



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Nick Duigan MP

Monday 17 November 2025

MEMBERS

Mr Rob Fairs (Chair)
Mr Dean Winter (Deputy Chair)
Mr Vica Bayley
Prof George Razay

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Finlay
Mr Ferguson
Mr Garland
Ms Johnston
Ms Badger
Mr George

IN ATTENDANCE

HON NICK DUIGAN MLC

Minister for Energy and Renewables, Minister for Sport, Minister for Parks

Energy and Renewables (Output 7.1)

Craig Limkin

Secretary, Department of State Growth

Vanessa Pinto

Deputy Secretary, ReCFIT and Resources

Sean Terry

Executive Director Energy

Adrian Christian

Director Energy Policy

Andrew Johnson

Director Office of the Secretary

Angela Conway

Deputy Secretary, Business Services

Sport (Output 5.6)

Shane Gregory

Associate Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet

Brett Stewart

Deputy Secretary, Creative Industries, Sport and Visitor Economy

Anthony Reid

Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning

James Avery

Chief Executive Officer - Stadiums Tasmania

Ben Goodsir

Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure Tasmania

Calen Jeffrey

Acting Director, Active Tasmania

Adam Sproule

Director TIS

Travis Boutcher

Director Finance

Parks

Jason Jacobi

Secretary

Sophie Muller

Deputy Secretary, Parks and Wildlife Service

Alice Holeywell-Jones

General Manager (Operations)

Danielle Poirier

Director (Major Projects and Infrastructure)

Tory Ross

Director (Tourism, Experience and Visitor Services)

Andrew Harvey

General Manager (Land Tasmania)

Yann Gagnon

Director, Royal Botanical Gardens

Amy Russell

General Manager, Wellington Park Management Trust

Adrian Pearce

Manager (Finance)

Josh Brown

Manager (Budget Services)

Sofia PAshev

Senior Finance Analyst (Budget Services)

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The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

CHAIR - The time now being 9.00 a.m., the scrutiny of the Energy and Renewables portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions, for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Chair. I have with me the Acting CEO of Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania (ReCFIT), Vanessa Pinto, my Chief of Staff, Amanda Lovell, and the Secretary, Department of State Growth, Craig Limkin.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Minister for Energy and Renewables is four hours. We will take a break for morning tea at 11.00 a.m.

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

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

Would the minister like to make a short opening statement?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Chair. Yes, I would, and it's a pleasure to be here to discuss Tasmania's and the government's ambitious energy agenda.

Tasmania already has a strong reputation as a renewable energy powerhouse and our government is committed to strengthening this reputation, to unlocking the opportunities for new industry and delivering improved energy outcomes for every Tasmanian.

As a state, we have much to be proud of in the energy space. Our existing hydropower system has provided clean, green energy to power Tasmania's homes and businesses for more than 100 years. In 2020, we became the first jurisdiction in Australia to be net 100 per cent renewable. Significant, not only on a national stage, but also on a global one.

The Tasmanian Government remains committed to seizing the opportunities offered by our world-class renewable energy resources and delivering for Tasmanians. Through the November interim Budget, we continue to focus on progressing Project Marinus, supporting new on-island generation and new emerging industries to grow our economy and, of course, working to ensure Tasmanians have access to the lowest possible power prices.

Project Marinus is critical to maximising Tasmania's renewable energy potential. Following the positive final investment decision in August, our key focus is on ensuring Tasmania is ready to seize the benefits that Project Marinus will deliver. Among those benefits is a forecast on average uplift of \$470 million to Tasmania's bottom line.

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The interim Budget includes \$191 million in equity contribution to deliver Stage 1 of the North West Transmission Developments, essential infrastructure to support Marinus and our renewable ambitions. This will create jobs, bolster our economy and ensure Tasmanians continue to have the lowest power prices in the nation.

Alongside Marinus Link, there is substantial private investment in the pipeline with over 7 gigawatts of potential projects identified by developers, and of course, we are continuing to invest in our hydro system with Hydro Tasmania progressing upgrades and investments to assets across the state.

We are developing new industries as well, with continued work on the Tasmanian green hydrogen hub, which saw announcement of Bell Bay Powerfuels as the provisional proponent earlier this year.

Our energy system has always been a strong economic driver of growth in the state, and now, our strong renewable credentials will help Tasmania set up for a strong, prosperous future. The government is not resting on our strong performance of the past; we are continuing to invest in this portfolio. I welcome questions on the Energy and Renewables portfolio.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you, minister. It's great to hear your passion around energy and how you talk about the benefit to Tasmanians, and for every Tasmanian. I'm interested in understanding the impact on energy poverty in Tasmania. Although you have said multiple times that we have the lowest prices, by your definition, because a lot of social housing is poorly insulated and in poor condition, people are actually paying higher bills.

Minister, how do you reconcile Tasmania's claim of having the lowest electricity prices with the reality that over 50,000 households are living in energy poverty, and there are many thousands repaying energy debts?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you. I appreciate the question and the serious nature of the question. It is absolutely true that Tasmania does have the lowest regulated power prices of any state in the country.

Ms FINLAY - Doesn't mean much if you can't pay bills.

Mr DUIGAN - I understand that, but it is a really worthy aspiration that the government has, and I have, to keep us with the lowest power prices in the nation simply because, as Tasmanians, we do typically consume electricity. There aren't a lot of Tasmanian households connected to a gas network, for example, and that makes Tasmania somewhat different from other jurisdictions, and by virtue of our climate. Obviously, having low prices, keeping the cost of energy low, is a key consideration. You'll see through all our ministerial charters that have been presented to the energy businesses relatively recently, this is a headline expectation of government. We're working with all those businesses to continue to deliver those lowest power prices.

There are things we can do, and I point to the recent Energy Saver Loan Scheme, which has been really important in helping Tasmanian families and businesses invest in consumer electricity resources - typically solar panels and batteries and things of that nature. That will help them make their houses more energy-efficient. Obviously, the best power is the power you don't use, so making sure we're working with people to lower their energy consumption is

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important. Also, through the No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS) that we have - again, supported by government and Aurora and others - we see that as a really positive step to make people's houses as energy-efficient as they can be, helping them to buy things like air conditioners and more energy-efficient appliances.

In terms of energy debt, which you mentioned, it's the raw number where energy debt would appear to be higher, but it's important to recognise that the level of debt is lower. One of the things we know, and one of the really important aspects of managing energy debt, is early engagement. The earlier we can engage with somebody who's having problems paying their bills, the much more successful they will be in having a payment plan where they can get back on track. It's when the debt becomes too much to contemplate that we see people having almost no credible pathway back. So, early engagement is really important. Aurora has a number of things that they do, we support where we can, but it is an area of considerable focus for the government.

Ms FINLAY - It has doubled in recent years. I understand the amount of debt might have lowered, but the number of people in debt, and the collective amount, has increased.

You mentioned the Energy Saver Loan Scheme, and I'll ask questions about that later and its continuation, if you're stating that's actually a benefit to Tasmanians, particularly ones with poor insulation and poor heating options. How many people, for instance, who are exposed to energy debt and energy repayments were actually able to apply for that, given that you've used that as an example of a benefit? How many people under energy debt applied for Energy Saver Loans?

Mr DUIGAN - The Energy Saver Loan Scheme, as I understand it, liberated some \$67 million of loans.

Ms FINLAY - My question is about Tasmanians in energy debt. The most vulnerable Tasmanians are living in the poorest housing standards and therefore their bills are the highest. You mentioned a solution to that being the Energy Saver Loan Scheme. I'm wondering how many people in energy debt were actually in a position to apply for that?

Mr DUIGAN - I'm not sure that's a metric that anyone would have.

Ms FINLAY - So, as the minister concerned for vulnerable Tasmanians, would you not have put your mind to that, given that you're saying that that's the solution?

Mr DUIGAN - I think that probably leans into what we would see as being a follow-on from the Energy Saver Loan Scheme, and that was a time-limited scheme for three years, and a really successful scheme. There were, I believe, \$67 million worth of loans written off the back of that scheme to support Tasmanians to put solar on their roofs and batteries in their houses and better insulation.

Ms FINLAY - I'm particularly focused on vulnerable Tasmanians.

Mr DUIGAN - If you'll let me finish answering the question - that scheme finished recently. I have asked ReCFIT to conduct a review of the scheme and come back with some thoughts about what we can do as a replacement or a follow-on for that scheme. That includes

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where that scheme might be more targeted, potentially, at people who were less able to access it previously or missing out on the benefits of transition.

Ms FINLAY - You have asked for ReCFIT to consider that?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Ms FINLAY - So, that's been on your mind, yet you don't know the answer, in terms of your asking them to contemplate how it might be a better fit, but you haven't actually put your mind to how you could support vulnerable Tasmanians with that?

Mr DUIGAN - Vanessa, you might be best placed to talk to what the terms of reference are or what that review is focusing on, and what metrics you are plugging into that.

Ms PINTO - Thank you. Through you, minister, and to the member. The Energy Saver Loan Scheme has been a very important scheme that's been in play for a number of years now. What we see is there's a range of forms of appliances in the home that people invest in. But key to that - which is why the NILS program is also important, that we're observing - is not just investment in energy-efficient appliances or solar for roofs, it's also investment in insulation and other elements that support a home in keeping down those energy costs.

What the review and assessment will do is look at the areas that need to be invested in for someone either in a rental situation with a landowner that is looking after that property, or in their own situation, where they can influence the way that the cost of energy in the home can be brought down. As I said, some aspects could be in relation to the appliances in the property as well as what needs to happen with the property.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, can I ask, through you - do you mind, Chair?

CHAIR - Sorry.

Ms FINLAY - Do you actually have statistics on how many vulnerable Tasmanians -

CHAIR - Ms Finlay, sorry, you've had three questions. We can circle back.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, thanks for your introduction. An overarching quick question: minister, in the past 18 months have you as an individual been subject, or party to, any Supreme Court matters?

Mr DUIGAN - No.

Mr BAYLEY - In the past 18 months have you as an individual incurred any legal costs that have been covered by taxpayer dollars?

Mr DUIGAN - No.

Mr BAYLEY - Just on the weekend, your federal colleagues confirmed a policy position to absolutely abandon net zero. You spoke very proudly of net zero as a state achievement in 2020, you said. If we're proud to have net zero here in Tasmania, how do you feel about your

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federal colleagues dumping it at the national level? Does that make you ashamed and you're willing to condemn them for that?

Mr DUIGAN - I certainly won't be condemning anybody. What's really important to recognise is that the Tasmanian context is very different from the national context. All of us benefit enormously from the decisions that were made a long time ago to lean on hydropower to be our baseload generator.

We are now, very thankfully, not facing the very challenging circumstance of needing to shut down baseload generation and look at what will come next and how we'll replace that and how we'll do that on what are very tight time lines. With the federal Liberal Party, what they are looking at is an entirely different set of circumstances to what we are looking at, so I would make that point very clearly.

For Tasmania, we are a renewable energy powerhouse, and this is a very, very opportune time to be that.

Mr BAYLEY - Noting, of course, it was protecting forests that tipped us over the edge of net zero. But do you not acknowledge that your -

Mr DUIGAN - I would also note that things like Project Marinus, Robbins Island wind farm, are massive carbon abaters. You can't have it both ways - do we support our reserving of forests, that's very good for our carbon accounting, but so too is Marinus, and so too is Robbins Island.

Mr BAYLEY - You'd have to acknowledge then that -

CHAIR - Order. Vica, you've had two questions. I want to move on, and can we please keep it relevant to Tasmania.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, Tasmania's lack of rain last year, which was the driest since 1934, forced Hydro Tasmania to scale back generation to conserve water. That means increased imports of energy from the mainland via Basslink, which actually affected our clean energy status. For the last three years we had 91 per cent to 100 per cent of that, while in 2024 only 79 per cent was produced from renewable energy.

What future strategy is there to increase renewable energy in the state to become more self-reliant, especially with increased demand and more drought conditions in the future?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Prof Razay, I appreciate that question. What I would quickly like to do is congratulate Hydro Tasmania. As you say, the last two years have been the two driest years on record. People at home and most of us here in the building wouldn't necessarily have noticed anything like that, but really challenging circumstances for Hydro to manage its storages and manage its generation.

I note that Hydro didn't get into prudent storage level area or high reliability. We didn't dip into those areas. But that does have an impact, obviously. You would have seen last year, hydro generation at about 60 per cent of our total state generation. In an average year, it's more like 80 per cent. That means more imports via Basslink.

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Typically, we import through the middle of the day, which is when energy in Victoria and the NEM is cheap and it's mostly solar. I don't think we get to account for that, but it is mostly solar coming in. That's not perhaps as bad as it looks in terms of our net zero position.

The other thing it means is that when situations demand, and when commercial opportunities are such, Hydro will run the Tamar Valley Power Station, which is gas-powered, which is not a renewable energy generation source. It is an important part of our energy mix at the moment.

But the first part of your question was: what are we doing to bring more generation on-island? It's important to recognise, and I'm not sure how familiar you are, but Tasmania has a legislated position of doubling our 2020 generation by 2040. So, our Tasmanian renewable energy target is to essentially double our renewable energy generation. We've got a large pipeline of projects. You'd be familiar with some of them; and we're seeing, as Project Marinus has provided certainty, there is a much greater level of engagement with some of those projects, wanting to see them get built.

Prof RAZAY - Can I just add to that? One of the best batteries for clean energy will be to increase our storage of water. Are there any plans to increase that?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, there are. Certainly in the Gordon scheme there is an opportunity to increase levels there. That has the result of getting more out of the Gordon Power Station for essentially no greater investment in new machinery. Just having that high head level allows that scheme to run more efficiently.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, thanks for mentioning earlier the Green Hydrogen Hub and the very exciting Bell Bay Power Fuels Initiative. You've actually got about four or five members at the table, in addition to yourself, who share a common interest in East Tamar, Bell Bay.

Developing a completely new industry like hydrogen has significant challenges, one of which is massive subsidies of other countries, and other states have walked away. What actions are the government undertaking and what will it do in market activation in that difficult landscape to kick-start the development of a hydrogen industry in our state?

Mr DUIGAN - Like all of us, I think, I have ridden the hydrogen hype curve, as it's been described. I think we are all seeing it a bit more clearly now.

I personally am deeply committed and I think Tasmania is still in the game for hydrogen now, as it was back in the early days of it, because the fundamentals are so very sound here in Tasmania. We have our green grid, we have relatively abundant fresh water, we have ports, we have carbon inputs as well. The development of a clean fuels industry does present fantastic opportunity for Tasmania to leverage those comparative advantages.

Bringing on new load and developing new industry in Tassie is a great complement to our legislated goal to double renewable generation by 2040. It's one thing to have new generation, but we need new load because that drives investment and that drives job creation, and so on, and wealth for our state. We recognise that developing a brand-new industry requires concentrated effort from government, industry and businesses. This is why we have undertaken

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a number of market activation activities in Tasmania to underpin the Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan.

This plan sets out a strategy for the development of the hydrogen industry. It included a \$50 million Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Industry Development Fund; \$11 million was allocated from the Industry Development Fund to trial three hydrogen fuel buses. I am very pleased to say that hydrogen buses are running around. You may have had some experience with the hydrogen buses, and it's great that we're making green hydrogen here. They'll be operated by Metro for three years. The hydrogen refuel system was completed in May and this is the first hydrogen refueller in the state. Separate to the trial, we've provided an injection of \$6 million for Metro to run electric buses. And, as I mentioned, the Lutana facility where we are creating green hydrogen in Tasmania.

The point shouldn't be lost that we are one of the relatively few jurisdictions that has a production facility. When the refueller was being commissioned and the buses were being commissioned, they brought in a truckload of hydrogen from, I think, Victoria. It was deemed that that hydrogen, which was grey hydrogen, was not of a high enough quality standard to do the commissioning of the buses and the refuel, so we had to wait for Lutana.

There are a number of other aspects, in terms of the Green Hydrogen Price Reduction Scheme allocating \$8 million to bring parity to the cost between hydrogen and traditional fuels. Countrywide, hydrogen is an important player there and we would expect to see them as part of our Green Hydrogen Hub at Bell Bay. There is plenty going on in that space and also plenty more to do, but I think we will stay the course.

Ms FINLAY - Regarding supporting vulnerable Tasmanians who are under energy pressure: when it gets to the point where they have no credible path, is how I think you put it, to pay back their debts, how many Tasmanians have had their power disconnected in the past 12 months due to unpaid bills? And what's the average time between a disconnection and them being in a position to reconnect power?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, I appreciate the question. I would point to the fact that, of recent times, Aurora Energy has embarked on a really substantial program of debt forgiveness. This is probably one we can cover off in great detail when Aurora is at the table next week. There has been this program of debt forgiveness for a lot of that cohort who found themselves with that no credible pathway back. That's been an aspect. Sorry, just remind me?

Ms FINLAY - How many Tasmanians have had their power disconnected due to unpaid bills, and what's the average time between a disconnection and a reconnection?

Mr DUIGAN - Let me have a spool through this to see whether I've got that.

Ms FINLAY - While you are having a look through, once someone gets to the point where they don't have a credible pathway back and they've had forgiveness, what supports are put around them so that they don't find themselves in the same situation again?

Mr DUIGAN - Okay. I don't have disconnection numbers, unless anybody here at the table has those. Obviously, Aurora and other retailers would have those. In terms of -

Ms FINLAY - Would you be happy to take that on notice?

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Mr DUIGAN - It's sort of a GBE matter.

Ms FINLAY - Well, you are the Energy minister, and you talked about not -

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, but what I would say is -

Ms FINLAY - So, you are happy to take that on notice?

Mr DUIGAN - No, not necessarily. I'm happy to answer it at GBEs when I've got Aurora in the room. I think it's very much a matter for them. What I -

Ms FINLAY - It's a matter for you as the Tasmanian Energy minister.

Mr DUIGAN - What I would say is that one of the programs that's been introduced through TasNetworks and Aurora is Knock to Stay Connected, which is an additional step that's been added in terms of all the typical contact that you would expect, but this is a physical visit to the property where someone will go and knock. That has seen a 65 per cent - is it a 65 per cent decrease in the number of disconnections?

Ms FINLAY - So, you know the decrease, but you don't know the number. I think you're hiding that, minister.

Mr DUIGAN - I'm not hiding it.

Ms FINLAY - You must know that, if you know that statistic.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay, please let the minister answer.

Mr DUIGAN - What I'm saying is that has been a really successful tool in avoiding people being disconnected. So, again, as we introduce more supports for people and engage with people, and that seems to be the key learning in all of this, that engagement, early engagement, face to face conversations, if you can have those things, you can typically find a pathway to keep people connected up.

Ms FINLAY - And support once they have been disconnected that they don't find themselves in that situation again.

Mr DUIGAN - But, you know, in terms of disconnections through the COVID period, there was a period of time where no disconnections occurred. So, there was a bit of a hump, in terms of debt and people not paying their bills and whatever else, so that did throw some anomalies up and that is sort of working its way out through the system now.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I do want to take you back to your federal colleagues' net-zero abandonment. Obviously, it's very pertinent for Tasmania. Let's be really clear, your colleagues have abandoned that because of their commitment to the fossil fuel sector, oil, gas and ongoing coal. It's very anti-renewables. Do you accept - I mean, they are the alternative government at the federal level; there will be an election in two years' time. Do you accept your federal colleagues dumping their commitment to net zero and what that means for renewables? Ongoing fossil fuel use poses a significant risk when it comes to Marinus. There were a lot of red flags in the Marinus whole-of-state business case, including the structure of the national

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energy market and other issues. Would not your federal colleagues abandoning net zero be a significant red flag and risk to Marinus?

Mr DUIGAN - Look, that wouldn't be the way I would see it. I continue to see perhaps the slower-than-forecast uptake of renewables on the mainland as being a continual positive for Marinus. I think where you can get clean, renewable firming over gas peaking or whatever that might be, you would choose that.

Mr BAYLEY - But you consistently point to some of the concessional finance arrangements and other sort of policy-based incentives that you have used to help justify Marinus and help make the economic case for Marinus.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes: keep the cost to Tasmanians down.

Mr BAYLEY - Well, that's your case, but you'd have to accept that federal colleagues, the alternative government, should they be in government, abandoning a commitment to net zero and wanting to stimulate ongoing fossil fuels development and energy generation from fossil fuels, wouldn't that pose a risk to some of those policy issues that you say are underpinning Marinus here and now? Doesn't that simply magnify the risk that was written into the whole-of-state business case?

Mr DUIGAN - No. I would take the counter view that it amplifies the opportunity.

Mr BAYLEY - So, a federal government that's committed to fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas and wanting to increase energy generation from fossil fuels at the federal level is not going to have any impact on the economic returns or indeed the likelihood of realisation of the Marinus project? Are saying there's no connection between federal policy and Marinus and the so-called benefits to Tasmania?

Mr DUIGAN - I would say that is a mischaracterisation of what the federal Liberal Party has said. I think it remains very committed to reducing emissions, but it also has some -

Mr BAYLEY - It's abandoned it's net-zero commitment. That doesn't sound like a commitment to -

Mr DUIGAN - Well, notwithstanding the fact that it remains committed to reducing its emissions.

Mr BAYLEY - I think we know where it's -

CHAIR - Mr Bayley, let minister answer please.

Mr DUIGAN - And that's right. As I say, there is a different context, there is a different argument in mainland Australia. What no one is shying away from is the need to reduce our carbon emissions, whether it's here in Tasmania or all of our nation, and project Marinus offers that opportunity.

Mr BAYLEY - But if the federal government abandon -

CHAIR - Sorry, you have had your two. Mr Garland.

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Mr GARLAND - A spokesman for Bell Bay Aluminium's owner, Rio Tinto, was reported in the AFR telling an audience at the Financial Review Energy and Climate Summit on 21 October that the Tasmanian communities and governments needed to choose their preferred use of their finite clean energy resources: either selling it to Victoria or keeping it on-island to run the major industrials. The whole-of-state business case for Marinus warned that a 5 per cent increase in transmission prices and higher power prices were likely to lead to the closure of one or more major industrials in this state. Minister, why was this information kept from Tasmania before the Marinus Link deal was signed?

Mr DUIGAN - There are three elements to that question. In terms of transmission increases, we as a government have said that for our direct transmission-connected customers, we will use the benefits of Marinus Link and the increased profits derived by Hydro Tasmania to shield our major industrial businesses from those cost impacts. We're unambiguous about that. We understand there will be an impact. It's a large transmission build, they are direct-connected transmission customers, they will see the impact of that, and we will use policy settings to offset those costs. That's an important distinction to make.

In terms of the whole-of-state business case, noting it's a Treasury document, but at the time of negotiating with the Commonwealth government around Marinus link and north-west transmission, there was a great deal of interest being shown by the Commonwealth in the impact of Project Marinus on Hydro Tasmania. There was a very keen interest from the Commonwealth and a very keen interest from us not to share those impacts with the Commonwealth because we felt that that would be an unfair impact on Tasmania, if we were asked to use our state-owned generator to offset some of the impacts, where we felt that wasn't the case and that wouldn't be the case in other states.

Other states have sold their generation assets, and no one's asking AGL to cover the cost of anything else in NSW or wherever that might be. There was a very real tension between how much we shared and what information was contained in the whole-of-state business case which you would have seen, which as you would note is a pretty comprehensive picture of the Tasmanian energy system and its inputs and outputs. That was the reason that we didn't share that document right up until the time that the decision was made, because those conversations remained live.

Mr GARLAND - Fair enough. We know people will see significant price increases in the transmission component of their bill, mum and dad householders; you've committed to shielding the major industrials from those price rises. What policy commitments will your government make to shield Tasmanian small businesses and residential customers from the price hikes they will see on their electricity bill as a result of Marinus Link?

Mr DUIGAN - The first point I'd make is that you're right, there will be an uptick in the distribution cost or transmission cost on customer bills, but all of the modelling shows that as we bring more generation into the state - and, you know, Marinus in and of itself sits there like a 750 megawatt generator essentially. It sits there ready to supply energy into Tasmania, and in the Tasmanian context that's a lot. All of the modelling shows that as you bring on more supply, the wholesale cost of energy will fall, and again the modelling points to the fact that there will be an uptick on the transmission side, but there will also be a downtick on the wholesale energy price side.

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For small businesses, for households we would expect price impacts to be either positive or even each other out over time. In terms of what policy settings government will take and we have committed to a pricing review, looking at what the impacts are. It's reasonable for Tasmanians to expect to see the benefits of having the hydro system in Tasmania and being in a good place. We have committed to a review to look at the pricing structure, potentially how we derive our wholesale energy price. I would again point that the energy businesses in Tasmania and the way the price is regulated in the office of the regulator have done a good job over the last decade or so in keeping a check on energy prices. We're in a good place and want that to continue.

Mr FERGUSON -To follow up from my previous question focusing on clean fuels, clean fuels like green hydrogen, a gas; green methanol, a liquid; are going to be part of that solution to continue to help sectors decarbonise that need to and want to, that are otherwise challenging to electrify. I am thinking here of marine shipping in particular, but also heavy industry where it's appropriate. I want to follow up from that previous question by asking what you're doing and what the government generally is doing to progress the clean fuels sector or the green fuels opportunity for those sectors that are looking for innovation and new technologies.

Mr DUIGAN - It's an interesting question of how we go about decarbonising those hard to abate industries - shipping, aircraft, heavy industry, and those sorts of things, where electricity and battery technology looks difficult to implement. Clean fuels will be important, and those sectors are challenging to electrify and will need other methods to abate their emissions. We're seeing derivatives coming from hydrogen like methanol, like ammonia. This is a future industry that Tasmania is very well placed to capitalise on. It does present an opportunity again when we look at those comparative advantages we have in terms of our green grid and certainly access to forestry products. But of course, this is a new industry globally and it's taking some time, as you might expect. We have some pilot projects and industry activation and direct partnership with industry and that's a good example.

In the case of methanol, it's one of the leaders. One of the big global shipping companies, Maersk, is building methanol-powered ships. Here, The Navigators Group, which provides a lot of the ferry services such as the Mona roamer and the Maria Island ferries, is building a new ship under its Encounter Maria Island brand which has been operating since 2017. They are currently seeking to develop a future fuels-ready vessel as part of that solution for Maria Island. That involves transitioning the vessels future or vessels fuel source from diesel only to dual fuel so it can run on diesel or green methanol. Both those fuel options would decrease the emissions associated with the ferry option. I am pleased to confirm that Tasmanian government is providing \$600,000 toward the \$1.29 million being invested by The Navigators into developing a new catalytic reduction system which will support green methanol or reduced emissions diesel. A further \$50,000 from that same fund will be used to support work on the regulatory costs of this project associated with being the first of its class. We've seen quite a bit of that even at Lutana with the production of green hydrogen, there was a number of regulatory processes that needed to be addressed through that. This would be an on-the-ground example and no better place than ferrying people to and from Maria Island to have a zero-emissions ferry and that would be a very good thing. Some of those local activations are really important.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, we've been talking about vulnerable Tasmanians living in poor housing stock not being able to manage their energy bills. There will be a number at some

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point, in terms of the number of Tasmanians having their power disconnected. There are many people actually choosing to turn their own power off, not eating or not heating their homes at nighttime. How can you say the Tasmanians are being given a choice when tariff 41 is being phased out, given that by 2029 the pricing for tariffs 41 and 31 will be the same. This is removing what many Tasmanians have been using in terms of their heating and hot water choices been taken away from them, how can you make the claim they have a choice?

Mr DUIGAN - To provide some further information on disconnections in Tasmania, there were 102 disconnections in Q3 2024-25. A 102 disconnections, this is down from 162 disconnections for the same quarter last year.

Ms FINLAY - And the time it takes for someone to manage having their power reconnected, which is the issue when they're without power.

Mr DUIGAN - I don't have that, we will see if we can get that for you.

Ms FINLAY - There's a suggestion that Tasmanians will be better-off moving their tariffs, and you've said they have choice. The reality is that you're pricing those tariffs to be the same by 2029. How can you say that Tasmanians have a choice?

Mr DUIGAN - They certainly have a choice right here, right now between tariffs 41 and 31.

Ms FINLAY - But in fine print, under stealth, you're actually making them the same and taking away that choice.

Mr DUIGAN - Following the Australian Energy Regulator's final determination on TasNetworks revenue reset submission, time of use tariffs became the default tariff for new electricity connections. So, if you have a new connection, you get a time of use. But we're grandfathering the existing flat-rate tariffs of 31, 41 and 22. This means that customers who are already on these flat-rate tariffs, like me, can remain on them if they wish. Importantly, yes, as we say current flat-rate tariffs will be grandfathered, meaning if you're currently on flat rate if you'll stay on it.

Ms FINLAY - But the pricing is increasing in 2029?

Mr DUIGAN - It is my expectation that TasNetworks' network tariffs are future ready and cost efficient, that way the way households use electricity is changing electric vehicles, rooftop solar and so on, promoting efficient use of the networks -

Ms FINLAY - I am focused on vulnerable Tasmanians, who can't pay their bills.

Mr DUIGAN - What is happening is that 41 and 31 are coming closer together, to be aligned by 2029. So 41 is going up, 31 is coming down, and they will meet in the middle by the time of 2029, that will be the flat-rate tariff.

Ms FINLAY - What modelling did your department do before making that decision on the impact on vulnerable Tasmanians? That's my focus here, not new builds and new owners. Tasmanians, in one quarter, 102 Tasmanians had their power disconnected and we're not sure how long they were without power before they could manage to get it reconnected. Are you

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aware of the modelling that shows that Tasmanians are actually going to be worse off under tariff 93, which is the time of use tariff?

Mr DUIGAN - No, there will still be a flat rate tariff. There will always be a flat rate tariff.

Ms FINLAY - Yes, but it will be priced the same. So, by stealth, you're actually creating a single tariff.

Mr DUIGAN - No, not priced the same. It will be a flat-rate tariff.

Ms FINLAY - Beyond 2029, there will be a differential which means -

Mr DUIGAN - There will be a flat-rate tariff. But in terms of -

Ms FINLAY - Beyond 2029, will there be a differential?

Mr DUIGAN - There will be a flat-rate tariff. There will be time of use and flat-rate. It will be up to the customer to choose -

Ms FINLAY - But will there be a difference in those tariffs?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

CHAIR - Sorry, Ms Finlay, it's been asked and answered.

Ms FINLAY - Well, he hasn't answered.

Mr DUIGAN - There will be a difference between the time of use tariffs and the flat-rate tariff.

Ms FINLAY - Post-2029, what will their difference be?

CHAIR - Sorry, Ms Finlay, we will have to come back for that question.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, page 12 of the Whole-of-State Business Case acknowledges the increase in transmission prices. It says:

Marinus Link and the North West Transmission Developments stage increase transmission prices, by an estimated \$70 for a residential customer on a typical bill. Transmission prices increase by \$140 for a typical small business.

We've seen evidence from the Savage River mine, for example, Grange Resources; I think it was 29 per cent.

Mr DUIGAN - Yep.

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Mr BAYLEY - You've argued that this will be offset by super profits, effectively, to be earned and generated by Hydro, and that this will offset and be distributed to make up for those additional transmission prices. But in -

Mr DUIGAN - For those direct connected customers, yes.

Mr BAYLEY - That's right. But last week in *Renew Economy*, the new CEO of Hydro Tasmania, Rachel Watson, made it very clear. She said, regarding Marinus:

Forget making money off it. It will be there to provide energy security.

The budget papers indicate a significant fall in revenue from Hydro because of the two dry years you talked about in your opening. How do you square this away, that Hydro profits are going down; it's an era of climate change and uncertainty in terms of river flows and ability to make money. How do you square this circle that there's going to be super profits but, at the same time, there's going to be higher transmission costs?

Mr DUIGAN - The transmission cost is completely knowable. We know what that uptick will be. We've said we'll mitigate in certain circumstances. In the case of small business and residential, we would see the transmission costs offset by a reduction in the wholesale energy cost. That's borne out in all the modelling that's been done.

In terms of squaring away, it's interesting. Hydro has had two very dry years. You'll notice in the first year of those two very dry years, Hydro actually made good money. This year, Hydro made much less money. There are two aspects to that. It's the hydrological inflow and its ability to generate, but it's also its ability to trade.

You would know that Basslink has run as a merchant link over the course of this year. That has substantially curtailed Hydro's ability to trade and curtailed flows across that link. The way that APA has put the link to market has meant that there has been a great deal less energy flowing across it. Basslink, come 30 June next year will be a regulated link, as it should be, and so will Marinus. That will allow Hydro to trade. Where you get average inflows and where you have the ability to trade, that's where you see Hydro being able to substantially increase its operating profits.

The other thing that's really important to understand is that it's not necessarily the volume that Hydro will generate, but it's Hydro generating into those high-price events on the mainland. That's where the revenue uptick comes from. So, it's not about higher volumes or needing more. In some ways, this is very much about protecting Hydro's ability going forward in these more climactic, variable circumstances; it's making the best strategic use of those storages.

Mr BAYLEY - I understand that in the context of selling into the market at peak periods, but, of course, the sheer volume of generation capacity is important. You mentioned the hydrological inflows. We've asked this a number of times, but can you confirm if Hydro have actually done the modelling around hydrological inflows over the long term under a climate change scenario? And whether they were used to underpin its profit projections that we used in the whole-of-state business case?

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Mr DUIGAN - Yes. Hydro is, as you would expect, very interested in long-term trends and hydrological inflows. It underpins their business. But again, I would make the point that Hydro would see the ability to more strategically use its -

Mr BAYLEY - I understand that. You've just confirmed that there has been a hydrological inflow done by Hydro that's informed their profit projections? Are you able to table that for the committee?

Mr DUIGAN - Hydro will be here at the table next week and I would encourage you to put that to them.

Mr BAYLEY - But, as minister, you're confirming that they've done that work?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly, they talk to me about long-term projections.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, former premier Peter Gutwein argued in the past that the state shouldn't pay more than 10 per cent of the cost of Marinus Link because it wouldn't get more than 10 per cent profit. Do you agree with that? Can you tell us in real terms what percentage costs the government will be contributing and what percentage of profit we might expect back?

Mr DUIGAN - An important outcome of the recent discussions with the federal government, and feeding into our decision on the final investment decision, was the fact that Tasmania's equity in Marinus Link would be capped. That the \$103.5 million Tasmania spent when Project Marinus was a wholly owned TasNetworks project would be recognised, but also that that would be the end of Tasmania's equity commitment to Marinus Link. That's an important distinction.

That was at the point when Tasmania had a 17.5 per cent equity stake in Project Marinus. Obviously, as further equity calls are made for other shareholders, which Tasmania won't be asked to meet, our equity position will go down. But importantly, also in those negotiations, we were able to negotiate a number of reserve rights so Tasmania retains a seat at the board. Tasmania needs to be comfortable with any progression on stage 2 of Marinus, for example, and a number of other things. That's where we sit with the Marinus Link, the cable piece.

The North West Transmission Developments is a TasNetworks project. You'll see in the Budget there's \$191 million committed there. That's the equity contribution to deliver the North West Transmission Development, which we're seeing as a \$1.1 billion project at this stage. There are big numbers.

In terms of what we're likely to see, we see a great deal of economic benefit as a result of Marinus, whether it's through the building of the cable itself or the North West TD. But also what that means in terms of other renewable generation projects that will happen as a result of Marinus.

We also see increased on-island energy security, very important with the changing climate. Again, we see those on-average upticks, or substantial uplift in Hydro Tasmania's operating profit.

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Mr FERGUSON - Minister, this is perfectly timed, following on from the questions from my colleague, Ms Finlay, and - I beg your pardon, Mr Bayley and Prof Razay.

Ms FINLAY - It's easy to get us confused.

