



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

REPORT OF DEBATES

Wednesday 25 March 2026

REVISED EDITION

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Wednesday 25 March 2026

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

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

No. 23 - Progress of Tourism Expression of Interest Proposals

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

With reference to an announcement in 2022, by the then Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing, Minister Barnett, that changes were being made to the Tourism EOI process to address concerns about land banking and to set milestones for projects to achieve key outcomes, and that this included a requirement that every six months proponents would need to provide proof they were actively progressing their EOIs, and noting the Office of the Coordinator-General oversees an 'Accepted concepts' webpage, and that the 'EOI statistics' link had not been updated between May 2025 and 11 March 2026:

- (1) Why hadn't the Office of the Coordinator-General updated the EOI statistics webpage between May 2025 and 11 March 2026?
- (2) Wild Bush Luxury had an EOI proposal regarding the South Coast Track Huts Walk, but Wild Bush Luxury has been bought by Intrepid Travel.
 - (a) Has Intrepid Travel sought permission from the EOI Assessment Panel to move forward with the South Coast Track Huts Walk EOI; and
 - (b) Does this EOI needs to be reassessed?
- (3) At suggested on the 11 March website update, no progress on any of the EOI proposals have occurred in the last 12 months. What actions have been taken to ascertain that progress is being made on the following EOIs:
 - (a) RiverFly 1864: Halls Island, Lake Malbena
 - (b) Circa Morris-Nunn, representing Hunter Developments: Recherche Bay Eco Resort
 - (c) Tasmanian Walking Company: Walls of Jerusalem Lodge Walk
 - (d) Tasmanian Walking Company: Overland Track Experience
 - (e) Tasmanian Walking Company: Cradle Base Camp Experience
 - (f) Wild Bush Luxury: South Coast Track Huts Walk

- (g) Wild Bush Luxury: Maria Island Experience
 - (h) World Expeditions: Walls of Jerusalem - Wilderness Puffer Pods
 - (i) World Expeditions: Overland Track - Wilderness Puffer Pods?
- (4) Why hasn't the Office of the Coordinator-General removed from the EOI process such proposals that have not been progressed?
- (5) What steps will be taken to ensure the public is kept informed of how EOI projects are progressing?

ANSWER

- (1) During the Public Accounts Committee hearing on 6 February this year, it was explained that the EOI statistics had not been updated since May 2025, because the status of the proposals included in that information had not changed in that period.

This does not mean that proposals have not been made, have not made progress in that period, but simply that they have not progressed from one stage to another. As identified in the EOI statistics table, the majority of remaining proposals are in the 'approvals underway' phase. This phase can include many elements and multiple approval processes (including local government, state and Commonwealth assessments, depending on the nature of the proposal. These may occur concurrently or sequentially (again, this depends on the nature of the proposal) as well as the preference of the proponent). All require the proponent to prepare significant amounts of information. This can take a considerable amount of time, which is why proposals may remain in this stage for long periods of time.

It's also noted that since the Public Accounts Committee hearing, the EOI statistics link has been updated to reflect the recent cessation of operations and surrender of the relevant licence by RotorLift. The page now states that it was reviewed on 11 March 2026.

- (2) In answer to question 2:
- (a) The Office of the Coordinator-General (OCG) is aware of the sale of Wild Bush Luxury by Intrepid Travel, which was made public in December 2025. The OCG has continued to engage with management during the transition to the new ownership. This transition is ongoing.

On 9 February 2026, correspondence was received from the proponents advising the EOI panel that - while final investment approvals will appropriately sit with the new owner following the completion of the transaction - it is intended that the South Coast Track Huts Walk EOI continue to be progressed.

The sale of businesses who are proponents in the EOI process is not new and has previously occurred.

Proposals the panel has previously recommended to proceed, and which have subsequently entered the approval phase do not need the 'permission' of the EOI panel to progress. In cases of change of ownership, the panel may choose to seek evidence of the new owner's capacity to deliver the proposal. This is a matter for the panel.

- (b) As noted, the business transition between previous and new owners is ongoing.

Proposals the panel has previously recommended to proceed, and which have subsequently entered the approvals phase, do not need the 'permission' of the EOI panel to progress. In cases of change of ownership, the panel may choose to seek evidence of the new owner's capacity to deliver the proposal and, again, this is a matter for the panel.

Ms Forrest - The question was, does it need to be reassessed? That hasn't really been addressed.

Ms RATTRAY - If that's not sufficient, I'm happy to take that back.

- (3) In answer to question 3 (a) through (i), regarding RiverFly 1864, Halls Island and Lake Malbena, on 30 October 2025: the acting chair of the panel wrote to the proponent requesting clarification on the status of the business entity associated with the proposal and the ability to deliver the proposal. A follow-up to the October request was sent on 3 February 2026. A response was received from the proponent clarifying the status of the business entity on 5 February 2026. This was considered by the Tourism EOI panel on 16 February 2026. A reply to the proponent, including the outcomes of this consideration, is currently going through the usual formal approval process prior to being sent.

Circa Morris-Nunn, representing Hunter Developments, Recherche Bay Eco Resort: on 29 October 2025, the acting chair of the panel wrote to the proponent requesting evidence of substantial progress. The secretariat emailed the proponent on 22 December 2025, requesting a response. A response was received on 22 December 2025 - the same day - which was considered by the Tourism EOI panel on 16 February 2026. A reply to the proponent including the outcomes of this consideration is currently going through the usual formal approval process prior to being sent.

In regard to the Tasmanian Walking Company, Walls of Jerusalem Lodge Walk: in correspondence dated 13 February 2025, the proponent advised that the Pine Forest Moor Hut, a part of their Overland Track Experience, had been lost to bushfire. A period of grace was requested in terms of

providing updates on TWC projects while interim arrangements for the operation of the TWC's Overland Track Experience were put in place.

The panel agreed to this request for a period of 12 months on condition that the proponent provide regular updates on progress towards rebuilding Pine Forest Moor Hut. These updates have been provided to the EOI program secretariat via monthly meetings with the Parks and Wildlife Service, which is responsible for the lease and licensing requirements associated with rebuilding the lost hut.

In addition, on 30 October 2025, the acting chair of the panel wrote to the proponent advising that the panel had determined that changes to the proposal design that had been previously proposed by the proponent did not constitute a substantial change and that evidence of the progress should be provided to the panel ahead of its meeting in February of 2026.

On 3 November 2025 the acting panel chair and the program manager met with a senior representative of the proponent to discuss project progress and the impact of the 2025 bushfire that resulted in the loss of one accommodation hut on the Overland Track, on the proponent's priorities.

On 19 February 2026 a meeting involving the same people took place to receive an update on progress to rebuild the lost hut on the Overland Track and to clarify next steps for all three of the TWC's EOI proposals. Correspondence was received from the proponent on 5 March 2026 providing an update on all three active projects (Cradle Base Camp experience, Walls of Jerusalem Lodge Walk, and the Overland Track Experience). This will be presented to the panel at their next meeting.

The Tasmanian Walking Company Overland Track Experience and the Tasmanian Walking Company Cradle Base Camp Experience: in correspondence dated 13 of February 2025, the proponent advised that their Pine Forest Moor hut had been lost to bushfire. A period of grace was requested in terms of providing updates on TWC projects while interim arrangements for the operation of the TWC's Overland Track Experience were put in place.

At its meeting on 27 February 2026, the panel agreed to this request, on condition that the proponent provide regular updates on progress towards rebuilding the Pine Forest Moor hut. These updates were provided to the EOI program's secretariat by the Parks and Wildlife Service, which is responsible for the lease and licensing requirements associated with rebuilding the lost hut.

On 3 November 2025 the acting panel chair and the program manager met again with a senior representative of the proponent to discuss project progress and the impact of the 2025 bushfire that resulted in the loss of one accommodation hut on the Overland Track, on the proponent's priorities.

On 19 February, a meeting involving the same people took place to receive an update on progress to rebuild the lost hut on the Overland Track and to clarify next steps for all three of the TWC's EOI proposals.

In regard to the Wild Bush Luxury South Coast Track Huts Walk: on 29 October 2025 the acting chair of the panel wrote to the proponent advising that the panel at its 20 February 2025 meeting deemed the evidence of significant progress provided was adequate to enable the project to remain in the Tourism EOI process. In the same correspondence a project delivery timeline was requested by 29 January 2026 in order to be considered at the 16 February 2026 panel meeting. The panel also requested financial modelling and the next progress update to be provided by 30 April 2026.

The proponent provided advice on 9 February 2026, including a project delivery timeline, which was considered by the panel at its meeting of 16 February, and a reply to the proponent including the outcomes of this consideration is currently going through the usual formal process prior to being sent.

Regarding the Wild Bush Luxury Maria Island Experience: the Tourism EOI panel has previously received advice from the proponent that this proposal cannot be progressed until the Maria Island National Park and Ile des Phoques Nature Reserve Management Plan, currently in draft, is finalised, as it will stipulate areas in which development may be permitted. Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania has consistently confirmed this position to the panel. The proponent will be required to provide evidence of sufficient progress of this project once the management plan comes into effect.

In regard to World Expeditions, Walls of Jerusalem Wilderness Puffer Pods and World Expeditions, Overland Track Wilderness Puffer Pods: on 29 October 2025, the acting chair of the panel wrote to the proponent advising that the panel, at its February 2025 meeting, deemed the evidence of sufficient progress provided adequate to enable the project to remain in the Tourism EOI process. In the same correspondence, a project delivery timeline was requested by 29 January 2026 in order to be considered in the February 2026 panel meeting, and a progress update was also requested by 30 April 2026.

The proponent provided advice on 27 January 2026, including a project delivery timeline, which was considered by the panel at its meeting of 16 February. A reply to the proponent including the outcomes of this consideration is currently, as I've previously stated, going through the usual formal approval process prior to being sent.

- (4) The decision to withdraw a proposal from the process on the basis of lack of evidence of progress is a matter for the responsible minister, based on recommendations received from the independent Tourism EOI panel. It is not a matter for the Office of the Coordinator-General.

Decisions to retain or remove proposals from the process have been routinely made by the minister based on the advice received from the panel.

Since the enhancement of the EOI process in 2022, four proposals in the assessment and approval stage have been voluntarily withdrawn by the proponents when they have been asked to provide evidence of progress.

Three have been withdrawn by the minister due to a lack of evidence of progress being provided, and it should be noted that one of the three proposals involved two sites. While one site had secured all necessary approvals and was operational, the assessment panel recommended the other site be withdrawn due to lack of sufficient progress. Therefore, statistics pertaining to the Tourism EOI process registered two withdrawals, not three.

