

CONSTITUENT QUESTION

House of Assembly

ASKED BY: Jen Butler MP

ANSWERED BY: Hon Jo Palmer MLC
Minister for Education

QUESTION:

From Todd of Mole Creek: for the past 14 months, the Mole Creek Online Access Centre has aimed to provide a five-day-a-week operation that has been wholly run by volunteers, with much thanks going to the Mole Creek Progress Association for taking us under their wing for insurance coverage and generously providing space in their community building. Under our own steam, despite many challenges, our centre has continued to push on and thrive. We have a great team, good local support and plan to further develop our services to improve rural digital literacy in the region.

Without this vital facility, townsfolk have to travel long round-trip distances to access equivalent services elsewhere. Can the Minister outline future funding for digital access in rural Tasmania? Is the existing digital grant program to be further extended? Has the government now completed its digital services review, and decided upon a replacement funding framework with the existing online access centres continuing to provide a role going forward?

ANSWER:

I thank Todd from Mole Creek for his question.

Through the *Our Digital Future* strategy, the Tasmanian Government recognises the importance of Tasmanians having online access to services, and the digital skills they need to work, learn, connect and participate in modern life.

We deliver digital inclusion through 46 Libraries Tasmania sites that offer free Wi-Fi, computer access, and digital literacy support with strong community reach and engagement.

Services are also provided through independent community managed Online Access Centres (OACs) funded through the Digital Connections Grants.

Since 1998 we have seen the number of OACs decline from over 60 to 15. I'm advised this has largely been due to ongoing challenges in attracting volunteers for management committees and to provide front of house services.

The government commissioned an independent review of *Digital Inclusion in Tasmania* in 2024, to better understand how services could be strengthened and made more sustainable into the future. I understand that Libraries Tasmania provided a copy of the Review to each Online Access Centre and local council on the 6th of March, 2025. The report can also be found here on the Libraries Tasmania website [Digital inclusion review report - Libraries Tasmania](#).

While the Review recommended the phasing out of Online Access Centres, the government did not support this approach.

Instead, in a small number of cases, services are transitioning to local libraries where there is a duplication of services, and we have increased funding in 2026-27 to the remaining eleven OACs currently funded.

I am advised the Meander Valley Online Access Centre which operated at two sites, including Mole Creek, ceased operations in early 2025 due to financial issues. Libraries Tasmania provided some further support to the Centre to assist with transitional arrangements until the cessation of the 2022-2025 grant on 30 June 2025.

I understand that the Mole Creek Online Access Centre has continued to operate since this time on a volunteer basis, as do a number of other Online Access Centres in Tasmania.

Our focus is on strengthening digital inclusion services through libraries. The Digital Connections Grant program is not being extended to

establish new Online Access Centres or to fund Centres that are currently operating on a volunteer basis.

The Tasmanian government recognises the importance of being able to access digital inclusion services in rural and regional areas. I am advised the Deloraine library, which is around 20 minutes from Mole Creek, provides computers, wi-fi and digital inclusion support services to that local community.



Hon Jo Palmer MLC

Minister for Education

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