Mr FERGUSON - Not really, but there you go. Thank you for your understanding.

Project Marinus is vitally important for Tasmania's future. My question arises from Prof Razay's. Can you outline the proposed governance structure, going forward, for Marinus?

Will you also tell the committee and me how the government can communicate the benefits of Marinus to Tasmanians? I hold the view that not all Tasmanians are fully aware of some of the very good outcomes that, that the government was able to secure before making a final investment decision in August.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes. There was plenty going on at the time, as people would be aware. I think it is incumbent on us to do just that and communicate the benefits of Project Marinus. I know there are people that hold differing views, but I think it was a clear and unambiguous set of advice provided to government to make that positive financial investment decision.

Governance will be a very important piece of this. This is a big project. We need to make sure we get it right. We need to keep a handle on the costs, we need to be delivering on time and on budget. That governance piece is the method by which we will do that.

There was a really substantial amount of governance surrounding this project and the journey to get us to the final investment decision. There were expert advisory panels, Project Marinus Taskforce, Executive Energy Steering Committee, the Energy Committee of Cabinet, all of this stuff, and a very clear runway about how we were going to get to this decision. That was, to some extent, disrupted by events extraneous to that. As the project now enters its delivery phase, it's critical that we have our eye on the governance space.

Secretary Limkin, I know you have been instrumental, pivotal and central to a lot of the Marinus governance to this point and perhaps this is an opportunity for you to speak to this one.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, minister, and through you. As the minister said, we've moved into a different area, and the reason why we've moved into a different area is Project Marinus has gone into a construction phase, so the Tasmanian Government moves into three/four parts.

First of all, it's managing our shareholder responsibility. We have to protect the state's interests by identifying risk early, identifying issues, and driving accountability in these boards. So, driving accountability in Marinus, North West TD, and working with our other shareholders - the Australian Government and the Victorian Government - to do that.

We have to provide appropriate project assurance. As members would know, we've used the Infrastructure Tasmania project assurance framework a number of times through various projects. In this case, Marinus is using the Australian Government framework, which is very similar to the Tasmanian one. It's really about providing accountability from project owners to shareholders on the delivery of Marinus, delivery of North West, the progress of other matters,

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and reporting this type of information efficiently up to shareholders so they can take appropriate action. This will help support early identification and timely decision-making on projects.

The last area we focus on is coordinating government policy and strategy through interagency and intergovernmental arrangements. As you would know, Marinus is very complex. Apart from a Tasmanian Government arrangement, we have two jurisdictions that we have to work with as well, so we've set up a number of forums.

First of all, there is a stream of work in relation to Project Marinus, and that's how the three shareholders work together, i.e. Victoria, the Commonwealth and us. There are official-level working areas; there are senior official working areas, which are myself and my other two counterpart secretaries, and then there are ministerial forums. These are designed to really resolve issues at a shareholder level. For example, if the shareholders have concerns about delivery time - there is none at the moment, but if we ever did - this is the forum where the three of us would discuss them, arrange a commitment and move forward.

We have North West Transition Developments governance arrangements, and in there are the shareholder responsibilities that the minister and the Treasurer will hold. There are the boards, where we hold the boards accountable. There are various working groups between officials within Tasmania, and then also with the Australian Government. As part of the renegotiation there is a requirement, because North West TD is intrinsically and so importantly linked to Marinus, to have those relationships worked through. Then there is a number of construction and project delivery. In Project Marinus, there are senior officials with the company, so we meet with the CEO and chair of the board on a monthly to eight-weekly basis to really hold them to account, to make sure that they are delivering on costs and the commitments they've given to the shareholders. There are budgeted oversight committees and an interdepartmental delivery committee to make sure they're delivering as well.

That's all the intergovernmental arrangements that are happening for Marinus.

Then we have a state-led [inaudible]. As the minister said, we have the energy committee of Cabinet. There is an Energy Executive Steering Committee -

Ms FINLAY - Who's on that?

Mr LIMKIN - On the energy committee of Cabinet, the Minister for Energy and Renewables is the Chair; the Treasurer is on there; the Minister for the Environment; and the Premier is on there. Ministers can be coopted in and out, depending on the issues, so there is the ability to have relevant ministers come in if we're doing that.

There is an Energy Executive Steering Committee. This has been the one that's gone through both the decision and now. I chair that committee with secretary level from DPAC, Treasury and NRE. The Office of the Crown Solicitor is there as an adviser to us to provide legal advice and technical advice, when needed. There is a working group, an energy taskforce continues on this, and then a number of program coordination groups.

The other thing that we've set up - because Marinus is not just an energy impact, it also impacts communities, it impacts jobs, it impacts how we're going to house people, how we're going to move, big wind blades on our roads, etc. The DSG executive committee has Marinus on our regular thing, and we form and discuss the impacts, and how we make sure we have a

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coordinated whole-of-government approach to resolving those types of issues for those communities. When I was up in the north-west recently, the mayor spoke to me about housing, so our Deputy Secretary accountable for housing is looking for that and how we support that community in that area.

The other thing is that, as you would know, there is a Secretary board where all secretaries meet. If the functions go outside DSG, we will actually have those conversations at secretaries' board to make sure the accountability sits at the [inaudible].

Mr DUIGAN - Thanks, Craig, and in terms of governance, I would be keen to release the framework in the coming weeks, because I think it's important that everybody knows how this works, and everybody knows where the accountability sits. To your question, more pointedly, about communication with the Tasmanian wider population about how we talk to the benefits of this, there is ongoing work happening there and we will be leaning into that as well.

Ms FINLAY - I want to wrap up my series of questions about vulnerable Tasmanians. So often this government has a signature announcement, a signature policy, it comes off with great fanfare and then sort of fizzles. The renewable energy dividends - big announcement last year. You'd accept that the offer was really negated by the increase in power prices. My question is, given this year that the profits of Hydro won't see a renewable energy dividend for Tasmanians in 2026, why hasn't the government communicated that? What are you seeking to do to offset not providing a renewable energy dividend in 2026?

Mr DUIGAN - Dividends, by their very nature, are a reflection of how a particular business goes through the course of the year. If you buy a share, that's how it would work. We've seen very substantial renewable energy dividends paid, specifically when we had our supercharged renewable energy dividend. That was substantially above any price impacts of the very small price that we saw through the regulated cost of energy in Tasmania. As Hydro's profits go up and down, that is reflected in the renewable energy dividend. This is an area that's in the remit of the Treasurer. In Energy we don't have those levers to pull.

Ms FINLAY - But you confirm there won't be one for 2026?

Mr DUIGAN - If you would have seen Hydro's profit, it's not at the level that would trigger a renewable energy dividend. That's as far as I would go there, noting that this is the remit of the Treasurer.

Ms FINLAY - You talked earlier about Hydro having a focus on modelling. Understanding its circumstances now and into the future, can you indicate an expectation of whether there will be a renewable energy dividend in the three years ahead, given the financial outlook for Hydro? Will Tasmanians expect a renewable energy dividend or has that program fizzled?

Mr DUIGAN - Absolutely not, no. That program continues, and we have good storages in our dams at the moment, we would expect to see the regulation of Basslink go through next year. We are committed to that being a good outcome and seeing those flows across Basslink. That would then, with water in the dams and the ability to trade, we would see that being good opportunity and good conditions for Hydro to go well.

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Ms FINLAY - Based on real data, it's your expectation that there will be renewable energy dividends in the years ahead, based on Hydro's modelling?

Mr DUIGAN - I don't see a reason why that wouldn't be the case.

Mr BAYLEY - To continue this thread, the Budget makes some assumptions. Hydro's dividend to the government is \$4.7 million this year, in forward Estimates it's \$115 million. The budget explicitly says, 'Hydro Tasmania's increase reflects an assumption of average rainfall and associated hydropower generation, following a period of dry conditions.' I don't accept that this is something for Hydro to table, you have based assumptions in the Budget here around a return to normal river inflows and normal rainfall conditions.

I will ask again, can you confirm that Hydro has done the river inflow modelling that underpins its projections, and will you table it because it is underpinning the assumptions in the Budget?

Mr DUIGAN - Again, given next week Hydro will be in the room, and you will be able to have the ability to unpack exactly what their work looks like. I don't have it at that sort of granular level of detail about what -

Mr BAYLEY - Would you be willing to -

Mr DUIGAN - Well, they're here next week and you can ask them -

Mr BAYLEY - I guess, would you be willing to table what you have now and what you have based your budget assumptions on, so we can look at that ahead of next week and ask those questions of Hydro and test them when they're in the room. This is your budget, this is budget Estimates.

Mr DUIGAN - That's probably in the realm of the Treasury. I would suggest, potentially, that if you want that outcome, get someone in the Treasury.

Mr BAYLEY - Would you be willing to take it on notice for this committee?

Mr DUIGAN - Not on behalf of the Treasury, no.

Mr BAYLEY - In relation to that modelling, can you confirm that it's been done - can you confirm what period it has been done across, into the future?

Mr DUIGAN - Look, I would be relying on my memory, Mr Bayley, and I really don't want to do that. It's important and I get it. I understand why you're asking the question and it's worthy of having a good look at. I would rather not say what I think I know in my head. Again, happy for someone to put it to the Treasurer and the Treasury, and they might be able to provide it for you equally, as I have said previously, Hydro can speak to that.

Mr BAYLEY - What about when it comes to the whole-of-state business case and the central case one, which models an average annual increase in returns from Hydro to the government of \$470 million, compared to a no-Marinus situation. Are you willing, or will you table the financial analysis and the assumptions and the methodology that underpin those profitability calculations going forward, that we used in the whole-of-state business case?

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Mr DUIGAN - Again, it's a piece of work that is owned in the Treasury and I won't make any commitments on behalf of Treasury. But, I know there was work done separately by Hydro, which essentially lines up with the work that Treasury did. I think, if you would like to see that, by all means ask for it in the correct forum.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, you have talked about how Hydro will be selling its power into the NEM when the prices are at their highest. Wouldn't you agree that now the Coalition has declared that the next federal election will be fought on electricity prices, there will be significant pressure on the Labor government to reduce the cap on wholesale electricity prices to bring down electricity bills, and that, if the electricity cap is lowered, it will significantly undermine the business case for the so-called Hydro super profits?

Mr DUIGAN - There's currently a review being led by Dr Tim Nelson into the National Electricity Market, the NEM review, which doesn't flag any substantial changes to the way the market would operate in terms of the spot price, which is where Hydro Tasmania would see its uplift in revenue opportunities coming from. I don't see that as a risk, certainly in the short and medium term, and we've spoken to the government about any such changes that might disadvantage Hydro Tasmania. Short answer would be, no. I think there will continue to be volatility in the wholesale spot market and as that volatility continues, that presents opportunity for Hydro.

Mr GARLAND - That was a risk identified in the whole-of-state business case.

Mr DUIGAN - Yep. Again, a 'point in time' document with risks at that time. As I say, there is an ongoing NEM review which doesn't flag any of the risks of which you spoke.

Mr GARLAND - Another question? The North West Transmission Developments. In Victoria, there are 90 km of underground high-voltage direct current cabling for Marinus Link from Waratah Bay to the Latrobe Valley inverter station. In Tasmania, there are 200 m of cable from the coastline underground, under the Bass Highway to the contaminated Tioxide site at Heybridge. Why are you allowing Tasmanians to be treated less than Victorians by Marinus Link and TasNetworks by pushing overhead transmission onto landowners when undergrounding is a practical alternative?

Mr DUIGAN - What I would say is the North West Transmission Developments is a transmission upgrade; it's an augmentation of existing transmission. As we have discussed on the floor of the parliament, 95 per cent of that line exists already, and this will be new towers - fewer of them, but taller. I'm very pleased to note that of the 5 per cent of the line that that will be greenfield, all of those landholders have agreed. We have an agreement from all of the greenfield sites and it's only that cohort of existing transmission owners that TasNetworks is working with. That's very positive news for this.

As I say, in terms of undergrounding, there is obviously the cost element to that. It is a very substantial cost. People will tell you between 8 and 10 times more expensive. For the case of the North West Transmission Developments, where it's a \$1.1 billion investment by TasNetworks that then becomes a very large and unwieldy number and has a massive impact on Tasmanian energy customers. It's also important to recognise that it's not without its impact on landowners. Having the cable buried doesn't mean it just goes away. It really doesn't. In a lot of cases we're hearing that there are more concerning impacts from having buried transmission than overhead transmission. I know it's one of those conversations that's gone

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round that this is something we should be looking at, but, at the moment, it is so massively cost prohibitive, when you're talking about the augmentation of an existing line, that it quickly goes out of consideration.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I wonder if you could give me an update on the progress of the renewable energy approvals pathway, announced last year?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, the REAP, or the re-ap as it's known.

Mr FERGUSON - While you're looking at your notes, you can also add to that, how it will work, how it is working, how proponents will benefit?

Mr DUIGAN - One of the key issues that I identified when coming into this portfolio was a potential, I don't want to say disconnect, but I'll say disconnect, between some of our proponents in the space and how they interfaced with government. Noting that were a number of government departments that people would need to engage with and a number of different pieces of information that were required. As we're in the position where we need to bring more on-island generation on, we felt it was a very sensible thing to try to better coordinate how proponents would engage with the government.

That would be the kind of the case for the streamlined approvals process. You would know now that each energy proponent or each renewable project has its own case manager and a single-point of contact for wherever it needs to interface with the government. Those people are skilled in knowing and understanding what people might need - particularly at the front end. And, that's where a lot of the frustration comes from, people will say, we have this project, what do we need to deliver and they'll talk to one person and they'll deliver that then they'll talk to somebody else and have to deliver something else. Knowing what you need at the start is very important.

Also, the \$14.6 million we funded this program with provides some extra resources to other agencies that have a crossover with delivering approval, so with the EPA, with NRE Tasmania, so there are actual headcounts into those agencies supported by this and the opportunity for case managers to steer proponents into those people with the expectation that we will get a timely outcome.

It's been really helpful. I was very pleased recently when the Equis Energy Bell Bay Wind Farm made it through the Commonwealth in the Commonwealth Capacity Investment Scheme. That was as a result of working with our case managers on their application, better addressing their application and just some of those things.

It's working well, there's always more to do. There are some pretty substantial roadblocks which are, I guess, in the realm of our offsets policies and things, and federal offsets, those are challenges for Tasmania. There's work being done on those, but you know, I think some of the kinks are being worked out, without referring to my notes.

Ms FINLAY - An interesting segue, so the federal coalition voted to scrap the net zero. You just mentioned Bell Bay Wind Farm. Some of the narrative around that is that they have committed to review all contracts that have not reached their final investment decisions under the Labor's Capacity Investment Scheme and Rewiring the Nation.

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In Tasmania that puts at risk projects like north west transmission, which is in Rewiring the Nation, and also the Bell Bay Wind Farm, under the Capacity Investment Scheme.

We've had Dorothy Dixers about the Bell Bay Hydrogen Project, assumably it puts all of these sorts of things in in the mix. So, you've previously said -

Mr FERGUSON - It's actually important to me and I would appreciate - we should show respect to each other with our questions.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms FINLAY - I said that you raised it as an issue. That's right. And your federal colleagues, over the weekend, have put all these things in Tasmania at risk.

So, my question to the minister is previously you've said the federal government's capacity investment scheme is one of the most important initiatives in place to de-risk projects and build investment certainty. Is that still your view?

Mr DUIGAN - Look, I was very pleased, as I say, to see Equis's project be accepted into the CIS.

I think, you know, it's been pros -

Ms FINLAY - Your colleagues have now put that at risk.

Mr DUIGAN - Well, I had a meeting with Dan's team very recently and I put Tasmania's renewable energy case forward. I think he understands where Tasmania is and our aspiration. So, I'm not particularly concerned about the issues about which you speak. What I'm concerned about is getting projects up. Getting things delivered.

Currently, we've got one project supported by the CIS. That's good. We'd like to see more. We've got an allocation for more. I will work with minister Bowen - and often make the point to him that it's all very well to have the CIS, but we've got to see projects getting built in it.

We would encourage all federal governments to work with us in order to get projects up. Tasmania has a fantastic resource in terms of our wind opportunity. There are some challenges bringing some of those things to market. There is a role for government to play, particularly government that has a wish to decarbonise, as all federal governments in Australia will do.

Ms FINLAY - You said you spoke with, I'm not sure if you said you met with, but you spoke with minister Tehan. I'm wondering what you raised in your meeting or conversations with him about your concerns for Tasmania? What risks did you identify?

Mr DUIGAN - We had a wide-ranging conversation.

Ms FINLAY - Well, I'm concerned for investor certainty into Tasmania. I'm concerned about the projects, as you said, that were already underway. We do want to see renewable generation in Tasmania and under your leadership in your government, we haven't seen new

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renewable projects. For you to say that you picked up the phone and you spoke to the minister, what concerns did you raise?

Mr DUIGAN - I note your concerns and would encourage you to do the same.

Ms FINLAY - I'm asking you, minister, this is your scrutiny, given that this risks investment in Tasmania. It risks our renewable future, what risks do you see and what risks were worthy for you to pick up the phone and speak to the minister?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, the shadow minister and I had a nice meeting together where we talked about a range of things. I think nothing in the shadow minister's language to me would indicate a level of risk to Tasmania.

Ms FINLAY - In two years, a federal election, the shadow minister if there is a change in government, therefore a change in policy, it will undermine these investments in Tasmania. Will you continue to express those concerns and what specifically are you concerned about?

Mr DUIGAN - I'm concerned about getting things built in Tasmania and for us to grasp our potential. I would also point to, you've mentioned the CIS, which is the current mechanism, it has an expiry date. There is through the Nelson review more contemporary mechanisms being considered. Those will be important, and they will sit in the broader energy policy space.

My job is to work with whoever's in government to deliver outcomes for Tasmania, and I'm committed to that. Obviously, I have a preference, but I've worked very happily with minister Bowen, would do the same with minister Tehan. We have an opportunity here in our state. We need to grasp it, we need to pull out all the stops, and I will continue to remain committed to that outcome.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I want to go back to the REAP and forgive me if I wasn't listening closely enough, but budget paper number 2 volume 1 at page 255 says that decrease in the energy and renewables output from 25-26 reflects the funding profile of the prior budget initiatives including the green hydrogen hub, Renewable Energy Approvals Pathway.

Can you confirm, is the REAP still alive and well? How many positions does it have at the moment? In 2024 you announced that there were nine full-time equivalent positions there. Are they all still employed and filled?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly, REAP is alive and well with positions in ReCFIT with those case managers and part of the broader team with positions in NRE, Environment Tas, positions in the EPA to the absolute specifics of - Vanessa's probably best placed to give you that level of detail.

Ms PINTO - Yes, there is a case-management program that is offered through ReCFIT. What we have done is to engage individuals who are experienced in particular areas, whether that may be planning or in the environmental space and what they seek to do is look after regions so they will service developments that are occurring, for example, in the north-west through the Central Highlands, up down in the south and then in the north, then what they seek to do is provide a very important facilitative role between the developer and regulators.

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Some of the areas that they may assist with are in the space of assisting with how to approach applications that need to be submitted.

Mr BAYLEY - Forgive me, if I can interrupt. I'm aware of the program and what it's seeking to achieve. My question was to the Budget and Output Group 7 and the fact that funding for that output was reduced, and the budget papers seem to indicate that it would impact on the renewable energy approvals pathway, but you're confirming that that's not correct. There are still nine positions in that program?

Ms PINTO - There are positions within ReCFIT itself and there are positions that are across other agencies, such as Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania in the environment team there to assist with the assessment of threatened species and other affected parts of flora and fauna for example, yes, so those and also within the regulator in the EAP.

Mr BAYLEY - In terms of the efficiency program that the government's engaged with, how does a program such as the REAP get treated when it comes to the EPU, the Efficiency and Productivity Unit, does it focus exclusively on that pathway and that program, or does it just look at ReCFIT separately and then the EPA separately and someone else separately and it may not look at this as a kind of a whole program of government?

Mr DUIGAN - I will ask the secretary to make comment on that.

Mr LIMKIN - My understanding is that the EPU will look at the outcomes, so it won't be department-specific. In relation to REAP, it is a program of work that has been done across multiple agencies to deliver an outcome for our community. We looked at the REAP. We will work in partnership with DPAC and our colleagues in NRE, Planning and Aboriginal Heritage as part of that process, but it's not going to be agency by agency.

Mr BAYLEY - What sort of transparency will there be about that program? The EPU looks at this as a program, makes a number of different findings, I guess, and recommendations. What level of transparency is there to us as parliamentarians and, more importantly, the public, about the recommendations the EPU makes and how the government therefore responds to those recommendations?

Mr LIMKIN - The EPU is led by DPAC and, at this stage, DPAC is currently working through how the EPU will function, working collaboratively with agencies. The secretaries have already had two conversations on the EPU, so I can't really give you information specifically, Mr Bayley, because that is a journey that the State Service is still going on.

Mr BAYLEY - Has it been communicated to you as secretaries that the responsible minister wants transparency around those issues?

CHAIR - You are asking more questions than you were allotted. You can ask it on the next rotation.

Prof RAZAY - Historically there have been concerns about the health risk of residents living near high-voltage power lines and also wind farms. For example, for years people talked about childhood leukaemia from living near high-voltage power lines. What's the record in Tasmania? How significant is it? What complaints do we have regarding local residents?

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Mr DUIGAN - That's an interesting question and not one I have a lot of information on. Somebody deep in ReCFIT might know. I imagine there have been a number of studies in Australia and more broadly to look at these sorts of issues. I am aware that when a wind farm is being contemplated there is a range of impacts that would be considered in terms of someone living close to it, the noise impact and those sorts of things, and those are addressed through that process. In terms of public health considerations, I suspect the question you're asking is more in that realm. I don't believe I have anyone here at the table or in the room who could speak with any great authority on that but maybe in the public health realm.

Prof RAZAY - I think it's important to have some information about that, especially if you're arguing about the benefit of having underground cables. You looked at it from an economic point of view. Of course it's more expensive, but it's nice if you balance it with other factors as well.

Mr DUIGAN - Sure. There are a great many power lines running across a great many countries in all parts of the world. If there were a correlation, I'm sure it would be a matter we'd be aware of, but it's not something that I am personally aware of at this point.

Mr FERGUSON - My question is about energy security, minister, and I don't just want to focus on water storages, so it would be good if you have information to hand regarding liquid fuels, petrol, diesel as well. The main focus I have is around our energy storages in our dams for Tasmanians. You've mentioned, and we know, that it's been a very dry couple of years for Hydro Tasmania. As always, they do a tremendous job. They manage the storages prudently and keep the lights on and industries running. I wonder if you could nonetheless provide us an update on that. What is the government and Hydro doing in partnership to manage that into the future, particularly when rainfall due to climate change is expected to be less predictable? Not necessarily less rainfall long term, but less predictable. I would beg your thoughts on that and how Tasmanians can be confident that the government is always acting in its interests.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Mr Ferguson. To your point, and as has been mentioned previously, the last two years have been the two driest in succession that we have seen in the state since records began for Hydro Tas. I again take the opportunity to congratulate the business for keeping the lights on and keeping everything business as usual without any seeming interruption anywhere. As minister, you are very aware of what storages look like and there is an email that comes out every Monday morning that shows you whether we've gone down or gone up. There was a concerning period of probably six months where we went down week on week on week with our energy storages and getting close to that prudent storage level.

That energy security framework was set up in the wake of the challenging circumstance in 2016, when we had low inflows and the Basslink outage. That serves to amplify the level of care we need to take around these sorts of issues and the value, frankly, for progressing Project Marinus, noting that Basslink is halfway through its asset life and these things take seemingly 10 or 15 years to come from inception to delivery. You've got to be planning for the long term and obviously Hydro does that.

There are two key metrics for Hydro, the prudent storage level which is there, and then the high reliability level which sits somewhere below. The prudent storage level, should we enter that, triggers a range of actions that need to be taken by government as well. It's a rigorous but transparent framework for what Hydro's doing. Then should we enter the high reliability level, that is essentially enough water in storage to cope with six months of low inflows and a

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six-month outage of Basslink. There is some forgiveness built into the scheme, but I think that's as it should be and as minister, I am not ashamed to say I err on the side of caution when it comes to our energy security. We're making things more robust.

In terms of your liquid fuel question, I think it's a good one. Perhaps Vanessa might be able to quickly shed some light on how that circumstance works.

Mr WINTER - Point of order, Chair. Under our rules, this answer's already gone on for three minutes. I ask you to draw the minister back.

CHAIR - I appreciate that. I haven't imposed time limits, I'm being rather cordial at this stage, but if everyone wants me to introduce time limits I'm happy to do that, but of course it applies for questions and answers, so it applies to everyone. At this stage I'm just being rather flexible and allowing all the questions and answers to be noted.

Mr WINTER - With respect, Chair, you might want to be flexible, but the Standing Orders, as approved by parliament, state that time limits of one minute for a question and three minutes for an answer shall apply in an Estimates committee and I'd ask you to uphold that.

CHAIR - I am well aware of that, Mr Winter, but it is flexible.

Mr WINTER - I'm sorry, it's flexible?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, given the recent decision on Marinus, how is it possible as shareholder minister that you've made a decision to pause the Tarraleah development, given the increased flexibility and delivery was talked about with great fanfare. How can that happen in the same moments that we've just progressed with Marinus?

Mr DUIGAN - I am happy to report to the committee that Tarraleah is not paused and work is continuing on Tarraleah. It recently passed through the next gateway and a request for proposal operation is being run by Hydro Tasmania as we speak. In terms of your question, I would need know if it was weeks or a month - something like that. I am advised it was a month ago.

Ms FINLAY - The full project that was contemplated, many of us have been up there and looked at the project. So the full project is continuing ahead? There's been no modifications to the project?

Mr DUIGAN - No modifications to the project, but as you would expect, this is a big project and there are a number of gateways, parliamentary approval being one of the significant ones. It has reached the request for proposal phase so that's only a market engagement phase to better test the numbers and that sort of thing. That's a period of work which will take us up until August next year.

It's an important step in the process as we work towards the final investment decision for Tarah.

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Ms FINLAY - Given that there was a pause, can you indicate to the committee the cost associated with that pause that's been added to the project?

Mr DUIGAN - I don't think I have got a number on that?

Ms FINLAY - Are you happy to take that on notice?

Mr DUIGAN - Again, Hydro, will be here next week -

Ms FINLAY - I'm asking you the question now and as shareholder minister, you're the one that put it under a pause. I don't need to use my time next week for that, are you happy to take that on notice?

Mr FERGUSON - Chair, this is the fourth question from Ms Finlay.

Mr DUIGAN - No, I think on the basis that you will be talking to Hydro next week and they can take you through all of what you asked.

Mr FERGUSON - That's the fifth question based on Mr Winter's point of order.

CHAIR - I ask Ms Finlay to please move on.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, we understand the EPA has a significant decision to make about Marinus Link over the next 10 days or so. There's a board meeting and board decision. We also understand that the EPA has not received the level of cooperation from Marinus that would be expected - that information has been withheld. Are you aware of these concerns by the EPA and some of its officers?

Mr DUIGAN - I'm aware of obviously a number of things that Marinus Link needs to provide to continue to keep the project moving. There are governance protocols that have been outlined by the secretary. There is an escalation path so to the point that you're raising now and the specifics of that of which I'm vaguely aware, but that hasn't entered the escalation protocol. I would be happy for the secretary to speak to it.

Mr LIMKIN - My understanding is the EPA has requested additional information and Marinus Link is actively working to provide that information. It has been providing that information to the EPA and will continue to provide information to the EPA should it request more information.

Mr BAYLEY - Have they made a commitment to provide that information prior to when the EPA needs to make its decision?

Mr LIMKIN - My understanding is that EPA and Marinus continue to work actively together, and I would hope that they would do that, and I have nothing to be alarmist about at this stage, Mr Bayley.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, can you confirm that in 2020 Marinus undertook seismic surveys without seeking EPA approval?

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Mr DUIGAN - That's one we might have to look into. Unless there's anybody in the room, that might know.

Mr BAYLEY - Can you take that on notice?

Mr DUIGAN - Happy to take that on notice, yes.

Mr BAYLEY - When it comes to the outstanding issues, you confirmed it's not on an escalation program, but you're aware that there are issues that are still being worked through and that there's information that hasn't been provided yet and EPA is not in a position to make a decision.

Mr DUIGAN - Again, I would say that the issue of which you speak hasn't been escalated.

Mr BAYLEY - What is the escalation pathway?

CHAIR - That's another question.

Mr DUIGAN - It's been detailed by the secretary through that governance space.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, in August this year, a joint statement was issued by 15 stakeholders in Tasmania, including TMAC and the Tasmanian Policy Exchange, calling for the government to develop policy frameworks to scale up CER deployment in homes and businesses. This could include setting CER or solar targets, publishing electrification and transition away from gas road maps, and allocating funding aligned with decarbonisation and equity goals.

Affordability mechanisms like grants, rebates and improved feed-in tariffs are important, should be strategically targeted towards low-income households or and renters to maximise uptake. Minister, can you update the parliament on whether the government is taking any of these steps?

Mr DUIGAN - Thanks, Mr Garland, I appreciate that. CER is a body of work that there is being quite a bit of focus on nationally at the energy ministers meeting and having some consistent rollouts and roles for retailers and transmission providers and that sort of thing. So, so there is a national framework that's being that's been worked on.

I would point to the Energy Saver Loan Scheme, which really drove solar uptake in Tasmania, as I say, some \$60 million worth of loans and solar was by far and away the number one product for which those loans were taken. We're seeing rooftop solar in Tassie as 3 per cent of our energy generation at the moment, which is substantially above where it was. I would note, and you did mention solar input tariffs, and we've seen recently where the federal minister has introduced free power hours in the middle of the day.

That's an interesting circumstance for Tasmania. On the basis that those sorts of things only work when the solar feed-in tariff is 0, which is the case in lots of the other parts of the country. In Tasmania, we have, I think, still, if not the highest then certainly among the highest feed-in tariffs in the country at about \$0.08 per kWh. That would be a challenging circumstance

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if it were asked of us to provide free energy in the middle of the day, which would presumably necessitate the reduction of that solar input tariff.

I think there are there are swings and merry-go-rounds in that space. CR is important. We're seeing batteries, community batteries being rolled out in Tasmania by TasNetworks and Aurora. Those, I think, are very prospective and we're a good jurisdiction to try things. I'm interested in the space and happy to support the next iteration of what our energy supports look like in terms of a replacement for the loan scheme - has a role to play as well.

Mr GARLAND - Now, a bit unrelated. I'd just like to know is it technically possible for the Reece-Farrell and Farrell-Sheffield transmission route to be upgraded to host an extra 220KV transmission line?

Mr DUIGAN - I think that's a TasNetworks. I doubt that ReCFIT would have that level of - anyone got that? If you're happy to save that for TasNetworks, they can certainly speak to that.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I'd like to take you back to my earlier question. It's very important to me that we raise the issue of energy security. I appreciate your answer on water storage, it was terrific, but if I can bring it back to liquid fuels, petrol, diesel. I should also mention maybe even LPG as a liquid petroleum gas. I might just raise those and I think you were going to seek some extra support for that answer. Of course, I would remind you and the committee of an episode where infrastructure was damaged by the Goliath and then we did have a disruption only what, two or three years ago. In view of that, it does raise the question of ongoing energy security in that space. I pose the question again.

Mr DUIGAN - Look, it does and whether it's damage to infrastructure or even weather events, certainly in the last two years we've had very substantial weather events which obviously have an impact on ships getting in and unloading. There is obviously protocol and when storages get to a certain level there is an escalation point, but Vanessa, perhaps it's one for you to provide some detail.

Ms PINTO - Certainly. Yes, there are protocols that are in place when there are incidents that may occur. There's coordination that occurs within our state as a jurisdiction and across jurisdictions at different times. Not dissimilar to when incidents occur, there can be events that are raised to ensure that communications occur across jurisdictions that is in relation to volumes of liquid fuel coming into the state. Also, as you would be aware, there's a network of retailers that provide fuel at-site and there is also a key role that Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania does in supporting that coordination between sites. The minister referred just recently, there can be events that can impact upon fuel arriving into the state. It typically comes in - for liquid fuels - will come in by boat and there's opportunities then, across those outlets, for coordination of liquid fuel across outlets to ensure that across the state key fuels such as petrol are maintained at appropriate levels.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you for confirming that the Tarraleah project is back in its previous shape. With the Cethana pumped hydro process that was withdrawn out of the EPBC process earlier this year, has that also been removed as a project?

Mr DUIGAN - No, certainly not. The EPBC, I have a memory of that.

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Ms FINLAY - It was withdrawn from the process in April.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, because there needed to be a rescoping or something. Have I got anything on that? Just bear with me. Cethana, as you would know, identified as Hydro Tasmania's preferred pumped-hydro option, I've heard people describe it as one of the most prospective pumped-hydro options in the southern hemisphere. It's a 750-megawatt, 20-hour storage. The key to pumped hydro is that duration of storage; you know, batteries are obviously good for an hour or two, but that 20-hour storage is very, very valuable. It will take advantage of existing infrastructure, including the lower lake transmission.

Hydro Tasmania is currently progressing approvals, has recently completed further geotechnical investigations and is developing a full Gate 2 business case ahead of a final investment decision mid-2027. EPB referral: I'm advised the original EPB referrals for the Tarraleah redevelopment at Cethana pumped hydro were submitted 2023. These referrals were based on early reference designs. Since then, Hydro has undertaken extensive geotechnical and engineering work and the project footprints have increased. After consulting with DCCEEW, Hydro withdrew the referrals with a plan to resubmit with updated information.

Ms FINLAY - Right, thank you. I appreciate that, minister. So both yourself and Hydro remain fully committed to Cethana as a project to take through to FID?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Ms FINLAY - Great. Can I just confirm on the previous advice around Tarraleah, you've said that it's taken that decision to unpause, so, to continue. Is that work continuing in this financial year or will it continue at the end of - I think it was stated that there was a three-year pause on that capital project - or is it due to recommence after that three-year period?

Mr DUIGAN - No, it is up and going now.

Ms FINLAY - Active and going in this financial year: okay, great. Thank you. I want to turn my mind to North West Transmission. When you made the decision to halve that project, there was an important tranche of North West Transmission missing. I'm keen to understand where progress is on delivering that, and by what time you would commit to delivering that essential tranche to connect up the renewables?

Mr DUIGAN - Burnie-Hampshire Hills, yes. As you say, an important spur line, and we are well aware of it. Ever since, as you say, the project Marinus was reduced, or was staged, the need to deliver that - because that's where Robbins Island will connect -

Ms FINLAY - Sure. You just said staged as a -

CHAIR - Sorry, Ms Finlay. This is another question; you've had three. Sorry.

Ms FINLAY - Are you committed to the second stage as well? It's not that it is only half a project at the moment?

CHAIR - Ms Finlay.

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Mr DUIGAN - Okay, whatever I said, but anyway, so stage 1 is the coastal route, stage 2 is the is the other -

Ms FINLAY - So my question hasn't been answered is what's the -

Mr DUIGAN - Right, I'm getting to it.

Ms FINLAY - No, I was just allowing the Chair to take a breath.