- (5) As was stated at the Public Accounts Committee hearing, the Office of the Coordinator-General's publicly available Tourism EOI webpages are updated as soon as possible. In addition, these pages are reviewed periodically, even if no changes have occurred, with review dates published to support transparency and public confidence in the information provided.

I'll take on notice that question that you didn't think I had an answer for.

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS

[11.20 a.m.]

Mr PRESIDENT - Honourable members, before I call the honourable Leader, I'd just like to welcome to the Chamber today the second group that have come through, the legal studies students from MacKillop Catholic College. We had a group through earlier, and I didn't get a chance to welcome them because we had a very long answer to a question and I couldn't find any space to get in. If you'd pass our welcome along to the other groups, and I dare say we possibly won't be here when the third group comes through, so, if you could be the messengers.

The reason that we will suspend the sitting is to have briefings when we're handling legislation. We seek information from all sorts of groups to make sure we've got the best possible information to base our decisions on. We've got another paper to table shortly, so, I will recall that. That's what we're doing. Very shortly, the honourable member for Hobart will table a paper. I didn't give her the call before because of the long and involved answer to the question.

Ms Forrest - So, it's all my fault, Mr President.

Mr PRESIDENT - No, it's not, it's completely my fault. Once we've finished briefings, we'll come back in and get into some business.

I hope you enjoy your stay in the parliament. Please pass our welcome on to the other two groups and I know that all members here are very happy to see you taking such an interest in our parliament and particularly the Legislative Council.

Members - Hear, hear.

TABLED PAPER

Joint Standing Committee on Greyhound Racing Transition - Report on Greyhound Racing Legislation Amendments (Phasing Out Reform) Bill 2025 Inquiry

[11.22 a.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Hobart) - Mr President, I have the honour to present the Joint Standing Committee on Greyhound Racing Transition report on Greyhound Racing Legislation Amendments (Phasing Out Reform) Bill 2025 inquiry. I move -

That the report be received and printed.

Report received and printed.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr president, I move -

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

Motion agreed to.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

[11.23 a.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, as you've already advised, I move -

That the Council be suspended until the ringing of the bells.

This is for the purpose of a briefing.

Sitting suspended from 11.23 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Ambulance Tasmania - Sarah Pentecost Complaint

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

My question is on behalf of a Tasmanian mother, Sarah Pentecost. In June 2025, nine months ago, Ms Pentecost lodged a complaint with Ambulance Tasmania, after a distressing experience involving her one-year-old son, who had suffered a broken femur. Ms Pentecost followed this up directly with minister Archer in September and received only an acknowledgement that her complaint was under review. The minister stated, within her response, that she takes seriously the importance of ensuring the concerns are acknowledged, directed to the appropriate channels and responded to as promptly and thoroughly as possible.

I wrote to the minister on Ms Pentecost's behalf on 1 December, after no further information had been received. The minister responded on 27 January, advising that Ambulance Tasmania was in the process of finalising the review and would be in touch with Ms Pentecost early in the new year. However, this matter is still unresolved, and Ms Pentecost has contacted the minister again on 11 March.

Can the Leader please advise when Ms Pentecost can expect this matter to be resolved, and a full response provided to her?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President. I have an apology to the member. There seems to have been some mix-up with the question that was placed on your seat and the answer that I have behind me for a question. I absolutely give an undertaking that I will provide the answer to you. If it's not today, it will definitely be tomorrow. I appreciate the seriousness of the matter that you have raised.

Freight Rail for Industry Transportation

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

[2.32 p.m.]

Minister, my question goes to the current concerns regarding escalating transportation costs in light of the Middle East conflict, particularly the ramifications of remaining fossil fuel dependence. We're confronted by the lack of passenger rail when hearing Tasmanians state that they're choosing not to travel, for example, through the Midland Highway to attend family and other social events in order to avoid the fuel and transport costs. However, my question goes to freight rail.

Is the government currently encouraging heavy industry and truck transportation to transition to freight rail where possible?

What capacity does TasRail have to take on additional freight in light of current fuel shocks?

More broadly, does the current Tasmanian Freight Rail Revitalisation Program include disruption to fossil fuel supply chains as an operational risk and is it addressed by the current resilience planning?

ANSWER

Mr President, I will seek some information on that last part of that question. I just want to check on that resilience part, because we're working through a lot of those things at the moment. I might take that part of it on notice, so that I get it spot on for you.

We are talking, literally, daily with all the GBEs and their requirements. Just before the crisis hit, we had quite a few discussions with TasRail about what their next steps were and that's a little bit in conjunction with issues that they are predicting could be an issue in the future with some of their major industrial customers. Just as disruptive as what they're finding now if things didn't go quite perfect. We've been dealing with the issue of the freight travelling north and south. There is a lot of work the CEO is doing with a lot of different freight companies as well as people like Coles and Woolworths that are now starting to bring some of their fresh freight down because the carbon footprints are a lot lower on the rail than it is with trucks running up and down the highway.

The management team at TasRail are very switched on to that and they've been quite successful over the last 12 or 18 months in increasing the number of people using them and the type of freight they're doing it with. Because there haven't been derailments, a lot of people, as I mentioned, Coles and Woolworths and other people with fresh freight, are now starting to use the rail for that sort of thing as well.

They are very conscious of their fuel situation, and it is secure and stable at the moment, but we can't predict too far out, of course, on that. That's why the discussions are happening a fair bit at the moment. I have been talking with each of my GBEs because most of them are fuel-hungry GBEs, and they've been talking amongst themselves as well. As soon as I can find out more information about the resilience plan, I will certainly come back to you as soon as I possibly can - hopefully tomorrow, just to finalise that a little bit more for you.

Ms Webb - Thank you, I appreciate that.

Metro Buses - Consideration of Free Travel During Fuel Shortages

**Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT,
Mr VINCENT**

[2.36 p.m.]

My question follows on from a question that I raised here yesterday about the enormous impact on the cost of living for everyday Tasmanians caused by soaring fuel prices and supply shortages. Acknowledging that the government currently has a half-price fare system in place for Metro, I wonder, minister, if you will give consideration to a policy of free bus travel during

this period of crisis, because as I'm sure you would agree, every cent we can help Tasmanians save in their travel costs is a positive.

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you for the ongoing concern on this subject. It is a moving feast and I did say in one of my answers in the other House today that three weeks ago we didn't have this as part of our day-to-day planning. It is marvellous how I've needed to go back over financial reports, and seeing the level of communication that is taking place now and the questions being asked of all the GBEs about what they're doing.

We are very fortunate that we now have at Metro Jessica Paton, who has come down from Queensland with immense knowledge on how to make systems work a lot better. We are already starting to see the benefits of her level of involvement in setting up public transport systems coming to the fore. I think we will see more of that starting to happen. I can give you an assurance that everything is presently under consideration and being discussed on a daily basis. As that information changes or comes around, I'm more than happy to update the House at any stage.

Freight Rail for Industry Transportation

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr VINCENT

[2.38 p.m.]

In response to the minister's answer to the member for Nelson, minister, you said that TasRail were planning for certain eventualities related to the major industrials. What are the considerations that the government and you are planning for? Is there a potential need for expanded capacity on the TasRail network or is it more about the potential for the loss of a customer or something else?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President, and thanks for that extra bit of the question because I probably didn't answer the member for Nelson correctly. They run a fairly decent capacity and there's always room to put extra in, but the efficiency of what TasRail have been able to do in minimising the losses of below and above rail is that if you send a train up that's good, but if you can get it coming back down with a full load that's even better, because it minimises the cost and makes it a lot more cost-effective for us as an operator and for the customers as well.

They have been working with various other industries to make sure that balance is there and it's a big part of our fortnightly meetings to make sure that balance is there. Because of the change in, for example, Boyer not producing quite as much, which is a heavy customer there now, they certainly have capacity going north. With the amount of freight that comes into, mainly, Burnie - and they do take a lot of containers out of Devonport also - they can balance those loads pretty well and I believe there is capacity there at the moment.

There is only so long they like to have the trains because you can only pull so many with the corners. I don't understand the physics of rail, but they know exactly how many they can

put on and they do it pretty efficiently. They even have specially designed equipment they can drop down when they've carried logs. A container can go into that space so they're not transporting the 'log-tainers' empty. They're putting a container on top of that in the collapsed mode, so they do a lot of work to maximise efficiency, but there is the capacity there to handle anything at the moment.

Low Emission Rail Technology

**Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT,
Mr VINCENT**

[2.41 p.m.]

My question is focused on the capacity of rail to assist in mitigating fossil fuel dependency. TasRail's statement of corporate intent 2023-24 to 2026-27 lists as a strategic direction of the business the following strategic objective:

Promote the environmental benefits of rail logistics and continue to investigate emerging low/zero emission locomotive technology.

My question is: what progress has occurred in identifying low/zero-emission rail technology and is there a timeframe by which Tasmanians can expect to see any implementation of such technology given its proven strategic importance to shift the state from fossil fuel dependency?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President. This has been a very interesting step with TasRail. We've had a renewal program of a lot of the old engines. It's about \$15 million, off the top of my head. It's being done in the Launceston workshop. We've upskilled a lot of local workers to a level now where the CEO is actually talking to other railways around Australia about bringing their engines down to Tasmania to be refitted.

The whole idea behind that was, there is a real gap in the industry at the moment between moving from the old style, which has been pretty well unchanged for many, many decades, to electric, or the word they're telling me, they believe that hybrid will be the way to go in the next step, because the electrics aren't really at a point where they are excited enough to invest the money.

The money the government has invested into the renewal program gives an extension of approximately 10 years, maybe 12, maybe 15, at the most. What it allows us to do, instead of trying to jump in at the cutting edge and make an expensive mistake on buying the wrong type suited to Tasmanian haulage, this will give them that 10-year buffer where they believe the industry will have matured. Because of the large freight on the mainland and other countries, the industry will have developed the next stage of hybrids or electrics, or whatever else might come out, which will then allow a sensible purchase that will take us into that zero- or lower-emission area.

It has been quite exciting working through that with them, and they have a deadset program to make sure they don't falter in the next 10 years while they move towards that

program. When you go to these amazing workshops in Launceston, the exciting thing is they really are set up well, and how they bring them in and do all the work. You talk to these quite young people there that have skilled-up from just being a basic railway engineer working on the basics to actually doing and machining special parts to keep all these going. There is an amazing skill level developing there in Launceston, which is just a side benefit, but it's amazing what they are doing in that area.

I hope that answers that question for you.

Ms Webb - Mr President, just to clarify, that 10- to 15-year timeframe is before we move to some form of low or zero emission?

