

Kristie Johnston MP

Independent Member for Clark

Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts Inquiry into Establishment of Parliamentary Budget Office

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As an independent member of the Tasmanian Parliament, I strongly support the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) in Tasmania. Independent scrutiny of public finances is essential to the health of our democracy—and right now, our system lacks the capacity to provide non-government members with timely, expert, and independent budget advice.

The Tasmanian House of Assembly also supports the introduction of a PBO. On 9 April 2025 it passed a motion I moved calling on the Government to fund in the 2025/26 Budget the establishment of a PBO.

Without a PBO, members like me are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to assessing the economic and fiscal impacts of legislation, scrutinising the government's budget proposals, or developing alternative policy proposals. We are often left to rely on departmental briefings—prepared by the same public service that must implement government policy—or on costly external consultants (which most of us can't afford) or on the good will of local experts who are willing to offer small amounts of their time to support our work. That's not a level playing field.

A well-resourced, independent PBO would change that. It would:

- **Allow me to request costings or fiscal analysis** of legislation, policy proposals, or amendments I am considering putting forward.
- **Help me assess the long-term impacts** of budget measures—not just the immediate headline figures, but how they affect equity, sustainability, and service delivery over time.
- **Support a better-informed public debate**, by enabling all MPs—not just those in government—to understand and explain the real impacts of budget decisions.

This view is reinforced by the recent Independent Review of Tasmania's State Finances conducted by Saul Eslake, which recommended the establishment of a PBO:

In order to enhance the capacity of the Parliament to comprehend and discuss fiscal issues, and to formulate policies which will have an impact on the Budget,

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the Review recommends that Tasmania follow the Federal Parliament, and the Parliament of Victoria, in establishing a Parliamentary Budget Office.¹

I believe Tasmania's PBO should be small but capable, with the ability to scale up during election periods. It should be independent of the executive government, and answerable to Parliament. And it should have a clear mandate to serve all members of parliament, especially those of us without access to a party apparatus or the resources of Treasury. It could be overseen by an appropriate parliamentary committee, ensuring that the PBO maintains independence and public trust.

As an MP, my job is to represent my community, scrutinise the government, and propose alternatives when needed. To do that properly, I need access to the kind of high-quality, independent budget advice a PBO can provide.

This reform is not about politics—it's about good governance. It's about strengthening Parliament's role, restoring trust in public decision-making, and ensuring that all elected representatives, regardless of affiliation, have the tools they need to do the job well.

I urge the Committee to recommend the establishment of a Tasmanian PBO.



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¹ Saul Eslake, *Independent Review of Tasmania's State Finances*, 2024, p9.