Mr DUIGAN - So TasNetworks has developed a term sheet for proponents because this would be an unregulated spur, and thereby will require proponents to pay for its costs until such time as it joins the regulated asset base. There's a period of time. So, there is a term sheet that would require any proponents wishing to connect through that to sign up to an annuity cost for servicing that line. Government has also said that should that threshold not be met, that it would provide a \$50 million underwrite to get that line delivered in terms of we're working with ACEN on Robbins Island and their transmission corridor which needs to be progressed from Robbins to get to Hampshire, so coordinating those two pieces of infrastructure that would be required to - again, when Robbins pulls the trigger, we will know the date that that needs to be required, but we're very well aware of it. There is a term sheet that exists and when there is some certainty about the connection timelines, I'm under the advice that it's a two-year build, so there is scope within what needs to occur on Robbins and in terms of getting the transmission pathway delivered to bring those two pieces of work together.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, to take you to a couple of south-west dam-related issues, in your answer to Prof Razay, I heard you respond that there is a project to raise the head level of the Gordon Dam. This is something that I have not heard discussed in the past. Could you explain that? Are you talking about raising the level of the dam, and therefore the area of the land being flooded, or are you talking about upgrades to the power station facilities? We've just been through the 50th year of that facility and I don't know of anything other than improving the technology of the power station that has been discussed.

Mr DUIGAN - Essentially, there is opportunity at the Gordon Power Station and, as you point out, there have been works going on at Gordon to refurbish machine No 2, I believe, but anyway, a substantial investment there. The station has a maximum rated output of - and these are made-up numbers - say, 300 megawatts, but with the storage where it is, it has a maximum output of, say, 200 megawatts. If you raise the level of the storage, increase the head height, you would then be able to get a greater output from the station, and essentially it's the lake level coming up by - I'm not sure and again I won't speculate, but a relatively small amount, one to two metres, something like that, and that gives you the greater capacity. What you need is a year where it rains heavily on the west coast to help build those storages. Probably, this year is not a year for that; last year wasn't a year for that, but over time it's something that we would see as a worthy goal.

Mr BAYLEY - Are you talking about physical engineering work on the dam structure itself?

Mr DUIGAN - No.

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Mr BAYLEY - Are you just talking about water management, so that the level of the dam can increase to perhaps where it has been historically and then it's managed from there, beyond, not actual physical management that would flood additional areas.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Mr BAYLEY - Coming to the Pedder impoundment, there was a magnitude 4.1 earthquake in September which was a deep concern and Edgar Dam is on a fault line. Can you confirm what assessments were done to confirm the dam was structurally sound, and are you able to table any of those assessments or reports?

Mr DUIGAN - Hydro's 24-7 monitoring system provided immediate notification of the September event. Assets performed as designed and no damage was sustained. There were no safety concerns.

Mr BAYLEY - Specifically around assessments on structural soundness and whether you can table them.

Mr DUIGAN - Let me just spool through this. There are current works occurring at Edgar and Scotts Peak which further strengthen - no, might be a good one for Hydro. There's stuff on flood modelling, but I haven't got anything specific on that.

Mr BAYLEY - On the structural integrity of the Edgar Dam?

Mr DUIGAN - Hydro is saying in terms of their assessment, no damage sustained through the earthquake. Obviously, there is work underway at Edgar to further strengthen it. Specifically, what would you like?

Mr BAYLEY - Assessments around the structural integrity of it in the context of that 4 September earthquake and modelling and indications as to next steps.

Mr DUIGAN - Are you happy for that to be a Hydro question?

Mr BAYLEY - If you're able to take it on notice that would be useful because again, these all inform questions.

Mr DUIGAN - It is very much in the Hydro so I would defer you.

Mr BAYLEY - When it comes to Scotts Peak, you mentioned -

CHAIR - Mr Bayley, that's your questions, sorry,

Prof RAZAY - Back to energy security, it's a favourite topic for today and because of lack of rain, it's important to diversify our clean energy resources. You have mentioned that only 3 per cent of energy comes from rooftop solar. I am quite surprised about the level. In Victoria, the average is 7.9 per cent in NSW, 10 per cent. Even in England with it so cloudy and drizzly -

Mr DUIGAN - What's their number?

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Prof RAZAY - It's about 4.9 per cent. I feel we have a great potential to build on the rooftop solar or even major scale.

Mr DUIGAN - That's a very fair assessment. People are often surprised when we see grid scale solar projects being talked about in Tasmania. Tasmania is a long way south and sun never shines, but that's not the case. In summer, the sun shines for a long time which helps our capacity factors. For rooftop solar, again I hark back to it, but the Energy Saver Loan Scheme put a lot of capacity into our industry of providing base load and casework for industry to tool up in Tasmania. That's been great and they continue to be active. I would expect to see continued strong growth in solar.

There are 6700 solar installations through the Energy Saver Loan Scheme. Again, deliverers of solar energy who are invested in keeping that supply chain going. We'll see that and that's a good thing and fits into Mr Garland's questions around consumer energy resources, community scale batteries and all of those things the future has for us in Tasmania. There are a lot of Tasmanians who are very interested in this and who might have an electric car and be very keen to plug it in and allow it to feedback into the grid, all of that stuff. Government has a role in supporting people who are perhaps missing out in some of the benefits of transition. We are aware of needing to play in the space.

Mr FERGUSON - Do we have time before we break?

CHAIR - We will take one more.

Mr FERGUSON - I want to take you to workforce development initiatives. The government has an incredibly ambitious energy agenda and you're delivering. I am proud of you and thank you for your work. I am thinking in particular of Marinus Link and the breakthrough that's been achieved there. I'm looking at the augmentation projects, the pump hydro initiatives as well. The question is all about how we can ensure that we maximise jobs for Tasmanians. I have no problem with outsiders coming in and bringing their expertise, but how can we put Tasmanians first to help them to get access to those opportunities, and obviously I also take you to the training piece.

Mr DUIGAN - It was an important part of the Marinus Link final investment decision or assessment document, which is available on the ReCFIT website, which is a good document in terms of setting out why Tasmania would make a decision like this. One of the things it highlighted was not only are there a number of economic impacts, but there are a great number of social and community impacts for Project Marinus and housing is one of those things that we need to consider and obviously workforce development is another one and harnessing those opportunities that do come for Tasmania. Making sure we tool up and skill up our workforce to meet that opportunity. Of course, training will be one of those areas where we probably do have a gap. In talking to other jurisdictions that have potentially been through this pathway, in other parts of the world, they will say that training is hugely important. The government's recent announcement on the Clean Energy Centre of Excellence in Burnie is a positive announcement. No disrespect to Burnie -

Mr FERGUSON - Hey, Burnie is one of the most wonderful cities of the world.

Mr DUIGAN - Indeed, but it is more regional. It probably doesn't see itself as a regional area, but it is a more regional place. That's one of the great things about renewable energy, is

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that it does deliver jobs and prosperity into the regions. A \$24.6 million investment into Burnie for that particular training facility will be important. Additionally committed another \$5 million through the Renewable Energy Services Hub in Bell Bay to maximise local procurement.

There's a feeling among local businesses and industries of knowing this thing's coming but not being entirely sure about is what my role to play or what's the opportunity for me. Having some engagement with industry, with business about how you can be involved will be so important, that everybody, Tasmania particularly, gets a benefit from this.

The committee suspended from 11.02 a.m. to 11.13 a.m.

Mr DUIGAN - Chair, I have some new information around the disconnection question that was asked by Ms Finlay. In terms of AER reported statistics on residential customers who have been disconnected for non-payments and reconnected within seven business days:

- 1 April-30 June - 89 disconnected, 20 reconnected within seven days, a reconnection rate of 22 per cent;
- 1 July-30 September 2024 - 85 disconnections, 27 reconnected within seven days, 32 per cent reconnection rate;
- 1 October-31 December 2024 - 50 disconnections, 16 reconnected within seven days, 32 per cent reconnection rate;
- 1 January-31 March 2025 - 33 disconnections, nine reconnected within seven days, 27 per cent reconnection rate; and
- 1 April-30 June 2025 - 23 disconnections, six reconnected within seven days, 26 per cent reconnection rate.

Customers that are not reconnecting within seven days are likely choosing debt avoidance or reconnecting outside the seven-day period. Debt avoidance is most commonly seen through customers using other family members or friends to take on responsibility for supply, or churning their account to another retailer.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you, minister. Just a clarifying question around Tarraleah and Cethana. As I understand it, they were previously on the website with ReCFIT and are not there anymore at the time of the pausing. Are they now major projects and have moved location or are they still owned by - where do they sit now? Has the structure changed in terms of the project responsibility?

Mr DUIGAN - Not as far as I'm aware.

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister, no.

Ms FINLAY - Okay, thank you. Minister, how satisfied are you that Hydro is complying with their new ministerial charter from July 2024, in particular, around the purpose, strategic and commercial expectations, where the principal purpose of Hydro Tasmania in performing

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its functions is to support the lowest possible power prices for Tasmanians and to enable economic growth and job creation in Tasmania, and the purpose around the strategic and commercial expectations is that you prioritise energy availability and supply for existing and potential Tasmanian customers?

Mr DUIGAN - I'm very pleased with the way Hydro is operating and has been operating for the past period of time. If you were to ask energy proponents in Tasmania, existing businesses, I know there's been plenty of conversations with our major industrials but I think everybody would say that Hydro is much more engaged in the space than has previously been the case.

Ms FINLAY - Out of five or 10, we can always make improvements but we can make greater improvements, so how far along the scale do you think they are in meeting their expectations?

Mr DUIGAN - As I say, I'm really pleased with how responsive Hydro has been. It's been something of a change and that's a change in terms of what's written on the pieces of paper and the instructions. It's been very much demonstrated in action by Hydro, I would say. I have lots of conversations with Hydro and I'm the minister, so they want me to be comfortable with how they're going about our expectations of them, but I also hear from a lot of other people in the energy landscape and that's being reflected back to me, and I wouldn't be surprised if you're hearing it too.

Ms FINLAY - I suppose that's why I ask. As a sliding scale, we can always be improving, right?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Ms FINLAY - So if there's been progress that's positive, but I'm wondering whether you feel there's more room to move. I only raise this question because I hear from industry that they're not yet satisfied that there's a true or 100 per cent alignment with your expectations.

Mr DUIGAN - I think the counterpoint to that is that the government and indeed the people of Tasmania expect Hydro to act commercially, and particularly as we're talking about Bell Bay Aluminium and big customers like that, there is a balance and we need to make sure we aren't over-intervening and are allowing those tensions to play out. I've been very pleased with the way Hydro has engaged in that negotiation over a long period of time and continue to engage, and indeed Bell Bay Aluminium, absolutely. We know that supporting those businesses is in the best interests of Tasmania, but it can't be at any cost because those are big businesses with big numbers.

Ms FINLAY - I suppose that's where my follow-up question comes. Our major industrials are facing all sorts of challenges - global, local, from all sorts of angles. As minister, what's your expectation and what strategy are you employing for all players in this space to keep them as customers, or are you accepting, as these things play out, that the NEM is the replacement for their demand and revenue?

Mr DUIGAN - No, we are absolutely committed to our industry in Tasmania.

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Mr BAYLEY - To continue the questions on the dam works, you mentioned work being done at Scotts Peak but I'm not sure that's actually the case. Can you confirm the present status of the Scotts Peak dam works and when a permit to do those dam works is anticipated being submitted?

Mr DUIGAN - Let me see. I may have inadvertently rolled Edgar and Scotts Peak in together, so if I have misspoken that's how I've managed to do that.

Mr BAYLEY - I accept that.

Mr DUIGAN - I may be able to find some reference. Again, Hydro has chapter and verse on this, but just let me see if I have anybody here. Bear with me, if you would.

Mr BAYLEY - While you're there, perhaps on the same briefing, there is some information about the estimated cost of that project. For 2019-2021 it was to be \$50 million. Cost estimates were sort of parked a bit while the EPBC assessment went ahead. We would have far preferred that referral to be both projects because they are clearly joined projects. That's not how you managed it, but now they're \$99 million, the latest cost estimate for the Scotts Peak project as well.

Mr DUIGAN - I've got information on Edgar, which is talking about \$35 million.

Mr BAYLEY - No, Scotts Peak specifically, please. If you have the estimated final completion cost of Edgar, that'd be very useful because we've only had estimates.

Mr DUIGAN - No, I do not.

Mr BAYLEY - Are you able to take that on notice? I accepted its detailed information you may need seek.

Mr DUIGAN - Again, and I know I keep saying it, but next week Hydro will be here and they will have it.

Mr BAYLEY - You don't normally have that excuse, minister, because we don't normally have Estimates in November.

Mr DUIGAN - It's not an excuse.

Mr BAYLEY - I appreciate that, but this information will help inform questions for next week, so I would prefer you, with respect, to take them on notice so that we have that information.

Mr DUIGAN - I think I will hold the line. It is a detailed question that is very much in the realm - it's not being run by DSG or by ReCFIT or by my office. It is being run by Hydro, so with respect -

Mr BAYLEY - These are budget Estimates and these are budget-related issues.

Mr DUIGAN - Is it reflected in the Budget? No.

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CHAIR - Asked and answered.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, I'll go back to the North West Transmission Developments. Independent documents lodged with the Tasmanian Planning Commission show that around 172 kilometres of the 238-kilometre North West Transmission Developments is upgraded existing line, roughly 72 per cent, with 66 kilometres being new alignment. On what basis do you claim the project is 95 per cent existing route when the publicly exhibited permit application shows a substantially higher proportion of new or realigned transmission?

Mr DUIGAN - That's probably my bad. As we know, a couple of years ago, Project Marinus was originally conceived as two cables and the full scope of North West Transmission Developments, which includes the coastal route which is Palmerston-Sheffield and then the loop. That's the full scope.

Currently, we're doing Stage 1, which is the coastal route and the Burnie-Hampshire line, and 95 per cent of that is existing transmission. The second stage, that's the Loongana Valley, et cetera, has a much higher proportion of greenfield sites being contemplated for it, - that's me not defining what I'm talking about.

Stage 1 is what's been contemplated at the moment. Stage 2 is a separate conversation that is reliant on the second Marinus cable or further growth in Tasmania's electrification needs.

Mr GARLAND - Very good. Another one. I understand there has been a nationwide shutdown of hundreds of wind farm towers owing to asbestos contamination from the brake pads in the lifts of these towers. Can you confirm if any wind towers in Tasmania will be affected by this asbestos concern and be required to shut down? If so, how long will those towers be shut down for?

Mr DUIGAN - An interesting question - not one that I have visibility on. I'll pass that to the secretary.

Mr LIMKIN - Through you, minister. Safety of wind towers is a WorkSafe matter. I'm not aware of the issue, but I'm happy to raise it with the director of WorkSafe. It's an important issue and I'll raise it with them.

Mr FERGUSON - I want to take you to the subject of north-east wind in my electorate of Bass. I indicate I'm a supporter of the project. I think it's exciting, but I want to be alert and to alert you to constituents' concerns. How can the government and the proponent of ACEN's north-east wind respond to the concerns of my constituents who live in Tomahawk? It's a beautiful seaside hamlet and community there. They are concerned about the impact on the visual amenity of their community from, what they described to me as 'proposed 19 270m towers around 3 km away'. I haven't attempted to validate those specific numbers, but the point is reasonable and as a Liberal member for Bass, I'm sympathetic to those community concerns.

Minister, are you willing to meet with concerned community members to hear those concerns? I wonder if you have any response to those concerns already, and can we use your role in government to encourage the proponent to engage positively with my constituents of Tomahawk?

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Mr DUIGAN - I, too, am aware, as many people would be, of the concerns of residents at Tomahawk. It's not unusual for residents to have concerns with these sorts of things. Tasmania currently generates 17 per cent of its power from wind. We seek to substantially add to that and there are a number of projects where we need to be listening to community. These things have to have a level of support in the community or they're very hard to progress.

My message to the proponents is to work with the community to understand their concerns about the best placement for towers, alignments, and those sorts of things. There is a pretty sophisticated approvals process for wind development in Tasmania and these are not new issues. I am aware of them, and have been contacted, I would think, once or twice by the Tomahawk Protection Society.

Ms FINLAY - Only once or twice?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, in terms of letters that I have seen, not heaps. If we want to decarbonise, if we want to do these things, we have to build these things.

Mr BAYLEY - In the right place.

Mr DUIGAN - Well, that's exactly right.

Mr FERGUSON - I just wonder if I could nudge us back to that area. I wonder if you'd be prepared to meet with them yourself?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, certainly. I have no problem meeting with them, but, again, my leverage is best placed with ACEN and saying we need to talk to the community and get these things. ACEN has met with the community group and has moved tower siting. Again, before these things are built is the time to make sure we get this stuff right, but I'm always happy to meet with people.

Ms FINLAY - Continuing on from the questions before and talking about MIs, it's great to hear of your commitment to maintaining MIs as customers and not just transferring opportunities to the NEM.

We have had exchanges around the power contract at Bell Bay Aluminium, and now there's a 12-month extension. What's your work plan to make sure that there is a power contract entered into well in advance of the 12-month horizon, which has caused this extension now?

Mr DUIGAN - The key missing piece of the puzzle at this stage is a commitment from the Commonwealth government. That's the key missing piece. Hydro is adamant with me that they're offer to Bell Bay Aluminium is at or near cost of production, and Bell Bay Aluminium is adamant that its requirement for a power price is what it needs to make that site viable and, really importantly, what it needs to trigger further investment in that plant, which is what we all want to see. But, there is a gap.

It is a gap given the amount of power that Bell Bay Aluminium consumes, that is beyond the balance sheet of Tasmania to cover. So, we need, as has been the case in smelters around the country, the federal government - and I should say the federal government and the federal

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minister have shown a willingness to engage on this. We just have to sit down and talk about how we get this done.

Ms FINLAY - So my question is, in order that we're not in this same situation again in 12 months' time, what's your plan to ensure that there's a power contract for Bell Bay Aluminium well in advance of the 12-month horizon?

Mr DUIGAN - This has been work that the secretary's had a lot of input into, and he's been meeting with all of those players. Noting, that it's probably likely that the Commonwealth aspect of this would be delivered through the Businesses and Industry minister, Mr Ayres.

So, from the Energy portfolio, there is energy for Bell Bay for 10 years at a set price. We will work with them. Absolutely. We would expect Mr Ellis, as the shareholder minister, and Mr Ayres to be working on that other piece, with support, obviously, from the Tasmanian government more broadly. It might be something you have some insight into.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you minister, through you. We're obviously keen for commercial arrangements between Hydro and Bell Bay to remain between Hydro and Bell Bay. We are working together with them to ensure that they continue those conversations and that those conversations are completed well in advance. If there are any small margin changes on either side that could be contemplated. DSG has had to look at both the Hydro numbers and the Bell Bay numbers and tested them quite diligently. We're trying to sit between the two as an informed broker, but not be involved in the actual negotiation because, ultimately, that is a commercial matter between Hydro and Bell Bay.

We are, as the minister said, on the business, industry and resources side, working very actively with the Department of Science - DISER, in the Commonwealth, to look at how do we unlock the green aluminium production scheme as well, so BBA is able to use that. Mr Ellis put a submission into that scheme. We've continued to engage with the Commonwealth on those matters to look at how we ensure the best deal for Tasmania here. How we make sure that we aren't disadvantaged to other states and territories because we continue to own our Hydro commercially.

We offer significant support to these major industrials because they are big employers in our state. They're important for regional jobs and economy, but no other state and territory can offer that. So, we need to make sure that there is a fair deal transacted between the Tasmanian government and the Australian Government in recognition of that. No other state or territory - the minister used the example of AGL, which would not be asked to forego profits for its shareholders to support Tomago, for example. From my point of view, we should not be asking Hydro or the Tasmanian community to do a similar thing. They're the negotiations that are continuing to happen at this stage.

Ms FINLAY - Okay, so I'm really keen on when you intend to conclude those negotiations. If there are elements of the operations at Bell Bay Aluminium that will become eligible for the green aluminium production credits and that doesn't start until 2028 so there's still a time gap in there.

My question is, in order that there can be a power deal for Bell Bay Aluminium within the next 12 months, when do you hope to have that work complete so that it's not scrambling at the last minute like it was now, and what are you going to do or what work plan do you have

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to fill that gap for the portion of Bell Bay Aluminium that may be in the future eligible for the Green Aluminium Production Credits?

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of work stream, it is a process of negotiation between the Tasmanian government, between Rio Tinto, Hydro Tasmania, to understand how the Commonwealth Government is going to support Bell Bay. What mechanism are they going to use? Are they going to use the Green Aluminium Production Credit scheme or is there another method?

We've seen across the country a range of mechanisms used, so grants, whatever you like. I'm not that wed to the mechanism, but I'm wed to the outcome.

Ms FINLAY - I'm looking for a circumstance where Tasmania is not red-faced again, where we don't have a 10-year power deal in 12 months. Do you have your mind, or have you set an expectation with the parties working on this, that there is a date that these negotiations - there will be gates of negotiations of things that you can achieve and not achieve. When are you hoping that you will have certainty and Bell Bay Aluminium will have certainty that they have a 10-year power deal?

Mr DUIGAN - I would like it to have been signed already, but that's not the case. We need to continue to work, but what we're not going to do is give up Tasmania's interest when the Commonwealth clearly should be acting. This is Australia's greenest smelter. It would be a completely perverse outcome should this smelter be forced into a closure plan to support other higher pollution -

Ms FINLAY - I don't feel like you're across the timelines of when you -

Mr DUIGAN - We know when it expires, don't we?

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, look, to stick with the Bell Bay and industrial theme, the Liberty Bell Bay Power Purchase agreement signed earlier in the year for 10 years. Can you confirm whether that's exclusively for GFG Alliance or whether it's transferable? What I'm trying to get at here, is it attached to that title and that major industrial, or is it something that notionally or potentially GFG Alliance could split off and sell separately which ultimately delivers a different result for the Tasmanian public?

Mr DUIGAN - My expectation would be that the power supply contract would go with the site, but I'd probably refer to the secretary on that. Do you have some understanding of that contract?

Mr LIMKIN - It's with the company, so it's with the actual company, which is the owner of the site. Unlike other parts of the GFG groups where it is integrated into GFG, Liberty Bell Bay is a very separate company with its own shares, and my understanding is the contract is between that entity and the company and therefore cannot be moved to another.

Mr BAYLEY - It effectively goes with the site.

Mr LIMKIN - It goes with the company and the site.

Mr BAYLEY - With the company and the site, not the owner of that company.

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Mr LIMKIN - That is my understanding.

Mr BAYLEY - Can you confirm that and correct the record if that is not the case?

Mr LIMKIN - Why don't you ask that in business industries and jobs on Thursday and I'm happy to confirm it by then, but that is my understanding.

Mr BAYLEY - Understood. No worries. Thank you. In relation to the Firmus AI proposal again in the north, has a power purchase agreement been reached for Firmus's expansion in the north? And is it for stage 1A1B or for stage 2 and if negotiations are ongoing, when do you expect them to conclude as minister?

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of their power purchase?

Mr BAYLEY - Yes, for a power purchase agreement for that facility. Obviously, data centres are a new high-demand customer, so there's a lot of interest in this particular proponent for a whole range of different reasons their history and the amount of data that they may need. Just some clarity and transparency around the power purchase agreement for the Firmus AI expansion.

Mr DUIGAN - As you say, data is going to be an ever more potential opportunity for Tasmania. We have our green grid; we have cooled climate. All of those things feed into that offering in terms of where Firmus is, Vanessa, do you have visibility on Firmus's PPOs?

Ms PINTO - My understanding is that both Hydro and Aurora are currently in negotiations with Firmus. And I also believe that you know that Firmus may also be considering, as you would do as a major load, discussions with other developments that are coming along. I believe that would be an active space they would look at but at the moment they are definitely discussing with Hydro and Aurora.

Mr BAYLEY - Do you have a sense or an expectation as to when those negotiations with Hydro or Aurora would conclude?

Mr DUIGAN - It would depend on what aspect of Firmus's plan you're talking about.

Mr BAYLEY - 1a, 1b, stage 2.

Mr DUIGAN - I know they scale up fairly substantially. In the very larger parts, it is absolutely a conversation.

Mr BAYLEY - But at the moment, nothing has been signed for any of the stages and no timeline has been set in terms of when it will be needed.

Ms PINTO - Not that I'm aware of.

Prof RAZAY - When there is an excess of wind and solar energy, it creates instability and oversupply into the grid, and therefore some grid operators shut the generators. What's the extent of this problem in Tasmania?

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What's the negative impact of it, and what are our strategies in dealing with this grid supply fluctuation?

Do we have any improvement in our storage of energy?

Mr DUIGAN - System stability is becoming an ever more present issue. With grids particularly we see high penetration of renewables. South Australia has substantial grid stability issues when the wind is blowing and the sun is shining. Batteries are seen to be a good grid stabiliser, as are large spinning masses and Hydro plant is very good for that as well. Tasmania has some natural advantages in terms of grid stability.

In terms of the curtailment piece that you mentioned, when there is too much generation happening somewhere, say, someone has to shut down: it's not a huge issue in Tasmania at the moment. I believe there is potentially some curtailment that happens on the north-west coast at various times when all the wind farms are going hard there, but it's not a material impact.

The overarching answer to your question is this need for strategic planning and making sure that you put things where there is access to transmission so you're not finding yourself in a position where you are generating but you can't get your generation to market. Obviously, for Tassie, having Marinus Link provides that opportunity, so if we have a lot of wind here or solar here and it's spilling, we can get it to the mainland market which is obviously larger and can soak up that energy, so it's a planning piece.

Prof RAZAY - Batteries often are not really the answer because they can only release energy for a few hours; isn't that right?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Prof RAZAY - We haven't had very advanced batteries to accommodate more.

Mr DUIGAN - No. I believe interconnectors, Marinus and Basslink also provide good system security inputs as well.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I want to bring up with you an area that I know you've been working on and that is in relation to underground private connections. We have the new regulation. I'd like an update on that, but no doubt you've acted because of the problem of a number of Tasmanians struggling to get their homes connected to the grid, due to complexities around undergrounding of private lines. It has been a complicated situation. I believe many would say needlessly so for Tasmanians to deal with, especially when what they've been looking for is to get power to their new home.

Could you explain what the fix has been in terms of the regulation, but more specifically, is it working for TasNetworks, for private contractors and homeowners?

Mr DUIGAN - This is the issue that became apparent. Late last year, it was becoming an issue where we had councils not wanting to be responsible for the underground connection. We had this very perverse outcome of a power pole next to a power pole. Everybody, me included, said that is ridiculous - make this go away. I am pleased it has been made to go away. That has been basically through the work of TasNetworks and I would compliment them on the work they have done.

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It is where you have underground connections where the point of supply and the service views is located outside the customer's property on public land managed by local government. And we had that sort of escalation or cascade of councils. One said we shouldn't be doing this and then more followed. That was due a section in the 30-year-old *Electricity Supply Industry Act 1995*, which prohibits running a line capable of conducting electricity across a title boundary unless it's done by an electrical entity such as TasNetworks or otherwise authorised. As there was previously no regulation providing such authorisation, some councils were not granting approval due to concerns associated with safety and liability. We had that conversation with TasNetworks and Department of State Growth and they worked together to sort it out. A good example of getting rid of red tape and the sort of issues we would like to see identified and got rid of. If there are more of them, happy to hear about them.

Essentially the step was to amend the Electricity Supply Industry Regulation to ensure that these private underground connections are categorised as authorised lines. I am pleased to confirm this regulation amendment was made. The amendment commenced on 1 October 2025, but it should be noted that TasNetworks was operating as though it had been amended sometime prior to that.

Mr FERGUSON - Is there any evidence to the contrary that there are problems. If it's quiet, I'm presuming it's working well from your point of view?

CHAIR - No, we will move on.

Ms FINLAY - Regarding the question that was asked by Mr Bayley, I have the same question, but in a slightly different way. At the moment at Liberty Bell Bay, they have their power agreement, but the site is shut down at the moment and they're not using their power. It's been suggested to me that, historically, that power that they're not using is sold back into the grid. How does that work when they are not using the power? Is there a net zero balance to the cost of their contract of power they're not using? Do they have capacity - which I think is what Mr Bayley was asking - to do anything else with that power allocation or is it simply not charged and not used, or do they still pay for it when they're not using it? Can they do anything else with it now?

Mr DUIGAN - Secretary Limkin has some answers on Mr Bayley's questions and may be able to expand more on that, but we will check how that goes.

Mr LIMKIN - In relation to Mr Bayley's question, I have confirmed that the contract is with Liberty Bell Bay Proprietary Limited, so it is with the company that owns the assets.

Mr BAYLEY - And used on that site and it's not transferable?

Mr LIMKIN - It is not transferable because that is where the ownership is. In relation to Ms Finlay's question, I'm not aware of that. That would be an Aurora answer. Unless Vanessa could answer it.

Mr DUIGAN - Vanessa?

Ms PINTO - I am going to give a generic response if that's OK, because I'm not pertinent to what's in that contract. What would typically happen with a contract of that magnitude, there may well be elements of that contract that are negotiated, in this case Hydro Tasmania or a

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large generator and a consumer being a large consumer. Those negotiations may well have in there that if load were to drop, if they were to be able to manipulate the way that they run their operations for load to drop - it's often referred to as 'curtailability' or 'interruptibility' - if those were to occur, then that enables them -

Ms FINLAY - That's when there's a benefit to Hydro isn't it?

Ms PINTO - There's a benefit. It may be that it could be used, for example the member referred earlier to stability issues, it can be used in a jurisdiction to manage stability issues. It could be used, for example, if that power needs to be used elsewhere, that could be from on-island for energy security reasons, or it could also potentially be that energy could be sold elsewhere -

Ms FINLAY - That's where it's contemplated, where it's useful in the system -

Ms PINTO - That's correct.

Ms FINLAY - so there's a benefit to Hydro, to Tasmanians and to the proponent. I suppose I'm asking a different question, where they are not operating at the moment, so there's no or very little - what happens with that?

Mr DUIGAN - That's the circumstance that was worked out with Nyrstar recently as you may remember, as they dropped their load requirement, there was a gain -

Ms FINLAY - There was a benefit.

Mr DUIGAN - There was. In terms of where that is with Liberty Bell Bay, that's one that we would need to -

Ms PINTO - The first comment I would make is it is a commercial-in-confidence contract and -

Ms FINLAY - I'm not asking for numbers, just understanding how it works.

Ms PINTO - Again, I'd refer generically that there may well be elements in that contract that enables flexing up and down of a consumer, with their load under the contract.

Mr DUIGAN - Given the volume of that contract, I don't think there is any way that it could have been sitting idle and being charged and not showing up in the books, in terms of a liability against the site.

Ms FINLAY - Are you happy to take that one on notice?

Mr DUIGAN - Let's see what we can find -

Ms FINLAY - Given that it's an energy contract. Happy to take that one on notice?

Mr DUIGAN - noting that the contract -

Ms FINLAY - I am not after specifics but after function.

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Mr DUIGAN - I will see what I can find.

Ms FINLAY - I will provide that in writing, thank you. Going back to the data centres and so with Firmus, I am really interested in your policy discussions that you're having internally and with Hydro and Aurora on the benefits to Tasmania from these types of operations, and therefore what sort of pricing policies you're contemplating for these data centres?

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of pricing policies, I'm not aware of a Treasury policy as such, but it would be my expectation that new load coming into Tasmania would pay a reasonable retail price, based on the volume they would be taking.

How we would look at them from the Energy portfolio, I am interested in, is making sure that they are appropriately located. There are certain areas where there is good access to new, renewable developments; where there is good access to existing transmission or forecast transmission augmentation and where there are opportunities to do other things. If you look at the Downie energy park proposal for the Central Highlands, it contemplates a number of these things really well. The appropriate placement, again, that strategic planning piece, which I would seek to lean into, is the important bit.

I think we will get data centres, Marinus comes online, that adds very substantially to our data transfer capability. We have good spots and good reasons why you would build data here. We want the data centres, and I understand there's data and there's data. Some data comes with more jobs attendant with it than other data. We want to be attracting the right data centres, for the right reasons, in the right places.

Ms FINLAY - I suppose that actually the question about policy -

CHAIR - Ms Finlay.

Mr BAYLEY - Just to follow on from that, you're saying in terms of power purchase agreements, either Hydro purchasing power from a generator or selling power into a load, the government doesn't give any sort of policy instruction or any direction to Hydro or Aurora on the things they should prioritise and how they should structure their negotiations in relation to those power purchase agreements.

Mr DUIGAN - There's the ministerial charter, which sets out expectations of supporting jobs and economic development in the state. But when it comes down to those commercial discussions, it's not a place for government to be. I'm very reticent to have government and politicians in the middle of contract negotiations. I don't think that's a happy circumstance.

Mr BAYLEY - You have the power to direct them to enter into a power purchase agreement, though. Have you had to exercise that power and direct Hydro into engaging and entering into a power purchase agreement?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly, there have been conversations with Hydro between myself and the government, and various instruments of government, around our expectation that Hydro has a very sharp pencil when it comes to, for example, Bell Bay Aluminium and other large important employers in the state. Some of these businesses might be experiencing some

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vagaries occurring in global markets which are, to some extent, outside their areas of control. We would see there being value in providing a bit of an anchor and a bit of a rock.

Mr BAYLEY - Are they just verbal discussions, or is there an exchange of letters?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly, I haven't provided a direction to Hydro Tasmania. I and the Treasurer recently, in terms of the 12-month extension to Hydro when that was floated, said 'Please action this'. It wasn't a direction, but it was a pretty clear instruction to proceed.

Mr BAYLEY - With Bell Bay Aluminium?

CHAIR - Mr Garland.

Mr GARLAND - Talking about Whaleback Ridge, have you or your office, or TasNetworks, done any costings to upgrade this transmission line route to meet any or all of the requirements of a partially or fully developed Whaleback Ridge wind farm?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly, Whaleback, having visited that site, it's a very prospective site to my eye. I know your thoughts on it. There is a transmission build obviously required there. Whaleback is in the Major Projects approval pathway. It's probably going a little bit slower than originally anticipated, I think that would be fair to say.

Have we done transmission surveys, that sort of thing? Presumably, there would be with TasNetworks, probably not an application at this stage, but a connection inquiry. So, I imagine they would have some understanding of the size and the route of the connection required. Vanessa, anything further to say there?

Ms PINTO - There is a process that Whaleback Ridge is going through at the moment under the Major Projects process, and they are looking to submit their Major Project impact statement around the middle of next year.

As part of that, they will look at the design of the project. It's really quite a large, it's got a number of phases to it. As a part of that, they'll look at the design response and the requirements. I would fully expect that, as a part of that process, they'd be seeking to engage with TasNetworks in the preparation of their Major Project impact statement.

Mr GARLAND - According to your government's expert advisory panel, for Marinus Link to have any chance of delivering the super profits you're promising the people of Tasmania, significant amounts of additional wind generation will be needed to be constructed by the time Marinus comes online in 2031.

Minister, how much additional wind generation is required in megawatts? Where are these wind farms going to go? And how on earth will they be ready to go in 2031 when Robbins Island, which has been on the cards for over 10 years, still needs another five years to commence, if it commences at all?

Mr DUIGAN - The number in my head is 800 megawatts by 2034 in the Marinus base case, so 800 is the number.

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It's important to recognise that in the last year or two we've seen Hydro partner with Northern Midlands Solar. That's a 288 solar farm. There are a number of wind farms making their way, albeit not as quickly as everybody or some people might like to see, but making their way through the fairly rigorous and elaborate planning process.

I'd point again to Equis's Bell Bay Wind Farm and others that are making meaningful steps through the planning process, Robbins Island among those, which in and of itself is a 900-megawatt wind farm. So, if we're talking about 800 megawatts by 2034, if we pull the trigger on Robbins, we're very close or, indeed, somewhat above that. So, there is a very creditable pathway to get to those numbers.

The other thing we've done, in the most recent election, was ask Hydro to provide another 500 megawatts into the grid, or partner with another 500 megawatts. So, they will have another approach to the market before the end of this year to bring more generation on beyond. We know how powerful that has been in terms of getting projects built. If you've got a project that's got a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Hydro, you have got a very real case to go to the bank with.

