



# **PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

## **TRANSCRIPT**

### **HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

#### **ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A**

Hon. Felix Ellis MP

**Thursday 20 November 2025**

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Helen Burnet (Chair)  
Mr Marcus Verney (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Josh Willie  
Ms Kristie Johnston

#### **OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

Mr Bayley  
Ms Badger  
Ms Butler  
Ms Greene  
Mr Di Falco  
Mr O'Byrne  
Ms Dow  
Mr Mitchell  
Ms Finlay  
Dr Broad

## **IN ATTENDANCE**

### **HON. FELIX ELLIS MP**

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

### **Ministerial Office representatives**

#### **Adam Foster**

Chief of Staff

#### **Rachael Murray**

Senior Adviser, Police, Fire and Emergency Management

#### **Edith Bevan**

Senior Adviser, Police, Fire and Emergency Management

#### **Mitchell Haigh**

Senior Adviser, Business, Industry and Resources

#### **Anne Fidock**

Senior Adviser, Business, Industry and Resources

#### **Jessica Jackson**

Senior Adviser, Skills and Jobs

### **Police Fire and Emergency Management Portfolio**

#### **Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management**

#### **Donna Adams**

Commissioner of Police/Secretary, DPFEM/State Controller

#### **Jonathan Higgins**

Deputy Commissioner of Police

#### **Adrian Bodnar**

Assistant Commissioner Operations

#### **Robert Blackwood**

Assistant Commissioner Specialist Support

#### **Doug Oosterloo**

Assistant Commissioner Capability

#### **Ross Hinkley**

A/Deputy Secretary

#### **Scott Wilson-Haffenden**

A/Executive Director, People & Business Services

**Mandy Denby (observer only)**

Director, Office of the Commissioner/Secretary

**State Fire Commission**

**Jeremy Smith**

Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner

**Matt Lowe**

Deputy Chief Officer - Operations

**Andrea Heath**

Executive Director, Strategy and Capability

**Mick Lowe**

Executive Director, SES and Volunteers

**Brad Menzies**

A/Chair, State Fire Commission

**Business, Industry and Resources Portfolio**

**Department of State Growth**

**Craig Limkin**

Secretary, Department of State Growth

**Anthony Reid**

Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning

**Michael Mogridge**

Deputy Secretary, Economic Development

**Katherine Booth**

Acting Executive Director, Business, Industry and Investment\

**Andrew Johnson**

Director, Office of the Secretary

**Angela Conway**

Deputy Secretary, Business Services

**Vanessa Pinto**

Deputy Secretary, ReCFIT and Resources

**Sarah Russell**

Acting Director, Resources

**Tom Byrne**

Assistant Director Forest Policy

**Forest Practices Authority**

**Anne Chuter**

Chief Forest Practices Officer, Forest Practices Authority

**Mineral Resources Tasmania**

**Ben Waining**

Director Mining Policy

**Alastair Morton**

Director, Mineral Resources Tasmania

**Skills and Jobs Portfolio**

**Department of State Growth**

**Michael Mogridge**

Deputy Secretary, Economic Development

**Alex Paterson**

General Manager, Skills and Workforce

**Stuart Hollingsworth**

Executive Director, Economy and Jobs Strategy

**Peta Sugden**

Senior Director, Industry Insights and Workforce

**Angela Conway**

Deputy Secretary, Business Services

**TasTAFE**

**Tim Gardner**

Chair, TasTAFE

**Will McShane**

Interim Chief Executive Officer

**Colleen Sheehan**

Executive Director, Governance and Corporate Affairs

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## The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

**CHAIR** (Ms Burnet) - The time being 9.00 a.m., Estimates scrutiny will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee and invite the minister to introduce the people at the table for the benefit of Hansard.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. With me is Donna Adams, Commissioner of Police, Secretary of DPFEM and the State Controller; Jonathan Higgins, Deputy Commissioner of Police; Adrian Bodnar, Assistant Commissioner Operations; and Ross Hinkley, Acting Deputy Secretary. We also have Adam Foster, my Chief of Staff, who won't be taking questions. We may may need more people over the course of the day.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much. The time scheduled for the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management is three hours. If the committee would like to take a break halfway through, it will be for 10 minutes. Questions, as you're no doubt aware, should be directed to the minister. The House resolution 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 so it can be included in correspondence to the minister for answer.

I remind you that the microphones are sensitive, so please be aware of that when you're drinking or clinking glasses, celebrating or whatever you might be doing. It's often difficult for Hansard to differentiate when people are talking over each other, so I ask that members speak one at a time. As Chair I will be looking to ensure a fair and appropriate conduct of proceedings today. I give a bit of leniency for the number of questions to ensure that everybody can participate.

Minister, would you like to make a brief opening comment?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. First, I congratulate you. I think this is the first committee that I've sat in with you as Chair, so congratulations on your role as Chair of Committees.

I begin my brief opening remarks by acknowledging the incredible work of our police, fire and emergency services. Their dedication, not just in times of threat to community safety with floods, storms and fire, but every single day keeps each and everyone of us in Tasmania safe and protected and able to live the lives that we enjoy. Our government is committed to being tough on crime and the causes of crime, which is why we are continuing to back our police with the resourcing, tools and powers that they need. Tasmania Police is the most trusted police force in Australia and they're now at record strength with 334 extra officers since 2014 on the ground, making our communities safer.

We've funded a range of important initiatives, from metal detection wands to get knives and other deadly weapons off our streets to the new protection vests and body-worn cameras for our officers to ensure they are safe as they carry out their job of keeping us safe. We're continuing to implement the recommendations of the commission of inquiry through the expansion of our nation-leading, gold standard trauma-informed Arch centres for victim/survivors, now in the north-west of the state, meaning that victims of sexual abuse statewide now have access to these centres that offer a multidisciplinary response, with

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specialised counselling and support services working alongside Tasmania Police under one roof.

We recognise that in times of emergency, our state is heavily reliant on our Tasmanian Fire Service (TFS) and State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers, and we're injecting even more funding into new infrastructure, equipment, protective gear and training for our almost 5000 volunteers statewide. We're also working to make volunteering for the SES and TFS even more attractive, showcasing what's involved in being a volunteer in two highly successful media campaigns and giving the facilities needed to serve by making it more attractive for Tasmanian women and young people to be part of our emergency services. This government is continuing to show that it fully supports and backs our frontline men and women.

**CHAIR** - Have you finished?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, if that works for you. I should have finished with a bit more jazz-hands by the sounds of things.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, there has been a dramatic increase in the reported number of drug-driving convictions. We heard about this yesterday from the committee in the other House. Do you know of any government ministers with convictions for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol?

**Mr ELLIS** - I don't, personally, but I will pass to Tasmania Police if there's anything that's appropriate to share.

**Ms ADAMS** - I wouldn't share an individual example through a budget Estimates process. I'm happy to take a question offline. In the interests of privacy, we wouldn't talk about any matters that may provide information around a person's criminal conviction or a current matter before the court.

**Ms BUTLER** - Can I put that on notice or write to you through the minister?

**Ms ADAMS** - You can, but noting there are privacy and obviously *Personal Information Protection Act* responsibilities we will need to consider in the disclosure of any information.

**Ms BUTLER** - Thank you. Would you consider it appropriate for a minister to serve in Cabinet if they have been convicted of a serious drug or drink-driving offence? We don't need you to provide any privacy details. I'm asking whether you think that's appropriate.

**Mr ELLIS** - I suppose Cabinet is a matter for the Premier. He's obviously got the Cabinet Handbook and a range of other matters that he takes into account. I know that there have been some high-profile drug and drink driving cases of members of parliament over recent months and years as well. Ultimately, the Cabinet is a matter for the Premier.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, you've brought in legislation for hooning. Do you know of any ministers with convictions for dangerous driving, driving without a licence, or hooning?

**Mr ELLIS** - In terms of dangerous driving, I don't know. When I first moved to Tasmania as a young plumber, I didn't realise that you needed to change over your driver's licence when you moved to Tasmania after something like three months, so I was found driving

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on a suspended licence because of that matter. That was about 10 years ago. I did the penalty, am not proud of it, but certainly something I think for all young people when they're moving state, it's important to consider there are some of these administrative paperwork rules that we all need to make sure we're working through. As I mentioned, that's something I've been upfront about, but as far as other members are concerned, again I'll refer to the commissioner if there's anything that -

**Ms BUTLER** - Just on that, though, you've been pretty fierce about labelling members of the community 'TikTok turkeys' and so forth when it comes to hooning, and I absolutely agree that hooning can be extremely dangerous. Driving without a licence also doesn't pass the pub test, as well as speeding and dangerous driving. At the time you were driving without a licence, were you also speeding at the same time, minister?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, I think that particular incident was something like low-range speeding, two demerits, that kind of thing, the kind of penalty that a lot of people who use our roads from time to time unfortunately get.

**Ms BUTLER** - But that is considered hooning, is it not, minister?

**Mr ELLIS** - Low-range speeding? There are particular offences and obviously hooning is a different kind of offence, dangerous driving, loss of traction, all of those sorts of things.

**Ms BUTLER** - Any speeding is considered dangerous driving, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - There are particular offences that those matters relate to. I think in my case it was two demerit points that I got in my early 20s, so something like 10 years ago. Certainly, I encourage all members of the public to drive to the speed limit. We understand that mistakes happen, particularly for our young people, but it's important that people drive with care. In that particular incident, certainly, I wish I had driven with more care, being 10 or so kilometres over the speed limit.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, in the past 18 months, have you, as an individual, been the subject of, or party to, any Supreme Court matters?

**Mr ELLIS** - No. There may have been matters as they relate to the minister for mines, but we'll have to double-check in terms of any kind of particular matters that are related to that role. But me, personally, no.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you. Just to clarify, are we able to put that on notice or do we have to come back and ask you again in that portfolio?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll double-check because there may be matters that ministers are party to as they relate to previous ministers in the role that I now have carriage of in business industry and resources, but as far as me personally, no.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you. To clarify, minister, in the past 18 months, have you, as an individual, incurred any legal costs that have been covered by taxpayer dollars?

**Mr ELLIS** - No.

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - In the Treasurer's Budget speech, he made particular mention of workers' compensation as a pressure on the budget moving forward, and I know this is a particular concern for this portfolio area. Could you please identify to the committee the latest data in relation to workers' compensation claims, particularly for Police, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - The Tasmanian government knows the emergency service responders experience situations most of the general public can't imagine. Emergency service workers run towards danger and are exposed to violence and other distressing situations. We're committed to supporting the physical and mental health of all of our emergency service responders, both career and volunteer.

In 2018, the government introduced a program to support the health and wellbeing of emergency services responders. A 2024 election commitment of \$1 million per annum over four years has seen our commitment of \$3 million a year increase to \$4 million. We support our groundbreaking health and mental wellbeing program that provides proactive preventive intervention measures 24-7 to our police officers, fire service, SES, and Ambulance Tasmania and State Service personnel. The government has introduced nation-leading presumptive PTSD legislation, removed the step-down workers' compensation provision for police officers and expanded presumptive cancer legislation for firefighters, which I'm happy to talk about later, perhaps.

The 2025-26 Budget provides an additional \$58 million - \$14.5 million a year over the Budget and forward Estimates to help make the increase in the DPFEM workers' compensation premiums. I'll pass over to the commissioner to talk through the data.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. For police, there are 249 open claims, 167 of those relate to a mental health illness, 82 relate to a physical injury, there are 102 who are totally incapacitated and in the last financial year we settled 29 workers' compensation claims.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - With the 167 claims in relation to mental health, how many were for total incapacitation?

**Ms ADAMS** - 102. A point of clarification, an open claim doesn't necessarily mean it's a claim that occurred in the last 12 months. Some claims can be open for a long period of time.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - That goes to my next question. Do you have a breakdown of how long some of those claims have been going for - is it easy to report in 12-month lots - or how many are longer than 12 months?

**Ms ADAMS** - It's difficult. I think I got this question yesterday and wasn't able to give the time period for the length of claims over that period.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Do you have an indication of the longest one?

**Ms ADAMS** - No, but there are some claims where we have members who haven't been with Tasmania Police for a significant number of years and they still have open claims, but I can't give you the year.

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**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, I note a question on Monday from the Leader of the Greens to the Premier, and I'll quote:

We are deeply concerned, as are members of Tasmania Police, about any prospect of silencers being approved for use in Tasmania. I referred to just two weeks ago where a woman was charged with the attempted murder of police officers after she allegedly shot at their car in Collinsville.

Minister, how many sound suppressor exemptions have been granted by the commissioner in the last 12 months? How many crimes or incidents have involved suppressors? Are Tasmania Police concerned about their use? And, was a suppressor used in the incident at Collinsvale, as Dr Woodruff implies?

**Mr ELLIS** - First, can I say that we're with our police officers who were involved in that incident. We're very grateful that the impact on them wasn't worse and, of course, the incident with Constable Keith Smith continues to resonate right across our community and particularly in Tasmania Police. I'll pass to the commissioner to see what information we can provide about suppressors and exemptions.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. In relation to the exemptions for sound suppressors, I will have to take that on notice. I have a community safety committee that provides advice to me in relation to requests for exemptions, and I base decisions on the basis of the advice from that committee. I'm aware of the question that was asked on Monday. I can confirm that I have given an exemption to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE) for the use of four sound suppressors in the activities associated with that exemption.

The last part of your question in relation to an incident at Collinsvale, again, mindful of the fact that this matter is before the court, I can confirm that a sound suppressor was used with the weapon that fired upon police who attended that residence.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, I noticed in the Budget there's funding allocated to support a Tasmania Police trial of tasers. Can you outline to the committee the details of this? Also, how are they going to be effective for the police and the community? What are the benefits and safety with those devices?

**Mr ELLIS** - Our government's committed to providing Tasmania Police with the necessary tools and powers to keep themselves and the Tasmanian community safe. That's why our government has committed over \$3.7 million in the 2025-26 state Budget for police protective equipment and safety enhancements, including tasers, wands and multiuse integrated protection vests.

Tasmania Police will trial the use of tasers by frontline officers, starting with a planning phase that will include the development of policy, training and implementation strategies, along with broader community consultation. With funding now committed, Tasmania Police will commence the procurement process of purchasing this equipment. It's anticipated that the procurement will take a minimum of three months. The taser trial will be conducted over 12 months and will incorporate a comprehensive evaluation phase across 50 officers working in frontline positions across various geographical locations within the state. The outcome of

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this evaluation will inform decisions on the potential permanent integration of tasers into the suite of use-of-force options available to frontline general duties officers.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, Supreme Court Justice Michael Brett, when sentencing a man for illegally selling a gun recently, stated that

The use of firearms by criminals in our Tasmanian society is, in the court's experience, at epidemic levels and is a matter of great concern to the community, to the safety of the community and, in my view, must not be tolerated and must be dealt with.

My question is: are you aware that there's been an increase from 288-380 total firearm-related criminal incidents in Tasmania in the last 12 months?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes. We echoed the concern of the Judge. Tasmania Police is committed to actively and diligently investigating all matters relating to illicit firearms. Police recognise that, whether legal or illicit, firearms in the possession of the wrong people present a significant threat to the community. Tasmania Police recently implemented a firearms strategy with the aim to protect the community by reducing the number of illicit firearms and reducing firearms-related offending and harm.

An appropriate response to firearm crime is a key priority. This has been identified as part of the new strategy. Divisions are to report on any firearm crime and firearm seizures. Tasmania Police is committed to the prevention of unlawfully manufactured firearms, which is an expanding issue at a national level. In particular, an emerging issue involves using 3D printers or electronic milling machines to manufacture unregulated homemade firearms and firearm parts. As of 1 July 2024, it is a criminal offence in Tasmania to possess a digital blueprint for the manufacture on a 3D printer or electronic milling machine of a firearm, firearm part or sound suppressor. Furthermore, the changes to the *Firearms Amendment (Community Safety) Act 2023*, commencing 1 July 2024, include restrictions on granting licences to, cancellation of existing licences or refusal grant of firearms licence to participants of outlaw motorcycle gangs.

The remaining matters, included in the amendment act commenced on 20 December 2024. I appreciate the parliament's support for that legislation that we brought through. I'll pass to the commissioner to add to my remarks.

**Ms ADAMS** - Tasmania Police sees firearms in the community as a community safety issue. We made a structural change to our organisation to include firearms and drugs as a new unit. We used to have drug investigation areas, but through the investigation of serious drug trafficking offenders, we saw that firearms were prevalent in that activity, so we made a structural change to ensure that our staff were investigating the trafficking of drugs but also any firearm-related crime. It's a very clear priority for our organisation to ensure that firearms and, in particular, illicit firearms are not in the wrong hands. They can be an enabler of crime and they can also make every police officer's workplace unsafe. We support those members of the community who have a firearms licence who comply with the laws in terms of safe handling and storage of firearms, but when we see firearms that are not safely stored or are in the wrong hands, that's a key priority for us.

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**Ms BUTLER** - My maths is not something I'm particularly well known for, but my calculation of those numbers is that that's a 76 per cent increase in criminal firearm-related incidents. Minister, you've slashed the Police budget by \$30 million. Do you think that this might be a good example of why Police should be excluded from efficiency dividends? That's a huge increase and they're very dangerous, criminal firearm incidents.

**Mr ELLIS** - I suppose one thing we will agree on, Ms Butler, is that your numbers aren't your strong suit, but in terms of the particulars -

**Ms BUTLER** - Well, what is that for an increase? From 288 to 380 is a pretty big increase in percentage.

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Butler, as I mentioned before, we've had an increase of 334 police officers. We're continuing to grow Tasmania Police and that's reflected by the record recruitment we've had going through the academy. That enables us to take stronger action on firearms and a whole range of other criminal activity in the community. It's part of the reason why we've also been able to stand up specialist units, for example, a full-time special operations group for the first time, as well as other areas like the Arch centres for victim/survivors.

What is important is that we give the police the tools and powers that they need to address these matters. That's why we brought through the *Firearms Amendment (Community Safety) Act*. Tasmania has a very high number of firearms, related typically to the fact that we're a rural and regional community, but it's also very important that we make sure that firearms don't fall into the wrong hands. We want to get the balance right between community safety and supporting responsible firearms owners. That's why the additional powers that we've provided to the growing number of Tasmania Police is important.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, this increase has been in the last 12 months since you slashed the Police budget by \$30 million. This isn't about responsible gun ownership; this is about criminal firearm-related incidents. Don't you think it's time you excluded Tasmania Police from efficiency dividends and provide them with the resources they need when you get these kinds of surges in criminal firearms incidents?

**Mr ELLIS** - Tasmania Police, because they -

**Ms BUTLER** - It's a bit of a red flag, don't you concede, minister? Can you answer that yes or no, that it's a red flag?

**Mr ELLIS** - Chair, I'd like to answer and I don't know why I'm being interrupted.

**CHAIR** - Yes, please go ahead and answer.

**Mr ELLIS** - The increase we've seen to police numbers and capability has enabled us to take stronger action on firearms crime. In terms of the approach that we've had for efficiencies, I want to congratulate Tasmania Police on the way they've approached it. It's been things like consolidating our CBD officers, making sure that we're utilising new technology -

**Ms BUTLER** - My question was whether the minister considered the criminal firearms incidents spike over the last 12 months to be a red flag? He hasn't answered that, Chair.

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**CHAIR** - It's up to the minister to answer.

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Butler, as I mentioned, because we have more police and more powers, we're actually able to effect more work and that includes our ability to interdict with criminal organisations and individuals who are hoarding firearms, for example, for a range of criminal purposes. I'll pass to the Commissioner of Police to talk through some of them.

**Ms BUTLER** - You haven't answered my question, minister. I do want to hear from the commissioner, but you didn't answer my question if you consider that that's a red flag.

**Mr ELLIS** - We're certainly concerned about illegal firearms in our community and appreciate the work of Tasmania Police.

**Ms BUTLER** - Criminal firearms incidents.

**Mr ELLIS** - We appreciate the work of Tasmania Police to ensure that we're bringing those people to justice, and I'll pass over to the commissioner to talk through some of those enforcement actions.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister. I want to compliment all of the police officers. Whether they're investigators in firearms and drugs or our uniformed officers, they have done some amazing work in relation to seizing firearms and in particular, as we've spoken about, illicit firearms which were found to be in the wrong hands and can be an enabler of crime and certainly make our workplace unsafe.

When we dedicate a new work area, such as firearms and drugs, it gives a clear emphasis and priority to our officers about where we want our focus and our effort. As I said, I'm really pleased to see that our officers have responded to that strategic priority and we've seen an increase in the number of seizures as a result of that activity.

We're also really pleased to see the support of the community in terms of our firearms amnesties where we have had a number of firearms surrendered through that process where some of those firearms were unregistered or family members didn't realise that a parent or a grandparent had a firearm. We provide a really clear path for them to hand those firearms in by having firearms amnesties in those communities. It will continue to be a priority for Tasmania Police, it is around community safety and it is what the community expects us to do.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, on Monday, tabled in another committee were the conservation areas and reserves that are going under assessment to be opened up to recreational deer shooting under the guise of deer management, although I note most, if not all of them are nowhere near the priority conservation areas we're trying to eradicate deer from. Does Tasmania Police have safety concerns about expanding to recreational shooting on multipurpose land? I note some of these reserves are well-visited tourism areas that have tourism businesses operating out of them as well. Has there been any consultation with Tasmania Police about this proposal?

**Mr ELLIS** - We're obviously working through a process. There has been hunting enabled on multi-use recreational land for generations in Tasmania. I'm happy to talk about that as part of the STT government business enterprise scrutiny hearings in the coming week. Certainly we want to make sure that when people are doing it they're acting in a responsible way, which is the vast majority of Tasmanian firearms owners.

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It's important to get the balance right between community safety and supporting responsible firearms owners, supporting the Tasmanian way of life, and hunting's been a part of the Tasmanian way of life for 35,000 years-plus. We'll work through the arrangements when it comes to the firearms matters for landowners. I'll pass over to the commissioner if there's anything further she wants to add.

**Ms ADAMS** - The only thing I would add in relation to the exemption I have granted for NRE to undertake activities in terms of culling, as I indicated before, we've initiated a community safety firearms review committee. There is legal representation on that committee and they consider requests for exemptions on the basis of community safety. As part of granting that exemption, it is limited to a specific number of employees. It also requires that the shooting activities must be subject to supervision and control as per NRE's approved culling plans. They need to have a reserve closure plan, and they also need to address public safety in a plan. There are a number of requirements for that exemption that they must comply with those conditions.

At the moment, that exemption has been granted for two years and is due to expire on 30 July 2026 as part of when an exemption is coming to an end. We will then review the way in which the exemption has been managed during that period of time, as part of our deliberations, and I take advice from the Community Safety Committee.

**Ms BADGER** - Through you, minister. Can I just confirm that the supervision and control and the exemptions you have in place, that's on the existing land that's permitted for culling by professional operators? Are you applying those same standards to the new land that's being proposed to be opened up? Have you been consulted on those 15 parcels of land? That was the original question.

**Mr ELLIS** - Exemptions are quite a different matter compared to permits for hunting on certain land, particularly for recreation. We're working through a process, as I mentioned, Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) makes very large tracts of land available for hunting purposes, and you can go to the STT website and have a look at where those areas are and what the opportunities are for hunting there. There's a range of other public landowners that do the same.

I think there are some really good opportunities for us to collaborate between our landowners, to talk on the fire side of things about the approach to a tenure-blind approach on public land for a whole range of those operations. Thinking about how we can work more closely across our public landowners, I think is a commonsense approach.

Certainly, in discussions that I've had, the approach that New South Wales takes in a technology-facilitated way to provide recreational hunting access to public lands in a modern way that provides more visibility for hunters, better ability to stage access through that land, is a really interesting opportunity that's been facilitated by some forward-leaning work on technology.

We will continue to work through that process and certainly we want to make sure we get the balance right between community safety and supporting responsible firearms owners.

**Ms BADGER** - I will ask, for a third time: have these 15 parcels of land been consulted on with Tasmania Police? I just note, what happened in New South Wales was accepted by the

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shooters, but it put a lot of fear in the general public that use those public lands, and we do not want to see a repeat of that happen in Tasmania, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - I think you're mischaracterising there. What I'm talking about is the ability to use technologies to manage access to public land, because obviously public lands, from what I understand, New South Wales is similar to Tasmania, it's been hunted on for generations. There are ways that we can use technology to facilitate that in a way that increases safety for the hunters, for the community, and make sure that we get the balance right.

It's probably too early, at this stage, to be consulting on particular parcels, but I'll check with Tasmania Police if that works happened at this stage.

**Mr OOSTERLOO** - Through you, minister. No, there hasn't been any consultation with us, but the act quite clearly allows for - our role as police in administering the legislation is to ensure that recreational hunters who hold a valid firearms licence have permission from the landowner or the responsible government agency, in this case, to shoot on that land. That is effectively what we're interested in.

We obviously play a broader role in terms of making sure that the hunters that have licences, that have permission to shoot on a parcel of land which currently exists and has existed for many years, do so responsibly in accordance with the other firearms laws, which are about safety of the hunters and the people around them.

**Mr ELLIS** - Chair, I will just introduce Assistant Commissioner, Doug Oosterloo, to the table.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, if I can go back to police wellbeing, can I perhaps get some more data? Drilling down into the workers' compensation claims and open cases, are you able to provide data on number of claims by district? So, for the north, western and southern districts.

**Mr ELLIS** - I will ask Tasmania Police to see what's available.

**Ms ADAMS** - I'm not sure I have that. Don't have it? Might need to take that one on notice.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - That's okay. You might need to take this one on notice as well, commissioner. In terms of that data, are you able to break it down into areas of policing, whether it's traffic, uniform, CIB, forensic. Do you collect data on that to understand where the pressure points might be around workers' compensation issues?

**Ms ADAMS** - We do, and yes, I can come back to you in relation to that.

It might be worthwhile to provide you with some information around a recent policy that we have introduced. Currently, the workers' compensation legislation prevents us from backfilling a position within 12 months of a worker going off on workers' compensation. We've introduced a policy that, at the end of the 12-month period we will do a risk assessment to determine whether we need to backfill that position. Ideally, we're trying to get the balance right in terms of supporting an injured worker, but also supporting the workforce in delivering a really valuable service to the community.

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That policy has been in place for probably the last six or seven months, and we hope to be able to manage and work through and assess the vacancies and the absences, with an emphasis on making sure we have the frontline response supported.

**CHAIR** - Are you putting those on notice?

**Ms JOHNSTON** - I'll put those on notice.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, I've reviewed the application form for exemption for antique firearms, which contains an extensive list of mental and physical disability throughout the history section. What advice has your department sought to ensure this is not discriminating against people with disabilities and breaching privacy laws?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Di Falco. The Tasmanian government is committed to progressing amendments to the *Firearms Act 1996* regarding antique firearms. This reform process is underway.

During 2024, the government released its policy for the regulation of antique firearms in Tasmania, and a consultation paper was released. The consultation period closed in November of that year. Drafting of the Firearms Amendments (Antique Firearms) Bill 2025 has been progressed, and this drafting has been informed by the public feedback from the consultation paper.

The Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM) are now proposing to conduct public consultation on the bill, with the timing of the consultation to be determined soon. In addition to opening the consultation to the public, DPFEM will be proactively contacting stakeholders and seeking their feedback.

I'll pass to the commissioner to talk through the forms process.

**Ms ADAMS** - If you're okay, minister, I will ask Assistant Commissioner Oosterloo to respond to that.

**Mr OOSTERLOO** - Through you, minister. The application for the exemption for antique firearms was developed to support Firearms Services receiving the information it needs to assess whether or not the persons requesting those exemptions were fit and proper people and comply with the other elements of the act. That's what's in place right at this moment, pending the progression of those amendments to the legislation.

On top of that, the firearms licence application form is being redesigned in consultation with stakeholders. A process has been going on for about 12 months around that consultation, which you may be aware of, Mr Di Falco. Those changes to the form that seek further information about the person's mental health and medical, physical health and other relevant conditions, are based on recommendations from coronial processes and outcomes that police, and Firearms Services in particular, seek more information and have a better understanding of a person's health history.

Changes have been made to make sure we can get that information. That is to make sure that we are able to make an informed decision in accordance with the responsibilities we have under the *Firearms Act*, which include gaining information. The term 'fit and proper' includes

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an assessment of someone's health, which includes physical health and mental health. This is to make sure that when that person has access to a firearm, they will use it responsibly and there's not a risk, or at least the risk is mitigated, around that person using it to harm themselves or others.

The changes being made to the current application form, yes, are in line with the questions that were asked as part of that application process. They're designed to make sure that we are only providing firearms, or access to firearms, to people that are fit and proper.

When someone answers yes to a question around their mental health, or provides information that suggests they've had some issues with mental health or other health-related questions, that doesn't preclude the person from having access to a firearm, it simply prompts further enquiries to be made and in most cases that involves a referral to a medical health professional. Depending on the nature of condition, we seek for the applicant to provide some sort of medical report to allow us to make an informed assessment about that person's suitability. That's what happens on all occasions. It does not preclude the person from gaining access, it simply prompts a further level of inquiry.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, it's pleasing to see that on 1 July 2025 there was an addition of a permanent commander to the Tasmania Police community engagement functions, so the former division is now a standalone command, as recommended by the Weiss independent review. Could you outline to committee how this command will operate and how it's expected to strengthen relationships between police and the Tasmanian community?

**Mr ELLIS** - The safety of the Tasmanian community is Tasmania Police's highest priority, as set out in the Tasmania Police Strategy 2023-2028 - Our Way Forward. The strategy aims to maintain the trust of the community and to keep them safe through targeting Tasmania Police's operational response and increasing engagement and reassurance activities. During 2024-25, Tasmania Police's community engagement functions were consolidated into a dedicated division led by an Inspector of Police with a sergeant; seven constables, one in the west, two in the north and four in the south; and two State Service employees, one in the west and one in the south.

As the member noted, with the addition of a permanent commander, the division is now a standalone command. The command has an ongoing focus on increasing engagement with our community, particularly with Tasmania's diverse and vulnerable groups. The command continues to provide programs that build relationships, reduce crime and assist members of the community at a higher risk of becoming a victim through coordination of crime prevention advice and support; participation in the national evidence-based education program aimed at preventing online child sexual exploitation, the ThinkUKnow program; provision of support to multicultural communities and humanitarian settlement program; support and liaison with Crime Stoppers Tasmania, police, community and youth clubs and Neighbourhood Watch; direct liaison with community groups to assist in connecting vulnerable community victims to local police stations to effectively support reporting of crimes; and direct engagement and liaison with the Tasmanian sporting community and groups regarding child safeguarding. These are direct recommendations of the Weiss review.