Mr VINCENT - Yes. I cannot remember them saying a deadset timeline, but it certainly covers the period that they feel they need to bring it in. Some of that technology might start to come in year five, seven, nine, but they've had to protect themselves so they're still operational in the time period until that advancement in the engines is available to us.

Climate Change Office - Changes

Ms O'CONNOR question to LEADER for the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms RATTRAY

[2.45 p.m.]

The Climate Change Office currently sits under Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania (ReCFIT) in the Department of State Growth, providing critical advice to government - which I will just advise is usually ignored, obviously - about how to reduce and adapt to the accelerating impacts of global heating on Tasmania.

- (1) Where will the Climate Change Office be located following the change from the Department of State Growth to Building Tasmania?
- (2) Will it be returned to the Department of Premier and Cabinet to provide whole-of-government oversight of climate action and working across agencies to deliver emissions reduction and effective adaptation planning?
- (3) Given the seriousness of the challenge facing Tasmania and its people, is consideration being given to re-establishing the climate change ministry?
- (4) Can the Leader provide any reassurance to the community that there will be no job losses and no further funding cuts to the Climate Change Office?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President. Before I begin the answer, I want to let the member know that the response has come back as one complete answer. If that's not satisfactory, please let me know at the end of this contribution.

Ms O'Connor - I certainly will.

Ms RATTRAY - I thought you would anyway. The Tasmanian government is currently working through the machinery of government changes announced in the Premier's Address, including transitional and restructuring arrangements in relation to the Department of State Growth. The resultant structure of Building Tasmania, and therefore any associated movements in other units currently within the Department of State Growth, is accordingly being determined.

The Tasmanian government will provide further updates in relation to the structure of Building Tasmania and other units once the transitional and restructuring arrangements have been determined. As part of this restructuring process, the government is engaging with stakeholders, unions and the State Service to ensure a planned and coordinated approach to implementation. No formal machinery of government changes will be implemented prior to 1 July 2026.

Recognition of Visitors

Mr PRESIDENT - Honourable members, I'd just like to take this moment to welcome our delegation back into the Chamber today. They enjoyed it so much yesterday they've come back for *sam-moa*.

Members - Hear, hear.

Government Car Fleet - Transition to Electric Vehicles

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

[2.48 p.m.]

My question relates to the government car fleet transition to EVs. It goes to the ramifications of remaining fossil fuel dependent and an urgent need for Tasmania to genuinely move to a zero-carbon future. Minister, the Tasmanian government has a policy to transition its passenger and light commercial fleet to 100 per cent electric by 2030. Yet by early 2025, only 1 per cent of the fleet had been converted to EVs, and now with four years to go to meet that 2020 deadline. Minister, what percentage of the state vehicle fleet is currently 100 per cent electric, and what's the projected EV uptake required annually for the state to meet its 2030 deadline?

ANSWER

Mr President, that part of transport doesn't come under my ministry, but I will just check on something there for you, to give you a partial answer.

We'll put that whole question on notice to the Leader to get that right information for you. I can say that the pool drivers have been quite excited over the last few months about some of the work they've been doing in testing various vehicles to see how they work distance-wise and operate. They have had some trials. It's not technically available knowledge for me, but I know the drivers have been quite excited about some of the testing they've been doing. We'll find out the rest of that for you, though.

Ms Webb - I'll send it through, and I had a follow-up accompanying question as well, so I'll send them both through. Thank you.

Answer to Question - Corporate Visits to Schools

[2.50 p.m.]

Ms PALMER (Rosevears - Minister for Education) - Mr President, on indulgence, I have an answer to a question by the member for Nelson that was relating to corporate visits to schools. The member was asking about a shared social media post involved in teaching in primary schools in February this year. She asked me to follow up on the advice that I provided yesterday. The Department for Education, Children and Young People has confirmed its advice to me that the Tassal program you have referenced has not engaged with any Tasmanian government schools in 2026. While individuals and organisations may promote events, programs, services or other activities on Facebook, the date of a post does not necessarily reflect when the activity occurred.

Fingal School Site

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for EDUCATION, Ms PALMER

[2.51 p.m.]

I have a question on behalf of my colleague, the member for Lyons, Tabatha Badger. As you'd be aware, minister, the Fingal school, as I understand it, has been declared surplus to the department's requirements. It hasn't, so I'll just reference here a note from the department to a stakeholder in Fingal saying that a minute to the minister was due to be forwarded to the minister's office next week, and that was in September, which declared the site surplus to educational requirements and approved its eventual sale. Or can you confirm whether or not Fingal School has been declared surplus to requirements?

Also noting that the school hasn't been operating as a school since 2020, the community in Fingal would very much like to keep the school in their hands for alternative uses as a local asset, to hold markets, a community garden, public meeting rooms, childcare, artists in residence and so on. Will you commit to engaging with the Fingal community about the future of their school?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President, and I thank the honourable member for the question. I can confirm that I have not received that advice from the department. I think they call it, actually, a 'recommendation', so the site has not formally been declared surplus, because I haven't received that recommendation from the department. I certainly really appreciate the importance of this site to the Fingal community. My understanding is that my office has been in touch with the Fingal Valley Neighbourhood House to provide an update around that and I'm certainly happy to commit to engaging with the community, but, to stress, we haven't got to that point yet where recommendations come from the department, but happy to engage.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

[2.53 p.m.]

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

That the sitting be suspended until the ringing of the division bells.

This is for the purpose of the continuation of a briefing process that we had this morning.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 2.54 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

MOTION

Premier's Address - Reply

Continued from 19 March 2026 (page 68).

Ms O'CONNOR (Hobart) - Thank you, Mr President. Other honourable members have observed that there wasn't a lot of substance or vision for the future or even any particularly strong connection to reality in the Premier's state of the state address, and it was a bit like someone in his office went and dusted off Will Hodgman's 2014 state of the state address, his 2015 one, and later ones that his successor, premier Peter Gutwein, put forward. It was a state of the state address that was written for another time.

Totally disturbingly out of touch. We've got a world on fire, literally and figuratively. We've got war in Europe, war in the Middle East. We've got the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed to the transport of fossil fuels that the world currently needs because it hasn't got itself off the teat quickly enough, and really, our future, both as citizens of the world and also as residents of this beautiful island, is being blighted by vicious, mad old white men. That presents a particular set of challenges, because we're a very small island with a very small population on a big and highly stressed planet. But what it requires of our leaders is courage and honesty.

We got, for example, a line in the Premier's state of the state address: 'There are exciting days ahead of us, exciting years ahead of us as well'- because, if you're going to state a cliché, there's nothing like repeating it. That is one way to put it, but it would have been more honest to say we have some extremely challenging days and years ahead of us, but because we are a resilient, resourceful, highly connected island community, none of those challenges are insurmountable. But we didn't get that.

So, here we have an island economy that is very significantly dependent on imported fuels of all different kinds. It has been great to see that matter raised by a number of honourable members, either in their state of the state contributions or in questions to ministers, because one of the most pressing things that we can do that wasn't raised in the state of the state address was 'become energy self-sufficient to the greatest extent possible'.

Remember, we used to be very significantly energy self-sufficient because of our Hydro system. Now we're plugged into the mainland and some of the power we turn on is coal-fired power. We have many more cars on the road than we used to, so the impact of fuel shortages and fuel price shocks on our community, one of the poorest in the country, will be profound.

What we needed to hear from in the state of the state address was genuine vision for making this island more independent, more self-sufficient, less reliant on imports, and more buffered from the kind of shocks that we are experiencing, which will only intensify.

We need to electrify our economy, and right now - because people are doing it so tough and it's not going to get any easier - we need to look at measures like free public transport. Half-price fares are a good start, but when people are making a decision about whether they can afford to drive to work, as legislators and on the part of the government, we need to make it as easy as possible for people to get where they need to go. Wouldn't it be great if there was a revival of interest in, and use of, Metro services? If there was a revival in the way we view freight rail but also started looking a little bit more at passenger rail? I see you nodding your head very enthusiastically at that. It is, unarguably, one of the cleanest and most enjoyable ways to get around, so I encourage government to turn our lemons into lemonade here and have a look at what opportunities are presented to us by the current crisis.

There's no question that out in the community, a lot of people are experiencing acute financial stress. Everything is more expensive and the sector that is dealing with that stress at the frontline are our community services. They've been asked to find savings for this year's state budget, because they too will be required to chip in for the Macquarie Point stadium. What government needs to do almost immediately is provide a cash injection to the community sector so they can support Tasmanians who are struggling, so they can support the people who we represent. When you lift people's circumstances and take some of the financial pressure off them, there are flow-on benefits everywhere - in our health system, in our mental health system, in our justice system, in our youth justice system. When you provide people with the basics, you strengthen communities. That is the way - the only way - we are going to get through what's coming at us.

As a number of members have pointed out, the state of the state was glaringly obvious in its failure to mention First Nations Tasmanians: the Palawa people. There was no commitment to truth-telling and treaty, no word about the return of lands - and there hasn't been any land returned here for more than 20 years. Not a word about the need for stronger Aboriginal heritage protection. It was a very disrespectful speech in that way. Where it lets us down, when you don't have a good connection between the Premier and First Nations people, is that it inhibits, in some ways, our capacity as a community to work with First Nations Tasmanians to help to deal with some of the enormous challenges that we're facing. Of course, the single biggest difficulty we will be beset with, as an island people, is climate change. It's really important that we connect to, and tap into, ancient Palawa knowledge about this landscape, how to manage it in a time of fire, with increased bushfire risk. That is knowledge that we need.

Some time, as I understand it, potentially even this year, the Thwaites Eastern Ice Shelf Glacier in Antarctica will split off from Antarctica. This is the glacier they call the 'Doomsday Glacier'. The reason they call it that, of course, is that once the Thwaites Eastern Shelf glacier breaks off from Antarctica and heads out into the Southern Ocean, it will impact on ocean levels, on sea level rise. Our coastal communities will be impacted. They're already being impacted by sea-level rise, coastal inundation, storm surges. The problem that we have with a

government that hasn't taken climate change seriously enough is that our adaptation planning to protect the people we represent is extremely deficient.

I refer honourable members to the report that was tabled today, which is the long-awaited review report of the *Climate Change (State Action) Act 2008*. I want to again thank my colleagues in this place for supporting my motion recently, which agreed that the act must be strengthened. The reviewers agree as well.