Mr FERGUSON - Earlier in our discussion we were canvassing Basslink's performance. I think the word you may have used was 'curtailed'. I want to ask you about that. If that is a reference to performance on an ongoing basis not meeting up with the current flow capacity of Basslink, then I'd ask for your commentary on that.

But then specifically take you to Basslink's conversion to become a regulated asset because, obviously, it's very important for our state. I'd ask for you to update the committee on that; specifically timing and its importance in the lead-up to Marinus's construction commissioning in 2034: how that is going, and how quickly that can be delivered as a regulated asset, noting that it is not entirely within the state's hands to do so. But I'd ask you to provide that update and tell us how aggressively you're pursuing that.

Mr DUGAN - I think it's very important for members to recognise that, among all of the interconnectors all over Australia, there is one that is not a regulated asset, and that is Basslink. For all of its 20-year life, Tasmania and Tasmanian customers, through Hydro Tasmania, have paid all of the costs of Basslink. Noting the not-insubstantial benefits that flow to Victoria by having Basslink, we are very much of the view that Basslink should be a regulated asset and that Victorian customers should bear their share of the cost of that asset.

I'm not sure how familiar members are with this process, but it has been an application by APA, who are the new owners of Basslink; they applied to the AER to have Basslink regulated. The original draft decision went against that. We were all very surprised on that basis.

Anyway, long story short, the AER has reversed that draft decision and now is contemplating the regulation of Basslink, so that's good. It will mean that 75 per cent of the costs will be recovered from Victorian customers for the first time ever. We hope that APA accepts the AER's determination on the price and value of its asset, which was 3 per cent lower than what APA originally floated.

I don't know that that's necessarily all that meaningful, but it has meant that Basslink has, since 1 July this year, been operating as a merchant link. That is, the flows across it are priced

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at a point which advantages APA more than Victorian or Tasmanian customers, or in the case of Hydro Tasmania, Hydro Tasmania. That has seen very substantial curtailment of the flows going across Basslink. We want to see that link flowing as it should.

Mr FERGUSON - Timing?

Mr DUIGAN - Timing, 1 July 2026.

Ms FINLAY - There's been a bit of conversation around Liberty Bell Bay and the power agreement that exists. I'm just wondering what role you play in supporting the future of Liberty Bell Bay in terms of getting it back up and running and supporting the jobs, particularly the workers that need to make sure that they secure their entitlements and things on that site. What role are you playing in that conversation?

Mr DUIGAN - At this point, I don't believe there has been an ask of the energy jurisdiction, or any ask of renegotiating that power contract, which as you would be aware, was signed relatively recently. At this point in terms of the energy contract, there hasn't been an ask for a renegotiation of that and indeed I notice as energy use on the site has decreased, so too has Aurora's security position, I think also decreased to some extent as well.

Ms FINLAY - Is it?

Mr DUIGAN - I believe that's the case.

Ms FINLAY - You mentioned when you were talking about Marinus that there's an energy committee. Is there for a site as significant as Liberty Bell Bay and for the impact on Tasmania a closure of that site would have, is there a committee established to work where you as Energy minister and the local member might be included, there's no sort of cross-government, at your level, working group on that?

Mr DUIGAN - There is a major industrial committee of Cabinet of which I'm a member.

Ms FINLAY - My question then is, what role are you playing to support the future of Liberty Bell Bay?

Mr DUIGAN - Again, unambiguously this government supports our major industrials, as evidenced by the fact that we've provided a \$20 million loan to get ore to that site as quickly as that was able to be done in order for that site to recommence. Sadly, there have been some commitments made on the other side which haven't necessarily come to fruition; but we remain absolutely engaged in making sure that site - which again, without the international vagaries that have been somewhat introduced into the market, and without the ore issue that Liberty has had - is a cash positive business. There has been, seemingly, an amount of cash taken from that business for other purposes, but we see Liberty as an ongoing, quality business.

Ms FINLAY - What pressure is the Cabinet major industrials committee putting on the Gupta Group to refund some of those funds that have been taken, and what position is the committee taking on the recent interest from the Georgians; is that seen as a distraction or is that a potential useful outcome for the site?

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Mr DUIGAN - It's obviously part of the conversation, obviously, it is. We again, spend plenty of time talking to the federal government about the role it may play here, given it has intervened at Whyalla. There are a number of things happening at Liberty. The government, as I say, is keen to see that site continue.

Ms FINLAY - Has there been pressure put on Gupta to return the funds?

Mr DUIGAN - Not from the energy portfolio.

Ms FINLAY - No, but from the Cabinet working -

Mr DUIGAN - I won't talk about Cabinet.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, you spoke earlier about the Energy Saver Loan Scheme and its ability to assist households with solar and storage, energy efficiency, appliances, building upgrades and the like, and last year the economic regulator reported there was a 31 per cent increase in the amount of solar energy being produced on island here, and largely on home.

A positive thing, and you've talked about the scheme in a positive sense, and you've talked about follow-ons, because of course that scheme is now closed, it closed on 1 September, and installations need to be complete in two weeks' time to be eligible for follow-ons. What are the follow-ons that you intend to initiate in this space, because it has been useful, it has been successful, and it is something that we need to improve here in the state, the energy independence of households?

Mr DUIGAN - One of the great legacies of the Energy Saver Loan Scheme will be the fact that the local solar industry is much larger, much more advanced, much more capable than it was three-and-a-half years ago when the scheme commenced. At that stage we had problems getting enough installers to do the jobs; now the industry has grown to such a point where it's got a bit more of that self-sustaining momentum. When that scheme finished, I was concerned that we would hear a great deal of noise from industries saying, the workload has dried up, but that's not been the case. The workload is actually continuing. We are still continuing to see very substantial solar installations happening across the state. I think that's been a really good legacy piece.

The more difficult part to address, in my view, is around those homes and those customers who perhaps aren't contemplating a \$10,000 solar installation but would like their house to perform better, or to be less cold, or don't have insulation in their walls, or incentivising a landlord to put energy efficient appliances or solar on a rental property, those sorts of things; again, we've asked for a review to be done of the Energy Saver Loan Scheme and for the learnings out of that, and potential ways forward. We're looking at that. We're not ready to go yet.

Mr BAYLEY - When's the review going to be finished?

Mr DUIGAN - When's the review going to be finished, Vanessa?

Ms PINTO - I'm hoping that an answer to when the review will be finished will come to me shortly. What I can say in time, actually probably by early next year, such that the government may consider if it would like to take any further action in regards that, and in terms

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of the scope of that review, there are a number of programs that have been undertaken over time. Prior to the Energy Saver loan scheme, there was the prior Tasmanian Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme, if we all recall that. We are going to have a look at how those schemes have been undertaken, the areas for improvement. We'll also look at what other jurisdictions are doing to see where there are opportunities there, to see how we can learn from that, to look at what possibilities could be provided.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, the energy regulator published its embedded network review final decision in August this year and that concluded that all energy customers should have a comparable level of consumer protections, regardless of their energy supplier, and requiring jurisdictional governments to act to address consumer gaps. Obviously, this was the national Australian Energy Regulator. Can you outline what action the Tasmanian government has taken to address the AER's findings, in particular, to ensure that customers in embedded networks here can access the electricity concessions.

Mr DUIGAN - Good question, embedded networks is one of those challenging areas to unpick given the nature of them. It's work that ReCFIT has been doing, again, I would point to the acting CEO to provide detail on where we're up to, but noting that you know, Tasmania is supportive of those.

Mr BAYLEY - Intention to implement them all?

Mr DUIGAN - Absolutely.

Ms PINTO - Embedded networks, as you would be aware, are privately-managed systems that supply to all premises within a site, like a caravan park or retirement village is a really good example of that. Typically, what will happen is the operator of that site will purchase in bulk and then onsell it. In Tasmania, many of those customers would qualify for the electricity concession if they were billed directly, however, they're not recognised as such. So far, some of the methods that have been applied are through the Energy Bill Relief Fund and the Renewable Energy Dividend. There is also in the 2025-26 Budget a new electricity rebate for eligible low-income embedded network customers, and the implementation arrangements are currently being developed by the Department of Treasury and Finance, working in collaboration with Service Tasmania.

Mr BAYLEY - Do you expect them to start rolling out immediately?

CHAIR - Sorry, Vica. You've had two. Prof Razay.

Prof RAZAY - Minister, Tasmania has many opportunities to harness marine energy, wave titles, ocean thermals. In fact, CSIRO suggested that nearly 11 per cent of Australia's requirement can be delivered by marine energy. Now, we did have an ocean wave generation prototype on King Island. We had a trial there. What was the outcome of that? Has there been any follow-up of more projects like that?

Mr DUIGAN - In my time, no. I don't believe so. I've had, as other members may have, anecdotal contacts and meeting with people who have, you know, proposals and prospective things. Hydrokite was one that I remember well. I think the key consideration at the moment is the cost, and getting those things to market. I'm not sure where there are jurisdictions who are delivering commercial quantities of energy through the methods you mentioned. Tasmania has

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some prospective areas - I think Banks Strait is pretty good in terms of its tidal flow and various things like that - but to my knowledge, we are not engaged in that space.

Vanessa, anything you have to add there in terms of what ReCFIT's seen?

Ms PINTO - Nothing further at this stage, minister. I will see if anything further comes through but nothing of detail at this stage.

Mr DUIGAN - Offshore wind is probably the most prospective maritime energy-generation opportunity, and Tasmania is very well placed. Bass Strait is a relatively shallow, pretty windy joint. We do have an offshore wind zone, and some proponents are looking at that.

Prof RAZAY - Do we know anything about that King Island trial?

Ms PINTO - Through you, minister. That was what I was just about to refer to. There's an offshore tidal and wave project being undertaken at the moment on King Island. It is a pilot scheme. So far, as I understand it from the information I've received, it's been technically successful but, as yet, it has not met financial viability, so they are some of the elements. As is often the case with a lot of new technologies, you have to go through a process of, firstly, shoring up that the technology actually works, and then having it in a space of competitiveness against alternatives.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, can you and your team give an update on the Bell Bay green aluminium hub, please? You announced the proponent back in May, I think. No doubt it's progressing. I want to know how it's progressing, what achievements have been reached in that time and, of course, with reference to Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing Zone as a tremendous proponent as well. I wonder if you could expand on that for the committee and let us know what the next steps will be.

Mr DUIGAN - I think you said green aluminium hub. It's hydrogen hub.

Mr FERGUSON - Hydrogen hub. I apologise. I do have green aluminium on the mind at the moment, for all the right reasons. Thank you for your correction.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you for your answer. It's a good one. One of our great aspirations is to see Tasmania placed as a global-scale producer of green hydrogen and its derivatives, because I believe we have that opportunity. I have spoken about our comparative advantages, which remain as present and as relevant as they have always been. It has been a year where other green hydrogen hubs have fallen by the wayside, and the hydrogen hype curve is a thing and it does exist. We will continue to work through that, noting that it's probably taking longer than everyone did expect.

With that, though, the Tasmanian Green Hydrogen Hub is jointly funded by the state and federal government. There are milestones that we need to make, and we are committed to making those milestones. This is \$11 million at the moment of state funding and \$70 million of Commonwealth funding.

Members may have seen the demolition of the old oil-fired Bell Bay power station the other day, which is the proposed site for the Bell Bay Powerfuels development. A very special

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site and a great advantage for that proposal. Bell Bay Powerfuels has recently been named up as our provisional lead proponent for the hub, so that's great. They continue to work on a very large 300 megawatt-plus electrolyser for that site and continue to look down the road of green methanol as being the likely product from that facility.

We've also been speaking to Countrywide Hydrogen, which has a smaller-scale local refueling proponent, or project, and Bell Bay we see is a great place for that to commence. So we would be drawing Countrywide in.

Also, I would mention recently an announcement from TasPorts about work they're doing with H2H, another substantial developer looking at Bell Bay as their chosen site.

The final implementation plan for the hub has been completed and that's been progressed to the federal government. It's one of the key milestones, so that's important. In terms of Bell Bay Advanced Manufacturing, they're one of our partners in this along with TasPorts and TasWater and Tasmania Irrigation and TasNetworks, and continue to have good conversations with them. Really important that we have the industry engaged in what we're seeking to do there, but also work with TasPorts and our hub.

Mr FERGUSON - BBAMZ.

Mr DUIGAN - BBAMZ. That's what I'm talking about. They're one of the consortium partners.

Ms FINLAY - That's a great segue to my question. For all of those opponents that you're talking about, whether it be TasPorts, whether it be Bell Bay Powerfuels, whether it be Countrywide Hydrogen, there is no doubt that in the future we will need water at the Bell Bay precinct.

The Tamar Irrigation Scheme. We spend a lot of time in the parliament making sure that instruments were available to allow the industrial water to augment that scheme, which means it's successful for farmers but also provides the outcomes here.

What's the status of that, and are you actively working to break down barriers in decision-making to deliver the water? The money allocated to the hub, are you contemplating any ways of actually delivering the water in advance of projects to prepare the site to secure investment which will also support the farmers in the area being able to pull their irrigation through?

Mr DUIGAN - The short answer is yes. I agree with, essentially, the premise of your question and the need to find a way, because we know that as a straight agricultural scheme, it doesn't quite stack up. On the industrial side, we haven't got a project that's got to FID yet that has felt that it was in a position to sign up for water sales. That classic chicken-and-egg type scenario.

What I've been doing is continuing - so for example the business case for the Tamar Irrigation Scheme has just been completed, so via hub funding we have paid for that - some \$600,000 and TI has done the work. That's been, I think, provided to the department and my office may be late October.

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The business case is positive. We know if these things come together, there's a very, very good cost benefit ratio for the Tamar scheme. How much risk the government has to take here is, again, the million-dollar question. Can we encourage other funding partners to be engaged in this space, noting the Commonwealth has a role through the typical National Water Grid Authority and how that works but is there a way to provide a hybridised model of that to deliver the outcomes we're seeking here? There are some live conversations happening there, but I'm pretty focused on the need to deliver this.

We will be allowing the farmers who have signed up to that scheme and committed money to take their funds out because I don't believe it's appropriate that we hold their funds while there isn't the certainty that they need at the moment and we need to just get on with the way of delivering this.

Ms FINLAY - Two clarifying questions there: is it a signal to farmers by allowing them to take their money out that you're not confident that it will proceed, or is that good faith given many of them have been paying interest on that money for a long period of time?

Can you clarify, are you saying that you are willing to break down the decision-making barriers to commit a project for the industrial water to Bell Bay without a proponent?

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of your first question around farmers, that's a good-faith thing. I felt that while we couldn't give them the certainty that they were looking for, it's important that they're not on the hook and paying dollars for that. So, we have passed legislation through parliament to allow this to happen.

What was your other question?

Ms FINLAY - I just wanted to check what you were saying yes to. Are you committed to breaking down the barriers for a decision to deliver water to industrial water without a proponent? Are you trying to find ways to get the water project through to Bell Bay in order to be able to deliver the irrigation project?

Mr DUIGAN - We are certainly trying to find a way, yes, no doubt about that. Again, I would caution that with there is a level of risk that it would be acceptable to government and a level of risk that wouldn't be acceptable to government, and finding where that is the tricky bit, and it's a big number.

Ms FINLAY - Sure. How far progressed is the work on the offshore terminal developments at TasPorts in terms of being able to deliver offshore wind when, hopefully sometime soon, the offshore zone, the Bass Strait zone, will be announced, and Bell Bay's critical role obviously in the network reports? Are you confident that the work is progressed enough that it will meet the time-frames to receive first components for the proposed offshore wind projects?

Mr DUIGAN - The offshore zone has been announced -

Ms FINLAY - I mean the proponents.

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Mr DUIGAN - Okay. I'm aware of work that TasPorts is doing and have seen schematics and things. It's not hugely appropriate for me to comment too much on TasPorts' operations or readiness for that sort of thing -

Ms FINLAY - But as Energy minister delivering offshore wind projects? Do you feel confident that they will be able to make the timeframes required to receive components?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, I do, particularly as how the staging of offshore wind looks like which would have Victoria going some years ahead of Tasmania. That would be my reading of the current status that will play a role in that.

Mr BAYLEY - Coming back to the Hydrogen Hub, minister, the Budget is really explicit in some of the risks that are identified there. budget paper 1 talks about the fact that:

Developing hydrogen export capacity at Bell Bay is expected to require new infrastructure investment, including port water transmission upgrades.

We've just talked about that.

This infrastructure may be delivered by government businesses, although most capital costs are anticipated to be recovered through commercial arrangements with end users.

How are you managing that risk as it stands at the moment in terms of decisions around investing upfront in some of that, so-called enabling infrastructure, versus the negotiations that obviously are yet to come in relation to new investors and the hydrogen producers signing up to take on that. You would have already delivered it. How are you going to force them into paying and recovering those costs?

Mr DUIGAN - I believe that's the nature of the challenge.

We want these things to occur; we want the hub to be there to facilitate new industries in Tasmania, but we can't put the government in the position where it's taking all the risk, and I understand that and I accept that.

Timeframes here are somewhat challenging in terms of meeting up, particularly as to the point Ms Finlay was raising - agricultural expectations on water and what will be the industrial expectations on water and will those timeframes neatly meet? It looks like possibly not and again, you know for transmission augmentation, we know what we'd like to do, but there needs to be a business case to support it. Those government-owned businesses will need to operate commercially and derive a return from their undertakings for the Tasmanian people and not doing things on spec. I don't think we can do things on spec.

Mr BAYLEY - In relation to the carbon input into these e-fuels, be it hydrogen, methanol and the like, can you confirm that there will be no native forest biomass going into those productions? I know some of these companies have identified they will be plantation only. Is that something that you as a government, and as energy minister, would be willing to prescribe to make sure that native forest biomass is explicitly excluded from these kinds of developments?

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Mr DUIGAN - I am not sure if I've got it in front of me and had a similar conversation the other day - certainly in the first instance, it's plantation forestry residues that is what is contemplated. So, currently, the waste product of plantation forestry. If that proves not to be enough, and the modelling shows that there's enough of that, the next would be to move into the plantation chip base, and again, there's more than enough of that. So, I don't think there's any expectation of native forest inputs.

Mr BAYLEY - As a result, is that something you think the government should explicitly rule out and make sure to give confidence more broadly to community and/or investors or others? Is it something you think the government should actually legislate, regulate or otherwise preclude from being available to those kinds of developments into the future?

Mr DUIGAN - The government is and remains a committed supporter of native forestry. If there is a way to use residues from native forestry more effectively, then I don't see a problem with that. But I take the point these are companies involved in providing e-fuels and they may have a different view of those sorts of things.

Mr BAYLEY - Noting, of course - we've heard the argument about waste products and tails wagging dogs in the end. We saw that with the wood chip industry through the 80s, 90s, 2000s and beyond. But it's not something you think the government should actually regulate or legislate, to give security to those companies and the community going forward?

Mr DUIGAN - I don't think it's a front-of-mind issue just yet.

Mr GARLAND - This is a question for the Secretary of State Growth and relates to the work of the Energy Executive Committee he chairs.

According to the latest Anglicare report, the rental vacancy rate is 0.3 per cent in Burnie in February and is the lowest in the state. Under these conditions, it is hard for anyone to find a rental at any price. For people on low incomes, even the lowest-priced rentals are not affordable, and they are often out-competed for these properties by people on higher incomes.

This was a clear risk flagged in the Marinus Link whole-of-state business case: hordes of fly-in fly-out workers from the mainland coming and taking the few rental properties that exist. Good for traditional Liberal voters who own multiple investment properties; not good for the rest of us.

What policy solutions is your government proposing to low-income locals who are going to find themselves without anywhere to rent because of the North West Transmission Developments and Marinus Link?

CHAIR -Mr Garland, the question has to be to the minister, not someone from State Growth.

Mr DUIGAN - I will direct - I would just make the point it is very much a real issue we will need, as a state, to contemplate and address. With that, I would ask the secretary. It's not the first time we've heard the need for this.

Mr LIMKIN - Mr Garland, as I said, one of the key things we've heard through the Marinus Link decision is the outside impact from the energy portfolio. What the minister's

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accountability and my accountability with my energy hat on is to ensure that relevant ministers or relevant people in departments are held to account for looking at delivering those types of outcomes. My job, as the chair of the Energy Steering Committee, is to ensure a coordinated approach across government to make sure all those activities are actually delivered. In my role as Secretary of State Growth, ultimately, I have the accountability for Housing and Planning also and worked with Mr Vincent on that role. We work in partnership with Homes Tas on the delivery of supporting our people where people have a right to housing. As you said, I know there are some challenging conditions in Burnie.

We will be working with Homes Tas to look at a whole region approach on this on looking at what's the need for skilled workers, what's the availability of accommodation, how do we actually look at bringing these matters on? This is very early in the piece given the fact that the Marinus Link decision was only recently made, but I can commit to you this is going to be something we will be very much focused on for the next 12 months, very much engaging with the communities.

Part of the reason I went up to the north and north-west was to actually listen to the communities and their mayors to actually understand how we can actually engage better. So, my commitment to you is we will be doing this through that portfolio and ongoing.

Mr GARLAND -Another question, given our significant debt as a state and this renewable energy expansion, it would be prudent of us as a government to minimise the impacts right across the board and the cost involved of doing so. Robbins Island: high density vehicles, disease free devil population, Aboriginal cultural values - only meeting place, the farmland that has to be acquired, the forest reserves that have to be knocked down, the 110 kilometres of transmission.

You mentioned last year in budget Estimates that Whaleback Ridge could achieve 200 per cent renewable energy target on its own. Would it not make sense to forego all of those impacts and all of those costs by going to Robbins and concentrate solely on using Whaleback Ridge, given there's no density vehicles, it gets the ticks by the experts there. There's no farmland to be acquired, there's no forestry to be knocked down. You have existing infrastructure at a stage process, we could use.

Wouldn't that be the most prudent way going forward to minimise those impacts and costs that are going to impact and costs that are going to impact my electorate significantly?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, appreciate your question and I understand and respect your passion and your close connection to Robbins and that area. Robbins is a very prospective spot for a wind farm. It's breezy-

Mr GARLAND - And contentious, minister, extremely contentious.

Mr DUIGAN - I note that in every case of every wind farm that's ever been built, there is a degree of contention. What we must have is a process that fair and equitably deals with the real impacts, the facts and looks at these things and makes a decision one way or the other. Government needs to be at arm's length from that process.

If Whaleback is all that you say it is, then the market will bring Whaleback into play and that will be good for Tasmania as well. At the moment, Robbins is moving slowly through its

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approvals process. It's got to a point and we as government who are looking to build more generation on-island to grow our state, to grow our economy have to take comfort from the people who do the assessments, who look at all the things you have mentioned and come to a dispassionate decision as to whether it is or not appropriate. As Energy minister, I have to have faith in that process and stand behind those decisions.

Mr GARLAND - You would have to agree that if you -

CHAIR - Sorry, Mr Garland, next one, Mr Ferguson.

Mr FERGUSON - On smart meters, I am aware that our state has committed to the ambitious target of completing the roll out of smart meters through Aurora by December next year, but that's substantially ahead of what the nationally mandated date of 2030 set by the Australian Energy Market Commission. Would you explain the benefits that smart metres offer that justifies an accelerated rollout?

Secondly, the one that we're perhaps most familiar with, in terms of the application to allow a customer to monitor and manage their power use, is Aurora+. Is the same benefit being received by customers who have different retailers other than Aurora?

Mr DUGAN - You touched on the great work that has been done by Aurora and TasNetworks to get our smart metre rollout largely complete and, as you say, well ahead of the national cut-off of 2030 - we're at 2026. Smart metres are one of those things.

There is a bit of a kerfuffle at the moment as we're getting into the tail of smart metres; people that have difficult installations and things like that, or people who don't want them for various reasons. We're seeing a bit of correspondence. The key thing that a smart metre does is give you more visibility over your energy use in your home. By having more visibility, you have more control over how you interact with your energy. I think that can only be a good thing. I don't know whether members use the Aurora+ app or if you're Aurora customers, but I have it and I use it, and I think it is a good and useful tool for that purpose.

Currently, we're at 90 per cent of Tasmanian customers with advanced metres. That means, obviously, readings - you don't have to have the metre reader come around to your house and you can see what's going on. We will be at a point where various other services can be delivered via the metre. What else have I got that I should say? No, I think that's good.

In terms of your other retailers, retailers other than Aurora are working towards a 2030 deadline. Aurora has the largest customer base in Tassie. I don't have visibility on what the other retailers have via their apps, but I did get a query about King Island recently and why they didn't have access to the time-of-use tariff. I think that's on the basis that the smart metres haven't been rolled out there.

Ms FINLAY - Earlier, Mr Ferguson asked some questions about power poles, and I have a few questions about power poles. At the beginning, I started asking about vulnerable Tasmanians, and I'm concerned that Tasmanians might be vulnerable to power poles not performing to their specifications. In recent wind events, in Legana, as an example, we saw a new power pole actually fall over. Where power poles are reinforced by the metal banding, it's meant to ensure that they're strong and capable to withstand certain specifications of wind - but we're seeing poles fail.

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I'm wondering what level of conversation, briefing, understanding you're having, or concern you have, around that, particularly where we have new poles. The volume of wind, and there's a metre for it and I can't think of the unit at the moment -

Mr DUIGAN - The Beaufort scale.

Ms FINLAY - Yes. The volume of wind is far less than the specifications for the poles, but they're failing. I'm just wondering what level of concern you have, or work you're doing, on understanding that, and the risks to Tasmanians to failed power poles.

Mr DUIGAN - I think what we've seen over the last couple of years, the year before more particularly, is those big weather events do have an impact on power delivery. Particularly, regional reliability is a conversation that I've been having with TasNetworks quite a bit this year. A few of those long, single feeders - Derwent Valley, north-east, Tasman Peninsula, where we're not seeing the levels of reliability that we'd like. Typically, they're vegetation related.

In terms of power poles, I know in the August 2024 event, there was rain on consecutive days followed by wind events on consecutive days. You often saw poles going down and indeed trees coming down, not necessarily through the massive blow event, but when the ground was saturated, and then it started to blow again. Then we were seeing trees coming down, and in the second and third events they were much less resilient. More broadly, the aspect or the topic of regional reliability is somewhere that TasNetworks is leaning into. There are new conductors and new lines on the market that are insulated and don't have the same tripping -

Ms FINLAY - My question is actually about the safety of the poles and the poles failing - not failing through rain and wind out of the ground, from roots up, but shearing. Where they're being reinforced, and the reinforcing is meant to be making that sure, they're failing above that as well. It's been suggested to me that there's a public risk in this, and that there have been scenarios where poles shouldn't have failed and they have.

(1) I'm interested in your level of awareness and conversation around that; and (2) The reliability of the auditing that's happening on the poles and whether we're confident there's new poles through that funny situation that has occurred, but whether you're confident that all of the poles in Tasmania are being audited and therefore managed appropriately for their potential failure rate.

Mr DUIGAN - I am aware of the supply chain of how TasNetworks gets poles, and how poles would be rated. It's interesting if we're seeing an increase in the failure rate in terms of shear, but it's a good one for TasNetworks, if you're happy to have it -

Ms FINLAY - I will be asking them. I have a very specific set of questions for them, but I think it's important for you as Energy minister to be aware of the concern and whether -

Mr DUIGAN - I don't believe it's been raised with me. Certainly, we've been talking about regional reliability, that sort of stuff, but in terms of poles shearing, it's not something that's come to me.

Ms FINLAY - The other question - is there a level of confidence about all of the poles in Tasmania recognised in a database and being audited and managed? There's a concern where

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some assets might have transferred from other entities into TasNetworks, that they're not being audited on the cycles that they should be. Therefore they're placing greater risk to the public.

Mr DUIGAN - If that's the case, that's something we'd want to look at, and it's not one that's been raised with me.

Ms FINLAY - It hasn't been raised with you?

Mr DUIGAN - No, it hasn't.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I want to take you back to Robbins Island, and I note your commitment to the process. You said it needs to be fair and equitable and you had faith in that process. I want to talk briefly about Aboriginal heritage and note the extraordinary step that the Aboriginal Heritage Council has taken, which is publishing a position statement on its website. This is the statutory body that advises government on Aboriginal heritage issues. It says:

Pilitika/Robbins Island is a place of connection, story and lives lived, of deep memory both tangible and intangible. Pilitika is a cultural landscape that is not an island in isolation.

Then they go on to say:

The Aboriginal Heritage Council will never support this project.

The Aboriginal community is united on opposing this project. Your Minister for Aboriginal Affairs also tabled a report in parliament in July 2021 that said the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* does not work. It does not provide effective mechanisms for protection. Yet this project was approved in 2023, two years after that 2021 report on the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* failing.

Do you think that an assessment of a place as significant as outlined by the Aboriginal Heritage Council, and opposed by the Aboriginal Heritage Council, do you think the process is fair and equitable? Do you really have faith in that process if it's being assessed against an act that your own minister, three years before, said does not provide effective mechanisms for protection?

Mr DUIGAN - Thanks for the question; I do appreciate it. Having been to the island, as I'm sure you have, and all others potentially, and understanding what has been done in terms of turbine placement to respect Aboriginal heritage on the island, I felt in my conversations that they were very sincere efforts that had been made.

Mr BAYLEY - The Aboriginal Heritage Council doesn't think that.

Mr DUIGAN - I can only speak to the conversations that I've had. I thought they were very sincere in their efforts to mitigate that issue, which they recognised. Again, for me as Energy minister, I have to have my faith in the process. I'm not sure of what you're alluding to, in terms of our Aboriginal heritage minister. I don't have knowledge of that conversation or that interaction. For me, it's the process, it's standing back, looking at it from the purview of the Energy portfolio - has it received its approvals? If that's the case, then I am happy.

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Mr BAYLEY - I guess that's the question, is your faith in the process, if it was assessed against an act that your government is reviewing and saying you need to update because four years ago you said it didn't provide effective mechanisms for protection. If your own statutory advisory body is saying it will never support the project, the question is, do you still have faith in that process, personally as minister?

I guess the option to restore this situation is, would you support the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* being updated, as is in process by this government, then having this project assessed against the new act, fairly and squarely, and in an equitable way, so that Aboriginal people can input into it, and a permit being discussed and determined as part of that process under a new act? Is that something that you think would be fair and equitable?

Mr DUIGAN - No, I don't think that's a fair and equitable outcome. Retrospective -

Mr BAYLEY - Because it disadvantages ACEN, the proponent?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, no, I think that is a -

Mr BAYLEY - Because that advantages Aboriginal people?

CHAIR - Mr Bayley, let the minister finish.

Mr DUIGAN - that is a very problematic proposition, in terms of applying retrospective legislation to various decisions that have already been taken care of.

Mr BAYLEY - We've already done that once with the State Coastal Policy on this project.

Mr DUIGAN - No, that's not true that's not true, we just simply made sound what was already made sound. So, no, I wouldn't support that.

Mr BAYLEY - Even though the Aboriginal Heritage Council itself says that you should never approve this project?

CHAIR - Mr Bayley, please.

Prof RAZAY - Minister, according to the Tasmanian Economic Regulator, in 2025 there was an increase in billing complaints by 36.5 per cent. That's a pretty high increase. I presume most of it comes as a result of increased billing. I would like to find out, how much our electricity bills have increased over the last few years. I know the latest one has increased by 2.1 per cent. For many people, who have been experiencing the high cost of living, even that can be quite enormous for them. That's why we are seeing an increase in complaints to Aurora Energy.

Mr DUIGAN - The increase in billing complaints, I'm not sure on, but Aurora Energy will be at the table next week. It's one of the retailers in Tasmania, I'm not sure whether that increase is entirely attributable to Aurora Energy.

In terms of electricity prices in Tasmania, it is important to recognise that they have been growing at a level lower than the rate of inflation in Tasmania for a long period of time.

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Between 2013-14 and 2025-26, residential electricity prices have increased 18.9 per cent for residential, and 5.8 per cent for small business, in normal terms. Despite increases in recent years, in real terms, regulated prices have fallen, 14.2 per cent for residential customers and 23.9 per cent for small business customers, since 2014. That's a fall in real terms.

I understand it is a bill that turns up with monotonous regularity for most people and it's not one that anyone enjoys receiving. Particularly, in the context of the national conversation, where you will see on the front page of the *Mercury* sometimes that the energy prices have gone up, energy prices up again, whatever, and that will be the case in some jurisdictions on the mainland. In Tasmania, we have an independent regulator who regulates our price. It doesn't change through the years. We know how much last year it went up, 2.1 per cent, the year before it went up half a percent. We know what the what those increases look like, they're locked in for the year. Tasmanians know what they're going to pay, and, over the last 10 years, we've done a good job in keeping a lid on energy prices.

Prof RAZAY - Minister, can you confirm also our cost of electricity is actually cheaper than the mainland, especially because the Hydro energy is cheaper?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, is it? But yes, it is fair to say that Tasmania has the lowest regulated price of any state in the country.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, this will be my last question of you in this output. I just want to say thank you for your participation today and I commend you. You are totally across your brief. I have a question, though, about energy in the community. We've talked a lot about, during our session, diversity of large-scale generation. We've talked about householder rooftop solar. What about in the middle: community assets like, for example, community batteries? We hear a bit about this on the mainland. I think that the north-west also has a scheme, but I would like to ask you, what is the place of that going forward in Tasmania, and is it something that we should be pursuing, or is it something better left to the larger cities of Australia?

Mr DUIGAN - I think it's absolutely something we should pursue, there are changes in the cost and the effectiveness of batteries. Anyone with an electric car will know that there is a massive battery sitting inside every one of those electric cars that in some circumstances could be better utilised and provide better value for the person that owns it.

Community batteries are an important aspect of supporting the growth of renewable energy sources and they're a shared solution, obviously, where you have a larger-than-home-scale battery in the neighbourhood, and that allows more solar connections without the need for expensive network upgrades, because you're supplying more locally and it allows that excess solar, which so often goes back into the grid at \$0.08, which is a lot in terms of everywhere else in the country, but I understand that people who pay \$0.30 for their electricity don't feel like it's a lot, and then they can use it in the evening, so the battery is very good for that, and it does help with that network stability.

The June 2024 integrated system plan released by the Australian Energy Market Operator forecast batteries will be needed and under the Federal Community Battery for Household Solar Program grant, there were two 120-258 kilowatt community batteries now operating, and they were installed by TasNetworks. There's one at Shorewell Park and there's one at Glebe Hill. TasNetworks has been successful for applying for an additional grant, and these grants will provide funding for an additional six community batteries in Tasmania.

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All six batteries will be approximately 200-400 kilowatts each and TasNetworks is responsible for the installation, connection and commissioning of these batteries at six sites. I would also note that the Hobart Show Society is in the process of installing a big battery out there, which is forward thinking of them. It's an evolving space and we want to be supportive of it. I think it has tangible benefits.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, can you provide for the committee a total amount that your agency's been asked to provide in terms of savings in the financial year under the efficiency dividend policy?

Mr DUIGAN - Sure. I would pass that one to the secretary. I'm sure, if he has his voice - while we are waiting, we do have answers to the seismic studies. Vanessa's got some answers to the seismic question for Marinus Link.

Ms PINTO - Yes, thank you. I'm advised by Marinus Link Pty Ltd. In 2019, Tetra Tech Coffey completed a self-assessment survey for the Marinus Link project as required by the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. They prepared a technical memorandum document and considered the likelihood of significant impacts on the environment from proposed marine, geophysical and geotechnical surveys to be completed for the Marinus Link project.

The self-assessment process concluded that significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance were unlikely and thus referral pursuant to the *EPBC Act* were not required. Further, it was determined that assessment and approval under Tasmania's environmental legislation was also not required.

