a title exchange has not been executed, then I would expect that if you're looking to perhaps sell it, then it's under consideration for disposal. The board may want it, you may want it, but unless that deed's been executed, then it is under

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consideration for disposal. Yet, in your response to NOM80 you only listed two property assets, one of which was not Malangenna, but we all know that Malangenna is under consideration for disposal. Minister, why was that property not included in the Notice of Motion 80 that you were directed to table to the parliament?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I think there's, you know, we're just trying to be upfront with the information that we're providing - in this case that those two properties were largely known. We expect those processes to be happening in this financial year. You note on page 343 the explanation of major variations includes the increase in proceeds from the disposal of non-financial assets in 2026-27 reflects the planned sale of excess land at the Devonport campus and a childcare centre in Launceston.

In terms of for the purpose of budgeting for future financial years. But I think it's been broadly understood right across the parliament that those two other properties have been included. Certainly our intention is to be upfront. That's why we've already been upfront in this process. But you know, we can provide some further information on that if you like, but I don't know if there's anything for the TasTAFE to add.

Mr MITCHELL - The concern I have, Minister, is that the order was clear in what it was expecting you to provide and you've provided information that you think is what we wanted to hear, but you've not included assets that were under consideration for disposal which have not yet been disposed of or sold. The question I have is, you know, what other properties are in TasTAFE's hands that maybe you may be looking at selling, that you think that we may be aware of, but which you haven't told the parliament about?

Mr ELLIS - I already told the parliament about those other two properties multiple times. It might just be a question of financial year when the returns come through. I'll just look to the team from TasTAFE if there's any further clarity that we want to provide there.

Dr BAKER - I'll just repeat what I said earlier is that it was approximately two weeks ago that I was in the State Solicitor's office with the seller's agent signing the documents to exchange the titles of the property.

Mr MITCHELL - Two weeks ago was after the minister's documents? I don't want to labour the point. I made my point.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Mitchell, it's in this financial year, whereas, the Budget's for future financial years. As I say, very happy to be upfront around these processes. Indeed, I've told the parliament, I don't know how many times, about those two particular properties and worked closely with the federal government, including your former colleagues on the disposal of the Malangenna facilities. It may just be a case of particular financial years.

In terms of your broader question, obviously we note in the motion, we're always reviewing our facilities to make sure that they're fit for purpose and what we need. We've got footprints in Hobart, Launceston, Burnie and Devonport - we'll continue that. But, we also take opportunities to modernise our facilities where they come up. We've got a really strong track record of doing that.

We'll pass over to the team at TasTAFE if there's anything further on facilities.

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Dr BAKER - Just repeating what we said in the earlier session that, you know, there's some interest from Homes Tas for some land at Devonport that's been underutilised since the time of that campus being created - in 1969, I think it is. I've exchanged some letters with the CEO of Homes Tas to look at the possibility of disposing of that land for social housing.

Mr MITCHELL - For clarification, is that only some of the campus land or the entire campus?

Dr BAKER - No, it's just a small parcel of the land.

Mr MITCHELL - My third question, Chair. Minister in 2026-27, in the Budget, total other comprehensive income is listed as \$2,000,022. In 2028-29 it is \$9,351,000 before decreasing to \$6,749,000 in 2029-30. Could you please explain the nearly fourfold increase in income that you anticipate occurring over those two years?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Mitchell, I'll pass over to the team from TasTAFE to have further.

Dr BAKER - With your permission, I'd like to call on our CFO to provide some response.

Mr ELLIS - We're introducing Mr William McShane. Sorry, Mr Mitchell, just for clarification, which line item were you looking at?

Mr MITCHELL - It says page 340 and it is the Total Other Comprehensive Income just above Comprehensive Result.

Mr ELLIS - You mean changes in physical asset revaluation reserve?

Mr MITCHELL - No, I'm on Statement of Comprehensive Income table 18.1 page 340. Oh yes, sorry, changes in physical asset revaluation reserve. Yes, my apologies.

Mr ELLIS - That's what you're asking for, what explains the change in physical assets re-evaluation?

Mr MITCHELL - Yes, \$2 million in 2026-27, to \$4.3 million in 2027-28, to \$9.3 million in 2028-29, and then back down to \$6.7 million. So you wouldn't mind explaining those variations?

Mr ELLIS - Is it that our stuff is worth more?

Mr MITCHELL - Well then it's worth less, so you know?

Mr McSHANE - We'd provide some further details, but that would be take into account sort of the time value of property over time. So valuations are done on a routine basis and we'd be applying an increment. There is a change in the balance sheet and the asset.

Mr MITCHELL - \$2 million and 2026-27, to \$4.5 million 2027-28, so over 12 months you anticipate it going up, doubling it, and then more than doubling it again, before it comes down again? So if it was a trajectory - but you're all over the place? I don't understand?

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Dr BAKER - Might take that on notice and come back to you with some further information.

Mr MITCHELL - Yes, thank you.

Mr ELLIS - But just to confirm: going up?

Mr MITCHELL - And then going down?

Ms ROSOL - Just back to the earlier question on the lab tech providers. Minister, you mentioned that you thought there were three and then I think is it, Ms Paterson, you said, there was one. Are you able to provide the name of that one at this stage? Although the providers that are looking, I think I missed that. I'm not sure if you said it, sorry.

Mr ELLIS - It says three, but I'll pass to Ms Paterson.

Ms PATERSON - Yes. Thank you, minister, through you. So the three that are currently providing the apprenticeship pathway are: ABC Training and Consulting; Labtech Training Victoria and; Melbourne Tech Institute, and there's currently 27 training contracts in place. So there's 27 people currently training in lab tech in Tasmania through our funding. The provider that is looking to provide a non-apprenticeship pathway is Labtech Training Victoria.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. I just to have some questions around TasTAFE and courses within the Tasmanian Prison Service, and I note that in the response to the Notice of Motion 80, it outlined that three jobs within the Tasmanian Prison Service will be axed. TasTAFE jobs within the TPS will be axed. Could you just explain those jobs and what impact that will have on access to education in the Tasmanian Prison Service, please?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks Ms Rosol. This one was done with mutual agreement between TasTAFE and the Prison Service. There's also another provider, Civil Construction Federation or CCF, that provides a program at Risdon Prison as a new partnership. But I'll just pass to TasTAFE to talk through further.

Dr BAKER - Thank you. We have a contract with TPS at the moment that's due to expire in the middle of this year, so another month or so. By mutual agreement, we're letting that expire. The funding that were provided through that contract doesn't cover our administration or our delivery staff. At the moment, there's three staff based at Risdon Prison that are fully administrative in nature. The funding for those positions will cease and we're currently in a consultation period with those staff around possible redeployment options. In terms of future training for prisons, we're still committed to delivering training to prisons and helping, you know, the TPS reduce recidivism around the state. We'll do that on a case-by-case basis, on a fee-for-service basis.

Ms ROSOL - So are you saying in that mutual decision to end the agreement, that you had with the TPS. Was that something that was initiated by TasTAFE because your costs weren't covered for these admin staff? How was that decision reached? Why did you decide not to renew the agreement?

Dr BAKER - Yeah, that's probably a better way of putting it. The agreement's expiring. We were getting towards the end of the agreement. As per normal with all these types of

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arrangements, we get together with the other party and discuss how we want to move forward, and as I say, by mutual agreement was decided not to continue in the arrangement that is that contract, but instead would provide training through case-by-case or a course-by-course, fee-for-service basis.

Ms ROSOL - Sorry, the reason for that decision?

Dr BAKER - Well, I can't speak on behalf of TPS, but for us, the revenue that we were getting through that contract was not covering the cost of delivery for us.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister with projects like Marinus Link and renewables projects like Robbins Island and Hydro upgrades, and enterprises like the HIF eFuel project getting closer to commencing in the north-west, my community locally is very excited about the hundreds and hundreds of new jobs that they might bring in specialised areas. And they're very excited about announcements that have been made to establish a Tasmanian Clean Energy Centre of Excellence in Burnie. Can you give us an update as to where the process of establishing the centre is up to and what are the next steps?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Look, can I just thank you as well for your very strong commitment to the training facilities in the north-west coast? I know you, as my direct predecessor in this area - it's been a huge area of passion and we've seen some pretty major investments go right through the Burnie campuses, including Freer Farm, but then the main campus there on site, as well as with the Youth2Independence facility too, which has a very strong youth jobs connection in that location. So, I'm just really grateful to be able to build on your work.

The Tasmanian Clean Energy Centre of Excellence is a major investment in skills and jobs for the future of the north-west. The Australian and Tasmanian Governments are jointly investing \$27.2 million over five years. That will establish the centre at TasTAFE's Burnie campus. It will deliver a modern, industry-aligned training facility focused on the skills Tasmanians need for a clean energy future. The centre will support training in key areas that will include electrotechnology, instrumentation trades and associated clean energy qualifications. Importantly, it's not just about a building, it's about creating a clean energy learning hub that showcases pathways into STEM and clean energy careers, particularly for young people and regional learners.

Good progress has already being made. The advisory committee's recommendations have been approved and Skills Tasmania is now working with TasTAFE on a grant deed to transition delivery of the centre to TasTAFE.

The project has already supported early investment in new training and equipment, with \$482,000 in equipment procured, including mobile instrumentation test rigs and additional testing and verification panels in Burnie. That means learners are already benefiting from contemporary, industry-relevant equipment.

Then because of the sort of dispersed nature of our electorate, our community and Tasmania, more broadly, a 25-room student accommodation facility at the Burnie campus has also been completed and is operational from May 2026, which will improve access for regional

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and remote students who need to travel for training. Looking forward to celebrating that with you in an event on site.

For the north-west, the benefits are really significant. It strengthens Burnie as a clean energy training hub, supports local apprentices and learners, creates clearer pathways into growing clean energy careers and helps ensure industry has access to the skilled workforce it needs. Renewable energy is a growth sector, as you noted, of the Tasmanian economy, and this plays to Tasmania's strengths.

The government will continue to work with TasTAFE to support this opportunity and others across the north-west.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you. Well done.

CHAIR - Prof Razay.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, our working life is changing rapidly. Many people over the age of 50 now choose to go into part-time or early retirement.

Mr JAENSCH - Fifty's the new 30.

Prof RAZAY - They are the group who are full of wisdom and knowledge - one we are losing. That's why I feel that my question about how can we try to attract them into, like, especially TAFE courses, to use their skills, because they are looking at how they can help the community in a different way, and I think TAFE can play an important role - for example, working in the aged care sector.

Mr ELLIS - Absolutely. There are some amazing opportunities that Tasmanians who are perhaps more mature and experienced haven't really looked to in those training opportunities and drive some of the key workforce priorities for us. In some ways, participation - people often think about young people participating in the economy, but just because the workforce data is 18 to 65 doesn't mean there's not some amazing ways for people to give back.

Probably everyone at the table wants to have a crack at this. I'll pass to TAFE first and then Ms Paterson. Then we might get Mr Hollingsworth to come up at the end, because there's different parts of the system that are doing some really interesting things.

Dr BAKER - Probably the point I'd make is that in the development of our new marketing strategy, it's a strong focus for us to target mature-age workers for both upskilling and reskilling. You know, we've got a kind of stable year 11 and year 12 job market. Immigration's a bit of a, you know, interesting topic for the nation to consider. We do see young people leaving and working on the mainland, so growing and making more productive the existing workers is a big focus for TasTAFE, and we'll do that through the provision of a lot of online courses, flexible courses, part-time courses, that suit people who are probably working at the same time, to either upskill or reskill.

Ms PATERSON - Thank you, minister, through you. Yes, so it's quite interesting when you look at the student count by age group in terms of government-funded vocational education and training. For 2024, for example, 22.3 per cent of learners were between 30 to 39 years of age, and 13.7 per cent were between 40 and 49 years of age, and 9 per cent were between

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50 and 59 years of age. So, the VET system does support quite a significant volume of upskilling and reskilling for Tasmanians.

There's also a program that we have called Building a Skilled Workforce, which has a stream that is for existing workers, and there was a budget of around \$4 million for that last year to support training for those existing workers to reskill and upskill. There's some really great sort of personal stories about what that has meant for people in terms of the way that it's changed the direction of their career and their life. We've seen some of that play out through our national and local training awards programs that we run annually.

Mr ELLIS - And Mr Hollingsworth - from a Jobs Tasmania perspective?

Mr MITCHELL - Very briefly, Chair.

DEPUTY CHAIR - Yes.

Mr HOLLINGSWORTH - I'll put a cap on myself, minister.

Mr ELLIS - Your reputation precedes you.

Mr HOLLINGSWORTH - I know. I'm a waffler. Very passionate about this. Very quickly - the other side of coin is supporting employers to be open to employing older workers and the contribution they can make. We have a number of programs supporting people career-changing or, if in the business closure, reskilling and connecting to new opportunities.

And again, the jobs hubs are capturing a number of those older people who are not eligible for other employment services to connect to local jobs opportunities or to contribute. But there's some big structural barriers as well around participation that we are continuing to want to work with the Commonwealth Government around to ensure that the structures are in place that don't disincentivise older workers continuing to connect and engage and contribute.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you, Chair. Minister, why is the planned sale of holdings at Devonport campus and Launceston Childcare Centre listed as a \$659,000 loss from total income, rather than listed as a revenue source? Could you please itemise the loss/gain of both of those assets?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I'll pass over to the team from TasTAFE and just reintroduce Mr McShane.

Mr McSHANE - Thank you. Sorry - apologies. Would you be able to repeat the question? I was moving.

Mr MITCHELL - Essentially, why is the planned sale of holdings at Devonport campus and Launceston listed as a \$659,000 loss from total income, rather than listed as a revenue source? Could you itemise the loss/gain for each of the two assets?

Mr McSHANE - Okay. On the first part, it is an accounting entry. So, when we take valuations of our property, we take it as replacement value of that property; not the market rate of a property itself.

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Mr MITCHELL - Thank you. I thought it might be that.

Mr McSHANE - On the second part of the question, I'd probably have to take that on notice to provide a split between the two assets.

Mr MITCHELL - I think the minister's happy to take it on notice? Thank you.

Mr ELLIS - Definitely.

Mr MITCHELL - And second question: minister: between 2023 and 2026, 82 TasTAFE qualifications were cut entirely and replaced mainly by short courses - one-day workshops, regulatory compliance and licensing courses. Now, short courses and skilled workshops do have value, but they are not substitutes for diploma-level courses and Certificate III pathways that you have cut. Short courses now represent 34 per cent of TasTAFE's total offering - nearly double the 18 per cent they were previously.

Minister, why are you gutting TasTAFE and locking young Tasmanians - or especially young Tasmanians - out of long-term training pathways that lead to secure jobs and careers?

Mr ELLIS - Look, Mr Mitchell, I think you just misunderstand the skills system. Unfortunately, your question probably says a lot about that. This government's really delivering on greater skills pathways, particularly for apprenticeships that will lead to skills for jobs, but there's also a whole range of need out there when it comes to skill sets and shorter-form qualifications that nationally is actually what we're pushing. And your former federal colleagues are pushing very hard in this space, and it seems like maybe you just don't get invited to those meetings from your colleagues.

Mr MITCHELL - Well, I've acknowledged that short courses have their place, but they're no substitute. They're no substitute for long courses.

Mr ELLIS - Well, indeed, in many cases they are actually what the learners are wanting. So, the learners are able to get a job on the basis of a skill set and the short qualification, rather than do the longer qualification. And often when it comes to low completion, sometimes it's on the basis that people get a job halfway through the qualification on the basis of the skill set that they've learned. So you probably should've spent a little bit more time talking to your colleagues up in Canberra. But I'll pass over the team to TasTAFE to maybe talk a bit about some of the short courses and the skill sets.

Dr BAKER - Yeah, look, definitely from an RTO lens, we're seeing more demand for short courses. We were just talking about, you know, older Tasmanians who are looking to upskill. They're definitely looking for part-time options and skill sets to help grow their skills and capability as they potentially transition either in a promotional activity or across to a new field. But across many of our industries - and I've talked about the white card and the construction industry, for example. Hospitality sector, in particular, are very big on a desire for increased short courses around barista, for example. So, what I'm witnessing is definitely a desire and a change in industry about moving away from long-term, full-time courses towards much more scaffolding of chunks of learning that might build towards a qualification. So, the qualification is not the end game, but we're seeing a trend of our students enrolling in shorter-form education and building skills as they need them for their career.

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Mr ELLIS - Dr Baker, we had a really interesting conversation the other day about some potential pathways in training and assessment, as well about what assessment skill sets might look like that could then, as you say, scaffold into the broader qualification, which is a really interesting sort of space.

Dr BAKER - Yes, a great example is with the Certificate IV TAE, which is the qualification you need to become a TAFE teacher. But many of our industry partners can actually teach or assess on our behalf by having a skill set from that full qualification. So they don't need the full qualification. They may just need, for example, the skill set. We're working with the Tasmanian Automotive Chamber of Commerce around getting some of their experienced workers across the sector, both automotive light vehicle and heavy vehicle, training them up in the assessment skill set so that they can undertake on-the-job assessment of their workers.

Mr MITCHELL - Third question, Chair, minister, how does your claim, or evidence, presented to this hearing earlier today that the 7 per cent fee increase is under review. I think, I apologise if I'm wrong, I think Dr Baker said it was under review. How does that align with the fact that that 7 per cent fee increase has already been baked into this Budget?

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, we'll continue obviously to work through a process there that's appropriate. It's a forecast. Similarly with parts of our other revenue opportunities with the Commonwealth that -

Mr MITCHELL - So, it's a review, but you're already counting on it.

Mr ELLIS - And as I mentioned, you know, we're working through a process, but I'll pass over to the team at TasTAFE.