I hope that honourable members will take the opportunity to have a look at the 2024-25 Independent Review of the *Climate Change (State Action) Act*. Recommendation 3 - and this came through very strongly, according to the reviewers, in the submissions - is that the government needs to establish a separate adaptation planning process in the *Climate Change (State Action) Act 2008* that enables adaptation actions to be developed and delivered separately to mitigation measures. What they found on the question of how adaptation is dealt with is that, and I quote from the report:

There is a lack of adaptation planning at a statewide level that accounts for all affected sectors and stakeholders. *Tasmania's Climate Change Action Plan 2023-25* will lapse at the end of 2025 and a new plan has not yet been developed.

Here we are in 2026, as the United Nations tells us that the last 11 years have been the hottest in human history, and we don't have a climate change action plan out of this government.

The Tasmanian government's response to the statewide risk assessment, 'Managing Tasmania's climate risks and opportunities' risk assessment response report, does include some new actions to address risks. However, the report says these actions are limited and the response doesn't include an implementation plan. There is a gap in adaptation planning. The review says:

Adaptation was also [a] priority concern for all stakeholder groups, reflecting the growing exposure of Tasmanian communities and industries to a changing climate. Despite this, adaptation is seen as not receiving sufficient prominence in the Act and there are concerns about effective implementation.

I will let honourable members read this review report at their leisure, but it was revealing when the reviewers said this in their opening statements:

Stakeholder confidence in the Tasmanian Government's ability to deliver meaningful climate outcomes remains low. While the achievement of net zero emissions since 2014 is an important milestone, it is driven largely by carbon sequestration from the land-use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector, rather than broad-based decarbonisation across the economy.

It points us to the need for stronger emissions reductions in other sectors, particularly transport, agriculture and industry, and notes that there has been a lack of visible progress in these sectors which is contributing to doubt about whether Tasmania's net zero achievement represents a real transition or a temporary accounting outcome from negative land use emissions.

It would have been terrific to hear from our glorious leader, the Premier, Mr Rockliff, that he understood the nature of the challenge and the risks, and that his government had a clear eye on what needed to be done and how it would engage with communities, including First Nations Tasmanians, to make sure that we are ready for the future.

One of the biggest challenges we will have - and this is not just from global heating; this is from the current fuel crisis - is in relation to our capacity to grow food. As I understand it, key components that come from the Middle East for fertilisers, including urea, are not coming through. Other countries, like China, are deciding not to sell nitrogen into the global fertiliser market, and right now in the United States and Europe, it's planting season. Again, it brings home how reliant we have been on imported food. What we need to hear from the Premier in a state of the state address is that this government is working with our primary producers, working with our incredible, amazing social infrastructure in our neighbourhood houses, child and family centres and other community organisations who already do emergency food relief. The Premier needs to work with primary producers, the social circle that already does food relief, and communities, to work on a plan so that we're growing more of our own food here. Exports are incredibly important - we know that - but we also have to feed our own people. We, the Greens, would very much like to see the Premier take food security much more seriously.

The only mention of the environment in the state of the state address was the words 'a strong environment'. That was it - a shallow, hollow reference to our life support systems. We still have a State of the Environment report that passed two statutory deadlines before it was delivered, that the government has provided no meaningful response to. It highlighted that the Tasmanian natural environment is under significant pressure, primarily as a result of global heating, but also poor land-use decisions and planning that we've made in the past and we continue to make to this day.

We are still logging and burning the habitat of critically endangered species like the swift parrot and the masked owl. People have different views on the value of the life of a swift parrot or a masked owl. I will always argue that those animals, equally, have an intrinsic right to exist. They have a right to a home, which is a habitat. We have a responsibility not to allow species to go to extinction on our watch. These are other life forms that demand of us respect, and it's not happening right now.

We still have large-scale logging and burning of our native forest carbon banks. We still have a finfish farming industry which is out of control, but which is also being impacted by warming waters. As we know, these environmental pressures and the way government responds to them can have significant negative impact on our brand. Tasmanians deserve better than to have the Premier only say the word 'environment' once in his state of the state address, and then only fleetingly, with no substance around it whatsoever. Part of what makes this beautiful place the best place in the world to live is our natural environment. We have a responsibility to look after it.

The big black hole in the state of the state address was the Premier's just glossing over the state's parlous finances. Nobody in this place eviscerates and dissects a budget better than the member for Murchison, so I'm not even going to try, but the headline figure of potentially \$146 billion in debt within a short 14 years is terrifying. That is a state that is bankrupt, but 'Premier Pollyanna' says all will be well. It's all manageable, because we've done such a great job of it over the past 12 years, we'll just keep doing what we've always done, and all will be

well. While we keep doing what we've always done, we're going to foist upon this community a stadium that it can't afford, that will be carried by generations of Tasmanians.

We've had a statement from the Premier in his state of the state address that there'll be no new taxes, so no attention given to how we might raise the revenue that we need to raise to cover the gap between our income and our expenditure as a state. I share the member for Huon's bafflement at the Premier ruling out any new revenue-raising measures. That means that what we're left with is job cuts and spending cuts, but don't worry about the job cuts, because the Premier has reassured us that the government is fully embracing the AI revolution. He says, 'We are harnessing it across the State Service to drive efficiencies and improve service delivery.' A completely contradictory statement. You might improve your cost bottom line of public sector wages, but there is no demonstrated link between the widespread use of AI by a company or a government and service delivery being improved or more efficient. What this is actually code for is job cuts. In the future, Tasmanians who pay through their taxes for services can potentially expect to have decisions about their applications or registrations made by a robot.

I'm not a Luddite. I'm not here saying that we shouldn't harness this technology. But the test of its use should always be two things: does this deliver a public good, and is it sustainable? They're the two questions we should be asking ourselves when we look at the widespread use of artificial intelligence in the delivery of government services.

They're the same questions we should ask ourselves when a company wants to put an AI data centre here on our beautiful island. At the moment, as I understand it, councils can't examine questions of power and water use of any particular development. If an AI data centre, like Firmus in Launceston or another data centre, goes to council with a proposal for a data centre, key questions can't be considered about the impact on power use, power prices and water.

There's a big AI data centre that's been moved for the South Island of New Zealand. If it goes in, it'll be the second biggest energy user in all of New Zealand. One data centre. It's important to remember that these data centres are not what we once imagined data centres to be, which was like big electronic libraries. These data centres are AI generators, they're not data storage centres. They're creating artificial intelligence, and it's a challenge that, as an island community, we are going to have to wrap our heads around.

People are going to start losing their jobs to AI. When the Premier refers in his speech to secure jobs for the future, we should view that with the greatest of scepticism, because a secure job in the future is looking more and more uncertain, given the onslaught of AI and the number of jobs it is already replacing.

A 100-megawatt data centre, for example, can use up to 2 million litres of water every day, and that's the same amount of water that thousands of households use. Microsoft's data centre in the US is using millions of litres of water in the southern states during droughts. There have been protests in the US states of Oregon and Arizona against AI data centres because of their water use that is competing directly with households. About one tenth of the growth in global electricity demand over the next five years, according to the International Energy Agency, is expected to come from data centres.

Now some jurisdictions have recognised the community concern about the proliferation of these data centres. For example, the Edinburgh Council moved to ban AI data centre construction in the city when presented with a particular proposal that created enormous community unease for a whole range of reasons including power use, noise and water use, and it was primarily around environmental impacts.

The Premier talked in this state of the state address about ensuring appropriate guardrails for AI. Well, good luck with that, because we've already got AI data companies telling us that the AI they're creating are breaking rules and making their own rules and finding ways around the explicit instructions they've been given by their human handlers. If the government of Tasmania, which can't get the berths right for our two *Spirits*, thinks that it can ensure appropriate guardrails for the use of artificial intelligence in Tasmania, they need to patent it, sell that tech around the world at a bargain price because everyone needs it, and all our budget problems will be over. Because there is no government and no company on earth right now that has developed appropriate guardrails for artificial intelligence. We need to have some sort of control - some sort of understanding and oversight and some limits on the use of artificial intelligence inside government - and we need to have better planning provisions around the construction of AI data centres in Tasmania.

I ask the question, for example, on the Premier committing to fully embracing the AI revolution: will there be transparency around the companies that are contracted to provide those services? One of the biggest AI contractors in the world is Palantir, which has supplied the technology to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in America that is enabling them to round up people who don't have white skin and is enabling them to target minorities in the United States. It is Palantir technology that the Israeli Defense Forces use to target particular individuals in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Tasmanian government should be very thoughtful and careful to protect the public interest in who it provides access to our data to.

Honourable members may remember that four or five years ago the Tasmanian government, without any conversation with the Tasmanian people, provided biometric data from about 340,000 Tasmanians to the Morrison government. That was our driver's licence processes and the biometrics that come with that. Well, three months ago, on the request of the Trump administration, the Albanese government provided a whole lot of biometric data of Australians to the Trump administration. The question is reasonable: is the facial data, the biometric data of Tasmanians, because it was sent to Canberra and then a whole wad of it has been sent to America, is that sitting in Palantir databases in the United States?

We're at a time in Tasmania's history when there's a huge question mark about what will be the skills of the future. What do we need in our people to make sure that we're ready for the future? The latest AI that I saw, which was only released a couple of days ago, replaces marketing people, basically. I got a phone call from a constituent earlier this year whose partner had been sacked by her employer here. She was a designer and she'd worked for this small company for about four years. She designed all their creative output, all the look of their brand and their marketing materials. They said to her one day, and I'm paraphrasing, 'thank you for your service. We are replacing you with artificial intelligence, and it's so good that you did all that terrific design work because the AI will have something of high quality to work with.' This is a story that will be repeated over and over again.

There's a question here about the skills that will be needed for the future and where to point our young people to get the education, training and skills that they need in a future that

is very, very different from the one all of us grew up in. Yet, what we got from the government is \$45 million in cuts to TasTAFE. Gutting TasTAFE. Extraordinary. We were told when the TasTAFE bill went through a few years ago that this would improve TasTAFE, improve course delivery and teaching, and what have we got? We have \$45 million carved out of our primary public vocational training provider.

Then, in an act of enormous cynicism, we get from the Minister for Skills and Jobs, Mr Ellis, a media release a few days ago to say that the government is really terrific because they're putting \$2 million into private training providers. We can all see what is happening here, and that is the downgrading of TasTAFE so that it is not seen as so valuable by the broader Tasmanian community. It is much easier to dispose of and then you've just got private training providers who can charge Tasmanian students pretty much whatever they want.

The state of the state address made only passing reference to really critical policy areas for the Tasmanian people. Talked up the government's commitment to the health system when we know it's been run down. We know, if you talk to everyone who works inside the Royal Hobart Hospital and the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, that the Royal Hobart Hospital itself is near bursting. The capacity of the hospital is pretty much at its limit and we will need a new Royal Hobart Hospital. We simply will, and we'll need it within the next 10 to 15 years.