The community engagement command continues to engage with stakeholders to assess and develop new ways of increasing reassurance and engagement opportunities with vulnerable and diverse community groups. Tasmania Police also has dedicated liaison officers for specific

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groups, including Aboriginal and multicultural communities, as well as the LGBTIQ+ community. I look forward to continuing to support the important work of the community engagement command.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, to make sure we're clear, you introduced legislation to crack down on hooning and you want our roads safer, as do we all, minister, but if I'm correct, you've admitted this morning to having been convicted for speeding while driving without a licence. Minister, you've called hoons 'TikTok turkeys'. What does that make you?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler. As I mentioned, there was an administrative matter when I first moved to Tasmania as a young plumber in my early 20s. I should have been aware that you need to change your licence over when you move states, but I wasn't at the time and subsequently was charged with a matter I believe carried the penalty of two demerit points. It's important that everyone's driving safely on the roads but we know more broadly how important it is that we take action on hooning. Hooning is an aggravated manner of driving that creates unacceptable risk to all road users and causes unnecessary anxiety across the community. The penalties associated with hooning offences range in severity from fines and driver's licence disqualification to vehicle clamping and legislation.

Legislative amendments that introduce the offence and penalties for road rage, for example, have recently been presented to the House of Assembly and are currently awaiting debate. These amendments will also increase the penalties for driving and hooning offences. I encourage all members to support it. I also encourage all members in their daily driving to stay safe on the roads. Certainly from my perspective, an oversight a little over 10 years ago when I was a young plumber was definitely something I wish I hadn't done. Like many people who find themselves 10 kilometres over the speed limit, I regret that I was, but I'm certainly committed to making sure that we're driving safe.

People driving in an aggravated manner are creating unacceptable risks to all road users. I think it's important for this House to take action on that. People make mistakes. That's why we don't confiscate and crush people's cars when they drive 10 kilometres over the speed limit, but when people deliberately acting in a manner that is highly unsafe, that aggravated driving manner we're speaking about with hooning, I think it's important that the House take action on that. We're all accountable for our driving actions, no matter how long ago, and I'd be in the same boat.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, can I just clarify? When you move interstate and you have a licence from another state, that doesn't mean that licence isn't valid in Tasmania, so it must have must have actually expired. Is that correct? Just because you haven't transferred it across to another state - a lot of us here have lived in other states. Can you clarify what that means? Are you being misleading or are you confused?

**Mr ELLIS** - From my understanding, you need to transfer your licence over from another state.

**Ms BUTLER** - You do, but it doesn't make your licence expired. You have a certain amount of time when you move to a new place.

**Mr ELLIS** - That's right, you do have a certain amount of time.

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**Ms BUTLER** - But you were done for driving without a licence, minister, if I'm correct.

**Mr ELLIS** - As I said, Ms Butler, I had a licence in another state and I didn't transfer it over within the prescribed time. I wish I had, and certainly these days I would have made sure that I did.

**Ms BUTLER** - But had your Western Australian licence expired and you were driving in Tasmania without a licence, minister? Is that correct?

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Butler, as I mentioned before, you need to change over your licence when you move to a new state within a certain period of time. To my understanding, that's what the rules are.

**Ms BUTLER** - How long had you been living in Tasmania and how long had you been driving without a licence?

**Mr ELLIS** - I moved to Tassie in 2014, and it was in 2015, so the next year.

**Ms BUTLER** - So how long had you been driving without a licence, minister?

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned, I was licensed in Western Australia and unfortunately I didn't realise I needed to make those administrative arrangements, so as I mentioned before -

**Ms BUTLER** - Would you like me to put that on notice - how long you were driving without a license, minister, because that is a very serious offence?

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Butler, we have already been through it. It was an administrative mistake that I made in my early 20s as a young plumber moving interstate. I regret that I wasn't more on top of my paperwork at the time.

**Ms BUTLER** - No, but how long were you driving -

**CHAIR** - Ms Butler, I think we'll move on to the next question.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, on hooning; you have been tough on 'TikTok turkeys', but you're not afraid to post videos of hooning on your own Facebook page. I and another Greens colleague, Ms Burnet, had a briefing with Tasmania Police around some matters not necessarily exclusive to hooning but we did have a discussion around the promotion and the fact that when we're sharing those kinds of videos it's not a deterrent. If anything, it's sometimes considered a compliment by the people committing that offence and doing the reckless, irresponsible thing, to have a minister or the police then sharing that online. Will you seriously crack down and stop sharing those sorts of things online? It's not a deterrent to stop it from happening.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger. Also, just confirming with you, Ms Butler, it is three months that someone has to do the changeover with their licence when they move interstate.

**Ms BUTLER** - And how long -

**CHAIR** - We'll leave that until your next round.

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**Mr ELLIS** - I'm happy to clarify the law.

**Ms BADGER** - No, if you've got the answer for Ms Butler, I'm happy for you to say that now.

**Mr ELLIS** - I've just provided it.

**Ms BADGER** - That wasn't her question.

**Ms BUTLER** - How long were you driving without a licence?

**Mr ELLIS** - In terms of your question, Ms Badger, it's also important for people to understand the policing capabilities. That's part of the reason Tasmania Police, for example, shared the video of drone footage taken over an area here in Hobart that is then able to track the person who committed the hooning offence and then shows a visual demonstration of police cars locating that person and pulling them up. It's important for the community, and people doing the wrong thing, to understand that police have significant capabilities in that regard. That's part of the reason Tasmania Police shared that. We want to also reassure the community more broadly, that if they're reporting these kinds of offences to Tasmania Police, then Tasmania Police has the capability to take action.

Now, it is important that we also take action on people glorifying crimes, but showing the tools and powers of law enforcement is quite a different thing. I'll pass to the commissioner if there's anything further to add.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. We recently, through our media, published some footage of hooning as part of a crackdown. We think it is important for the community to understand the capability we have to detect vehicles as part of trying to educate motorists and drivers that that type of behaviour is completely unacceptable and we do have response capabilities.

Hooning was featured quite significantly in our community survey. Tasmanians want us to take action on poor and dangerous driving and, as a result, the use of drones and the work of our uniformed police in the coordinated response to some of the poor levels of driving, has been quite successful in being able to identify some of those poorer road users.

**Ms BADGER** - I don't think anyone is disagreeing that it's important for the community to be aware, whether they're committing the crime or concerned about hooning, to understand what resources Tasmania Police have to crack down on that and how that's changing. I wouldn't underestimate the intellect of Tasmanians, most of them understand how drones work and there's a way to mediate what responses are available to crack down on this crime without showing it and making it something that people might strive to have shared and be a part of. Will you seriously reconsider how that is being mediated to the Tasmanian people into the future? That's probably more directed at yourself, minister, than Tasmania Police, appreciating that that was there's only been one incident recently where that's been shared.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Ms Badger. It's important that we are communicating about our police capabilities.

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, it's very important to me and to the community that our police are supported in the very difficult job that they do. The high levels of workers compensation claims speak to the pressures, I suppose, that police are facing on a day-to-day basis and we want to make sure that they're safe in that job.

In answer to a question I asked previously, about workers compensation claims, the commissioner raised the issue that there's a policy - if I understand it correctly, I don't want to misunderstand it - that when someone's on workers' compensation, there's no backfill for that position for a period of 12 months at which point it will be reviewed. Do you have an indication then, if there are any workers' compensation claims that arising from work stress, overload issues that are, therefore, not backfilled, creating additional pressure to the colleagues of that person who's out on workers' compensation for overload stress issues? I imagine their stress would only be multiplied if that person is then out on workers compensation and that position is not backfilled. Can you speak to that minister, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass to the commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. When we have an absence, which we identify is going to continue due to the medical information that we're provided, we asked the local area, normally led through the commander, to make an assessment of the impact of that absence. If there is an identified risk to being able to deliver the service and the impact on the team or that work area, they can make a submission for that position to be, what we call, shadowed. That essentially means we keep the person who is on long-term incapacitation in the position, in accordance with the legislation, but we put another person in and backfill that position. As I said, we use the term 'shadowing.' We've done that on a number of occasions, to ensure that critical work areas have the resourcing that they need and our commanders, supported through our assistant commissioners, have the ability to move their staff around their districts, to ensure that the critical areas in any particular work area that's deemed to be at a lower resourcing level can be supported through the reallocation of resourcing.

It is a challenge. We have 102 people off and it does put pressure on us, in terms of the high expectation the community has to be a responsive and proactive police service. It's a daily management strategy to make sure that we are balancing those needs, appropriately supporting our officers who are off, making sure that there's the right balance in supporting the work areas at the same time. As I said it, it is a challenge.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Further on from that, do you have, through you minister, an indication of the overtime pressures, and in which particular areas? We are obviously asking our police officers to do more and more, their duties I'm assuming wouldn't often fall within neat rostering timetables and sometimes they're required to do overtime. Do you have an indication of where those particular pressures are, and what areas of policing you're finding that overtime requests or additional work beyond rostered hours is required?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Johnston. I will pass to the commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Overtime is a feature of policing and it can come about as a result of an interdiction that may lead to an arrest and see somebody working beyond their rostered hours. Yes, it also can come as a result of needing to backfill a position because we have a specific service delivery requirement. I'd have to have a look to see whether - I probably only have organisational level overtime figures amongst the pack, I will try to have a look for you.

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One thing I can say in relation to overtime is the change to the rostering - the six and six and four and four rosters were perpetuating significant amounts of overtime because of the structural deficiency that we had with those rosters. When you're bringing people back to work shifts on their days off because you don't have enough people to staff those rosters, or are asking them to continue beyond their 10.5 hours and pushing them into 13-14 hour shifts to backfill a roster that we simply don't have sufficient numbers to run, that's one of the contributing factors for us moving away from that roster. We are now back to our award-base roster and that has alleviated some of the pressures from overtime.

To add, we have a fatigue management framework that will commence on 1 January next year. It's been subject to significant consultation and engagement with our staff. That fatigue management framework will have a cap on the amount of overtime that an individual can work in a fortnight. That's been based on work health and safety experts telling us how we need to manage the fatigue and, importantly, the cumulative effects of fatigue on our officers, which sometimes overtime can contribute to.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Is that a document that can be tabled?

**Ms ADAMS** - The fatigue management framework? Yes, we can. It's probably still in draft, but due to be finalised - or is it?

**Mr OOSTERLOO** - Through you, it's been finalised.

**Ms ADAMS** - Okay, we can do that.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - It can be tabled? Thank you very much.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, what is the average timeframe for someone to be granted a firearms licence through the firearms services? What is the allocated budget for firearm services in 2025? And, in your view, is this meeting the requirements of the committee? Is it fit for purpose? Is the process built on a triage system or is it by application date?

**CHAIR** - Any more questions there? It's quite a lot of questions there, but all related. Try your hardest, Mr Ellis.

**Mr ELLIS** - Absolutely not a problem at all. Thank you, Mr Di Falco and I recognise this is an important matter for many in the community. In late 2024, the firearms service was impacted by some significant staff turnover, which resulted in service delivery delays. During that period, a backlog of new firearms licence applications resulted with delays in processing licence renewal applications. Measures have been put in place to actively reduce the backlog, including improving overtime to reduce backlogs, especially for new licence applications, and staff redeployment to support critical review functions. Firearms Services are continuing to actively manage workloads to maintain best service delivery levels and the main consideration is prioritising tasks that could impact community safety.

Other strategies have been developed to address current backlogs and improve overall service delivery into the future, including engaging staff who had previously worked in Firearms Services to assist with overtime processing, because this is quite a specialised task. Staff recruitment for the 2027 licence peak will commence in early 2026 to avoid any impacts from late 2026 and throughout 2027. There will be weekly reporting on progress against

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backlogs to senior management and TasTAFE will also schedule additional courses to cope with increased demand following the measures put in place to address the backlog in processing new applications. I will pass over to the commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister. As you've indicated, we have put some additional resources into that area to work through the number of firearms licence applications we've received. There has been an increase in the number of firearms licence applications and they are considered on the basis of ensuring that an applicant understands the importance of the compliance requirements to safely store and handle firearms, and there is a number of checks and balances they work through to ensure that that can be complied with, including as Assistant Commissioner Oosterloo has already spoken about, that an applicant meets the fit and proper person test which is in the legislation.

I'd also add that there isn't actually a time imperative in the legislation for processing an application, but we do that on best endeavours to ensure that an applicant gets a timely response to their application within the resourcing requirements we have available at the time.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, we know that Tasmanians are directly affected by cybercrime from online shopping scams, identity theft, fraudulent investment schemes and cyber attacks that target every everyday people. These crimes can cause significant financial loss and emotional distress for individuals and families. Could you outline to the committee how Tasmania Police help protect the community from these types of crimes?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermey. Cybercrime is an ever-increasing challenge given its borderless nature, the pace of technological change and the significant risk it poses to individuals, organisations and economies.

Tasmania Police recognises the importance of combating cybercrime by utilising partnerships with Commonwealth, state and territory agencies in conjunction with industry and non-government organisations. Tasmania Police has a dedicated Cybercrime Unit to manage Tasmanian individuals and organisations who fall victim to cybercrime. Tasmania Police has developed a response plan aimed at providing Tasmanian victims of cybercrime with immediate remediation advice to prevent further victimisation and recovery of funds where possible.

The Tasmania Police strategy adopts the national approach to address three distinct elements - detection, prevention and protection; investigation, disruption and prosecution; and recovery and support for victims.

Over the past three years, Tasmania Police has developed the following actions: a dedicated cybercrime unit responsible for investigations received via the national ReportCyber platform; a qualified team of cryptocurrency investigators trained in numerous platforms at a national standard; implementation of a cybercrime and cryptocurrency workshop to increase the knowledge and skills of police members in general duties and investigative areas; and representation on numerous national committees fostering strong partnerships to facilitate information-sharing, focusing on detecting cybercrime threats and protecting the community.

Pleasingly in Tasmania, the number of victims of cybercrime and total loss is trending downwards. In 2022 the number of Tasmanian victims was 1622, with a total loss of \$13.2 million. In 2023 there were 1766 victims with a total loss of \$17.8 million, which

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represents a small jump. However in 2024 the number of victims and total loss trended down again, with 1509 victims and a total loss of \$12.3 million. In 2025 to 30 September there's been 1050 victims and a total loss of \$5.7 million. These statistics demonstrate the excellent work and dedication of Tasmania Police in detecting and preventing cybercrime in Tasmania.

I'd also like to highlight the work of Detective Sergeant Paul Turner, who was recently awarded the Tasmania Police Investigator of the Year award highlighting his nation-leading work in online threats and cybercrime. Since commencing his role in leading the Cyber Investigations Unit, Detective Sergeant Turner has been developing the cybercrime capability of Tasmania Police to respond to complex and evolving cyber threats. In partnership with the Australian Federal Police and the Department of Premier and Cabinet, he's also co-developed a cyber awareness program for school students which promotes ethical online behaviour and digital safety.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, there's a quote from when you were talking about hooning legislation. You started today confirming that the government has commenced drafting on our new legislation which will make a significant impact in terms of our ability to keep communities safe from hoons on our roads who think that they are frankly above the law. Minister, did you think you were above the law when you were driving unlicensed and speeding?

**Mr ELLIS** - No, Ms Butler, but I was certainly disappointed at the time and should have been much better with my paperwork and also stuck to the speed limit. This is something I've shared in the media publicly in the past and it happened more than 10 years ago. I'm not entirely sure why this is the most important thing in your world at the moment as it relates to police.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, you didn't come back to me on how long you were driving unlicensed. Are you going to provide that information?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm happy to write to you, Ms Butler, on the particular months.

**Ms BUTLER** - Just to ensure there is no confusion around this, will you table for the committee the details of your conviction and penalty notices?

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Butler, I'm happy to see what's available. As I mentioned before, this is something that -

**Ms BUTLER** - Will you table that, minister? It's a very serious matter and you are Police minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - Certainly, when I was in my early twenties as a plumber I made the kinds of administrative and low-range driving mistakes that people in their early twenties tend to make. It's not something I'm proud of but it is something I've shared publicly in the past, including with the media. I'm happy to see what's available to share with you and anyone else.

**Ms BUTLER** - And you will table that today, minister, for this committee?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm happy to take it on notice, Chair

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**Ms BADGER** - Am I permitted to ask a question about fire or are we exclusively doing police?

**Mr ELLIS** - We'll do fire after, if that works, because we have to change all the people at the table and that sort of stuff.

**Ms BADGER** - Okay, sure, no worries. Can I just get clarification on the time allowed if we're going to split up the portfolios so we can arrange our questions given that wasn't outlined at the beginning?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm in the committee's hands, Chair, as far as how long you want to spend on each one?

**CHAIR** - It's really up to you as a committee as to how much time you would like, as far as I'm concerned.

**Ms BADGER** - I've only got one question, so if no-one else has got one I'll just wait until right at the end, perhaps.

**Ms BUTLER** - I also have some questions on fire and SES as well.

**CHAIR** - Are there any more questions particularly for police?

**Mrs GREENE** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Alright, so just stick to those, Ms Badger.

**Mr ELLIS** - We've got to call AC Blackwood to the table at some stage.

**Ms BADGER** - My question is to Mr Blackwood - no.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well done.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, could you please outline some of the details of the use-of-force options trial funded in the Budget? I understand from the media and also in your response to the member for Clark's, Mr Vermey, question before that will involve the rollout of tasers. However, it's an options trial, which sort of implies that other technologies would be involved, so can you please provide some more details on that line item?

**Mr ELLIS** - Sure, Ms Badger. This is an important part of the Budget that provides a 12-month trial of tasers for frontline officers which provides extra use-of-force options and greater safety in high-risk situations. I'll pass over to the commissioner to talk through some of the details.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister. Developing a safe model of policing is a key priority for Tasmania Police and it is a key priority in our annual strategy. We want to continue to build a safe environment for our police officers. As you can imagine, the jobs that they face each day can be quite challenging. As part of our commitment to a safe model of policing, we undertook a review of our operational skills training and our use of force options.

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In addition to that, we conducted a work health and safety review as a result of the tragic North Motton incident. In both of those reviews it was identified that we had a capability gap in terms of the use of tasers. Every jurisdiction across Australia has a taser as a capability that they can utilise. We've been very cautious in moving towards the use of tasers. We wanted to ensure that the use of tasers is well regulated through training and a clear understanding of when that use-of-force option should be relied upon by our officers.

Following that cautious approach, we believe that a trial of taser conducted over the next 12 months will allow us an opportunity to really evaluate how taser is used during that time. It would be ideal if we're not using it at all and we don't have any critical incidents, but unfortunately, it's the nature of policing that our officers are attending critical incidents every day.

We will look to deploy the taser over a period of 12 months to 50 officers. We are going to purchase 50 tasers, and we'll take advice from our Operational Skills unit as to where they should be deployed, but most likely in our 24/7 and country areas. Then we will seek to evaluate it. If we think the gap has been closed because we've implemented that new capability, we will then provide a budget submission to look at a broader expansion of that capability.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you. To clarify, as far as that line item in the Budget's concerned, that was called the 'Force options' - that is exclusively relating to tasers?

**Ms ADAMS** - If you're referring to the line item, it actually refers to - If you're talking about police protective equipment and safety enhancements, as it's described? That line item has three things.

**Ms BADGER** - Yes, as it's related to the 'Forced options trial', which is funded.

**Ms ADAMS** - In that particular line item it covers the MIPV vests, as well as the wands, and then 50 tasers.

**Ms BADGER** - Yes, okay, great. Thank you.

**Ms BADGER** - Sorry, that was just clarifying the first part of my question.

My second question - you mentioned that the review that's gone into making this decision, obviously, there have been reviews in the past into this as well that haven't resulted in this decision, in 2009, 2011 and 2016. Is that review public? Is it going to be made public, to help the public understand what's changed since the previous reviews, and whether that also looks into the training that police are going to be undertaking as well?

**Mr ELLIS** - It would be fair to say one of the big things that's changed is actually taser technology. Tasmania Police's ability to effectively leapfrog some of those older generations of tasers into a much more effective use of force option has really prompted a rethink, but I'll pass over to the Commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Through you, minister. I wouldn't see that report being made public. It does identify our use of force options and provides some commentary around other states and I don't think it would be appropriate to share the jurisdictional scan of other jurisdictions. What I can say is that I'm really proud that we've taken a really deliberate approach to

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continually assessing that gap. Those reviews demonstrate that. We have been really cautious in terms of the decision-making to consider taser.

What we have found, though, is there is a prevalence of knives in Tasmania. The interactions and the use of force reports that we get on a daily and weekly basis highlight that we have more members in the community that are carrying knives. Our officers are also facing a greater number of people who are affected by alcohol, mental health-related issues and illicit drugs. This is about keeping those individuals safe but also our police officers safe, and providing an additional capability for them to consider in the resolution of that incident in a safe way.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, through you and perhaps the commissioner. I assume that when an officer exits a service, exit interviews are conducted. Can you give us a breakdown on how, over the last 12 months of those who've left the service, how long they've served for, and do you keep data about the reasons for them exiting the service?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnston, and I'll pass to the commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you, we do keep very good exit interview surveys, and the majority of our staff do participate in those surveys. There are three general categories that we list, I guess, as a reason for somebody leaving. One is for new employment, one is family responsibilities, and one is essentially burnout from policing. I guess they are the three categories.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Retirement?

**Ms ADAMS** - It is important - I can't give you the exact on each of those - actually, I may have it in here.

**Mr ELLIS** - Because retirement's different to resigned.

**Ms ADAMS** -Yes. What I do want to say is that the figures around separations, we're talking about 67 people in the last 12 months that actually resigned. We had 27 people retire, we had two terminations, and we had four transfer to the State Service. Of those resignations, then you reduce those by another 11 who were trainees. Because of the uplift in our recruitment program, we basically have doubled the amount of trainee programs, so that's not an unusual figure. We had 22 of the 67 settled a workers' compensation claim. Four left as a result of disciplinary matters. So, we're really left with 30 that were seeking alternative employment.

That's around 2.8 per cent of all separations where somebody is actually going to another job. That's not to say that we don't want to keep our officers, because our priority is to invest in our current staff. We want to value the experience that they build up. We see them as our future leaders. It is very much our focus. We're in the process of developing a recruitment and retention strategy. We've been engaging our workforce in relation to that, and we had an excellent workshop in Campbell Town, with all of our inspectors and commanders, to start some early conversations around retention.

We have what we call a 'think tank', which is an opportunity to bring various different ranks and levels and experience across the state together to brainstorm ideas and initiatives on retention, and that's happening in December. Retention is very much a priority for us, because

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we've got so many jobs within a job, and if we can create the opportunities for our staff to move throughout the organisation when they feel that - They might be a little bit tired from an operational role. We have a number of non-operational roles. We really want to build and layer somebody's career.

We do spend a lot of time talking about the life cycle of a police officer and, I guess, overlaying where we see people who may well experience a mental health-related workers' compensation matter, and trying to look at where we can implement interventions.

It's an absolutely critical priority for every one of the leadership group here to have a clear investment in our staff, and our staff to feel that investment, because we do value what they do and we would love them to be the future leaders and to be sitting at this table in, you know, 20 years' time.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Regarding those that have left to go to other jobs, either in the public service or elsewhere, you obviously invested heavily in those officers during their time in the service. Is there any incentive for them to return in terms of - You might want to keep them back. What do you do in terms of trying to incentivise return to the service?

**Mr ELLIS** - We have someone that's reconnected with the Tasmania Police service speaking at this table, but you're right, it's a wonderful way for us to bring some of that capability back. I'll pass to you, commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you again, minister, and through you. Thank you for asking that question because, again, another change that we've made based on feedback from our staff is, we now have a policy where, when someone leaves, within two years, we write them a letter to say, 'Two years is up, how are you liking it over there, would you like to come back? If you come back, we'll recognise all your skills, your rank and everything that you achieved whilst you were in Tasmania Police.' Now, that policy has been in for about 18 months and 11 people have come back. That's 11 people we may not have seen -

**Ms JOHNSTON** - The 11 you lost from your trainees have come back?

**Ms ADAMS** - I've spoken to everyone of them to understand why they've come back. It's the camaraderie, the support; they feel the value of what they actually do and the impact that they can have on the community. We see that as being, again, an initiative of our staff giving us feedback and us translating that into an organisational policy that's having a really good impact.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's a compliment to the quality of Tasmania Police training and that ethos of service and integrity does mean our people are highly sought after. In some ways, that's a good thing, but it's also a challenge, making sure that good people stay. Certainly, the training that you get through Tasmania Police can set you up for life and the interest that we have in our members from public sector, private sector, right across the economy, is as encouraging as much as it's a challenge.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, while we're on the subject of training, are there special training requirements for police officers to undertake to inspect firearm storage? If not, what training is being delivered to ensure that the officers are up to date on the complexities of the

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regulations? Do you think there is a need for additional funding to firearms services for educational material?

**Mr ELLIS** - It is a specialised area where we continue to train our people. It's part of our core business, but I'll pass over to the commissioner to talk further about that.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. The personnel that work in the firearms service are a combination of police officers and State Service employees. The State Service employees become experts in terms of the understanding of the legislation, and our police officers perform the compliance checks of firearms owners and their storage and handling of firearms. Those officers have been in their roles for a significant period of time, and have developed quite an expertise. Every police officer is provided training in terms of the legislation that we obviously enforce, and we have police officers who work in firearms services who are experts in understanding the legislation and their interpretation of the legislation.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, can you outline some of Tasmania Police's proactive policing strategies that have contributed to a reduction in crime across our communities? One of the things that I've seen is the 'cuppa with the copper,' which certainly gets a great reaction around the community as well, not being a force but just coming up to, which is a good incentive.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermev, Tasmania Police has established a number of taskforces across the state that are designed to target recidivist offenders to drive down crime rates. While the taskforce is focused on specific regions, they remain agile in their approach to addressing crime and emerging issues, using intelligence from the public to decide their priorities. Taskforce Raven was established in February 2025, targeting recidivist offenders in youth crime across the northern district, specifically in the areas of crime, retail theft and antisocial behaviour. The taskforce supports uniformed police with high-visibility patrols and proactive intervention strategies. Since its inception, there's been a downward trend in crime across the district.

Taskforce Respect was established in July 2025 specifically to address public order and crime issues in the Glenorchy division in the electorate of Clark, including shoplifting offences. The members attached to the taskforce directly support the uniformed shifts through proactive patrols of retail precincts in the wider community.

Also in the electorate of Clark, Taskforce Saturate has been in operation for several years across the southern district. It's an agile taskforce supporting both uniform and criminal investigation areas. While this taskforce does support public order responses in public places, it predominantly focuses on targeting recidivist offenders and those committing volume crime across the community.

The great work of our frontline officers and taskforce members is demonstrated by the crime statistics available in 2024-25. In 2024-25, total offences decreased by 4 per cent to 34,609. Contributing to the reduction in crime was decreases in offences against property by 5 per cent, offences against the person by 2 per cent and fraud and similar offences by 16 per cent. The clearance rate for total offences increased to 53 per cent in 2024-25, which is the highest rate recorded in 60 years. The clearance rate being effectively the solved rate. The reduction in crime in 2024-25 followed three years of crime increases.

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Tasmania Police's targeted taskforce approach has proven highly effective in reducing crime across the state, by focusing on recidivist offenders, youth crime and public order issues. And, by remaining agile to emerging challenges, these taskforces have directly supported frontline policing and delivered measurable results.

You did ask about Cuppa with a Cop and our community partnership. I will pass over to the Police Commissioner to add to the answer because I think she would be, just about the only commissioner in the country who actually attends cuppa with a cop and is there working with the public in Burnie.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. I should recognise Neighbourhood Watch. This is their initiative. It's a fantastic initiative and it's something that we're really proud to partner them with.

I've been to four cuppa with a cops now, and what a great opportunity to sit down and listen to community members and really hear what their concerns are. There's been a number of slight tweaks to what we do in terms of some of our patrols and interactions based on that feedback. It's a real privilege to be able to hear what the concerns are firsthand. What is also a privilege is to get the feedback because our community have a strong level of support and respect for what Tasmania Police do and it's really nice that they feel that they can provide that level of feedback, when I attend those events.

**CHAIR** - Committee, do you want to keep going with the police for another round or two rounds and then we'll have a break? Two more rounds and then we'll have a break.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, I have a question about Radio Dispatch Services (RDS). We know RDS average around 1700 calls per day, 000 inclusive. It's a very busy workplace. Our figures suggest in 2014-15 around 36,500 calls were made to RDS over a year. In 2023-24, that's just about doubled to around 721,000 calls made. That represents an increase of about 114 per cent over the last 10 years. It's our understanding there hasn't been any changes to staffing structure in that time as well. Minister, how many 000 calls are answered on the first presentation in RDS?

And, just to state what an amazing job the staff at RDS do as well.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, that's right. They're certainly incredible people. I will pass to the Commissioner of Tasmania Police to provide that information.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. I don't think we have that information. I'm looking up to Assistant Commissioner Bodnar just to check. We need to take that on notice.

**Mr HIGGINS** - I can answer that, through you, minister. There has been an increase in staff. Between 2014 and 2018, we increased by 10 sworn staff in that area and that was five sergeants and five constables.

**Ms BUTLER** - Okay, thank you. It's our understanding that there was a report that was completed around August last year to do with radio dispatch services' minimum staffing levels. Are we able to have a copy of that report tabled? I haven't been able to find it anywhere, so I don't think it's a public document. Through the minister, sorry.

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**Mr HIGGINS** - Through the minister. Again, I'm going back in time to previous roles. It was an internal review done with a committee that was set up with the Police Association to do a review, which was during that period I was just talking about, actually. That was around staffing the changes in the call and dispatch model that was later implemented, and the committee was disbanded after it was no longer required with the consent at that time of the Police Association, but it could always be reinvigorated if it became an issue.

The review touched on the model that was in place and it goes back to the original site they were in, which was the other side of the building where they currently are now. Essentially, they did everything, so we had telephonists who took calls for general inquiries, but essentially the operators would be call and dispatch and they did everything, so part of that review was the staffing. Then with the infrastructure changes that happened with the completely new centre they were put into, they went to a completely different model in call and dispatch. There's more than just police there, there's some great civilian staff who would have been there for many years as well, and they don't take the call and then dispatch as such, necessarily, there are dedicated groups that do certain functions within it, which has worked particularly well. It's a completely different workplace than it was back in that 2014-2018 period.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, what is the daily call abandonment rate over the last six months? That's the amount of 000 calls that go unanswered. How long are people waiting for their calls to be answered?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler, I will pass that over to Tasmania Police.