Dr BAKER - Just be clear, the review's been completed by management and we're in a governance process now about taking that to our board for final endorsement. So, that's happened after the Budget build had occurred, so for me, that's a kind of a timing issue.

Mr MITCHELL - Clarification, Chair, I'm not sure that aligns. I'll look back at the *Hansard*, but I think, certainly the impression I got sitting at the table, was that the 7 per cent fee that the Labor leader raised in the question - although whether that's under review, you're now saying the review is complete, all bar the shouting - and it's essentially done and dusted. Is that what I'm hearing?

Dr BAKER - Management's completed their review, and we're going through a governance process to determine whether that gets approved or not.

Mr MITCHELL - So it's not under review, it's completed?

Mr ELLIS - Well, the board will review it and then the minister will review it. If you jump in the middle of a process, Mr Mitchell, that's the nature of the beast.

Ms ROSOL - I just would like to ask some questions, minister, about ESL courses in Launceston, which I understand are under review at the moment. You make a big deal about the importance of preparing people for jobs and ensuring that TasTAFE focuses on job preparedness. Learning English, for people who are migrants to Tasmania is an essential part

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of job-preparedness and if those jobs and those courses are cut from TasTAFE, it means that all that will be available is the federally funded courses, language courses that are provided through MAX. It means that people who don't qualify or meet the criteria of those federal courses won't have anywhere in the north or north-west of the state where they'll be able to learn English as a second language, limiting their ability to engage in jobs in the future. Do you consider this as acceptable? And why is TasTAFE considering cutting English as a second language courses in the north and north-west?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Rosol, pass to the team from TasTAFE.

Dr BAKER - I think the two courses you're referring to are ones that are delivered under the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) program.

Ms ROSOL - I believe they're AMEP in the south and not in the north and north-west.

Dr BAKER - That's correct, and we only have the contract for the north, so -

Ms ROSOL - Well I believe the contracts in the south

Dr BAKER - Sorry it's south.

Ms ROSOL - And at the moment English as a Second Language (ESL) courses are provided by TasTAFE outside of those contracts. So it's TasTAFE under state funding that's providing those courses which provide a pathway for people to learn English and get jobs outside of the AMEP. Not everyone meets the criteria for AMEP, so this is going to be a loss for people who don't qualify for the federally funded English courses.

Why are we considering cutting that in the north and north-west and basically blocking an important pathway for migrants to learn English in the north and north-west and find their way to jobs, which is what the minister says is so important?

Dr BAKER - I'll just repeat that we can't offer AMEP courses in an area that we're not contracted to deliver -

Ms ROSOL - But you're currently offering ESL in the north?

Dr BAKER - They are AMEP programs that we're not supposed to be delivering, so I will be stopping that.

Ms ROSOL - It's been happening for years though, how could you have not known that that? Was that was covered by state funding? I'm just asking why state funding's being cut to an important pathway for migrants to learn English and get jobs.

Mr ELLIS - I think what Dr Baker's saying is that we provide the AMEP program in the south and have, you know, gone beyond our remit in the north where there's another AMEP provider. The AMEP program both are north and south, and that's how it works across the country. We're coming back to just providing the area where we're the recognised provider - is that a rough summary?

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Dr BAKER - That's it in a nutshell and there is another provider who will provide that service.

Ms ROSOL - They're not providing it in a particularly good way at the moment is my understanding and not everybody meets the criteria for their course. The ESL that's been offered at TasTAFE has been well-respected and much appreciated, and I think it'll be a significant loss in the north and north-west.

Mr ELLIS - In terms of the quality question that you've raised there, Ms Rosol, we can follow up for some further detail there. For the federal government, this is their contracted process. So they'd be interested to know if there's challenges, I don't know the basis of those claims.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. I can follow up.

Mr ELLIS - I'm not sure if you've spoken with the provider up there but obviously the federal government's the contractor in that process.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you. I just have a question going back to the Tasmanian Prison Service, with that agreement that finishes at the end of June this year. Will there be a gap between courses if it's now going to a fee-for-course agreement between the Prison Service and TasTAFE? Will there be any gap in courses and what courses are currently negotiated to be offered at the Tasmanian Prison Service?

Dr BAKER - We're going through a process of negotiating next year's training plan with the prisons right now. It's much the same as in previous years around - there's some hospitality courses, carpentry, horticulture, conservation, land management. Once that training plan has landed and we have a contract in place, we'll commence delivering at the dates that suit the Tasmanian Prison Service (TPS).

Ms ROSOL - So there could potentially be a gap as part of the negotiations.

Dr BAKER - Well, at the moment there's not continuous training that happens now. It happens in blocks throughout the year when prisoners are available.

Mr ELLIS - Ms Rosol, can I also just pass to Ms Paterson to maybe add to the answer previously on the AMEP program with the kind of broader skills for you?

Ms PATERSON - Yes, thank you, minister, through you. Navitas Skilled Futures has the contract in the north and the north-west. As the minister mentioned, they're contracted through the Australian Government to provide that service. I believe that service is currently being reviewed and the Tasmanian contract has been extended and will be reconsidered by the Australian Government in due course.

Ms ROSOL - Thank you.

DEPUTY CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Business, Industry and Resources. If the changeover can be as quick as possible, that would be appreciated.

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The witnesses withdrew.

The committee suspended from 3 p.m. to 3.05 p.m.

Business, Industry and Resources

CHAIR - It now being 3.05 p.m., the scrutiny of the Business, Industry and Resources portfolio will now begin. Welcome everybody. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite you, Minister, to introduce persons at the table for the benefit of Hansard, please.

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Chair. We have Shane Gregory, Acting Secretary, Department of State Growth; Vanessa Pinto, Deputy Secretary, ReCFIT and Resources; Alastair Morton, Director, Mineral Resources Tasmania; and Dr Sarah Russell, Director, Forest Policy. We'll introduce other people as we go.

CHAIR - The time scheduled for the estimates of the Minister for Business, Industry and Resources is three hours. We'll have a brief break around the 4.30 p.m. mark after we've finished that round. Minister, as the committee has agreed that opening statements should be tabled rather than read, you now have an opportunity to table a statement before we proceed with questions.

Mr ELLIS - All good.

CHAIR - Thank you. Dr Broad.

Dr BROAD - Thank you. Minister, how many FTEs are there at Mineral Resources Tasmania (MRT)?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Broad. I'll pass to Ms Pinto.

Ms PINTO - Thank you. Through you, minister, I might just check. If we could take that on notice and I'll come back to the committee with those numbers. I just don't have them available on me right now, but we can get that. Sorry, my apologies. There are 46.

Dr BROAD - Are there any current vacancies held open or roles that are expected to be cut?

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister. In terms of the approach, if I take a broader approach to the machinery-of-government changes, as you would be aware the government made a commitment to reduce - through the state growth machinery-of-government changes - 250 FTEs and the associated reduction of \$250 million with that. In terms of the structure of the Mineral Resources Tasmania team and what that will look like, there's still a body of work to be done to work out the structure of that team. I can refer further to the acting secretary to give you a bit more detail about that.

In terms of current vacancies, I think it's - I don't have exact numbers in front of me - but it's not unusual in any of our units to have a movement in staff that can be associated - we have

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casual, fixed-term, and permanent staff, and there can be some changes that are occurring. We normally manage them through a very structured process with a workforce management committee that manages that process. I'll check in with the acting secretary if there's anything further to add.

Mr GREGORY - Thank you. Through you, minister. The number of vacancies at any point in time is a very moving feast. It will change from day to day. I don't have those specific numbers on hand. We track as part of the government's reporting on FTE numbers. We track at agency level and they're provided through DPAC as an open disclosure, but we would have to seek the detailed information. We would have it, but we don't have it on hand.

Dr BROAD - So, 46 FTEs. How does that compare to historical levels at MRT?

Mr MORTON - I don't have specific figures in front of me, but I think if you go back through a period of time - Mineral Resources Tasmania has been around for 30 or 40 years since the early 1980s. If you go back to that time, we definitely had more staff. I can't give you exact figures.

Dr BROAD - Okay. What about recent history then? Has the staffing level been stable? Or has it decreased or increased?

Mr MORTON - When you're talking recent, what like?

Dr BROAD - Five years maybe.

Mr MORTON - Stable. It's been stable over the last five years.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, some questions in relation to your Forestry portfolio responsibilities. In response to my questioning in parliament on 19 May, the Premier said that:

Sustainable Timber Tasmania will continue to factor in Commonwealth policy changes into contract arrangements.

Minister, are you proposing to remove any force majeure or similar clauses from the wood-supply agreement contracts currently being negotiated so that the state won't have to pay compensation?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. Obviously we don't have STT here, at the table with us, and we've got GBE scrutiny later in the year, but I'll try and assist the committee as best I can.

We're working through a process. We've had some good feedback from the federal government about the strength of our regulatory system here, in Tasmania, and looking to have our independent Forest Practices Authority and the broader system that we regulate forestry under recognised and accredited under a Commonwealth bilateral agreement. Certainly, we've had some great feedback from the federal government about the quality of the regulatory structure we have here, so that should give us confidence for foresters - public and private - farmers and others. We can take some heart that we'll be able to deliver a good agreement with the Commonwealth. Of course, we'll be scrutinising that process very closely, but we've had some good engagement.

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We'll also be looking to deliver long-term contracts for Forestry because it's important that, when it comes to Forestry, these are long-run businesses, they grow trees for 30 to 60 years, maybe even longer, and people invest in equipment, trucks, machinery, processing lines. You actually need regulatory certainty and commercial certainty, and we're looking to deliver both as part of this process.

Without STT here at the table, I can't give you too much operational detail from them, other than to say I understand that some negotiations have included fundamental change clauses so that we can work through the contracting process while some of the regulatory process is underway as well and we can deliver certainty in regulatory sense and a commercial sense very soon.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. Just for clarification, you said fundamental change clauses - is that the same thing as a force majeure or is that just a lay euphemism for force majeure?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. Obviously, again, we don't have STT staff here at the table, so I'm happy to take it on notice as best we can. But I'll just look to see if any of the other officials have any input that they can provide. Happy to take on notice for STT then.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. Independent legal advice found that there would be a significant and probable risk to STT in the state for compensation claims if the government rushed into -

Mr ELLIS - Is this part of the Wilderness Society?

Dr WOODRUFF - That is advice that they sought from an independent legal person. That's right.

Mr ELLIS - The Wilderness Society stuff isn't what I'd call independent - but anyway.

Dr WOODRUFF - And the state - well -

CHAIR - Carry on, Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - Make those claims if you like. There's a significant and probable risk to STT in the state for compensation claims if the government rushed into renewing wood supply contracts prematurely. Minister, are you intending to delay signing the wood supply agreements until after the federal environmental laws are finalised?

Mr ELLIS - Dr Woodruff, again, we want to deliver certainty for the industry, for the thousands of people who work in it, and to do that we need commercial certainty and we need regulatory certainty. As I mentioned before, we're working closely on both.

I'm happy to take STT matters on notice. Obviously we don't have STT people here at the table with us, but you we want to be working through this in a prudent manner but, certainly, the cheering about the end of native forestry from you in the committee hearings last year doesn't look to be supported by the federal government. That's a good outcome and we're working delivering a sustainable future for Forestry here, in Tasmania.

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Dr WOODRUFF - But as a minister for Forestry resource responsibility overall, do you accept that there would be a risk to Tasmania if the government created wood supply contracts prior to the finalisation of the federal environment laws?

Mr ELLIS - Dr Woodruff, there would be a huge risk to Tasmania if the federal government shutdown native forestry. That would be a massive risk; it's a \$1.2 billion hole in our economy - Forestry all up. Of noting that our RFA affects public and private land use, forestry, farming, a whole range of others. So, that would be a massive risk. Also, if you're going to destroy people's livelihoods and businesses and jobs and communities, you should compensate them. There's obviously some hypotheticals from you there about would it be a problem if we destroyed the forest industry and people's livelihoods? Yes. But we don't want to get there.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, taxpayers fund the Forest Practices Authority to provide independent, efficient and trusted regulation. Environmental stakeholders have raised concerns about the authority's independence and governance, while private landholders have raised concerns about fairness, proportionality and procedural conduct. Given criticism emerging from both sides of the forestry debate, what evidence can the government provide that the current expenditure on the Forest Practices Authority is delivering value for money and maintaining public confidence in the regulatory system?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Garland. What I might do is, is Ms Chuter around? There you are. Now, I misled Parliament yesterday in giving Ms Chuter a PhD that she doesn't have. Everyone else seems to have a doctorate in Forestry, but perhaps a doctorate in patience and outstanding regulatory capacity.

One of the things I would say, Mr Garland, is sometimes having criticism from both sides of the discussion is often a sign that you are somewhere in the middle. Certainly the Forest Practices Authority has been recognised nationally in some of the discussions we're talking about before as really nation-leading. We now no longer need to take the Tasmanian government's word for it; that's what we're hearing from federal bureaucrats, and supporting the work of Ms Chuter and her team is really important.

We do think, as always, there are opportunities to improve: a more user-friendly forest practices regulations that the FPA administer, just so that farmers can more easily understand it. But even some other opportunities, even replanting native vegetation, can be a bit complex for people, so I'll pass to Ms Chuter to maybe talk through some more on this one.

Ms CHUTER - Thank you, minister, and through you, minister. Thank you for your question. Regulation is really difficult and is very difficult to please everybody and part of me always considers we're doing our job if we're not pleasing everyone. The FPA has a statutory duty for due care to the environment, taking into consideration socioeconomic and environmental outcomes, and we do that to the best of our ability.

We have a system that is tenure-blind, so it applies to both public and private forests; it applies to plantation forestry as well as native forestry, and it does have a quite a complicated and rigorous rule set that can be difficult to interpret. That's why the FPA houses specialists and staff within the organisation that can provide support and advice. We really focus on that communication, education, setting standards, making sure we monitor those standards, training our officers to be able to apply those standards, and making sure we get the adaptive

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management framework that the system is built on working really well for all of the users of the system.

Mr ELLIS - Minister, how many matters has the Forest Practices Authority (FPA) referred for prosecution in each of the last five years? How many matters were resolved through prescribed fines rather than prosecution? And how many those prosecutions have resulted in environmental remediation agreements instead of financial penalties?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks Mr Di Falco. Ms Chuter?

Ms CHUTER - Thank for the question. I've just I've got the data for you here, so it might be a second. Okay. I have information for year-to-date. So year-to-date, we've had approximately 160 enquiries received by the FPA. That's resulted in approximately 63 per cent of advisory responses. That's responses where we've issued advisory information or it hasn't proceeded any further through the investigation profile. Thirty-seven per cent have formally been investigated. Of that 37 per cent, we've had four cases referred to the DPP, five board-prescribed fines, so that's fines issued by the Forest Practices Authority board, but we've also entered into agreements for rehabilitation under long-term FPPs (Forest Practise Plans) for seven of those matters. We've got an agreement with one landowner to work towards a conservation covenant for one of those matters.

I have the details on fine revenue received for the last five years, but I don't have the details broken down like I just gave you for the last five years, but they are provided in an annual report each year, so you can go back to the end of the annual report, which is obviously on the website, and get that information in terms of fines and prosecutions.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, can you update the committee on the government's work with the Commonwealth on its *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC) reforms and the work that's being done to secure the future of our forestry sector.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Jaensch. What I might do is pass to Ms Pinto, who's been really at the coalface of this, to talk through some of the work there.

Ms PINTO - Yes, certainly and thank you. Through you, minister and to the committee. As the committee would be aware, the federal government passed changes to the *EPBC Act* and other acts at the latter part of last year. As a part of those changes, it did provide a date that the current exemption under the RFA for the regulation of both forestry and environmental requirements would cease, which is 1 July of next year.

Under the governing EPBC legislation, there are pathways that the Commonwealth, in partnership with jurisdictions, can take as a process whereby the industry's operations can be administered and managed effectively in accordance with both Commonwealth and state law. We have been working very closely with - and as the minister referred to, we've got a very productive working relationship with - both the Department of Climate Change Energy, Environment and Water and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. What Tasmania has been able to do in a very productive way in the first probably quarter, I would say, of this year, minister, has agreed a pathway under the act. The pathway is to enter into a bilateral agreement that would thereby accredit the Forest Practices Authority as the regulator in this state, with the aim to secure that ahead of 1 July time-frame next year.

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I can let the committee know that the minister received correspondence only - I think it may be only as of last week and, in accordance with that act, the Commonwealth is required to gazette a notice of intent to enter into a bilateral agreement. My understanding is, from my colleagues, that will be gazetted on 9 June next week.

Just as a little bit more information, for the purposes of the committee and for members of public, and particularly I note this in a great admiration to the industry, my comment would be that there is an awful amount of engagement with industry and key stakeholders as a part of this process. We appreciate that work and note that that is supporting the government here, in working closely with the Commonwealth, noting that there continues to be close engagement for and greater understanding of the forest management system in this state and how that operates and how well that has been for decades now, aligning with the Commonwealth obligations with regards environmental standards and this exercise will be demonstrating that.

CHAIR - Time has expired for the answer.

Dr BROAD - Does MRT have staff reduction targets?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Broad. Just to -

Ms PINTO - What I might do is pass, through you, minister, if you wouldn't mind with our grace for acting secretary to respond.

Mr ELLIS - Yes, of course.

Mr GREGORY - Thank you. Through you, minister. We have a broad FTE reduction target announced by the Premier as part of the state of the state address - it was 250 FTE. We haven't allocated those targets down to specific business group level; we'll be working through that as part of the machinery of government changes as they are implemented.

Dr BROAD - How many licence renewals do you currently have awaiting decision?