Mr BAYLEY - The question was around the approval of the seismic testing itself.

Ms PINTO - That's the actual process that they undertook.

Mr DUIGAN - And sorry, Vanessa, Edgar Dam impacts?

Ms PINTO - Thank you. Again, this is advice that has been received through from Hydro Tasmania. It's in relation to a seismic event that occurred in the Strathgordon area. The epicentre of that was around Lake Pedder near Gordon Dam with a 4.2 on the Richter scale. They were notified by seismic monitoring equipment that the organisation retains the seismic event was not a triggering of the Edgar fault. The response was managed as a level 1 incident and there were a number of inspection staff that were on site within 15 minutes of the event.

From there, there was an examination of respective assets and a number of assets, including Edgar Dam, were inspected. Those engineering inspections were completed at Scotts Peak Dam, Edgar Dam, Gordon Power Station and Gordon Intake. Wild dam operators completed inspections of Serpentine and Gordon Dam.

Results from the visual inspections and regular review of surveillance data indicated that all dams were performing satisfactorily. They then followed that with a lessons-learned session that was conducted one week after the event. All attendees agreed the incident was managed effectively.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for the update. Back to Ms Finlay's question.

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Mr LIMKIN - So to answer Ms Finlay's questions, The Department of State Growth's efficiency saving target in 2025-26 is for \$5.19 million. It increases to a structural reduction of \$7.78 million in 2026-27.

In addition, saving requirements in 2025-26 budget are \$310,000, increasing to \$619,000. These are in relation to agency marketing, communication expenditure improvements, office and leaseholding improvements and procurement process improvements.

What I would say is the department, as part of our 2024 realignment process that I undertook when I became secretary, has already looked at identified a number of opportunities to deliver these type of savings and we will probably exceed our expectation.

Ms FINLAY - Okay, great, thank you. You said that you've identified some measures. What would some examples of those be outside the ones that you just listed?

Mr LIMKIN - So, in relation to how we're managing it as a department, because we are managing it as a department, they generally fit into the following categories. We're looking at combining functions and services in areas to deliver leaner operational models. So, how do we do business more effectively? How do we use technology more effectively? How do we renew our administration processes?

For example, we've got grants and capital programs, how do we do them and streamline processes, not just to create an efficiency but also to make it easier for our community. Can we use less forms? Can we use less manual signatures?

One of the examples I use quite regularly is that renewals of drivers licences had to be sent out by post. Now that is a significant amount of expenditure when we should be providing people with a choice and whether you want it by post or do you just want to by e-mail, so it gives people a choice. We're also looking at how do we manage our workforce to put people in the areas of greatest needs.

I will use an example, when the Marinus Taskforce was needed, I moved people from the rest of the department and stop work to focus them on the Marinus Taskforce because that was the most important piece of work for a period of time.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. My third question is, can you outline the number of job requests that have been directed as a result of vacancy controls and the freezing of the policies in the financial year - jobs that you might have requested to have within the department that have been rejected?

Mr LIMKIN - I will have to take that on notice and provide that as a department basis, not an output basis.

How we do workforce management in the committee is in the department we have a number of principles set out and we ask each deputy secretary or CEO to do an assessment against those principles. Those principles then come up to a workforce committee which is me and the Deputy Secretary of Business Services, and we have a conversation about can we move our people around, are there opportunities to look at moving people around? We also look at, are there other types of priorities or other things that we could stop and create opportunities on

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those types of things? But for the specific number for the department, I will have to take it on notice, minister.

Ms FINLAY - Do you have that by output?

Mr LIMKIN - We won't have that by output. We only manage this as a department. We do not manage it by output.

CHAIR - To clarify, you're taking that question on notice?

Mr LIMKIN - I will have to. I don't have that information.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I want to talk about eagle deaths. It was raised quickly in relation to Robbins Island, and eagle deaths as a result of interactions with energy infrastructure is something that has been a significant topic of debate for a long time now. This is not just density in wind farms; this is interactions with power lines and the like. Are you able to update the committee on the number of raptor deaths due to interaction with energy infrastructure and can you break that down between wind farm and specific wind farm and transmission infrastructure.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, and I believe the wind farm information is publicly reported. Let me see what I have here and broken down into quite specific farm by farm categorisation.

Let me say at the outset, we are all committed to making this a better circumstance for all of our wildlife - eagles, devils, whatever you like - so we are working together to provide a better outcome for all of our wildlife interactions and there are processes for new developments' impact on wildlife, key considerations, threatened birds and transmission lines. TasNetworks takes its responsibility to protect and mitigate very seriously and in the last four years has invested more than \$4 million to help protect threatened bird-life as part of its Threatened Bird Strategy. Going forward, over the next five years, TasNetworks will spend at least \$1 million on targeted bird mitigation measures. Also, partnerships with Bonorong and direct funding is provided to these organisations for injured birds.

Bird deaths - 18 threatened birds were impacted by power lines in 2024-25. TasNetworks has reported 10 reportable bird deaths this financial year so far. TasNetworks is making strong progress on bird protection and will continue to invest in strategies to improve bird protection. Wind farm operators are, obviously, required to comply with strict preconstruction, operating and monitoring requirements. Let me see what we have.

We do not have a breakdown, but I'm pretty sure, Vanessa, that it is publicly reported.

Ms PINTO - I believe so, minister, but I don't have the information.

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of the last lot of numbers I saw from the wind farms, particularly those wind farms that have had issues with large raptor strikes, the numbers are pretty good. If they're not publicly reported, let me see if I can get them.

Mr BAYLEY - Thank you. In terms of those threatened birds strikes with power lines and the 10 in this financial year, can you confirm, does TasNetworks spend its own money - is

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there any money in this Budget to specifically target those kinds of wildlife interactions with energy infrastructure?

Mr DUIGAN - If there is, it will be coming from Environment and the threatened species fund, so I'm not sure about that.

Mr BAYLEY - Nothing comes through from the -

Mr DUIGAN - I don't know if nothing, but not from Energy.

Mr BAYLEY - Not from Energy, that was what I was going to say. There was just a little bit to be added, I think.

Ms PINTO - I was going to clarify that wind farm mortalities are published by the operating wind farm on their websites and in their annual environmental reports, and copies are provided to the EPA and they're publicly reportable.

Mr BAYLEY - Acknowledging that they're the reported ones, as opposed to ones that possibly go unreported.

Mr DUIGAN - We don't condone any of that. Report them. We want it to be better.

Mr BAYLEY - I'm not saying that in the context of being deliberately not reported, but not being found.

Mr GARLAND - Given that transmission over long distances leads to energy loss and also given the majority of mineral processing and mining industry demand for greater access to electricity to decarbonise and electrify is coming from mining operations on the west coast of Tasmania, would it be smarter for the government to prioritise renewable energy development and transmission development closer to these operations?

Mr DUIGAN - The short answer is yes. I'm very committed to only building, in terms of transmission, what is required. That needs to be an absolute, central point of focus. We don't want to overbuild this; where you are building generation near load, that's a good thing. We are looking at a piece of work there that would lean heavily into that, so -

The time for scrutiny has expired.

CHAIR - The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Sport.

The committee suspended from 1.11 p.m. to 2 p.m.

DIVISION 12

Output group 5.6

CHAIR - The time now being 2 p.m., the scrutiny of the Sport portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, please, names and positions for the benefit of Hansard.

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Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Chair. To my left, Dr Anthony Reid, Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning; my chief of staff, Amanda Lovell; Brett Stewart, Acting Deputy Creative Industries, Sport and Visitor Economy; and to his right, James Avery, CEO, Stadiums Tas.

CHAIR - The time scheduled for the Estimates for the Minister of Sport is one-and-a-half hours; would the minister like to make a short opening statement?

Mr DUIGAN - Great to be here with you all today as Minister for Sport and recognise the vital role that sport plays in improving physical and mental health and building community connectedness and social skills. The state government is committed to ensuring more Tasmanians, regardless of their age or background, get active and have somewhere to play. It's important that we continue to work with the sector to provide safe, inclusive and fun opportunities for all Tasmanians to participate in sports and activities of their choice. The 2025-26 Budget includes significant and important funding for sport and recreation initiatives which will continue to deliver on the government's commitment to get more Tasmanians active.

We are continuing to assist more Tasmanians to access affordable participation opportunities through Ticket to Play, and Ticket to Wellbeing for elderly Tasmanians. The Tasmanian Active Infrastructure Grant Program has been allocated \$5 million over two years to deliver upgrades to existing infrastructure. The government is investing \$130 million into community sporting clubs and infrastructure across all corners of the state, and this includes further upgrades to Dial Park, the new Northern Suburbs Recreational Hub in Launceston, Elphin Sports Centre, Glenorchy Sports Centre, increased capacity at the Devonport Oval Sports Complex, and improved and additional facilities for community venues such as the Penguin Sports and Services Club and Valley Road Regional Football Club.

This is, of course, on top of \$130 million for a major redevelopment underway at UTAS Stadium and \$12 million to improve the Silverdome. The Tasmanian Institute of Sport continues to successfully support talented Tasmanian athletes to develop their sporting potential and compete successfully on the wider stage, and that's why we're investing \$1.5 million into the TALENT ID FOR 2032 program.

Access to organised sports opportunities shouldn't depend on where you live, and programmes such as Reclink are doing a fantastic job in communities, particularly in southern Tasmania, providing access to sporting competitions for young people who may not otherwise get the chance. I'm pleased that this year's Budget includes an additional \$450,000 over the forward Estimates to enable the Reclink team to strengthen and continue this important work. I look forward to continuing the work we're doing to help sport and active recreational organisations and individuals thrive into the future, and welcome questions on this area of portfolio responsibility.

Mr WINTER - Minister, the North Launceston Football Club has no future at York Park post the end of the 2027 season, and it seems no one considered the future as part of the redesign of the \$130 million so-called upgrade of York Park. How did it happen that no one considered the future of a club that had been there for 100 years?

Mr DUIGAN - Happy to speak to this, and note we have James in the room who is overseeing the redevelopment - the very exciting redevelopment of UTAS Stadium, and has been having obviously long and ongoing conversations with the North Launceston Football

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Club, a very important club in the Tasmanian football scene, in the Tasmanian sporting scene more generally. We recognise that finding a home for North Launceston, noting that they are currently housed in the western stand of UTAS and that's only until the end of 2027, will be a job of work for all of the interested parties. The most up-to-date information, as I mentioned, is probably with James. If you could provide the latest on where that's at.

Mr AVERY - Certainly, Minister. There's been an ongoing schedule of consultation with the North Launceston Football Club, City of Launceston, AFL Tasmania, the NTFL and ourselves to try and find a solution long term for the Bombers. There's been two issues we've been trying to work through. One is the short-term issue of displacement for the football club, given that there's a redevelopment at the venue. We've worked successfully, very closely with the club to move them from the centre west stand, which has just recently been demolished. Their club rooms are there as you would be aware over into the western stands.

I think we've found a suitable solution in the short term. The long term, as you point out, is the question at hand and we're working with them as to see whether there's a viable option to keep them within the precinct within Invermay Park. At the moment, I think those discussions are proving pretty fruitful and positive, given that the scope of the redevelopment doesn't include new club rooms or gym for the football club. It's a matter of where they might be able to relocate if the club is open to that. I understand that's something they have been discussing with their members most recently.

Mr WINTER - Specifically minister, the question was how did it happen that they weren't included in the scope of works? Was that a conscious decision by the government that they wouldn't be a tenant at York Park or is it an accident they weren't included in the new design?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly I won't speak for the government's position prior to my arrival in this portfolio, but since I've been here, I'm very cognisant of the need to have a long-term solution that suits the Bombers.

Mr WINTER - Specifically, was it a deliberate decision to not incorporate them into York Park's future or did they get forgotten about as part of the design?

Mr DUIGAN - As I would reiterate, I didn't initiate the design. I won't speak to where that design came from, perhaps James could.

Mr WINTER - Perhaps Mr Avery could.

Mr DUIGAN - We are all aware of there not being necessarily a space for North Launceston in the new redevelopment.

Mr WINTER - It's not necessarily they're not there - they're out.

Mr DUIGAN - While they will, in my view, continue to play on the UTAS Stadium main ground, the long-term future for North is probably within the precinct, probably Invermay Park.

Mr AVERY - The project predates Stadiums Tasmania's existence. When Stadiums Tasmania was first established and involved, the scope of the project had been established

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already. We played a role as the future owner, operator of the venue in relation to the redevelopment project and earlier this year took over responsibility for delivering that project. In terms of the development of the scope, at the very beginning, Stadiums Tasmania was not established at that point.

Mr WINTER - When was North Launceston told that they wouldn't have a future at York Park?

Mr AVERY - We opened discussions with them about that. I don't know whether anyone else had spoken to them about that prior to when we were established two years ago. It was one of the first points of order that we did. I met with Thane Brady, the then former Bombers president at the venue itself, to discuss what the future might look like. We certainly had a conversation with the football club, it would be over two years ago now, but I do not know who had spoken to them prior to that.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I want to go to the Macquarie Point stadium, should it ever be built. My understanding is in Stadiums Tasmania's annual report that, as an asset, that would be transferred over to the books of Stadiums Tasmania to manage in the longer term. Can you explain what happens to the debt associated with building that stadium that Macquarie Point Development Corporation would accumulate? The figures we've been provided through the budget panel shows that Macquarie Point Development Corporation would borrow at least \$490.7 million to build it, more assuming there are cost overruns as people are expecting. Do you expect that debt liability to transfer across to Stadiums Tasmania with the asset?

Mr DUIGAN - That would be a question for the Minister for Macquarie Point.

Mr BAYLEY - You're the minister for stadiums Tasmania. I suppose the question is: would you be comfortable with that liability of debt being transferred across with the asset? That is a normal practice when it comes to the transferring of assets, ensuring that they're able to be serviced and the like. What would your view, as minister, be in relation to transferring that debt?

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of the question and the hypothetical nature of it, James, is that one that you have contemplated?

Mr AVERY - It's not something that has been determined as far as I understand. It certainly is one that the minister, I believe, would be across at this point, but it's not something we have entered into formal discussions with.

Mr BAYLEY - It's not hypothetical though, aside from the fact that the stadium is a hypothetical proposition at this point, but if it is built, it will incur at least \$490.7 million worth of debt to one agency. That asset then gets shifted to another government entity and I am asking you, as minister, for the entity that would inherit that asset, whether you would be comfortable with that liability shifting across with it?

Mr DUIGAN - All I can give you is the fact that, you know, as part of the sports portfolio, that's not a scenario that's been contemplated.

Mr BAYLEY - Not been contemplated, so what has been contemplated? Just a direct transfer of the ownership of the asset to Stadiums Tasmania?

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Mr DUIGAN - That Stadiums Tasmania would become the operator of the stadium, yes.

Mr BAYLEY - Owner and operator.

CHAIR - Mr Garland.

Mr GARLAND - Is the government intending to sell Bellerive if Mac Point stadium is approved?

Mr DUIGAN - Bellerive Oval, the land is, as I understand it, owned by the City of Clarence Council, with the infrastructure and the buildings on the land potentially owned by Cricket Tasmania. It wouldn't necessarily be for the government to be able to sell that asset.

Mr GARLAND - Right, so you would not have had any discussions with property developers around developing that site?

Mr DUIGAN - Not personally, no.

Prof RAZAY - Northern Tasmania is really concerned about the future of UTAS Stadium. We had an association with the Hawthorn club for 24 years. It brought \$20 million to \$30 million a year in economic benefit. They are really concerned that having a main stadium in the south will affect future football and that they might put more and better games in the south to make their investment here viable. How are you going to address the concern of north Tasmania?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Professor Razay. Look, it's a good question, but you know, that's the reason behind why we, as a government and the Commonwealth government, have invested heavily into UTAS Stadium to make it a better venue for fans and patrons and broadcast. We would see it with an expanded role in terms of hosting AFL football. Currently, it hosts four games a year. Certainly, in the years prior to Macquarie Point coming online, it will host a lot more than four games. Going forward there have been some commitments made around the type of games that we will see at UTAS Stadium. We see a very bright future for UTAS Stadium in the new football landscape, whether that's the Devils playing there, and they will be playing not necessarily Brisbane or the Gold Coast Suns. Hawthorn may choose to play there, but they will be big-drawing games and, as I say, we see a very bright future. James, you would, as the owner of UTAS Stadium, you would have a clearer view?

Mr AVERY - Yes, as the current owner-operator of the venue, we are very keen to see as much high-drawing content in the venue as possible, whether that be AFL football, whether that be a range of other events. The redevelopment project enables us to have a greater diversity of events through the venue. Sport is a critical driver and is well-established in a state like Tasmania in particular, but the redevelopment also opens up the opportunity to have more business and conferencing events in there, attract more concerts.

We are in ongoing discussions with concert promoters at the moment about bringing events there, not just when the venue has been upgraded, but in the short-term. Yes, the football content is critical, but being able to attract other sporting codes to have their elite content there is a major focus of ours. The redevelopment gives us a much better position to be able to negotiate those outcomes.

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Mr FERGUSON - Good afternoon, minister, and to your team. Thanks for attending. I want to ask about the utilisation of Stadiums Tasmania's overall portfolio of properties and current and envisaged?

By the way, congratulations on the Silverdome event. I think it shows that our sporting outlook is about a lot more than the one code that we're always hearing about, which is AFL. We all love the AFL, but to have a rodeo at Silverdome raising money for the LGH was fantastic. I want to ask you, minister and your team, what the government is doing and planning to do to attract elite sporting events and content to our venues in the future?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, for anyone who was able to get along to the rodeo at the PBR at the Silverdome - I didn't get there, but it was, apparently, a great event. It demonstrates the need and the value of looking more broadly at what we can host at our venues and what are the opportunities available to us.

I'm pleased today to be able to release Tasmania's major venue content strategy that has been developed by Stadiums Tasmania. The focus of this strategy is attraction and, of course, retention of high-quality content across Tasmania's sporting and entertainment precincts. This is an important first step in seeking to maximise the opportunities for Tasmanian venues to attract events and content across the range of sectors, whatever they may be.

From here, Stadiums Tas will work with the industry and stakeholders on a detailed action and implementation plan. This piece of work is a vital addition to the work being done as part of the broader visitor economy to ensure Tasmania's stadiums and entertainment precincts deliver maximum value for the community and the economy.

I'm aware that Stadiums Tas undertook an extensive statewide consultation process, engaging with key stakeholders in the sports, tourism, hospitality and entertainment sectors. I was very pleased to be with you, James, the other day, at Ninja for the announcement of [the] Richmond [Tigers?] into the Hobart market at that venue, and I think that's good.

Looking at the whole suite of events and that content strategy will support that outcome.

Mr WINTER - Back onto North Launceston Footy Club. They have to be out of the ground within two years. Is there any money in the Budget for planning and design work to upgrade the main park?

Mr DUIGAN - What we all understand is that North needs a home. There are a number of entities, as James alluded to, that have a role to play in that. I see a very substantial role in this for the City of Launceston Council, noting that, when the government took ownership of UTAS Stadium that freed up a substantial amount of operating cash for the City of Launceston. So, we need them at the table amongst all those other people. I'm committed, though, as Minister for Sport, to making sure that there is a long-term solution for the North Launceston Football Club.

Mr WINTER - I asked you specifically: is there any money in the Budget for planning and designing an upgrade of Invermay Park?

Mr DUIGAN - In the state Budget? No. In this budget -

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Mr WINTER - Is the government committed to that funding to doing that?

Mr DUIGAN - I have indicated that I am committed to a long-term solution for North Launceston.

Mr WINTER - Can you confirm that before the election you provided a draft letter to the president of North Launceston Football Club, Adrian Hall, that included,

I'm pleased to advise that a re-elected Tasmanian Liberal Government will commit \$100,000 to enable design and planning work to be undertaken around a proposed new facility for North Launceston Football Club

Is that the case?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Mr WINTER - You provided a draft letter, but not a final signed letter. So, is the government committed to providing that \$100,000 towards the upgrade or not?

Mr DUIGAN - I believe Mr Hall, shortly after I sent him that letter, went out and stood next to you, as you provided an alternative for him and, on the basis of that, I chose not to sign my letter.

Mr WINTER - So, because I did media, the North Launceston Football Club does not get the \$100,000 to secure its future?

Mr DUIGAN - As I've said, we'll make sure there is a long-term future for the North Launceston Football Club.

Mr WINTER - You just linked those two things. Mr Hall went and endorsed Labor's policy, and because of that, the draft letter was never signed and they don't have \$100,000 in this Budget.

Mr DUIGAN - I haven't signed that letter.

Mr WINTER - Do you understand how this looks for the North Launceston -

CHAIR - Sorry Mr Winter, asked and answered. You've had more than -

Mr WINTER - I will come back to it, Chair.

Mr BAYLEY - Coming back to the Macquarie Point stadium debt - \$490.7 million is Mac Point's borrowings. Last year's Budget identified them as being short-term borrowings, additional expenditure outside of the forward Estimates is anticipated to be met through short-term borrowings by Mac Point Development Corporation. This year's Budget has no such qualification around the durability or the length of those borrowings, so, I think we can assume that they will sit there for a little while. The Coordinator-General has flagged that maybe they don't get paid back at all.

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Notwithstanding your previous answer that it hasn't been contemplated to shift that debt across to Stadiums Tasmania, as would be the normal practice, the government does propose to service the \$490 million through grants from the general government sector going forward. If the government was to be doing that, servicing that debt for Macquarie Point through grants from, effectively, operating budget, would you be content with that debt then being shifted across to Stadiums Tasmania?

Mr DUIGAN - All of that is very much cart before the horse, and I don't think there's anything meaningful I can say from the discussions that I've had to answer those questions. Those are questions that will come in the fullness of time. We need to get the stadium approved and get it built, then we will understand how those kinds of machinery elements will take place.

Mr BAYLEY - Surely, as minister who's responsible for the entity that will adopt this stadium, you'd have a position on whether the debt that is incurred in order to build the stadium should travel across with the stadium itself.

Mr DUIGAN - That will be the case, should that come in front of me. At this time, that's not a circumstance that has -

Mr BAYLEY - In budget Estimates, as minister responsible for that the entity, the final home for that stadium - if it is built, you don't have a view on whether the debt should travel with the asset?

Mr DUIGAN - Not that I would give you here today, no. Not without having the opportunity to fully contemplate the question.

Mr BAYLEY - This hasn't been a discussion within government, in terms of how you manage that debt, which entity pays for it, how it gets paid down?

Mr DUIGAN - Not a discussion that I've been party to.

Mr GARLAND - Were there ever any costings done on the potential to upgrade York Park to be the Tassie Devils' home?

Mr DUIGAN - Not as far as I am aware. I think the costings to upgrade it to the state that we want to upgrade it to is \$130 million. In terms of - I don't think it's ever been contemplated as the home of the new AFL team.

Mr GARLAND - Right. Now on to something different. Your government promised \$25 million for the upgraded Dial Road Stadium in Penguin. You seem to have backed away from that?

Mr DUIGAN - No. The government committed to making Dial Park a tier four venue. Along with that announcement came an allocation of funding of \$25 million. As you'd be aware, Dial Park is a relatively new and modern facility. In terms of the budget required to get Dial Park to a tier four standard, it was costed at \$14 million, thus that was the amount of money that was provided to council to then complete those works. Council remains the owner of Dial Park. There were some initial thoughts that it would come into the Stadiums Tas portfolio, but after some discussions with council and the football club, particularly, about how that would actually work and their access to revenue-raising opportunities, it was decided that

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it was probably better left in council's hands. The quantum funding required was \$14 million and that's been provided.

Mr GARLAND - Right. So, it wasn't anything to do with the blowout and the costs of the AFL high-performance centre in Kingston?

Mr DUIGAN - No. The residual \$11 million has been deployed to other sports infrastructure on the north-west coast. I think around \$5.8 million has gone to the Devonport precinct - remind me Brett.

Mr STEWART - Through you, minister. There was an additional \$4 million provided to Stadiums Tas for the Silverdome upgrade and \$1.2 million for various projects in and around the north-west: Penguin Sports and Services Club, King Island Bowls Club, Port Sorell Bowls Club, Valley Road Regional football facility.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, as you know, I think I'm the biggest fan of the northern subs recreational precinct, but now I've just looked down the table to the Chair and we might be equal huge fans of that project.

Our government have extended what was originally I think seven courts, now building on out onto 11. I'd like an update on that, and a particular interest area for me and from conversations in the community is the governance model that will sit around it as well.

What I'd be asking you is, are we on track for completion in the near future, at least for the first major stage for seven, and what's the future operational outcome that you're envisaging or is there more work required on that? Of course, I am thinking of East Launceston and the PCYC question which has been an ongoing unanswered question.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Mr Ferguson, and I note your support involvement fingerprints all over the northern suburbs rec hub and it is getting to a very exciting point in that very large project's life.

We are scheduled to open in the early part of next year, and having the opportunity to go through recent weeks and to see the scope and scale of that building is pretty exciting for Launceston. Mowbray, more pointedly, and we are very much looking forward to that, as is NTNA and you know, various basketball leagues and all aspects of the community.

In terms of governance model, PCYC Northern Tas will be overseeing the governance of the multi-user facility with NTNA running the netball centre there. Of course there are four netball courts, three of those courts will be dual line for basketball as well, which would provide an income stream and some pressure off in the basketball space. So that will be good.

As well, you would have seen recently that we've announced another - well, a repurposing of \$18 million to deliver a further four courts on that site. That's in lieu of providing three courts at Elphin, which was proving to be a very challenging piece of work, although I should mention money will be spent at Elphin to bring it into a more fit for purpose state.

Mr FERGUSON - That's great, thank you minister.

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Mr WINTER - Minister, North Launceston football club has been at tenant York Park for 100 years. Within two years they're going to be evicted from their own home grounds. You've pulled the offer of \$100,000 to enable a design -

Mr DUIGAN - I haven't pulled any offers.

Mr WINTER - Well, you said an earlier answer that the offer to fund design was pulled from the table when they did media with Labor. That's not correct now?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, I didn't sign the letter.

Mr WINTER - So the offer was made and then after they did media with Labor, the offer was taken -

Mr DUIGAN - They had a look at where my thinking was at, and they decided a different way.

Mr WINTER - Minister. It's actually really serious. The timelines here are so tight, there's already less than two years. Even if you've funded the infrastructure upgrades in this budget, it would be tight to deliver them at Invermay Park. So what's the plan? How can you guarantee that this 100-year-old football club will have a home come season 2028?

Mr DUIGAN - We will do that, but it's an ongoing piece of work.

Mr WINTER - But how?

Mr DUIGAN - It's an ongoing piece of work. There are a number of stakeholders that need to play a role in this. It's not just incumbent on the government. There are a number of people that we want to see involved and engaged in this piece of work.

Mr WINTER - Minister, you own the infrastructure that they're being kicked out of. You are the landlord, they are the tenant. They are being removed from a ground they've been at for 100 years. You need to find them a solution. It's got to be better than we will find one. You've refused to provide the funding that they needed for design, so how are you going to make sure that they will have the infrastructure and facilities they need so the club can have a home in 2028?

Mr DUIGAN - We will continue to work and continue to bring all the relevant parties to the table to get an outcome. As I say -

Mr WINTER - This has got a bit of stench of ferries without a berth to it, minister.

Mr DUIGAN - As I say, we will make sure that North Launceston and the storied history of that club is not forgotten and they have a home.

Mr WINTER - But how?

Mr DUIGAN - We will continue to do the work.

Mr WINTER - But you've just said you're not funding the work they say is required.

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Mr DUIGAN - I'm absolutely not saying that at all, Mr Winter, and funding requirement that is needed for North Launceston, or if the result of that work is that government has a role to play in providing funding, then that will be contemplated in the May Budget.

Mr WINTER - In the May Budget they will have 15 months ahead of them before they get kicked out of their home.

Mr DUIGAN - As I say, there may be a role for Launceston Council in this. There may be a role for other players.

Mr WINTER - You are now the owner of the infrastructure, the landlord.

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of where the long-term future of North Launceston may be, that's Invermay Park, where council is the owner of infrastructure.

CHAIR - Let's move on.

Mr BAYLEY - Much is made of the AFL deal to deliver the Devils as the 19th licence in the league. We understand that and it has a lot of deliverables in it that are really clear, and this has been debated at length. One of those that your government has spruiked a lot recently is a \$360 million commitment that the AFL is making to Tasmania and to football in Tasmania. The AFL deal itself only flags \$120-odd million, \$124 million I think it is. The Planning Commission identifies that the balance was committed via media release.

My question to you is have you signed a subsequent agreement with the AFL where it spells out its commitments, and you have them signed up to that?

Mr DUIGAN - I haven't signed a subsequent agreement. As you mentioned, we are expecting that the AFL will invest \$358 million in total into Tasmanian football a part of the licence deal which will flow into communities and clubs and that will be made up of \$10 million into the club's training and administration centre, the T&A, \$90 million toward game development, \$33 million into development of young male and female talent, \$210 million into distributions to the new club over 10 years, and importantly, a minimum of \$15 million into the stadium at Macquarie Point.

Mr BAYLEY - So \$124 million of that is as part of the agreement, the 19th licence agreement, and on that basis, you're proceeding with a remarkable process to approve and build that development. Are you saying that there's not a subsequent agreement with the AFL that locks in those commitments? You haven't signed one. Has anyone else in your government signed an agreement with the AFL to lock in those commitments?

Mr DUIGAN - My understanding is that these are the commitments that have been made as part of the club funding arrangement.

Mr BAYLEY - The club funding arrangement spells out \$124 million. Your government has been citing \$360 million for a long time since. Are you telling me that no one has put pen to paper with the AFL to lock in those commitments? The Planning Commission reports that it was a media release from the AFL announced it, but are you saying that no one has gone back to the AFL and asked them to sign on to those commitments, as they did in the club funding agreement and as Tasmania did to a significant number of different commitments?

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Mr DUIGAN - The number to which you refer, which is contained in the club funding agreement, remains.

Mr BAYLEY - \$124 million.

Mr DUIGAN - The \$210 million number is a number between the AFL and the club because those payments flow to the club.

Mr BAYLEY - Some of them flow to the club. You just went through them before and some of them go to other places.

Mr DUIGAN - \$210 million in distributions to the new club over the first 10 years.

Mr BAYLEY - So everything over and above the \$124 million are actual payments to the club because that's what you're effectively saying, is that correct?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, right?

Mr BAYLEY - Not into community football, not into other facilities, into the club?

Mr DUIGAN - And the staff who live, work, play here in Tasmania.

Mr BAYLEY - They're not additional commitments into community football or football development in in the state. They're commitments maintain the club.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Prof RAZAY - Hawthorn Club has the most successful relationship with Northern Tasmanians and the UTAS Stadium and they had the most successful win rate of 75 per cent, which is the most successful record in any club at any venue in the history of Australia. Northern Tasmania wants to continue that relationship with Hawthorn. They have made enormous investment, not just in football but also in the community, especially in children and youth. What Northern Tasmania want is commitment to continue this relationship. We only have guaranteed games until the end of next year. So, what guarantee are you giving us beyond that?

Mr DUIGAN - So, we have guaranteed games until the end of 2027, four games next year, four games in 2027, and at this stage there is no further agreement between Tasmania and the Hawthorn Football Club. I would note that relationship is managed under the major events partnerships agreements, which sits in the events portfolio, for which I am not the minister. So, the ongoing nature of that commitment should be discussed with the minister responsible for the portfolio.

I would echo your sentiments around what a positive partnership that has been between Hawthorn and the City of Launceston. Tasmania, more broadly, has 10,000 Hawthorn members here in the state, but I would also make the point that the football landscape in Tasmania is about to change in a seismic way. We will have our own team, and I think there is a school of thought that our own team should be the focus of Tasmania. The Tasmania Devils should be where our focus lies.

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It's a view I hold as Sports minister. I know others hold divergent views, but I think we deserve to give our team all the support that we can as a state to ensure it is successful in the short and the longer term.

Prof RAZAY - I feel disappointed - like, Northern Tasmania supported football with high attendance, 14,500 average over 24 years compared to 9500, and I feel Hawthorn, we might lose them because they were already approached by Queensland and Cairns and I think we should continue that relationship, not two but four games a year, and I believe Tasmania [inaudible] support two teams, rather than put all our basket with one team and there is no guarantee that it will be successful.

Mr DUIGAN - I also believe that Tasmania [inaudible] support two teams.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Chair. Minister, I just want to bring the discussion for my question around to grassroots sporting participation, whether it is school-based activities or interschool-based competitions or community, even commercial, sports that involve participation. What are you able to share with the committee about the data around participation, how that data might be useful in sports planning, not just in terms of the very large investments like stadiums and deals with AFL teams and basketball teams, but how that data can inform good policy settings so that we can help more young people get off their devices and get outside and enjoy some fresh air and not just exercise, but team-based exercise for their mental and physical wellbeing. So, a question about participation.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you. I appreciate that, and it's a great story that we have to tell in Tasmania around participation across a very wide variety of sports. The ones that tend to get noticed are basketball, and netball to an extent, but you know it is happening wherever you look, and it's not just our young people, it's also older Tasmanians who are engaged in active recreation and the government supports the development of high-quality and well-planned facilities to ensure we can provide a full range of sports and active recreation opportunities.

To support this objective, work has progressed to capture and display the location and key attributes of Tasmanian community sports facilities. The Department of State Growth published the Tasmanian Community Sports Facilities Portal, which is, as you may have seen, an interactive map capturing and displaying, as an initial phase, council-owned and certainly school facilities data and further facility datasets will be expanded in the portal over time and previously, there have been no central database or platform for that and that's why the portal's been developed to enable the government and our communities and local councils to be more informed about the current state of supply and future demand for sporting facilities. The portal will continue to be a key input to guide future investment of sports infrastructure and it's important as we make those decisions around the state and that will be -

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, do you have data that supports people using the portal?

Mr DUIGAN - That's a good question. Brett, do we have data that supports people using the portal?

Mr STEWART - I will take that on notice, minister.

Mr FERGUSON - I will come back. Thank you.

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CHAIR - To clarify, you are taking that question on notice?

Mr DUIGAN - We will come back with some information.

Mr FERGUSON - I know it's new, I'd love to know if people are engaging and using it and if it's helping them with their planning. I might come back to that as well.

Mr WINTER - Minister, your office sent this draft letter to the North Launceston Football Club at 1:08 p.m. on 3 July. That same day, two-hours later, the club did media supporting Labor's policy to keep the club at York Park. Why should the club endorsing the approach of keeping them there preclude them from receiving \$100,000 to design their future at Inveresk Park?

Mr DUIGAN - For clarity, it wasn't my office that sent that letter. I think it was probably an election campaign circumstance.

Mr WINTER - It was a representative of yours -

Mr DUIGAN - Of the campaigning Liberal Party. Yes?

Mr WINTER - Yes.

Mr DUIGAN - Sorry, what was the rest of your question?

Mr WINTER - The club endorsed the policy to keep them at York Park, which was their preferred position. Your policy, as outlined in the letter, was to help them design a new facility at Inveresk.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Mr WINTER - Which is clearly better than having no home at all.

Mr DUIGAN - No doubt.

Mr WINTER - Why does their endorsement of the policy to keep them in their home preclude them from receiving funding to move to Inveresk Park?

Mr DUIGAN - In no way does it do that.

Mr WINTER - In an earlier answer, you said that because they'd done media with Labor, that that policy - you never signed the letter.

Mr DUIGAN - The work goes on, Mr Winter, we need to find a solution to this issue. As I say, there are a range of stakeholders at that table. Government is one, Stadiums Tasmania another, council another and we will continue to work to find -

Mr WINTER - Are you aware that they are still seeking the funding to allow them to design their future at Inveresk Park?