**Ms ADAMS** - Again, we will have to get that information. I don't have that to hand.

**Ms BUTLER** - Okay, thank you very much. Will you table -

**CHAIR** - Are you asking for that to be taken on notice?

**Ms BUTLER** - It's on the same thing. Would you table the radio dispatch services minimum staffing levels report, or that briefing?

**Mr HIGGINS** - I think we'd have to have a look at it, because it was some time ago now. The purpose of it was for internal -

**Ms BUTLER** - I think it was August last year that it was finalised.

**Mr HIGGINS** - I'm talking about the one before that.

**Ms BUTLER** - Oh right, sorry. If I put that as a question on notice, as a request for it to be tabled, would that be appropriate?

**Mr HIGGINS** - Perhaps for us to consider, but I'm not sure I can say now if we could table it.

**Ms BUTLER** - For consideration?

**Mr HIGGINS** - Yes, I am happy to write back to you.

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**Ms BUTLER** - Thank you very much.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, there's \$500,000 for the first financial year and \$300,000 for the second that's been provided in this Budget for the Weiss review recommendations. That funding is allocated for a restorative engagement framework, a community engagement command and to establish a dedicated victim management team. Can you please provide us with a breakdown of how that funding is being allocated?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger. At the request of Commissioner Adams, an independent review was undertaken in relation to the conduct of Paul Reynolds across his 40-year career prior to his death on 13 September 2018. The review commenced in October 2023 and was led by experienced barrister Ms Regina Weiss. While the review focused primarily on the conduct of Paul Reynolds, Ms Weiss accepted information relating to any police officer.

The final report was publicly released on 4 July 2024 and the review made five recommendations, all of which have been accepted by Commissioner Adams and the government. Implementation of the Weiss independent review has received funding of \$1 million for establishment and governance work as a transfer from the Department of Premier and Cabinet during 2024-25. Implementation is being coordinated through DPAC's Keeping Children Safe reform group, with contributions from both DPFEM and Department of Justice. Oversight is provided through existing commission of inquiry governance structures. The Weiss review and its recommendations have been referred to the Office of the Implementation Monitor for independent monitoring.

As you mentioned, as part of the 2025-26 Budget, the government is providing \$800,000 in funding over two years. This investment will provide funding to implement in parts recommendations arising from the review that are specific to Tasmania Police. I will pass over to the commissioner to provide further detail.

**Ms ADAMS** - As the minister has highlighted, there was \$1 million transferred from the Department of Premier and Cabinet from their commission of inquiry funds to contribute to the Weiss funding. In collaboration and discussion with the Department of Justice, the first recommendation you referred to in regard to establishing a restorative engagement framework for people who have experienced grooming and/or sexual abuse by Tasmania Police officers, that will be transferred to the Department of Justice and they will take responsibility and the lead in relation to that recommendation. That makes sense given the work they have done in establishing other redress schemes that make sure we get the gold standard in terms of how we manage that scheme and we're not trying to manage a scheme independently of that.

The remaining two recommendations are the establishment of the community engagement command and the work around working with those sporting groups. That command has now been established and we have a range of interactions with the community in terms of the sporting organisations and more broader than that to ensure that we educate the community about unacceptable sexualised conduct in sport.

The last recommendation is around the establishment of a dedicated victim management team. We're well progressed in our scoping in relation to that and we'll take some advice from victim/survivors as part of the development of our response to that recommendation.

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**Ms BADGER** - On the community engagement command and the victim management team, in the forward Estimates in this Budget they're funded for two years and then there's nothing after that. What happens from two years onwards?

**MS ADAMS** - The understanding is that should we require additional funding for either of those, we'll put through a submission to government. At the moment with our community engagement command, we've moved some of the community engagement police officers we've had within the district into the command, so that has only required an uplift of an additional two positions.

In terms of the victim management team, we will obviously need to establish what will be required to fund the ongoing support to ensure that recommendation is implemented in the way we want to. As I said, the scoping for that is well progressed and we've got an opportunity to go back if we need further funding.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, you have been a champion of introducing tough-on-crime approaches for children, including adult time for adult crime and reviewing bail options. This is completely contradictory to your government's Youth Justice Blueprint, the subtitle of which is Keeping Children and Young People out of Youth Justice System. I know a number of other ministers have expressed concern about this particular tough-on-crime approach, including the Minister for Children and Youth yesterday at Estimates.

It also contradicts Australia's obligations as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 37, which explicitly states that the detention or imprisonment of a child should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. Minister, will you drop your adult crime, adult time mantra and policy because it does not keep Tasmanians safer?

**Mr ELLIS** - The Premier mentioned that all options are on the table, particularly when it comes to responding to repeat violent youth offenders. Tasmania is a safe place to live and we know that total crime rates in Tasmania are significantly lower compared to the early 2000s. Unfortunately, we also know that Tasmania is currently experiencing an increase in youth crime. Youth crime charges have increased in each of the last four calendar years, including by 17 per cent in 2024. While not all youth offenders are repeat offenders, we also know that in 2024, 57 individuals accounted for 50 per cent of the total youth crime charges. Any criminal behaviour by these youths is entirely unacceptable and no business owner or member of the Tasmanian community should be assaulted or living in fear.

Tasmania Police is working closely with the Department of Education, Children and Young People to consider the complex issues facing this group of young offenders. This has included the commissioner recently briefing the DECYP executive on the roles played and challenges faced by Tasmania Police. Tasmania Police is a key partner in major reforms for child and youth wellbeing that have been recommended by the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings. Implementation of the recommendations also needs to appropriately consider the ongoing need to address youth crime. I'll pass over to the commissioner and the team at Tasmania Police.

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, I appreciate that police don't want to be arresting and detaining young people and they want their community to be safe, but this is a question for you around policy and not for the police commissioner. Youth diversion rates have dropped significantly over the last 10 years, by 40 per cent. There have been a number of concerns raised, in particular from Anne Hollonds, the recently stepped down national Children's Commissioner.

There is absolutely no evidence that 'adult crime, adult time' works as a community safety measure, and the federal government has recently announced that they intend to renew a Senate inquiry into Australia's youth justice and detention systems. That inquiry will focus on, among other issues, the over incarceration of First Nations children and young people, Australia's compliance of human rights obligations, and the creation of national minimum standards for youth justice detention systems. Importantly, it has stated a commitment to hearing directly from young people with experience of the youth justice system. Do you commit to at least waiting for the report of that review before proposing any changes to sentencing or bail laws or implementing your 'adult crime, adult time' policy?

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned before, the Premier said that all measures are on the table, including 'adult crime, adult time.' We have seen success in Queensland from 'adult crime, adult time', in terms of reducing crime and victimisation rates.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - There is absolutely no evidence of that, minister, and you are out of step with your Cabinet.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, there is. Chair, there clearly is statistical data that's been provided by the Queensland government and that's probably also part of the reason why the Labor government in Victoria, just in the last week, effectively announced 'adult crime, adult time' as a policy as well.

Part of the reason I was going to pass to Tasmania Police is about the diversions because we do think that there are some important options that are not currently available to us and that we're working with DECYP on to enhance and broaden our capability to divert young people. In line with the principles of the Youth Justice act, Tasmania Police diverts youth from the court system where it is appropriate. These diversions can include informal cautions, formal cautions and community conferences. When it comes to diversions, though, under the existing rules, there are challenges when a youth offender or alleged youth offender pleads not guilty, but is then found guilty. I'll pass to Commissioner Adams if it's okay with you to talk through

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, can you table the evidence that you're suggesting that there is from Queensland to support 'adult crime, adult time' policies?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, I am happy to take that on notice. It's a publicly available document, but we'll follow up and make that available to you. Do you want me to talk about the diversion options that we're looking to expand?

**Ms JOHNSTON** - No. I'm asking you specifically, will you wait? My question was will you commit to waiting for the report from the Senate inquiry before you implement any changes. Given that your policy, minister, is completely contradictory to your government's youth justice blueprint and what other ministers involved in this area, in particular with youth, have stated?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Johnston, as I mentioned, the Premier has said that all options are on the table and the Premier said that that includes 'adult crime, adult time.' We're working through the appropriate processes. Certainly, as I mentioned, statistical data has been provided by Queensland and I'm happy to provide that to the committee. And, as I mentioned, the Victorian government has now embarked on that as a policy. We're certainly noting the interstate experience. Obviously, we'll work through a process here in Tasmania as far as where we go from there, but the Premier's been really clear, all options are on the table.

We want to make sure that community safety is the priority. Of course, there are a lot of different opportunities to try to support young people to get back on track because young people do make mistakes in their journey.

If you don't want me to pass to the Police Commissioner, I'm happy to talk about the work that we're doing, looking at the opportunity to allow young people to enter a diversionary process, even if they plead not guilty. As I mentioned before, young people do make mistakes, and one of those mistakes is listening to their lawyer when they say plead not guilty when the young person knows that they committed that offence.

We're working through a process but by expanding that so that even young people who plead not guilty are able to be diverted and go through those formal cautions, community conferences, we believe that will expand diversionary options that are available to young people. We've also invested significantly in other areas where we can help young people get back on track. I've said before, particularly with my Minister for Skills and Jobs hat on, I'd much rather a young person's in an apprenticeship than Ashley, and some of the work that we're doing with organisations like JCP Youth, for example, a significant funding commitment through them really demonstrates that we want to, of course, be tough on crime, but tough on the cause of crime, and that's important for our community to get balance.

I know that in your community in Glenorchy, Ms Johnston, there's strong support for us to take that balanced approach and we're working through it.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - It wouldn't be driven at all by your publicity, would it Mr Ellis?

**CHAIR** - We will move on -

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, would it be correct to ascribe the increase in firearms crime to 3D printing or classification of toy gel blasters as firearms, rather than conventional firearms?

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned before, we made a number of changes when it comes to community safety in the Firearms act, that commenced 1 July 2024 and December 20 2024 as well. It's important that we're able to take action on this. Tasmania was, from memory, the second jurisdiction in the country to bring in 3D printer legislation into the *Firearms Act*, behind New South Wales, and we're committed to making sure that we're responding to these emerging threats.

There are also concerns from the community about the use of gel blasters and, certainly, because of their firearms-like appearance they can cause a range of different concerns. It is concerning often when police seize drugs and - use of standard firearms - we are also seeing

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gel blasters as part of that cache because can be used to intimidate members of the public, but I'll pass over to Tasmania Police to talk through that further.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. To answer the question 3D printers have absolutely featured in some of the investigative work that we have done. Conversely, a lot of the great work that our team has done relates to traditional firearms as we know them. Operation GAT, which was an operation we did in April of this year, resulted in 45 seized firearms and eight silencers being recovered through a number of searches. We had another example later in April where we recovered a high-powered rifle that had been stolen from the east coast and it happened to be in the hands of a man that had a family violence order in place. We had another operation called Winchester, where we recovered another 11 firearms that included rifles and shotguns. It's fair to say that the work that our firearms, drugs and uniformed teams do, the predominant firearm that is recovered is a traditional firearm as we know them.

**Mr VERMEY** - Drones are becoming a bigger use in all workplaces and, obviously, with the police as well. How are they being used effectively, and how are they overcoming privacy concerns?

**Mr ELLIS** - Remotely piloted aircraft or drones remain a critical tool for Tasmania Police to combat crime and ensure community and police officer safety. Tasmania Police maintains 47 drones in all geographical police districts, road policing services, forensic services, marine and rescue services, and specialists and tactical groups.

As of 30 June 2025, drones have been used in 3312 operations statewide since Tasmania Police introduced the capability in July 2019. Drones have assisted in tracking evading motorists, searching for missing persons, locating stolen vehicles and property, providing investigators with accurate 3D models of crash scenes, and providing overwatch during searches for offenders. Drones have been used for 947 training flights to enhance pilot skills. In the 12 months prior to 30 June 2025, drones were deployed for hooning vehicles on 40 occasions, to 3D model serious and fatal crash scenes on 51 occasions, and to support nine major traffic reinforcement operations. During targeted operations, drones are highly effective as they provide vision of offending vehicles to secure valuable evidence for court. We've spoken about this already this morning, but in addition, drones can be used to track offending vehicles back to home addresses. This reduces the need for police to directly pursue vehicles, particularly in built-up areas, and enables police to safely locate and seize the vehicle at an appropriate time.

Tasmania Police's use of drones is authorised and operated in accordance with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, or CASA, to ensure that they do not present a hazard to other aircraft, people or property. Drone operations are not used for general surveillance, but are instead utilised for specific incidents or occurrences.

When planning to use a drone, remote pilots consider privacy and relevant permission from land owners, as well as local government restrictions and by-laws. Drones are not operated on or over private property without owner permission, warrant or legislative authority.

**CHAIR** - I've had a request that we break now, so we'll break for 10 minutes. We'll be back at 11.01 a.m.

**The committee suspended from 10.50 a.m. to 11.01 a.m.**

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**Mr ELLIS** - I was asked to table some evidence regarding 'adult crime, adult time', so I table a joint statement from the Premier of Queensland, the honourable David Crisafulli; and the Minister for Youth Justice and Victim Support and Minister for Corrective Services, the honourable Laura Gerber, from 7 October 2025 entitled 'Fewer victims of crime as 2986 youths charged under adult crime, adult time'.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**Mr ELLIS** - I don't know if that needs to go to you, Chair.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, my question is about the Government Radio Network (TasGRN) project. The initial TasGRN contract signed in 2021, as you are aware, was awarded \$567 million to Telstra Corp for the GRN itself. The amount blew out to \$763 million in 2023.

**Mr ELLIS** - No, that's not right.

**Ms BUTLER** - That's an additional \$196 million. The reason provided by you for that blowout at the time was the \$196 million was for user agencies, to cover the cost of their usage. When I was reading through the Police Corporate Performance Report, it states that there is a variation of \$17.7 million, and that's to do with agency leasing fees. Is that on top of that initially budgeted \$196 million?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler.

**Ms BUTLER** - Does that make sense? I've always been a bit obsessed with the GRNs.

**Mr ELLIS** - Your numbers are, unfortunately, not your strong suit.

**Ms BUTLER** - I took that out of *Mercury* articles at the time. That was the dollars that were documented publicly at the time. I'm not misleading.

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned, numbers aren't your strong suit, but for a record investment of \$763 million -

**Ms BUTLER** - Excuse me, Chair. That wasn't very kind. I've quoted numbers that were documented numbers, and the minister really needs to withdraw that.

**CHAIR** - Can we move on? I think both of you have made your point.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler, you quoted numbers, I quoted you. Through a record investment of \$763 million by the Tasmanian government and user organisations, we've introduced a world-leading radio capability for our emergency services, the Tasmanian Government Radio Network, the TasGRN. The important project follows the 2013 bushfire inquiry and the 2014 Auditor-General's report on government radio communications, which both highlighted the need for reliable interoperability in radio communications to support effective responses to emergency situations.

The TasGRN has been operational since July 2023, and eight user agencies are using the TasGRN: Sustainable Timber Tasmania, Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, Hydro Tas, TasNetworks, Tasmania Police, Ambulance Tasmania, the TFS and the SES.

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The network provides greater interoperability across our fire response agencies, for example, as well as increased coverage, secure and encrypted communications, and a modern user interface. During fire incidents, TFS works with stakeholders, including private forestry industry, to ensure effective operational coordination and response.

The Tasmanian government agencies have been working hard to deliver this project. It is an exceptional project. I think it's a real testament to our people that we've been able to deliver this world-leading capability for Tasmanians.

I will pass over to the commissioner to talk through the finances.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. To answer the specific question that you referred to about the \$17.8 million, that's the user contribution. Each of the eight user agencies have to contribute to the service, and you should see that in our annual report. There might be some slight variations, but you'll see that every year.

**Ms BUTLER** - There was the initial funding of an additional \$196 million, and that was put by you on the public record, in a media release, that the \$196 million was for user agencies, to cover the cost of their usage. Is that \$196 million - that \$17.8 million that's coming as additional variation in the Budget - is the \$17 million on top of that \$196 million, which you said at the time was to cover user agencies?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler. I will pass to Tasmania Police.

**Ms ADAMS** - It is actually the same. It's the \$17.8 million, is extrapolated out over the life of the contract, which is 12 years.

**Ms BUTLER** - Okay, that makes sense. Is there a closure report for the TasGRN project, minister?

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

**Ms ADAMS** - No, I don't believe there is.

**Ms BUTLER** - Will there be a closure report for the actual project?

**Ms ADAMS** - I'd have to take some advice on that. We're still in a process of looking at decommissioning sites and I would expect that that's probably a part of the project, but I'd have to take some advice as to whether there will be a project closure.

**Ms BUTLER** - I will put that on notice. I've just got one more on the TasGRN and it's really short. Was all the TasGRN government allocated funds consumed within the project or was money held aside?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler, I will pass to Tasmania Police.

**Ms ADAMS** - It's all within, I'm told.

**Ms BUTLER** - Thank you.

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**Ms BADGER** - Minister, I appreciate this might be something we need to take on notice, but can you please outline for the committee how many FTE positions in both Police and the TFS in the last financial year and this financial year to date have been subject to recruitment freezes, targeted negotiated voluntary redundancies or any other form of redundancies, and any other vacancy management or workforce renewal initiative resulting in positions being either eliminated or deliberately unfilled?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger, I'll pass to Tasmania Police for the specifics of the data.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister. In terms of redundancies and WRIPs, there have been none. In terms of the recruitment freeze, I think it has been publicly noted in the media that we were an agency that actually increased our numbers during the recruitment freeze as opposed to reducing our numbers. However, we have 10 roles that weren't approved for filling during the period of the freeze. Those roles are assessed by our vacancy establishment team, which is chaired by the deputy secretary and has the relevant operational lead representative on that committee, so there have been 10 roles that haven't been approved for filling. That doesn't mean that those positions have been abolished in any way, it just means they haven't been approved for filling at this time.

**Ms BADGER** - Am I able, at this stage, to get any data from TFS on notice, given they're not at the table, minister?

**Ms ADAMS** - That is inclusive.

**Ms BADGER** - I apologise.

**Ms ADAMS** - So that is the department; I've got my secretary hat on at the moment.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you. I also had some questions around police training on coercive control that's been undertaken by the Small Steps 4 Hannah Foundation. I was wondering if you could please outline for us how it's been tailored specifically for police and whether any evaluation's been done at this point or when you're intending to do an evaluation on the impact that training is having for Tasmania Police?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Badger. Coercive control training sessions have taken place in forums that combine Tasmania Police, government and community members across the state. Further training continues to be held around the state in sessions planned for the coming months and a standalone session was held here in Parliament House on 18 November 2024, which was attended by 40 senior male State Service leaders. Other sessions have been conducted with over 3000 police, government and community sector participants. I'll pass to Tasmania Police.

**Ms ADAMS** - I will pass to Assistant Commissioner Robert Blackwood.

**Mr ELLIS** - I introduce Assistant Commissioner Robert Blackwood to the table, at long last.

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**Mr BLACKWOOD** - To be called up for a question, this is probably the best one, because for me this is such a good news story in terms of the training that was done. The way this training came about was that I and a couple of other staff attended a conference in NSW where some of the trainers from Small Steps 4 Hannah and Hannah's parents presented, and it was some of the most moving training you could ever be a part of, hearing what was just the most tragic story. We train our police all the time in policy and procedure and we have great laws and great policy in terms of how we do it, but this training was about really getting into the hearts and minds of police and also community workers in this area to understand that every interaction they have with a family violence victim is important and can be life-changing.

The way this training is run out is it's a two to three-hour workshop, depending on the interaction, and is run by a facilitator from Small Steps 4 Hannah. We brought in two really experienced police officers into that training in the family violence space, so we're then linking that to what we do every day. We've had over 1000 of our police officers complete this training now and in total it's more than 3000 throughout Tasmania. This training is also going into the prisons as well.

What we saw as a result of this training was a rise in our family violence incident reports. When police go to a family violence job, it can be classified as an argument, where a family violence offence isn't necessarily committed, or an incident, where we believe family violence may occur. What we saw coming out of this training after each time it had been running in different areas was the level of reporting for incidents going up. That was telling us our officers were picking up on those small things, those coercive control incidents that the training is all about, so it had a really positive impact.

In terms of evaluation, I don't want to give the full details here because I'm not 100 per cent sure that I can take that on notice but I believe it was evaluated. There's feedback at the end of each session from the members who participate, but it's something that we as an organisation are really proud of what we've done and we'll continue to look at how we continue that rollout and further develop it.

**Ms ADAMS** - To add to Assistant Commissioner Blackwood's answer, the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA), has an annual conference where police practitioners from around the country come together and share really good policing strategies and success stories, and we've been requested to present on this particular training program at that conference which is next week.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you. Will the funding for that program continue for the foreseeable future?

**Mr BLACKWOOD** - Small Steps 4 Hannah charge very little for doing it, which is a great thing. Also Justice, who were part of some of this training, contributed to it as well, so it's been funded internally and we will continue to do that.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Just to be clear for the committee and those who might be watching along at home, as evidence that 'adult crime', adult time policies work, the minister has tabled a media statement from the Queensland government, not any actual peer-reviewed evidence-based longitudinal study that actually works.

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Johnston, there is data available in that statement.

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - There is data here and it does say there has been a 10.8 per cent per capita reduction in the number of victims of crime in relation to this particular policy. There's a number of explanations, perhaps, for that, including that those young people and children are detained and therefore can't commit those crimes, but they are not detained indefinitely. Unless it's your policy to detain children and young people indefinitely in this state, which I certainly hope it is not, these young people have to come out into the community at some stage and we know that when you incarcerate young people, they aren't rehabilitated and in fact they're harmed, which makes our community less safe.

Minister, is it your intention to pursue the 'adult time, adult crime' policy and abandon your government's commitment to implement recommendation 12.11 of the commission of inquiry to raise the age of criminal responsibility?

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Johnston, as I mentioned, the Premier has made it very clear that all options are on the table and we're working through that appropriate response. The community expects community and public safety to be the first priority of government, and I think that's fair enough.

In terms of the minimum age of criminal responsibility reforms, the government is committed to implementing all the recommendations arising from the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings. As you mentioned, one of the recommendations is to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14. The Tasmanian government will consider this matter seriously to ensure that the implementation of the recommendation is achieved while also appropriately disrupting and preventing youth crime.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - So you'll just 'consider' the matter.

Minister, you mentioned in your answer prior to the break that 57 young offenders were responsible for approximately 50 per cent of the youth offending crime. Can you give us any information about the percentage of those young offenders who have been or continue to be in out-of-home care?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass to the Tasmania Police.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and this was a question that we had yesterday. We don't have the detail in regard to who's in state care or out-of-home care, but what we have done is - the executive within DECYP and the Tasmania Police executive have met on two occasions to work through the 57 - there's been some great work from our team in being able to provide the information so that DECYP can then consider it from their perspective. There's been significant collaboration between us and DECYP, so we both better understand our perspectives. Obviously, we have a community safety role, but we are cognisant of the youth justice blueprint and it's also important for the DECYP team to understand, again, how we - the touchpoints that we have in relation to youth justice.

We did send our deputy commissioner to DECYP for three months on a secondment. That was about putting ourselves in their shoes, so we could be challenged in how we're viewing the youth offending issue. We've learnt a lot as a result of that particular secondment. I'm not sure whether the deputy wants to talk about that, but for him to have to go to Ashley on

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close to seven or eight occasions and understand and get to look at the problem through DECYP eyes.

We've certainly been very committed to work with the leadership group within DECYP and to ensure - and the minister highlighted a moment ago about - through a good collaboration, you identify where there can be some quick wins. We can't divert, unless a young person admits their offence and you've identified that there's been a drop in diversions and that is absolutely true. We need young people to admit their offence, a simple offence, to divert them. We have that in legislation, there's a simple fix to be able to reduce that requirement and that will potentially open up a lot more opportunities for diversion.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Could I just ask a follow-up question, an operational question? When you're engaging with a young person and you've identified that they're in out-of-home care or are homeless, or whatever it might be, who is it you contact in relation to being the appropriate adult, in relation to that person? Whether you're questioning them, arresting them?

**Ms ADAMS** - It can vary. Obviously, we want the responsible guardian that can be the foster parent and, in other occasions, it may not be. Ideally, that's what we want, the guardian who's responsible for the care of that young person.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Is DECYP automatically notified of that if it is a person in foster care?

**Ms ADAMS** - I would have to look, do you -

**Mr BODNAR** - Yeah, just through the minister. We would be notifying child safety services through our intelligence system, but also making a phone call to follow up because of the seriousness of it.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, some time ago it was proposed that low level breaches of the *Firearms Act* be dealt with by way of infringement notices and fines, rather than being dealt with in a court. Is this still your current position?

**Mr ELLIS** - Certainly, the *Firearms Act* community safety legislation that we passed included a range of infringement notice processes and Tasmania Police are working through the process of operationalising those. I'll pass to Tasmania Police to add further.

**Ms ADAMS** - I'll ask Assistant Commissioner Oosterloo to come back to the table.

**Mr OOSTERLOO** - Through you minister. The infringements have been added to the to the act. There has been a delay in implementation of those actual infringements. We are in the process of replacing our infringement notice system. The Police Infringement Notice System (PINS) has served us well for a long period of time, but we are upgrading that as part of a suite of other changes that we're making to our information systems, and PINS is one of those. Part of upgrading and replacing the PINS system over the next 12 months we will be building in the capacity to issue those infringement notices, that types for firearms matters.

Meanwhile, police take an educationary approach to low-level matters where we're dealing with licenced firearm holders who commit minor breaches of the act and will only prosecute in circumstances where there's been a clear breach of the act, and will only prosecute in circumstances where there's been a clear breach of the legislation. What we're really trying

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to do as part of our overall approach with firearms compliance and enforcement is exactly that, make sure people are compliant with the act, make sure people understand their obligations and are keeping their firearms safely.

**Mr VERMEY** - When do we change over to the next one?

**Mr ELLIS** - I can't answer that question for you, Mr Vermey.

**CHAIR** - Committee, when would you like? Do you want to continue with Police?

**Ms JOHNSTON** - I still have one more.

**Ms BUTLER** - I have one more. I think one more round.

**Mr VERMEY** - I'll pass it on, then. There you go, the things we do.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, I have a question about funding for Forensic Science Services and the impact on service delivery. How many forensic services roles have been cut due to government budget cuts? We did get information from an RTI, an incoming government brief that stated there was a backlog, and that 50 per cent of the backlog was attributable to family and sexual violence and assault. I want to make sure that you understand that the intent of these questions is to try to link a backlog with cuts to forensic service.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler. We've been investing significantly in Forensic Science Services Tasmania (FSST). They provide a wide range of chemical toxicology and biological forensic science services for the Tasmanian justice system. FSST is Tasmania's only National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) accredited forensic science laboratory, providing analytical services. FSST is operationally independent of Tasmania Police, they have 38 staff across the biology, toxicology, chemistry, quality and administration sections.

In 2024-25 FSST received 24,296 forensic test requests, including a range in biological examination, DNA analysis, toxicology, illicit drugs and a range of other matters. Forensic Science Tasmania's biology examinations involve several processes: biological examinations, DNA extraction, amplification, analysis and reporting.

We're certainly seeing important work coming through from Tasmania Police regarding that process. I will pass to the commissioner.

**Ms BUTLER** - Just to clarify, my question was around how many forensic service roles are being cut due to budget cuts, and what is the backlog of unprocessed forensic evidence at the moment, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass to the commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. The Forensic Science Services Tasmania has had no positions reduced. In fact, we made a deliberate decision, because of the small workforce and the important work that they do, that they would be immune from any consideration around the management of vacancies.

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In terms of the number of matters that they have for analysis at the moment, I would say that fluctuates all the time. When we have a particular strategy in response to a trend in crime, there is a dedicated focus. That, in turn, can lead to a number of additional crime scene samples that need to be examined. As you've alluded to, there has been an uplift in sexual offending and, as a result, there has been an uplift in corresponding samples for testing. We have committed some additional overtime over the last few months to work through some of the outstanding matters that we have.

However, as I said, it does fluctuate depending on the operational effort on a particular crime or trend that we have. Again, I want our scientists to work in a very considered and deliberate way, without any undue pressure put on them because the work that they do is highly valuable. It's critical to us in being able to bring perpetrators and offenders to account. We work with them on a weekly basis to ensure they have the right supports in place, to be able to address those matters.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, it might be something that we need to put as a question on notice, but do you know what the average wait time for DNA evidence samples at the lab relating to family and sexual assault cases, otherwise known as 'rape kits,' do you know what that average wait time is? I'm happy to take that on notice because it's a big question.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler, and I'm happy to pass to Tasmania Police shortly but it's certainly an important area we've been investing in. In the 2022-23 budget, Forensic Science Services Tasmania was allocated \$367 million over four years to invest in critical scientific instrumentation and laboratory infrastructure. This funding has provided FSST with newer generations of technology and instruments for our scientists, ensuring quality evidence for court proceedings -

**Ms BUTLER** - The average wait time is what I'm looking for.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, and I'll pass shortly. The funding will also increase the evidence storage capacity, including sexual assault evidence kits. This means that victim/survivors of sexual violence can have forensic samples taken, knowing that evidence will be kept until they feel ready to report to Tasmania Police.

We're in the fourth and last year of the FSST technology uplift. I've put on record to you in previous years some of the work that's already happened, but this year we'll finalise the acquisition of additional environmentally controlled storage capacity for critical forensic exhibits -

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, this is not going to my question.

**Mr ELLIS** - I mentioned before it's an important part of our uplift mobility solution for remote crime scenes and paperless examination, complete network hardening or cybersecurity, a new UVIS spectrophotometer and new Nimbus DNA robotic platform -

**Ms BUTLER** - I wasn't asking about equipment, minister, I was asking about the average timeframe.

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass to the team of Tasmania Police.

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**Ms ADAMS** - Ms Butler, to answer your question in terms of DNA, we have 789 unstarted cases and they've basically been with Tasmania Police - I guess the longest is from January 2025, if you were to put it like that.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, are we outsourcing any forensic services to other states at all?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass that to Tasmania Police.