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister, and through you. I probably need a little bit more information to respond to that one. We have something like 590 leases, 152 expiration licences, a number of retention licences and special licences, and other things. We have quite a large number of tenements in the leasing licence category. Can you - sorry, what was that question again?

Dr BROAD - How many renewals are awaiting decision?

Mr MORTON - How many renewals - mining lease renewals?

Dr BROAD - Well, all sorts: exploration lease, mining lease, production lease.

Mr MORTON - I don't have the exact figures, but we have a relatively large number of mining lease renewals awaiting decision at the moment. So, I suppose probably just to provide a bit more context: we have, again, you know, 500 mining leases, a large number of licences. They come up for renewal or extension of term under the licence piece. So, we've had a bit of a backlog of tenements that we've been working through recently, and that has caused us to put all our effort into prioritising the granting of tenements, to get action rolling. It should be noted

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that where a tenement is pending renewal, it's still an active tenement and work can still occur on that tenement. So, you know, until a decision's made, effectively, work can still occur on a tenement that's pending renewal. We do have over 200 mining leases pending renewal at the moment.

In terms of extension of term for exploration licences, it's - I'll come back to you on that one, but it's a number in about the 20s. It's a much smaller number.

Dr BROAD - Do you benchmark how many are granted on time? That they renew when they fall due?

Mr MORTON - Through you, minister, so, there's no timeframe. In terms of our decision-making, what we're trying to do at the moment is trying to get as many tenement decisions made. It's taking about six to 12 months on average. As I've said, tenements that come up for a renewal are active, so they can keep mining, they can keep operating whilst a renewal decision is made. I understand, you know, six to 12 months is longer than we'd like it to be. We're trying to work as hard as we can to get those numbers down. But there's no specific timeframe; it's active until a decision is made, and they can keep working.

Dr BROAD - But what is the term of those renewals? So, like, once it's renewed, how long are they -

Mr MORTON - Well, that depends. Exploration licences we tend to keep on relatively short, because we're wanting people to progress through to mining on older tenements. With mining leases, it can be renewed for up to 20 years, but it depends what's happening with the specific tenement in terms of - and also how long the person's seeking it to be renewed for.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you, Chair. Minister, logging in the Lonnvale Forest has accelerated in the past decade, despite increased sightings of swift parrot nesting and foraging in and around coupes. Consideration was given to making the area a swift parrot important breeding area (SPIBA), but that did not occur. Why isn't this area in the SPIBA, given the prevalence of swift parrot nests and sightings?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. Obviously, we don't have any STT staff here at the table, so happy to take that on notice.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. A Cabinet document shows that an economic study was done on the Lonnvale region to show that creating a SPIBA would cost STT \$12 million and contractors \$10 million. Have economic considerations overridden environmental protections for a critically endangered species?

Mr ELLIS - Look, as I mentioned, I'm happy to take it on notice, given we don't have STT staff here, because this is Budget Estimates, not GBE scrutiny, but -

Dr WOODRUFF - Sorry. I apologise. Those questions should have been the Forest Practices Authority. That's my mistake.

Mr ELLIS - Okay, sure. Look, happy to pass to Ms Chuter, maybe, if there's something you want to add on this one?

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Dr WOODRUFF - Look, I'm sorry, that first question was also, through you, to the Forest Practices Authority, Ms Chuter, in relation to why isn't the area in the Lonnvale Forests created as a SPIBA given the prevalence of swift parrot nests and sightings?

Dr RUSSELL - Yes, thank you for your question. This obviously goes back some time. So I think it was about 2021 that the Lonnvale Forest area, we had an influx of breeding records for swift parrot in that area. Until that point, that area didn't have historic evidence, through data, of swift parrots breeding in that area. Following that new information, the Forest Practices Authority, through its adaptive management process, took account of that information. And the first formal step that was taken was to issue what we call a Chief Forest Practices Officer instruction. So, this was the CFPO prior to me, issued an instruction that in that Lonnvale Forest area, that while the information was being considered and reviewed, the area was to be treated on a coupe-by-coupe basis. Under the agreed procedures, there are two different pathways for management of threatened species. It can be through endorsed management agreements such as SPIBAs delivered through what we call the Threatened Species Adviser, which is an online decision support tool. It also does things like it delivers appropriate and endorsed management actions for a range of different species. That's one pathway for managing threatened species and this is the procedures agreed between the FPA and NRE Tas.

The other pathway is through a coupe-by-coupe approach, where we recognise there's new information that the current endorsed planning tools and management approach doesn't account for that information, but we recognise there's a risk. So, we treat them on a case-by-case basis. That Chief Forest Practices Officer instruction issued around 2021-2022, somewhere in that area, asked that all those coupes in that area be considered on a case-by-case basis. That then manages the risk to the species. So, the area has not been formally been considered by the FPA or the authority for consideration as a SPIBA because that risk is being managed on a coupe-by-coupe approach, rather than through the endorsed management approach.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you, Ms Chuter. This was really about a Cabinet document that was released under the Right to Information that showed that there would be costs of \$12 million to Forestry Tasmania, trading as Sustainable Timbers Tasmania, and contractors of \$10 million. It really seems, to people who are looking at the impacts on a critically endangered species, that economic considerations are overriding the protection of that species.

Perhaps through you, minister: Ms Chuter, how is it possible that given the influx of information you said - which wasn't there because it hadn't been done - of the nesting and breeding habit of swift parrots - was subsequently done, mostly by citizen scientists and concerned people because they could see the habitat being destroyed - why hasn't it been identified as a SPIBA? How is it possible to protect that habitat?

Ms CHUTER - Thank you, and through you, minister, so, going back to the pathways for managing threatened species. In managing it with a coupe-by-coupe approach, what that means in practice is that the areas are still assessed as a swift parrot breeding habitat, and that any coupe that has potential habitat in it - being either forests with hollows or a foraging species of eucalypt for the swift parrot - has to be referred to the Forest Practices Authority for case-by-case advice. So, it means that one of the FPA specialists is looking at every single operation in that area that might impact swift parrot potential habitat, and giving site-specific advice - so that is a rigorous way to manage a threatened species.

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Dr WOODRUFF - Ms Chuter, through you, minister, do you think that this is death by a thousand cuts, where you're actually looking at individual spots instead of looking at the holistic landscape, which is full of nesting and foraging habitat, you're just going and picking out areas. It's a critically endangered species. How can that possibly be acceptable protection?

Ms CHUTER - Well, I think that the way the biodiversity management works on the Tasmanian forest management system is it's sort of a tiered approach, where you have your reserve system that does a whole lot of landscape-level management protection. That's obviously been established through various processes over the years. Then you've got your state policy if you're maintaining permanent native forest estate, and that also operates at that landscape level. So those are two landscape-level mechanisms designed to manage and conserve biodiversity natural values. Then beyond, the next level down, is what we call off-reserve management, and this is the space that the FPA operates in, in terms of coupe-level assessments. And so it complements those landscape-level assessments by going, okay, at this site level, if we also have habitat for this critically endangered species, we have to do a level of management for that species at that coupe level as well, which complements all of those other landscape-level measures in place.

Dr WOODRUFF - It seems to be a perfect example of why we need national environmental laws to be stronger because it's really not working.

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff, we'll take it as a comment and move on.

Minister, there's quite a lot of regulatory uncertainty and resource unreliability right at the moment. I'm interested to know what form native forest product contract negotiations are taking. Have you, minister, formally sought advice on whether the conduct of these negotiations is financially prudent or not and, if you haven't, wouldn't it be prudent to do so?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Chair. Again, STT's not here at the table, but I'll just look to the Department of State Growth if there's anything further that we'd like to add.

CHAIR - It's really a question for you.

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister, probably the comment I would make is that we're going through a really comprehensive process at the moment ensuring that the forest management system we have in operation and, at industry level, the operations that are occurring, that are being undertaken on both public and private land, that are required to comply with that forest management system. And what would be an accreditation of the way it operates in this state will have a lot of legal requirements to it. It is absolutely pertinent of a jurisdiction as our own to seek and inform ourselves legally of what those obligations are and what that would mean in the operations of that industry in this state. I make, again, the note that that is operations across public and privately-owned operations.

So, in broader answer to that question, I would say that is certainly an area that the government will be seeking advice on, that, as I note earlier, we're working very closely across industry, and I make specific note that that will be considered across both public and private operations.

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Mr Di FALCO - Minister, what ministerial oversight exists over the Forest Practices Authority's enforcement and prosecution decisions? Has the minister ever reviewed the consistency of prescribed fines issued by the FPA?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. Obviously the FPA's an independent regulator and they are oversighted by the courts and when we talk about FPA decisions being upheld by the courts, that means that the FPA has acted lawfully. Now, in terms of responsibilities of government, obviously we hold the pen on the legislation and the regulation and we've committed that we're going to review the regulations to make sure that they're user friendly and outlined a few kind of key principles that we think there might be opportunities to act on, pending feedback that we get from industry and the community and others who are involved.

Firstly, we want to make sure that we get the balance right for farmers managing their properties. Secondly, we want to cut red tape for private growers - and that could be native or plantation. Then thirdly, we think there's an opportunity to deliver on our election commitment in the special species space, to provide access across a range of land tenures.

So, really welcome the feedback to come through from that process, so that we can ensure that the regulations continue to be modern, fit for purpose, and we look for opportunities to make them more user friendly.

I'll just look to Ms Chuter or DSG if there's anything further that you wanted to add?

Ms CHUTER - Through you, minister, I can provide a bit of information around the authority's consideration of compliance matters of enforcement and prescribed fines. The Forest Practices Authority, when undertaking investigation and determining enforcement measures, has a number of enforcement mechanisms that it can use - everything from advisory information, rehabilitation, restoration, actions, section notices to cease activity, through to fines and prosecution.

As a lot of regulators, we use our enforcement and investigation protocols built around the regulatory triangle, where you spend a lot of time in that setting the standards, communicating, educating, training, ensuring the community understands the standards, and then monitoring how that goes, and the pointy end of the enforcement is that pointing to the triangle.

In terms of fines, the legislation allows the authority to offer a prescribed fine in lieu of prosecution, where there is serious environmental harm. Those fines are a matter for the authority itself, so, that's the Board of the Forest Practice Authority to determine, but in general, fines are determined based on aspects, such as the severity of the environmental harm, the scale of the impact and the capacity for rehabilitation, and culpability, including any sort of compliance history, or understanding of the system that the alleged offender may have.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, in the recent Budget reply debate, there were some differing and strong views on the role of mining royalties, and their contribution to state revenue. Can you please provide an update to the committee on the current status of mining royalties in Tasmania, and comment on their role in delivering outcomes for the state?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Tasmania's royalty system continues to deliver strong and stable returns to the community. Can update the committee that royalty revenues

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for the 2025-26 financial year is expected to exceed \$93 million, representing one of the strongest outcomes on record.

Mr JAENSCH - Fantastic.

Mr ELLIS - This reflects both current industry performance and the strength of the underlying policy framework. Tasmania applies a legislated royalty system that combines a royalty on net sales, with a profit-based component. The framework includes a statutory cap that provides relief during periods of market downturn, so this structure ensures that community shares in strong commodity price conditions and profitable operations. At the same time, it recognises the cyclical nature of the resource markets, and supports operational continuity during weaker conditions.

Stability in the royalty system is critical in a jurisdiction with high cost structures, particularly being an island in regional and remote locations. This stability supports long-term investment, protects employment and allows operations to continue across commodity cycles. The framework includes incentives to support on-island processing, and value adding within Tasmania. This ensures greater economic benefit is retained in the state, rather than relying on, say, exports of unprocessed materials.

Mining companies in Tasmania currently contribute approximately 4.22 per cent in net sales in royalties. While comparable across comparisons across jurisdictions vary, this rate is considered very balanced and competitive in a national comparison. Royalty revenue is highly concentrated with the majority generated by a small number of large scale operations. In recent years, the seven largest companies have contributed well over 95 per cent of royalty receipts, most of that in our electorate of Braddon, of course, and the sustaining royalty revenue depends on maintaining a strong and productive mining sector. The government's focus is on supporting exploration, establishing new developments, and facilitating expansion of existing operations, and we appreciate the significant royalties paid by our large existing resource operations, and also welcome the opportunity to work with new entrants to help broadened the royalty base. Royalty revenue is an important contributor to the Tasmanian budget, and helps to fund public service services that all Tasmanians rely on.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you.

Dr BROAD - So when the granting of a tenement is pending, are the people seeking to be granted a tenement still expected to pay the bond, pay the fees on an annual basis, even if it can take years for that tenement to be granted?

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister, and through you. I suppose to break it down that - a couple of things there, you've talked about the bond or the security deposit, as we call it, and the fees would be the rent, so the rent continues to be payable, that's payable on an annual basis, and that's the rent - as I said, it's an active tenement. The bond, or the security deposit, that's the amount that we hold if we need to come in and, the site is abandoned, and the Crown needs to [inaudible] so obviously we continue - they don't pay that on an annual basis, is what I'm saying. We hold an amount, and we can, increase or decrease that amount as needed, so that it's appropriate for the site, and we'll continue to hold that while they're operating.

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Dr BROAD - But pending a tenement being granted? From what I understand it can take years for a tenement to actually be granted. Is the person seeking to be granted that tenement still expected to pay annual fees, and have handed over a bond, when it can take years before they actually get tenure?

Mr MORTON - Through you, minister, I may have misunderstood the question, so I was talking about an existing tenement where it was pending renewal. I think you're talking about -

Dr BROAD - Granting.

Mr MORTON - a tenement where it's being assessed to grant, so it doesn't exist until it's granted. There's an application fee that they need to provide to us for processing the application, but obviously the security deposit is payable as part of the - we need the security deposit before we can grant the tenement. But, it's not until it's granted that things like, you know, we mentioned things that are required to be paid.

As I said before in my previous response, we're putting all our effort into trying to prioritise the granting of tenements so that companies can operate. Obviously they require other approvals as well, but we're trying to prioritise that to get them on the ground.

Dr BROAD - Exploration licences are often only renewed for a year, and at times it can take more than a year to renew. This means that tenement holders may never actually have proper tenure. Minister, can you see how this could be a barrier to operators investing in tenements which technically may not actually be renewed?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Broad. I'll pass back to Mr Morton.

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister, and through you. Exploration licences - most of those I'm thinking of, it is a requirement they're granted for five years, so upon granting it's a five-year term. Then, as extension of terms come up, they're granted on a case-by-case basis. There are some requirements under the act, if some requirements are met then an extension of term must be granted.

What I think the state's general approach is, is we don't want really old exploration licences. We want companies actively exploring the ground, and with a competitive work program that is driving through to mining, because ultimately we want to get them through to mining. But, we understand too that every tenement is different and that there's complexities, and things come along. Some tenements will take longer to get to that point, so we're mindful.

When we get to that extension of term, we will just be assessing it on a case-by-case basis, we can extend for longer than one year, we'll extend depending on the work program and what they're proposing.

Dr BROAD - Minister, what's your understanding of when the fees for things like exploration licences fall due?

Mr ELLIS - Sorry, Dr Broad, what's our understanding of fees falling due?

Dr BROAD - Yes. Payment of rent.

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Mr ELLIS - I'll pass to Mr Morton.

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister, through you. You said the fees and then you said the payment of rent specifically.

Dr BROAD - Oh well, yes, specifically payment of rent.

Mr MORTON - When does it fall due like in a, in a calendar year or specifically? Is that the question? I'm just seeking to clarify the question.

Dr BROAD - The issue is, is that, I think if we boil it down to the nub, is that people are being asked to pay rent in advance, rather than on the anniversary date of which the licence was issued. So which is it? Should the rent be paid on the anniversary date on which the licence is issued, or is it to be paid in advance? A year in advance, for example.

Mr MORTON - Can I circle back, minister, with that question, with a response to that question shortly?

Mr ELLIS - Sure.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, this might be a question, through you, to Ms Chuter from the FPA. In Coupe DN023H, STT made assurances of retaining -

Mr ELLIS - DN0?

Dr WOODRUFF - DN0. STT made assurances of retaining all trees above 250 centimetres DBH where operationally safe to do so, but a visit to the coupe shows that those trees have all been extensively logged. My question is why is there such a disparity between the assurances that were made in the Forest Practice Plan process and what is actually eventuated on the ground?

Ms CHUTER - Through you, minister, and thank you for the question. DN023H: the authority are aware of the information you're referring to, of the alleged breaches in that Forest Practices Plan and we are currently investigating this matter in accordance with our statutory responsibilities. We have undertaken a preliminary assessment, and we are gathering more information. It is an active investigation, so I have to be mindful of judicial fairness. What I can tell you is our preliminary information has indicated that some of those large trees have been felled for safety reasons.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay. Through you just to clarify, is there very clear guidelines about what can be called safety and is there an opportunity or a space for potential abuse of that of that term?

Ms CHUTER - Through you, minister. It's a very difficult space. There is legislation related to worker-safety that is not FBAs legislation. I'm mindful not to speak around the parameters of legislation that we do not administer. We are very conscious of the fact that safety is paramount to those who are operating in the forest. For this particular matter, all of this information is forming part of the investigation, and no decision or outcome has been determined yet. The matter is ongoing.

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Dr WOODRUFF - Okay, thank you. Minister, following up through you possibly to Ms Chuter on the comments that we're talking about before about swift parrot important breeding areas (SPIBA). I'd just like to really clearly understand what you were saying, Ms Chuter, with regards to that breeding area in the non-SPIBA area in in Lonnavele. Are you saying that you're currently managing that area in Lonnavele on a case-by-case or coupe-by-coupe basis? And does that mean that in practice you might look at one coupe in the area and see that there's no Swift Parrot records in that particular coupe and therefore say that that coupe would be all clear for logging? Whereas if the entire area was declared an important breeding area, it would mean that the broader land area would be entirely off limits for logging regardless of what was happening in one specific coupe?