But, because of the political choices that have been made over the past 12 years, that's a conversation that it feels almost foolish to initiate, because people go, 'We can't afford a new hospital, we can't afford it.' But they know the government has chosen to afford a \$1.13 billion stadium that, of course, by the time it is finished, will cost a whole lot more.

It might not be this government, it might be the next one, but in the not too distant future a Tasmanian government is going to have to come to grips with the fact that we need a new Royal Hobart Hospital so that our hospital can serve the health needs of Tasmanians in the future.

On housing, there is no clarity from the government about the future of Homes Tasmania, and this state of the state address had one big idea in it. Okay, I exaggerate; it had one small-to-medium size idea in it and that was taking apart the Department of State Growth to create Building Tasmania. Now, in principle that could be a very good thing. Don't get me wrong, because we always thought the Department of State Growth was a folly.

But we need to understand what is the future of Homes Tasmania. Now, I am somewhat comforted by the quality and the heart of the current minister responsible for Homes Tasmania, and I mean that genuinely.

Members - Hear, hear.

Ms O'CONNOR - I know that minister Vincent takes a deep and compassionate and strategic personal interest in these matters. But we still have people who are sleeping on the Domain. We still have 25-, 26- and 27-year-old children living at home with their parents because they can't afford to rent in the city.

We still don't have enough medium-density housing in this beautiful city I represent. There is still too little invested by both Commonwealth and state governments in the provision

of social housing, because if you invest in high-quality, affordable social housing in your communities, as Tasmanian governments did for decades, then you provide opportunities throughout the rest of the housing market. You'll take pressure off rents. It may well be easier because the demand pressure is not so high for young people to afford to buy their own home. These, again, were the matters that were just glossed over in the state of the state address - in an address, unfortunately, that read like it had been spat out by ChatGPT and delivered by a premier who was just dialling it in.

That is a theme that's come up in responses to the state of the state in this Council. I don't know if Jeremy Rockliff is here for the rest of this term. I don't know, but I read this state of the state address, and I felt as if he'd lost his drive for the job, because it was so depressingly ordinary, so untethered from the reality of the times, so glib about the challenges that he did mention, like the budget, so little attention paid to the kind of future that all of our children and grandchildren - all the children in our communities - are facing because it's not an easy one. Yet here we are in an incredible position to do something about it to make it better.

In a world degenerating into chaos, what we really need here is strong, honest, courageous, farsighted leadership. We didn't get that in the state of the state address. I do hope that the Premier - in fact, I doubt he has - pays at least some attention to the contributions in this place on his address. It's all easy downstairs when it's very noisy and everyone's shouting at each other and sometimes contributions aren't that considered. It's easy to ignore that as white noise if you're a premier or a minister. This place is different. Many of the contributions on the state of the state have, in one way or another, nailed it. I hope the Premier is listening to some extent. It's always good to be hopeful in life, so, I'll end on a hopeful note.

What is it that gives me hope, for example, about this place? What we have that a lot of places don't have - and it's a magic thing - is a highly connected community. We have our arguments. We don't always agree. But in the end, we're always an island people who are deeply connected. It is those community connections that will help to keep us safe in the future. When you talk to climate scientists, they will tell you the safest places to be are where they have the strongest communities.

So, we have to do everything we can to strengthen those community ties. That means really looking after people - back to where I started, in a way. That means making sure the people we represent are a focus of government and that at this time when life is really hard for a lot of people, the government's got their back. In our wonderful New Town office, we've just set up a community pantry. I have to say demand is high. I've been quite surprised. I'm pleased that people know there's some food relief around, but there is a lot of stress in our community. To make our community stronger, we need to be investing more in food relief. We need to be making sure we're not carving up the capacity for people to learn extra skills, for example, through TasTAFE. We need to be making life as cheap as it possibly can be, for example through free Metro travel, and at the same time investing in our towns and cities so they're cooler. We really need to do that.

I am hopeful, despite being more tethered to reality than the Premier was in his state of the state address. I am hopeful about here, and how we will tackle the future, and I'm hopeful because of our people. I note the address.

[5.11 p.m.]

Ms LOVELL (Rumney) - Thank you, Mr President. I rise to deliver my reply to the Premier's state of the state address for 2026. The Premier began his address with some very strong words:

We are well positioned to seize the opportunities before us to ensure Tasmania remains the best state to live, to work, to invest and to raise a family.

I think we all share that ambition right across Tasmania. Who wouldn't want Tasmania to be the best state to live, to work, to invest and to raise a family?

However, I want to look at that a little closer. What does it mean to be the best place to live, the best place to rent, or to buy an affordable place to call your home? We know rents are ever increasing, and buying a home is getting further and further out of reach for many Tasmanians. There are more than 5000 Tasmanians on the waitlist now for housing. That's 5000 Tasmanians either without a safe place to live or at risk of being without a safe place to live.

We've got crisis accommodation providers like the Hobart Women's Shelter who turn away eight out of every ten women who come to them for help, nine out of ten children. Every week they're turning people away. That's eight out of ten women who are trying to escape family violence and can't be accommodated through Hobart Women's Shelter because they don't have the resources for it.

As for the best place to work, Tasmania has the lowest workforce participation rate in the country, and the highest underemployment. Women's participation remains well below the national average. While we can talk about unemployment rates and cherry-picked statistics that make us look good, there's a lot more to that picture than the government generally talks about. Let's just ask the Tasmanians who work in the largest workforce in the state, the public service, if they think Tasmania is the best place to work; the Tasmanians who work day in, day out delivering the services that we all rely on: the healthcare workers, doctors, nurses, allied health workers, pharmacists and GPs.

The paramedics are having to make decisions about who to send an ambulance to and who to send a taxi to. The doctors and nurses are working double, sometimes triple shifts in a hospital gridlocked by access block because the government has no understanding of the needs of the patients and no plan to address them.

The child safety workers have to make decisions about the most vulnerable children in our community, based not on who is at risk and who isn't, but based on the severity of the risk, because they know they're not resourced to respond to every child who needs them.

The workers in our correctional facilities are dealing with too many people being detained in facilities than they have room for, with no programs to support these people to stop reoffending when they are released into the community.

The teachers, support staff, cleaners, groundskeepers, admin staff and others in our schools give their absolute all every day to make sure Tasmanian students are cared for, looked after, and able to learn as best they can in the face of a government who refuses to listen to

their concerns about their own safety, with rising incidence of violence in schools, deteriorating mental health among students and among teachers and other staff, and more and more pressure every day. Just this week we've got industrial action, full-day school closures for the first time since I can remember. I want to take this opportunity to say that I stand with those Australian Education Union members, the teachers and other staff in our schools who are fighting for what's best for students because I know they have the students' interest at the heart of every single thing they do.

I was so disappointed to hear the Deputy Premier's comments that the industrial action - which is, we know, always taken reluctantly as a last resort - was a political strategy by the AEU to upset the Education minister at the May election. What an insult. There are two points I want to make to this. The timing of these negotiations and the Legislative Council election in May was not the design of teachers or the AEU, and I'm sure they would have liked negotiations to have been concluded long before the election. They haven't been wanting to drag this out.

The other point I'd like to make is that we are all accountable for our decisions, our actions in this place and in our role as elected members at each of our elections. It's really the only way we are accountable. That's democracy. Is the Deputy Premier suggesting that that shouldn't be the case?

Tasmanians know who to trust when faced with a choice between the people who nurture, educate and care for their children, grandchildren, friends and neighbours every day at school, and the Deputy Premier or other members of the government who make such egregious comments about those good people, and about others who work in the public service. Tasmanians know who to trust.

As the best place to raise a family - to go back to those opening comments of the Premier - access to early education and care remains an enormous challenge for Tasmanian families. Fifty-seven per cent of the state is what's known as a 'childcare desert', which means there are more children requiring places in early education and care than there are places to accommodate them. Families want to work, but they can't get the care they need for their children. Household budgets take another hit and it's often women who leave the workforce to care for their children, and children are missing out. Access to early education and care is critical for success in learning down the track, and at the moment too many Tasmanian children are starting school behind.

Cost of living remains one of the biggest challenges for Tasmanians. I hear it all the time, I know we all do. Families having to cut costs, kids missing out on school excursions or playing a sport, learning to swim, learning a musical instrument or an art. So, to be the best place to raise a family I feel like we have a long way to go. After 12 years, with all of these things getting worse year after year, why would the government expect anyone to believe that now, all of a sudden, they are going to start seizing opportunities to make our state the best place to live, work and raise a family? I just can't believe that. Tasmanians are looking for a vision for our state and they're not getting that from this government.

Twelve years. We've got widespread industrial action right across the public service because this government won't listen to their own employees. We've got a budget coming in May where we all know there are cuts to come - there have to be, there is no other option. We've got ongoing questions about integrity and transparency and again, back to an earlier comment and comments by other members - and I heard, particularly the member for Hobart

speaking about this just a moment ago - it's the cost of living. I know people in my electorate in Rumney are getting smashed every single day. I know some things can't be controlled by the state, I get that. We all get that and there are lots of costs that we have no control over, but we have to be pulling every lever we can to help Tasmanians with their cost of living increasing the way that it is. That is our responsibility as a state. It's the responsibility of the state government.

My biggest concern is that when we've got a budget in the state that it's in, a budget being handed down in May that the easy answer will be to slash the services that Tasmanians rely on. I say this year after year: when you've got a community who is being smashed by cost of living, they will rely more and more on those services. The answer is not to cut the services that people rely on, it's not to cut funding to organisations that are managing things like emergency food relief, crisis accommodation, affordable housing. These are all the services that Tasmanians are going to be relying on more and more. Every year that cost of living gets harder and harder.

I hope the state will accept that responsibility and understand that while we can't control everything, we can control a lot and we should be pulling every lever we can to assist Tasmanians with their increasing costs, because without doing those things there is no way that Tasmania will be the best place to work, live, invest and raise a family.

I note the Premier's state of the state address.

[5.20 p.m.]

Mr VINCENT (Prosser - Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, today I rise to respond to the Premier's state of the state address. For all my adult life, I've had an interest and watched local, state and federal politics with a lot of passion and interest. Over the last 15 years my commitment and passion for government at all levels has not wavered. Since being elected to this place in 2024, I believe I've worked hard to bring vision regarding the future of Tasmania to life.

I've now been asked by the Premier to get things built and to get things done, and that's exactly what I intend to do. I am extremely proud to say we are entering a new era of opportunity through Building Tasmania. It will ensure our ongoing commitment to the delivery of infrastructure in our state, and it will allow for the delivery of projects as our state needs to be ready for the future. We are centralising the capital works delivery into one department, reducing duplication and pooling our talent to ensure we do the best job we can with everything we build, efficiently and sustainably. It is a delivery-focused department designed to ensure the future prosperity of Tasmania. When you look at the 10-year rolling infrastructure list being last year at \$32.4 billion and now at close to \$40 billion, it underlines why we need to have this concentration on a department that can build things and get things done.