**Ms ADAMS** - No, we are not.

**Ms BUTLER** - We're not? How many -

**CHAIR** - We'll move on because we have limited time. We're running out of time.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, under your government's watch the percentage of youth subjected to diversions from police instead of court action has decreased from 54.4 per cent in 2014-15 to 35.6 per cent in 2023-24. Just this year, your government has introduced a string of new police powers that target young people. This evidence you've tabled based on the Queensland legislation shows that you're heading in the completely opposite direction of the youth justice reform that was committed to, so which is it? Do you plan to increase youth diversions from the justice system or to decrease them? You can't have both.

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned before, we want to get the balance right. We need to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. It's part of the reason we speak about the small group of serious repeat violent offenders, some of whom are under 18 and currently on murder charges at the moment. It's important that we work through with some of those people early who have a small number of offences or are first-time offenders and work through that diversionary process. As we mentioned in answer to a question from Ms Johnston, we think there's a good opportunity to look at broadening the scope for people to enter the process even if they plead not guilty, but it's also important that we're protecting the community.

I might also speak about a particular matter as it relates to the way young people have been pleading in recent times, and that's doli incapax. Children aged 10 to 13 are presumed to be criminally incapable, which -

**Ms BADGER** - Chair, we had a very specific question and we're limited on time.

**Mr ELLIS** - This is in relation to pleading.

**CHAIR** - Did you have a second question?

**Ms BADGER** - We're talking about diverting young people altogether by putting prevention methods in place -

**Mr ELLIS** - Diversion is related to pleading because you have to plead not guilty to -

**Ms BADGER** - Unless you're going to answer the question about whether you're walking away from the justice reform that was committed to, which the statistics show -

**Mr ELLIS** - If you're not interested in pleading that's fine.

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**Ms BADGER** - I think you can put that out another way, minister, respectfully.

**Mr ELLIS** - If you don't want information about pleading that's fine.

**Ms BADGER** - You can reframe that and be respectful, minister.

**CHAIR** - Ms Badger, do you have a question?

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Badger, I'm happy to help. You asked about pleading so I'm providing some information.

**CHAIR** - No, she didn't.

**Ms BADGER** - I didn't; that's the point, minister. We'll just move on to something that I would like to know about, online crime reporting. You said about mid last year that the new augmented online crime reporting portal would be live by November last year. Where is that up to? Of course that was also then going to lead into an online portal for sexual assault crimes which was part of the commission of inquiry recommendations. Where are both of those new systems up to?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger. Project Link is a \$1.75 million project to deliver an online crime reporting function where members of the public can report certain categories of crime, providing more contemporary ways for police to engage with the public. The ability to engage online with Tasmania Police was requested by 25 per cent of respondents in the 2023 community survey. The solution will accept crime reports relating to graffiti, property damage and theft, including retail, fuel drive-off and making off without payment. It's expected to provide significant operational efficiencies for frontline policing and improve opportunities for public and industry engagement. I'll pass over to Tasmania Police for an update.

**Ms ADAMS** - Ms Badger, you need to blame me for the delay on this project because I'm not going to have a project go live when we have some technical glitches at the moment. This needs to be a seamless experience for members of the community, especially some of our elderly members who we think will use this particular capability. I've made it very clear to the project team that this will not go live unless those tweaks are addressed. At the moment they're working through that to ensure that the system will deliver the service that we expect. We expect that the community will then be able to have confidence in using it and will use it.

**Ms BADGER** - Absolutely. I appreciate there probably isn't a timeframe that you can provide when technical glitches are overcome. Is there a timeframe available from when that first general online crime reporting goes live to the next iteration of that, or will they both sort of come out together or you're not sure at this stage?

**Mr ELLIS** - As the commissioner mentioned, it's important that we get this right so that people have a good experience when they are reporting and it's effective. The importance of that and the risks of that are compounded when we start talking about serious crime. I will pass over to the commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - The first phase of the project was around retail crime, minor crime we're allowing the community to report. The second phase was in regard to the sexual abuse allegations and that was due to be complete by 1 July 2026. I haven't had an update on whether

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they're dependent in terms of the delay or have a flow-on effect, but at the moment the priority is to get that reporting system right. We had strong feedback from our community during the community survey. It won't go live until it's right.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, you'd be aware that the Retired Police Association of Tasmania (RPAT) have been advocating for some time for assistance for mental health services for retired police officers, and indeed this House moved a motion for that to be funded some time ago. Can you please update the committee on the trial of mental health support for retired police officers and the funding arrangements for that?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnston, and I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you about this the other day. The work was raised by a previous member of this place, Mr Jenner. Senior departmental staff and I met with the honourable member on Monday 12 May 2025. Following this, senior departmental staff met with representatives of RPAT on 22 May 2025. On 25 September, I and senior departmental staff, including Commissioner Adams, met with you. The pilot support program is to be trialled for 12 months and a client services manager appointed to facilitate the pilot research and evaluation.

Wellbeing Support provided training to two cohorts of retired police officers to enable them to become peer supporters. The training occurred previously in 2021 and 2023. Wellbeing Support also provides wellbeing accommodation and parking for former police members, should they or their families need accommodation and parking while undergoing medical treatment in Hobart. Two three-bedrooms homes are available for wellbeing housing for current and former emergency responders and a third house, also three bedrooms, has been renovated. I will just pass over to the commissioner.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you for the opportunity to meet in September to discuss this issue. I think you're aware during the passage of that particular brief that we've done some work to look at a trial of providing some medical support to retired officers with a limit on the psychological sessions those officers can receive. We will look to commence that trial pilot in 2026 and then consider the impact of how that trial - and the difference the trial has particularly made.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, in relation to the stadium, the conditions attached to the draft order require various traffic management issues to be dealt with, and a number of emergency evacuation issues, which will involve the police at various stages, particularly on event days. Can you indicate the likely cost of police involvement in managing major events at the stadium, and whether that will be billed to the Macquarie Point Development Corporation (MPDC) or whether that will be taken out of the police budget?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Johnston. Safety at large events are a core business for Tasmania Police. Tasmania Police have been an active stakeholder in the Macquarie Point stadium planning discussions. Tasmania Police is provided opportunities to provide feedback to the MPS design team on spaces specific to emergency services use within the stadium, this includes vehicle staging areas and an emergency operations centre.

Tasmania Police has also had an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed emergency management plan. Under the provisions of the planning permit and enabling legislation report, the commissioner is required to approve the flood and emergency evacuation management plan as the relevant regulator, as the state controller. As the process continues,

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Tasmania Police will undertake testing and exercising of the plan for the operation of the stadium, ensuring compliance with minimum standards or requirements set out in national and international guideline documents. A range of forums have been held for AFL integrity and security annually in Melbourne, which includes broad stakeholder representations across police, government and private enterprise.

I will pass to Tasmania Police to talk through the operational impacts.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. Tasmania Police have been engaged in the planning around a potential new stadium. We've had officers travel interstate to look at what has occurred in terms of the policing, in particular Victoria Police, in how they police their stadiums. We will certainly take advice from those jurisdictions as to what type of models we have available to us, and we will consider that as the time comes closer to the stadium being fully operational and up and running.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - My question in relation to police resources for event days - is that an activity that can be billable back to either MPDC or Stadiums Tasmania?

**Ms ADAMS** - I understand that there are various models in other states in terms of how they police large events and whether there are cost recovery or fee for service. Again, we will take some advice in relation to that, to look at what's the best model for how we police events at the stadium and what's right for Tasmania.

**CHAIR** - Committee, I think we will move on to Fire and Emergency Management. Did you have one particular question?

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Yes, one before we move on.

**CHAIR** - Yes, sorry, I thought you were indicating that it was for fire.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - On that last question, it depends on the fans. I think Carlton fans are quite dangerous.

**Members** - Hey, hey.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Sorry, I didn't realise, my mistake.

**Mr ELLIS** - I can't believe that came from a Collingwood supporter.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - My question minister, and I understand it was touched on briefly during a hooning discussion, I know, working with the local officers on the eastern shore in dealing with antisocial behaviour, not just hooning, the use of drones has become quite important and crucial. Could you inform the committee of what kind of investment you have currently in drone technology? As one of the issues has been their availability. I know you can't just use them willy-nilly, they need to be part of a broader operation. What kind of investment is moving into drone technology, and are you looking at expanding that to increase your capability and capacity in that area?

**CHAIR** - In the interest of time, minister, have you answered that already?

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**Mr ELLIS** - We can give an even better answer, if you want.

**CHAIR** - Sure.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Is it the way I framed it that was much better? Sorry, my apologies.

**Mr ELLIS** - I might pass to Tasmania Police, if there's further operational information that might assist the committee on these operations.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Apologies.

**Ms ADAMS** - Thank you, minister, and through you. We have 47 drones, and the government has made a commitment of \$460,000 over four years, from 2022-23 and that's on top of a \$400,000 commitment that they gave from July 2019. We've grown the capability, 47 drones allows us to have a capability across the state and provide that capability and it's readily available. We've also trained a number of our staff as pilots, who have been accredited through CASA requirements.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - How big are the drones?

**Ms ADAMS** - Yes, well. It's a fantastic capability.

Thank you for also for highlighting the benefits because it certainly makes policing safer and allows us to have a response to the complaints that we do get around hooning.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - Mr Vermey, are you happy to forego your question to the police?

**Mr VERMEY** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. We will have a quick turnaround. Thank you very much everybody who's appeared so far. I'll call up Fire and Emergency.

We only have less than half an hour for this part of the discussion for scrutiny. Minister, would you like to introduce the new people at the table, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. Jeremy Smith, Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner; Matt Lowe, Deputy Chief Officer, Operations; Andrea Heath, Executive Director, Strategy and Capability; and Mick Lowe, Executive Director, SES and Volunteers.

**Ms BUTLER** - Minister, I had an email from a volunteer firefighter, it reads:

You may or may not know that the TFS has cut the crew size of our fire trucks. I'm a volunteer firefighter and just recently our 3.1 fire truck has had the following modifications: removal of the rollover bar and the removal of the seat in the cab, which has effectively cut the crew size down from five to four. I am led to believe that a number of other brigades with large and medium tankers have had similar modifications and they've been told that the reason for the modification is that the front axle cannot support the weight and they're not to standard.

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Minister, do we have a problem with our fire tankers not being the correct weight and modifications and have we reduced crew sizes as a consequence?

**Mr ELLIS** - This has been a matter that has been publicly canvassed for about two or three years now.

**Ms BUTLER** - This is an email that came to me yesterday, so it's relevant.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Ms Butler. I'm sure it is. I'm just providing some context. We've been working through some historical matters in relation to fleet build. Some of these vehicles date back to the 1990s and the Tasmanian Fire Service and SES have been working through the process of modifications to ensure they meet compliance, but I'll pass to the commissioner to provide some more detail.

**Mr SMITH** - Thank you minister, and through you. We've known about these issues for several years now and we have a scope of works of either upgrading or removing those vehicles from the fleet. Each vehicle, obviously, gets assessed to make sure it meets the national road rules and, at times, it comes to our attention where they're not meeting the guidelines.

That particular case, I'm not aware of. However, I will pass it to Matt Lowe who manages our fleet, if he has any further information.

**Mr Matt LOWE** - Thank you, commissioner, and through the minister. We have a small number of our 3.1, which is our largest type of vehicle, where the rear centre back seat has been isolated to reduce the load in the vehicle, so it's reduced capability from five firefighters to four. Some work we're currently doing is where - we have a plan in place and a tender that's gone out now to reduce or take out of service our single-cab fleet. We have 22 of those trucks remaining in service. They'll be replaced with five-seater vehicles to increase our capability so I can get more volunteers onto the fire ground. So, we have a plan in place to address that.

**Ms BUTLER** - Is it best practice to have a crew size of five or four? Is this compromising what's best practice? Through you minister, sorry.

**Mr Matt LOWE** - Through you again, minister. No, best practice is for a crew of four and if we can get a crew of five - if I look at my career crews across the state, four is our minimum staffing for an urban fire truck. Sometimes, if we have extra staff on duty, we will put five in the vehicle, but four is the optimum. You have the driver, you have the officer, and you have two that work the fire on the hose lines.

**Ms BUTLER** - Okay. How long will it take until all those modifications are put into place as you're rolling out?

**Mr Matt LOWE** - The modifications to the 3.1s have been completed with the isolation of the seat to make the vehicle safe. We're looking at a two-year build program for those 22 vehicles to be replaced. Some of the vehicles will also be replaced through some of our newer purchases in other areas where flow-ons reduce that fleet. So, it's a combination.

**CHAIR** - We have only a short time, Ms Butler.

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**Ms BUTLER** - Is there funding in the budget for those 22 vehicles to be replaced over the next two years, minister?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler. Obviously funding for Tasmanian Fire Service comes through a range of different areas. Primarily funding comes through the three levies that are available, but, of course, we've been working through this program for a couple of years now. I will pass over to the Tasmanian Fire Service to talk through that.

**Ms BUTLER** - I can put that on notice as well if you like, because we are short of time.

**Mr Matt LOWE** - Through you, minister. In short, yes.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, the budget papers lack a bit of detail around the continuation of the existing funding towards four of the additional field officer positions to increase the level of operational support for Tasmania's volunteer firefighters. Irrespective of whether that funding is coming from a general pool or has been shifted to the State Fire Commission budget, is it your expectation that these field officer positions will continue or are you expecting that operational support for Tasmania's volunteer firefighters will decrease over the forward Estimates?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Ms Badger. Support for recruitment of more field officers is about coordinating support and training for fire emergency services volunteers. That's \$1.5 million over three years between 2025-26 and 2027-28. Four of these additional field officers have now been appointed to the role and the regional chiefs have allocated tasks to these additional staff based on the operational needs for their region. We consider commitment complete and transferring to business as normal. I will pass over to the commissioner.

**Mr SMITH** - Thank you, minister, and through you. Yes, these positions are important to support volunteers and assist with the workload of the district staff. It's our intention to build the business case to go into the corporate plan ongoing for these positions and it'll be assessed as a priority by the commission members.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you. Earlier this year in the preseason fire briefing - which I thank you and the minister's office for, it was very thorough and in particular thank you for providing the report, although it's publicly available online, and the lessons that were learnt from the LA fires. In that briefing there was made mention of the need to sort of look at how in Tasmania, particularly I suppose in Hobart and the Derwent Valley areas that are globally renowned for their fire risk, how to stop house-to-house ignition, particularly as we transition to places that are going to have more lithium batteries and batteries for charging electric vehicles. What are the next steps for the TFS in looking at how we can do that locally here as well as from the lessons of the LA Fire? What are the next steps that the TFS are going to be reviewing and reporting on to then practically implement that throughout the community?

**Mr SMITH** - Through you, minister, if I may. There's a couple of aspects to that. Obviously, Wellington Park - and Wellington Park Trust are currently reviewing the emergency management and fire management plan for Wellington Park, which includes the fuel management, managing the loads, managing the access of people, et cetera, but also the areas of the interface between the park and suburbia, as such. Part of that planning is also understanding what we can treat around the Wellington Park and inside the ground itself. A lot

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of the fuels are not treatable by burning, so we have to look at other opportunities to mitigate the risk in the Wellington Park Trust and the surrounds.

The issues around the fire in Greece aggressing into suburbia, as such, it was part of a tour that I put Matt Lowe on to go and view and learn from what occurred in LA. I'm not sure Matt, if you'd like to add anything to understanding those risks in the next steps.

**Mr Matt LOWE** - Thanks commissioner and through you, minister. One of the themes I looked at when I went to LA was that urban conflagration, which is a term the Americans have coined to replace firestorm. So, it's basically when a bushfire extends into an urban environment and you have that house-to-house ignition. There are several ways they're mitigating that in America through early detection, rapid rate of attack, which we also engage with here.

I had a recent meeting with David Bowman from UTAS and he's doing some work with RACT around mitigating these types of incidents and what we can do with reduction of fuel loads, not necessarily through fuel reduction burning, but other ways. We've had some early discussions around grant programs around home hardening, which the Americans have done a really good job on, of home-hardening properties. Not necessarily every property in every street, but maybe a few select properties that would protect other properties and stop that. There is further work to be done and I will be catching up with David Bowman and his team for further discussions in that space.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Minister, my question goes to capital facilities and infrastructure. South of Hobart in the Kingborough, Channel district, there's been significant land development and the and the risk is changing in the urban and peri-urban areas. I know there's been some discussions about an investment in there to upgrade, well, find a new home for the Kingston Volunteer Fire Brigade and that station, given its situation is complicated in terms of getting access to any sort of incident that comes on.

You also have the Margate and Snug stations which are very much under pressure and I think that was exposed during the fire incident earlier this year, February this year. I know that there have been discussions about investment in those facilities. How are you going with the Kingborough Council and is that something we can see in the forward Estimates? Because the local community is becoming increasingly concerned about the risk.

**Mr ELLIS** - We're talking about the challenges with the mountain here, but, of course Snug was one of the most hardest hit areas in 1967 and it's a highly fire volatile environment down there on a bad day. The government has a \$15 million commitment towards Kingston Emergency Services Hub. We're undertaking planning and scoping for each of the hubs that we've identified and further work is required to determine the most effective and functional model. The funding has been reprofiled to reflect estimated timeframes.

Kingston funding commencing 2029-30 and it's expected the business case for the Kingston Emergency Services Hub will be submitted through the Structured Infrastructure Investment Review Process (SIIRP), prior to the end of 2025-26. There's also a significant uplift that's been happening over recent years with the Volunteer Infrastructure Investment Fund or the VIF. That's a \$10 million investment that is bolstered in this budget by \$2.5 million in additional funds and that's been providing upgrades in facilities in volunteer stations right around Tasmania, but, in that Kingborough, Channel area they've been significant beneficiaries of that. Noting, of course, that Kingston volunteer brigade is one of the busiest in the state and

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truly extraordinary people. Some of them I think have been more than 3000 calls and that kind of thing. I'll pass over to the commissioner to talk through further.

**Mr SMITH** - Thank you minister and through you. Thank you for the question Mr O'Byrne. It's important that we do continue to help the volunteers in the Channel, Huon and Kingston areas. In fact, recent conversations with the brigade chief have indicated that they would like further support from the TFS and we are considering implementing a daytime crew into the Kingston area to support their operational activities and build more resilience in those communities. Certainly we've had discussions about how we staff that and potential timeframes for that crew from existing resources to be moved into the Kingston area. That'll be occurring, most likely, within the next three months. I might just throw to you, Matt, if you have anything else you'd like to add.

**Mr Matt LOWE** - Thanks, commissioner and through you, minister. Yes, we've commenced some remedial works to the Kingston brigade as it currently sits and we'll be looking at adding an additional day work crew down there. Our volunteers provide an excellent response to the community in Kingston, but due to working outside the area during the day, they can't provide a response during business hours. After-hours there is no issue; we have plenty of numbers and they're doing an excellent job. We'll transition into a day crew down there. At the moment Hobart currently attends incidents at Kingston as soon as they're paged to back up the local brigades.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - Just as a follow-up, I understand that and I'm obviously in touch pretty closely with the brigades down that way. The risk has changed and evolved over the years and central is if you can respond in the time required and that's always been the test. The question specifically, minister, is around your interactions with the Kingborough Council. Has there been some agreement with the council? I understand they're willing to provide a portion of land to assist with the redevelopment. The second sort of echo to my first question was what are the plans for the Margate and Snug brigades, given the challenges they were placed under in that Margate incident earlier this year?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr O'Byrne. We have had conversations with Kingborough Council. We've had good support from councils in the past. I note that for the Sorell emergency services hub that land was provided to us for \$1 and we really appreciate that. In the Kingborough case, the council hasn't been quite as forthcoming with opportunities for that kind of land support so we're continuing to work through a process with them, but I'll pass over to the team at TFES to add to that.

**Mr SMITH** - Thank you, minister. I think it will be important when we build the business case for Kingston from a TFS and probably SES point of view that we have a full understanding of what the surrounding resource and the model looks like and where that station or hub may be located. I think the issues for Margate and Snug are going to exist for a period of time until we build that business case.

The facilities, whilst being a bit small and not really sufficient for managing large incidents like what occurred at Margate Plains, the fire on the hill, we certainly learnt from that from an operational side of making sure those nearest brigades don't become the staging areas and get overrun by other vehicles and managing the incident from those small stations that aren't set up for it.

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**CHAIR** - We only have 12 minutes left, so if you're cognisant of that we'll try to get through this round. Are you okay, Mr Vermeij, if we skip over you?

**Mr VERMEIJ** - No, I'm happy to throw one up.

**CHAIR** - I don't know if you're going to be very popular with other committee members.

**Mr VERMEIJ** - Minister, a media campaign ran across summer with calls for the public to be prepared and be aware, with more than 97 per cent of Tasmania classified to be bushfire prone and that includes private homes and businesses. What is the government doing to ensure that individuals are ready for fire season?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Vermeij. The TFS delivers a suite of community-based programs, resources and messaging to support planning and preparedness for bushfires at a local, household and individual level. Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods (BRN) is an evidence-based program that focuses on building shared responsibility for bushfire preparedness through collaboration with volunteer brigades, local government and other community stakeholders.

This includes regional forums and training for Tasmanian Visitor Information staff to support their role in providing bushfire safety information for tourists and visitors. Over 3000 community members participated in BRN activities in 2024-25 and in that year TFS and SES continued their collaboration to implement the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness project which supports people with disabilities, chronic illness or limited mobility to be better prepared for bushfires, floods and severe storms.

In the interests of time, I will just give a shout-out to the Bushfire-Ready Challenge, an interactive electronic communications tool providing household bushfire planning and preparedness activities and encourage all members of parliament to reach out to their communities. It's delivered through a new interactive online platform which remains available year-round on [bushfire.tas.gov.au](http://bushfire.tas.gov.au).

**Ms BUTLER** - It's been brought to our attention that there's been some significant issues with the new co-located building for fire and SES at Cambridge and that sections of the building have had to be pulled apart and rebuilt because it's not meeting security standards, alluding to the thickness of the walls. Minister, are you aware of any issues with that particular building?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will pass over to TFS.

**Mr SMITH** - I'm not aware of those matters. In fact, I don't even know if we have a building at Cambridge that has SES and TFS located.

**Ms BUTLER** - It's a co-use site at Cambridge, apparently, and there have been significant problems with the build.

**Mr LOWE** - We don't have a shared facility at Cambridge. We have the Sorell Emergency Services Hub which is a shared facility. Do you mean the Cambridge training complex?

**Ms BUTLER** - Yes, it might be the Cambridge training complex because it specifies Cambridge.

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**Mr LOWE** - The only thing I can think of is we've had some security issues down there with people getting into the yard after hours. We've currently put in some surveillance to mitigate that, the police are well aware and we're working closely with them.

**Ms BUTLER** - Can I put that on notice just in case something has happened recently with that, because it came from a pretty good source? I do hope they're wrong.

The other question I have is that the TFS has procured two 15-year-old tankers from the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and they have to be updated to comply with Tasmanian Standards. Minister, are you aware that those two appliances that have been purchased by the Tasmanian government will need significant modifications?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Butler. Regarding the procurement process I will pass over to the Tasmania Fire Service.

**Mr SMITH** - The State Fire Commission and Tasmania Fire Service purchased two tankers recently to meet an operational need. They were procured through a process of tendering from the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, so it wasn't the CFA, to put that on the record.

**Ms BUTLER** - Okay.

**Mr SMITH** - They have just recently arrived in the state, I believe, and are undergoing mechanical and operational checks. Those upgrades will include the TasGRN radio because the radio is not complemented. Obviously, there may be some issues around equipment layouts with lockers and pump fittings. I will pass over to Matt who manages the fleet.

**Mr Matt LOWE** - We recently had two of our fleet that during our annual inspections and servicing were found to have some structural rust in them. They were assessed as no longer being able to be in service. They are early 1992 single cabs, which I mentioned earlier we have a plan to replace. As a stopgap for those two, we bought two vehicles from New South Wales, a 2000 model and a 2003 model, so newer than the older ones. They'll come in as an interim until we get that build program out. They've arrived in the state. The mechanics will review them, they'll drive south, our fleet services will look at what structural amendments need to be made, if any, and they'll be put into service as soon as possible.

**Ms BADGER** - I have some questions around the Wellington Park management, particularly the fuel reduction burning agreement which has been done through the Parks and Wildlife Service more than the TFS. It's our understanding that this year some of the requested fuel reduction burning funds from Parks hasn't come through at this point. If in that instance Parks can't manage it for whatever reason - budget constraints or I'm not exactly sure and we didn't get to the bottom of why that was in Estimates - what capacity and responsibility does the TFS have to step into that area and ensure the fire management of the park is still rolling out as it's been projected to do?

**Mr ELLIS** - CFS currently coordinates development of the Wellington Range Strategic Fire Management Plan that encompasses Wellington Park and adjacent private reserve land which totals approximately 81,000 hectares. The plan is developed in line with the Hobart Bushfire Risk Management Plan. It outlines key bushfire exposures, fire management zones,

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fuel breaks, strategic fire trails and fire management units to inform fuel reduction program planning. While TFS is leading the development of the plan, Parks and Wildlife Service, Wellington Park Trust and relevant councils are providing input. The draft Wellington Range strategic fire management plan is tracking for finalisation in early 2026.

I will pass over to the Commissioner.

**Mr SMITH** - Through you, minister. As the minister alluded to, we are coordinating the drafting of the new plan, but it's important to note that the fuel reduction program has Parks and Wildlife and STT representation on that steering committee.

As I mentioned earlier, the majority of the Wellington Park vegetation isn't able to be treated by fire, so we're looking at other alternatives to reduce the risk up there. We're also ensuring that we prioritise the fuel reduction burns that lead into the park, so we stop or exclude fire from entering. That's an important strategy and an important priority for the fuel reduction program.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, we've had some contact from a few SES volunteers who volunteer in the remote area search capacity of the SES. We'd all be aware there's an increasing number of bushwalking rescues and things like that, requiring volunteer support as well as professional support. Volunteers are reporting having to buy appropriate equipment off their own back. Obviously, some of the vegetation they're going through is prone to ripping clothing and things they would generally be using. We're going to see these rescues increasing into the future. Where's the additional funding going to come from to make sure we can maintain the volunteers, and that they're not out of pocket? We're going to need more volunteers into the future with more extreme weather events as well.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger, and a big thank you to our search and rescue teams, the SES volunteers you mentioned, and of course, Police, Ambulance Tasmania, Surf Life Saving Tasmania and others. They've been recognised globally on the back of some recent work, and I think that's really encouraging. All Tasmanians can be very, very proud of the work and the capability that we have.

I will pass over to the commissioner and the team to add further.

**Mr SMITH** - Thank you, minister, and through you. There are a couple of initiatives that are currently underway. One is that our personal protective clothing committee is looking at new protective equipment for our volunteers, both TFS and SES, and also the volunteer infrastructure fund. I might throw to Mick Lowe, who has carriage of the SES operations.

**Mr Mick LOWE** - Through you, minister. Yes, we have three really capable search and rescue units across the state: one in the north, one in the north-west and one in the south. Equipping them is a real focus at the moment. We're in the process of rolling out a new suite of equipment to them. In fact, we just had the recent clothing equipment committee, where that was ratified. We're matching that clothing based on the type and the requirement that's come from Tasmania Police, who lead search and rescue from an organisational perspective. So, we're pretty confident that will suit most of their requirements. As they identify any additional requirement -

**CHAIR** - The time for scrutiny has finished, unfortunately, halfway through an answer.

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I'd like to thank the minister and those who appeared before the committee. To let everybody know, the next committee will be with the Minister for Skills and Jobs and will start at 12.15 p.m.

**The committee suspended from 12.10 p.m. to 12.15 p.m.**

**CHAIR** - The time being 12.15 p.m., the scrutiny of the Skills and Jobs portfolio will now begin. I welcome you, minister Ellis, and other witnesses to the committee. Minister, would you like to introduce the persons at the table?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. With me at the table here I have Alex Paterson, General Manager, Skills and Workforce; Tim Gardner, Chair, TasTAFE; and William McShane, Interim Chief Executive Officer, TasTAFE.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much. We have just one hour I think -

**Ms BADGER** - Two and lunch.

**CHAIR** - I see what you're saying. We have two hours - one hour each side of the lunch break. I intend that we break for lunch at 1.15 p.m.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. Our government makes the largest recurrent investment in economic development in Tasmania through the Skills and Training portfolio. This is about building the workforce we need today and preparing for the opportunities of tomorrow.

The Tasmanian Skills Plan sets a clear direction; it puts the learner at the centre of the VET system and guides our investment. The central theme is Skills for Jobs. We prioritise funding for training that leads to employment outcomes, focusing on skills in shortage and those demanded by employers. This plan also aligns with the National Skills Agreement, where the government has agreed to prioritise effort towards critical priorities.

To deliver this, we use tools like the regional employment dashboard for data on employment growth areas and we work closely with industry, drawing on the Industry Skills Compact to target high-demand skills. Key sectors include the care sector, clean energy and traditional trades.

TasTAFE has a critical role as the government's public provider, including maintaining a presence in regional areas. Our objective for TasTAFE holds - to provide responsive and innovative Vocational Education and Training (VET) tailored to the needs of industry and businesses, with the learner at the centre. We continue to make significant investment in TasTAFE. We provided over \$118 million in additional investment for capital and other priority initiatives, plus growth in recurrent funding. The 2025-26 deed provides \$105.84 million, an increase on previous years. We've grown funding to TasTAFE and we want to maximise value for learners, employers and our economy through that investment.

The 30-month legislative review shows that we're on the right track with the legislation, but it also makes clear that we need to accelerate the pace of change to deliver the outcomes

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Tasmania needs. We're working with TasTAFE to grow enrolments, respond to industry needs and deliver initiatives like the Alanvale Health Hub, the Clean Energy Centre of Excellence and training for our visitor economy. These investments will support TasTAFE to increase its capacity for enrolments and deliver more contemporary training into the future.

To maximise value through TasTAFE as our public provider, we will need to accept change. TasTAFE needs flexibility to adjust its course offerings and capacity to meet learner and employer needs. It's about making smart choices to ensure a strong and thriving TasTAFE, a capable RTO sector, ensuring the industry has its skills needs met, and Tasmanians are supported with skills for jobs.

Beyond TasTAFE, the government supports over 100 registered training organisations (RTOs), through contestable grant programs, to train Tasmanians. Examples include Seafood and Maritime Training for seafood and maritime training response, response training for the meat industry, and work and training in Avidity, bolstering training in the care sector.