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Mr DUIGAN - Look, that maybe something that you know about, James, but, as I say, there is a job of work to do here. We're not resiling from that.

Mr WINTER - But it's not funded, though, and they have less than two years to move. It's unfunded. They have no home, and at the current trajectory, they will have no home.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, and what I would say is, there is nothing that has come across my desk in terms of a representation from North about funding from the government.

Mr WINTER - I think it's pretty clear what they want. I mean, they want a home.

Mr DUIGAN - That was my offer to them.

Mr WINTER - Then you withdrew the offer.

Mr DUIGAN - No, no. I think they chose a different path.

Mr WINTER - No, no, no. I think you fundamentally misunderstand their position.

Mr DUIGAN - Anyway, as I say, there is nothing -

Mr WINTER - No, it's not 'anyway'.

Mr DUIGAN - There is nothing in front of me at the moment for me to progress in that space. There is a job of work going on.

Mr WINTER - You're the Sports minister, and look, I shouldn't have to do this, but they desperately need a home. They desperately need the funding so they can actually go and design their new home. If this doesn't happen in the very short term, one of the oldest, most respected, most successful football clubs in Tasmania will have no home, if you don't act now. What are you going to do?

Mr DUIGAN - We will make sure that North Launceston has a home.

Mr WINTER - That's not actually an answer on how you're going to do it. How will you do it?

Mr DUIGAN - We're committed to that outcome.

Mr WINTER - You don't know how you will get there; you will get there?

Mr DUIGAN - We will get there.

Mr WINTER - Right. Minister, I'm not sure that satisfies anyone at the club. Can you commit to providing them with funding to do the design at Inveresk Park?

Mr DUIGAN - I will certainly commit to continuing to do the work to make sure there is a long-term future for North Launceston. They're hugely important in my part of the world and we will get it done.

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Mr BAYLEY - Minister, international and indeed national research has shown that stadiums are an increasing venue for sports betting advertising and encouragement and the level of saturation of advertisements, the integrated nature of it and the sort of impulse nature of the advertisements, and stimulating an impulse reaction to gamble, are of significant concern, and they are not matched with alternate warnings about gambling and measures to sort of deal with people's addictions and challenges in that space.

Has the government turned its mind to this in relation to all its sporting venues, in terms of policy about how Stadiums Tas will engage with the sports betting sector, let's call it, and with a harm-minimisation approach informing it first and foremost?

Mr DUGAN - Thank you for the question, and I note the increasing level of interest around this particular issue. It's probably one that's directly in the Stadiums Tas space, given the commercial nature of the operations that Stadiums Tas would seek to operate under. James?

Mr AVERY - Stadiums Tasmania in relation to the Mac Point project or, in fact, any of our other venues, hasn't been approached by any gambling or wagering organisations to date. We are certainly committed to partnering with responsible organisations, in that sense.

We're aware that there are regulations that already apply. For example, I know there was some change several years ago in relation to live odds being advertised in venues during events, and that no longer happens. We think that's a very good thing.

In terms of those partnerships that our hirers undertake, for example, if we're talking in the sporting realm - football and cricket - we can't determine who they partner with from a sponsorship point of view. We obviously can in terms of our own assets within the venues, which on event days, are limited. We will get, for example, somewhere between 5 to 10 per cent use of signage within the venue when we stage sporting events of an elite level.

From our perspective, we are certainly cognisant of partnering with responsible partners in relation to our assets within the venue. We cannot dictate terms to our hirers, unless there is an edict across the entire venue.

Mr BAYLEY - Just to unpack that a little bit more, through you, minister, for Mac Point, for example, on an AFL game day, should it ever come about, you're saying that the AFL has [inaudible] 90 per cent control over the electronic billboards and all the advertising in that venue. You have no capacity to influence, moderate at least deal with some of the risks that may be associated with what is being promoted there?

Mr AVERY - You're accurate in terms of the percentage split for the hirer. If the venue was deemed to be a venue that had banned all forms of gambling advertising, then that would be a measure, yes. Otherwise, at the moment we can't, for example, determine to an AFL club playing there that they can't do a sponsorship with a wagering company for guernsey sponsorship and branding. Obviously, we don't determine who clubs do commercial partnerships with.

Mr BAYLEY - You're saying that if a venue had a ban on all gambling advertising, for example, voluntarily put, that would then be a consideration that the hirer would have to take into account, as to whether they choose to take on that venue and actually use that venue in the first place?

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Mr AVERY - Yes, it would create an issue in terms of where they're able to play, and therefore whether you, as a venue, are able to enter into a venue hire agreement with that partner. For the Mac Point project, that is a relatively simplified way to look at it. I guess if this is flowing to all government-owned or government-funded venues, you're talking about a lot of community venues. If there is a community organisation that has undertaken some sort of a partnership with a wagering company, there's another layer of complexity there.

In terms of the venues that we operate, yes, it would create some sort of negotiating commercial issue with our hirers, if that was the case.

Mr BAYLEY - Is that something that you've contemplated at all, or the Stadiums Tas board has discussed how it wants to engage in that responsible wagering advertising space?

Mr AVERY - Our organisation is very mindful of it. We're watching the trends nationally and globally in terms of advertising within stadia very keenly and very closely. There's been a number of changes over the years, as I've alluded to, and we think they're sensible changes. We are very aware of our corporate social responsibility as an owner-operator of large-scale community assets.

Mr BAYLEY - Do you see a world where those kinds of ads -

CHAIR - Sorry, Mr Bayley, we'll have to come back to you.

Prof RAZAY - Northern Suburbs Community Recreation Hub is one of the major achievements in sporting venues because it's built in the most disadvantaged area. We want to ensure people in the suburb can access the sporting activities because costs can prohibit many youngsters.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Prof Razay, and I agree. It probably demonstrates the evolution of a city that the current PCYC sits in Newstead, which at a time was a disadvantaged area of the city. That's probably not so much the case any longer. It's great to see some infrastructure going into the northern suburbs. I'm really pleased about that. That's a great opportunity and we would dearly love to see all of the kids up there get really excited about this, because this is for them.

I think it's important to have PCYC North running the venue due to some of the altruistic values that that organisation holds, bringing kids in and seeing the value of sport and participation and joining something. That was one of the key platforms for why that site was chosen over - it was probably six or seven years ago when that work first started, out of council, interestingly enough. So, we're really pleased to see it there and we want to see it leveraged. We want to see everybody, and that's why it has so many different offerings in terms of what it does, what it can hold and what it can bring.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, my earlier question was about sports participation data, so I might come back to that in the latter part of my contribution now. On the facilities portal you mentioned, I ask that you take on notice, or take on board, that there might be a way for members of the public to recommend other additions to that portal. I'm just noticing, for example, in one particular suburb, the tennis club's there, the bowls club's there, but the golf club isn't there. That's just for your awareness -

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Mr DUIGAN - Just quickly, the way it's been designed, I think, is with layers. So, the council layer, school layer - and there are other layers to come.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you. On data, the meat-and-potatoes of my question comes back to how our government initiatives around sporting infrastructure, attracting games and codes, are leading to better participation, particularly of young people but all-aged Tasmanians. I wonder if you have any evidence or data you're able to bring to light?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly.

Mr FERGUSON - Motivated by wanting more participation.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, well, that's what we've seen. There are obviously good examples to point to recent times with the JackJumpers. I suspect we'll see similar sorts of things with the Devils and all of those kinds of investments that governments make. To support this commitment, the government funds a range of organisations through budget commitments and through the Department of State Growth's Active Industry Fund.

In terms of data, key findings from an AusPlay April 2025 release include that:

- 53.3 per cent of Tasmanian adults participate in sport or physical activity three or more times a week. In fact, I think I saw, in terms of participating once a week, that Tasmania was well above the national average, at 69.6 per cent;
- There is a trend towards participation in non-sport activities, such as going to the gym, with 34.9 per cent of Tasmanians participating in non-sport-related activities only; 11.1 per cent participating in sport only and 40.4 per cent participating in both.
- Female participation is less likely to be in sport-related activities, with 40.3 per cent participating in non-sport related activities only. Recreational walking saw 62.5 per cent
- Participation rate in comparison to males where sadly - 44.8 per cent.
- The most popular activities for Tasmanian adults were walking, fitness, gym, bushwalking, running, jogging and swimming and, pleasingly, more than a third, 38.8 per cent, of Tasmanian children participated in organised sport or physical activity at least once per week outside of school hours, with more than half, 51.8 per cent, participating at least once every fortnight.

Mr WINTER - Minister, back to the North Launceston Football Club, based on the timeline of when you made the offer and then withdrew the offer, how can we not conclude that North Launceston Football Club was punished for standing with Labor?

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Mr DUIGAN - Absolutely not. No offer has been withdrawn. I am happy to talk to North

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Mr WINTER - So now the offer wasn't withdrawn.

Mr DUIGAN - As I say, we will continue to work with various stakeholders with the club to get it sorted.

Mr WINTER - But you earlier referred to it as an 'offer'. Are you saying it wasn't an offer now?

Mr DUIGAN - It's not an offer that has been ratified, no.

Mr WINTER - Minister, can you see how vindictive this looks?

Mr DUIGAN - No. I'm more than happy, as I continue to say, to work with the club. I don't have anything in front of me at the moment. I don't have an ask from the club or from the council, or from -

Mr WINTER - It's pretty clear what the ask is.

Mr DUIGAN - Well, what's the ask?

Mr WINTER - They want a home, minister.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Mr WINTER - And outside of York Park, the next best option is Inveresk.

Mr DUIGAN - As we do, we continue to work with the club and others to provide that home and that would be the outcome that I would expect to see.

Mr WINTER - The ministerial Code of Conduct, I'll read from it. It says:

Fairness of Decision Making

Ministers must take all reasonable steps to observe relevant standards of procedural fairness in decisions made by them. Such decisions are to be unaffected by bias or irrelevant considerations.

Are you confident that you haven't breached the ministerial Code of Conduct by making this decision based on them having stood with Labor?

Mr DUIGAN - Election campaign?

Mr WINTER - This is not the election campaign anymore? They haven't been funded in this Budget and your earlier offer said that they would be.

Mr DUIGAN - In an election campaign, the party consulted on a party proposal - matter for the party.

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Mr WINTER - No, it's a matter for you. You've made the offer and then withdrawn the offer. You're still the Sports minister.

Mr DUIGAN - No, I'm very, very happy to continue to entertain the contents of that letter and other proposals.

Mr BAYLEY - When I go to the major venue content strategy recently released by Stadiums Tasmania, it identifies that venues are underutilised, with surplus capacity existing through the content calendar for all venues, particularly in winter.

Basically, our venues are already underutilised. There's obviously been work done around the Macquarie Point stadium and I identified a remarkable 334 events across 337 calendar days. Are you confident that this is actually deliverable? Are you confident that this is deliverable for a new facility in Hobart when the existing facilities are already underutilised and seemingly underperforming when it comes to events?

Mr DUIGAN - You would need to look at the potential contrast between existing facilities and what is proposed for Macquarie Point, and -

Mr BAYLEY - An expense, and there's a whole range of factors you would have to take in there if you are going to look at something massive and new.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, all of that, but we do have the expert in the room and I would ask James to talk about that scenario and how he and his organisation see what you're putting forward.

Mr AVERY - I believe there's some underutilisation for a range of reasons. One, because previous owners of some of these venues, it hasn't been their core business. They haven't had the expertise or experience to be able to maximise these types of venues in terms of managing them on an ongoing basis, attracting content, different types of events, greater diversity of events. Part of the reason Stadiums Tasmania was established was to try to rectify some of those issues so the expertise and experience that our organisation brings to the table seeks to try to bridge some of the gaps that may be there in some of those venues.

Mr BAYLEY - Have you seen that turnaround since Stadium Tasmania was stood up?

Mr AVERY - Yes, we have in a relatively short space of time. As the Stadiums Tasmania model takes full effect, there is the benefit of greater efficiencies in terms of costs spread across greater venues. There's greater purchasing power in terms of attracting events. All of that culminates in the model that we've put forward in relation to the Macquarie Point project as well.

Mr BAYLEY - In terms of the model for Macquarie Point, given there's inherent risk and assumptions in the modelling, what would you consider would be fair margins of error, I guess, in terms of some of the predictions you've put into the major events schedule - not schedule, but estimations - for Macquarie Point?

Mr AVERY - We think there'd be very little margin based on the thoroughness and comprehensive nature of the operating model that we've built out. Specifically in terms of the

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events calendar, that's been built on consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including industry experts, focus groups with Tasmanians who have indicated that they are interested in going to Devils games, interested in going to Hurricanes games, interested in going to concerts and other live entertainment events. It's engaging specialists who operate on a national and global basis that build these types of modelling many times over, and previously have put together events calendars. It's based on our consultation and analysis of other venues that are either operating in other states or are directly comparable to the one we're doing. So, I would say that the margin for error around the events calendar is very small.

CHAIR - Mr George, do you have anything?

Mr GEORGE - Let me cede my question for the moment and come back to it. I've been trying to keep up with two committees.

CHAIR - Sure, we can go back to you in the next round. That's fine.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I will take you back to our earlier question and answer. That's encouraging data, on participation. It's pleasing to hear that in some of those areas - not all - Tasmania was ahead of the national average. At least, I think that's what you said. Do you have any sense of trend?

I mean, we're seeing record amounts of investment by this government - more than in our lifetime - attracting sports, new codes and new teams to our state. Is there any evidence that the participation data has a trend attached to it? Are we going up? Are we going in the direction that we would like to? I'm not sure what sort of level of detail you have on that data, but I'm very keen on this and also to see if it can help inform the policy approach going forward and even support the work, for example, of the Health department and our goals for kids.

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of participation and those trends, I will point to Brett. We also have some further information around portal numbers. Brett?

Mr STEWART - Before I forget, Mr Ferguson, I will respond on behalf of the minister to your earlier question about the usage of the portal. Since its launch on 5 September 2025, there's been 526 active and unique users to the portal site - that doesn't include State Growth usage, so that's encouraging - in a little over two months.

Further to the question on participation: the most recent set of data that we have that the minister talked you through earlier is actually based on a new set of metrics that AusPlay are using. That's the Australian Sports Commission - the arm of the commission, that does the surveying.

Unfortunately, we don't have any direct comparison or trending in terms of those numbers. They will obviously be available when we next get the survey next year. We are, however, encouraged by quite a bit of anecdotal evidence from different codes around increased participation. Codes such as cricket, football a la both codes, AFL and soccer, basketball, and emerging codes like pickleball et cetera have shown really strong numbers. But, in order to get direct comparisons on these numbers, we will have to wait for the next survey.

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Mr WINTER - I want to ask about the AFL high-performance centre in the budget paper 1. Page 150 talks about the reclassification of expenditure from being infrastructure to being reclassified. Who's going to deliver the AFL high-performance centre at Kingborough?

Mr DUIGAN - My expectation is that that will be the club that will deliver the high-performance centre at Kingborough.

Mr WINTER - And that's what this Budget - that's what the reference is - on page 150, it says the reclassification reflects several projects will now be delivered by third parties. So, the Kingborough sports precinct, we now know, by the Devils rather than by the AFL?

Mr DUIGAN - The high-performance centre, the club?

Mr WINTER - Yes, by the club. The Dial Regional Sports Complex -

Mr DUIGAN - By the council.

Mr WINTER - By the council: and the Huonville Child and Family Learning Centre isn't yours, but I assume by the council.

Mr DUIGAN - I would assume so.

Mr WINTER - Can you explain the reason why the AFL high-performance centre isn't being delivered by government and is instead being delivered by the club? Can you tell the committee who will own the infrastructure?

Mr DUIGAN - The reason for that is the AFL and, by extension, the football club, has fairly significant experience in delivering high-performance centres. Part of the department felt that it was an appropriate thing for the club to be able to make the decisions around the high-performance centre, and in terms of what would be included and what would not be included within a funding envelope.

We know that the funding envelope is \$115 million; and if that was to include everything that everybody wanted to see, there was a risk that that could be elevated. I think it is a good place to have the eventual user incentivised to deliver the best facility for them, given that they have the knowledge and understanding of what they need most in there, rather than the government being prescriptive in delivering them.

Mr WINTER - They're specifically delivering the \$115 million high-performance centre; who will deliver the infrastructure upgrades or the new facilities for the incumbent clubs, the Knights and the Tigers and presumably other clubs?

Mr DUIGAN - Currently that work sits with the council. There is some consideration being given to perhaps including some of that with the high-performance centre, just in terms of the way that we're able to accelerate and perhaps get some efficiencies around delivering some of that other attendant work in the precincts. Potentially, oval 3 is something that might be delivered as part of the high-performance piece.

Mr WINTER - Does the Devils delivering the high-performance centre mean that Tasmanian taxpayer money is now capped at the \$115 million, that they will pay any overruns, or are we still on the hook for overruns?

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Mr DUIGAN - No, that's certainly the agreement, that that's the funding envelope and -

Mr WINTER - The AFL and the Devils would pay any additional?

Mr DUIGAN - I would expect the club to assume that risk.

Mr BAYLEY - To pick up on that, before I move on. Who would ownership reside in?

Mr DUIGAN - Ownership?

Mr BAYLEY - Ownership: particularly if there was additional capital needing to be invested by the AFL or the club.

Mr DUIGAN - The land would continue to be owned by the council, leased to the club for a period of time. The club would own the building infrastructure, with some caveats around how that might be seen in the event of a catastrophic event.

Mr BAYLEY - Effectively, that's now a \$115 million grant to the club. They would own the asset at the end, not the land, but the capital as infrastructure?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Mr BAYLEY - What commitments - I know this has been a point of discussion - what level of community access would be maintained for that \$115 million, appreciating, of course, it's a high-performance venue and not all the facilities are suitable, but I think there has been some commitments made around ongoing community access to that infrastructure; what is that commitment? Could you re-put it here for the committee and from an updated perspective, of ongoing community access to the high-performance centre?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, absolutely, community access: the high-performance centre for the Devils will encompass two ovals, one of which will have the Tigers playing on it. In terms of access to the facilities, there are, I think, ongoing conversations and, Shane, you might be best placed to talk to how those interactions would be managed there. There are some, I guess, learnings from other clubs around the country in terms of how they provide access to their high-performance centres; some do a great job of it and some are less forthcoming. Shane Gregory, Associate Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet, has been pivotal in the negotiations around that.

Mr BAYLEY - What commitments are you going to extract from the Devils while maintaining that?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, I think, given it hasn't come out of the ground yet - but you know, we're all focused on that and I think council's very focused on making this a welcoming place. It will be a place that hosts elite sport, no question about that, but we want this to be a very vibrant community asset. Shane.

Mr GREGORY - Obviously, the primacy of the high-performance centre is to support the AFL team. That will be the predominant use and there will be, given the nature of that function and the players, there will be significant components of the T and A facility that won't

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be open to the public. The club is planning to have a cafeteria space that would be open to the public. They are planning to have some merchandising space that will be open to the public.

They will be having some auditorium facilities and a sort of function centre component, which they plan to have community events occurring in, and the secondary oval for their use under the club funding development agreement will primarily be a local community team facility. They will have a licence to access it, but it will be prominently for the Kingborough Tigers and they will continue their community-based action.

Mr BAYLEY - And things like a pool or a gym or something like that, you're saying that they wouldn't be open to the community? It extends to cafeteria and gift shop.

Mr GREGORY - Well, the consideration will be, when the Devils have an AFL men's team and an AFL women's team, a VFL men's team and VFL women's team, they're not actually going to have a swimming pool as such, but the facilities in their wet area, their plunge pools, their recovery pools and their gym will be in pretty constant use, so no, I don't think they would be making those available to the public for use. I do not think there would be capacity to do that.

CHAIR - Independent member for Clark, Ms Johnston.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you and apologies, minister, if you've already answered these questions, I cannot be in two places at once. I'm interested in the acquisition of Ninja Stadium and whether due diligence have been done with negotiations with Cricket Tasmania and Clarence City Council. There are no details in relation to the cost of acquiring these venues, upgrading them or ongoing maintenance obligations. Have you done that work? How much will you be acquiring this particular venue for?

My understanding, from talking to Cricket Tasmania is that, if the bottom falls out of their business case for the operation of Ninja Stadium as a conference facility, function facility if the Macquarie Point stadium is built, what's the liability moving forward for state government if we take on this asset?

Mr DUGAN - Thank you, I appreciate that question. I think there is a piece of work, obviously, to do around Ninja and what its role is going forward. In terms of purchasing the asset, James is probably best placed to speak to that. It is not one that's come across my desk, Cricket Tasmania asking - or Clarence Council asking for government to buy it, but, James, I'm happy for you to give the latest update on where that acquisition sits.

Mr AVERY - Yes, certainly, minister. That piece of work is underway at the moment, from what I understand, in terms of due diligence, so, there's a number of parties doing it. I understand that Clarence City Council are looking to commence a piece of work that would constitute due diligence in terms of what a transfer of ownership from council to Stadiums Tasmania would look like at the land. The work, in terms of what is required for cricket to exit the venue to a new high-performance facility, I think that work is getting underway as we speak.

There's also a piece of work to validate what the future use of the venue is going forward as well. In terms of what would it cost for the state to take ownership of the venue, I can only go on the most recent venue transfer that we have undertaken, and that was with the City of

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Launceston, where we entered into a commercial negotiations and established a deed and I believe the cost of that in the end was \$1. So, from our perspective, we would be looking to try and replicate something similar along those lines obviously, but that would come down to a negotiation with council in terms of transfer of ownership of the land, and a negotiation with Cricket Tasmania in terms of the assets on the land.

Ms JOHNSTON - I think that might come as news to Cricket Tasmania, who are expecting \$70 million to \$80 million.

Mr AVERY - Sorry, to be clear, that's in relation to council for the ownership of the land, and in relation to the asset, that would be a negotiation that, clearly, government would have to be involved in, not just Stadiums Tasmania and Cricket Tasmania.

Ms JOHNSTON - And the second part of my question in terms of the ongoing operation of Ninja Stadium as a viable proposition, given that it is going to have a competing facility just across the river, what due diligence has government done in relation to being able to manage that and any liabilities or deficits that might be arising from that.

Mr DUIGAN - Again, given just in the realm of football we will see such a substantial change in the usage case and demand, we will have an AFLW team, we will have an AFL team, we will have two VFL teams. There will be need for places to play and as we contemplate this, it's not a matter of having too many grounds, it's probably more the opposite. In terms of those things, James, what work you have done there?

Mr AVERY - That work is about to commence in terms of validating what the future use of the venue would be. From our perspective, as the minister's alluded to, we think there is a significant amount of content that will need to be played outside of the Macquarie Point venue and that is whether it be Sheffield Shield cricket, whether it be VFL, VFLW, whether it be attracting other events that are more size right for a venue of the scope and capacity of Ninja Stadium; whether it is getting other tenancies involved and housed in the venue and make it a multi-sport high-performance precinct for some of Tasmania's other sports that don't have the same profile as say football and cricket do. That's the work that needs to be explored on the stadium at the moment.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, back on to participation and if I can now take you to a slightly different segment of this area of interest. Ticket to Play for younger people. Ticket to Wellbeing for older people. How are those investments appearing in terms of a value proposition for government? Are they good investments? Are they leading to good participation or hopefully increased or more sustained participation amongst those cohorts?

Mr DUIGAN - They are excellent programs. Ticket to Play is a program that's aimed at younger Tasmanians and providing them with some funding to get involved. That's for people aged between 5 and 18 years and the 2024-25 round saw the highest number of vouchers issued since the inception of the program with 18,568 Ticket to Play vouchers issued to 9284 children and young people. Each of those vouchers is \$100 for which those young people can spend on various sporting gear or participation costs. Ticket to Play was extended in the 2024-25 financial year to include applicants who receive family tax benefit A with funding over 500,000 allocated over two years for this.

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Ticket to Wellbeing continues to go gangbusters. I would be interested if members had interactions because we opened it recently. It was open for a period of five days and was fully subscribed in that time so. We will have another round of Ticket to Wellbeing vouchers available early in the new year. Then I'm really pleased to say that will be the end of the trial process, a two-year trial. Then we have some increased funding, \$1 million per year for the two years following that. We're seeing older Tasmanians going very enthusiastic at our Ticket to Wellbeing and a lot of the supporting clubs are seeing greatly increased participation from people.

Mr FERGUSON - I am happy to hear that.

Mr WINTER - Yes, back onto the high-performance centre, minister, and the associated infrastructure. When will the high-performance centre be completed? As part of that, can you also outline when the associated community infrastructure will be completed? That comes under a different line item with \$20 million, which I assume is for the Knights and the Tigers.

Mr DUIGAN - It is \$25 million.

Mr WINTER - We have \$20 million, \$5 million in year one. Anyway, can you just tell us when each component will be finished?

Mr DUIGAN - The critical piece is the high-performance centre itself. Functional completion of that facility needs to be October 2027. Plans are out and about, and we will be going to market. Ideally, I'd love to go to market before Christmas. It may end up being early in the new year, but certainly the plan or best endeavours is to go to market before Christmas this year or have some market engagement. That's the key consideration as contained in the club funding agreement. So, October 2027.

Then in terms of delivering the supporting infrastructure around the Knights and the Tigers, car parking and various bits and pieces like that, and how that is scheduled, Shane, you're probably best placed to give an understanding of that.

Mr GREGORY - We would be expecting the first component, the oval 3, to be delivered about the same time as the T and A facility.

The other components, council only just started working on the design of those, so the timeline for that is not defined, but certainly oval 3 we expect to be coming online about the same time as the T and A facility.

Mr WINTER - Are the clubs going to have somewhere to play so there's not going to be any period where they're left homeless? They're going to consistently have somewhere to play.

Mr GREGORY - The club, government and council are all on a council-run precinct oversight committee. That committee is overseeing and managing that. Council's working closely with all the clubs to make sure that yes everyone has somewhere to be and no-one's left out in the cold.

Mr DUIGAN - But I would take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the clubs, because there are an element of disruption and no small amount of good faith that has been

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displayed by those clubs to have us in their precinct. It's a great precinct. We seek to make it better, but they are important partners along the journey.

Mr WINTER - And I understand as part of the negotiations to get a high-performance centre down to Kingborough that the mayor was insistent that associated infrastructure was incorporated. I am sure car parks are part of that, but the other component was a link road into Spring Farm. Is that incorporated in this funding for Kingborough sports precinct community infrastructure?

Mr DUIGAN - There are some elements - so the sporting infrastructures contained within that aspect. There are possibly some roading aspects that might be contemplated through state roads, but -

Mr WINTER - Are you able to say what they are?

Mr DUIGAN - What was the road that you mentioned?

Mr WINTER - Spring Farm Link Road and Gormley Road.

Mr DUIGAN - Gormley, I think, is the one that would be part of State Roads Program.

Mr WINTER - So the question is, can you outline what the components of the Kingborough sporting precincts community infrastructure are? I would be happy for you to take on notice.

Mr DUIGAN - At this stage it's probably still, as Shane mentioned, a work in development. There are conversations continuing. What I would say is we're committed to the outcome, getting a good result for Kingborough and getting a good result for all of the sporting clubs in that area, the Devils amongst them.

Mr WINTER - Is there any agreement to upgrade the Spring Farm Link Road as part of the high-performance development?

Mr DUIGAN - Shane.

Mr GREGORY - Not directly as part of the high-performance development.

Mr WINTER - So what indirectly is there then?

Mr GREGORY - There have been conversations between various departments in council to do some further work around the connector road to even understand whether it's actually viable. There are a number of significant issues there outside of the high-performance centre that relate to the environment and land stability. There's some significant issues to be worked through to prove up whether that can actually be built.

Mr BAYLEY - Minister, I had the privilege to attend a few sporting events across the weekend, went to the tennis on Friday, the South Hobart B League game on Sunday, both televised to national and international audiences. The tennis centre had a whole range of facilities in temporary structures out the back that were brought in on the Spirits. Darcy Street had part of its grandstand steps taped off, presumably because they were unsafe.

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The talk amongst all sports is the amount of money that's going to the AFL, \$115 million, we're just hearing, now being gifted to the Devils to build a new facility down there they will own.

What do you say to these other codes who are scrimping and saving and doing their very best to play international and sometimes national levels with completely substandard facilities? They cannot get a look into your government to get the level of assistance that they need to meet the needs of their players. Some of these codes are far more popular and far more played in this state than AFL, for example.

Mr DUIGAN - I would have to reject that. This government, if you cast your eye around all the sporting infrastructure that's being built in Tasmania at the moment and has been over the last five years, or the life of this government - you have to go back sometime in history to find a period of building of sports infrastructure similar to this.

I went to the tennis on Sunday, and I sat down with Tennis Tasmania to better understand their hopes.

Mr BAYLEY - Challenges.

Mr DUIGAN - Well, to hear how they will prioritise spending of money that we have promised for them.

I do understand it is a lot of money. It is a huge opportunity for Tasmania to have our own AFL team. It is something that we have strived for for decades. We are on the very precipice of that decision now and I hope that that all goes well.

Activity creates activity, and we are investing there. We are investing in community sports very heavily in each corner of the state - we continue to do that. I do understand though. Certainly one of the things I see as you travel around the state looking at sports infrastructure the job that we have ahead of us to make our bathrooms and our change rooms multi-user and all of those kinds of things. I don't resile from the fact that there is a job of work to do, but I don't think that precludes us from seizing this very substantial opportunity.

Mr BAYLEY - You point to the history of investment up until this point, but obviously the level of investment that's happening at the taxpayers' expense at the moment in relation to Mac Point and all the upgrades, for example, some of which we support, but obviously the Macquarie Point stadium is the case in point. \$2 billion over 10 years is a conservative estimate, I think.

Do you have confidence? Can you look those other codes in the eye and say you're going to be able to give them what they need in over the future years to meet the needs of their players to compete at the highest level that they possibly can as well? Because a lot of people are saying that they just simply believe that you can't and that you won't.

Mr DUIGAN - That's what this is about, confidence, and we have the confidence.

Mr BAYLEY - It's not just about the confidence, it's about money, it's about budgets.

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Mr DUIGAN - to build this very substantial investment in Tasmania now, and Tasmania into the future and that advances the case for our state and for all the things that you talk about. If we shy away from this opportunity that, in some ways, is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mr BAYLEY - I don't think it would be shying away from the opportunity. It'd be taking on board expert advice, making decisions based on evidence and fact, and the advice of experts.

Mr DUIGAN - Indeed, and if you cast your eye around Tasmania and the rest of the country and the globe, anything that stands out was built against the advice of experts.

Mr GEORGE - I'd like to take up a couple of questions. One is the Ninja Stadium following on Ms Johnston's questions. Minister, it looks to me as though Ninja Stadium is liable to become a stranded asset for the government. It's going to be surplus to requirements and its upkeep will be costly. What gives you the confidence that there's going to be sufficient, demand and sufficient income to make it worthwhile for the government maintaining it?

Mr DUIGAN - As I said, Mr George, what we will see is a circumstance where we're looking for more grounds, not fewer. I have great confidence in Ninja, as you know, as a piece of sporting infrastructure that has a place for a long time to come. James, where do you, as the owner-operator of that venue, see it at some point in time?

Mr AVERY - Through you, minister. With Ninja, we need to remember that currently it's leased by cricket and, therefore, it's run through the prism of cricket, which is entirely appropriate given that they're the ones who have the lease. That precludes a whole range of other events that could be going through the venue. Of course, there will be some events that transfer across to the Macquarie Point stadium, Big Bash Cricket being the main one, and maybe a couple of other live entertainment events.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has now expired. We will take a short break and as time taken for breaks must be made-up, can I encourage members to be as quick as they can? The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Parks.

Mr DUIGAN - Chair, can I correct the record on one aspect?

CHAIR - Sure.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you. I just wanted to correct the record and clarify - I'm happy to do it at the start of the next one.

CHAIR - Yes, we will do that. Thank you.

The committee suspended from 3.30 p.m. to 3.37 p.m.

CHAIR - The time now being 3.37 p.m., the scrutiny of the Parks portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table - names and positions, please - for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, Chair. To my left: my Chief of Staff, Amanda Lovell. To my right: Jason Jacobi, Secretary of NRE. To his right: Sophie Muller, Deputy Secretary, Parks and Wildlife Service.

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CHAIR - Thank you very much, minister. Would the minister like to make an opening statement?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly, thank you, Chair.

Great to be here as Minister for Parks and to speak to this important portfolio, because Tasmania's parks and reserves and Crown land cover around 50 per cent of our state and are important to Tasmanians and to the visitors who come from all over Australia and the world to experience them. Tasmania's natural landscapes are world-class destinations, attracting both locals and visitors every year.

Importantly, we are continuing to invest in our parks to deliver significant economic, social and cultural benefits to our state. This budget includes an additional \$21.6 million over the forward Estimates in operational funding, in recognition that wages, insurance, fuel and contractor costs have all increased. There's also a further \$12 million over three years from 2026-27 to maintain and upgrade visitor experiences and infrastructure across our parks and reserves.

The Budget includes our ongoing commitment to delivering capital investment in key visitor sites around the state. This significant investment in our Parks estate also supports regional employment, with over 445 nature-based tourism operators in our state who will benefit from these improvements.

We are funding critical works at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. We will continue to deliver the \$40 million Next Iconic Walk in the spectacular Tyndall Range, and secure our reputation as one of the great walking destinations in Australia, if not the world. We are investing \$10 million to sustainably manage recreational off-road vehicle access within the Arthur-Pieman Conservation Area.

Tasmanians were invited to have their say on another major project: the draft Maria Island National Park and Ile Des Phoques National Reserve Management Plan. Many Tasmanians have a strong and special association with Maria, and I look forward to seeing the finalisation of this plan.

We are continuing to invest in bushfire winch capability to protect our natural assets. This has proved crucial in early stages of a fire, when it's still small and burning at a lower intensity, to get crews on the ground into difficult access areas. This helps to slow the fire's spread.

We've also made a number of key investments across the Lands Tasmania portfolio. Over the next 12 months, the focus will be on increasing take-up with conveyancing professionals in the national electronic conveyancing space, and banks transitioning ongoing system releases and the addition of new dealing types.

I'm happy to take questions on my Parks portfolio.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Before we get to that, just a reminder: the time scheduled for Estimates for the Minister for Parks is two hours, so we will finish at 5.37 p.m.

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Mr DUIGAN - Chair, I do need to correct the record out of our last sitting. I'm advised that the government is responsible for any cost overruns at the high-performance centre, not the club.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, as you've outlined, our parks and our Parks staff are really phenomenally important across Tasmania, and hold both our reputation in conservation but also local enjoyment. What's the current backlog across our parks of maintenance across the assets, across walking trails, buildings, visitor services? How well is the budget keeping up with the needs of maintenance and protection and care about Parks assets?

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of a backlog of scheduled work not being done?

Ms FINLAY - Yes.

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of that, which is sort of operational - Sophie, I'm happy for you to speak to that. I note that the Budget does include increased funding for maintenance of some of those assets -

Ms FINLAY - It's always under pressure. Therefore, the staff are always under pressure, I suppose.

Mr DUIGAN - That's right, and my work as minister has been to have that recognised. I'm really pleased to see that there is an increased allocation for maintenance funding in the budget. I would ask Sophie to potentially speak to where that is and the importance of that.

Ms MULLER - Thank you. We have over 34,000 assets registered in our asset-management system, so a significant portfolio of assets that are worth around \$1.1 billion. We have a system that conducts audits and inspections of those assets and it prioritises our maintenance program according to the criticality of the asset, the condition of the asset, the importance of that asset to visitor safety, to visitor experience, to staff operations et cetera and so, that process of prioritisation helps to direct where the funding goes.