My question is therefore does the designation of a SPIBA in that area would deliver landscape-scale protection for the critically endangered Swift Parrot, whereas at the moment the coupe-by-coupe system is essentially fragmenting the habitat for that critically endangered species?

Ms CHUTER - Through you, minister. That's not what I'm saying. The forest practices assess system and the assessment, and the management is based on habitat, not on species records. It's based on whether the operational area or the coupe contains what we call potential habitat. The assessments would actually have to take account of any potential habitat regardless of whether there are nesting sites or siting records nearby. Now obviously if there are nesting sites, that a particular nest-tree will get a buffer. I believe it's a 50-metre exclusion buffer. But if I get corrected by my colleagues and it's 100 metres, I'll come back to you. But I'm pretty sure it's a 50-metre buffer. Beyond that, it doesn't matter whether you've got records or not. The system is designed to manage the habitat, the potential habitat. Regardless of whether the area was designated as a Swift Parrot important breeding area or managed on a coupe-by-coupe basis, potential habitat would be assessed regardless and management actions applied whether it be through the threatened species advisor, which would be the endorsed management, or in this case through a coupe-by-coupe approach. The advice would take account of potential habitat.

Dr WOODRUFF - But if it were a SPIBA then it would be like dramatically scale back the potential logging that could occur, wouldn't it?

Ms CHUTER - Through you, minister. No, not at all. Not necessarily. So a coupe-by-coupe approach can actually result in higher levels of retention.

CHAIR - Minister, I'm trying to elicit some information on your department's action on the pending environmental law reforms. Would the state be liable to pay out logging and supply contracts if logging and supply undertakings cannot be fulfilled?

Mr ELLIS - What I would say in the first instance is that if you destroy people's livelihoods, you have a moral duty to pay them out.

CHAIR - It's not really the question, minister.

Mr ELLIS - Well, I think there's compensation that's been worked through as part of that process. So, if you're to destroy an industry, you should compensate the people who are involved in it. That's -

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CHAIR - I'll bring you to my question which was around the pending environmental law reforms.

Mr ELLIS - Yeah. So, the environmental law reforms, you know, accredit our systems and we certainly had, as I mentioned, really strong engagement with the Commonwealth who recognised our independent Forest Practices Authority and the broader architecture that we have is very sound, probably nation leading. Tasmania is among the leading jurisdictions in the country on this, then we deliver a bilateral agreement that recognises our system. Forestry will continue across land tenure and across forest types. Now, if say for example the Commonwealth were to cram down on Tasmania, a ban on native forestry, like the Victorian Government did to itself; Victoria has, I think, at last count paid out \$1.5 billion in that process. They've destroyed firefighting capacity, they've destroyed regional communities, and they haven't delivered a better environmental outcome. They've actually reduced their ability to manage the landscape so let's not go down that path. Let's deliver a bilateral that accredits our system. We might pass to Ms Pinto to maybe talk more about how the ongoing negotiations are going with the Commonwealth, noting the answer to Mr Jaensch as well.

CHAIR - Sorry, before you do, and I'm very happy to hear from her, but it's around getting advice in relation to your, or the state's, potential liability.

Ms PINTO - Through you minister, and I'll make this succinct to the question. So the first comment I would make is that the minister is accurate here, what we're looking to do is to undertake a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth that would accredit the forest management system, but it also needs to ensure that the industry is operational. So if we have a system - I'm using this as a very hypothetical context - so if we were to have a system that would render large parts or even sectors within an industry inoperable, then that is going to be a matter for an element of the negotiation. Absolutely. We have made that a very clear element of discussions with our counterparts in the Commonwealth. Further I would note that I've made reference earlier to the imperative to ensure that as a jurisdiction we have comprehensive legal and technical advice, that will be also forming part of that, which would consider through two lenses, and I'm looking at these from a legal perspective, and look at the lens of the Commonwealth and their obligations. We will look at the lens of our jurisdiction and their obligations, and then I just merely make acknowledgement of the minister's comment in terms of what would be ostensibly due to an industry and I think you know, you made the reference of moral grounds. I think that's another imperative that needs to be considered.

Mr ELLIS - The other element, just to add, as well as the regional forest agreement, there are significant compensatory provisions under that if there's an impact on Tasmania's forest industry, the Commonwealth potentially need to pay. So obviously that's something that you know we continue to receive legal advice on. It's very important that we deliver a regulatory regime that continues Forestry and its Land Management properties across the Tasmanian state and if the federal government's changes were to shut down native forestry, that would be an economic, social, environmental and financial disaster for the Commonwealth and Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, my understanding is the FPA have issued fines of over \$2 million over the last five years. Can you explain the methodology of how they come up with the fine amounts issued?

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Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. I'll pass over to Ms Chuter.

Ms CHUTER - Thank you for your question. So the Forest Practice Authority, the board of the Forest Practices Authority is responsible for issuing the prescribed fines. As I said earlier, prescribed fines - I'm just looking for the exact words for you, it is in our act - 'the prescribed fine can mean a fine of such amount that the authority determines is equal or approximately equal to twice the amount required to make good the damage done or the loss incurred by the commission of the relevant offence, or if the relevant offences of a particular serious kind or would not be possible or practicable to make good the damage done or any loss occurred by the commission of the relevant offence, such amount that the authority determines will constitute an appropriate sanction and deterrence in the circumstances'. That's in the legislation - it's set out in the legislation.

As I mentioned before, in practice, when the board of the Forest Practices Authority considers enforcement actions and considers fines, it does come down to, within the bounds of that legislation, matters such as the severity of the environmental harm. So for example, if it's harm on a value that would not otherwise be allowed with a forest practices plan, like loss of a threatened native vegetation community, that's generally prohibited under the *Forest Practices Act*, that would be considered to be serious environmental harm. It also comes down to the scale of the impact, so the size of the offence and whether or not there is opportunities for rehabilitation and restoration. For example, if the area has been cleared and then converted to, for example, pasture, then it's very difficult to rehabilitate that site and it's particularly difficult when it's a community that's a threatened native vegetation community. Again, because under our legislation that cannot be cleared - it's prohibited to clear and convert that community. Also culpability, so if the alleged offender or responsible person has multiple offences or if they have demonstrated understanding of the forest practice system, that sort of comes in. But it's also within the bounds of that legislation that I read out earlier and you can find on the *Forest Practices Act*.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, following on from our previous discussion about royalties, we don't keep getting royalties out of the end of that system unless we keep exploring and investing in new mining activity in the state. Can you please outline what the government is doing to back exploration and attract this investment so that we secure our mining future?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. The government's approach to mining exploration is deliberate, disciplined and focused on securing the long-term future of Tasmania's resources sector. It's based on a clear principle: exploration underpins discovery, discovery underpins development and development underpins jobs, investment and the royalties that sustain regional Tasmania.

That's why the government's continued and strengthened the Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative or EDGI. This initiative has been a central element of Tasmania's mining policy in recent years, it provides targeted co-investment to support greenfield exploration, particularly for minerals that are essential to the global transition to renewable energy and advanced and defence manufacturing. The government's extended the program through to 2028 to ensure the exploration activity continues in a competitive national and global environment. The government investment in the program has leveraged substantial industry spending and supports tens of thousands of metres of drilling across the state. That level of activity strengthens geological knowledge, increases the likelihood of discovery and builds the pipeline of future mining projects.

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It gives me great pleasure to announce that the successful applicants of round 12 of EDGI have been identified. There are some exciting projects funded in this round, including some for tungsten, copper and rare earth elements. Provision of competitive support for drilling and associated costs in underexplored regions will ensure that companies can test new targets and expand the state's resource base. And if the drilling grant programs are completed to plan, around 9900 metres of new exploration drilling will occur. It should be noted that successful applicants will need to gain standard work program approval, under the Mineral Exploration Code of Practice or MECOP - I think that's how we say that acronym - and comply with the landowner notification process on private land before drilling work can commence. It's expected that this round of the program will help unlock millions of dollars worth of exploration activity in Tasmania, benefiting our local economy and creating new opportunities in our resources sector.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you. Thank you for the acronyms.

Dr BROAD - Minister, is Mineral Resources Tasmania demanding rent in advance rather than by the anniversary of the date the licence was issued?

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister. Through you, I have an answer to your previous question. First of all, I'd like to say that for mining leases, rent is actually paid in advance. That's paid 12 months in advance and that's a requirement. I think your question before was around exploration licences.

Dr BROAD - No, the payment of rent, that specific question. The payment of rent - you're saying it has to be paid in advance.

Mr MORTON - For mine leases.

Dr BROAD - For a holder of an exploration licence, a special exploration licence, a retention licence or a production licence -

Mr MORTON - Yes.

Dr BROAD - you're saying it has to be paid in advance?

Mr MORTON - I was just talking about mining leases just then. In answer to your question before, and you're reading from the mineral resources regulations of 2026 there -

Dr BROAD - Yes.

Mr MORTON - Yes. The holder of those, an EL and SEL, a retention licence or production licence is payable on or before the anniversary day on which the licence is issued. The rent is due on the anniversary date of licence grant, with the first anniversary being the beginning of the life of the tenement in effect, because it's meant to cover that year, so the rent covers the year. But I suppose probably, as I understand it, to your point, the rent is designed to cover a year and then we roll on that basis. If, for example, that licence is refused during that year, then the period of time where the licence didn't apply, they will be refunded for that amount, so they're not out of pocket. It's rent to cover the year where they hold that tenement and then we roll on that basis.

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Dr BROAD - I'm just trying to get this clear here: so when it comes to the payment of rent for the exploration licence, special exploration licence, retention licence, that is paid on the anniversary of the date which the licence is issued. You're interpreting that as in advance.

Mr MORTON - On or before the anniversary date.

Dr BROAD - Yes.

Mr MORTON - How do you mean, in advance?

Dr BROAD - If I'm granted an exploration licence, then the rent is due on the anniversary of the granting of that licence, which is a year later.

Mr ELLIS - Dr Broad. if there's a specific matter that you're concerned about, I'm happy to follow up. I feel like we are going around in circles here.

Dr BROAD - My understanding is that in the past it was paid in arrears, okay, so you pay the rent by the anniversary date on which licence was issued which is a year later, but now the demand is to pay the licence in advance, and that is a year's difference which impacts cashflow and it seems like it's a different interpretation of the regulations.

CHAIR - That's a question?

Dr BROAD - Yes.

Mr MORTON - Minister, I'm just happy to return to my previous comments, which is under the mineral resource regulations, it says on or before; we're getting it at the point of the granting of the tenement, so at that time, and then it covers that year and then we roll on from that point.

Dr BROAD - I don't understand your interpretation when it talks about the anniversary. There is an 'on or before' but you're saying 'before' is a year before. The mineral resource regulations are quite clear. This talks about the 'anniversary of the date on which the licence was issued': that's a year later, so why has this interpretation changed?

Mr MORTON - I'm the statutory officer under the act. That's the way I'm applying it as I don't believe it has changed.

CHAIR - Do you want to take that on notice, ask to have it taken on notice?

Mr ELLIS - I think it has already been taken on notice.

CHAIR - It has been taken on notice; we might move to Dr Woodruff.

Mr ELLIS - It has sort of been taken on notice in one of the questions from before. We just answered it.

Mr MITCHELL - No. You undertook to get information and bring it back, not to take it on notice.

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Mr MORTON - And that was the information I brought back.

Mr ELLIS - Sure. Yes.

Dr BROAD - I didn't use up three then, did I?

CHAIR - I reckon you did.

CHAIR - One more then, Dr Broad. I don't want to diddle you out of an important question.

Dr BROAD - It takes a while to get back around, you know. Has the evidence required to prove public liability insurance changed in recent years?

Mr MORTON - Thank you, and through you, minister, so the requirement to provide public liability is in the act, and we have a set of guidelines that set out what is required in terms of what needs to be in the public liability certificate.

Dr BROAD - Has that changed? That was the question. How long has that been in place?

Mr MORTON - I might circle back on that one, if that's okay; I don't believe so, but I will just confirm on that front.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, we know that there's an information deficit in Tasmania when it comes to natural values. That was one of the findings of the *State of the Environment Report*, and that report recommended a collection strategy. Despite agreeing to this recommendation, your government agreeing to that, there's no funding in this Budget to do that. Is that because you don't want to collect the data? And I ask a question in relation to the new environmental laws: how would the National Environment Protection Authority, newly to be established, be able to rely on state information when it's already recognised that there's a deficit of it?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks Dr Woodruff. Obviously, there's certainly some interest in data projects here. Interestingly enough, it's actually forestry-managed land that has significant amounts of data and then in sort of parks and reserves it's actually where we see less data from many of these natural values, which can actually be a challenge when you're taking into account whether a species is threatened because it may be extant on forestry land, but then it may be significantly more widely found in reserve land, but that's not necessarily covered. Now, I'm far exceeding my brief as a plumber, but I might look to the experts who might want to talk more about some data collection and some opportunities there.

Ms PINTO - So, minister, through you, currently the government has made a commitment to review the *Mineral Resources Development Act*. As a part of that commitment -

Mr ELLIS - Sorry, I think we're talking forestry.

Dr WOODRUFF - We're talking forestry, natural values.

Ms PINTO - So I was going to refer to it in the context of that, but I will move across into forestry, absolutely, and thank you, minister. So through you, the Forest Practices

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Authority, as a part of performing their regulatory duties in working also with other agencies such as Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, collate and collect data in addition in their enforcement and monitoring role. I will refer to Ms Chuter to speak a little bit more about that. In relation to obligations regarding the EPBC reforms, there will be new national environmental standards regarding data management and reporting of that. All of those things are actively being considered at the moment.

As I noted, we are actively engaging with the Commonwealth as a part of that. That exchange is involving the exchange of data and information. My expectation is through that we will be able to assess what other additional systems and forms of data tracking and reporting will be required. I also further note that, in discussions with the Commonwealth, ensuring that states are adequately equipped to deal to those obligations will also be an element of the negotiations with the Commonwealth.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. Rather than going to Ms Chuter, through you, minister, I might just ask a follow-up question with Ms Pinto or yourself, indeed: as I understand it, in order for the National Environment Protection Authority to be able to be confident that states can undertake their work through bilateral agreements, there needs to be robust and, you know, fulsome baseline environmental data that exists. The *State of the Environment Report* that was done for Tasmania shows that it is very deficient in Tasmania and recommended a specific natural-values collection strategy, but that hasn't been funded. I also note that the national values management area in the department has been cut across the forward Estimates, I think from memory by about seven-eighths in the third and fourth year. It's a dramatic and steep reduction in money. So there's certainly money taken out of capacity in that area. What do you say to the gap recommended from the State of The Environment Report that hasn't been funded, or am I missing something?

Ms PINTO - I might just seek a clarification with regards to the reduction of budget. Are you referring to State Growth or are you referring to other agencies such as Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania?

Dr WOODRUFF - Well, the natural values management area in NRE -

Ms PINTO - Firstly, with regards that, I'm not in a position, through you, minister, to make comment on that. What I can make comment on is our obligations. As I noted, we are in a situation, whereby at the moment, one of the environmental standards, which is regarding data and information standards - which will set at a Commonwealth level, the obligations with regards the maintenance of data that covers natural environmental values and other associated standards of ecological value - that hasn't been released as yet. We are live and, at the moment, in discussions with the Commonwealth. I note through my colleagues in Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, we'll be actively engaging. Again, I don't want to speak on behalf of another agency, but I'm sure that that will be a consideration as to how that is undertaken across government, including within the regulator, within the forest management system and within the government that oversees resources policy.

Dr WOODRUFF - My question remains about the funding for it. There's no funding to do this collection strategy which was recommended in the State of the Environment Report.

Ms PINTO - I'll just make one more comment, minister, and then we'll just quickly refer to the regulator in that regard. My comment to the honourable member would be that the

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Commonwealth has already assigned funding across this coming financial year and the following financial year of \$8.5 million that has been assigned to Tasmania as a jurisdiction that is going through a transition phase to negotiate a bilateral agreement. Part of that funding may well - I'm not presupposing where that funding will be applied - but it may be a consideration for us as a government as to how we may bolster systems that are within our remit, including within the regulator and it will be considered as a part of that. My comment to that would be is that there is access to funding at a Commonwealth level but we would be - but we are currently going through a process to resolve in a federation funding agreement with the Commonwealth that may well consider those areas.

Dr WOODRUFF - But there's no commitment to that yet, to going into natural values data collection?

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff, we'll move around the table. Thank you. Minister, I just want to continue with the line of questioning that I've started. With foreseeably less availability, how are expected increases or decreases in value of native forest products being considered as part of contract negotiations?

Mr ELLIS - So the basis of your comments about decreases?

CHAIR - Well, with the reduced, the likely reduced supply.

Mr ELLIS - On the basis of?

CHAIR - Oh, well, I think it might be STT information.

Mr ELLIS - Do you mean with the resource mix change to plantation?

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr ELLIS - So there're two separate processes - obviously without STT here - but, there's a contracting process for the high-quality plantation sawlog, which is coming online now. It was planted after a sort of wave of lock-ups around the early 1990s. That project is coming through at the same time as the recontracting for the native resource. Certainly, you know, as we're signing new contracts, we're going to make sure that we get a good deal that supports STT's ongoing operations and continued profitability, while also making sure that the industry has good opportunities to grow. Again, we don't have the STT staff here at the table, but at a high level, certainly new contracts provide opportunities for us to take into account the growing demand for Tasmanian timber and the new resource mix that's coming through with -

CHAIR - This is really - I'm sorry, you might have misunderstood my question. I'm sorry if it was clumsy, but it's really in relation to the changes in the environmental laws and negotiations.