Tasmania is a small market, so we've always leveraged the benefits of the national VET system. Engaging interstate providers to come to Tasmania and support apprentices to get the specialist skills they need, wherever opportunities exist, has helped to support thin markets. If learners are to be at the centre, we need the Tasmanian VET system to remain agile and responsive. This means embracing change, delivering public value, and maximising value across the board. At the same time, we're focused on improving completions. We've got the highest completion rates in the country, but we know there's more that can be done. We want to see more Tasmanians finish their qualifications and be ready to take up job opportunities.

In October, I announced a new \$25.8 million package to strengthen VET across the state. This is a continuation of the national partnership we have with the Australian Government to strengthen the VET system, ensuring that it delivers high-quality, responsive and accessible training. A critical element of that is the additional funding of \$15.8 million to support students and improve training completion rates. This will support efforts to improve transitions between school-based VET and TasTAFE and investment in mentoring programs to improve wraparound support. With this plan, we're ensuring that Tasmanian learners are supported to succeed and have the skills for jobs that will take our state forward.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, redundancies have been announced at TasTAFE. Educators are telling me your comment that their skills are not required in this economy make them feel the most undervalued they've ever felt in their lives. I note for the record that management has offered that staff facing redundancy can go home after their redundancy meeting, but they are staying at work because they won't abandon their students. Even in the face of their financial security crumbling before them, TasTAFE educators think of their students first and these are the people you are abandoning. Can you confirm that 18 TasTAFE staff are being made redundant two days before Christmas?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr. Mitchell, I'll pass to the team at TasTAFE to talk through more about the operational side. Broadly speaking, the Tasmanian Skills Plan guides investment in areas most critical to meeting Tasmania's future skills needs. Principles in the skills plan are skills for jobs, supporting learners to succeed and building a stronger, more connected system. The plan sets out government priorities -

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**Mr MITCHELL** - Chair, with respect, I didn't ask the minister about the Skills Plan, I asked about the redundancies and the TasTAFE educators being affected by it.

**Mr ELLIS** - The Skills Plan is important because it's a key part of this process. The plan sets out the government priorities including health care, energy and building and construction. TasTAFE put forward a proposal to Skills Tasmania to remove 12 qualifications from the subsidised list of products under the deed of purchasing agreements, which was accepted. The proposal was informed by a review that involved consideration of enrolment numbers, high withdrawals, low completion rates and qualifications not explicitly included as a priority training area. I'll pass over to the team at TasTAFE.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. Mr Mitchell, it's always an incredibly difficult decision around staffing and to make decisions around the redundancy of staffing is unavoidable. Unfortunately, that is the position we find ourselves in. Given the broader context that the minister has provided, the most important thing to us is the sustainability of TasTAFE as an organisation and particularly to look at the broader cohort of learners we've got, which at the end of last year was 25,000 enrolments. Our most important thing is that we are in the best position to serve the broadest needs of our learners and fundamentally that starts through a close alignment with the Tasmanian Skills Plan and working closely with the state around its training needs. From time to time these decisions have to be made and we have made them.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, you've given evidence that ending TasTAFE subsidies for 12 courses would free that funding up for other priorities. What is the quantum of funding that is ending for the 12 courses and to where specifically is it being redirected?

**Mr ELLIS** - I mentioned some of our key priority areas previously that we want TasTAFE as a public training provider to focus on, a similar list to -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Chair, with respect, the minister's bloviating. It was a very specific question about the quantum of funding. How much in dollar terms is being cut and where specifically is it being redirected? I don't need another motherhood statement.

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm talking about the redirection. It's important to note, Mr Mitchell, that the government you were a part of as well had a very similar list, including focusing on the care economy, building and construction, renewable energy, sovereign capability and food security. We're focused on similar areas, but I'll pass to the team at TasTAFE to talk through the financial matters there.

**Mr GARDNER** - There's no cut to our funding.

**Mr MITCHELL** - You're cutting the subsidy funding for 12 courses and you've given evidence that was to free up funding for other priorities, so what is the dollar quantum of funding that is being cut from those 12 courses and to where specifically is it being redirected?

**Mr GARDNER** - I'd have to refer to my CEO around any specific figures if we have them. If we don't have them here, we can table those with you.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Can I ask that that be taken on notice?

**CHAIR** - We might try to see if there's an answer first.

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**Mr McSHANE** - We could probably take that on notice and provide that later.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, can that be taken on notice?

**Mr ELLIS** - We'll see what we can provide, Mr. Mitchell.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Thank you. Last question, Chair. Minister, you say the majority of government-subsidised courses for lab tech are already provided by non-TAFE RTOs. However, DECYP gets the majority of its lab tech workforce from TasTAFE graduates. What consultation was held with DECYP prior to making the subsidy cut decision to ensure that there would be no detrimental impact on filling lab tech positions in schools?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell, and you're certainly right. The majority of training for lab tech is provided by specialist training providers and our government already funds three private training providers through the Apprentice and Trainee Training Fund to deliver the Certificate IV in Laboratory Techniques in 2025. These private RTOs are the Melbourne Tech Institute, Labtech Training Victoria and Alan Bartlett Consulting. As I mentioned, the majority of Tasmanian government funding -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Chair, with respect, the minister was given time before the question started to give an introductory statement. He's not addressing the question. What consultation was held with DECYP prior to making the subsidy cut decision to ensure there would be no detrimental impact on filling lab tech positions in schools? I ask that you answer the question.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I am certainly answering it, particularly because it's important to note that for workplaces in industry those private RTOs will be important.

**Mr MITCHELL** - How is this relevant to the consultation that was or was not held with DECYP?

**CHAIR** - Mr Mitchell, can we hear the minister's response, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. It's relevant and important because we envision those training providers will be a key part of the training for the future in lab tech. There are a number of other private training providers endorsed by Skills Tasmania with laboratory techniques courses on scope where there is an option to seek funding for delivery to Tasmanian learners. I'll pass over to the team at TasTAFE and Skills Tasmania to see if there's anything further to add.

**Mr FOSTER** - There is nothing further from us.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Can I confirm there's no consultation with DECYP prior to that decision being made?

**Mr GARDNER** - First, we have industry engagement with people in industry all the time. Second, we engage very closely with Skills Tasmania around state needs and the state schools plan and we're informed by that and our own data in making our decisions.

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**Ms BADGER** - Minister, who made the decision not to include the 12 courses that are losing their subsidies that is resulting in 18 staff being made redundant two days before Christmas? Who made the decision that those 12 courses in the deed between Skills Tasmania and TasTAFE would no longer be receiving the subsidies?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger. I outlined the process before but I'm happy to do so again because it's largely a shared decision through a process. The Skills Plan guides the investment into areas that are critical to meeting Tasmania's future workforce needs -

**Ms BADGER** - In the interests of time, perhaps I could further clarify, minister. I just want to know whether it was you or TasTAFE specifically. I understand that there was a process, but we've had multiple briefings on this and other members have been part of those and we're receiving inconsistent information. It's important for the students and staff to understand ultimately who made that decision.

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned, it's a shared decision and it's worked through a process. Part of that is the Skills Plan, which is the strategic basis for the areas of priority that we need to look into. That plan is, of course, approved by me. It sets out the government priorities including health care, energy, building and construction, food security and other key matters. TasTAFE then put forward a proposal to Skills Tasmania to remove 12 qualifications from the subsidised list of products under the deed of purchasing agreement. That was then accepted, and, as I mentioned before, the proposal was informed by the review, so it's a shared decision, it's a process that's worked through, and that's how we need to approach all of the training we undertake and the support we provide for learners.

**Ms BADGER** - To clarify before I move on to my second question, TasTAFE put that recommendation to you, minister, to sign off on, but did they do so under your direction initially?

**Mr ELLIS** - I mentioned, Ms Badger, that they put forward the proposal to Skills Tasmania to remove the 12 qualifications under the deed of purchasing and that was then accepted. I'm happy to pass over to TasTAFE if there's anything further to add.

**Ms BADGER** - My clarification is whether TasTAFE initiated this off their own back or if they were directed by the minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - As I keep mentioning, Ms Badger, we've set out the Skills Plan, which is really clear about the -

**Ms BADGER** - Thanks, minister, I understand how the Skills Plan works. This isn't part of it. I'd like to hear from TasTAFE.

**Mr ELLIS** - It is part of it and a key part of it us saying to TasTAFE, 'These are the areas of priority need -

**Ms BADGER** - So you did say it to TasTAFE?

**Mr ELLIS** - It's setting out the areas of priority need.

**Ms BADGER** - So you did say it to TasTAFE?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Sorry? It's setting out the areas of priority need for the state -

**Ms BADGER** - I understand how it works, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm glad to hear that, Ms Badger. It sets out the areas of priority need; we then put that to TasTAFE. TasTAFE has then worked through a proposal that they've then put back to Skills Tasmania, which was accepted. I'm not sure if there's anything further you wanted to add, from a TasTAFE perspective?

**Mr GARDNER** - That's exactly as the process worked. We made our own determinations based on our own data, and we made a recommendation to Skills Tasmania.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, this morning the Education minister said that she had had no consultation with you whatsoever on these cuts. Why didn't you consult with your colleague?

**Mr ELLIS** - Of course we work through a process. We've notified the process for these 12 courses; we've then worked through examining those. Our commitment for the next steps for DECYP training, and any other workplaces that need lab tech training, is to work through - because we do provide government support for a range of different providers, including many that provide in-workplace training and assessment. I mentioned the three before and there are others that have those qualifications on their skills list.

We will, of course, work with all organisations and all learners that would like to receive lab tech training, just as we do currently. Noting that the majority of training that's provided for lab tech training is provided by those specialised RTOs.

**Ms BADGER** - My question was just around why you didn't consult with them. Were you not aware of their concerns around recruitment issues as a result of this?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger. Obviously, we made the notification, we've then been consulting, and now a decision has been made. Our commitment is to continue working with them and make sure that support is provided for lab tech training to learners so they can continue to receive that training here in Tasmania.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, what are the apprenticeship completion rates - and I stress completion rates - for the past five reporting years, broken down by industry? In which industries have completion rates declined despite ongoing skills shortages?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnston. Certainly, we're pleased in Tasmania that we have the highest completion rates in the country. It's certainly not an area that we rest on our laurels for, because we know that continued investment is important. That's why we've signed this additional deal with the Commonwealth, so that we can continue to grow that. We really want to maintain our national leadership in this area.

Our completion rates are at 55 per cent, compared to 47.7 per cent nationally, and we want to grow that even further. Certainly, some of the work we're doing with group training organisations (GTOs) around apprenticeships is demonstrating a high degree of success. Many GTOs report apprenticeship completions in excess of 80-90 -

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - It's a really simple data question. I don't need the background, I just want the raw data, please.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, sure. I am happy to pass over to Ms Paterson, but certainly, some of those GTOs report completions of 80-90 per cent, and that's really encouraging. We're working through them to receive support for the learners to engage with. I will pass over to Ms Paterson.

**Ms PATERSON** - Through you, minister. In terms of completions in the post-COVID era, the Australian Government's Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements program wage subsidy stimulated significant increase in apprenticeships and traineeships activities. That closed on 30 June 2022, and that has had an impact in terms of the numbers of apprenticeships activity nationally.

Leading up to 30 June 2022, completions in Tasmania accelerated at a faster rate than nationally, peaking at 3820 in the year 31 March 2023, following commencements, which peaked earlier in that year. Subsequently the percentage decline in completions from 2023 peak until 31 March 2025 are more distinct for Tasmania than they are nationally.

I don't have to hand completion rates by industry. That's not an easy data point for us to gather, but I can certainly take that on notice, if that's helpful.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - I can put that on notice, minister, if that's all right. It does go to the issue, and I'll start my third question - did Jobs Tasmania or State Growth provide advice to Treasury that additional funding was required to lift apprenticeship completion rates? So, you would need to know in what areas you'd need to lift those - and if so, what funding was requested, and what portion was provided and approved?

**Mr ELLIS** - Sure. I mentioned before, Ms Johnston, that it's certainly an area of focus of ours - that's part of the reason why last month we secured a significant uplift in funding from the federal government. I mentioned the package before of \$25.8 million. A core focus of that is around completions and continuing to grow the opportunities. Really, we want Tasmania to be the nation leader into the future, just as we have been, and for other states to be able to learn from the success that we've seen. To do that will require more funding. That's why we've delivered the package. I'm happy to pass over to Ms Paterson for any further detail.

**Ms PATERSON** - Thank you, minister, through you. The Australian Government has contributed \$7.9 million to Tasmania under the National Skills Agreement for the Improving Completions project in Tasmania. That will deliver a mentoring program to improve the capacity and capability of the sector to deliver services to businesses that improve completions, particularly for priority cohorts and industries that are listed under the National Skills Agreement. This initiative also includes a really important Pathways Partnership Program to improve transitions and foster collaboration between TasTAFE and DECYP as well as the DECYP RTO. That reflects the collaboration that's really needed to improve those pathways between school and further education.

The funding was available on a condition of matched funding and the Tasmanian Government has pointed to a matched funding contribution of \$7.9 million, which includes a project to look at a new framework for improving completions through TasTAFE.

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**Mr GEORGE** - Minister, I'd like to know what goes through your mind, and the collective government's mind, when it decides that it's fine to vandalise the idea of Tasmania as being the creative state, with the destruction, over years, of arts and design support from government, under your government?

Are you aware of the fact that in the creative arts and design courses in TAFE, that impacts at least two-thirds of the students, who are women? Women, we all know, have trouble maintaining incomes throughout their working life, because they often end up with family duties. This is one area where women can maintain an income and maintain their creative elements throughout their lives.

I'd just like to know what went through your mind when you approved the destruction of these courses that are so important to the basis of Tasmania as a creative state? Particularly when we know that there are as many people who are employed by, and supported by, the creative arts as there are in Tasmania's mining industry?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr George. No, this decision wasn't made on the basis of gender, but more broadly, the government is a strong supporter of the arts. We continue to recognise the value of the arts sector to our economy. That's why we continue supporting institutions such as the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, our many arts and cultural festivals, as well as support for new art through Screen Tasmania and Arts Tasmania.

The decision by TasTAFE is simply about TasTAFE focusing its resources in the area where it's best placed to provide training - that's either directly linked to employment through an apprenticeship or traineeship or very likely to lead to an employment outcome. Training in the creative industries can therefore be supported outside of the VET system.

I can advise that Skills Tasmania is convening a meeting with key stakeholders to address emerging workforce priorities across the arts sector, and I look forward to those discussions continuing.

In Tasmania, the creative sector pathways are also supported through the University of Tasmania, primarily delivered at The Hedberg, part-funded by the Tasmanian government. As a government, through Arts Tasmania and Screen Tasmania, we also provide opportunities for non-accredited professional development through paid attachments, residencies and other work placements. We look forward to continuing to work with Tasmania's arts sector and supporting its future growth.

I might pass to Ms Paterson and talk through further about the range of different options that are available for creative sector training pathways.

**Mr GEORGE** - Minister, I admire the passion with which you argue your case. The question is, did you bear in mind, when you approved these cuts, that these cuts affect women far more than they do men, and that the impact on these people's potential to create a life from creativity and to make incomes from creativity, the impact is specifically on women rather than men?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you Mr George. So, gender wasn't a factor here, although it is -

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**Mr GEORGE** - It should have been.

**Mr ELLIS** - It is worth noting that many of these courses have a majority male cohort currently, but I suppose that's the thing with the arts, we all have a passion in it regardless of our background.

I'll pass over to Ms Paterson to talk through some of the key pathways that we're hearing from the national Jobs and Skills Council and from the creative industry, so that we can support the workforce into the future.

**Ms PATERSON** - Yes, thank you, minister, through you. Supporting women in vocational education is a priority in the Tasmania skills plan. The Tasmanian government commits to encouraging and supporting all women to participate in VET, including by improving pathways for women into non-traditional occupations, leading to higher paying and more secure job opportunities. That continues to be a focus for us.

In relation to the creative sector in particular, we are really committed through that session that we're having in early December to better understand what the creative sector needs in terms of training in Tasmania. We have heard through a series of consultations, some of them are led by the Jobs and Skills Council for the creative sector nationally, which has done a number of consultations in Tasmania, that employers in that sector prioritise hands-on experience and internships and industry led programs over formal qualifications. Accredited programs for them are often too rigid to quickly adapt to emerging technologies and practices. We're looking forward to that session in December to understand what types of training the government can support that will better meet their needs than the training that was occurring through TasTAFE to date.

**Mr GEORGE** - All very late, minister.

**Mr VERMEY** - Believe it or not, we actually are heading towards summer and, with a busy summer season approaching, Tasmania's visitor economy and worldclass experiences it offers will be in high demand. How is the government partnering with the tourism and hospitality industries to meet workforce needs and create clear pathways for Tasmanians into this thriving sector?

**Mr ELLIS** - Our government's committed to building a skilled workforce to grow our tourism and hospitality sector that will support our visitor economy. Tourism and hospitality accounts for one-in-eight jobs in Tasmania and injects billions into our economy. There are so many great opportunities on offer through our visitor economy, many of which require a VET qualification. The recent Tourism Tasmania Odd Jobs campaign showcased not only the diversity of jobs available in our tourism and hospitality sector, but the importance of a VET qualification in taking up these opportunities.

TasTAFE's new school for the visitor economy will transform how we train future generations of tourism and hospitality workers. The school replaces the previous Drysdale brand and incorporates programs in tourism, guiding, hospitality, cookery, bakery, butchery, events, and the Tasmania Academy for Leadership in Sport, of which I know you're a big supporter Mr Vermey. The school will equip learners with the skills they need to thrive in tourism and hospitality, supporting one of our state's most important industries. The school

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operates across campuses statewide, ensuring access to worldclass training wherever Tasmanians live.

Since you, of course, joined me in the announcement earlier this year, I can share that TasTAFE has appointed a new head of school and is establishing an advisory committee for the school of visitor economy. The group will provide strategic advice on workforce demand, skills, gaps and emerging opportunities, ensuring that TasTAFE's training provision remains aligned with industry needs.

Beyond full VET qualifications, skill sets and non-accredited training are becoming training pathways being sought by learners and employers. Our government is supporting the establishment of the Tasmanian hospitality and tourism academy, formally visitor experience training, to meet the demand of non-accredited short courses in tourism and hospitality. Our government continues to engage with tourism and hospitality industry training providers and supporting training pathways into jobs. Can I just commend you Mr Vermeij on the outstanding apprentices that you have trained through your business. Some very fine young Tasmanians.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, the TasTAFE legislative review report states TasTAFE has quote, 'identified an opportunity for efficiency through divestment and closing down some campuses.' The government has announced its intention to close the TasTAFE Drysdale South library and relocate staff to Clarence. What campuses are intended for closure or merging?

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned before - in the House, I think it was - we're keen to reinvest in our campuses and continue to provide new opportunities for our learners. There are, because of the nature of some of TasTAFE's assets, a number of assets that are not core to training. For example, large land holdings that are currently vacant, which of course could be an opportunity for housing. There also -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Chair, with respect, we've taken half an hour to get through one round of questions.

**CHAIR** - I know. It's taken a long time, hasn't it?

**Mr MITCHELL** - The minister is really blowing these out. These questions are very specific. He doesn't have to take up the full three minutes; he can do that with Mr Vermeij, that's fine. The question is: what campuses are intended for closure or merging? Simple question.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yeah, thanks, Mr Mitchell. And, as I mentioned, we're looking to reinvest in the campuses. There are some areas where we own assets that are not being used for training. I mentioned, of course, vacant land. Another key area is around childcare centres that are owned by TasTAFE, but are not actually providing training. We've got a portfolio of 10 locations -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, I will bring you back to the question. What campuses are intended for closure or merging?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yeah thanks, Mr Mitchell, and I'll bring you back to the answer. We work through the process. There was the sale of the 10 Hunter Street Queenstown property, which has been approved by TasTAFE, and they're working through the crown solicitor on that

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contracting process. An offer to purchase the Malangenna Children's Centre has been received and is currently being considered. Those assets are, as I mentioned, not core to teaching. The Queenstown asset has not been used by TasTAFE for training purposes since approximately 2013, with the space leased to a third party in 2015, which concluded in early 2024.

TasTAFE entered a lease with the state government-owned Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation, of course training as the West Coast Wilderness Railway, in mid-2024, for a term of three years. The Abt Railway Ministerial Corporation approached TasTAFE with an offer to purchase the property at the agreed sale price of \$170,000, consistent with the government valuation obtained in 2024. The funds arising from the sale of the property will be reinvested for maintenance of the TasTAFE assets. And, as I mentioned before, TasTAFE currently leases a building to Malangenna Children's Centre to operate a childcare centre at the TasTAFE Devonport campus. Discussions on options to purchase the building have commenced with Malangenna Children's Centre, with an offer being received and currently under review. Any sale of the Devonport property is subject to the TAFE board and, of course, ministerial approval.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, I'll take it that anything you haven't mentioned is not for sale, so it'll be interesting to see what happens out of that. Can you commit to the future of the TasTAFE Campbell Street campus?

**Mr ELLIS** - Campbell Street is actually an important strategic asset for us. We've been investing significantly in that location. I'll pass to the team at TasTAFE to talk through that particular campus and its offerings.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. Campbell Street is a very important footprint for TasTAFE. It's significant for us to have a presence in the Hobart CBD, and we will retain that presence in the Hobart CBD and we have no plans to leave it.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Last question, thank you, Chair. The government promised in 2021 to employ an extra 100 TasTAFE teachers. How many extra teachers have been employed over and above the number that existed at the time the promise was made, and when will the government deliver on its promise of 100 extra TasTAFE teachers?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. As we mentioned at the committee hearings last year, we consider that commitment acquitted -

**Mr MITCHELL** - What a joke.

**Mr ELLIS** - Certainly in regard to the teaching workforce that's required by TasTAFE. At the 2021 election, we committed to an additional 100 TasTAFE teachers, and more teachers have been recruited on top of new agreements that mean teachers are doing more teaching. TasTAFE needs a dynamic teaching workforce that's flexible and adaptable to training needs in the future. Some teachers may, of course, choose to work for TasTAFE at peak times while continuing to work in industry.

As I mentioned, with the operational decisions of TAFE, I'll pass over to them.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Before you pass on, minister - the question included how many extra teachers have been employed over and above the number that existed at the time the promise

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was made. You're saying that you said last year the promise has been acquitted. Then, it should be a simple mathematical equation - X numbers of teachers there, X number there, and B should be more than 100 more than the first number. If that's not the case, then you haven't acquitted the promise.

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr Mitchell, as I mentioned before, we need to meet the demand that's coming through. There was a huge spike during the COVID period, with the former federal government implementing a range of subsidies and support for the economy that included the job trainer program. When your government removed the job trainer program -

**Mr MITCHELL** - And brought in free TAFE.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. When your government removed the job trainer program, that had an impact around the country. It's important we make sure the TasTAFE teaching workforce is fit for purpose and is the right size for learners. We've made available the capacity to expand to that number. From what I understand, TasTAFE has delivered an equivalent 66 additional FTEs through the new Teaching Employees Enterprise Agreement and the additional hiring process.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, you've said 66 FTEs. How does that equal 100 extra teachers?

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr Mitchell, we make available the funding for that process, but of course it's dependent on learner need and focusing on those key areas. As we mentioned at the committee hearing last year, we're focused on making sure that TasTAFE fit for the future. I think it would be nonsensical -

**Mr MITCHELL** - It's another broken promise. You promised 100, you delivered 66 and you reckon that's good enough.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, regarding the new Tasmanian Automotive Chamber of Commerce (TACC) automotive centre at Cambridge that there's a 10-year lease on, can you please talk us through the process of procurement for leasing that centre and fitting it out, and the public and transparent process that would have gone through for a tenure for such a project?

**Mr ELLIS** - Do you mean tender or tenure?

**Ms BADGER** - Well, only one of them is applicable to it, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger. A strategic partnership between TasTAFE and the Tasmanian Automotive Chamber of Commerce is delivering a new \$2.35 million purpose-built automotive training centre here in the south in Cambridge. The new training centre has been secured for a long-term lease agreement on a recently built structure at the Cambridge Industrial Park and it's certainly an encouraging piece of work for TasTAFE if we want to be more industry aligned. I'll pass over to the team at TasTAFE to talk through that facility and the process.

**Mr GARDNER** - Based on an event that happened at Campbell Street last year where our ability to deliver training was curtailed because of the flooding of the basement at Campbell Street, we've been focused on securing solutions to get our trainees and learners back into the

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classroom and to work with the industry to ensure we don't have a backlog of training. That has meant an enormous amount of work very quickly and I want to commend the team at TasTAFE for actually finding a viable alternative solution which doesn't tie up capital. It actually gives us a blend of capital and a long-term lease arrangement to allow us very quickly to reestablish training in the south of the state to meet the state's and the industry's needs while we also seek to look to longer-term solutions.

**Ms BADGER** - So just to be clear, there was no process that went out publicly for anyone to fit out that building, it was all done through a TACC member for the cost of a few million dollars that TAFE paid for out of their budget - is that correct?

**Mr GARDNER** - I'd have to refer to my CEO in terms of the process. Will, do you want to speak?

**Mr McSHANE** - All I can say is that it's enormously difficult to find space at the size and magnitude that we need to be able to deliver automotive in the south. The square footage that we had in Campbell Street was over two floors so it was fairly sizeable, so to find an equivalent space that wasn't spread over a number of sites was incredibly challenging. Our process was to work with TACC and industry in partnership to find an appropriate space we could use that was fit for purpose. We certainly recognise not having a fit-for-purpose facility would defeat what we're aiming to do. As far as the funding goes, the money has been provided through Skills Tasmania for the \$2 million as well as the \$350,000 that was retained from a spray booth project that was federally funded.

**Ms BADGER** - So just to confirm, nothing went out publicly and all the decisions of who did the fit-out and the development was all internal.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's probably worth noting, Ms Badger, the need to move quickly because of the unfortunate flood damage that occurred at the Campbell Street campus. Making sure we're delivering training for our learners and aligning with industry is a good thing. Acting swiftly to take advantage of an opportunity with industry is a good thing. I'll pass over to TasTAFE if there's anything further to add.

**Mr GARDNER** - No, nothing further, other than the fact that within the confines of our organisation, our legislation and our governance obligations, we're very comfortable with what we did. The most important thing is that we get learners back in the classroom as quickly as possible. We're very clear about the value we derived from the money we spent and certainly there is no sense that there was anything untoward or inappropriate about the way the money was applied.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, as you may be aware, Dress for Success Tasmania is facing significant financial challenges. The recent state and federal funding applications have been unsuccessful and without urgent intervention and support the board have had made the difficult decision that they are unable to continue and will need to cease in June 2026 unless they secure additional funds. Since their inception they've supported 1580 women with clothing, coaching, resumes and confidence building. These women are now contributing meaningfully to families, workplaces and communities. Dress for Success Tasmania is the only organisation in the state solely focused on empowering disadvantaged women through styling and career readiness. Their holistic practical model has proven to change lives. Will you be ensuring that they have funding in the May 2026 Budget so they can continue to impact on women's lives positively?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnston. I really appreciate your advocacy and appreciate the work of Dress for Success. They're an amazing team and the support they provide for women in Tasmania is wonderful. We want to be breaking down the barriers for people to participate.

The 2024-25 budget initiative of \$2.5 million over two years through the Workforce Participation and Training Program is aimed at supporting disadvantaged or vulnerable population cohorts engage with the labour market. That includes Dress for Success and Hamlet. A big shout-out to the team there on the amazing Tasmanian Community Champions awards and other organisations like the Bike Collective who've been granted a combined \$1 million over two years. I might introduce to the table Mr Stuart Hollingsworth who's the director of Jobs Tasmania to talk through it further.

**Mr HOLLINGSWORTH** - The Jobs Tasmania funding that is supporting Dress for Success is continuing for another period of time. The federal funding caused a lot of challenges for the board, so we've been working with them to engage the federal government on their contribution to the organisation. We are in the process of working closely with the board and have provided additional resources to support them to review their sustainability in the good work that they do. This includes collective engagement on federal government reform around supporting participation for women in the workforce and some of the structural barriers that are established and inhibit engagement with the labour market, and continuing to connect the Dress for Success team who are working with a number of stakeholders engaging with women to support their connection to work, such as the Regional Jobs Hub program. We have been working closely with the board over the last few weeks to address these concerns and issues to resolve some of that sustainability challenge.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Thank you for that. Minister, despite all that they are looking at closure in June 2026 and whether it's state or federal funding, they need additional funding. This impacts on Tasmanian women, and particularly noting Mr George's concerns about the creative industries, we need women to be engaging as much as possible in the workforce. Will you commit to meeting with the Minister for Women, Jane Howlett, on this? She is very aware and I'm sure she'd be keen to take you there so you can see the impact for yourself on Tasmanian women.

**Mr ELLIS** - I have been there before and really appreciate their work. I'm happy to go again because I find it inspiring. As has been mentioned, that program received additional support for 2024-25 and the Budget ensures service delivery until September 2027. It is disappointing regarding federal funding and we will be happy to advocate to the federal government to make sure they also recognise the importance of this program, just as Tasmania does. We'd really welcome an opportunity to meet with the team at Dress for Success again and work through their processes.

**Mr GEORGE** - Minister, before your government decided to continue to vandalise the creative arts in Tasmania, I understand that there was a 30-month review undertaken by KPMG, supposedly followed by three weeks of consultation before a final decision was made on 12 November. My office was told that we would have access to some of that, but I've seen nothing so far. So clearly, the decision by TAFE was made as a result of, or on the back of that consultation feedback, or otherwise the consultation would have been pointless. Can you

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provide a copy of the final report, and explain to us the outcome of that consultation process that led to the death of these creative courses?

**Mr ELLIS** - Can I just get some clarity - when you said the 30-month review -

**Mr GEORGE** - KPMG review, as I understand it, according to your office.

**Mr ELLIS** - Okay, there's a couple of different processes. There's a 30-month legislative review into TasTAFE, and then the work that's done for the qualifications specifically. I think you're talking about these qualifications specifically. I will pass over to TasTAFE regarding the work they have done to review these particular courses, and any information that might be further available.

**Mr GARDNER** - They're two separate things, from our point of view. The 30-month review was undertaken - the 30-month legislative review, which was a requirement of the legislation of the act. That was undertaken by an independent panel; that wasn't KPMG.

There was a separate report that was undertaken by an independent panel into the legislation itself and the enactment of the legislation, the governance under that. There's no interrelationship between that piece of work and our work around courses and overall review of products and what products we would and wouldn't deliver. They're two very separate things.