We have an asset maintenance budget of around \$1 million and that will grow to \$4 million in 2026-27 over the three-year period beyond that.

Ms FINLAY - And so, for the highest-priority assets identified, and I am not sure what system you use in terms of the category categorisation that you add to them, how many are not maintaining their asset-management schedules, how many are behind of the top priority?

I'm particularly interested in the original question around walking trails and those priority assets that are public facing, how many are not maintaining or keeping up to their maintenance schedules? Recognising the large number of assets, but you have a system to identify that, do you have a report on assets that are not being maintained to the standards expected in the system that you are reporting against?

Ms MULLER - I guess we prioritise the work that we have based on available resources and the criticality of the need. I think that \$4 million over the forward Estimates per year over that three-year period will give us an opportunity to really focus on important investment in assets like walking tracks, but the current resources are allocated towards the most critical asset-maintenance program.

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Ms FINLAY - Minister, thank you for those answers, given that you have identified it as a concern and it's a concern in terms of safety, but it's also a concern in terms of pressure of the people that are trying to keep up with the load of work required of them: What keeps you up at night in terms of our Parks assets and the areas that continue to be identified that need more work? Where are the areas that you are most concerned about that has caused you to lift the funding for maintenance?

Mr DUIGAN - Look, in terms of what keeps me up at night, and I expect that Parks, as they do, prioritise their maintenance as required, but I think for me it is fire; that is the greatest threat to our Parks in my view and making sure that we are fit to meet those challenges as they are very real for me and for everybody who enjoys those things. I think that's one of my key considerations. This is a recognition of that large-scale billion dollars-plus of assets and in recognition that we need to be spending a few more dollars keeping those in the order that we would like people coming to our parks to expect them to be in.

Ms BADGER - Minister, for quite a few years now, people have been calling for the reserve activity assessment RAA process to be reformed into a statutory process. The government has recently walked away from reforming the RAAs. In your media release, you said that you plan to improve coordination between the non-statutory RAA process and the planning permit application under the statutory LUPAA process. Could you please talk us through what that means tangibly, what's going to be changed to improve coordination, as you put it?

Mr DUIGAN - So, thank you, and I would reject the notion that we are walking away from forming RAA. I think we have made substantial improvements to RAA over time, and we are not taking a legislative path to the reform, but we are seeking to continue to improve the RAA to deliver reliable outcomes wherever it is used, and I would note that I think some 80 per cent of RAAs are lodged by Parks, or activities within Parks. In terms of what we've done, we went out for feedback in terms of engaging with stakeholders around what they would hope to see from the RAA reform process. In listening to that feedback, we won't be introducing a new statutory process. The government remains committed to the ongoing reform; further transparency is an important part of that, and opportunities for public input into RAA processes.

I think the improvements we've made over the last four years have made it a more robust system. I would point to the release of the online leases and licensing portal, which puts up for everybody to see all the leases and licences on reserve land, that has been great for transparency. In terms of improving coordination between the RAA process and the planning permit process, which aims to further reduce duplication, improve consistency in decision-making and providing clarity about the various LUPAA assessment pathways. Sophie, you're probably in the best place to talk to that interface.

Ms MULLER - There were over 800 submissions through the consultation process and through that feedback we certainly learned the community's value that they've placed on the role of LUPAA and councils, in particular, in terms of undertaking assessments. Over the last couple of years there's been considerable effort to improve transparency, reporting and clarity around the RAA process, and in particular, the relationship with LUPAA. I think that was highlighted through the consultation, that there's a need for ongoing clarity to ensure that there's clarity around how the two systems operate together.

Ms BADGER - I'm just going to go back to the original question. I understand what's happened in the past. Thank you for that recap for other members, though. What are you doing

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moving forward? You said in the media release that there was going to be improved coordination; what are those steps to improve coordination moving forward, or have they not been mapped out?

Ms MULLER - There's still a body of work that we need to do to address some of the issues that have been raised through this process, including clarity around the two assessment processes and how they relate to each other.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you, Chair. Minister, the Parks and Wildlife Service has written to seniors card holders to inform them that from 1 December 2025, PWS is aligning the senior cardholders discount to be consistent with the 20 per cent discount provided to other concession card holders. This will take the current cost of an annual parks pass for all parks from \$40.65 to \$81.40, doubling the cost. A key reason for this is budget saving, estimated to be \$800,000 annually. Has anything ever been done to show how many seniors will not be purchasing a pass now, as a result of this significant - or doubling - increase in the price?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, I appreciate the question and the interest in this one. It's pretty topical today. The history of the seniors pass discount I think goes back to a 2018 election commitment, where the level of the seniors parks pass was brought down to a very low level, and that was to encourage Tasmanian seniors to get out and enjoy the parks. What we have seen, however, is that very close to 70 per cent of people purchasing those passes are not Tasmanians. So, we're providing a very substantial discount to a cohort of people that we would prefer not to.

Section 117, or whatever it is, of the Australian Constitution makes differentiating between people who live in different areas of the country very difficult. To bring the seniors parks passes back to the same level of concessionality as others is fair and reasonable. It's ultimately not popular, I can understand that, but it's only 30 per cent of those passes that are going to Tasmanians. I think that's something we need to address, because providing - our parks are a substantial offering that we provide to the community and there is a cost to providing that, and this seems somewhat out of step with that. Importantly, we have written to everybody who holds a senior's pass, offering them the opportunity to repurchase that pass under the current cost framework. Everybody who has one can buy another one for a period of two years at the same price. That will help stagger, hopefully, some of the impacts of it. I get the point, but I think it's one of those things where there is an opportunity to bring some alignment back to the parks pass.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, still, at 30 per cent though, that's a lot of Tasmanian seniors who are experiencing cost-of-living pressures, and significant cost-of-living pressures, who will have the price double - increase. Have your departments done any work whatsoever to try and see if there's a way to bypass the constitutional issues in relation to this kind of discount, because that is a lot of Tasmanians who want to be able to enjoy our natural areas and get out and be active and healthy, who are experiencing cost-of-living pressures, who will have that Parks Pass double, and who might not be able to afford to take up that additional extension at this point in time.

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of the work that's been done, I would let the department speak to that. Again, I would point to what we have done in terms of trying to mitigate the impacts by offering an ability to buy a new pass at the same concessional level, and bringing an

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alignment to where our concessions sit in the park space. Is it fair and reasonable to have a concession for our seniors that doesn't apply to other concession cardholders? I'm not sure.

Ms JOHNSTON - Have you done any work to try to figure out a different way?

Mr DUIGAN - I will pass to the department to speak to that.

Mr JACOBI - I will pass on to Sophie in a minute, but I can assure you we did get extensive advice about whether there were any opportunities to bypass the Constitution and there are none. What we did do, is we designed the parks pass system back in 2021 - we did a restructure of the way parks passes - and the fees for each of the different classifications of parks pass, and that significantly advantages Tasmanians, particularly those that purchase a one and a two-year park pass. Short-term visitors, who typically only purchase a short-term pass or a couple of months, will continue to do that, because it's not an advantageous to them to have a one year or two-year pass. The pricing for a one year and two year was actually dropped to make it a much more attractive for Tasmanians. It's through that mechanism that we've achieved a differential, but Sophie may want to talk further about that.

Ms MULLER - The only other thing to add is that the 20 per cent concession rate that will apply to seniors is consistent with many other jurisdictions. We're actually moving to be in keeping with the provisions in other jurisdictions.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon, Minister, to you and your team. Thank you for appearing again. My question is around accessibility. It would be easy to link it back to Ms Johnston's question in terms of finding ways to encourage more and new cohorts of people to enjoy our parks. I'm looking at people with physical disability that would potentially prevent them from enjoying our park environments. The question is about what the government and what you're doing to upgrade facilities to allow people to better immerse themselves in our parks and reserves, and ensure that they have safe and secure access to walking tracks and to increase those options so that more of our community can enjoy our beautiful places.

Mr DUIGAN - It's a really important aspect of what we're doing and trying to achieve and funding. Parks, by their nature, can sometimes be somewhat inaccessible. Even to the most able-bodied people there are experiences that are challenging to get into, but that shouldn't obviously prevent us from continuing to expand the range of opportunities for people who have issues with mobility and access. I'm very pleased that there is work being done in that space and improving access to parks and reserves around the state.

Of recent times, visitors to Goblin Forest will now benefit from upgrades to the boardwalk and bridge. That's one of our 60 great short walks. That's ensuring accessibility for disabled people, and that's a 400-metre circuit. We're doing some more accessibility walks, which will be in Stanley with works recently completed, and that's from the walking track, part of a \$2.3 million commitment to improve safety and now there's a track which connects Godfrey's Beach to the Nut, which obviously takes people out of that traffic circumstance. In addition, an all-access track featuring handrails, widened paths and more gradual slope which is being built from the Nut Cafe up to the base of the Zig Zag Track.

In the north-west, we continue all new access boardwalk along with McBrides Creek in the Ferndene State Reserve and that's part of the Dial Range upgrades. I was up there the other

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day. It is it is an area where there will long be work to do and opportunities that exist. I am happy for the department to add any thoughts about how they prioritise those works, but if you're happy there

Mr FERGUSON - I am, but my only closing point would be that so long as there's some area of activity of that improved accessibility in each region, it gives people those options where they do.

Ms FINLAY - How many Parks' assets or sites are currently closed due to either safety concerns or staffing issues?

Mr DUIGAN - I will pass to the department for an update there.

Ms MULLER - I don't have a specific number to hand, but when there are events like St Columba Falls, for example, a significant storm event that impacted infrastructure that required a significant process around undertaking assessments, determining the work that needed to occur to remediate the site and make it safe. In those circumstances, those sites are closed for that work to be undertaken and the insurance process to be gone through. As to a specific number of sites that are currently closed, I don't have that. That information is available on our website through our alerts page.

Ms FINLAY - In a consolidated form or as they come up flicking up each time something individually is closed -

Ms MULLER - As they closed but in a consolidated form.

Mr JACOBI - It would be incredibly difficult figurative provide because it's a moving feast. Sometimes the site is closed for a day to address a safety issue, then it's reopened. Sometimes you do get, like Sophie pointed out, St Columba Falls, which require a whole tender process to undertake the work, and they might be closed for a period of time. It would be almost impossible across all of our assets and all of our sites in the entire state to give you a figure that was relevant.

Ms FINLAY - I'm contemplating questions on Pioneer Dam in an area that's closed at the moment. I am trying to understand how many sites in a long-term sense. Some of the feedback I get from people on the ground is 'Please don't give us anything more to manage, because we're really stretched looking after what we have now.' Hence the question on being able to maintain our current assets. Perhaps I could re-ask the question in a long-term sense, not in just an event sense. How many of the assets and sites of Parks are closed due to either safety concerns, so upgraded maintenance or through staffing concerns?

Ms MULLER - It's important that as assets are closed due to age-related issues, safety concerns, either public safety or environmental impact concerns that we step back and take a look at what's needed into the future and don't just replace like for like, as a result of the increasing costs associated with managing infrastructure and the need to be strategic about where our assets are positioned. That's the strategic approach that we take. As assets are identified to be closed for a range of different reasons to ensure we step back and take a look at what's needed into the long term.

Ms FINLAY - How many assets would be undergoing that type of consideration at the moment?

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Ms MULLER - As I said, I don't have a specific number, but I can think of a handful where those types of considerations are being deliberated currently.

Mr JACOBI - It's also important to recognise the capital program is key to the renewal of tired arranged assets. For example, Tamar Boardwalk, we have a significant capital investment in replacing a lot of the bridges and the boardwalk sections. As Sophie pointed out, the design of the replacement is critical to the longevity of the asset, so when we use the capital money to replace it and renew it, we can often get a much longer life out of it.

Ms BADGER - In the past budget and this budget there's about \$7 million allocated to make Mt Field a year-round destination. In the past budget description, part of it articulated for new huts and in this Budget, it says for the public huts.

I note after the last budget came out retrospectively, there was an EMRS poll that popped up by QR codes throughout the National Park asking people how they might want to make the National Park a year-round destination and how they would use it.

Can you just talk us through exactly what the breakdown of the \$7 million funding is for: new huts, public huts, and what other infrastructure that investment's going into and how that decision was made. Whether it was based on need, previous feedback or was that retrospective to the EMRS polling?

Mr DUIGAN - There are track upgrades, a new concourse which sits outside of that.

Ms BADGER - That's a separate line of funding.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes. There is the opportunity to contemplate something new in accommodation on the mountain and we're not yet settled on exactly what that looks like, but in terms of how the funding breaks down and what else is included in that, perhaps, Sophie?

Ms MULLER - We are still in the planning phase of this particular project and part of that includes listening to the park users. We are certainly interested in the feedback from community and from people who regularly use that park.

There are a number of components to that funding package which include upgrades to tracks and investment in accommodation. We have been going through a comprehensive process looking at the range of possibilities that could be considered in delivering that. Having particular regard to visitor safety and not increasing invitation in sensitive Alpine areas and certainly wanting to make sure that visitors are safe when they use our park.

Ms BADGER - To clarify before I move on to my next question, you don't have specifics of what that \$7.6 million is actually for that you can provide us?

Ms MULLER - We have a broad description, as I said - a combination of track work, accommodation, improved wayfinding and transport options through the park. The actual breakdown of what that will look like in terms of a program of work is still being deliberated and we're looking at a range of options for what that might look like.

Ms BADGER - It has a funding figure attached to it, so you must have some estimate or breakdown. I am confident you didn't just pull that figure out of thin air. It wasn't the minister's

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favourite number. There must be something more that you can provide than a vague description of how a regular park works.

Ms MULLER - At this stage there's no additional concrete breakdown of what that expenditure profile will look like. It will be determined as we work through this planning process.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, the NRE's annual report shows there are 77.47 FTEs on parental leave, leave without pay or external secondment. Are these roles backfilled or are they simply left vacant and what's the operational impact of these?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, I appreciate the question and will pass to the secretary.

Mr JACOBI - It's important to note our target for budget savings or efficiency dividend this last year was \$1.7 million. It's \$3.4 million for this financial year which includes the previous \$1.7 million and a new \$1.7 million.

We have undertaken a process to identify opportunities for making those savings and salary savings is a key component of that. I believe it's important to note though that is largely around the vacancy that occurs in a position when a position is vacated. For example, if somebody retires, we often then recruit to the position and there is a timeframe for that recruitment process and that translates to a direct saving.

Across resignations or movements of people from one position to another, we have achieved a significant amount of our last year's saving target through that process. We also identified a number of other potential savings in publications, advertising, fleet use, accommodation and across all those different sorts of categories of savings. In some of them we have achieved quite substantial gains which have contributed to our ability to achieve the \$1.7 million for last year. I remain confident we're also on track this year to meet the \$2.4 million target.

Ms JOHNSTON - My second part of that question was what's the operational impact of achieving those savings? You're making savings from positions not being filled, whether they are from parental leave, leave without pay, external secondment or people moving on, but what's the operational impact. Those jobs don't just disappear; what happens to those services not provided?

Mr JACOBI - We have set up an establishment management review executive committee and that comprises my board, my deputy secretaries and myself, and that board is informed by another steering committee which considers each and every individual position when it becomes vacant. And some of the things that they turn their mind to are the key principles about how important is that position to operational service delivery and so, how fundamental is it to delivering public services in a timely way.

We also consider the psychological and physical impact of not recruiting to that position quickly. So, obviously, if you hold a position vacant in a small team, the others carry the load, and in certain teams that can be inconsequential and in other teams that can be quite significant. So, we turn our mind to each and every position and what impact it may or may not have and we then, as a board, make a decision around almost each and every position and how quickly we need to recruit to it.

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In some cases, if the position is critical and it will have a substantial operational impact, we might move somebody from another role into that position immediately so that there is no gap. In other cases though, it might be that we can afford to not fill that position for a period of time or potentially even reclassify the position. So, in those sort of circumstances where there is the flexibility to not fill the position immediately, we're taking the opportunity, we're discussing it openly, collectively as a team, and we are all acknowledging and are clear of the implications of doing that.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Chair. Minister, Ben Lomond National Park is not in my electorate, but it's a national park that's held in great affection by people in my electorate of Bass, and you can't blame them: it is close to the city of Launceston, it offers fantastic winter sporting opportunities, particularly skiing, snowboarding and cross-country-type exploration, but it suffers from a lack of an update to the master plan. I know that's on your agenda. I would like an update on the master planning process, but in particular, what stakeholders can expect from here and if you would agree with me that we can make Ben Lomond National Park, carefully managed and sensitive to the environment, but a year-round destination.

I climbed from Carr Villa car park to the summit, not a hard walk, but a stunning, beautiful walk back in February and I met a few people, but not many, and it struck me just what an incredibly beautiful place it is. I could see mountains on Flinders Island from the summit on a clear day in February and I think it's something of an opportunity to maybe take some pressure off other parks while obviously enhancing the opportunity to our local community and to visitors. So, I would seek your opinions on those things and, in particular, the master plan progress.

Mr DUIGAN - Well, thank you, Mr Ferguson, I appreciate that question and yes, I spent a bit of time Ben Lomond in recent times and great to see that there are works going on there which are making that a better place. The state government has invested fairly significantly here, again, in Ben Lomond and it is with that vision of making Ben Lomond a year-round destination and as you drive up Jacob's Ladder on a nice summer day, and I do it occasionally on my motorbike, there are few more impressive vistas going around.

So, current projects funded through the \$2.8 million include the Contemporary Master Plan and improvements to the infrastructure on Ben Lomond and a few months ago, I reported that the new village walkways are now complete on the mountain, connecting the public shelter to the snow sports building, and it's a big wide pathway that allows people to come and go up and down the up and down the slopes and that's good if you're carrying your snowboard, not that I do that.

Priority infrastructure works are being progressed, including replacement improvement of the Jacob's Ladder Lookout, with the construction expected to be completed in Summer 2026 and these commitments follow on from major project works completed over the last few years and, again, I would point to another very successful snow season on the mountain and to the further allocation of water provided by Parks service to facilitate snow-making on the mountain and I think there is a vibrancy on Ben Lomond which has perhaps not been there in the relatively recent past, so we remain committed to it being a year-round destination.

Mr FERGUSON - And stakeholders, what can they expect from the next part of the master plan?

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Mr DUIGAN - It's a management plan, not a master plan per se, and further infrastructure priorities include upgrades to the summit, walking track removal of old infrastructure and various aspects like that. The first stage of consultation on the management plan will commence later in this year and the second stage of consultation will occur once the plan has been drafted and released for public comment and we would be expecting that to be.

Ms MULLER - So, there will be consultation that will be undertaken next year.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you very much.

Ms FINLAY - Following on from the vacancy questions before, I think there's a lot of love and some fatigue and overwhelm and maybe some inconsistencies within the people that are working in Parks. And you would be aware that passion piece means a lot of people are working more than expected, long hours, overtime, using a lot of personal resources and personal time to commit to their work.

What role are you playing and what conversations are you having to help manage the reliance on the Parks team to who are doing a lot of unpaid overtime and providing a lot of informal labour to actually keep caring for our parks?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, certainly, my number one job is to deliver a budget outcome for Parks that enables it to go about delivering the services that we would expect of it. And I would point to the fact that there are upgrades or uplifts in funding around maintenance and caring for those things, which points very much to the point that you are making there. So, in terms of my job, it is to make sure we have got enough money to deliver the service that people expect and I am always happy to talk to the department and the team about where they might see a deficiency or something that they would prioritise in terms of a funding ask and I'm happy to facilitate as I am able.

Ms FINLAY - Is there concern about those pressures on the workforce? Are there programs or support wrapping around the workforce, given the load that they do and that personal protection or the sort of commitment they feel to the task that they do? Where is that at the moment in terms of a priority, looking after the people that are looking after Parks?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly, I see the passion of which you speak. No doubt, whenever you go out into the regions particularly and talk to the Parks staff and they are worried about the bloody ragworts somewhere or whatever it might be and you see that they care. So, in terms of how you manage that care, there might be something Sophie or Jason could say to that, and understanding what guardrails you need to put around people.

Mr JACOBI - The operational funding boost of \$7.5 million is incredibly important. It is filling a significant gap that we had in the Parks service and it enables us to have the confidence, particularly Sophie, to recruit to positions and keep positions filled, not having to be finding savings all over because the costs for running the Parks service have certainly increased, so that operational boost is a substantial benefit.

We have a very strong whole-of-agency approach to psychological safety, and we are constantly reaching out to our staff to make sure that they are alert to the options available to them through the Employee Assistance Program. We run a number of workforce planning

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exercises across, not just Sophie's division, but the whole department and that's about understanding where the pressure points are in our workforce and what can we do either structurally or in terms of support, other support, to enable staff to feel safe, to feel capable to do their job and well-equipped to do their job. I think they are the key things that we put in place regularly to ensure that. Sophie may want to talk more about the specifics.

Ms MULLER - I guess, just to reinforce what's been said, I do think we have an incredible workforce in the park service and you're right in that regard; people are very passionate about the way that they do and deeply committed to it and, certainly, we have a strong emphasis on staff safety and support. So, when I reflect on the last six months for example, and some of the visitor safety incidents that our staff have been involved in responding to. Making sure that staff are supported during and after those types of events and staff are supported in the interactions with the public, when public there might be a bit of public pushback on decisions that were made through a particular event. Ensuring that staff have the opportunity to debrief and are supported through those types of processes.

Ms FINLAY - It seems to me that it is possible there's some inconsistencies across Tasmania, how maybe each of the regions are managed or distributed where that resourcing is occurring.

It's been brought to my attention that perhaps some of the housing options, accommodation or personal camping options for people in certain districts and access to PPE gear in different areas seems to be inconsistent, and whether people that are working away from home out on sites are receiving their correct allowances and things. Is there a comment on current management of the team and a commitment to look at making sure that supports are universal across the different regions of Parks?

Ms MULLER - I'm not aware of those issues, but certainly with such a large workforce and such a dispersed workforce, there is a potential for there to be some of those inconsistencies that might arise. But certainly, if there are inconsistencies that do need to be looked at, we're very open to any specific feedback that might require us to have a look at what's provided.

Ms BADGER - More than happy to take this one on notice, if necessary. Minister, can you please outline for the committee how many FTE positions last financial year and this financial year to date, have been subject to recruitment freezes, targeted negotiated voluntary redundancies or any form of redundancies; and any other vacancy management or workforce renewal initiative resulting in positions being eliminated or unfilled?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, I will hand that to my secretary, who I'm sure would have that information to hand.

Mr JACOBI - Can I just clarify, Ms Badger, are you talking about the whole department, or just the customer service?

Ms BADGER - Just Parks, please.

Mr JACOBI - Okay, if you could just bear with me. If you could just help me try and find the specifics around Parks.

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I will just talk about the recruitment freeze and how we've dealt with that. As I mentioned before, we're taking a very measured approach to ensure that all of our essential public service functions can be delivered, noting the fact that we do have a budget savings plan and we do have a target that we're trying to meet, and we have met in the last financial year. We have the Establishment Management Review Committee stood up and it considers each and every decision. I'm certainly not aware of any position in the Parks and Wildlife Service that has come to that committee, that we have determined to not continue. In fact, I'm pretty confident that every position that has come, we have determined to fill to ensure that we've maintained our full complement of positions.

There have been positions, though, that have come to the committee that have warranted some questions about is the purpose and intent of that position the same now as it was three years ago? Is this an opportunity to reclassify the position or to change the role description, so that it better meets the needs of the workforce of the team, and we certainly have taken the opportunity to do that.

I can recall, several months ago, there was some concerns about host ranger positions, I think on the Three Capes Track, and that they hadn't been filled or they were reported to not have been filled. It actually wasn't the case; that was a point-in-time piece of advice. Those positions that had come to the committee; we'd ask some questions about the nature of the positions and how they could be filled because there were other people - it was an opportunity to put other people who are running out of work into those roles, that were perfectly skilled and capable of doing it. Moving our workforce around to keep people employed is a really important part of the decision-making that goes on in this space and those positions were further recruited.

I can also clarify there's been no redundancies and there have been no workforce renewal - WRIPs (Workplace Renewal Incentive Program).

Ms BADGER - Fantastic, thank you. On the work that's been done - or possibly being done - at Mt Field and also the work to be done at Hastings Caves, is it Parks's intention after that work is completed to seek a private operator to run those operations? For example, the huts - public, or as you've suggested possibly a new form of accommodation at Mt Field, also the Hastings Caves booking system there, if that's going to be through a private operator, outside of the regular EOI process?

Mr JACOBI - In the case of Mount Field, the government huts has been an incredibly successful public product. It's much loved, it's in a great location, it's consistent with the management plan. Clearly, we would like to see the investment in Mount Field result in a significant improvement to the government huts. There is an opportunity to upgrade them, to make them better, to make them last longer. I don't know if this has been resolved yet, but there might be an opportunity to build some additional accommodation, because the accommodation is fairly limited at government huts. It might be just small - another cabin, or a couple of cabins. I don't know if we've resolved that yet. I think the intention is for it to stay as a government-run, public-owned and -managed product. I don't believe there's any intention to commercialise that, because people are pretty passionate about Mount Field and they have expressed that clearly in the past.

In terms of Hastings Caves: the expressions of interest for opportunities at Hastings Caves is still being progressed, and we intend to progress that because there has been some interest in the past the Hastings Caves pool. I think it's important, though, that particularly

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the cave product continues to be run and operated by the public service, because the caves are in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, they are important to our brand as a Parks service, and we play a really critical role - a range of staff, and the guides at Hastings Caves - play a really important role in educating the public about the values of the karst systems - not just in Hastings Caves, but across the whole of the TWWHA.

I think it would be fair to say the expressions of interest process for Hastings Caves will probably draw up a number of different ideas. It might be the pool, but it might be something completely different, because there has been talk and ideas in the past about wellness opportunities in that area, and it might be that an operator decides, 'Look, I just want to do a wellness-type thing.' We don't know the outcome of that yet, but I think the intention is to go out with that in the coming year.

Ms BADGER - In the coming year, that will be?

Mr JACOBI - I believe the intention is we're trying to get the expressions of interest process out for early next year.

Ms JOHNSTON - Just going back to the issue around vacancies. Can you give an indication to the committee: the workers' compensation claims that are based purely on psychological components, for the department for Parks specifically - have you done any work in relation to those claims and the correlation with vacancies in those areas?

Mr JACOBI - Bear with me, I just have to actually find that. I will just go to compensation claims, and this is again just for the Parks and Wildlife Service. I just want to be careful about - I won't mention any names or positions or anything; I will just give you a figure. For the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, we had 14 positions in compensation claims in the landscape programs, 26 in operations, one in major projects. That is it, so they add up to -

Ms JOHNSTON - 21? And of those - that's total claims, but how many of those were relating to mental health or psychological injuries? I'm assuming that was the total number, sorry.

Mr JACOBI - Look, I can't tell you specifically for the Parks and Wildlife Service, and I probably would be loathed to do that, but I can give it to you for the whole department.

Ms JOHNSTON - The whole department? Yes.

Mr JACOBI - Psychological: 15. Physical: 44. I've got a category here of compensation claim by type. The type is 'disease', which there is 10.

Ms JOHNSTON - I appreciate that you don't want to disclose just for Parks alone. Is that because the number would, in those particular areas, indicate the people or is it just you don't have that data available?

Mr JACOBI - I don't have that breakdown.

Ms JOHNSTON - Don't have that breakdown.

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Mr JACOBI - No, no. Mental stress compensation claims for the Parks and Wildlife Service, total claims is five, four of which have been accepted and one has been disputed.

Ms JOHNSTON - Five for Parks and Wildlife relating to mental health claims, out of the 41?

Mr JACOBI - Yes, that's different to compensation claims which I spoke to before.

Ms JOHNSTON - Right, sure. Have you done the work then - part of my question was - have you done the work in relation to whether those claims relate to those areas where you've been experiencing vacancies? Whether that's through parental leave, secondments, not replacing positions, have you done any work to see whether that's a direct correlation there?

Mr JACOBI - No, we haven't. I don't believe that we have - each compensation claim or claim, whether psychological, is quite unique and special to the employee and it might relate to a specific circumstance. I think it would be very challenging to correlate the individual circumstance with a particular theme across the division.

Ms JOHNSTON - I suppose it goes to Ms Finlay's question about people doing extra work.

Mr JACOBI - I understand where you're coming from, but no, I don't have that breakdown available to me and I suspect that would require us to go to each individual claim and to review, which we do, what is the cause of the root cause of the claim and whether that is related to an incident in the workplace and then what was the nature of the workplace incident? Quite a complicated question that you were asking. Certainly, in the case of each individual claim, we work very hard to make sure that we deal with and address the particular circumstance that it might relate to in the workforce.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, minister. I wonder if I can turn your mind to Maria Island and the government has funded the Rediscovered project. It's been, I think, working out quite well, but I will ask you for an update on that. I was looking at the statistics for some of the reference sites, just now, and noticed that at least of the reference sites for our Maria Island National Park has the first or second highest increase in visitation since 2019. I think that that's a consistent trend on earlier years as well. With such an increase in visitation, by my reckoning, around 61,000 last year. That's a big number. I wonder if you'd let us know how the government's commitment is ensuring that the island will be able to cope with those increased numbers of visitors, but also then still be able to provide the best possible experience for locals and visitors exploring this wonderful natural asset which I love so much. I'm sure you do too.

Mr DUIGAN - Indeed. Yes, thank you. It is one of those one of those things where you run the risk of loving it to death and while that's obviously not the case for Maria, we are seeing substantial uplift in visitation. Throughout the last two years, visitation has increased around 60 per cent from 46,000 to 74,000 and that is a very substantial amount of growth.

Everyone who has been to Maria will understand the attraction of it. It is great, and we've done obviously some work on getting people to and from the island and that's working well, and upgrades to the jetty and so on. Access to the island has been improved and I think we are seeing the results of that. Our government is committed to protecting this important landscape and ensuring both visitors and locals alike are able to continue to enjoy it.

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The influx of visitors, though, obviously presents some challenges for the island infrastructure. A 2021 election commitment was designed for stage 3 of the critical infrastructure upgrades on Maria, and that's to provide certainty of experience for tourism operators and visitors. I'm pleased to announce today that works on the final stage of this critical infrastructure project will begin next month with the awarding of the contract. Local business Spectran was awarded the \$8.9 million contract after a competitive request-for-tender process. The works are essential to supporting a sustainable visitor experience on the island.

With the visitor numbers to Maria continuing to grow, these upgrades are critical to protect the islands natural and cultural values and, in terms of the works that are contained within that phase 3, it is a new wastewater treatment plant, it is the decommissioning and site rehabilitation of the existing wastewater treatment plant. All existing buildings within Darlington connected to the precious sewer system and new water and electrical connections to meet contemporary standards, upgrades to fire water main which will better service staff houses and upgrades to the raw water capacity and supply pipelines and works are expected to start next month and be completed toward the end of 2026. Pretty significant upgrades to Maria which have been prioritised as a result of the increased visitation.

Ms FINLAY - Everyone loves to go camping and to visit all sorts of things, whether we can get access to Maria or other places, but that classic, salt-of-the-earth people going out and doing basic camping is something that's getting harder and harder to do all the time as more people love to be around and we get more visitors. We've discussed before, and your office has been fantastic in being in touch, in terms of the challenges of keeping open at Pioneer Dam access for camping. Can you tell me what the current status is of that and what recommendations are being actioned in terms of Pioneer Dam?

Mr DUIGAN - There is work ongoing on Pioneer Dam and I'm deeply conscious of anytime we as government prevent access to people, that is not what I'm here for. In terms of Pioneer, well perhaps we've got the experts in the room, let's hear from them rather than me read from my notes. Sophie, let's have the latest on Pioneer.

Ms MULLER - We're currently undertaking our procurement assessment for the works to decommission the dam.

Ms FINLAY - What does that mean, technically?

Ms MULLER - I'm not a technical expert, but that work really is about -

Ms FINLAY - Do you mean to drain it and get rid of the wall that's there?

Ms MULLER - And remove the wall of the dam so that then it's able to be safe and people can continue to use the site. That tender's gone out, we're assessing the tender response and for that work to be undertaken. Once it's dewatered and the walls removed, you said, so that people can continue to access the site, you're imagining, you're contemplating it in the future it will be opened up for camping again.

Mr DUIGAN - I think it is now. Can you get around the back of it?

Ms FINLAY - Depending on what you are getting in there on.

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Ms MULLER - The site is closed currently, and it hasn't ever been a site that's been explicitly managed for camping, but obviously it's been.

Ms FINLAY - Understanding the language that you're using, that's all. When you said people can get back to the site. There are many, but there are few places that people can classically go out and do their, and I don't like to use the word simple necessarily, but there's beauty in the simplicity of what people do there, and so I'm hoping to understand what the intention is in terms of being able to provide for people to get back to the site.

Mr DUIGAN - The reality is that the dam has a big leak in it and at some point, at some time in the future, will potentially fail and we want to get ahead of that eventuality. We will do the work to get the head water bit sorted out and then people can continue to access the site as they have done previously, albeit not over the dam wall. They would need to access it via the eastern access.

Ms FINLAY - Are you saying that the dam wall will no longer be there?

Mr DUIGAN - Not in a circumstance that would enable you to drive over it, I don't think. Is that right?

Ms MULLER - That's correct. We're also part of a working group that the council has established to consider future options for that site.

Ms FINLAY - The minister's saying that in the future there will be provision for people to have access somewhere to the site.

Mr DUIGAN - That would be my expectation, yes.

Ms BADGER - The Pine Forest Moore Hut burnt down in the devastating summer's fires, and I do want to congratulate Parks for the good work that they did do in that instance. I'm wondering if we could seek some clarity please about whether it's been determined as to how the hut burnt down, whether it was from the main fire front or indeed, a back-burning mission that perhaps did not go as planned, to put it politely. In this case, whose insurance covers the loss of that hut? Is it the Tasmanian Walking Company, or does that come from Parks or NRE?

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of the cause of that, I think I will refer to the department.

Mr JACOBI - Through you, minister. I haven't got the specifics on the particular fire, but I am not of the understanding, and neither is Sophie, that the loss of the hut was caused by any particular action of our firefighters on that site. You know, we were defending the natural values of the estate, but also defending and trying to protect that asset. We do that all the time with built assets in the World Heritage Area or any reserve that we're responsible for. So, I don't think we can point to the hut having been burnt, or it's loss, being attributed to any action by the department.

Typically, though, the replacement of those assets, if they are lost by fire, are the responsibility of the lessee. So, in this particular case, I think the Tasmanian Walking Company have taken it upon themselves to rebuild and rebuilt at their cost. We are doing whatever we

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can to support them to do that in the right way and as quickly as possible, so they can get back up into operating.

Ms BADGER - That's great, thank you. Minister, through the EOI process, proponents that are having their proposal actively considered provide six-monthly updates on how they're progressing their proposal, to show that they are valid, and they're still doing that. In the last, not this recent six months, the six months prior to that, the proponent for the Lake Malbena proposal was not requested to give that six-monthly update. Why is that, and what message is that sending to everybody else that's doing the right thing and being required to provide those updates?

Mr DUIGAN - In essence - and correct me if I'm wrong - but I think because that proposal now sits in the realm of the Commonwealth government and the EPBC referral, which has been delayed and delayed and delayed, it was deemed acceptable for the proponent, given there had been no movement from the Commonwealth on that, that the proponent was able to continue through.

Ms BADGER - Can we confirm that's the case, please? Of course, that's not progressing through the EPBC because the proponent's not provided the adequate cultural heritage assessment that the department's been waiting on for some time. They're now having to make a decision, if they have enough information to make a decision. Surely this, as a test case, as this proposal has been for their EOIs for some time, if they're not having to provide that information and there's no expectation of them to do so, what message is that sending to anyone else that's trying to have a private proposal in our World Heritage Areas and national parks?