Through its building projects group, Building Tasmania will be consolidating delivery of other public infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, police stations and other essential builds. Through bringing these together into a single agency, we can better leverage scale projects and using standard designs to drive down costs and speed up delivery. It will enable greater consistency in procurement and processes to ensure the coordination of infrastructure and roads alongside new housing developments. Through better planning, scoping, design and sequencing of projects, we can reduce bottlenecks and provide greater certainty for the construction industry. Building Tasmania will eliminate the fragmentation between

departments, bringing together the necessary expertise to deliver our major infrastructure, housing and roads for the future.

Tasmania's latest 10-year infrastructure pipeline update demonstrated the strength and the numbers I just mentioned of the construction sector and the growing investment opportunities across the state. It demonstrates the confidence in the Tasmanian economy and shows the breadth and depth of investment across our regions. Our government recognises we can always improve the way we deliver on this state infrastructure. That's why we announced plans during the 2025 election to provide whole-of-government expertise in delivering major projects and ensuring value for taxpayers. This also includes finalising a comprehensive statewide infrastructure priority list. The list will help guide strategic investment, inform budget allocations and support ongoing engagement with the Australian Government on nationally specific projects. It will also include providing whole-of-government project assurance for major infrastructure and capital works projects valued at over \$200 million, helping identify issues early and avoiding costly delays.

In addition, this will lead to the development of a long-term state infrastructure strategy with a clear and transparent pipeline of projects. I truly support this move. You must have those things in place to be able to do this level of work.

As the minister for Infrastructure, I am committed to continuing the strong progress that in recent years has delivered a new Bridgewater Bridge, a transformed Midland Highway and record investment in the state's road and bridge network.

Housing is a fundamental foundation to quality of life. I recognise the pressures the housing systems are under, with record low vacancy rates for rentals and higher demand for social and affordable housing. I acknowledge we need to deliver more homes and infrastructure, and we need to rethink how we deliver these homes. The traditional delivery models of the past are no longer fit for purpose to deliver the scale we need in the timeframes we want and expect. We need to set ambitious targets and tap into the latest technology of developing opportunities, accelerating construction, and delivering more homes. The building delivery arm of Homes Tasmania will be incorporated into Building Tasmania, and I think that's very much the right place for it. Faster and more efficient delivery means more Tasmanians into homes sooner. Strengthening delivery capability is core to the success of our housing delivery strategy. Building more homes is vital and I'm unashamedly not going to stop talking about it or doing it.

There've been some suggestions in the other place recently that we lack the heart when it comes to housing, that I lack heart. I might have worked pretty hard through my life and probably abused it a fair bit too, but I can tell you there's still plenty of heart there to get this job done. In my inaugural speech to this Chamber, I talked about having my own brush with homelessness and living in a shipping container for over six years, and that's been a driving force in the last couple of decades for me to make sure that I help wherever I can.

I was proud to say that I dragged a heap of friends into a situation a few years ago where we took over the Levendale Primary School and over a number of years, before it was pulled apart by COVID, used the Edmund Rice system to put over 700 children with challenges through that revamped school to give them a chance of understanding what it was like to live a normal, happy life, and it's a very emotional thing to do. I do note that the member for Rumney some years back was also one of the mentors in Edmund Rice -

Ms Lovell - Not too many years ago.

Mr VINCENT - Sorry, not too many, a few years ago, I stumbled on that number there unfortunately. But it is very emotional and it stays with you; you don't lose what you see and it does drive you enormously.

In recent years, my lovely Jan at home and I have had to endure some family violence and coercive control very near to us, and it is a hard time and a hard thing to get used to. I do have my heart in this. I do have life experience in this area, and I think most will agree that I do wear my heart on my sleeve on this. I certainly want to make a difference with housing at all levels and crisis care.

I'd like to say I won't stop working towards and implementing efficiencies and effective controls to building more homes and delivering for Tasmania. This leads to our commitment to refining and strengthening Tasmania's planning scheme. A strong planning scheme is critical and through the machinery of government changes, the State Planning Office will move to Building Tasmania to further support building our state's future. This will be brought through the designing of critical frameworks which will support liveable communities, protect our environment and support our economy.

The Tasmanian planning policies, which come into effect on 1 July 2026, form an important part of the Tasmanian planning framework. The policies will provide guidance on key matters for the state, guiding land use and development. Strong regional land-use strategies are critical in balancing competing land use and interest within regions. The regional land-use strategies underway will identify how the Tasmanian policies can be balanced within our regions. We want to create conditions for resilient, liveable communities, infrastructure delivery, and set clear expectations around growth. This will support streamlined development assessment programs and processes.

The delivery of housing is a key focus of the State Planning Provisions review. We are working on amendments to the Tasmanian Planning Scheme to support the delivery of the right housing in the right locations for Tasmania. Tasmania is experiencing housing availability and affordability issues, and the planning system has a role to play in addressing these, supporting a strong economy and a caring community. Through processing minor changes, we can provide more practical, affordable options and better support ageing in place, multi-generational living and smaller households. It's all about making Tasmania a better and more positive place to live.

I look forward to the year ahead with my normal passion, vision and commitment.

In the transport space, we have a lot ahead of us, and more so now in recent weeks with the changes that are happening. A detailed business case for the first stage of the Rapid Bus Network, along the northern corridor to Claremont, is being developed through 2026. In May, we will be implementing the first phase of the Greater Hobart Bus Network review. It will introduce services like a new Sunday run to Brighton, as well as ensuring existing services are made more reliable. Work on a larger, second phase of the network review will continue over 2026. This phase will focus on route redesign and aim to deliver a more efficient network, delivering greater value for money for the Tasmanian community. A new proposed network is scheduled to be submitted to me for consideration by the end of the year.

We'll see the brand-new *Spirit of Tasmania* vessels entering service then as well. We all know the project went off track. We got it back in step and we're making great progress down there. Photos this week show most of the buildings framed up and ready to be roofed and walled. The gantry is being installed in Devonport, and the new terminal building is being built. I am keeping my focus on the end game, where our new ships are bringing more passengers, more vehicles and more freight into Tasmania. These visitors travel to our regions and are vital for our visitor and regional outcomes and communities.

For many of you in this Chamber, you know the passion I have for the Local Government portfolio. I often find myself still wearing my mayoral hat as I look to tackle headfirst a significant body of work underway in the sector. My commitment to local government remains steadfast, ensuring our councils are positioned to provide the best outcome for their communities. We are continuing to deliver our Priority Reform Program, laying the groundwork to achieve the recommendations of the Future of Local Government Review. It has been a long time since councillor numbers and allowances were addressed, so we're working hard to make sure the balance of representation in local government is correct. That will be progressing very shortly through to this House. It will form part of our Local Government Amendment (Targeted Reform) Bill, to be presented to the parliament shortly. This bill will improve governance, conduct and performance across the local government sector. Our exposure draft electoral bill, which closed for consultation just last month, will aim to establish a new and more flexible statutory framework for local government elections.

There's a lot of work to do, and we're listening to the sector the whole way through. That goes with everything I do. Lots of work, and importantly, lots of listening and a lot of communication. I would like to think that everybody here knows that I just want to get stuff done.

Thank you, Mr President. I note the Premier's Address and commend it to the Chamber.

[5.35 p.m.]

Mr EDMUNDS (Pembroke) - Thank you, Mr President. I know in some debates, with the final person to speak there's a lot of anticipation about where they're going to go. Everyone's on the edge of their seat waiting for that speech. I fear today is not that day.

Mr Vincent - Shame, shame.

Mr EDMUNDS - However, I do relish the opportunity to speak in front of a not-quite-bare quorum here today. I note we have some observers in the Gallery just to put a bit of pressure on. I'm going to talk loosely about my priorities for this year, both within this House and within my community. I think we have to strike a balance between holding a government to account and being prepared to put ideas forward, whether that's as a policy that people can wait three or more years for, or that can perhaps be enacted upon by government in the short term. It's also about being a constructive player within this Chamber, which I know most of us try to do every time we set foot inside this Chamber.

I will start with cost of living, which has been my number-one priority from before I entered this Chamber, and I hope, almost through every lens we view any policy through. I will double down on that as a priority this year. I think the TasWater decision and the work that's being done by our finance team - I suppose you would say most notably the shadow

treasurer, Mr Winter, is an example of that. However, it's about action and ideas, and I'll talk a little more about that going forward.

It's also about fighting job cuts. We have a public service, whether they're in our classrooms, in buildings nearby, or out in the streets, who we value in this state and that we need.

It's also about finding waste. Old governments tend to collect barnacles, and whilst I note comments from members of the government about trying to stay vigilant about that, it's also about all of us, frankly, having an eye for when we see waste and ways that can be tackled, because we have a significant budget challenge.

Ms Rattray - It's going to take me a while to do my list.

Mr EDMUNDS - Well, we've got time. I will talk a little bit about the Fiscal Sustainability Report (FSR), which others have spoken about, but for the sake of the record, this is where I wanted to hinge the majority of my contribution today. I want to talk through some of the findings and information that we've gathered from this document that was prepared by Treasury.

The FSR says that Tasmania's budget has a structural deficit, which is driving growth in debt and debt-servicing costs. This is unsustainable and will result in impairment in the ability to provide services. Our state is poorly positioned to respond to a major economic shock, because our fiscal buffers have been depleted. I think we saw questions about that in the lower House today with regards to the fuel situation. Shocks will come, and Treasury says such major economic shocks have been observed to occur approximately every 10 years. We're on a bit of a shorter timeframe if this shock continues to shock our economy. Treasury found that without action, Tasmania's finances will rapidly deteriorate with growing deficits and escalating debt. By 2039-40, operating expenditure is projected to be more than double revenue. Compounding debt-servicing costs will grow rapidly to become the second biggest operating expense after health. Within 15 years, net debt will grow to \$129.5 billion.

Tasmania is now in a fiscal crisis of historic proportions, with Treasury warning that debt levels are unsustainable, and that immediate action is required to prevent long-term damage to essential services. The Tasmanian Fiscal Sustainability Report reveals a structural budget failure that has worsened dramatically in recent years, driven by Liberal mismanagement, expenses growing faster than revenue, and a growing reliance on borrowing to fund day-to-day services. To be blunt, reckless Liberal financial management is sending Tasmania broke. The report outlines that conditions have deteriorated rapidly since Treasury's 2021 report, which warned that if corrective action was not taken then, corrective actions would be significantly more severe. We are now at that point.