**Mr GEORGE** - Okay. What I'm looking for is the process, and documentation of the process, that led to the decision to, first of all, cancel these courses. Secondly, I'd like to see the outcome of the consultation process that was supposedly put into place over three weeks, as I understand it, before a final decision was made.

**Mr GARDNER** - Minister, if I may, just to be clear on that, the consultation process is our industrial process. To step through the process of this, TasTAFE undertook its own review internally. We make a review based on our obligations in relation to the minister's statement of expectations, the Tasmanian Skills Plan, and then looking at courses we deliver and whether they need to be accredited courses or not, and whether TasTAFE needs to deliver them. Based on running through those filters, we then identified a shortlist of training products that we recommended to Skills Tasmania for discontinuation.

Skills Tasmania accepted that recommendation, and then, at that point, before we could make a final decision, we needed to undertake a consultation process, as we are obliged to do under our enterprise agreements. We entered into a period of consultation with our staff, and that's effectively to test a proposal as to whether those products can continue without government subsidy. We undertook a process of consultation. I think the first piece was two weeks of direct engagement with our workforce. Then there's a subsequent three-week period where we take input.

All of that is then collated to inform a final decision. That was done, and the decision was made, based on all of that, that those products were not viable without government subsidy. Therefore the decision was taken to discontinue those products.

**Mr GEORGE** - Through you, minister. Can we see documentation that describes the process and the results of that consultation period?

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**Mr GARDNER** - I can only take that on notice, Mr George, just to be able to then look at what information we can provide. I don't mean that in terms of not providing transparency to the process, but we need to have a look at the documentation we've got that leads into a recommendation, so I think I need to take that question on notice.

**Mr GEORGE** - Did the minister agree to that?

**CHAIR** - Mr Vermey?

**Mr MITCHELL** - Chair, before we move on to Mr Vermey, does the minister need to assent to give the question on notice?

**CHAIR** - I thought you had.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, I just did.

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Mr VERMEY** - With increasing demand for care amongst Tasmanians across aged care, disability support and community health services, what action is government taking to address workforce shortages in the care sector? How is the government supporting skills development to ensure Tasmanians receive safe, high-quality care?

**Mr ELLIS** - Our healthcare and social assistance sector is the largest employing industry in Tasmania, with 46,848 employees as at August 2025 and projected employment growth of 8.3 per cent from 2024 to 2027. Many of the pathways in the jobs are vocational pathways. Our government is supporting training and upskilling through the VET system. The most significant VET qualification is a Certificate III in Individual Support, with 1394 enrolments in 2024.

We're also supporting short courses and Certificate IV qualifications, upskilling the workforce and the training pathways through apprenticeships and traineeships. These qualifications are being delivered through training providers like TasTAFE, Avidity Training and Development, and Work & Training.

We've been investing \$7.5 million into the Alanvale Health Hub at TasTAFE to deliver technology-supported, industry-aligned training and strengthen our health and care workforce.

We've also committed to establish the Early Years Workforce Development Fund to improve completion rates, retain workers and boost childcare availability, particularly in rural and regional areas. We hope to announce the launch of the fund alongside industry very soon.

Looking ahead, we're committed to continuing to engage with the industry, building on the Industry Skills Compact, including early childhood education and care, signed in November 2023; and Disability Services, signed in August 2024, to align training with workforce priorities.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, why did the government choose to lease a site for an automotive training facility in a zone where training facilities are unlawful?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. Obviously working through a planning process is a usual part of development. Certainly while I was planning minister, it became very apparent

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to me that it doesn't make common sense that vocational training isn't a permitted use in some of these zones, particularly as we look to align industry more closely with training, and training more closely with industry. These zoning and planning processes are pretty standard when it comes to development.

I will pass over to the TasTAFE team to talk through further about this development.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. I can only reiterate CEO's comments earlier about the incredible challenge of finding sufficient footprint to get a training facility up and running in such a short period of time, given the event that we experienced. We had no lead-in and we were looking at a very short range of options. It wasn't until we were well progressed through that process that it became clear that there was a planning hurdle. Subsequently we've been working with government, with our minister, with the Planning minister, to address that planning hurdle so we can proceed with the delivery of training on that site.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, what steps have been necessary to enable automotive training to be lawful at the site, and have those steps been initiated and completed? If not, when do you anticipate completion and when will students start studying there?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I'm sure the Planning minister can provide a further update. They actually initiated when I was Planning minister, because again, when I looked at the strategic need to better align training and industry, it certainly made sense to provide training opportunities in areas where industry operates. I think you'd agree that that's common sense, or certainly I hope so, and hopefully that would be something that -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Certainly, I think it's common sense to have training facilities where they're lawful, but anyway.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, I'd hope that you'd be supportive of this, because it's exactly what we want to see from our learners. We're working through a process. A planning process is pretty typical when doing developments and we'll work through that in the usual way. I'm sure the Planning minister can provide the latest on his side of things, but I'll pass over the team at TasTAFE, if there's anything further to add.

**Mr GARDNER** - No, there's nothing further, thank you minister.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, the Budget shows TasTAFE's employee benefits reduce from \$97.4 million in 2024-25, to \$95.4 million in 2028-29, which is a \$2 million reduction over the forwards. Explain this reduction in employees' benefits, particularly in light of wage increases that are budgeted to occur over this period.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I will pass to the team at TasTAFE to talk through that.

**Mr McSHANE** - Just to clarify your question, what numbers are in the budget chapter?

**Mr MITCHELL** - The numbers I have are \$97.4 million in 2024-25, going down to \$95.4 million in 2028-29. It's a \$2 million reduction in employee benefits.

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**Mr McSHANE** - Yes, just to confirm in the cash flow, not the comprehensive statement of income. The primary reason for that is to do with the 27th pay period. In the last financial year we had 27 pay periods, which happens every 11 years.

**Mr MITCHELL** - You're telling me that in four years time, we will have had on the government figures, 2.5 per cent wage increases year on year, but your employee benefits are reducing by \$2 million in four years time?

**Mr McSHANE** - No, I'm suggesting that you're marking against the \$97 million, which was the year just gone.

**Mr MITCHELL** - My point is, you're going from \$97.4 million in 2024-25, to \$95.4 million in 2028-29.

**Mr McSHANE** - Yes.

**Mr MITCHELL** - So, in four years, your employee benefits are going backwards?

**Mr McSHANE** - Sorry, no. For clarity, in 2024-25 we had 27 pay periods and those forward periods have 26 pay periods. There's one additional pay period that happened in the 2024-25 year, that isn't repeated for another 11 years.

**Mr MITCHELL** - You're suggesting -

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr Mitchell, this is a very well understood concept, and you can see it in the growth from 2025-26, which is 90.

**Mr MITCHELL** - I get the pay issue; I get the pay period -

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm not sure that you do, because you keep asking the question. It goes from \$90-95 over the course of the forwards -

**Mr MITCHELL** - I really do. You're suggesting there is no increase in employee benefits, despite wage increases over that time. Which suggests to me, you're anticipating fewer staff over the four years.

**Mr McSHANE** - Apologies, in the question - the growth in employee benefits is aligned with our enterprise agreements for those three agreements we have in place.

**CHAIR** - You have three minutes left before the end of the session.

**Ms BADGER** - Fantastic. Two rapid-fire final questions, then. Minister, can you please table the KPMG report that concluded that TasTAFE's campus footprint was too large and that there were divestment efficiencies?

The second part of that, because I'm thinking that answer might be quite short - when we're talking about the choice of location for the automotive facility at Cambridge, talking about the appropriate footprint, being the hurdle for that, there were other options on the table, some of them with a greater footprint. Why was that decision made to go with somewhere

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where there weren't the planning facilities in place, and the fit-out has gone to a member of the TACC?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger. Obviously, we want to work closely with industry and rezoning is a standard part of the planning process. We want our training to be industry aligned, that includes co-locating with industry. I don't think there's anything particularly controversial, or, certainly, I hope that there isn't because that would be a good outcome.

I mentioned before previously to you around some of those areas for divestment, areas that are not involved in training - the Queenstown shed, that's now -

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you, minister. I listened intently to your answer, and I note you gave an answer in the House as well. I'm just asking if you can table the KPMG report.

**Mr ELLIS** - I will look to the team of TasTAFE to see what might be available in that regard.

**Mr GARDNER** - The KPMG report, it's unfortunate that that 30-month review picked up one line, in a really extensive exploration, which actually followed on from a previous report, which was a requirement under the transformation - as part of the transformation process. Which was an assessment -

**Ms BADGER** - I'm really sorry to interrupt, we have 30 seconds left and I concur if that's picked up one unfortunate line, it would be in the interests of the public to have that tabled.

**CHAIR** - The time for this session has expired, but we'll kick off with the confirmation of that.

**The committee suspended from 1.15 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.**

**CHAIR** - The time being 2.00 p.m., we will resume this session. Minister, I'll be asking questions instead of Ms Badger as she's at Committee B, so would you mind answering the question she put to you, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will pass back to the team at TasTAFE.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. The KPMG work that Ms Badger referred to is not available. It was not submitted as a report. It was an internal piece of advice that informed further internal work.

**CHAIR** - Minister, in relation to the total list of sites TasTAFE is planning to divest, do you have that information?

**Mr ELLIS** - I mentioned before the divestment that happened at a shed in Queenstown that's now being used for the West Coast Wilderness Railway and also that there's a process underway in regard to the Malangenna childcare centre which is leased from TAFE for which a request has been made but no decision finalised.

**CHAIR** - So you're saying, minister, there are only two sites that you're divesting. Is that right or is that or do you have a list of sites?

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**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned, one's recently been made and one's for consideration. There's a range of different facilities TAFE owns around the state that don't have a core teaching purpose, whether that's vacant land, other childcare centres that are operating purely as childcare centres rather than teaching facilities. I suppose as a broad area, we want to be reinvesting in our campuses and assets that are not used for teaching core TAFE purposes, so that is something we'll look at and consider on an ongoing basis.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, minister. We don't have any Independents here at the table, so we'll go to Mr Vermey.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, with record low unemployment rates in Tasmania, which we're pleased with, I know for a fact we've got employers struggling to find people to fill jobs. What action is the government implementing to increase workforce participation and create opportunities for young Tasmanians into real jobs?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermey. Tasmania's economy is strong and growing. We've seen record job creation and investment, which means opportunities for Tasmanians. We're working together with community and training organisations to support more Tasmanians into training and employment pathways.

Our regional jobs hubs are making a real difference by connecting people with local employers and training. They're tailored to community needs and helping thousands of Tasmanians find meaningful work. Jobs hubs networks have worked for over 12,000 Tasmanians, including supporting 6000 people into work and connecting 3000 with training. The hubs also engage with more than 9000 businesses statewide.

In addition to our highly successful jobs hubs, we're supporting targeted programs to help more Tasmanians into training and employment. We've provided additional funding to specialist organisations to support more opportunities for Tasmanians to engage in the labour market, and we've mentioned before Dress for Success, Hamlet and the Tasmanian Bike Collective.

Through the Workforce Participation and Training Program we expanded the funding round to a total of \$3.5 million. These grants support community-led projects to support workforce participation. Even more Tasmanians will be supported to be job-ready through our 2025-26 Budget. We know the best way to be job-ready is by getting a foot in the door, and these programs offer unique opportunities. Delivered by not-for-profit Workskills Tasmania, Troublesmiths' long-term funding valued at over \$500,000 over four years furthers its mission of supporting young people to build confidence and engage in work. The future of social enterprise Hamlet Cafe is also being secured with a further \$750,000 over three years as an injection in this interim Budget.

We've also recognised that transport shouldn't be a barrier to employment, That's why Area Connect provides flexible services, linking job seekers in regional areas to workplaces and training providers. Through the 2025-26 Budget we've committed \$1.6 million to extending the program which has enabled nearly 60,000 trips since it commenced.

Ensuring that young people have the skills and training that they need to start their careers is a vital first step. Our Youth Jobs Strategy is well into implementation and design to ensure

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young Tasmanians are supported through training with jobs and employers are equipped to create meaningful opportunities.

We've recently announced the first demonstration project with Incat which will put the ambition of the strategy into action. To support the important agenda, we've established a taskforce that brings together young people and key representatives from industry, community, jobs hubs, schools and the tertiary education sector. By investing in training, transport and community-led programs, we're ensuring every Tasmanian has a chance to participate and to succeed.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, what is the current total FTE educator workforce at TasTAFE?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I'll pass to the team at TasTAFE for that data.

**Mr GARDNER** - As at March 2025, there were 457 FTE.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Thank you. I note that's lower than the 495 employed as of October 2024. Can you tell me what was the FTE of TasTAFE educators in May 2022, May 2023 and May 2024?

**Mr GARDNER** - We will have to take that question on notice.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, are you happy to take the notice?

**Mr ELLIS** - I think perhaps June might be better, being the end of the financial year. I have data for June 2021 at 408.29, but I am happy to work through that.

**Mr MITCHELL** - I'm happy to take June. I just wanted something consistent with figures. If you're happy to take that on notice I'd appreciate it. Thank you. My third and final question is what does the total FTE of TasTAFE educators plan to be by June 2026, June 2027, June 2028 and June 2029?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. Obviously, much will depend on demand and working through that process. I'll pass to the team at TasTAFE if there's anything further to add.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. Part of our forward planning is where demand sits with students. The important thing is that we match capability and capacity with demand and we'll continue to work with that on an annual basis as we do our annual budgeting processes.

**Mr MITCHELL** - The question was what is the total FTE of TasTAFE educators planned to be? I'm assuming you have plans for what those numbers should be, notwithstanding all the various plans you have in terms of your workforce allocations. According to your best knowledge at the moment, what is the total FTE of TasTAFE educators planned to be by June 2026, June 2027, June 2038 and June 2029?

**Mr GARDNER** - Mr Mitchell, I can only respond as I did before. We will continue to look at the numbers we need on an annual basis based on enrolments and student demand.

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**CHAIR** - Minister, in relation to workplace health and safety, how many TasTAFE staff are on workers' compensation for stress, bullying, psychological or psychosocial reasons, physical injury and other leave due to being unable to work? Can you provide this data over a five-year period?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. I'll pass to TasTAFE.

**Mr GARDNER** - Chair, to help me understand, are you seeking information in relation to the current body of workers' compensation claims for a specific period?

**CHAIR** - How many workers are off on workers' compensation?

**Mr GARDNER** - We can provide you with that information.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Do I need to put that as a question on notice?

**Mr GARDNER** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Can you provide that with a five-year breakdown?

**Mr GARDNER** - Historically yes, to the extent that we have that broken down; whatever data we have in relation to the breakdown. We currently report on physical and psychosocial. I can't be clear that we have that breakdown for the last five years, but we certainly do now.

**CHAIR** - Have you noticed an increase in workers' compensation claims, particularly for psychosocial issues?

**Mr GARDNER** - Not noticeably, certainly the incidence of psychosocial claims is increasing as a proportion of the overall claims, but in line with national trends. There's nothing that we would see in our organisation that's any different from what we're observing and reading in this broader space nationally.

**CHAIR** - Do you do any surveys of workers? Can you just give an indication of what you're seeing in those surveys?

**Mr GARDNER** - Over the last two years, we have conducted pulse surveys to get a sense of the sentiment of our workforce across a range of fronts. We did that in 2024 and we've done that again in 2025. We've seen from 2024-25 some moderate improvement in overall engagement, but it's fair to say that this is a long exercise and we're continuing to invest and we want to get it into a much better place because, ultimately, the success of TasTAFE is driven by the quality engagement of our people. That's what we're about and we continue to invest in that.

**CHAIR** - Any trends in relation to particular campuses that raise concerns for you?

**Mr McSHANE** - Through the minister. Our surveys do go through to be talking more about the various departments and areas. If we're talking about specific teaching areas as opposed to locations, so we don't drive down into the location rather than the various, dare I say, schools or facilities that operate within it. We don't go down specifically to campuses.

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We also recognise that, certainly, it's difficult to drill down, particularly if you have limited numbers of participants because if there are low numbers of participants in surveys, if they get singled out as hard for them to trust.

**CHAIR** - Is it okay, minister, to ask for that methodology to be tabled please?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll look back to the TasTAFE team as far as that. One thing I will say in general though is since the transition, I have been very appreciative of the work that the TasTAFE board and executive have done to uplift safety at a range of different campuses. I know it's been a significant area of work. Sometimes the training work in certain areas, construction, for example, is higher risk and the work to uplift safety on campuses is actually very much focused on aligning with industry training and expectations as well. I'll pass back to the TasTAFE team to see what's available.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. I'm happy to provide some information around the methodology we apply. In this context, we have been applying the human synergistics model as a basis for understanding where our culture is at and we are working off the organisational - it has a cultural inventory model and we undertake a survey of the back of that model to see where our workforce all sits in relation to that.

That allows us to point to areas where we can seek to improve and focus, particularly some of the areas that we've identified through that process around role clarity, role conflict, some quality-of-service areas. In overall employee satisfaction, we recorded last year, 58 per cent of our employees who responded reported satisfaction to a great or very great extent. We've seen some improvement in that this year, but we want to drive that to a much stronger point.

If I may return to a question that you asked just earlier in relation to workers compensation claims, in July 2024 we had a total of 29 workers compensation claims on foot, 13 of those psychosocial, and 16 physical; and in July 2025, we had 32, 18 psychosocial and 14 physical. We had an increase in psychosocial and a slight decrease in physical.

**CHAIR** - What was the first date?

**Mr GARDNER** - July 2024, a total of 29 claims.

**CHAIR** - That's fine, I won't take up too much more time.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, with rapidly changing technology presenting opportunities for productivity and enhancing service delivery for Tasmanians consistent with our red tape reduction agenda, what action is being taken to support better training outcomes for learners, teachers and training providers?

**Mr ELLIS** - This is a very exciting area of skills investment because, in addition to our significant investment in contemporary training facilities, we're also ensuring more efficient systems, which means training providers can focus on teaching and not paperwork. New IT systems will also transform the way that apprentices, trainees, training providers and employers are supported by TasTAFE and Skills Tasmania.

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Through Skills Tasmania, our core systems replacement project will replace two outdated systems, which have been in place for many years and are no longer fit for purpose. It will bring together how government manages payments to training providers and learners, tracks apprenticeship and traineeship progress, and collects information and reporting data, and enhances information management. ReadyTech, which is the leading provider of education technology solutions, will design and deliver the system over the next 18 months followed by an eight-year support period.

With around 9000 Tasmanians in an apprenticeship or traineeship and around 100 registered training organisations on the books, making systems and processes more efficient is both productivity boosting for the sector and a direct action on cutting red tape. Through TasTAFE, investment in a new student management system (SMS) to be delivered by Technology One, as the successful tenderer, is a really exciting step forward. The new SMS will provide significant benefits to learners and staff. The investment will provide TasTAFE with rich information to support business decision-making and provide educators and administration staff with the tools they need to maximise learner success. The new SMS will allow learners and employers to self-serve information and request the support they need to enhance their experience with TasTAFE. Investment in core underlying systems at both Skills Tasmania and TasTAFE will take our Tasmanian VET system forward with enhanced service delivery and less red tape for learners, providers and employers.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, in 2021 you promised 100 extra teachers. In October 2024, you had 495 TasTAFE educators, now we're told that you have 457. Explain to me how you got 38 fewer educators today than you had in October 2024, and yet you maintain that you have acquitted your promise to deliver 100 extra TasTAFE teachers, even though you only delivered 66? Explain the maths.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Mitchell. As I mentioned previously, we've had a significant uplift; 66 full-time teacher equivalents. That, of course, is also supported by the work that we've done to increase teaching hours and make sure that we're delivering a higher productivity from our teachers. That's encouraging. That's part of the work that we've been doing.

We've now structurally funded this commitment through the budget and that enables us to work through, when the time is right, around teaching opportunities. As was mentioned at the hearing last year, we're satisfied with the uplift as it relates to demand because I'm sure that even you would not expect TasTAFE to be employing teachers where there's not demand.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Are you expecting less demand for TasTAFE services over the next few months? Does that explain the fewer teachers?

**Mr ELLIS** - When your federal government cut the job training subsidies -

**Mr MITCHELL** - And introduced free TAFE.

**Mr ELLIS** - When your federal government cut the job training -

**Mr MITCHELL** - And introduced free TAFE.

**Mr ELLIS** - When Mr Mitchell's federal government cut the job training subsidy, what that meant around the country was a reduction in the number of people going through vocational education and training. We want to work to support TAFE. We've seen significant

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uplift in investments, like the student management system, which is a more than \$20 million commitment that will really future-proof TAFE and provide amazing opportunities for learners. The funding has been made available for the 100 new teachers. TasTAFE, as was mentioned last year, are then focusing on the areas where there's particular -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, you said the funding has been made available for the 100 extra teachers. What does that mean?

**Mr ELLIS** - It's structurally included in the Budget now. As TasTAFE continues to work through the process, some areas are hard to employ for around the country, including areas like electrotechnology, but I will pass to the team at TasTAFE to talk through more in terms of hiring and the teaching workforce.

**Mr GARDNER** - Mr Mitchell, I am happy to provide you with the data on our workforce, because it is all published within our annual report. I must say, just looking at our annual report, we're struggling to find your figure.

**Mr MITCHELL** - The 495?

**Mr GARDNER** - Yes, because our figures -

**Mr MITCHELL** - I will find that for you, because I have drawn that specifically from data you have provided.

**Mr GARDNER** - We have figures for the year-end published in our annual reports, and they don't show those figures, but happy to make the figures from our annual reports available to you.

**Mr MITCHELL** - I will dig mine out. I'm sure I got it from an official source, or the reports I've read.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's important, as well, to not mislead the committee.

**Mr MITCHELL** - A hundred per cent. Absolutely. You and I agree on one thing at last.

You mentioned electrotechnology. Young Tasmanians are trying to enrol in Certificate II Electrotechnology, and they report to me extreme difficulty. One has tried in July, logging in 10 minutes after enrolments went live, but missed out. In November he had two devices ready to jump as soon as enrolments went live, but still missed out. Without this course, he cannot get an apprenticeship. Minister there clearly are not enough classes to meet demand. What are you doing to ensure that young Tasmanians can get into the courses they need?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. Certainly, electrotechnology is an area of high demand. It's part of the reason why energy is a key focus on our skills plan. It's part of the reason also why we've expanded our very successful High-Vis Army initiative to include the sparkies, through the National Electrical and Communications Association. A lot of that is about focusing, or supporting, the uplift of industry to really take more ownership of their workforce development needs and their training needs as well.

It's been a successful project, but we recognise that there's more that needs to be done. That's part of the reason why we've delivered the nation-leading Water and Energy Trade

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Centre of Excellence at the Clarence campus, which has nearly doubled training capacity there. It's part of the reason, as well, that we have funded, in partnership with the federal government, a \$27 million north-west Clean Energy Centre of Excellence, which is really going to transform the opportunities for sparkies, in particular, to get the education and training that they need.

It's encouraging to hear that there's high levels of demand, and happy to reach out directly to your constituent about opportunities that may be available. I will pass over to Ms Paterson from Skills and Jobs, if there's anything further to add on electrotechnology training around the state.

**Ms PATERSON** - Minister, through you. Just to confirm the \$27.2 million partnership with the federal government, which is really an acknowledgement that we need to boost both the quality and the capacity of electrotech training in Tasmania.

That investment is going through a process at the moment with an advisory committee to look at work around contemporary delivery, but also workforce needs, particularly for the north-west with the projects coming online there. We can then understand not just where we need to lift capacity in existing courses, but also where we might need to add specialist courses to the offering, either through TAFE or through private providers.

That advisory committee work is expected to come together next year, and we will be providing advice through that advisory committee to the minister and TasTAFE as to how that investment gets taken forward through TasTAFE.

**Ms DOW** - Is there a public piece of advice or a report or something that would be publicly available?

**Ms PATERSON** - Through you, minister. I would expect that a lot of that information would become publicly available once the process is completed.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, what TasTAFE courses other than the 12 that have been publicly identified have been nominated, or are planned to be nominated, for subsidy changes?

**Mr ELLIS** - Obviously, we've worked through this process, but I will pass over to the team at TasTAFE. Obviously, we should be reviewing our course options on a regular basis to make sure that they're meeting industry and learner needs, but happy to pass over to TAFE.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. There is nothing else at this stage, but as the minister noted, it's our job, always, to ensure that we continue to review our entire suite of products to ensure they're relevant to Tasmania and Tasmanians and they help put learners into jobs.

**Mr ELLIS** - Probably one of the other things to note as well, Mr Mitchell, is on the other side of the ledger where new courses are being stood up. The Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Support, that's going to be delivered at the expanded Alanvale Health Hub is a good example of that, and I appreciated your presence there the other day. We're expecting more drug and alcohol support courses that will be provided at that location.

Certainly, with the advent of the Tasmania Devils, we've been really pleased to partner TasTAFE with some major sporting organisations in Tasmania to deliver the Tasmanian Academy of Leadership and Sport. That has had incredible success, I've got to say, in its first

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year, with 55 learners, 30 of which already have jobs before the course is even finished, and tracking on a very high completion rate, potentially around 90 per cent. That's been an amazing partnership facilitated, of course, by the Devils and the stadium, but through Cricket Tasmania, Netball Tasmania and the JackJumpers.

There are some really exciting opportunities for TAFE if we're able to continue to work to review where learner needs exist, and how we can better support industry and their workforce in the future.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, what courses does TasTAFE currently offer that they plan to not offer in 2026-27 and over the forwards?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell, I think we've largely answered this question, but I'll look to TasTAFE to see if there's anything further add.

**Mr GARDNER** - There's nothing further to add. There's nothing further other than what has been tabled and the courses that we have notified.

**CHAIR** - Was that tabled earlier? Is that right?

**Mr GARDNER** - Sorry, the 12 courses that the funding subsidies have been removed from and that TasTAFE has made a decision on.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Yes, so just for clarity: the first question which you answered was about subsidy changes. This question was about courses. So, you're saying that there's no plans to change any courses?

**Mr GARDNER** - There are no plans to remove the offering of courses at this stage. We obviously, ultimately, have to see what enrolments we get. We're only very early in the stage leading since enrolments have opened. So ultimately, we have to continue to monitor that. That's a process we go through every year. If there's no demand -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Sorry, I just want to be super clear. There are no courses that you currently offer that you know that you will not be offering in 26-27 and over the forwards?

**Mr McSHANE** - Aside from the ones that we've already -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Other than those, yeah.

**Mr McSHANE** - Other than those, no.

**CHAIR** - A question about the Certificate IV in Laboratory Techniques. Is that on Skills Tasmania's priority funding list?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Chair. We mentioned that we're already supporting three different specialised training institutions to provide the Certificate IV in Laboratory Tech training. We do note as well that there are other training providers that have that qualification on scope, but I'll pass over to Ms Paterson to provide further information.

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**Ms PATERSON** - Yes, thank you, minister through you. Certainly, the Certificate IV in Lab Tech is a qualification that we currently fund as an apprenticeship and traineeship through three existing providers in Tasmania.

**CHAIR** - Are they Registered Training Organisations (RTO)?

**Ms PATERSON** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Private RTOs, or are they -

**Ms PATERSON** - They're public - they're government-funded RTOs, yes.

**CHAIR** - So does it continue with priority funding?

**Ms PATERSON** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Right. In a briefing that Ms Badger attended which was on the course subsidies cuts, she asked for data that shows the RTOs that are now receiving the course subsidies versus the cuts to TAFE. Do they have the same or more completion or employment outcomes as the course at TAFE? Is there the same course graduation completion with those?

**Ms PATERSON** - We don't have the breakdown of completion rates by provider, but we can certainly provide comparative completion rates between TAFE and other government-funded registered training organisations. The private providers' completion rate average is 64.9 per cent and the TAFE average completion rate is 52.1 per cent. There are obviously good reasons why the TAFE number is a bit lower. They are delivered to some higher-needs cohorts and provide a lot of wraparound support in those situations, so I wouldn't read too much into equality aspects of those varying numbers.

**CHAIR** - Do you strive to get better outcomes?

**Ms PATERSON** - Absolutely, yes, through you, minister. Under the National Skills Agreement, the improving completions project which is funded by the Australian and Tasmanian governments and half of that funding, \$7.2 million, is for TasTAFE to develop an improving completions framework designed to look at improving those completion rates because obviously if we can get better outcomes for the training we're already funding in the system, we can support more Tasmanians into work and that's our policy objective.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. Minister, are you happy for that to be taken on notice?

**Mr ELLIS** - We'll see what's available for you, if that works, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Sorry? The completion rates?

**Mr ELLIS** - I think you're asking about individual providers so we'll see what information is available.

**Ms PATERSON** - Yes, I'm just concerned about the market sensitivities of providing information on individual RTOs.

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**CHAIR** - I understand.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, in my multicultural electorate of Clark I hear stories of international graduates and migrants who have skills we need and want to make Tasmania home. What is the government doing to ensure Tasmanians can benefit from the multicultural migration system and attract and retain skilled migrants?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermeay. With Tasmania's record low unemployment rate, many crucial local industries are finding it hard to recruit and retain the right staff with the right skills at the moment, including skills like health care, building and construction, advanced manufacturing and renewable energy, as well as the tourism and hospitality industries. Skilled migration plays a critical role in Tasmania by helping to meet skills demand and workforce shortages across the economy while we continue to invest in building our local workforce.

The Tasmanian Skills Plan includes actions to deliver Tasmania's Skilled Migration State Nomination Program, work with employers to raise awareness of skilled migration and exploring alternative options in Australia's migration system that may benefit Tasmania. Tasmania's Skilled Migration State Nomination Program helps to attract and retain skilled migrants and support a range of critical industries and sectors. We've now received the full nomination allocation for the 2025-26 program year from the Australian Government. In 2025-26 a total of 1850 nomination places have been allocated to Tasmania. In total, this comprises 1200 nomination places for permanent subclass 190 and 650 nomination places for provisional subclass 491.

While all Tasmanian industries benefit from the program, the healthcare, social assistance and tourism and hospitality sectors are significant beneficiaries, comprising 27 per cent of nominations in 2024-25. Work is also underway for landing a designated area migration agreement, or DAMA, for Tasmania. An agreement of this kind with the Australian Government will offer Tasmanian employers access to more overseas workers than standard employer-sponsored visa programs. We are working with the Australian Government to land this agreement and will continue to advocate nationally to ensure that Tasmanian regions and businesses can attract and retain the skilled migrants we need.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, can you confirm that PowerPoint sessions were held at which TasTAFE leaders were instructed to cut 20 per cent from their budgets?