Mr DUIGAN - Well, the state doesn't monitor the Commonwealth's approval processes. Is there anything further that the department would like to add? That is underway, that's my understanding. I'm happy to hear if there is a contrary view to that.

Ms MULLER - Through you, minister, no additional information in relation to that. I guess just to point out that the EOI process is managed through the Department of State Growth - the OCG.

Ms JOHNSTON - Going back to workers' compensation and vacancy control. Wouldn't you agree, minister, that it's a bit of a false economy to achieve budget savings through vacancy control only to pay it out again in workers' compensation because of burnout, mental health issues and things like that, for those staff that are carrying a load from the vacancy control? Will you commit to monitoring or implementing a system to monitor the wellbeing of staff in units or areas where there has been vacancy control exercised?

Mr DUIGAN - Look, I would expect that to be part of business as usual for the Department for the Parks Service. I'm not sure there is a correlation between those things that you've mentioned there.

Ms JOHNSTON - You don't have the data, though, so you can't make that assumption.

Mr DUIGAN - No, so I will not make any assumption, other than to say it would be an expectation of the government that the department manages its people to a very high level and makes sure their wellbeing is looked after. If there is more to be said on that issue, and I'm sure there is plenty the department does to maintain the wellbeing of its people, I'm happy to -

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Ms JOHNSTON - I suppose, moving forward into the next budget, there's going to be significant cuts coming down the line in future budgets. Will you then be implementing some kind of reporting mechanism so you can track that data, to see whether there is indeed a correlation, to ensure that we're not saving with one hand and paying it out with the other hand, and having a massive impact on people's lives? This is only going to increase, as we see more vacancy control or budget cuts coming down the line. Is that something that you'll be putting in place so that we can report against that in future budgets?

Mr DUIGAN - Again, it's the first time I have heard that as an idea. I would be interested to know what the department does in terms of that already. Overlaying another piece of governance is perhaps not something I should be committing to here at the table, but I do take the point that you're making, and we have a duty to make sure that the people's wellbeing is being considered. I will hand to Jason to perhaps fill some of those gaps.

Mr JACOBI - I totally understand the point that you're making, Ms Johnston. I think it's important- I don't believe there is a correlation. We have absolutely been committed to keeping positions - particularly in the Parks and Wildlife Service - recruited to as quickly as possible. Now, with some of the operational funding certainty that we've got, that just provides additional reassurance to be able to maintain capability and capacity.

We have a variety of systems which are just business as usual, which deal particularly with psychological safety but also the safety and wellbeing of our people. Our safety reporting system is a critical database and tool that we use on a daily basis to record and track near misses or incidents, both physical but also psychological. That is really important to being proactive in our response and preventing workers' compensation claims. I'd like to think that through those business-as-usual systems, we're on our game and addressing things before they get bad.

We also have a psychological code of practice; we have workplace equality and respect standards that we roll out and regularly ensure that our staff, our newly-employed recruits, are aware of.

We have an anti-bullying strategy, a Belonging at NRE Tas strategy; we routinely tell people about access and provide access to our employee assistance program - and the scope of that employee assistance program is quite significant. People can draw on the support of professional counsellors for quite a considerable period of time to help them through work-related but also personal-related issues.

I think if you put all those things together, we do have a very comprehensive approach to the wellbeing and condition of our employees, and I'd like to think that we are very acutely aware of it.

As a board, as an executive, we routinely - every meeting - talk about safety. Every single meeting that we have is prefaced by a discussion about workplace health and safety, and we constantly talk about both psychosocial and physical issues, and general wellbeing.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I just want to reflect on that previous answer. Thank you to you and your team, and in particular the secretary, for looking after your workforce. I think that's great.

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My question, minister, is about the Next Iconic Walk. We've seen multi-day walks become more popular. I'm thinking of the Overland Track, which has been an absolute staple of tourism and enjoying the wilderness areas, and more recently, the Three Capes Track. I'd really love it if you would provide an update on how we're going with the west coast Next Iconic Walk. What can we expect next? How can we help take some pressure off other natural assets by providing this new tourism product and promoting the west coast, of course?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, it's exciting and it is one of those areas that Tasmania is becoming ever more renowned for. Walking is quite a thing, and whether you choose to do it - as you do, Ms Badger - in some more challenging circumstances than I might choose, or whether you choose to come to it as I, and plenty of people have done, through the Three Capes Track - just a fantastic family experience. We've been trying to get on the Overland Track ever since I've been minister for Parks, but we can't get on because it is very well subscribed, but anyway, one of those days.

To have on the horizon another offering in this area is important. It's good for our brand. It does draw people to Tasmania. Importantly, it takes people out to the regions, whether it's the peninsula or whether it will be Queenstown and the west coast.

We have committed a substantial amount of funding, \$40 million, I do understand that's been the number that's been associated with this walk for a period of time. There is continuing demand. More than 90 per cent of Three Capes Track walkers say they would walk a new track with the same standard elsewhere in Tasmania. Those same people say that it's one of the best things they've done in the last 12 months. Some of them say it is one of the best things they have ever done in their lives.

As part of the project, the track alignment has been finalised following ground truthing and assessment by various specialists. The process carefully considered potential impact on natural, cultural and heritage values. It is an extraordinary part of the world, so sensitively taking people through there is going to be important.

The walk has been designed to accommodate a maximum capacity of around 12,000 visitors per year over the spring, summer and autumn seasons with the maximum capacity year round of approximately 16,000 visitors. That equates to 34 walkers departing per day or overnight hut stayers with 10, maybe 11 campers or so. In that realm of pretty boutique.

Consultation has been widespread with eight information sessions held in four locations. The project planners have also completed an environmental impact statement that will form part of the RAA process. The RAA was released for formal public comment on 11 October, with the closing date extended by two weeks after a request from the member for Lyons, which was a good idea. Submissions are now due this Friday.

After the finalisation of the reserve activity statement, a development application will be lodged with West Coast Council. This will provide further opportunity for public review and comment on the plans for the project. Project updates including current hut and campground designs are available on the park's website. I think 2028 is the date.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, to you, but it might go through you, the practicalities of how the water above the dam is drained and then the wall is removed. What understanding is there around what ends up happening to that local environment in terms of those changes. I am

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interested in the consideration of unintended consequences for that. That's my first part of the question.

The second part is in your contemplation and your expectation that it will be reopened to campers, what sort of time frame do you have in your mind on this work happening, and then what sort of season might they be able to look forward to?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, I welcome to the table Alice Holeywell-Jones, Operations Manager in Parks. Is that the correct title? I should know that. Alice has had long and storied involvement with Pioneer. So, without me muddying the waters as it were, if you would speak to that and the practicalities and the actual how to?

Ms HOLEYWELL-JONES - I think Sophie talked previously around the procurement we're currently going through. At this stage, we're going through the procurement stage for the decommissioning of the dam. The second stage of the procurement or the additional piece we need to progress with is around a structural engineer who'll oversight that decommissioning. It is quite a technical and complex piece of work that needs to happen. A secondary component of that will also be bringing in specialists to do environmental and natural assessments as part of that process.

Ms FINLAY - That hasn't happened yet?

Ms HOLEYWELL-JONES - No. Basically, the scope for the procurement process, we had submissions that didn't cover the full scope. Now we're going out directly to specialists, because of that complexity. They will help guide that work by the specialist kind of contractors who will do the decommissioning. They will take into consideration the advice from both the structural engineer and the natural values specialist at that time.

In relation to the second part of the question -

Ms FINLAY - That was more of a question for the minister.

Mr DUIGAN - In terms of how soon we can get people back in there? Presumably - well, your timeframes, Alice?

Ms HOLEYWELL-JONES - We're working through the procurement process at the moment, and we've been expediting that process as much as we can. We are continuing to work through that and meet regularly with users of the site and local community members as part of that working group that Sophie referenced earlier. Certainly, doing as much as we can to get the site safe and accessible as quickly as we can.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. While you're at the table, minister, the questions for you, but it may be helpful.

The contemplation of the project up at Cape Reed of opening up safe access and trail head and increasing the amenity up there, what is your current involvement is in helping support to progress that?

Mr DUIGAN - Certainly. I am eminently supportive of what opponents are seeking to achieve at Kate Reed and have had contact along the way and we work with Parks to help

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deliver an outcome there. Alice, are you able to speak on the status of the Reserve Activity Assessment?

Ms HOLEYWELL-JONES - We've recently been working with the proponents for the revised RAA proposal around the Kate Reed master trail plan and its implementation. They submitted an initial RAA. I believe it was around July, and we provided some kind of high-level feedback on that draft. They've recently resubmitted an updated copy of that RAA draft proposal and we're working with them again on some further feedback in relation to that at this stage.

Ms FINLAY - Minister, it seems you're open and supportive of the project and there's been no concerns raised. I have asked questions of Mr Vincent in the past about this as well, so obviously it connects up both of those road accesses. I know Mr Ferguson has raised questions at the table. There are all sorts of things going on in that area that need addressing, whether it be road safety on the main road access. You might go bushwalking in certain places. I take my kids riding there and it's a horror trying to get safe access into there. You are not concerned in terms of the different departments working together to provide assurances that it's

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Mr DUIGAN - A coordination.

Ms FINLAY - Yes.

Mr DUIGAN - As I say, I have had some connection, knowledge and understanding and support for this project for a period of time. As minister, I have written to the City of Launceston requesting that we form a working group and that they are present in this. I understand the working group which includes the state government representation and proponents and council have met a couple of times. That's work I would like to see continuing, that everybody's engaged and, as you say, speaking and understanding what the shared goals and visions are.

I have spoken to Mr Vincent on this and we need to work together to better understand it, but obviously there is a piece of work that Parks is doing in terms of the RAA. There has been an RAA proposed in Kate Reed previously which didn't meet the objectives of the reserve and things like that.

Ms FINLAY - This one satisfies. It doesn't seem to have barriers, at an observer's level. It doesn't seem to have barriers in terms of getting an outcome.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes. I believe there is an outcome to be had.

Ms BADGER - Minister, while Parks might be saving \$800,000 a year on charging seniors extra, you have the Tyndall Range, which, as you've just said, has had a \$40 million price tag since 2021. The Freycinet Visitor Gateway Project's been at about \$14 million since 2019, off the top of my head. Inflation's gone up. The projects are not any smaller. At what point are you going to update the costings for those projects?

Mr DUIGAN - I believe when we have updated numbers, fully scoped and have fresh numbers. I am happy to be open and transparent, but I don't have a number to share with you

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today. The number we have allocated to the project is \$40 million. That will be the case until we have another number.

Ms BADGER - Until you exceed that number or like this. This is the third project. It goes back to the Mt Field project as well. You have all this money allocated, you're charging senior citizens extra to get into a national park, and you don't have any outline of the details of how much the itemised details of any of these projects actually are to what the updated cost is. We're in a budget crisis, so it's really important, minister, that Tasmanians understand where the money is going.

Mr DUIGAN - As I say, we have allocated \$40 million to the Next Iconic Walk. When there is something else to say in that space, I will be happy to provide that.

Ms BADGER - On the Freycinet Gateway, the \$14 million, I'm seeking to understand whether included in that cost is going to be the sewerage connectivity from any kind of bathroom facilities at the gateway area into the Coles Bay system. I'm sure you'd appreciate there's quite an issue there opposite where the gateway is proposed going into Muirs Beach, which is one of the popular swimming areas, and the exact amount of money that's going to be allocated to bitumen and concrete.

Mr DUIGAN - I must alert everybody that the secretary will be stepping out for the rest of our session, I believe.

Mr JACOBI - Yes, I apologise.

Mr DUIGAN - Off to other places. Around the detail of Freycinet and what's contemplated there, Sophie, if you wouldn't mind.

Ms MULLER - I think the gateway is a concept plan at this point in time. In terms of specific costings around concrete and so on, we don't have that level of detail in relation to that project.

Ms BADGER - I understand you do have that detail.

Ms MULLER - As I said, it's a concept plan. We've done some preliminary costings of that plan, but the plan itself isn't finalised. We undertook community engagement earlier in the year. We received feedback from the community through a range of information sessions we held in Coles Bay, and we are working through the feedback that we've received and continuing to input into the concept plan before we move into detailed design work.

Ms JOHNSTON - Both Ms Badger and I were at a recent Invasive Species Council election forum where, it's fair to say, the room expressed some frustration that the area of environmental management and invasive species control is a growing area and should be an industry that should be growing with highly-valued and highly-skilled individuals in it. Your government champions its job-creation credentials; what are you doing to increase job creation opportunities in invasive species management and environmental management within parks?

Mr DUIGAN - You know of recent high-profile events that I would think about with invasive species; I would point to aerial culling of fallow deer in the Walls of Jerusalem National Park. That was a substantial investment in that space and that was largely conducted

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via shooters in helicopters, but there were some input from the sporting shooters into the second and third tranche of that invasive species management action. In terms of other capacity building, Sophie, do you have something?

Ms MULLER - There's a small TWWHA biosecurity team that operates within the Parks service and that team is both delivering a range of programs, so planning and implementation of weed management, for example, planning and monitoring around invasive species like feral cats and contributing to the deer management work that's been undertaken by Parks. They're both doing a range of work but also working across Parks field staff and helping to support field staff undertake a range of work as well.

In terms of addressing invasive species management consistent with the TWWHA management plan, that team's also been successful in securing a range of federal grants to support the delivery of that program of work. For example, they're undertaking a range of initiatives on offshore islands in terms of the HPAI preparedness work, and that will include both on-ground works in terms of weed and other pest management.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, I did read in the *Mercury* this morning your announcement about progress on the Edge of the World initiative. It is a remarkable place, Arthur River, Edge of the World, great branding and actually a tremendous location, also some of, I think, Tasmania's best on-road driving experiences; great roads and a great environment to enjoy, but obviously a deliberate strategy to make the place more user-friendly but also to attract additional visitors and cater for those and the growth that is experienced there. I would like to ask you how you expect that project to progress and listening to the public, I think feedback's open until just before Christmas, but when will we start to see those improvements and what are you most hoping to achieve as a result of that overall project?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you Mr Ferguson, I appreciate that, and yes, Edge of the World is great. It's in that area that lots of people visit, there's access to the beach and the coast there to be managed as well, and driving tracks through the Arthur-Pieman, but the geography of the destination in the Arthur-Pieman Conservation Area and the western Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural landscape means it's the eastern side of the longest uninterrupted expanse of ocean on the planet, from Argentina, having driven my boat down there.

I am proud the government has committed \$2.5 million to deliver upgrades to the Edge of the World area as well as to revitalise and reimagine the site, and the site, for those of you who have been there, is in need of a bit of reimagination, and the draft final concept, as you mentioned, is now available for public feedback and has some great images about what people can expect, and has been developed by our landscape architects, Inspiring Place, and the draft includes the feedback received so far.

The Edge of the World is an important cultural and recreational site and the proposed scope of work includes improvement to road access, parking, walking opportunities, toilets, shelter and picnic facilities and will provide interpretation around the importance of the site, the project - and this has been I think the most perhaps important aspect of the development in terms of protecting the site's significant Aboriginal cultural heritage and natural values, while also ensuring facilities and infrastructure can sustainably accommodate current and future users. The revitalization project is expected to be completed in 2027.

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I think the Arthur-Pieman is one of those great sort of unheralded areas of Tasmania that, when people go there, they are sort of stunned to see it. So, I think it's a very worthwhile investment and in a very sensitive area, I think it has been done well.

CHAIR - Ms Finlay.

Ms FINLAY - Thank you. In understanding the status of this work up at Kate Reed and the mention of there being a secondary or a follow-up application put in and there were some areas for further clarification, I am just wondering what the areas requiring extra information might be for that project and also, getting some clarification on the level of the assessment, if it is a level 2 assessment happening on the project?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you, and again, for the detail on this and how openly we speak about current RAAs - but you are the expert here, Alice, so I will leave you to it.

Ms HOLEYWELL-JONES - The submission from the proponent at this stage is draft, so we are just providing some initial feedback to them on their draft proposal before they submit it formally. So, there are some areas that we have just kind of indicated to them that we would require some more information, and they are working through that at the moment.

Ms FINLAY - Okay, and based on the draft that has been submitted, is it likely to be assessed at a level 2 activity?

Ms HOLEYWELL-JONES - So, I guess, until we have such information, I would not want to commit to the level, but I think we are indicating that it's possibly up to a level 3 or potentially a level 2 given the level of significant interest in the site with public consultation.

Ms FINLAY - Okay, thank you. Minister, I am interested in the works under the capital investment program that are proposed up into the north-east parks and reserves upgrade, the work that's going on in that area?

Mr DUIGAN - North-east in capital investment, any bit in particular?

Ms FINLAY - I'm interested because it's been disclosed in the budget papers and in the briefing information, I'm just interested in what is actually being proposed to be done there.

Mr DUIGAN - Let me have a look to see whether I've got details that would speak to capital investment in the north-east.

Mr FERGUSON - Janie, do you mean the North East River?

Ms FINLAY - No, not on Flinders Island, in the north-east. North-east parks and reserves upgrades, it's \$1 million, it sounds interesting. I've never heard of anything happening in the north-east, so I'd like to know something about it, please.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, the north-east, so -

Ms FINLAY - It doesn't seem to be commonly known; none of us are aware.

Mr DUIGAN - No, I am aware of this bit, which was the Larapuna/Eddystone Point boat ramp upgrades, which has been done in 2023.

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Ms FINLAY - That doesn't sound -

Mr DUIGAN - The north-east parks and reserves upgrade, \$1.02 million.

Ms FINLAY - Yes. That's it.

Mr DUIGAN - Dora Point toilet upgrade, construction contract expect to award late 2025. Are we on track for a contract award?

Ms MULLER - Yes, we are, minister.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, we are. South Croppies toilet upgrade is currently in design and approval stage.

Ms FINLAY - Okay, so those two projects?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, and the boat ramp previously.

Ms FINLAY - Great, thank you.

Ms BADGER - Minister, in the Tyndall Range EIA, there's a section on that that attributes the area to being a particularly important dark sky region, which it absolutely is. There's a phrase in there that says 'A dark sky sanctuary for all Tasmania'. Are Parks intending to nominate this area for dark-sky protection formally? If so, why not the south-west, which is just waiting for a signature? Most of the volunteer work behind all of that has already been done for Parks and it's an area of incredible cultural significance, as I know that you're well aware, minister.

Mr DUIGAN - I'm going to say not to my knowledge, in regard to dark sky at Tyndall. I think it will be pretty dark out there, and without wishing to sound flippant, I don't think there is a proposal that we are considering there. As to why not in the south-west, I'm not sure that I've got anything there, do I? Do I have anything in front of us at the moment? Noting that the south-west is already one of the darkest places on the planet, and you would expect it to continue to be so, given its current status as a World Heritage area.

Ms BADGER - Just to be clear, minister, there is a proposal before - perhaps not you personally, but certainly the department and I know you've been approached by at least three different people or groups and organisations seeking that. So that's not quite accurate, what you said before.

I'm also just curious: up in Narawntapu there was a ground parrot found in the area for the first time in a long time, which is great news. However, in the week that that was found, there was a planned fuel-reduction burn that was going to happen around some of the button grass of Frenchman's Cap, which was peak breeding ground for these birds - or habitat, I should say. In this serious time for them - luckily that got called off because of the wet weather - but how on earth did that decision-making come, that that was an appropriate time for that area, given the birds there?

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Mr DUIGAN - Look, I will defer to Sophie in terms of that. I would just pause to make the point about the value of fuel-reduction burning, particularly as we are seeing the west coast and perhaps landscapes that weren't traditionally threatened by fire being somewhat more threatened by fire. I'm supportive of the fuel reduction burning program -

Ms BADGER - At the cost of threatened species?

Mr DUIGAN - No, that's to put a word in my mouth.

Ms BADGER - That's a question.

Mr DUIGAN - No. What I would say is I'm supportive of the program. How we schedule these burns, I would hand to Sophie about what are the inputs.

Ms MULLER - I'm not aware of the specific details of that particular planned burn, but I certainly know that as we're planning planned burns, there's a lot of work that goes into assessing and seeking the advice of specialists, including ecologists, across the department, and that really helps to shape those planned burns.

Ultimately, it is about weighing up against the value and benefit of planned burns as part of that process, but we'll certainly take on advice of specialists in the plans.

Mr FERGUSON - Minister, you mentioned earlier in our hearing that the thing that keeps you up at night, if anything, is the fire risk. I think we all stand united on the importance of protecting our natural assets and environment but, of course, physical infrastructure in our parks. Can you, please, let me know how you're going with your agency in preparation for the upcoming fire season. Can you also touch on interagency cooperation and how you see that?

Importantly, I'd also love to hear about performance of the new Government Radio Network (GRN). It's probably been in place now for three, maybe four, years. I'd like to know how your department is finding that as a key participant in that project. Not just from a coverage point of view, although that's so important, but also the greater ability that was promised, to have more access to data and maps using devices that are attached to the GRN. I appreciate there's a fair bit in that, but I'd like to learn more.

Mr DUIGAN - I might start with one of the aspects in the middle, in terms of the collaboration and cooperation between agencies, obviously TFS and Parks and STT. It's one of those things that gets singled out whenever we host fires from other jurisdictions they always tend to make a point of how well the agencies here in Tasmania work together, how there aren't the great walls up and the siloing that they tend to see in other jurisdictions. There is very much an all shoulders to the wheel spirit among - when we stand up an incident control centre, everybody's on the same page and everybody's pulling in the same direction. I'd make that point and thank people for their continued cooperation. It does help.

In terms of last fire season, we saw considerable fire challenges. That validated - and we've seen the review of the of the west-coast fires with the report that came out recently, which again singled out the good work that Parks undertakes each year. Extensive training, planning, preparation of equipment, technology, and watching those fire-ops in real time with list map overlay and all of the technology that we're able to bring to bear, demonstrates how far we've come - and that early intervention satellite monitoring; it is the only way that we can meaningfully identify, get to, and fight a fire before it becomes an inferno that is beyond our

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scope of control. Technology is ever more important. Those monitoring cameras, eight monitoring cameras in weather stations to assist with that early detection. Planned burns, about which we've spoken.

Parks does the vast majority in terms of area each year, while TFS is an important player in spaces closer to population centres, it is Parks that is out there doing those very large burns at a landscape scale. There are 160 parks personnel trained to fight those fires and they will be coming to this part of the year knowing what may lay before them. There might be another big season. We don't know what's coming, and we thank those people for the work that they do in advance.

Where else did your question go?

Mr FERGUSON - Preparation for the radio network and GRN.

Mr DUIGAN - Perhaps with more operational oversight of the GRN than I have, Sophie?

Mr FERGUSON - Performance of the GRN. My question was, is the performance of the GRN meeting agencies' needs, particularly with coverage and also access to data, maps and so on?

Ms MULLER - Through you, minister, I think the short answer would be yes. It is meeting the agency's needs. In terms of coverage, as I understand it, at a reasonably high level, it's largely working well. I think there might be - several months ago, I was aware of a few areas where there were some coverage issues that were being worked through, but I think the short answer is yes.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, I was aware of some of those, maybe the year before last, but I believe there has been work done to provide that level of coverage that we were looking for.

Ms FINLAY - I want to circle back, off the back of that question and one that was asked earlier by Ms Johnston. There's no doubt that the reputation of our Parks staff, particularly in fire, is extraordinary and they should be acknowledged for that. With those massive surges required in that workforce, however, it does leave other areas with less, and so the load is greater. There was those questions before about the psychosomatic challenges. Earlier, we heard that on the top of a \$1.7 million efficiency required, there's another \$1.7 million now. I worry that you will then have a \$3.4 million expectation in the next year. I asked questions earlier around care for and understanding of the workload pressures and the extra time that staff are providing. There was a suggestion before about Narawntapu and Freycinet - these places that are being talked about. How many field centres are there in Tasmania that are staffed or operated by less than two people? How many people are out there on their own, with or without the appropriate training, holding up the responsibilities of sites in Tasmania?

Mr DUIGAN - I will get you an answer to that question. It's also important to recognise what the secretary said about the supports that are in place for staff -

Ms FINLAY - If you're broken, support doesn't help.

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Mr DUIGAN - Understanding the pressures, yes, but also the fact that there is - we're talking about efficiencies and we would seek to achieve those in areas not necessarily impacting the services that we don't want to see impacted, but the upticks in funding as well that have been identified.

Ms MULLER - Through you, minister, I think there would be very few field centres where there is two or fewer staff. I think potentially King Island -

Mr DUIGAN - Flinders.

Ms MULLER - Flinders, yep. But, beyond that, our field centres are generally larger.

Ms FINLAY - Going back to that series of questions that I asked at the beginning in terms of a site's or area's assets that might be closed due to staffing pressures. There was also the safety question that I asked. Is it common that sites would be closed due to staffing, either unavailability of staff or staff being asked or required to operate beyond their training or level?

Mr DUIGAN - Thank you Sophie.

Ms MULLER - Through you minister. I'm not aware of any closures as a result of staff availability. In fact, when I reflect on the last year and the impact of the significant fire campaign through the west coast fire period, and visiting Mount Field during that time and speaking to staff, they were reflecting on the impact of staff leaving the south to participate in that really significant fire campaign. They were operating with fewer than normal staff, but certainly they were able to accommodate the standard requirements in terms of staffing. So, I think that we are flexible when we need to be and are particularly responsive in those periods where there are surges.

Ms FINLAY - In those circumstances, not just when there's surge staff going in other areas, do you feel confident that people who are working remotely in challenging circumstances and under pressure in terms of workload on sites, are working to the appropriate level of training that they have, in terms of supervision?

Mr DUIGAN - Thanks Sophie.

Ms MULLER - Through you minister. I have no concerns in terms of staff operating within their realm of capability, capacity, training -

Ms FINLAY - When's the last time Parks did an internal cultural survey about workforce satisfaction and concerns?

Ms MULLER - Through you minister. That would be the last State Service survey, which I believe was undertaken in 2024.

Ms FINLAY - Primary concerns or workforce concerns raised through that survey?

Mr DUIGAN - I don't believe I have a brief that speaks to that. I don't think I've heard any particular concerns in that area, but Sophie, do you have anything that you're able to speak to, about that 2024 survey? Or anyone else in the room, Parks? Have we got anything there?

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Ms MULLER - Through you, minister, we do have something here and I just need to locate it. What I can say is in terms of participation. I think we had a 62 per cent rate in terms of Parks staff participating in that survey which, I think, when benchmarked across the whole of the State Service, is a good outcome.

We know that people felt really connected with the team they work with. I think one of the reflections that we get from the State Survey results is that people value their team and feel supported by their team. In NRE Tasmania we also have a really strong connection to purpose, so the purpose of the agency being delivering a sustainable Tasmania being something that people really connect with and value.

Ms FINLAY - This is a new portfolio area for me, but in preparing for the portfolio and also preparing for today, the feedback that I have been receiving is that, I think that's a strength and a potential challenge for individuals, because there's such a passion and a connection to the task. You work in Parks because you love the environment and you want to look after Tasmania and create great visitor experiences and places for Tasmanian to enjoy, but sometimes then that can mean doing more, and that coming with challenges and burdens. So, that's a positive, but I'm interested in what else the survey bore out?

Ms MULLER - Through you, minister. We've heard that people would like to see some improvement in training and development opportunities, in remuneration, in management and leadership, and a greater focus on positive workplace behaviours. They were some of the kind of top line issues that were raised through the survey.

Ms FINLAY - So, as a result of those -

CHAIR - Sorry, Ms Finlay, we have to keep moving. Ms Badger.

Ms BADGER - I'd like to ask about the comprehensive cultural heritage assessment over the TWWHA. In its entirety, it was expected to be completed in 2028, and we haven't asked you about this since about 2022, at which time five of the 10 components were underway. Can you give us an update on those components, and if it's still on track for completion by 2028?

Mr DUGAN - The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service is meeting the requirements of the TWWHA management plan. Is that what you're referring to?

Ms BADGER - The comprehensive cultural heritage assessment is part of what's been recommended by UNESCO, the Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value on the Cultural Heritage Assessment. So, it's a requirement. It came out of the 2015 reactive monitoring mission as something that needs to be done.

Mr DUGAN - As part of?

Ms BADGER - As part of the body's requirements for upholding the cultural values of the TWWHA.

Mr DUGAN - Okay, thank you. What I am able to say is a number of plans and strategies have been developed by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, in partnership with the Environment Division and Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania, that outline the various measures and management actions to support decision-making in relation to the management

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of the natural and cultural values in the TWWHA). These include TWWHA fire management plan, detailed plan for comprehensive cultural assessment of the TWWHA - and if I cut straight to the chase - the detailed plan for comprehensive cultural assessment of the TWWHA also includes work packages related to identifying, understanding and managing the impacts of climate change on the cultural values of the property. That would appear to be -

Ms BADGER - I'm happy to take that on notice, if you could table an update for each of those 10 components, because I understand it's quite extensive and not necessarily easy to find now.

Mr DUIGAN - Yes. Okay, so that's work that is ongoing, presumably. We can take that on notice?

Ms BADGER - On that similar theme, the TWWHA has been retired from UNESCO's, or the World Heritage Committee's State of Conservation reporting cycle. That's very important to have that international level of scrutiny and support for the TWWHA, not just for the Tasmanian government but the Australian government. Of course, that goes to funding for firefighting, which I'm sure we all agree is continually needed; invasive species such as the deer, and perhaps we could get some help for that ragwort you've alerted us to, minister. What are you doing to work with your federal colleagues to get the TWWHA back on the State of Conservation reporting cycle?

Mr DUIGAN - The Commonwealth, as you are aware, is the party responsible there. Why that circumstance has occurred is not something I'm able to access in my mind at the moment. Sophie or Alice, I'd be happy to hear your thoughts there and where that piece of work sits.

Ms MULLER - Through you, minister. We talk with the Australian Government from time to time particularly around the MP work table, so they participate in that forum and are part of those discussions that occur. As part of those conversations, issues like the matter you've raised do get discussed from time to time. As to whether there's an explicit strategy around engaging with the Australian government directly on that matter, I don't have any information to hand.

Mr DUIGAN - I'm trying to think of my time in the Environment portfolio. I have some memory of it and discussion of it, but I don't have any update to provide.

Ms BADGER - Thank you, minister, I appreciate that. I'd encourage you to write to your federal colleagues and get that back on the table, for the interests of the state.

CHAIR - Just clarifying, were you taking the question on notice?

Ms BADGER - The previous question.

CHAIR - You will?

Mr DUIGAN - Yes.

Ms FINLAY - I'm interested in the outcomes of the survey that was done statewide, and you gave me some responses for Parks. Are you comfortable to table that document? It's an

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area of particular interest for me in terms of the people that are looking after our parks. It had some interesting information there.

Mr DUIGAN - Is there a summary of the survey that was undertaken in 2024 that would be available?

Ms MULLER - Yes.

Mr DUIGAN - Happy to share that?

Ms MULLER - I'm not sure if we routinely share the survey data.

Ms FINLAY - We've had them tabled in previous -

Mr DUIGAN - We might take some advice on that.

Ms FINLAY - Everything up until that last question was glowing in terms of how the workforce is going, and there have been a lot of concerns, which is why the theme of my questions has been around making sure that we are looking after our workforce. Is there anything on there that would concern you to table it?

Mr DUIGAN - I would be happy to share it with the committee in confidence. I don't know what the sensitivities are and if there are ways to identify people or if there are some problematic circumstances.

Ms FINLAY - Yes. It sounds like it's just stats and high-level summaries.

Mr DUIGAN - You are happy to have that tabled?

Ms FINLAY - Appreciate it. Thank you.

Ms BADGER - I understand Parks has a compliance team that look at nature-based tourism (NBT) operations, or more importantly, a lack of NBT operations, where shuttle bus holders might not have the appropriate tourism licence. That's the nature-based tourism licence that people require. How does that compliance team work? Are they doing regular checks across the board? Is it just at key national parks where we have a vast influx of private tour operators, e.g. Mt Field and Freycinet? What are those compliance officers equipped with to do their job? For example, do they have recording equipment, or are they just handing out a type of knob, or do they have higher powers?

Mr DUIGAN - Again in that operational space, so Sophie, for you in terms of the compliance team, as such.

Ms MULLER - There is a central compliance team that sits within our landscape programs area. That team, I guess, does a number of things. They're responsible for training authorised officers across the parks and reserve system. That's I think around 200 or so staff that are authorised officers. They also lead operations in partnership with others such as Tas Police, for example, and pursue the sort of higher-order infringements, et cetera, that are issued to people who are not complying. They would plan operations; they would have a compliance strategy that sort of determines priorities. They're obviously a range of matters from simple

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non-compliance with Parks pass, for example, through to more complex operations. We've had a particular focus on wood hooking, for example, this year.

As part of that, there is certainly work that occurs monitoring compliance of nature-based tourism operators. Again, there have been a couple of areas of focus in the last year that have resulted in, I guess the first step is education - making sure people understand what they need to be complying with and informing people as to their obligations under their licences.

Ms BADGER - To be clear, is that something that normally happens on the ground in the parks? Would, for example, a member of the compliance team be permitted to visit an NBT holder's private residence to question them about whether they were or weren't complying, or how they were using their NBT?

I just want to reiterate that second part of my first question - I appreciate it was lengthy - about what sort of equipment the compliance officers would have. Would they be permitted to have recording equipment on them? Happy to take that on notice as well.

Mr DUIGAN - No, we'll try to get an answer for that, won't we?

Ms BADGER - Thank you.

Mr DUIGAN - Andrew Harvey to the table, and your correct title?

Mr HARVEY - Acting General Manager of Landscape Programs. Yes, they are able to wear body worn cameras.

Ms BADGER - Are they permitted on a private residence or is their work exclusively within National Park zones? Private residence, of course, being to follow up someone who has an NBT licence, not just anyone?

Mr HARVEY - Yes, they can, if it's justified under the act. If it's within their powers, they can go to a private residence or, in the case I think you might be referring to, also the business residence.

Ms FINLAY - I also have the Innovation, Artificial Intelligence, and the Digital Economy portfolio. I'm interested in digital ticketing machines used across the parks. How is that approach being used to consider visitor experience, engagement, staffing rotations and access, and are they likely to be rolled out conservatively? Aggressively?

Mr DUIGAN - Digital ticketing machines as opposed to?

Ms FINLAY - Someone having an exchange with a person.

Mr DUIGAN - Pay-and-display machines?

Ms FINLAY - Not for parking, but for access to the park. Instead of having a person explain the park and, you know, concierge -

Mr DUIGAN - Yes, sure. Out of hours and here you go, I haven't got a pass, but I can get a pass. We have rolled out a number of pay-and-display machines. My understanding is

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they've been largely well received and we've seen a fairly substantial uptick in Parks passes. I think that would evidence the fact that some people who would ordinarily buy a Parks pass but the field centre was closed and weren't able to, are doing the right thing getting a Parks pass out of the machine. For more detail and granular information, Sophie perhaps, on that?

Ms MULLER - Through you, minister. We have rolled out, I think it's around 24 pay-and-display machines across the Parks estate. Certainly, there's a lot of benefits associated with that. It means that we're able to make it easier for people to comply with the requirements to either pay for camping or have a Parks pass. As you know, we're often not carrying cash that previously we may have had on us. The old systems of putting money in an envelope and putting it in a secure box actually made it harder for people to comply. The pay-and-display machines have certainly seen an uplift in revenue, particularly at sites where we haven't had an active Parks presence.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has now expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation, at 9.00 a.m. tomorrow. Please stop the broadcast.

The committee adjourned at 5.37 p.m.