Mr ELLIS - Well, I mean, we've had no indication as yet, unless the Commonwealth's told you something that they're planning on reducing the amount of -

CHAIR - You'd be the first to know, minister.

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Mr ELLIS - Yes. I mean, from our perspective, we're looking to sign a bilateral agreement that credits our existing system. You know, we'll need to work through that. The Commonwealth is effectively asking the states to fly the plane while they're building it, so some of these national environmental standards is still coming out. We'll continue to engage closely with them, but, I suppose, more broadly, there's strong demand for Tasmanian timber. We're a net exporter of timber. We do it profitably. More than 50 per cent of our industry is in the private sector. We'll continue to work with the federal government to deliver a bilateral and that will provide more certainty for the forest industry and farmers and others who are involved in growing trees.

CHAIR - It would be interesting to know when we get to that peak wood, but anyway.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, would you support a mediation process between landowners and the FPA before prosecution is commenced, and has the government considered introducing a right to remediation process before prosecution for first-time offenders?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Mr Di Falco. I understand there is a mediation process that's available to people. I'll pass to Ms Chuter to talk through the process.

Ms CHUTER - Through you, minister, thank you for your question. A really important part of the enforcement process is to ensure that landowners have a right of reply and ability to be able to input their information and relevant information into an investigation. To set out what is a very complicated process because investigations can take months to years, depending on the complexity of it, but to try and set it out as simply as I can, given the time constraints, when new information comes to the authority that there has been an alleged offence, there are a number of steps that happen before we get anywhere near prosecution. They include written correspondence; offers to explain how this alleged offence may have occurred; and offers for interviews, so alleged offenders can be interviewed so that we can understand, they can put their side of the story and how it's happened on record.

Even when an investigation gets to the board of the Forest Practices Authority, it goes through at least two stages of review. The preliminary information will go to the authority, which will make a preliminary determination based on the information before it. A landowner then has a right of response to be able to provide any new relevant information or to look to negotiate for rehabilitation or restoration actions. That is absolutely a priority if we can get actions that make good any environmental damage done that is always a really good outcome. We then go into a final determination and, even if the matter ends up going with a recommendation to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for a prosecution, we keep the door open. Through that process, we are always open to having more conversations and we make sure that alleged offenders are aware that, prior to a hearing we can always have a conversation, within the bounds of the judicial system. There is a lot of opportunity through an investigation for the relevant party, or the alleged offender, to interact and provide more information in various forms that the Forest Practices Authority can take into consideration.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, critical minerals are essential for the expansion of modern technologies and renewable energy and national security. We have some critical minerals here in Tasmania. What is the government doing to ensure that we are taking advantage of what we have and securing our place in global markets?

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Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Critical minerals underpin modern economic activity, renewable energy systems and national security capability. They're essential inputs into technologies, such as electronics, batteries, defence industry and advanced manufacturing. Global demand for critical minerals is increasing rapidly, driven by the transition to low-emission energy systems and the growing importance of secure and diversified supply chains. Tasmania is well positioned to respond to this demand with a strong mining sector and demonstrated potential across a broad range of critical minerals, including tungsten, silicon, and rare-earth elements like cobalt, antimony, and lithium. That's why the government committed \$3 million over three years in the 2024-25 Budget to deliver targeted critical minerals initiatives. The current production in Tasmania includes tungsten, high-purity silicon for advanced technology applications, and heavy mineral sands containing rare-earth elements. Tasmania has 15 critical minerals with defined resources and continues to see strong exploration across the state. The recent remaking of the Mineral Resources Regulations tabled in May 2026 added five new critical minerals to reflect the increasing interest in critical minerals, and the potential for commercial opportunities.

The government released the Tasmanian Critical Minerals Prospectus in November 2025 to promote the state's mineral potential and investment advantages. Targeted investment attraction activities including trade engagement, and mining industry forums, are being used to harness interest in Tasmania's critical minerals and attracting capital into Tasmania. Government will continue to work with the resources sector to unlock new critical mineral opportunities for the benefit of Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you. I just wondered, Committee, do you want to have the 4.30 p.m. break now, and we'll start back with Dr Broad? We have a 5-minute break?

Mr ELLIS - Sure.

The committee suspended from 4.26 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

CHAIR - Welcome back, and with those interruptions, we're due to go to 6.07 p.m. We'll start with you, Dr Broad.

Dr BROAD - Thank you. So, I'm just trying to clear up this issue on when rent is due. There was a an invoice sent to Moina Gold on 1 April requiring rent to be paid, should be made on or before 12 May 2026. This was disputed. In an email sent to Mr Morton:

As previously discussed, as you have previously agreed with Andrew McNeill, if you want to pay rent just before the anniversary date, that is acceptable. The next request MRT sends to you on this regard will be a reminder just prior to the anniversary date, which is 12 May 2027.

The rent on this licence is not overdue and you are compliant with the requirements of the act.

I'd just like this issue cleared up. Is there flexibility in this or are there legislative requirements?

Mr MORTON - Thank you very much. First of all, if it's okay, through you, Minister, I might just go up because you can clear up an issue about public liabilities because you've asked that previously. Public liability is a requirement of the act. This has not changed. Public

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liability is a requirement for all tenants and, effectively, public liability is important as it's covering the Crown as the principal under the insurance contract and it's a requirement to protect the Crown and the public interest. If there are individuals having trouble understanding what the formants of the act are, we have a set of guidelines, they're up on our website, we make them publicly available, we send them out quite regularly. If people are having trouble understanding that, they just need to give us a call and we'll assist.

In regards to your most recent question, and noting that you're quoting an email I sent to an individual probably about two hours ago.

Dr BROAD - Was that two hours ago?

Mr MORTON - Yes. Well, you've probably got the comment there, so-

Dr BROAD - I didn't realise it was two hours ago.

Mr ELLIS - Time is everything, isn't it?

Mr MORTON - Still warm. The comments I made before in regards to the way I, as the statutory officer, and interpreting that, I note that pretty much the entire industry is paying rent upfront, and that individual I'd communicated, I said what I said to him because he's having trouble meeting that.

Dr BROAD - That's the answer? Okay. Are there mining operations who have paid more royalties than owed due to calculation errors?

Mr MORTON - More royalties than owed?

Dr BROAD - Yes.

Mr MORTON - Thank you, firstly, and through you, minister. I'd probably just make some general comments about royalties. As the minister said before, it's been a bumper year for royalties with about \$93.5 million, which is a clear record, and then with about \$2.2 million of fees and rentals; this is a record take. Effectively, and the minister described that this sort of hybrid ad valorem, with the sliding scale system that we've got for our metallics and construction minerals are paid on the fixed rate.

There are those systems. What we effectively do is, companies will pay and they pay on a quarterly basis and we effectively go through the process of if it's fixed rate, it's fairly simple; if it's sliding scale, we've got to look against the requirements of the act. There are some times where we'll have to look at what's been paid and sometimes there can be some back and forth just to make sure they're compliant with the requirements of the act.

Just some further comments. I think the minister mentioned before actually, which is our seven big miners pay the vast majority of - so, it's seven companies paying about 95 per cent of the of the overall royalty take.

Dr BROAD - Thank you. The guidelines that you're talking about for the public liability insurance, are they, are they from 2024? Is that what you're referring to?

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Mr MORTON - Yes.

Dr BROAD - Okay, thank you.

CHAIR - Welcome, Ms Badger, over to you.

Ms BADGER - Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, in their 2025 annual report, Catalina Resources, which is formerly Shree Minerals, stated that in December 2024, they received notification from MRT that it was increasing the rehabilitation and security deposit by over \$460,000 to over \$1.2 million. On 24 February, Catalina Resources announced the sale of the Nelson Bay River iron ore mine to Newcam Metals. The Nelson Bay River Mine has sat mothballed for over a decade, with over 90,000 metres cubed of acid-producing waste rock sitting at surface in breach of its permits, and a court decision declaring it's aboveground disposable, unlawful. Catalina, which is formerly Shree, as I said, also said in its announcement that it expects that an \$800,000 rehabilitation security deposit would be released to them by the Tasmanian government. Minister, have you approved the transfer of the mine lease at Nelson Bay to Newcam Metals, and what is the current estimated cost of rehabilitation of the Nelson Bay mine, that is including the relocation of the 90,000-metre cubed of acid-generating waste rock?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks Ms Badger. Mr Morton?

Mr MORTON - Can I again take that and just come back to that if I can, Minister?

Ms BADGER - Just double checking for the record, that's happy to be taken on notice?

Mr MORTON - I think I can come back in this session if that's okay, just give me a moment.

Ms BADGER - That's quite alright. Look, my second question is around that as well. I'm just wondering why there is a discrepancy between the revised \$1.2-million rehabilitation security deposit and the \$820,000 that Catalina claims is to be released, and whether Catalina already had the increased \$460,000 released or perhaps forgiven?

Mr MORTON - Minister, I'll probably just start by making a general comment. You've asked a very specific question about - quite a detailed question about a security deposit with regards to a specific company. I mean, probably the comment I'd start with is that security deposits are a requirement under the act, and the Minister sets them, but I mean they're quite operational things. So MRT, and effectively what we're looking at is the amount of disturbance, so we're effectively setting the security deposit on what the amount of disturbance is in the event that the company abandons the site and the Crown has to make good the site. Under the act, there are requirements that we can we can basically set the security deposit as we need. We can up it or reduce it. You're asking some quite specific questions around whether statutory decisions have been made to return money, and I can check that, but I'm not sure if you we normally comment on that detail about specific decisions at company level.

Ms BADGER - Very happy for you to take on notice from the MRT's perspective in terms of the release of any of those funds.

CHAIR - Minister, are you happy with that to go on notice?

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Mr ELLIS - Yes, we'll see what we can provide. We'll double check what we can provide.

Ms BADGER - I'll write it out on notice, and if you can come back in this session that's absolutely fine. Yep. Thank you.

CHAIR - Minister, I just wanted to just acknowledge that it's a difficult time for many of our major industrials buffeted by global headwinds. We've got a couple of those examples that I can think of, but unlike our GBEs, major industrial are not taxpayer-funded, so their profits are not returned to the taxpayer. Which begs the question why the taxpayer should be subsidising their losses. Particularly when we have a budget crisis which is requiring the Treasurer to slash funding to our public services? Noting in this current financial year almost \$50 million of taxpayer money has been handed out to two of our major industrials by the government. What provisions are in the Budget for more handouts or bailouts for these large companies, and what sort of business case is prepared or cost benefit analysis is prepared, in advance of each bailout, and what role do your portfolios have in this process?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Chair. Look, seeing as we're going on to industry and resources, we've brought Mr Michael Morgridge to the table, who's Deputy Secretary, Department of State Growth. What do you call your area, markets?

Mr MOGRIDGE - Economic development.

Mr ELLIS - Economic development, excellent, and we'll bring anyone else that we need to the table as well, Chair, but noting other members may wish to continue on with mining and forestry, too.

So, probably firstly in terms of the Budget, this \$7 million provision, as it relates to strategic support for industrials, in this particular case, is the offer that's been made to Nyrstar, as part of the broader package between the Tasmanian state government, the South Australian state government and the federal government to support the twin plants here at Hobart, and also at Port Pirie. So, for Tasmania, that will bring our total financial support for the Hobart Zinc Works up to \$30 million as part of this broader support package, which is a small portion of the overall funding that's come through from the federal government and the South Australian state government as well. So, you're not quite right to say that, you know, their profits aren't taxed because, of course, profits are taxed. Now, there's also a range of other taxes that they pay in terms of, you know, payroll tax; they pay substantial payments to our GBEs and you know, the broader supply chains, which they which they support. So, in the Tasmanian context, we do want our private industries to stand on their own two feet and to be profitable businesses. Now, what we've seen nationally and globally, particularly with the concerns around predatory pricing in the mineral supply chain -

CHAIR - Sure.

Mr ELLIS - is that there may not be a level playing field. We're also seeing a once-in-a-generation global collapse of an industrial empire, in the case of the GFG Alliance, which is impacted the Whyalla steelworks, a whole range of British steelworks, and other major industrial businesses. In the Tasmanian context that's impacted our impacted TEMCO, the Liberty Bell Bay manganese smelter. And so we're seeing at once, this broad global challenge, that's being seen in basically all industrial businesses - all smelters, sorry, in Australia, that

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have seen significant bailouts from the federal government, in aluminium, in copper, lead, zinc, a range of other areas - manganese - then there's also the specifics with Liberty Bell Bay, too. So, it's something that we need to be very conscious of. We're living through very strange times, a globe that is more uncertain and more dangerous, and sovereign industrial capability is the key bedrock of countries being able to withstand global insecurity and geopolitical conflict.

CHAIR - Yes, I, understand that, but, I suppose, and back to my question, it was really around how do you make these choices? I mean, we're talking about lots of taxpayer money, taxpayer dollars going into this. So, how do you identify and, you know, like come up with the business case? I'd like, kind of understand that process within your department.

Mr ELLIS - Absolutely. They're really hard choices, and in many - you know, there are no easy answers in this space because we would prefer taxpayer dollars to be spent on essential services, obviously, but there are some real challenges with these major industrials and in the Tasmanian economic context, they are disproportionately large. So our four major industrials use 50 per cent of our electricity networks. That's quite unusual as well, for a small state with a small economy, to be so reliant on - in that case for businesses in the energy market, and, you know, if you broaden it out, some major other industrials. What I might do is pass to Mr Mogridge, to talk through some of the modelling work that we do to, kind of compare the costs and benefits and the different ways that they, these businesses support the economy, and how we weigh up some of these difficult choices.

CHAIR - That would be great.

Mr MOGRIDGE - Through you, minister, I think the minister summarised it very well. I guess the additional context that I would add is in relation to the support that's provided through the major industrial steering committee, which consists of secretaries of State Growth, Treasury, and Department of Premier and Cabinet, and also the major industrial Cabinet committee. These forums are the opportunity that the minister referred to, through which detailed analysis can be undertaken around the broader macroeconomic implications and benefits of these businesses. The minister's referred to energy usage, but also understanding the employment profile in relation to those businesses, understanding the economic benefits for their regions, understanding the regions themselves and the importance of those businesses in those areas, and also the durability of those businesses to the economy. Are they likely to endure difficult economic environments, and so on.

What's laid on top of that is a broader context around the critical minerals implications, the capacity for us to seek to work with the Commonwealth Government in relation to these businesses. There's a whole host of considerations that go into the understanding of the government in how we turn our mind to the supports that might be available to a particular [inaudible].

CHAIR - Thank you, in the interest of time, we might go on.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, we've talked about exploration support and critical minerals. What else can the government provide to help increase and drive mining investment in Tasmania?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Mining remains one of Tasmania's most important industries, supporting thousands of jobs, particularly in regional communities and generating

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billions of dollars in economic activity and exports every year. Tasmania is endowed with worldclass mineral resources including tin, tungsten, copper, gold, nickel, rare earths and other critical minerals and strategic materials that are increasingly important to the global economy.

I'm today pleased to announce the release of the Tasmanian Minerals Investment Opportunity Guide, a new resource designed to connect investors with a pipeline of investor-ready mining projects across the state. The guide showcases a range of opportunities, including the Heemskirk tin project, the Firetower tungsten and gold project, the Montezuma silver and antimony project, the Avebury nickel mine, and the ABx Group's Deep Leads rare earth project. Importantly, this guide builds on the work we're already doing through our critical mineral strategy to attract investments, support exploration and strengthen Tasmania's position as a supplier of the minerals the world needs.

The government continues to support exploration through initiatives such as the exploration drilling grants initiative, which is helping unlock new mineral discoveries and attract private sector investment into Tasmania. We're also seeing strong interest in the sector more broadly. Mining and resources projects make up one of the largest components of the government's investment pipeline, reflecting growing confidence in Tasmania as a destination for long-term investment. Tasmania offers investors a compelling proposition, worldclass mineral resources, a skilled workforce, established infrastructure, renewable energy advantages and a stable, well-regulated jurisdiction with great local members.

As global demand for critical and other minerals continue to grow, Tasmania is well placed to play an increasingly important role. Our focus is on ensuring more exploration, more investment, more processing and, ultimately, more jobs for Tasmanians.

Dr BROAD - Minister, can you explain the significant reductions in this year's Budget and even bigger reductions across the forward Estimates for pretty much all your output groups in the Budget under this ministry, so Output Group 1 - Industry and Business and Output Group 4 - Regular Resources Policy and Regulatory Services?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Broad, obviously there's a range of different grants processes that are coming offline as part of the forward Estimates. Also, as has been noted ad nauseam probably by the Department of State Growth, their provisional allocations in terms of the out years, so the department will no longer be in existence and will be in a different structure, so in the future out years, we'll be able to get a better picture in the next budget. I'll pass to the department secretary if you want to talk through some other matters there.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister, we have a significant machinery of government change to undertake with the Department of State Growth. That will see the current department substantially change, becoming Building Tasmania and a whole range of functions moving out, including economic development and ReCFIT moving out. The machinery-of-government change, as announced by the Premier, at the state of the state, required some significant operational efficiencies and FTE reductions. That all landed in the middle of the Budget development, so we've reflected those operational efficiencies into provisional allocations through the budget papers. We would expect that as we work through the machinery-of-government change, we'll understand how they actually come to fruition and where they would apply. I suspect some of those would move from what's in the budget papers and then things might appear quite differently within the next 12 months.