**Mr ELLIS** - We've been looking to grow our funding for TasTAFE, but I'll pass over to the team at TasTAFE around any briefings.

**Mr GARDNER** - I am not aware of with this. There is always engagement with our team across the board about how we're going to manage with the resources that we have and shape our resources with the funding we get, so it's a continual exercise to look at how we manage our costs across the organisation. In terms of anything specific -

**Mr McSHANE** - Every year we go through a budget process for ourselves, which is usually a calendar year budget. Ahead of next year, as a management group, we will look at what we can do with what we have. Certainly there's been a trajectory of looking at our costs and sensible cost management throughout the organisation and reducing costs that we believe would not be value-generating. We talked at the previous year's Estimates about looking at administrative costs where we know we could seek efficiencies and where we can do it smarter.

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**Mr MITCHELL** - I'm going to come back to the specific question. Can you confirm that PowerPoint sessions were held - so somebody's gone and set stuff up - at which TasTAFE team leaders were instructed to cut 20 per cent from their budgets? If that didn't happen, I'm happy for you to say you're not aware of it and don't know, but I'm not hearing that.

**Mr McSHANE** - Often when we do our budget process we will start with looking at what we can do, which includes looking at stretch capabilities for our cost management. We put the challenge to our workforce to see what we can do, and that is not uncommon for organisations to do in a budget setting process.

**Mr ELLIS** - To be honest, it's something that we should be expecting of all state servants, Mr Mitchell. Where there's waste, duplication, opportunities to do things better utilising modern technology, which is going to be a significant uplift for TasTAFE, that's what you would expect. Your side of politics has been talking about the need for that, so I would have thought you'd certainly welcome some of those standard and basic cost control measures.

**Mr MITCHELL** - What I'm hearing is a confirmation that PowerPoint sessions were held, at which TasTAFE team leaders were told to cut 20 per cent from their budgets. Are you confirming that happened?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will look again to the team from TasTAFE to see whether there's anything further to add, but you've asked the same question.

**Mr MITCHELL** - I'm trying to get clarity on the answer.

**Mr GARDNER** - I think what Will is saying is that every year we go through a process to seek to do better with what we get. We are in a constrained environment where we're seeing growing demand, so we have to find ways and it's prudent for us to look at every part of our organisation and ask them to look at their budgets and see what they can do with it. That's a standard process. What washes out of that ultimately comes together as our budget and you see that published in the budget chapter.

**Mr MITCHELL** - When TasTAFE was removed from the public sector there were arguments made that the changes would allow for flexibility for short-term workers to come in and be paid above the current wage. How many times has someone been employed under a short-term contract, as outlined in that premise for making TAFE a Claytons GBE?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. Obviously flexibility in terms of the way that we hire people is important because we want to make sure there is a strong alignment between industry and TAFE. Certainly our learners really appreciate when there's industry currency from their teachers, and the capabilities that have been provided certainly make that available. The review mentioned that TasTAFE has the tools it needs, it's seeking acceleration of the pace of change and uplift, and we welcome that feedback.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Sorry minister, I'm going to interrupt.

**Mr ELLIS** - That seems to be what you do, Mr Mitchell, but I will pass to the team at TasTAFE.

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**Mr MITCHELL** - The question is how many times has someone been employed under a short-term contract, as outlined? It's a pretty simple question; it doesn't need a glossy brochure.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. I will pass to TasTAFE.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. One of the key elements of the process of organisational transformation under the new legislation was to transition our workforce employed under the State Service across to work under the *Fair Work Act*. That process required us to carry across copied state instruments from the State Service for an interim period while we then negotiated enterprise agreements with our workforce under the *Fair Work Act*. Everything we do in the organisation is in accordance with the legislative requirements, so anything we do in terms of sessional employment, casual employment, permanent employment, all falls under the requirements -

**Mr MITCHELL** - With respect, through you minister. How many times has someone been employed? I didn't ask whether it was legit, how many times has someone been employed under a short-term contract?

**CHAIR** - Through you, Minister.

**Mr McSHANE** - Could we get just clarity on exactly what employee we're talking about? Are we talking a teacher, a non-teacher, a contract role that is attuned to specific project outcomes?

**Mr MITCHELL** - As long as you're clear in your answer as to who you're referring to - If you want to refer to just teachers, that's fine. If you want it to - as all workforces. As long as you're clear in your answer as to who you're referring to. My question is how many times has someone at TasTAFE been employed under a short-term contract? I mean it's a pretty clear question. I don't need the glossy brochure. I just need the -

**CHAIR** - Mr Mitchell, if you direct your questions through the minister.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Through the minister.

**Mr GARDNER** - I can point to the - we have sessional teachers. Our teachers are either permanent, full-time, permanent part-time, fixed term. If we referring to fixed terms, so people that are coming for to do specific things, then on March 25, we had 34.5 fixed-term FTE.

**Mr MITCHELL** - It's referring to the - When TasTAFE was set up under the new arrangements - In setting it up one of the arguments for that was that the changes would allow for flexibility such as short-term workers to come in and be paid above the current wage.

**Mr GARDNER** - I would challenge the premise of that being one of the underpinning premises, certainly flexibility. It was actually - Anything we do is in accordance with the Fair Work act. If someone comes in, like anyone else, if you come in as a casual or you come in for a fixed term, then you're paid in accordance with the enterprise agreements. You asked the question, the numbers of people. We had in on March 25 in terms of the head count, 38.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Ms Dow is going to take the third.

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**CHAIR** - One question, one more question. Yep.

**Ms DOW** - Minister, I was wondering if it would be possible for you to table the review of Drysdale that was done that involves the school of the visitor economy. I can't seem to find it anywhere I'd be interested to review it.

**Mr ELLIS** - Certainly, there are some great opportunities to offer across our visitor economy, many of which require a better education. The TasTAFE school for the visitor economy will transform how we train future generations of tourism and hospitality workers. The school replaces the previous Drysdale brand and incorporates programs like tourism, guiding, hospitality, cookery, bakeries -

**Ms DOW** - Point of order, Chair. My question was very specific and it was about tabling the review that was undertaken of Drysdale and I'd appreciate if the minister would say yes or no.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Mr Dow. The independent review of the Drysdale Tourism and Hospitality Centre of Excellence was undertaken taken in 2024. The review was conducted by an experienced consultant with extensive experience in tourism and hospitality sectors. The review involved consultation with industry, Hospitality Tasmania, TICT, TTHWAC, as we know it, TasTAFE board and the TasTAFE staff. The review was initiated in response to long-standing stakeholder criticism and an unsustainable operating model. The review identified the need to better align training offerings with industry to realise and grow opportunities -

**Mr MITCHELL** - Point of order, Chair.

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm happy to pass over to the team at TAFE to add further to my remarks.

**CHAIR** - I want to clarify something for the two Labor members. There is no point of order in these committees, so the minister has answered the members question or not, but I cannot direct a minister in how they answer a question. If the member is of the view that the question has not been answered, they may ask another question or raise it as a matter of concern in the committee's report. No point of order per se. You're trying to get to the point; I understand that. Sorry, Minister. I'll let you hand over to Mr Gardner.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thanks Ms Dow. That report actually has been shared with a number of industry representatives. To that end, it has been circulated around the place. Happy to provide a copy, just to the extent - All I would just say is, we just need to review for anything that's commercial in confidence, but otherwise I'm comfortable to table that.

**Ms DOW** - Thank you very much and I'd like to hear from you on that. My second question is, I understand there was a review done of the capital assets across the north-west coast undertaken by TasTAFE. In a similar vein, would it be possible for the community to have a copy of that review?

**Mr ELLIS** - Obviously, we've made significant investments into capital on the north-west coast, the new Tasmanian clean energy centre of excellence, a \$27 million partnership

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with the federal government, upgrading the accommodation there as well, which I know Anne Urquhart is a big supporter of, and the agricultural centre of excellence at the Freer Farm has been an excellent investment for the state and very strategic. I'll pass over to the team at TAFE. We have obviously spoken as well about the childcare assets and the shed at Queenstown, too.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. So, as with my previous response in relation to Ms Badger's question, that was a piece of internal advice, it was never tabled with government and it simply informed internal management work. It's not available publicly.

**CHAIR** - We'll go around again, I think. We probably have time at least for another one or two rounds.

Minister, I was really pleased to attend with you, although I did note that it was easier to get there by bike rather than by car, the TAFE graduation, which was held at 3C last year. It was a pleasure to be there, and I noticed that it was a very multicultural list of graduates. It was certainly good to see that. Just following on, Mr Vermey has talked of the migrant skills program, but I'm curious to know, do you have a breakdown of people who come from other countries who are who are learning at TAFE?

**Mr ELLIS** - I really appreciated you being there and I know a lot of our learners appreciate the support. It's important that we celebrate VET in the same way that we celebrate a university graduation. You're right, too, it is one of the amazing features of a TasTAFE graduation that we have people coming from all over the world, whether they are Australian but have different ancestry, or they are new migrants. I think it's quite an extraordinary feature of TasTAFE and really about the hope and opportunity that we look to provide. I'll pass to the team to talk more specifically about migrant numbers and support.

**CHAIR** - I might suggest that clearly my question is around migrant enrolments.

**Mr GARDNER** - Chair, just so I understand, because I'll have to take the question on notice to provide the data to you, are you looking for enrolments for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, or specifically multicultural - anyone who is not Australian by -

**Ms BURNET** - No, are there international students at TAFE?

**Mr GARDNER** - There are two different cohorts; migrant students, who now reside here in Tasmania, and then we have international students who travel here to undertake their training specifically in Tasmania. That's quite a small cohort, which we're looking to build. The larger one is those that are part of the migrant community. We would have to see what we can provide in terms of specific data in relation to that, but I'm happy to have a look at that for you.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, and I note that - I think it might have been last week - that Be Hers was featured for members of the migrant community, mainly women who have had poor opportunities to get into the workforce, and many were going to TAFE. Will they be impacted with TAFE service cuts or course cuts?

**Mr ELLIS** - I might look to Stuart Hollingsworth on Be Hers. Are you the right person to speak on that one, Stu?

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**Mr HOLLINGSWORTH** - Yes, thanks, minister. It might be the TAFE team, in terms of the last part of that question. Be Hers and Migrant Resource Centres have been funded for those programs under the Workforce Participation Training Program to support that engagement, in particular that Be Hers program with TasTAFE.

Alongside that, other supports to engage the migrant community are through work with the Multicultural Council on their employment strategy; connections to our Employer of Choice program, ensuring employers are accessing, able and prepared to take on the opportunity to build their skilled workforce through the migrant community; and of course, through our regional jobs hubs as well, particularly the Glenorchy Jobs Hub and our Career Connector Program. The Be Hers program and the TAFE interfaith, I might pass back through the minister, to the TAFE team, if there's anything to add on that, noting the program is probably a fairly new one.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Hollingsworth, and I will pass to the team at TasTAFE.

**Mr McSHANE** - I will probably have to come back to that.

**CHAIR** - Okay, another question on notice?

**Mr McSHANE** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - In relation to English as another language and availability for people with non-English-speaking backgrounds, is there any change to availability of those courses, with these cuts to courses?

**Mr ELLIS** - Again, Chair, the list of 12 doesn't refer to English as a Second Language training. I suppose more broadly, TasTAFE are really increasing the support that we provide to our learners to succeed. It's actually Pillar Two of our Skills Plan, supporting the learners to succeed - the taypani learning centres that we've invested in, including recently at the Alanvale campus, are really about making sure that support is available to our learners, whether they've got challenges with language, literacy, numeracy, access to digital technology, or even just the need for peer mentorship and support.

I will look to the team at TasTAFE to talk through support that we provide to our learners.

**CHAIR** - Or if those are being cut, really, is my question.

**Mr GARDNER** - To your question, there's no change to the program. We run an adult migrant English program that's separately, federally funded, and that remains unchanged.

**CHAIR** - So, it's federally funded?

**Mr GARDNER** - Yes.

**Mr VERMEY** - For clarity, minister, Tasmania's building and construction sector is vital for delivering the homes Tasmanians need and major infrastructure projects. How is the government ensuring we have the construction workforce to meet these demands and deliver these exciting projects for Tasmanians?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermey. There are significant opportunities presented by the \$30 billion infrastructure pipeline, including the stadium proposal, through the highly successful high-vis army initiative. We're working together with the building and construction sector to deliver the next generation of tradies. There is \$6 million committed to extend the high-vis army to 2027 and to include sparkies and plumbers in the effort.

The high-vis army has delivered an array of successful projects and activities including prevocational training programs, support for apprentices and state-of-the-art training facilities. Results so far: high-vis army members have presented at over 650 school, industry and job seeker events with over 62,000 people engaged; over 4300 learners participating in 442 accredited courses; over 500 participants in 43 pre-employment and job-ready programs with a focus on regions, women and migrants; and over 365 people have been identified as successfully gaining apprenticeships and employment from these programs.

This additional funding will see the construction sector actively enhancing career pathways, improving regional access, building capacity in the teaching workforce and promoting construction careers, especially in regional areas. We're backing in the Master Builders Tasmania's feasibility study into the northern Tasmanian building and construction training centre through a \$300,000 investment, to explore support in the north and north-west.

We're pleased to announce the Fee-Free Construction Fund is now open. The Fee-free Construction Fund is a new activity under the Fee-Free Skills Agreement that allocates funding of \$1.647 million to Tasmania to deliver fee-free construction training over the years 2025 and the year 2026. TasTAFE was prioritised to deliver fee-free construction places, in addition to its fee-free TAFE arrangement, as the state's only public provider and the largest of the RTOs that make up the publicly funded training and workforce development systems in Tasmania. TasTAFE was funded to deliver 253 fee-free construction training places in 2025, and the same volume in 2026.

The Fee-Free Construction Fund will be open to eligible endorsed RTOs through a contestable grant program between now and 28 January 2026. It provides opportunities for specific industry-aligned private RTOs to deliver training under the Construction, Plumbing and Services Training Package which TasTAFE does not have additional capacity or does not deliver.

The focus will be on entry pathways for jobseekers at the Certificate I and Certificate II level or skill sets that fall under the Construction, Plumbing and Services Training Package.

Working with TasTAFE and other RTOs, we're creating new opportunities for Tasmanians to get the skills that they need to join our construction industry.

**Mr MITCHELL** - I've deferred to Ms Dow for a couple of questions.

**Ms DOW** - Minister, you spoke before about the divestment of land and buildings, and one of those properties was the Devonport Childcare Centre. I recently wrote to you seeking confirmation of receipt of the offer that's been put forward to purchase that building.

You will be aware that there's federal funding also that's going to be invested in that site to create more childcare places, which will be a fantastic thing for the Devonport region. When

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can we expect a decision to be made by the board and the executive on whether that offer is going to be accepted?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Dow. In responding to you, I will note a personal conflict, but I'm happy to pass over to the team at TasTAFE for their consideration and the advice that they'll provide up to, probably, the Premier or Treasurer in signing-off on that matter.

**Mr GARDNER** - Thank you, minister. I'm happy to advise that we resolved to accept an offer at our last board meeting.

**Ms DOW** - Fantastic.

**CHAIR** - Do you have a question, Mr Michell?

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, the TasTAFE 2024-25 Annual Report states apprentice enrolments at TasTAFE, while you have been minister, have plummeted, from 8693 in 2022 to 6985 in 2024. What are you doing to arrest and reverse this steep decline?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Mitchell. You'll note that the biggest impact there was a change to a federal Labor Government, of which you were a part. Sadly, the decision to reduce the training subsidy for apprentices has had a material impact around the country. It was disappointing -

**Mr MITCHELL** - You are referring to the COVID job training measure, I believe.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, you got rid of JobTrainer.

**Mr MITCHELL** - It was a COVID measure, of course. You forgot to mention that.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's interesting, Mr Mitchell, that you would try and defend that decision. Certainly, many states around the country, including Labor states, have been advocating to the federal government to reinstate more training incentives for apprentices. You'll see in this Budget payroll tax incentives for apprentices, so we believe in supporting our apprentices and their employers and we'll work through that.

We did see a big spike during the coalition government, particularly due to the COVID stimulus measures and the resulting JobTrainer support. When that was taken away by your government, we did see a normalisation of numbers.

**Mr MITCHELL** - Minister, are you suggesting that your success or failure as a minister is dependent upon what federal governments do? What are you doing as Skills minister in Tasmania to address this steep reversal in apprentice numbers under your leadership?

**Mr ELLIS** - We've had a big increase in apprentices and completions coming through the system, thanks to the former federal government who sadly took away the incentive. We've been doing significant work here on the high-vis army, and I've noted that before about the exceptional work that program is doing to get more people engaged in the opportunity of the construction sector.

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I'll pass to Ms Paterson, who will talk through some of those measures within the high-vis army, particularly as they relate to things like the construction apprenticeships.

**Ms PATERSON** - Minister, in addition to the high-vis army aspects, there's also the Tasmanian Government Building and Construction Training Policy, which has a requirement for projects completed up to the value of 5 million to include at least 10 per cent of the total labour hours to be undertaken by apprentices and trainees, and there's a civil requirement as well. So, 36 projects were completed within the scope of that policy, delivering a total of 243 raining hours.

**CHAIR** - The time for scrutiny has expired. I thank the minister and the witnesses for attending. We will have a five-minute break before we start the next portfolio to appear before the committee, which is Business, Industry and Resources under Minister Ellis. Thanks, everyone.

**The committee suspended from 3.00 p.m. to 3.05 p.m.**

**CHAIR** - The time being 3.05 p.m., the scrutiny of the Business, Industry and Resources portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister, Mr Ellis, and other witnesses to the committee and I invite you, minister, to introduce persons at the table for Hansard.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. I've got Craig Limkin, Secretary of Department of State Growth; Vanessa Pinto, Deputy Secretary ReCFIT and Resources; Michael Mogridge, Deputy Secretary, Economic Development; and Acting Coordinator-General Dennis Hendriks.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. I hope Hansard got that because I certainly did not.

**Mr ELLIS** - Sorry, Chair, I'll speak up.

**CHAIR** - That's fine; I'm sure they did. The time scheduled for this portfolio is three hours so we'll have a break at 4.30 p.m. or thereabouts. Minister, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. Tasmania's economy continues to perform strongly and our government is focused on the things that matter most - supporting businesses, securing investment, backing our regions and protecting local jobs. That's what Tasmanians expect and that's what we're delivering.

The Office of the Coordinator-General remains a key driver of investment attraction and major project facilitation for Tasmania. Last financial year alone it facilitated \$431 million in new investment. Since 2015 it's delivered more than \$5.3 billion in projects and built a pipeline worth over \$2.1 billion. This is real investment, real confidence and real jobs for Tasmanians.

We're now developing our economic diversification and investment strategy with a clear focus on productivity, AI adoption and unlocking new investment opportunities across Tasmania. Tasmania's advanced manufacturers are competing and winning on the national and global stage. We're backing them through our Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan and Defence Tasmania, which continues to secure new opportunities for Tasmanian companies across the defence and maritime sectors.

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Through the kunanyi/Mount Wellington strategic review we're laying the groundwork for sustainable, well-managed tourism and economic activity that respects community expectations while unlocking long-term opportunities for Greater Hobart.

I'm also working closely with our major industrials including Bell Bay Aluminium, the Hobart Zinc Works, TEMCO, Liberty Bell Bay and the Boyer mill to ensure these cornerstone employers have the certainty, reliability and support they need to remain globally competitive and continue underpinning regional jobs. We're also standing firmly behind the regional communities when they need it. We've established the Bell Bay Response Team, which is a practical, proactive step to give the region certainty and coordination at a time of change.

Tasmania's minerals and resources sector remains a cornerstone of the state's economy, responsible for the majority of our export earnings and thousands of regional jobs. We're strongly positioned in critical minerals, with our upcoming critical minerals prospectus to help attract further investment into this high-value, high-growth sector. Through measures like the Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative we're ensuring regional Tasmania remains competitive and exploration-ready.

As we've demonstrated at Hellyer, responsibility matters. When a company fails to meet its regulatory obligations and responsibilities, we will act to uphold Tasmania's regulatory framework, protect our interests and maintain the highest standards our mining sector is known for.

**CHAIR** - Before I hand over to Labor, as Chair I'd like to be looking to ensure the fair and appropriate conduct of proceedings today and ask that all participating members do the same. I will be going to the other committee, so Mr Vermeij will be stepping in for me a little after four o'clock.

**Ms FINLAY** - Minister, I'm acutely interested in the current status of Liberty Bell Bay. I understand this week there were concerns about workers being paid, but I have confirmed that workers were paid this week, which is great. It's a deep concern in the local community. There's ongoing concern that superannuation and other allowances aren't being paid. I'm just wondering what awareness you have there and what role you're playing in ensuring that workers have the appropriate secure arrangements around their wages and additional payments.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Finlay. The Tasmanian government recognises the significant contribution that Liberty Bell Bay or TEMCO assets make to the state as a long-term major export manufacturing business, employer and supporter of local business and key industries such as transport, advanced manufacturing, resources and energy. Liberty supports around 250 direct jobs and an estimated 400 additional indirect jobs. It spends approximately \$160 million in goods and services annually, with 190 Tasmanian supply businesses which generate an estimated \$450 million in economic activity across Tasmania.

The Tasmanian government recently stepped in to support workers and the northern Tasmania economy by approving a secure loan facility of up to \$20 million to Liberty Bell Bay to enable the purchase of manganese ore. Through Tasmanian government support, a shipment of ore was secured, which has now been delivered to Bell Bay and Liberty Bell Bay has now experienced changes in its overseas selling-market conditions, which are being monitored. Production recommencement is now delayed until Liberty Bell Bay gains clarity around supply position in the US and finalises its ramp-up plans. The Tasmanian government's recent actions

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around securing ore for Liberty Bell Bay clearly demonstrates our focus has always been on the wellbeing of Tasmanian workers, suppliers, contractors, and the regional communities who ultimately rely on businesses such as Liberty for their livelihoods. I'll pass over to Mr Limkin and the team at State Growth to talk through that further.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you, minister, and through you. My team regularly is in contact with Liberty Bell Bay on-ground management to understand how they continue to support their workers and how they continue to support their community obligations. The minister said in his opening statement that we have set up the Bell Bay response team. This is to ensure that we can closely monitor the evolving situation at Liberty Bell Bay and continue the work with the community in relation to this asset.

In addition, we remain in ongoing conversations with the Commonwealth Government to ensure - this has to be a state and a Commonwealth partnership, as we've seen around the nation in Whyalla and in Queensland. So, we remain in conversations with our federal colleagues. I had a conversation last night with the secretary of [Inaudible] about Liberty Bell Bay and how we continue to work together in partnership to secure the future.

**Ms FINLAY** - I wouldn't like this to be a second question, Chair, because my specific question was about wages and superannuation. I'm wondering what specific conversations you're having around the security of workers on site, and their wages and other obligations?

**Mr ELLIS** - We expect all businesses to meet their obligations to their workers when it comes to wages, superannuation, and paying their contractors and suppliers as well. We expect Liberty Bell Bay's owners - the GFG Group - to be reinvesting in this business and the people that they've reaped significant dividends from in recent years in Tasmania. I'll pass to the secretary if there's anything further to add.

**Mr LIMKIN** - No, minister, not - apart from my previous answer that we continue to engage with the company to ensure workers, suppliers and the community's expectations are met. Those conversations happen at the moment sometimes daily, sometimes a few times a day. We take an advocacy role. As the minister said, it is ultimately the company's accountability to fulfil their commitments and their contracts with the community.

**Ms FINLAY** - My second question, just coming out of that answer, in terms of local businesses, I'm also having daily phone calls around local suppliers and contractors who are owed vast amounts of money in various amounts. I'm wondering what your current role is to help broker support for Tasmanian businesses, some very small, tiny businesses, some large businesses, that are owed tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars. What role are you specifically playing in supporting local businesses in the circumstances?

**Mr ELLIS** - Obviously, it's ultimately a matter that the company needs to meet their obligations to their suppliers and their workers and be reinvesting in the community where they've reaped significant dividends over the years. So, we're continuing to play that advocacy role and we want to make sure that all suppliers in Tasmania receive what they are contractually entitled to through that process. I'll pass to the team at State Growth, if there's anything further.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister; It is principally an advocacy role at the moment. We're not a contractual party between the two, but we, like everyone at this table, I'm sure, want to see people paid for the work that they've completed. We are advocating, the team

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continues to work with management, and we will continue to play that advocacy role each time we talk to management.

**Ms FINLAY** - You talked about the work that the government did to secure the initial ore payment, and you talked about having security over that. I'm wondering what the current status is with that contract and with that loan over the ore, and whether you're aware of anything that is happening positively in this space that could see future ore shipments secured and, therefore, the site getting up and running?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, we're disappointed that Liberty made the decision to continue with the production pause, despite seeking the loan for the ore. The loan to Liberty Bell Bay was carefully designed by the state to ensure it is purposed solely around securing valuable ore supply for the Bell Bay manganese asset. The loan operates with appropriate security and conditions that protect Tasmanian's interests and ensure the risks to the state are reduced as much as possible. The provision of the loan was subject to independent expert advice, as well as advice from the Tasmanian Development Board. It needs to be made very clear that the Tasmanian government support is intended to assist Tasmanian workers and their families by recommencing production at Liberty Bell Bay and not to directly benefit Liberty's owners, the GFG Group.

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, the *Mineral Resources Development Act* (MRDA) is now 30 years old. I'm sure you'd agree a lot has changed in the past 30 years, and we're seeing things changing very quickly, particularly in the resource space, with critical minerals coming online. Has that act ever undergone a full review and, if so, when?

**Mr ELLIS** - I didn't know you were asking Dorothy Dixers today, but I'm very pleased that you have some interest in this matter because it's certainly an interest that we're interested in as well. As you characterise it, a lot has changed since 1995. There are some important areas where we think there may be opportunities for reform. Ultimately, we want to be cutting red tape for the industry while also ensuring that we are delivering a good outcome for the Tasmanian people, because they are the ultimate owners of much of the mineral resources that we have beneath our feet. I'll pass to the team at State Growth, either the secretary or Mr Morton - or Ms Pinto.

**Ms PINTO** - Through you, minister. The last amendments were undertaken in 2017, so it is very timely for having a look at the MRDA. I also note that in the regulations there are obligations to keep the regulations updated. We're in the middle of that process as well.

One of the things I would note is that State Growth's mining policy team, as well as Mineral Resources Tasmania itself, keeps very actively engaged with stakeholders. Through those discussions we identify areas where there could be improvement, not just within that act, but across other pieces of legislation that impact on the industry. I might also note that there is actually going to be a roundtable, I think the timing of it is towards the end of this month, with industry, where there will be opportunity further again to garner their insights, feed into any potential areas of amendment within the legislation or within the regulations.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you. For a Dorothy Dixier, minister, you couldn't even answer it. We're talking about past full reviews and I just want to know in terms of the act as it currently is, there are provisions for objections to the granting of exploration licences and mining leases. However, it's our understanding - and please, do correct me if I'm wrong on this case - that

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these provisions are limited to those who own some or all of the affected land that the exploration and mining leases would be on, or for anyone who holds a mineral tenement in the area. This means that wider communities that are going to have adverse impacts aren't easily available to have their say through the act. For example, what's happening with the ABx bauxite mine at Reedy Marsh. So, communities that have limited legal standing should be able to make objections or see that there are amendments made. Don't you think that this is an issue that needs to be addressed, so communities can have formal input?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Badger, I was really trying to note that we have some common ground in this matter, in terms of the *Mineral Resources Development Act*. Chair, can I just introduce to the table our Director of Mines, Mr Alastair Morton, who will be assisting us today as well.

Broadly speaking, we want to make sure that we're cutting red tape and that we're working, as we do currently, with affected parties and Tasmania's mineral exploration and licencing system, I have to say, is quite a strong one. We've found that through the Business Council of Australia's 'Regulation Rumble' - I think it is called - Tasmania is the second-best jurisdiction in the country when it comes to a supportive business environment and certainly the work of Mineral Resources Tasmania is an important part of that. We want to make sure that we can get new mining operations operational and that we're not overly -

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, just in the interests of time again, I didn't ask anything about business, I'm asking about the act review and community input.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, thanks Ms Badger. Business is really important when it comes to mining because it's businesses that do mining, but I'll pass to Mr Morton to talk through some of these processes.

**Mr MORTON** - Thank you, minister, and through you. To start with, as a regulator, I obviously regulate the act that I'm given. As Ms Pinto mentioned, the act was last updated in 2017 and we're always looking at review and continuous improvement. I think that what you're referring to is there are objection processes under the act. There are processes where we need to notify and people with an interest can object so those places exist under the act.

It's also worth noting that all mines require a mining lease, but they also require council approval, and in many instances EPA approval, and the council and EPA have their own public notification or public representation systems as well. So, there are multiple opportunities for people to provide input into mineral developments.

**Ms BADGER** - So, it was right in the instance in the question whereby a community that's going to have adverse effects can't appeal anything through this act? There are other avenues that may or may not be applicable depending on what's being proposed, therefore is this going to be something that the minister will consider as a part of the reviews?

**Mr ELLIS** - Ms Badger, you're asking about the Selbourne matter, from memory is that right?

**Ms BADGER** - No, the ABx4 proposed bauxite mine at Reedy Marsh.

**Mr ELLIS** - Sorry. Reedy Marsh, because they do have a proposal at Selbourne as well.

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**Ms BADGER** - Yes.

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass to Mr Morton if there's anything further to add.

**Mr MORTON** - Nothing further, minister.

**Mr GARLAND** - Minister, the Central Coast Council recently voted to end native forest logging in the Dial Ranges. A vote that was informed by a Saul Eslake economic study of the Dial Ranges, which showed that logging only contributed 1 per cent of the income generated from the Dial Range.

Minister, we understand you met with the Central Coast Council to hear about their decision. You have the power under the *Forest Management Act* to revoke the status of the Dial Range's permanent timber production zone. Will you be doing this? If not, why not?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Garland. No, I won't be. Forestry, as well as mining, has co-existed with a range of other activities and natural values in the Dial Range for a hundred years and I think it's really demonstrative of the way that we manage land for mixed usage. I appreciate the interest from the council. I also appreciate the interest of the forest industry, many of whom work and live in Central Coast and for whom that's a key and important part of their livelihood.

The land at the Dial Range was agreed by the former Labor-Greens government to be harvested and certainly we have no intention of changing any of that land that was agreed, noting of course that there was a lot of land that was agreed to be taken off the harvesting schedule as part of that process, so we'll maintain that there.