There was no net debt when the Liberals came to power in 2014. This mess has been entirely created by them. The bulk of the damage has happened over the past four years with Mr Rockliff as Premier. Tasmania has gone from having the strongest balance sheet of any state or territory to the weakest.

Under all scenarios outlined in this report, the public sector will be slashed. New taxes will have already been planned, and the Tasmanian economy will suffer. The report outlines that the cost of servicing debt will be at least \$600 million per year - money that could be used

to support the critical services Tasmanians rely upon, which I spoke about earlier. Treasury projects that Tasmania's debt would reach \$129.5 billion by 2039-40 if nothing changes. However, this trajectory is so extreme that the system would likely break before reaching that point, noting that:

Tasmania's finances are projected to rapidly deteriorate without significant correction.

Treasury also warns of the risk of external intervention if the state loses control of its finances. The report states that unsustainable debt and debt-servicing costs could lead to external intervention and a loss of sovereignty over the control of Tasmania's finances. I know people have cautioned against the comparisons to places like Greece, but that's what the words say. After 12 years, we've seen a government that has destroyed public finances, and now every Tasmanian will need to brace themselves for the pain of it. Tax rises and public sector cuts are coming, and there's really no-one to blame but the government that's there.

There we go - that's a nice, rosy start. I am looking forward to continuing to work on the Public Accounts Committee this year. I believe we have - and I'll stand to be corrected - 10 or 11 outstanding inquiries, although we did tie a bow on at least one of those today. That will be good, and I look forward to seeing that tabled tomorrow. It's a bit of a slog getting through some of those reports, as I'm sure we all understand, so I look forward to, hopefully, with the prorogations of the last few years, being able to get some of that work done.

Amongst that is the *Spirits* oversight, the biggest infrastructure stuff-up in Tasmanian history. I note the comments of the minister previous to me, and, certainly, I think we all want this thing sorted. We want the big new boats operational. We want to see more people on them. We want to see the economic boost that we've been told that will provide the state. I note that we will probably see an update in the Budget, so I'll look forward to that and look forward to how that can be scrutinised when we understand it.

Speaking of oversight, we've also established the Stadium Oversight Committee, and looking around this room, there were plenty of people who put forward ideas, requests, and probably demands about how this project can, hopefully, have guardrails put around it so it doesn't end up exactly like the *Spirits*. I think we saw some of the best of the parliament in terms of trying to put as many guardrails as we could around that project and learning from the mistakes of history. I look forward to continuing to do that. It's been pretty enlightening. Some of the stuff that's come up in the public hearings has been said again by somebody three weeks later and that's been news. You forget what people do and don't know in the outside world. I'm not talking about information that's in camera, but there was so much information handed over both during the briefings and during the Project of State Significance (POSS) process in those public hearings which have started. There's so much interest in that project. I will play my role; hopefully it lands close to being on budget - I'm sure it will. I spoke earlier this week about my views on how the Tasmania Devils club will adjust the way we think in this state.

There's still a lot of work to do on our Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) inquiry. I look forward to that being tabled and being discussed or noted in this Chamber. Speaking of guardrails, I think that's going to be a good thing for our state, provided it's set up appropriately and isn't lip service. What we've seen from other jurisdictions is that it's like an insurance policy on blowouts, particularly as I know a lot of people in this Chamber have talked about how expensive elections have been for this state. Ultimately, the public have had three early

elections in a row. We haven't had a full parliamentary term since 2018, but, when there's an election, people expect a contest of ideas and policies and that can cost money. The PBO, if it can be set up appropriately, will be a way to protect against unrealistic promises that might have to be delivered.

The interesting thing about it, and I know there's scepticism from some, is that it's not necessarily something that's aimed specifically at the government or the opposition. It's there for backbenchers and minor parties as well. Sometimes the most hare-brained policies can come from those circles because it's easy to pull an idea that sounds pretty good, but no rubber has to hit the road from some of those individuals, and particularly ones who are, not to say 'part of the establishment', but are coming from the outside. With the growth of a certain party's votes over the weekend, that'll be important in terms of holding them to account, because something that sounds really good can have knock-on effects.

An example that may not apply in Tasmania, but a Victorian example in evidence we received was around free public transport and the maths that had been done - I think by the Greens, not that I'm setting out to verbal anybody - but that the cost would be what the ticket costs, but it's not. There's the fines revenue, there are other things that hadn't been considered and when the PBO report came back, I think they parked that policy perhaps. Again, I don't want to verbal them, but it's more to make the point that the budget impact of a policy isn't what's on just one receipt, there's a layering of things. When you have an appropriately resourced and credible Parliamentary Budget Office and budget officer, you can inoculate yourself from potential policies that might - particularly in our instance - bankrupt your state or at least make the mission out of the horrible financial circumstances we are in even harder.

Numerous other reports are in the works and I'm looking forward to ACPAC later this year - the Australian Council of Public Accounts Committees - which is being hosted in Hobart and I believe has about 80 people coming from around Australasia. As the chair of ACPAC comes in, is it 81 delegates?

Ms Forrest - Yes, around 80. Quite extraordinary.

Mr EDMUNDS - I'm looking forward to chairing a couple of those, or facilitating some of those discussions. It should be a real barrel of laughs and the member for Elwick is going to contribute as well as the member for Murchison, as well as our colleagues Mr Winter and Mr Jaensch from downstairs. So, it should be good.

Ms Forrest - Let's acknowledge the work of the secretary for pulling it together.

Mr EDMUNDS - As the Chair points out, the Committee Secretary, Mr Scott, is doing the work to pull that together.

We've also got our energy committee, which I'm sure those of us who are on it, or have been on it, are looking forward to seeing a final report to put down on this table. We know the story of that committee, which started as an upper-House-only committee and was going about its work and I'm sure would have had a very tidy, very insightful report on the impact of power prices on Tasmanians within five to eight months. However, as we may discuss in upcoming weeks, the challenges with joint parliamentary committees when you have a rotation of lower House members or issues with quorum, it can be hard to get that work done. Ultimately, since we had the merging of the lower House committee with that committee, it was hard. We, I don't

want to say lost our way, but it certainly bogged it down and nobody thought we'd still be not dealing with that committee report two-and-a-half years later.

To education, where we have our minister in our House and plenty of people watching. I have a huge interest in the proposed upgrades at Clarence High and Lindisfarne North and will continue to keep an eye on them through the budget papers. I noted last budget cycle the disappointment that Lindisfarne North had moved back in the budgetary line-up and we'll be keeping an eye on where those dollars are in the next budget.

We have challenges in health. I sat with my own grandmother, who is in her 90s, in a hallway in the LGH not that long ago. It's not really where you want someone that old and vulnerable to be. It's a challenge, and I note the reporting and questions in the lower House recently on that. It's in spite of the hard work of the people in our hospitals, in ambulances, in our community, our pharmacists, doctors and nurse practitioners, who are working so hard to keep Tasmanians healthy. But it's a challenge, I acknowledge it's not going to be solved by clicking our fingers, but the human reality of it is not good.

In Housing, we're fortunate enough to have the minister in this House. Homes Tasmania: the famous fast-track that delivered six houses in seven years. Homes Tasmania has failed and is essentially gone. I look forward to seeing where things go, but I also have concerns about how you can make something better by cutting it.

Cost of living: TasWater we've already talked about, signed off by the government. I watched with interest the debate in the lower House about that. I think Mr Winter was on the money where he said:

I don't think that the state government delegate at that meeting understood what they were voting for, but we'll find out because they signed up for the TasWater price rises.

TasInsure: the hoax. It's not saving a single Tasmanian \$250 on insurance this year. I'm not sure if it will next year but we'll wait and see. The policy that we were told would not cost Tasmanians a cent has already blown \$100,000 on a consultant.

Transport, I think we've talked about in this Chamber a lot, and the pressures particularly now that we might see an increase in people using it that those bus cancellations of 18 months ago, the 120 services that were temporarily taken out and now are completely gone and the pressure that's going to put on people trying to get to school or to work in their community.

I note the member for Montgomery's comments about local government in the Premier's remarks, but I also note the comments from our minister here. The thing that frustrates me about local government reform - being, like a few, of local government before being here - is we tend to always seem to end up in election years when we're doing our big reforms. The compulsory voting came in right on the eve of the last election. The uncertainty about direct election of deputy mayors and, indeed, the numbers around the table. People who are interested in running for leadership positions at councils or around-the-table councillor positions are basing financial decisions of whether they'll stick their neck out or not and how much money they might need to save. If you want to be a leader at a council but you don't want to be the mayor, because maybe you've got a different job or whatever, then it's a much different proposition to have to run a deputy mayor campaign than to just romp it home at a council and

then try to win around the table. I appreciate that there's some certainty on that now, but I also note that the uncertainty was causing issues.

Another thing I'd caution, and not to bring down the wrath of the state on me, just to remember the local government sector when consulting with it isn't just the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) and it isn't just the mayors. There are a lot of voices in the local government mix and sometimes, I think, having been one of those people around the table, I had a mayor who I don't think represented my opinion and perhaps, not even the Council's position when going off to LGAT and indeed voted against the will of the Council a couple of times.

There are challenges around young people and losing planeloads of young people. This is not just 19-year-olds who'll be back in a few years to buy a house. We're losing 30-year-olds who've got the family already. It's a massive challenge for us.

Hospitality: I do look forward to the measures to cut red tape coming into effect, but they have been announced 12 months ago, reannounced recently and unless I'm about to be knocked off my feet, I don't believe they've been tabled downstairs this week.

I know of businesses waiting far too long when navigating government red tape. I know from personal experience when you raise an issue with the Red Tape Reduction Coordinator, you don't even get an acknowledgement, let alone a response.

Our pubs, restaurants, clubs and the people who work at them are the backbones of our community, whether it's for a knock-off, to watch the game, catch the big fight, hopefully back a few winners, grab a meal, catch up with old friends, make new ones to put in your footy tips, to celebrate, to commiserate and to mourn, they are the beating heart of our communities. You know that if something's happening in your community, it's likely that the people are going to be at one of these places.

I'll touch briefly on our sporting landscape. I'll talk about the Hurricanes. We should congratulate our WBBL champions. It was pretty cool for a month or so there. Tasmania held both Big Bash trophies. I was there on the night and at the launch for the WBBL side. They are a credit to our state and should be congratulated.