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Dr BROAD - Can we just get specific then: forest policy reduces from 2.3 million in this year's budget down to 629,000 in the 2029-2030 year. Where are they moving to? Why is that budget allocation - this year's budget is half what it was last year, and it's going to reduce, you know, to - I don't know, a quick estimate, a fourth, about a quarter of the current budget. How do you explain, if you can use that line item as a way of explaining the changes?

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister, again, I would repeat the previous answer I gave, that at the moment there are a number of operational efficiencies that are just provisional allocations within the budget papers. Timing of the machinery-of-government change fell in the middle of basically the last few months of finalising the budget, so we didn't have time to actually think - work our way through all the operational efficiencies and how they will come to fruition. Some items within the budget papers are flow-through funding, so we didn't have time to look at that in any detail. Any operational efficiency allocations beyond the current budget year and even, to an extent, inclusive of the current budget year, are provisional allocations, and we will need to work through all those and understand how they will actually apply through this current year. It's going to take us six to 12 months to bed down all the machinery-of-government changes. So we will need to work through all that. At the moment they are simply provisional, and there is no specific answer to that question.

Mr ELLIS - I will just pass to Ms Pinto as well, for some specifics on the forest policy.

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister, and through you, I won't go over the key points that the acting secretary has referred to; they're accurate in terms of treatments that have occurred across output groups. What I will add is additional information for the benefit of the committee and the honourable member - is a bit of detail about fixed-term initiatives that are dropping off. That is often what occurs in an output group and yes, I can appreciate it can sometimes be hard to understand what's sitting in there. I will just talk you through the three key ones that are treated through that output group.

In the 2025-2026 Budget year, which occurred late last year, there was \$650,000 towards the forestry future growth and innovation pathway: that expires in this current financial year. So that's one drop-off; we also have what the minister referred a bit earlier to, the On-Island Processing Program, which has been really successful. There's funding in the current financial year of 3.284 million and that funding then drops down to just over 1000,000: 1,000,034 in 2026-2027, and then that specific programs funding ceases then from 2027-2028. Then we also have a smaller sum, but a sum of 192,000 that is currently in this current year for the support of the Tasmanian Timber Promotion Board, and that is in this year and then the following two Estimates. By 2028-2029 all of the fixed-term initiatives have progressively dropped off. That's just a bit more detail as to those changes in that output group. Thank you.

Dr BROAD - So could you give a similar explanation of these terminating projects and programs in the mineral resources line item? Is there also some terminating projects and programs in 4.2?

Ms PINTO - Yes. Through you, minister, yes, that is correct. There is - and I will check with my colleague, I think there is a standing funding allocation for rehabilitation trust that the government allocated some additional funding, referred to as bolstering the rehabilitation trust. That is 100,000 in this current year and continues as another 100,000 in 2026-2027 and then that drops off. We've been talking a lot today at the table about the critically-important Critical Minerals Strategy that in this current financial year has 1.35 million and that same sum

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continues into 2026-2027, and then that fixed-term initiative's funding ceases. We also have the - we've had a lot of discussion today about exploration and the merits of that and the importance of that. We have a program that has been a long-standing program, the Exploration Drilling Grants Initiative that is currently, in this financial year, 850,000 and then that progressively drops down 575,000 in 2026-27 and then drops to 375,000 and 2027-28. I've got only two more, so I will keep going, with the grace of the committee.

We then also have an initiative which is really important around ensuring we market Tasmania. I make note that there's an international standard of recognition, the Fraser report. I will check with my colleague if I've titled that correctly. I think we've moved, minister, from 75th to 17th as a part of that rating; excuse me if I've got that wrong. A really important part of that is to market Tasmania's potential and we have funding in the current financial year of 250,000 and then that continues that funding profile every year through the Estimates period. The very last support for mining exploration and quarrying sectors, there is some funding of 200,000 that ceases this current financial year that then drops off. You will see there's quite a bit of movement in those fixed-term initiatives, and I will reiterate the acting secretary's earlier comment that there are also provisional allocations that are occurring across that output group.

Ms BADGER - I've just got some questions around the Office of the Coordinator-General and the expressions-of-interest process for tourism developments.

Mr ELLIS - Can we just get the DSG staff up to the table? And we've just got a response on Catalina.

Ms BADGER - Before you do, can I just double check that - the minister didn't answer the first part of that question, which was to you, and that's whether you had approved the transfer of the Nelson Bay River lease to Newcam metals or not?

Mr MORTON - Thank you, minister, and through you, I think Catalina made a number of public statements recently. I can confirm that there's been no sale and no transfer, no application for transfer. Catalina owns and continues to be responsible for the mining lease. They - I think you said before that they made a public comment about return of the bond or the security deposit. There's been no request made for that to occur. I note that it's the minister who makes decisions on whether to return the bond or not, not the company.

MRT recently advised Catalina that we would increase the security deposit for the site from 800 to 1.2 million. They've accepted that. That figure, the 1.2 million, reflects, you know, the full cost of the clean-up should the Crown need to do that to prevent environmental legacies, but probably a key point I'd make is in the theoretical event that Catalina does apply for a transfer and that occurs, then the new owner will need to replace the bond. We will always hold the bond there, and the bond only gets returned at the point where they've rehabilitated the site to our satisfaction and then it gets returned as part of the close-out.

Ms BADGER - Absolutely. Can I just confirm one part on that? Has that increase, the \$460,000 increase, come to MRT or no?

Mr MORTON - I think it has been requested and it's being read through at the moment.

Ms BADGER - It has been requested, but it's in the process? Okay. Thank you so much. Appreciate that you could come back to us with that today. The EOI process -

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Mr ELLIS - I will just quickly do some introductions if it works.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr ELLIS - I've got Dennis Hendriks, Acting Coordinator-General, and we've got Andrew Crane, who's project director, Office of the Coordinator-General, and world expert on the handfish.

Ms BADGER - I wish I had a handfish question.

CHAIR - Throw one in.

Mr ELLIS - He won't be taking any questions on handfish. He might do, I don't know.

Ms BADGER - Shame. All right, well, we will stick to the EOIs. I'm wondering if we could please get some advice on how many EOIs have been assessed by the assessment panel in the last 12 months and how many have been, you know, approved to progress, and in addition, how many have been approved to progress and have commenced the RAA process in the last 12 months?

Mr HENDRIKS - So, through the minister, in terms of just recent proposals, there was one new proposal received into the tourism EOI process in the 2024-25 financial year, with the outcome of the panels consideration being finalised in this financial year and then one new proposal has been received in this financial year to date, and it's currently under consideration.

Ms BADGER - The EOI Assessment panel wrote to the proponent for the Lake Malbena proposal, Daniel Hackett, assessing the viability of his business, which of course is still in a court-ordered liquidation: What was the finding of the EOI assessment panel as to whether that proposal is still viable to progress through the system?

Mr CRANE - Through you, minister. So, a letter from the acting chair of the panel on 29 October 2025 requested the proponent provide clarification on the status of the business entity associated with the proposal and the ability to deliver the proposal. This information was requested for consideration at the panel's December 2025 meeting. The proponent responded on 5 February 2026, that Wild Drake Proprietary Limited, as currently subject to liquidation under the oversight of Mr Adam Johnson, and Mr Johnson had formed the opinion that Wild Drake is solvent and is supporting an application by the project proponent to have the control of the business returned on that basis. This involves a court application, which we understand is expected soon. The panel is awaiting the outcome of that process.

Ms BADGER - Okay, thank you.

CHAIR - Minister, I don't know whether you came up with the name 'machinery of government' and those proposed reforms but-

Mr ELLIS - I stand on the shoulders of giants, unfortunately, Chair. I can't claim responsibility -

CHAIR - Well, to me it sounds very Stalinist actually, you know, like it's very sort of clunky. I can just imagine -

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Mr ELLIS - I've never been described as a Stalinist. Described by many things, but not Stalinist, anyway.

CHAIR - So, I think Dr Broad's question kind of touched on this, but I don't know that we got a specific answer as to where the portfolios of business, industry and resources actually go in these machinery of government changes?

Mr ELLIS - DPAC.

CHAIR - So, they all go to DPAC?

Mr ELLIS - I'll just look to Mr Gregory, with his Stalinist language and-

CHAIR - The name is Stalinist. There's probably another description for these changes actually.

Mr ELLIS - Comrade Gregory.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister. I've never been called that myself, I don't know.

CHAIR - It's not personal.

Mr GREGORY - I haven't taken it that way, Chair. So, in terms of the restructuring of the department - we might use that term -all of the functions related to transport services and infrastructure, strategy and planning remain in what will become Building Tasmania and other functions coming in or all of the project delivery functions from other agencies and all of the functions of Homes Tasmania, that becomes Building Tasmania, all of the other functions that currently sit within Department of State Growth move out.

So, climate change moves to NRE Tasmania. The functions related to creative industries, sport, events and the arts move to join with Tourism Tasmania and Brand Tasmania and the remainder of the functions all move to Department of Premier and Cabinet.

CHAIR - That's interesting because it would be interesting to see how many FTE go to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. So, the former - I think he's still officially secretary - but Craig Limkin is currently the head of your department minister, but has been on very extended leave since it was announced that his own department would be spread to the four winds, if you like, but demolished.

I understand he'll be appointed as head of agency for the new arts creative industries department. Is that correct?

Mr ELLIS - It's outside of my area, but can I also just thank Mr Limkin for the work in the time that we've had together. I have very much appreciated his wise counsel, but I'll just look to Mr Gregory if there's anything you can update on that. It may be more of a question for the Premier and the Head of the State Service, but I'm not sure what we can...

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister, I think that's a question for the Premier and the Head of the State Service. I'm currently acting in the role until 4 July.

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CHAIR - Yes, I understand that. No slight on you. Mr Limkin has been the - you're in an acting capacity, aren't you? Can you take that on notice, Mr Ellis?

Mr ELLIS - I'm happy to follow it up with the Premier and the Head of the State Service.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Jaensch?

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you very much, Chair. With the Office of the Coordinator-General at the table, minister, can you please speak to us about the level of investment activity currently being supported by the Office of the Coordinator-General and what that says about demand for investment in Tasmania at the moment?

Mr ELLIS - I know how excited Mr Hendriks is to talk about this. I'm just going to pass to you, Mr Hendriks, to give us the answer on this one. It's a very good news story.

Mr HENDRIKS - Thanks, minister. It is a very exciting story and there is significant investment being attracted to the state at the moment. We have a pipeline of activity in excess of \$40 billion at the moment. Now, that doesn't mean that all of that activity will actually be generated, but it's a very good indicator as to the level of interest that's there. I do have a breakdown as to what some of that involves. Obviously, there's a lot of confidentiality around various proposals. That includes in excess of 115 projects, 37 in the north, 30 in the north-west, 25 in the south, 23 across the state, so it is spread fairly evenly across the state at the moment.

In terms of where that is, about 10 per cent of that is probably in what we would call concept stage; 58 per cent, which is the majority, is in feasibility stage; 22 per cent in approvals; 2.73 per cent in pre-construction; 5.24 per cent in construction; and the rest in operations. We count investment facilitated effectively in a different bucket, which means that those projects have reached a stage where they are far more certain. Normally, it's a development application, funding agreement, or something like that. We count about \$5 billion worth in that. We've got about \$2 billion of that that's actually moved through to completion. So, it is a very positive story.

In terms of the sectors that that encompasses, we're talking about agriculture and food, obviously AI, infrastructure, and digital tech, energy and resources, knowledge-based shared service centres, manufacturing, maritime and space, property development, and of course the visitor economy. It is a very positive story and we're quite excited about what's coming.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you.

CHAIR - Dr Broad.

Dr BROAD - Talking about the Wood Encouragement Policy. The policy states that during construction tendering, alternative design proposals which reduce the amount of wood used should only be accepted if they represent proven value for money or where they enhance the quality, functionality, technical aspects, or building performance such as cost efficiency over the life of the building. With many large government projects over the short term, including the Macquarie Point Stadium, how will the minister determine that project proponents will maximise the use of Tasmanian wood and what metrics are being used?

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Mr ELLIS - A big shout out to my predecessor, Guy Barnett, and of course Launceston [inaudible], who have promoted the Wooden Encouragement Policy very well over many years. I will look to the Department of State Growth to talk through some of the opportunities here.

Ms PINTO - I might just start by making a comment that there's an economic and social benefits test that is applied through procurements and that typically has a weighting of 30 per cent in competitive procurements. The intention there is to ensure that what we're doing is any kind of procurement delivers back into our economy. The intention is to ensure that wherever possible what we are looking to do is to provide that welcome opportunity. It's not just about - the policy that was seeking to ensure we supported the wood and timber industry is broader and covers all sectors of our economy to ensure that Tasmanian businesses have that opportunity presented to them.

Dr RUSSELL - Just to add to that? We're just currently looking into working with Treasury on how we can potentially strengthen some of those procurement provisions within the Treasurer's instructions around the application -

CHAIR - I'm finding it very difficult to hear. I just wonder if you could speak up a little? Thanks.

Dr RUSSELL - Sorry. Yes, we're just currently working with Treasury at an officer-level to work through any other issues we can do to strengthen that policy in the context of the Treasurer's instruction and the application of that policy.

Mr ELLIS - As mining minister, I've of course been working hard on a gravel encouragement policy for the surface of the stadium, but I've thus far been unsuccessful through the Cabinet process, Chair.

CHAIR - Dr Broad.

Dr BROAD - So, is the Mac Point Stadium still to have a wooden structure holding up the roof?

Mr ELLIS - Did have MPDC and relevant officials here previously, so I just looked to the secretary, if there's anything you want to add now? Or perhaps it's one for previous portfolios.

Mr GREGORY - Yeah, through you, Minister. The specifics of the design are really something to discuss with Mac Point Development Corporation. But given the scale of the roof, it is not a purely a wooden structure; it's a steel structure with wooden components on it. There's a significant amount of wood in that project, but the roof structure is a steel and wood composite structure.

Dr BROAD - Thank you. So you're just talking about the bilateral agreement with the federal government. If the bilateral agreement isn't approved by 1 July 2027, what is your plan B?

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Mr ELLIS - So we're working through the bilateral process at the moment, and we're very keen to deliver on that. Unlike your statements last year, I don't think the end of native forestry is inevitable, Dr Broad. I think that's a statement that you've certainly lived to regret -

Dr BROAD - I didn't say that, so that's okay.

Mr ELLIS - Well it's on the *Hansard*, Dr Broad.

CHAIR - Through the Chair.

Dr BROAD - I mean, he's verballing me. Seriously.

Mr ELLIS - You said it, Dr Broad. Not me.

Dr BROAD - I did not.

CHAIR - Continue, minister.

Mr ELLIS - So we're keen to deliver on the bilateral process, as Ms Pinto's mentioned, the gazettele of that notice will be coming out very, very shortly. That's an encouraging step forward in securing \$8.5 million in the federal budget to support Tasmania specifically and the other states with other funding to deliver a similar process. It has been encouraging and welcome, the fact that we have really been recognised as having a nation-leading forest practices system has been very encouraging. We're working full steam towards delivering that outcome for industry and it's important that we deliver that certainty, and I'll look to Ms Pinto if there's anything further than that.

Ms PINTO - Thank you and through you, Minister. With the grace of the committee, I might just make one further comment in relation to the member's prior question. A colleague has just also clarified in regards to the wood encouragement policy that is embedded in the procurement Treasurer's instructions, so just in reference to your earlier question, so thank you.

In relation to this question that you have raised, which is extremely important, so thank you for the question and it's a good opportunity to be able to put on the record, particularly for industry, and I note that we have really close engagement with industry and the minister had a round table with industry - I think it may well have been April of this year - and we're looking to do that again in the next couple of weeks, which will involve representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and I won't do the long one, DCCEE, thank you.

In answer to your question, we are actively - and as I noted, there is a notice of intent that will be gazetted to proceed down a path of a bilateral agreement. We have also have other avenues under the *EPBC Act* to facilitate an industry and jurisdiction to be able to operate under that act. Strategic assessment pathway is another pathway. We are actively again engaged at a Commonwealth level to have that as a contingency pathway if needed. But we are, I put on the record again, the intention here is that we move to accreditation through a bilateral agreement, and I also note that the minister referred to the funding committed by the federal government of \$8.5 million, that will come through a form of a federation funding agreement. We are yet, as to jurisdictions, to negotiate and finalise that, but the timing of that is in the immediate term, and normally those forms of agreement have mutually agreed milestones or performance

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outcomes attached to them. This holds both parties to account. That's a really important part that we would be seeking to do on behalf of our jurisdiction to ensure that both parties are working to those timeframes to deliver an outcome for our industry.

CHAIR - Last question.

Dr BROAD - As the industry works with both federal and state governments on these new reforms, there are some industry participants who are also wanting certainty by having their public forest estate contracts signed. Have you given instructions to the public forest manager, STT, to get on with the job and get these contracts for native and plantation resources signed to provide the confidence and certainty these participants would like?

Mr ELLIS - I think you'd been sitting at the table for the last two hours and 20 minutes, Dr Broad, and we've covered this extensively. I don't know if there's anything further you want me to add in particular on this, but we're looking to do that so we can deliver certainty for industry in a commercial sense and in a regional sense as well.

Dr BROAD - It's about whether you've given instructions.

Mr ELLIS - Oh, we made an election commitment on it. We've been working diligently to deliver that.

Dr BROAD - It's quite a specific-

CHAIR - Ms Badger.

Dr BROAD - He didn't answer the specifics, has he given STT instructions?

CHAIR - I don't think he's going to answer it.

Mr ELLIS - Well, we continue to work with STT to deliver it. They're committed to delivering it. We're working towards that.

CHAIR - Ms Badger.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. My question is again to the Office of the Coordinator-General. I'm wondering if you could please advise us the total number of AI and data facilities that you're currently working with for Tasmania and, if possible, providing a rough estimate of their power consumption?