I loved hearing from Elyse Villani at the recent International Women's Day lunch. People call them the 'Cane Train'; I'm going to butcher this, but they basically find a carriage for every player and personality type or life situation on the train. You might have your quiet carriage and your family carriage and things like a party carriage probably. It was really cool to listen to her, and she'd make a great guest speaker for anyone looking to organise an event. Not that I have any, I don't know why I said that. Congratulations to everyone at Cricket Tasmania for that and for the season they've had.

The JackJumpers didn't quite make it. They were smashed by injuries. I think they had a bench less than when we had the bare quorum here earlier, by the time they played their finals. But they did show a bit of Tasmanian grit, and as an undersized basketballer myself I loved watching their forwards try and mix it with some of the big boys from other teams and the way they never gave up and kept fighting and made the playoffs was awesome. I really look forward to the entry of the Jewels into the WBBL and was stoked to meet their coach, Claudia, recently at that International Women's Day lunch.

The footy club - I think I spoke about them this week, the Devils. They're now established. They had their first game and are changing the landscape of our state. And we know that's the pointy end and we know there are Tasmanians playing basically every sport under the sun at every age group in this state.

I believe and now I've got first-hand experience of this with my own children, the youth and junior programs are far more welcoming and inclusive, better organised, more professional than they certainly were when I was a child.

I'll also touch on the fuel issue, as we talked about. I am concerned at the lack of scrutiny into the app. We raised this when we had our Energy Committee on Friday, asked about how many compliance checks were there. There had been none. I don't believe they really started until about Tuesday this week. I hope we can get an update tomorrow on how many checks have been done from the minister. I'm sure we will because there's so much heat on it. I'm getting increasing anecdotal reports. Indeed, I had one in my own electorate today, that was displaying two different prices in two different directions.

In a note this morning, just to circle back to Hydro, some of the questions we've been asking the Energy Committee about dividends and the renewable energy dividend, that's the dividend that everybody gets money off their power price if Hydro returns more than \$90 million. However, these questions we've been asking, I'm not sure we're going to hit that threshold anytime soon.

I'll talk about infrastructure briefly. In Pembroke, we're seeing far too many projects failing to get out of the ground. There are countless major projects that I remember voting for when I was on council, that seem to be going nowhere. We see a lack of investment in local infrastructure and despite the best efforts of locals, we're seeing a lack of delivery by the state government where the federal government has already stepped up.

I note there's coverage again of the Mornington Roundabout, which I know everyone's sick of hearing about. The glazing over, the rolling back of people's eyes when they hear that something's going to happen with that roundabout. I almost feel sick when I say the words 'Mornington Roundabout', so I can't imagine how people feel when they see it being delayed and discussed. There's \$80 million from the federal government. I think we just need to get on with it.

We have an amazing community on the Eastern Shore, a community that's politically, socially and culturally engaged. A community where common sense still reigns and where people live in the political centre. I think they're being let down by this government and I'll continue to hold them to account.

I note the state of the state address.

[6.01 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Thank you, Mr President. My reply to this debate certainly won't be a lengthy one. However, there are some points on behalf of the government which I can make briefly. As I said at the outset, the state of our state and our shared responsibility to keep moving forward is still a focus, and certainly focusing on what matters to families, workers, students, volunteers,

community groups and small business. I'm sure that's what we've heard and seen from the contributions that have been presented over the past duration of this debate.

The state of the budget and the cost-of-living issues have been outlined in many members' contributions, and we know Tasmanians are worried about the ever-increasing cost of living: grocery prices, interest rates, insurance premiums, health insurance premiums, doctor's fees, pharmacy fees, medication and now, fuel prices. Tasmanians are being hit in all directions. Increasing interest rates and now fuel prices are not only putting added pressure on households but also on business, industry and the community sector.

The state government has provided support on the cost of living in areas within their control where government holds the levers, whilst navigating a challenging time for the state's financial situation. It has been evident over the contributions that other members feel that and have raised that.

There has been the halving of bus fares for a further year. All fares or routes, regional and rural, savings to Tasmanians are thousands of dollars. Also delivering over the four years in concessions, assisting those eligible with significant relief with the cost of power bills, local government rates and water and sewerage - the ones that we see regularly and that are really important.

There has also been some mention of the machinery of government changes announced by the government. This is aimed at enhancing delivery of the government's key priorities and consolidating functions to strengthen outcomes for the Tasmanian community to benefit from. Much has been spoken about that and over the coming months, we will create a new delivery-focused department called Building Tasmania, headed by Mr Vincent.

I acknowledge the comments from members relating to health and certainly heard the contribution from the member for Pembroke regarding his grandmother. Nobody wants to hear that. Clearly it is another significant matter of concern for many members. Demand for health services is increasing, and the government is responding with investment of approximately \$10 million every single day into our health system. This includes target investments into our four-year elective surgery plan and the government's outpatient transformation strategy to ensure that Tasmanians can be seen and have their appointments and procedures sooner. On a personal note, the member for McIntyre received a pathway for students undertaking school-based work experience opportunities that I spoke about in my contribution as the member for McIntyre, and I acknowledge that the Minister for Education has provided the necessary information, so if anyone is looking for that, I have a copy.

The messages to the government, through the very thoughtful and considered contributions, are acknowledged, and the matters and points raised have been noted. I undertake to summarise many of the key points to the best of my ability and pass them on to the Premier at the next opportunity. Again, the opportunity is appreciated to provide some comments in response to members, and I thank everyone for their thoughtful and considered contributions.

Motion agreed to.

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA (PROTECTION OF LAND) BILL 2025 (No. 58)

Second Reading

[6.07 p.m.]

Ms PALMER (Rosevears - Minister for Education) - Mr President, I move -

That the bill be read a second time.

Mr President, Tasmania only has one university and its future matters deeply, not only for higher education but for our economy, our workforce and our capacity to grow and prosper as a state.

This bill does three things - clearly and deliberately. First, it secures an ongoing university presence at Sandy Bay, consistent with our election commitment. Second, it enables two parcels of land identified by the university as surplus to future needs to be rezoned for inner residential use. Third, it creates a pathway for the value unlocked from that land to support investment into a new, world-class STEM precinct. That is the central link in this bill. It turns surplus land into opportunity, and opportunity into investment in the skills and industry Tasmania needs for the future.

The case for action is grounded in the data. Like other jurisdictions, Tasmania is facing challenges in productivity and workforce capability. Across the economy, digital and technical skills shortages are a consistent constraint on growth. Our technology sector already contributes more than \$1 billion annually to the state economy and is projected to triple by 2035, creating 21,000 new jobs. Yet at the same time, 31 per cent of workers lack critical digital skills, and more than 1500 businesses report shortages. It's estimated that addressing these gaps could deliver over \$200 million in productivity gains by 2030.

The number of people in Tasmania currently holding STEM-related qualifications is 25 per cent below the national average. If we want more engineers, more scientists, more digital specialists, we have to create an environment that attracts students into those fields and supports them to stay, study and build their futures here in Tasmania.

That brings me to the university itself. We've seen what happens when we invest in modern, fit-for-purpose facilities. The Cradle Coast campus redevelopment has seen an increase in local applications of over 100 per cent, and I'm advised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students represent more than 20 per cent of students undertaking medical degrees there. We are seeing more opportunities for students in the north-west through new facilities enabling expanded offerings.

The new Inveresk campus in Launceston has become a thriving centre of learning, research and innovation, while the Forest has reimaged higher education in the south. It is a great example of world-class facilities and what is possible.

However, at Sandy Bay, many STEM buildings are among the oldest on the campus. They are no longer fit for purpose and enrolments have declined as a result, despite growing national demand. If we are serious about building Tasmania's future workforce, that cannot continue.

That is why this bill matters. This bill provides the mechanism to help fund the next step. It allows land the university has identified as surplus to future needs to be rezoned for inner residential development. It creates the pathway for the value generated from that land to be reinvested into a world-class STEM precinct. That is the link.

This bill provides a clear, defined and timely mechanism to unlock that value and enable it to be directed towards the investment Tasmania needs. With this bill we move forward with certainty - securing an ongoing university presence at Sandy Bay, while enabling land not required for future needs to contribute to the next chapter of higher education in this state.

The STEM Precinct Detailed Business Case by Deloitte makes the opportunity clear. New facilities would attract top researchers and educators. They would strengthen the university position as a centre of excellence in science, technology and innovation, and they would support stronger partnerships with industry - creating more opportunities for students to gain real-world experience while they learn. Importantly, a visible and accessible STEM hub would also strengthen outreach activities, increasing interest in STEM pathways for senior secondary high school students and encouraging them to continue their education here.

This proposal has not emerged in isolation. The future of the Sandy Bay campus has been the subject of extensive community discussion and engagement. This bill was the result, preventing the university from disposing of campus land at Sandy Bay without the approval of both houses of parliament.

There are only two parcels of land exempt, which we are looking to rezone. Rezoning the identified parcels of land above Churchill Avenue was included in the university's Masterplan, informed by a substantial program of engagement in 2021.

Hobart City Council has also undertaken two rounds of consultation on the Mount Nelson and Sandy Bay Neighbourhood plan, with the discussion paper recommending higher-density housing on the same land proposed to be rezoned in this bill. The university has continued to receive technical and planning advice from Hobart City Council officers on this land. This is not a new idea; it is a well-understood opportunity, now supported by a legislative pathway. It comes at the right time and in the right place.

Tasmania needs more well-located housing. Land close to jobs, services, education, and transport is critical. The land proposed to be rezoned under this bill sits near the Hobart CBD and presents a genuine opportunity for appropriate inner residential development. Clause 7 makes it clear that the rezoning applies only to the defined parcels of land. It cannot extend to land protected as vested land.

It is equally important to be clear on what this bill does not do. This bill does not approve any specific development. Any future proposal will still be subject to Hobart City Council planning processes, including full public scrutiny. What this bill does is enable the opportunity. Timing matters, because without the bill, the pathway to a new STEM precinct becomes very uncertain. The choice before us is clear. We can keep the status quo - allow outdated infrastructure to continue to age, skill shortages to continue - and see a key housing opportunity delayed. Or we can act - act to secure the future of the university at Sandy Bay, unlock land for housing and invest in the skills, research and innovation that Tasmania will rely on in the years ahead. This is not just about land; it's about jobs, it's about skills, it's about housing, it's about

acting now to back the future of our only university and the future of our state. This is about an opportunity.

I commend the bill to the House.

Mr President, I move -

That the debate stand adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

[6.15 p.m.]

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

That at its rising the Council adjourn to 11.00 a.m. on Thursday 26 March 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Ms RATTRAY - Mr President, before I move that the Council do adjourn, I remind honourable members that we have a briefing starting at 9.30 tomorrow morning.

I move -

That the Council do now adjourn.

The Council adjourned at 6.16 p.m.