Mr HENDRIKS - Thanks, and through the minister. It's a little bit difficult because it's actually very much a moving feast. Like, I would say there's less than 10 that we're talking to at the moment. I'd also say that a number of those aren't really in the realm of Firmus. They're traditional data centres, some of them are quite small, and I'd also say that there is no one even close to where it's progressed as where Firmus are. I would argue that some of them are really almost enquiries at this point, that are showing interest in the state.

There is all sorts of level of scale there, but a lot of that is like - the conversations haven't progressed, I suppose, to the point where there's been any conversation about what's even

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possible in regard to availability of energy and pathways and all of that. It's sort of much, much earlier stage compared to where we are with Firmus.

Ms BADGER - Absolutely, yes. So, just to clarify, you'd say under 10 and Firmus would be the biggest?

Mr HENDRIKS - Oh, by far.

Ms BADGER - I mean, they're obviously already here and underway, so that's very fair. Thank you.

Back onto mining. Minister, Bluestone is progressing its assessment of the paste fills tailing storage at the Renison mine. MMG has recently announced investigating alternatives to the unnecessary flooding of rainforest at McKinney Creek in Takayna. Minister, do you agree that these two companies are now progressing 21st-century tailings storage technologies and will you join us in thanking the Bob Brown Foundation and the thousands of volunteers who help make this happen?

Mr JAENSCH - Might be a short conversation.

Mr ELLIS - So, it is going to shock you when I say no, I won't.

Ms BADGER - They're doing your job for you, minister. They're bringing mining into the 21st century.

Mr ELLIS - Yeah, yeah, but look, the tailing storage is well known. There's tailings at Renison, there are two tailings dams at Rosebery, there are tailings dams in a whole range of different other locations. Tailing storage facilities continue to be built at some of the most modern, high-technology mines in the world. It's the nature of the tailings resource that, indeed, in Tasmania, we actually see companies looking at tailings as a future resource. They come back, they mine the tailings and, with modern technology, extract more out.

Indeed, there are probably some older mines - there's a view among the old timers that there's more resource in the tailings than they're actually extracted in the plant. Tailings storage facilities, well known technology, well known kind of methodology. Paste fill does of course have its particular applications, and depending on the type of the mine, age of the mine, there are some opportunities that are available to different miners and different methodologies.

So, you know, work still ongoing. MMG noted that they're still looking at the South Marion Oaks site. They're doing their due diligence to, broadly speaking, make sure that there is a future for the mine, and they need somewhere to store the tailings, so they can continue, and they continue to discover more - which is quite extraordinary for a mine that's 90-years old, or nearly - that the more they look, the more they're continuing to find them some great profitability announcements, too. I'll pass to Mr Morton, if there's anything that you want to sort of add, in particular.

Mr MORTON - No, no further comment, Minister.

Ms BADGER - Alright, the department doesn't want to thank the Bob Brown Foundation. Just checking.

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CHAIR - I'll go to Ms Johnston -

Mr ELLIS - Specifically on the technical things, by the sound of it.

CHAIR - and welcome Ms Johnston.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you Chair, coming from the other committee. Minister, the Tasmanian Development Board oversees roughly \$60 million in grants and loans, and the most recent corporate plan published on its website ran from 2021 - 2024. No more recent plan appears on their website. No quality activity reports have been published on the website since September 2025. Section 15(A) of the *Tasmanian Development Act 1983*, requires the board to prepare a corporate plan covering at least three financial years, including a statement of corporate intent.

Minister, can you confirm whether a corporate plan does in fact exist, a current corporate plan does in fact exist, and if so, why is it not being published, and if one has not been prepared, is the board then not in breach of obligations under section 15A?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Ms Johnson. I'll pass to the Acting Secretary of State Growth. Do I call you the CEO of the Tasmanian Development Board, in this context as well? Acting CEO?

Mr GREGORY - Yes, correct. Yes, thank you, Minister, and through you. I can advise that there is a new corporate plan in draft at the moment.

Ms JOHNSTON - In draft at the moment. The process under the act is that the board must submit a draft to the minister, and Treasurer, at least 90 days before it takes effect, and the minister must approve a compliant plan at least 30 days, for a tax effect. At what point are we, has the draft been submitted to the minister, or is it still underway?

Mr GREGORY - I would have to check on that, Minister.

CHAIR - Do you want that taken on notice?

Ms JOHNSTON - Are you able to take that on notice, in terms of when that will be provided?

CHAIR - You're good with that, minister?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, for sure. Probably just to note as well, I think there's some bigger picture with the TDR board. There are some good opportunities for legislative reform to help the TDR board really drive some major economic opportunities in this state. We will have more to say on that in terms of legislation and the way that it lines up with our economic development, and diversification investment strategy, but, certainly we imagine that the future of the TDR board is actually delivering more than it is currently, and providing some of the tools and the levers to really help grow opportunities in our state.

Ms JOHNSTON - Does it concern you, minister, that it appears that the TD - that Tasmanian Development Board has been operating for the last two years without a strategic road map, in that it hasn't had a corporate plan? The last one expired in 2024, you would think that a corporate plan would be developed before the expiry of the current one. Does it concern

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you that they've been operating, and investing money - a significant pool of money in public funds - without a strategic road map?

Mr ELLIS - Obviously, they continue to operate on the basis of the existing one, and we're working through a new one, but I don't know if the secretary has got anything further to add.

Mr GREGORY - Minister, through you, just to add that I've just had confirmed that the draft has been signed off within the department today and will be forwarded to both the treasurer and the minister very shortly.

CHAIR - Minister, I just wanted to get back, just a fairly brief question, because I know, we're getting down into the final half hour, and I just - it's in relation to industry subsidies, again. I was interested to read in the budget paper 2, chapter 4, page 63: funding's been provided to TasNetworks for the government's policy to shield existing direct transmission connected customers from the transmission cost impacts of Marinus Link, and the north west transmission thing.

Mr ELLIS - Transmission developments, yes.

CHAIR - Development, thank you. Direct-connected customers are the major industrials which fall under your portfolio. This funding commences in this budget at \$1.4 million, goes to \$3.7 million next year, \$4.5 million the next year, and \$6.5 million the following year. Can you indicate why these taxpayer funds are going to the major industrials when Marinus Link hasn't even been built yet, and what other taxpayer funded subsidies, rebates or exemptions are our major industrials receiving from the state government?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Chair. Obviously, it more aligns with the Energy portfolio, but we do have a lot of the relevant departmental officials here with us today. I'll just look to the Acting Secretary in terms of guidance on what we might be able to provide at the table.

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister: just for the benefit of the Committee, I am the Deputy Secretary across Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania and Resources, so I do have that information available for the benefit of the committee in your question.

The Marinus Link project, which includes both the undersea cable and the North West Transmission Development Project component, as you've noted, reached a financial investment decision last year - and that decision occurred during what was then a caretaker period. Just prior to that, the government made a policy decision.

As a part of that decision, consideration of consumer impacts was one of the eight criteria. For the benefit of the committee, the Financial Investment Decision Assessment Report is available online publicly and it outlines those eight criteria, and one of them was consumer impacts. This particular group of consumers, being direct connected to the transmission system consumers, were quite significantly impacted by the costs associated. Other consumer groups were not; they were within a reasonable impact level, and that is in majority due to what had been negotiated through the process.

So, deeply concessional funding for both the Marinus Link and the North West Transmission Development Project brought down those loan costs as well as the negotiation of

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the share between Tasmania and Victoria. For all other consumers, it was fair and reasonable, but for Direct Connect customers it was very significant. I'm talking - and excuse me, this is off memory - but we're talking as a collective group, about \$25-30 million a year impact.

CHAIR - Why are taxpayer funds shelled out for this?

Ms PINTO - So, the government made a policy commitment that those Direct-Connect consumers for the net real impact would receive an offset. The Department of Treasury and Finance has been working very closely with TasNetworks to understand what those cost impacts would be over the forward Estimates, and there are some cost impacts that occur in this immediate revenue period for TasNetworks as a network service provider that will impact those individuals. And the mechanism that has been determined by the Department of Treasury and Finance with TasNetworks is to have a, - I'm going to use those colleagues of mine in Treasury and Finance - I think the correct term is like a community service obligation payment will be made to TasNetworks, to ensure that those offsets are honoured.

Mr ELLIS - As you can imagine, Chair, Marinus and North West Transmission Developments deliver, you know, in excess of \$400 million a year back to the Tasmanian taxpayer. And there are some impacts, but with a transfer pricing mechanism, you get the significant benefit of the uplift in revenue and then you help shield people that are affected, in this case the major industrials, to a smaller degree.

CHAIR - Well, it just seems like a pipeline of money, taxpayers' money, to Marinus. That's what I see, but we'll go to Mr Jaensch.

Mr ELLIS - It's more a pipeline of money from Marinus to the taxpayer and then, you know, we distribute a small percentage of that.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you, Chair. Minister, Tasmania's home to some internationally competitive advanced manufacturing enterprises, many of them up on the north-west coast, where we live. Can you update the committee on how the government is helping local manufacturers to adopt new technologies and improve their productivity and build new opportunities here?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Jaensch. Manufacturing remains one of Tasmania's most important industries, employing thousands of Tasmanians and contributing billions of dollars to our economy each year.

If Tasmania is going to continue growing wages, productivity and exports, we need to ensure our manufacturers remain globally competitive. That means helping business adopt new technologies, improve productivity and access new markets. That is exactly why the government recently supported nine Tasmanian manufacturers to participate in an Insights into Excellent Industry Tour alongside Australian Manufacturing Week in Brisbane. Businesses including Elphinstone, AQ1 Systems, Casting Tasmania, Bulk Nutrients, Hemp Harvests and others were able to gain firsthand exposure to emerging technologies including robotics, automation, advanced manufacturing systems and AI-enabled production processes.

The tour is about helping Tasmanian businesses build new networks, learn from industry leaders and identify practical opportunities to improve their operations and competitiveness. More broadly, the government continues to support manufacturing through our Advanced

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Manufacturing Action Plan, the Industry Capability Network, our defence industry initiatives and the investment attraction activities that help create opportunities for local suppliers and manufacturers.

We're also seeing strong interest in advanced manufacturing through the Office of Coordinator-General's investment pipeline, with new opportunities emerging in defence, maritime industries, critical minerals processing, food production and advanced technologies.

Tasmanian manufacturers have a strong reputation for innovation and quality. Our role is to ensure they have the tools, skills and opportunities they need to continue competing successfully in national and international markets, because when manufacturing succeeds, Tasmania succeeds.

Dr BROAD - I would like to draw your attention to the government's plan to sell Wilkinsons Point to the LK Group. On Tuesday, the minister, Mr Duigan, told the Legislative Council Committee A that he had not received a request to declare Wilkinsons Point surplus land from you as minister, and it had not been declared surplus land under the relevant legislation. He confirmed that this had to occur before the land could be sold.

Given the Premier announced that he had reached an agreement with the LK Group in February last year, how do you explain the fact that land hasn't been designated surplus land?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Dr Broad. The Tasmanian Government remains committed to partnering with private enterprise to unlock investment, create jobs and drive economic growth. Government's considering a proposal to redevelop Wilkinsons Point, which would include the sale of Crown land. No Crown land at Wilkinsons Point has been sold to date. The parties have not yet agreed on a masterplan for the site, which is required before settling the land available to be sold or the purchase price. As such, no binding sale agreement is in place and nothing's progressed beyond the first step of the land sale process.

However, if the sale was to proceed, the current proposal to develop a multi-use retail precinct, a family resort and a hotel complex is expected to create jobs during construction and ongoing phases and deliver new opportunities for local suppliers.

The government's negotiations on the sale of the land are focusing on protecting the interests of the Crown. This includes retaining ownership of MyState Bank Arena; retaining foreshore land for transfer back to Glenorchy Council; ensuring sufficient Crown land remains for the current and future needs of the arena, including for public access and amenity; future-proofing transport corridors, for example, for potential widening of the Brooker Highway and upgrades to Lloyd Road; ensuring that only reasonable and necessary costs to activate Wilkinsons Point are incurred by government, for example, land decontamination, flood inundation and water, sewerage and energy infrastructure.

Dr BROAD - Sorry, you didn't go anywhere near answering the question. Why haven't you sought for this land to be declared surplus land?

Mr ELLIS - Because we're currently still in negotiations. I'll pass to the Acting Secretary of State Growth.

Mr GREGORY - Thank you, minister, and through you: I think the simple answer to that is we are some way away from having a formal agreement to dispose of the land, but any

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agreement to dispose of the land would be subject to a range of conditions, including the land being declared surplus to requirements and having a reserve value set by the Valuer-General.

Dr BROAD - So, minister, have you received any advice about seeking the declaration of Wilkinsons Point as surplus land?

Mr ELLIS - I think we mentioned we're still in negotiations, but I'll pass to the Acting Secretary of State Growth.

Mr GREGORY - Minister, through you: no, we haven't made a request of the minister at this stage.

Dr BROAD - Are you considering the declaration of surplus land? How long does this process take? Is it just a tick-and-flick exercise, or is there a whole process to go through?

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister: there is a process to go through. It doesn't take months. It is a matter of providing relevant advice to the minister to make that declaration, and we would seek to have the minister make that declaration at a time closer to having a formalised agreement in place.

Dr BROAD - Does that process also take into account evaluation of the land?

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister: the declaration of the land as surplus is separate to the valuation put on the land. Crown land that is sold must be sold at the value, at least the value, set by the Valuer-General as a reserve price determination.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, I want to ask a question about the announcement that you made earlier of the federal government planning to gazette its notice of intent, I think on 9 June, to enter into a bilateral agreement with the state, and specifically the Forest Practices Authority, to accredit forest activity under the new federal environment laws.

You've answered quite a few questions about what's been going on behind the scenes with the Commonwealth in terms of getting to this position that you're entering into the agreement. Does gazetting this notice of intent mean that the terms you've negotiated with the Commonwealth Government are set? Will the public be able to comment on the terms of the agreement? When do you anticipate the agreement will be finalised?

Ms PINTO - In answer to that question, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* there is a requirement that the Commonwealth has to gazette a notice of intent to enter into a bilateral agreement. That is purely all that is occurring at this point in time. The substance of that agreement has not been developed. Also in accordance with that act, there is an obligation for a consultation period that must be adhered to, so there will be an opportunity for that to be undertaken, but this is all future activity that will need to occur in accordance with that federal legislation.

Dr WOODRUFF - Through you, minister: at the moment, you don't understand when the agreement is anticipated to be finalised - what the timeline for the end date would be?

Ms PINTO - The terms of that bilateral agreement haven't been set as yet, no.

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Dr WOODRUFF - Okay, thank you. Minister, of course, it's the position of the Greens that native forest logging should end entirely. That's not news to you. We're concerned to hear how the agreement is being progressed with the Commonwealth Government because, with respect to people in the room, we and a lot of the community don't have confidence in the Forest Practices Authority, as it stands, to protect threatened species and forest systems.

In Tasmania, at the moment, a Forest Practices officer can sign off on a Forest Practices plan for a coupe that they have an interest in logging. We have the Forest Practices Authority being taken to court for failing to properly protect swift parrot habitat. We've heard earlier about potential breaches of a Forest Practices Plan which potentially resulted in giant trees being logged.

The community doesn't have confidence in the forest practices protection system and there's no capacity for the Forest Practices Authority to protect threatened and endangered species, as it stands. Do you acknowledge that?

Mr ELLIS - So, there're a range of things that are untrue in that, but I'll just bring Ms Chuter back to the table to provide some more information.

Ms PINTO - I might just make one comment before passing to Ms Chuter. In accordance with the legislation and the agreement between ourselves and the federal government for Tasmania's Regional Forest Agreement, there is a requirement every five years for an independent review of that agreement to be undertaken. And the most recent independent review occurred in this period, the recent period, and was, in accordance with the obligations, was tabled federally in both Houses of Parliament.

I will just make a note that that independent reviewer found that the Tasmanian forest management system, of which the regulator - the Forest Practices Authority is a regulator - is 'a mature and adaptable system supported by a comprehensive forest practices system and a Comprehensive, Adequate, and Representative (CAR) reserve framework'.

So, I'm just acknowledging that an independent reviewer has considered the application and the framework of the system in Tasmania and has made that determination.

Dr WOODRUFF - Well, through you, minister: to that comment, of course that's within the current federal environmental laws, which have been widely understood and, indeed, found to be completely inadequate to protect the environment. That was Graeme Samuel's work. That is why we've got these new laws coming down the line and a federal national Environment Protection Authority, to try and turn things around. It's within that context that the review would be making an assessment. But to Ms Chuter, thank you.

Ms CHUTER - Thank you. Through you, minister, there was quite a lot in your previous question.

Dr WOODRUFF - It's really about: what do you think needs to change in the Forest Practices Authority in order for it to be able to undertake the protection of critically endangered and threatened species. The laws are changing at the federal level because they currently don't work. What are you expecting you're going to have to change in the FPA to make the FPA work?

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Ms CHUTER - I think the simple answer to that question is, it's unknown. We're currently going through the process to look at the forest management system, which is obviously more than just the forest practices system. It includes the reserves out there as well. To understand how that aligns with the new national reforms and I'm speaking slightly outside my remit here because that project is being led by Department of State Growth, but I can answer from a technical point of view if that's alright with you.

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes.

Ms CHUTER - As we go through that process and noting that new environmental standards are being developed and as we go through that process will understand how the system is aligning. The way the Tasmanian Forest Management System works is it does manage threatened species through the agreed procedures. I can go into detail in that-

Dr WOODRUFF - That's OK.

Ms CHUTER - I think we've done that before, but it is an adaptive management system. It does take account of new information, and the system can adapt to that new information as it becomes available. It's very difficult to answer your question on the alignment because that process is still under work.

Dr WOODRUFF - You expect that there would need to be changes to the agreed procedures because you've been under the RFA and now you're going to be under a new system, so there would need to be some changes. Is this your understanding?

Ms PINTO - We're going through a comprehensive benchmarking exercise, and it is the federal environment minister that is the approving officer under the act to determine, through a bilateral agreement, the accreditation of our system. The benchmarking exercise we are participating in and on behalf of my colleagues in DCCEEW (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water) and DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry), I would make note that it's a very collaborative engaged process we are undertaking with those officials. We are working with them in a discovery exercise of explaining the way that the forest management system works and how that system works against the national environmental standards that I note and the minister made reference to earlier, are still being finalised, so we are going through an iterative process.

At this point in time, we don't have any indications that the system will need to change. That is at this point in time in the exercise. As we go through this, I'm anticipating that the benchmarking exercise that is being undertaken by DCCEEW, may identify areas where our system requires change but at this point in time we have no indication of that.

Dr WOODRUFF - I look forward to doing what we can to point out the deficiencies of the system as it stands and to get as many changes as possible to try and protect critically and threaten endangered species.

CHAIR - We'll go to the next question. Minister, in 2020 your government produced a Green Hydrogen Action Plan to be a significant global supplier of renewable hydrogen for export and domestic use by 2030. The green hydrogen industry, meanwhile, has been massively overhyped and we're seeing projects collapse all over the country. In 2024, your government received \$70 million from the Australian Government towards the \$300 million Tasmanian

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Green Hydrogen Hub project. Can you tell the committee, how much has been spent by your government in addition to the \$70 million from the federal government to develop the Green Hydrogen Hub?

Mr ELLIS - More on the energy space. I will pass to Ms Pinto.

Ms PINTO - The \$70 million funding agreement with the Australian Government was on the basis, so the grant agreement has a commitment from both jurisdictions as to the enabling infrastructure to support the development of the hydrogen industry in Tasmanian, specifically in the Bell Bay region, so at the time that the funding agreement was determined, Tasmania outlined the degree of enabling infrastructure that would need to be established in that region to support the development of a hydrogen industry. I'm talking specifically about ports, I'm talking transmission, I'm talking water infrastructure, land, et cetera.

As a part of determining that \$70 million funding, the Tasmanian Government - and I will need to clarify the exact percentage - I may not have it in front of me - I believe about 23 per cent is the share of the Commonwealth to Tasmania, and that would include then the amount of investment that would be occurring in Tasmania. So, as an example TasNetworks would need to do an upgrade of the George Town substation. That now has gone through a period of development as a part of the regulated asset and would have a certain sum of money associated with that. So, that's the structure of the grant.

In terms of the expenditure that has been undertaken for this grant to date, there was just over \$11 million in funding that had been provided by the Tasmanian Government towards the Green Hydrogen Hub project. In terms of how much has been spent to date, I am just checking my records. I might not have that available with me at the moment, minister. It is in another portfolio and I just don't think I have that exact amount of expenditure to date, but we can provide that.

CHAIR - I'm just curious to know, there's been a theme for many of my questions, but whether any other Tasmanian taxpayer money has been spent on this project? Are you talking about upgrades, upgrades to substations and so forth, like, has that been included?

Ms PINTO - I'm going to check with my colleagues in terms of the - I will check in terms of the \$11 million funding. There was an allocation in a prior budget period for \$11 million, I believe - and I will get that clarified and checked for the record - towards the Tasmanian Green Hydrogen Hub.

CHAIR - Thank you. Because I'm just not, and I'm just wondering, have we managed to - we haven't managed to export any of the green hydrogen?

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister. The intent of the agreement between the Tasmanian Government and the Australian Government is to establish the enabling infrastructure to support an industry. So, its objective is to support the enabling infrastructure to occur that would then bring along a proponent. At the moment we have a provisional proponent that has been confirmed for the Tasmanian Green Hydrogen Hub, which is Bell Bay Powerfuels. We have an agreement between the deed of commitment between the government and Bell Bay Powerfuels. They are in early stages of development but without the enabling infrastructure are not in the position to be able to operate, if you know what I'm saying. So, it's about getting that foundation enabling infrastructure.

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CHAIR - Thank you. Mr Jaensch.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you, Chair. Minister, private forestry is a significant but under-recognised part of Tasmania's overall resources sector. Can you please outline the scale of the private forest estate in Tasmania and the contribution it makes to timber production and the state's economy?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you. Mr Jaensch, I might introduce to the table - because I know she's been itching to answer a question - Dr Elizabeth Pietrzykowski, the CEO of Private Forests Tasmania.

Mr JAENSCH - Actually a doctor.

Mr ELLIS - Actually, a doctor. One of our many tree doctors. That's the thing, I've been practising the pronunciation for Dr Pietrzykowski's name for many years and I'm delighted to bring you to the table.

Dr PIETRZYKOWSKI - Thank you, and I feel honoured to make this debut here this evening in this place. Thank you, through you, minister. So, private forestry makes a substantial and often under-recognised contribution to Tasmania's resource sector and broader economy. It represents a significant component of the state's forest estate and production capacity. Approximately 33 per cent of Tasmania's total forest area is privately owned, equating to around 1.8 million hectares, of this, approximately 843,000 hectares is native forest, 247,000 hectares is plantation forest comprising both hardwood and softwood. Within the state, there's more than 427,000 hectares formally designated as private timber reserves, supporting a mix of institutional investors, commercial operators and individual land owners, including farmers. These participants collectively contribute millions of dollars annually to the Tasmanian economy. The scaling production from private forestry is particularly significant. In the 2024 to 2025 period, private forest supplied approximately 2.8 million tonnes of logs to market. This represents more than 68 per cent of the total volume of forest products produced in Tasmania. The majority of these outputs is derived from plantation forestry. Hardwood plantations contribute approximately 1.69 million tonnes, while soft wood plantations contribute approximately 972,000 tonnes. This highlights the critical role of privately managed plantation assets in underpinning the state's timber supply. These figures demonstrate the primary source. Production in Tasmania of private forest is a large institutional forestry operations and smaller holdings managed by farmers and individual land owners. So there is an intersection between agriculture and forestry and this is what we call farm forestry. Farm forestry is really important to the sector in that it enables diversification of income for private land owners who are running forestry and also farming production operations. So, for example, they might have a carbon project on their property, they might have selective harvesting on their property, amongst their normal cropping rotations. So, the forestry operation really does provide that diversification and through Private Forest Tasmania, as an independent statutory authority, we're basically supporting the growth and development of the industry in Tasmania. We do this through priority projects such as the current Carbon 101 Forestry educational program and the Access to Market project which will be fundamental to enabling and activating private forest resource into the market.

Mr JAENSCH - Is there a minimum lot size or volume?

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Dr BROAD - Minister, how much equity does the state government or entities hold in the Dolphin Mine Group 6 Metals mining on King Island and is there any proposal to reduce or increase that equity share?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you Dr Broad. I will just look to the team from the Department of State Growth or maybe Office of the Coordinator-General (OCG) to provide an update.

Mr HENDRIKS - Thanks, minister, and through the minister. The Tasmanian Government converted its existing \$10.49 million loan into an equity stake in Group 6 in April 2025. The decision to convert that loan was part of a comprehensive turn around plan developed by the company and senior lenders. That company is currently going through a process of being relisted and work will be underdone to, sort of, provide the government with options in terms of then what it decides to do in terms of its equity position and we'll sort of make those decisions at that time. I think that's due to happen around September. I think there's a general meeting coming up soon.

Dr BROAD - Sorry, what was that?

Mr HENDRIKS - I think the intent is to have that relisted by September and we will do some work over that period to provide the government with some options in terms of what it may or may not decide to do with that equity position.

Dr BROAD - I have a question for Ms Chuter, if she'd like to go to the table. How reliant is Forest Practices Authority (FPA) on aerial imagery and Geographic Information System (GIS) layers like TASVEG to identify land clearing breaches?

Ms CHUTER - Thank you. Through you, minister. Thanks for the question. It depends on the nature of the allegations and the investigation. We do use aerial imagery or satellite imagery to detect land use change or forest loss and that can initiate an investigation. We also are starting a project where we're looking at forest loss using other types of aerial imagery. A lot of our inquiries do come from people observing alleged unauthorised forest practices. As we go through an investigation, again, depending on what our field observations find, we might rely on various types of evidence such as we can collect information from drones, we can have JS analysis done on areas cleared and that all uses aerial imagery as well. So it sort of depends on the level of evidence we need and the type of investigation we're undertaking.

Dr BROAD - So, after the identification, I take it the next phase is for an investigation, so a site visit I'd imagine. Given the potential for a rather large fine, does the FPA provide any guidance to land owners as to whether their response, or their lack of response, can actually be used against them if it's brought before the courts?

Ms CHUTER - Yes. As an investigation progresses, once we have a level of evidence that indicates that we think there is a potential alleged offence, we do issue warnings with our advisor information. We let the responsible party know that information they provide can be used in court proceedings if it gets to that space.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, in the annual report of reserve estate data at 30 June 2025, the permanent timber production zone (PTPZ) informal reserve land is listed as reducing by 2200 hectares. That's a pretty substantial loss for that particular reserve class and those informal reserves have previously included things like eagles nest reserves, streamside reserves, giant

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tree reserves, et cetera; can you please explain that reduction? I'd like to know is it a policy change or what has happened to those 2200 hectares?

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Dr Woodruff, obviously, PTPZ is managed by STT who aren't here, but I will double-check with the forest team.

Ms CHUTER - I'm not entirely sure I can answer this question, but can you just repeat where the information has come from?

Dr WOODRUFF - The Tasmanian forest estate areas is an annual report that's made every year. The last one, at 30 June 2025, lists all the public land or the private land and all the different tenures, informal reserves, other formal reserves, et cetera and under informal reserve on PTPZ or Sustainable Timber-managed land, there's a negative figure of 2200 hectares. Could I take that on notice?

Ms CHUTER - I can answer in a general sense, but I'm very well aware that PTPZ land is managed by Sustainable Timber Tas, so it may be a question that they need to answer but, in a very general sense, there may be a number of reasons why there is forest loss. Without seeing it, I'm not sure if you're talking about forest loss or native forest reduction, because the - whether it includes things like roads for accessing forest areas, that can be captured as a reduction of native forestry, but I'm definitely starting to step outside my scope because I'm not the land manager for PTPZ.

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes. Minister, could I take that on notice? What would you suggest?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, if that works for you guys.

CHAIR - Right, thank you.

Dr WOODRUFF - My second question - that was one question - is that okay to take it on notice?

Mr ELLIS - I will just double-check. All good to take it on notice?

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister, it is a matter for STT.

Mr ELLIS - We can follow up through the STT process. I'm sure they're happy to let you know.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. My second question is in relation to a listing on Ta Ann's website, which says that the Bridgewater Bridge project was a major project that Ta Ann supplied form ply for. Just a couple of questions about that: do you know what was the value of the supply contract with Ta Ann, whether there was a public tender process for that contract, and if so, whether the other tender as were competitive with the Ta Ann bid.

Mr ELLIS - One more for infrastructure. I will look to the acting secretary.

Mr GREGORY - Yes, minister, through you, they would be referring to a supply contract that they had with the head contractor, McConnell Dowell. So they that wouldn't have been a contract with the state directly.

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Dr WOODRUFF - So that's not something that infrastructure - maybe that's an Infrastructure Tasmania question, or you think would they be aware of that?

Mr GREGORY - Well, no. The answer to that would be it's not a - wouldn't be a question for the department or Infrastructure Tasmania; the state government had a design and construct contract with McConnell Dowell, and it's McConnell Dowell's job to engage all the subcontractors that they have and buy all their materials as well. So, we wouldn't have that that level of detail. I wouldn't expect that we would have that level of detail.

Dr WOODRUFF - Okay. Thank you.

Mr ELLIS - Chair, we've just got an update on one of the answers.

Ms PINTO - Thank you, and through you, minister, in answer to the question earlier requested by the Chair, I can confirm for the Tas Green Hydrogen Hub, the government assigned \$11 million in funding, and total spend to date on that project is \$6.551 million approximately.

CHAIR - Thank you. So, minister, I believe that in 2024 there was \$8 million of Tasmanian taxpayers' money given to Countrywide to set up green hydrogen hubs and a hydrogen transport network, and I presume that that's separate from that money that Ms Pinto is talking about. So can you just tell us what's been delivered in relation to those projects.

Mr ELLIS - Thanks, Chair. Again, not my portfolio, but happy to try and assist the committee, if Ms Pinto is -

Ms PINTO - Thank you. So through you, minister, just acknowledging that is a matter for the Energy portfolio, but in answering that question, the government had a number of initiatives that were being considered in the hydrogen space. One was what's referred to as a green hydrogen price reduction scheme, of which you've made reference to the recipient of a Crown Law grant, being Countrywide, to that scheme; and the intention with that scheme is that as new technology comes online in an industry like energy, it takes time for that technology to be competitive with substitutes.

So it's a very pertinent example at this point in time, with the fuel crisis that's occurring globally: so diesel is a very heavily-relied-upon fossil fuel, and green hydrogen in different forms, including in other forms such as ammonia and methanol, can be used as a substitute. What you can see occurring is that the difference between what the market's prepared today to pay and what the cost of production is can have a differential, so the intention of the green hydrogen price reduction scheme and the sum of 8 million was to bridge that gap. The conditions of that contract with Crown law deed with the recipients is it only triggers once they start production, and that hasn't occurred as yet. They're still going through a development phase. So that funding hasn't been called on as yet.

CHAIR - Okay, I suppose you know, like I've been asking these questions about various green hydrogen projects and I wonder, minister, if you can take on notice to list all of the money spent, all taxpayer money spent, on these projects to date, please.

Mr ELLIS - As I mentioned, Chair, happy to follow up with minister Duigan and working with the department.

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CHAIR - Mr Jaensch?

Mr JAENSCH - No further questions.

CHAIR - Dr Broad. We're going until 12 past, I think. Yes, we've added some extra time on.

Dr BROAD - 12 past: okay, there might be time to answer this question, then.

Mr JAENSCH - I thought it was seven minutes past? It was seven before.

Mr ELLIS - I welcome the extra five minutes, Chair, even if Mr Jaensch doesn't.

Dr WOODRUFF - I will ask a question.

CHAIR - I think Dr Broad is asking a question.

Mr JAENSCH - It's on the record now.

Dr BROAD - Let's tone down the hilarity for a few more minutes. Minister, in January 2023, Premier Rockcliff publicly celebrated a \$1 million grant to Boags and said it would support jobs and growth. Since then, what warnings did Lion give the government about costs, investment pressures or the future of the site, and what did the government offer in response?

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Dr Broad. Obviously, the Premier mentioned that we've been approached by Lion in recent days. It's really disappointing for the local community, the workers there on site and it's going to be a significant hole in the fabric of northern Tasmania. It's been a such an icon for so many years. It is good to see that Lion have made commitments to their workers in terms of their entitlements, but also additional retraining and that they're committed to repaying the \$1 million grant that was made available.

The Premier has obviously made some statements about some potential repurposing opportunities for those funds. They have noted that this is a commercial decision, one that they were committed to on the basis of changing consumer tastes and low levels of utilisation at the factory, but still very challenging, a very challenging week for a lot of Tasmanians that have a lot of love and care for that brand and the particular facility. I might just look at anyone in the department or OCG if there's any further comments that you want to make in this regard.

Mr HENDRIKS - Through the minister, the only comment is that I will be meeting with some of the officials from Boags over the next few days to just talk about some of what's happening next.

Dr BROAD - The bit you didn't answer though, was what warnings did Lion give the government prior to this?

Mr ELLIS - As I mentioned, we obviously work with the company. They've been a longstanding business in the north of the state for many, many years. I had good ongoing relationships with them, and they've made the announcement in recent days; I think the Premier

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was informed on Sunday or around then. They've been very clear, commercial matter on the basis of changing tastes and low utilisation at the factory.

Dr BROAD - Was that when you also became aware?

Mr ELLIS - Yes, Sunday or Monday: start of the week, anyway.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, a right to information document showed that the government started a new process related to the future potential production forest area within the Resources portfolio in September last year; what's the nature of those plans, and is that a policy based around protecting those key forests, or a further expansion of native forest logging?

Mr ELLIS - Sorry, Dr Woodruff, did you say, started a new process in September 2025?

Dr WOODRUFF - In September of last year I've got, through a Cabinet note to yourself that was received under right to information, made public under to right to information.

Mr ELLIS - So look, I might just look to the department for information we might be able to share in this space.

Ms PINTO - Minister, on behalf of myself and my colleagues, I'm just checking and they have confirmed that we're not aware of any new process occurring.

Mr ELLIS - I'm happy to take it on notice, Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thanks, that would be really helpful.

CHAIR - Mr Jaensch.

Mr JAENSCH - No further questions.

CHAIR - All right. We are coming to the end of the line. Anybody else got a question, with this last 30 seconds, or can I just sum up?

Dr WOODRUFF - No.

Dr BROAD - Sum up.

CHAIR - Maybe when you're thinking about it, Dr Woodruff, I'd just like to thank everybody who's been in attendance of this committee, ministers and staff, committee members, MPs, and of course, Mr. Fox and his team, *Hansard*, and the broadcast team. Thank you, and on that note, we've reached the end of the time for scrutiny. I appreciate everybody's time and patience with us.

The witnesses withdrew.

The committee adjourned at 6.12 p.m.