I understand there's some interest about balancing the mixed use at the Dial Range and certainly was asked about mountain biking. One of the things I will say is that forestry has been a key driver of mountain biking opportunities right across Tasmania. If you look at STT's work to establish the Blue Derby trail rides as well as other work at Maydena which - from memory actually utilises a Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) road for access to that bike park and the wild Mersey also in our electorate has some forestry interactions. I think it's important that we have a diverse regional economy and ultimately forestry is a friend of regional communities. If we want a strong and diverse regional economy, it should be forestry and tourism rather than forestry or tourism.

**Mr GARLAND** - But surely, minister, a one per cent return, with the overwhelming objection from the community wouldn't be proven to respect their issues if you're not getting [inaudible]?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Garland. Our native forest harvesting of course is one of the key drivers of our economy, particularly in the north-west. These coupes were agreed for harvesting and I'm happy to have a further discussion when we've got STT in the room with us at the government business enterprise scrutiny next week. Broadly speaking, these lands have been agreed for harvesting; they'll provide an important economic activity for our forestry industry and provide the products that we get from native forests, the timber to build our homes, fibre for a plastic free future and products storing carbon naturally while trees will regrow. I appreciate your interest. I understand you've been out to parts of that coupe as well, but we'll be continuing with the coupes that have been agreed for harvest.

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**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, how do you, as minister, ensure that Sustainable Timber's access policies reflect the government's stated commitment to supporting recreational hunting as part of the Tasmania's Wildlife Management Strategy?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Di Falco. Can I just flag as well - happy to go into further detail with the STT team that will be at the table with us next week in government business enterprise scrutiny. What I'll say from a kind of high-level approach is that we want our forestry company, public forestry company to be managing the land for multiple uses. That has included hunting for many generations and there are a number of different areas that are available for hunting. I think there are some interesting opportunities and certainly appreciate your interest in the recreational land access for our hunters and we'll continue to work through that and happy to provide further information when STT is available at the table.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, can you update the committee on what the government is doing to support local workers, industry and the community in Bell Bay and Northern Tasmania?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermey. Bell Bay is one of Australia's most important industrial precincts and it has sustained jobs and economic strength in northern Tasmania for generations. With major employers like Bell Bay Aluminium and Liberty Bell Bay playing such a central role in our export economy and energy system, it's essential the community has confidence and clear communication during periods of uncertainty.

That's why the government has established the Bell Bay Response Team, a proactive, practical forum that brings together industry leaders, local government, community representatives and all levels of government to ensure the region is supported now and into the future.

Our aim is simple - keep local jobs strong, maintain regional confidence and make sure we're prepared for whatever scenarios may emerge. While it's not singling out any individual business, it's about taking a whole-of-community approach so that Bell Bay has the stability and coordination it deserves. The response team held its first meeting recently and it was constructive and forward-looking. This is about planning partnerships and making sure the right information flows between industry, community and government.

We'll also continue engaging constructively with the Australian Government. Bell Bay's industrial base is nationally significant and we expect federal support to reflect that importance. The Bell Bay Response Team will meet again in mid-December and will continue as long as needed to maintain confidence for workers, suppliers and the broader Northern Tasmanian community. While of course others are focused on uncertainty, our government is focused on solutions, stability and a strong long-term future for Bell Bay.

**Ms FINLAY** - Off the back of that and the answers to my first round of questions, the answer on each occasion around securing worker payments and entitlements, contractor payments and getting the site back up and running. The answer on all occasions was that's the responsibility of the company. So, minister, I'm wondering when was the last time that you picked up the phone or met in person with Sanjeev Gupta himself to impress upon him how important it is that he does the right thing for this site to make sure the payments to workers, payments to contract and the site gets up and running as soon as possible because that's

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obviously where the advocacy needs to happen. When was the last time you were engaged with Mr Gupta?

**Mr ELLIS** - Our schedules are available for public release, so I'll double-check on the particular date when we met with Mr Gupta. That was in Launceston. I met with local management as recently as Saturday. We've been continuously actively engaged with the company. Certainly, it's been a big focus of ours. We want to make sure that they're meeting their obligations to the Tasmanian community. This is a private business. It's important that private businesses pay their bills, particularly to their workers and their suppliers. We'll continue that advocacy of course, as well. We continue to advocate to the federal government. I've spoken through a text exchange with the minister Ayres as recently as the last couple of days. We're continually involved with the federal agencies more broadly. I'll pass over to Mr Limkin on the timing, but the last time Mr Gupta and I formally met in person was 3 September in Launceston. As I mentioned, met with senior leadership from Liberty Bell Bay as recently as Saturday.

**Ms FINLAY** - Before you hand-over, when Mr Gupta was in Launceston I also met with him and impressed on him the importance for him to do the right thing. My question, the first part was, when had you more recently picked up the phone? What's important here for all workers, they, on a daily basis, are stressed about the security of their future employment and many are looking for alternative employment. Contractors are beyond overwhelmed with their personal responsibilities to their employees and their other subcontractors in terms of non-payment. So, since you met with Mr Gupta in person, have you taken the opportunity to continue to impress on him the importance of him doing the right thing through any other means of communication?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, Thanks, Ms Finlay. We've been engaging with local management as a primary source as well as the federal government, particularly noting some of these matters. We're happy to pass over to Mr Limkin to detail some more of the engagement and, of course, the Bell Bay response team which was recently established working with local government, local industry and a range of representative groups with an interest in this facility.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you, minister, and through you, and I will hand to Mr Hendriks in a second. My team continues to engage, as I said, daily with local management. In relation to the federal government, we believe that we cannot do this alone, it has to be a partnership with them. We have met. I've flown up and discussed with the Commonwealth Government a number of times. I've met with them personally. I have sent a number of letters that we are still waiting responses for. As I said, I have been in regular contact with the secretary as well. We believe the pathway here for a solution is advocacy for local management, which my team does, and resolving a partnership with the Australian Government, so we can support workers and the community, in taking us forward - and remove the uncertainty that you've spoken about, but Mr Hendriks.

**Mr HENDRIKS** - Through the minister, I can just confirm that we've had ongoing dialogue, particularly with local management. Certainly, the general manager speaks very regularly in terms of what's happening. We've also engaged with, probably less so, but certainly regularly, with some of the government representatives from GFG who is also regularly in touch.

**Ms FINLAY** - I think there's no doubt -

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**Mr ELLIS** - Sorry, Ms Finlay, just for completeness as well, we've also sent a range of letters of demand reserving our rights due to a breach of loan conditions, which includes non-payment of supplies. Just in terms of communications.

**Ms FINLAY** - Thank you. To put on the record, there's no doubt that local management are exceptional and there is deep respect from the workers who are under pressure and contractors and the community around local management. It's great they're in regular contact with them, but they're in a rock and a hard place. They're great people caught in the middle. The advocacy needs to be at levels above that, which is why I asked that specific question about Mr Gupta directly.

Given that local management are great but almost have their arms tied behind their back, and that there hasn't been more regular and recent representation to Mr Gupta himself, what do you see as the solution here? I know there's a response teams. I know you're working together, but what do you actually see as the solution?

**Mr ELLIS** - We're working through that, ultimately, the most straightforward response is for the business to invest in their business and, therefore, also invest in the community. They've reaped significant dividends over a number of years and it's important that they now put back into that business. As a government, we provided a loan so that they could get back on their feet, and in production they chose not to take that course and we're working closely with the federal government.

We need to be cognisant that this is a very large business, particularly in a Tasmanian context, so no one level of government will be able to solve this challenge by themselves. That's part of the reason we've been advocating so strongly with the federal government, and it's part of the reason we're disappointed that another Bell Bay asset you chose not to join with us on that.

**Ms FINLAY** - Point of Order, minister. You didn't present anything for us to join in with you. You don't have a plan about that at the moment. You missed your deadline and weren't able to negotiate a power deal for by Bell Bay Aluminium, so don't go using that. We're having a very pleasant conversation about the workers at Liberty Bell Bay, but I ask you to continue to address your responses there, unless you want to go down the fact that you failed to deliver a power contract to Bell Bay Aluminium.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Finlay. There was a lot that was wrong in that, but -

**Ms FINLAY** - No. What was wrong in what I just said?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm just about to tell you, Ms Finlay. Chief among it was that most of the parliament joined together in support for advocating for local businesses through the motion that was moved by Mr Ferguson the other day. You made a decision -

**Ms FINLAY** - Did you ever provide anything that we could advocate with you on? We would be bipartisan at all times about businesses in Tasmania, but you did not once put anything before us that we could actually join with you on, to take to the federal government.

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**Mr ELLIS** - Clearly, we put a motion forward to the parliament that was supported in a in a multi-partisan way -

**Ms FINLAY** - That was after you missed your dropped deadline and the expiry for the power deal.

**Mr ELLIS** - Sorry, Chair, I don't know if the member wants an answer to any of her questions.

**Ms FINLAY** - The Liberty Bell Bay questions I would love an answer to.

**CHAIR** - Ms Finlay, can we wait for an answer and then Ms Badger will have the call.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. The reason it's important that we take a team Tasmania approach in this, is because -

**Ms FINLAY** - It would be nice if you did that, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm sorry this is triggering for you, Ms Finlay, but it's very important that we take a team Tasmania approach to it because this is a very large business. Tasmania - we want to see the same kind of support that the federal government has provided in partnership with state governments in other locations.

**Ms FINLAY** - They've done the work, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - Certainly, we're conscious of the need to support the Tasmanian taxpayer.

When it comes to Australia's sovereign steel manufacturing supply chain, that's a task for us as a country. The federal government is yet to put a specific offer in writing, as far as the approach that they're going to take. We've included the federal government through their local representative as part of the Bell Bay response team, and we're continuing to work closely with them on the long-term solution. Ultimately, it will need to be one where the federal government takes a strong ownership stake in this challenge and that's why we can't commit to a specific course of action until the federal government agrees.

I will pass to Mr Limkin to talk through some more of the work that we're doing to address this situation.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you and through you minister. We have worked very hard to put a package that we believe is fair and reasonable to the Commonwealth Government. We are currently awaiting a response for that. I don't want to go into the details here, but what I will say is that our package is very unique compared to other states and territories. If I look at New South Wales where Tomago has similar challenges like other smelters around the country, the New South Wales government does not have an energy contract with Tomago, it is now entered through AGL.

Part of the focus that the Commonwealth has been doing is having states and territories play a role in supporting these businesses through a grant program. Our position has been very clear that we have a hydro asset and that we have a unique situation where we can provide power at a different price compared - because we support regional jobs, the economy and the

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community, a lot of these businesses provide a lot of social support as well. It's not just economic and regional jobs, it is about how they play a really important role in their community. We've been heavily advocating for the federal government to acknowledge that, to recognise that, and count that as a contribution that we provide. We still have not received an answer to this.

**Ms FINLAY** - Just for the record, we voted for that motion, minister, and you know that.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you, minister. A couple of months or so ago, we saw on the Mineral Resources Tasmania website an advertisement for an exploration release area (ERA) for coal. Why is your government inviting new coal exploration in Tasmania when we most need to be phasing it out?

**Mr ELLIS** - One of the key priorities that we have, of course, is building more homes, and the coal that we mine here in Tasmania largely goes to supporting the Railton cement facility in your electorate of Lyons, just up the road from me. Cement is obviously a key component in building more homes and delivering a whole range of, for example, renewable energy projects. So by ensuring that we're supporting Australia's manufacturing supply chain, and particularly one of the national-scale assets that we have here in Tasmania for cement production, it's important that they have feedstock raw materials for things like coal.

I think it's important to note that only one company currently produces coal in Tasmania. There are no coal seam gas operations or exploration licences for coal seam gas in general. The Cornwall Coal Company, a subsidiary of Cement Australia, operates five mining leases in Tasmania. They're all in your electorate - four in Fingal valley, one just north of Hamilton in the Derwent Valley. The company's been operating continuously since 1886.

In September 2024, Cornwall was granted a new mining lease - the Blackwood 6 mining lease, or 2-1-4-5-PM mining lease, located south of Cornwall's existing mining lease. It permits the company to establish a new access portal for extending underground resource extraction. All coal mined by Cornwall is used domestically in the manufacture of cement, at Cement Australia Railton facility. Additionally, Cornwall holds four retention licences in and around Douglas-Apsley National Park, as it has done since the 1980s.

I'll pass to Mr Morton to add anything further.

**Mr MORTON** - Thank you, minister, through you. The question was about exploration release areas?

**Ms BADGER** - Why are we opening up more exploration areas and facilitating that to continue, which the minister didn't touch on. I don't want to get too far off track here.

**Mr MORTON** - Mineral Resources Tasmania regularly advertises exploration of these areas on its websites. The ERA processes are a legislative requirement, and effectively provide for the transparent and orderly and open release of ground that has become available, for example, where a previous licence ceases to be in force. It is not actually making any ground available that would otherwise not be available. It's a mechanism whereby if the licence ceases to be in force, we run an orderly process.

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We put an ERA out so we can get a competitive and transparent process for companies to apply. I think in the ERA, the coal one you were specifically referring to, that was recently released in early November and nobody applied; there were no applications. So it just becomes open ground, like most of the rest of Tasmania, in terms of applications for exploration licences.

**Ms BADGER** - Thank you very much. It's good to know that's through the legislative requirement, because that's all the more reason why we need a full, open, transparent and public review of the legislation.

Minister, I'm interested in the three exploration licences that are where your government's proposing the new \$40 million-plus Tyndalls Track. Can you please give me the amount of money that these three leases have been paid out through the Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative (EDGI) grants since the track proposal came online in 2021. For reference, those are EL28/2001, EL16/2018 and EL12/2016.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Ms Badger, I'll pass that to Mr Morton.

**Mr MORTON** - I might have to come back to that, through you, minister.

**Ms BADGER** - You can take that on notice.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, the Tasmanian Development Board supports the industry development activities of the department, and its primary focus is on the creation of investment and associated employment through supporting implementation of government policies. The Tasmanian Development Board is supposed to support industry development activities for the department. It is meant to produce quarterly reports, but there hasn't been a report since March 2025. Where are the June and September reports?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnson. I'll pass to the Secretary of State Growth.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Minister, I will have to check on the member's question and come back to her during the session.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Thank you. Minister, can you provide a complete list of all the grants, loans and amounts the board has given out over the last two years, please?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnston. I'll see what we can make publicly available and pass to the Secretary.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister, I believe that information is available in the annual report of the Tasmanian Development Board, but I will double-check for you.

**Mr GARLAND** - Minister, the whole-of-state business case warned that Marinus Link might lead to the closure of one or more major industrials because of higher power prices and higher transmission costs. That's on page 111, for those at home. Bell Bay Aluminium provided a submission to the Australian Energy Regulator in relation to the North West Transmission Developments, in which it raised concerns about the significant negative financial implications on its business from higher transmission and likely higher power prices from Hydro Tasmania.

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Liberty Bell Bay did likewise, explicitly stating that it did not support the project. A spokesperson for Bell Bay Aluminium's owner, Rio Tinto, was reported in the *Australian Financial Review* telling an audience that the Financial Review Energy & Climate Summit on 21 October that the Tasmanian communities and government needed to choose if it preferred selling its finite power to Victoria or keeping it on island to run the major industrials.

Minister, do you agree that the decision to go ahead with Marinus Link has not been welcomed by the major industrials? Is your government being upfront with Tasmanians about the risk that one or more of them may close in the near future because of this?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you Mr Gartland. Certainly, Marinus Link provides significant opportunities for us to increase the amount of energy that's available on island. That's part of the reason why the Battery of the Nation project was conceived, because there are very long parts of the day when the sun is shining or the wind is blowing on the mainland where power prices reach into negative areas, so the opportunity to import very low-cost energy over the Bass Strait interconnector, and then also to potentially store it in pumped hydro storage, represents a significant opportunity for our state.

Of course, transmission costs are a key cost for the major industrials, and it's important that we work through that in a sensible and methodical way so that we can best support those businesses to succeed, as well as all the other businesses in Tasmania for whom transmission costs are important. Of course, there are opportunities that will come with the ability for us to import cheap electricity over the network and store it in our nation-leading dam infrastructure.

I'll pass to the Secretary of State Growth to talk further.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm actually going to hand it to Vanessa on Marinus.

**Ms PINTO** - Through you, minister, and thank you very much for the question, Mr Garland. In answering that question, I'll answer it in two parts. Firstly, you're exactly correct. It's extremely important to acknowledge the impact of network charges on not just our top four major industrials, but all Direct Connect transmission customers. There is a dozen of them, and due to Tasmania having quite an unusual composition in its demand profile compared to other states, it is quite heavily dominated by a small handful of large users. So, any kind of network charge increases do impact them; you're absolutely correct in that regard.

The second point I would note is that in relation to that key stakeholder group, there was engagement with that group leading up to, and during, the development of the FiT assessment and advice through to government. Just prior to the government entering into an election the issues and concerns, which were discussed directly with the Tasmanian Minerals, Manufacturing & Energy Council (TMEC) on behalf of that stakeholder group, was actively discussed with government at that time. And in the FiT assessment report itself on Marinus, it does also clearly explain in there that the government had made a decision, a policy position that the impact of increased network charges would be offset for all direct connect customers. So, that's not just major industrials, that's all of the direct connect transmission customers. That is on the basis of that being fed into that fit assessment, as to how - or the mechanism for offsetting that.

That is a matter that is residing with the Treasurer and with the Department of Treasury and Finance to determine the appropriate mechanism for how that will occur. But it is a very

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active part of the next step of policy work that's needed for that major investment decision for the state.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, can you update the committee on the progress of the strategic review of Kunanyi/Mount Wellington and how the government is ensuring it reflects the community's views and long-term needs?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermey. The government is undertaking a comprehensive whole park strategic review of Kunanyi/Mount Wellington to make sure that Tasmania's most visited natural asset is managed sustainably for the long term. This is the first time in decades that anyone has stepped back and looked at the entire park, its values, its visitor experience, its governance and its transport challenges in one integrated process.

We asked Tasmanians to have their say, and they certainly did. More than 9000 people contributed through the surveys, written submissions and focus groups. That level of engagement reflects how deeply the community cares about the mountain and the feedback is already helping to shape the long-term direction and the review. Earlier this year we released the vision document which captures the communities aspirations, protecting natural and cultural values, improving safety, parking and access, supporting better all-weather transport options, ensuring that the mountain remains inclusive, accessible and sustainable as visitation continues to grow.

The consultation summary provides even further detail about what different parts of the community value, from regular recreational users to families, visitors, young people and people with disability. We've always been clear that the review's terms of reference are deliberately broad. This ensures that all options are explored: governance, infrastructure, land management, visitor experience, cultural interpretation, transport and emergency management.

Nothing is predetermined and no recommendations have been finalised, but certainly recent reporting has mischaracterised this process. Reference to a cable car? Not new. The government has got a long-standing policy position to support a sensitive low impact proposal that improves safe year-round access. The review is simply doing what it was designed to do. Consider all potential areas, test them properly and ensure the final plan reflects evidence, community values and the long term needs of the park.

We're now in phase three, which is developing the action plan. This work is being informed by detailed research, expert input and continued engagement with key stakeholders. The action plan will set out strategic objectives and actions to achieve the vision and will be provided to government in the first half of 2026. Ultimately, this review is about giving Kunanyi/Mount Wellington the long-term planning that it has needed for decades. It's about making sure the mountain remains safe, accessible, protected and celebrated not just for today's visitors, but for generations to come.

**Dr BROAD** - I'm just trying to get my head around - there's a number of distressed major industrials and indeed mining operations around the state. I'm trying to get my head around how certain businesses qualify for support and others don't. So just starting off with Liberty Bell Bay. The Australian Financial Review reported on October 20 - it's an article by Simon Evans, quoted as saying:

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The state had earlier received advice from Deloitte that more government assistance was likely to be required before the smelter could operate again.

This came after it was discovered that that Mr Gupta's businesses had actually pledged Liberty Bell Bay as security to another unrelated entity in the UK. First of all, what sort of due diligence was done before that \$20 million loan facility was put in place?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Broad. It's probably also worth mentioning there are a number of distressed assets around the country and that's important because there is very much a national picture at the moment. Mr Gupta's businesses at Whyalla is one of the largest bailouts that the country has ever seen. Certainly the federal government made it clear when they stepped into that space. There's been support for Mount Isa smelter and there are seemingly supports for aluminium smelters around the country, except not the greenest aluminium smelter in the country for the Green Aluminium production credit scheme. We're continuing to work with the federal government on that, but it's important to reference that this is a national challenge for major industrials, that Tasmania is not immune from, but that we are hopeful that the federal government will provide the same sort of support that they have provided for smelters in other states, but are yet to commit to here in Tasmania.

I spoke before about the way that the Liberty Bell Bay loan has been secured. That's really important because we want to make sure that we are protecting the Tasmanian taxpayers' assets. Their contribution there, while also trying to work to get the smelter up and running. I mentioned before the loan has been carefully designed by the state to ensure it's purposed solely around securing valuable ore supply for the asset. The loan operates with appropriate security and conditions which protect Tasmania's interests and ensure the risks to the state are reduced as much as possible. I mentioned before as well, we received independent expert advice and advice from the Tasmanian Development Board. I'll pass to the secretary and his team if he wants to provide further information.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you and through you, minister, as the Minister said, we had multiple conversations with the TDR board to make sure that any loan was designed to mitigate the risk. We have a number of ex-bankers and financial professionals around the TDR, but also we specifically asked them on those matters. We actually have engaged KWM, who are our legal advisors, to provide a specific legal advice. They work in partnership with Crown Law. Then we have Lloyd also revising us on financial matters. All that information was developed and advice and options were provided to the government to ensure that we protected the state's interests while ensuring that we provided the opportunity for the company to restart as they had committed to do to the government as part of the entry of the line.

**Dr BROAD** - My understanding is that security is against the ore itself. Now, since that ore was purchased and that \$20 million loan was put in place, the company has breached a number of conditions. I've highlighted one, which was the intercompany loan. The other obviously is that they haven't started processing, haven't restarted the plant. Then also, this is on a background of Gupta's businesses - Mr Gupta's businesses are failing all over the world and indeed, there being some financial question marks over his entire enterprise, what contingencies do you actually have in place should the worst happen and the business doesn't restart?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Broad. Just to clarify, there's security over the ore, but there's also security over the site. It's a highly secured line in that context and the loan to Liberty Bell Bay include securities and conditions which protect Tasmania's interests and ensure that risks of the state are reduced as much as possible. Liberty Bell Bay has breached several conditions of the loan agreement and the government has written to LBB, as I mentioned to your colleague before, in relation to these breaches, to reserve our interests. The government is currently evaluating and considering options in relation to these breaches using independent expert advice.

Again, the Tasmanian government reiterates its focus on supporting the workers, suppliers and contractors and regional communities who ultimately rely on the Bell Bay manganese asset for their livelihood. That's why also that, given the scale of this business, it's important that we're working closely with the federal government on any future pathway for action. We're hopeful that the federal government will make commitments to that in the future, noting that they get to so far.

**Dr BROAD** - Where does the state then rank as a creditor? Is that actually secured against the site? If it's secured against the site, where do we rank in terms of the other creditors to the business?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Dr Broad. I will pass to the secretary.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister, my understanding is that we are ranked as first ranked creditor in relation to the [inaudible].

**Ms BADGER** - Minister, I'm just interested in mine rehabilitation. How many mining leases have expired or otherwise ended in the past year, and how many of those have submitted a rehabilitation plan?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Badger, I'll pass to Mr Morton shortly, but one of the interesting elements is this year, the government has delivered an important new initiative, Bolstering the Rehabilitation Trust. Under this initiative, an additional \$100,000 per year over two years will be provided to allow Mineral Resources Tasmania (MRT) to expand its work in rehabilitating abandoned mine sites.

This funding is in addition to the \$150,000 per annum already provided to MRT for its abandoned mine site rehabilitation program. This additional funding reflects both the rising costs of rehabilitation work and evolving community expectations around legacy mining areas on Crown land. I'll pass to Mr Morton to talk to some of the specifics.

**Ms BADGER** - Before you do, minister, can I just bother you to repeat what that initiative was called?

**Mr ELLIS** - It's the 'Bolstering the Rehabilitation Trust', which is a sentence that doesn't make sense, except 'trust', in that case, is the Rehabilitation Trust.

**Mr MORTON** - Through you, minister, I'll give figures for the 2024-25 financial year, because they're complete.

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Mining leases that effectively ceased, we had 27 in total. Of that, some were consolidated with other mining leases, some were refused or lapsed, some expired, and some were surrendered or withdrawn. So, there's a range of things and, as the minister was saying, it is a requirement that all companies provide a security deposit against their mine lease, and that we have an approved decommission and rehabilitation plan that the EPA ticks off on.

Depending on the way in which it happens - if companies close out because they've mined out the resource and they've let the mine lease go and they rehabilitate according to the plan, then they get their security deposit or bond back. If they, in some way, disappear from the site, then we have the security deposit sitting against that. So, if they don't do the decommission and rehabilitation plan as they're required, then we've got the bond against the site that we can use as noted.

**Ms BADGER** - If possible - and I'm happy to take that on notice, it was part of the initial question - how many of the mining leases have expired, or might be in care or maintenance? As you explained, they're not all necessarily expired, and there are a few categories on that. If that data is available, that would be great.

In addition, the second part of that question, but it's on very much the same topic - how many former mine sites remain that aren't rehabilitated or under-rehabilitated, or not in accordance with the plan, and what cost is associated ongoing with that at the moment?

**Mr ELLIS** - It's probably worth mentioning that there is a very large number of mines, historical workings, over a couple of hundred years right across Tasmania, so some of that may be difficult to quantify. I'll just look to Mr. Morton.

**Mr MORTON** - Thank you, minister, and through you. The number I gave was 27 in total for the 2024-25 financial year, and that was where the mining lease had ceased.

As to your comment before in regard to care and maintenance, companies can have a mine lease in place but put the mine into care and maintenance, but they haven't closed out the site, so to speak - it's still active, because often they can come out of care and maintenance. We've got a number of sites in that situation. This 27 was specifically where the mine lease was no longer in existence. As I said, there was a number of reasons. Sometimes it was consolidated, so consolidation is where you might have a company that's got two mine leases next to each other and it wants to make them one; consolidates them. There are also some where the application's expired, or a couple where we refused the application, or a couple where they withdrew or surrendered the application. So, they just, you know, didn't proceed.

Sorry, was there a second part?

**Ms BADGER** - On rehabilitation, but I probably don't need data on mines from the 1800s or anything like that, more contemporary would be great, thanks.

**Mr MORTON** - Through you, minister. The MRT does manage a number of abandoned mine sites. As I said, the current situation is, contemporary mining has tight regulation. They need a rehabilitation plan and security deposit.

Then going back in time, there's quite a large number of abandoned mine sites. We do manage the abandoned mine sites on Crown lands. We do that with \$150,000 appropriation

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and we've got that recent bolstering the rehab trust fund initiative - so an additional \$100,000 over two years, which we're very appreciative of. We are managing a large number. Some of them are very small, almost diggings or scrapings sort of thing, but there are some in there that are more complex to manage.

We work closely, so as part of the rehabilitation trust, we've got a steering committee which has got the peak bodies, but it's also got the land management agencies on it, such as Parks, Sustainable Timber and obviously the EPA. We've got an annual work program; we obviously try and prioritise and go for the sites with the most issues first.

**Mr ELLIS** - Chair, before you go to the next one, I think Mr Limkin had an answer to a previous question.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister. The September quarterly report for the TDR is imminently to go up. It was considered by the board recently and it will go up. We will also just double-check the website, because when I looked there were a couple of historic ones not there, so we will just double-check that.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - The June and September ones are missing.

**Mr LIMKIN** - It's only one that I identified, in 2023, but we will just double-check.

In relation to what is in the September report, I can advise that in the September quarter 2025:

- Four new Regional Tourism Development Loan Schemes have been approved;
- Two new agricultural loan schemes were approved;
- No new business schemes were approved;
- No Tourism Development Loan Schemes were approved; and
- No building construction loan schemes, because it closed in 2021.

In relation to the Regional Tourism Development Loan Scheme, current approvals as of 30 September 2025, there were 10 active approved loans totalling \$10.10 million, inclusive of drawn and undrawn amounts.

For the AgriGrowth Loan Scheme, current approvals as at 30 September 2025, there were 23 active approved loans, currently totalling \$18.19 million inclusive of GST.

The Business Growth Loan Scheme, current approvals at 30 September 2025 is 16 active approval loans, currently totalling \$7.09 million, inclusive of [inaudible] and amounts.

The TDR annual report does include high-level information on the grants as at 30 June 2025.

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - Thank you, Chair. Just to clarify whether I need another question on notice from the previous answer. The question I actually asked was to provide a list of all grants, all loans and all amounts the board has given out over the last two years. You referred me to the annual reports - it's not contained in the annual reports apart from a summary, but I want a list of all the grant recipients. Should I put that on notice, just to clarify?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister. We will have to take that on notice for the last two years.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - My question therefore is about Advanced Manufacturing Accelerating Growth Scheme. Minister, how many acquittals have not been submitted under this scheme? How many grants have been requested to be refunded or been repaid? How many applicants have been deemed ineligible to due to not submitting acquittals?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnston, I will pass to the team at State Growth.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Can the member just repeat the question, so we can make sure we get the actual -

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Thats alright. It's the Advanced Manufacturing Accelerating Growth Scheme - how many acquittals have not been submitted? How many grants requested to be refunded or have been repaid? How many applicants have been deemed ineligible due to not submitting acquittals?

**Mr ELLIS** - The information I have here at a high level is around six: 17 applications were approved totalling \$1.4 million, an additional \$357,000 provided from the existing budget. Total additional deployment of 78 positions and leveraged investment of \$3.5 million. I will look to the team at State Growth if there's more information we can provide.

**Mr LIMKIN** -That's the information we've got. We will just have to check the member's detailed question.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - I should put that on notice as well?

**Mr LIMKIN** - We will try and look and see that.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Minister, how do you ensure that hunter feedback and complaints regarding excess closures or road conditions are formally captured, escalated and responded to at ministerial level?

**Mr ELLIS** - We're talking in regard to Sustainable Timber?

**Mr Di FALCO** - Yes.

**Mr ELLIS** - So I'll need to perhaps take that one on notice for next week, Mr Di Falco, when we've got the team from STT here. Of course, when matters are raised to me at a ministerial level, we do take them very seriously. We recognise that it's a key part of Sustainable Timber Tasmania's role as our public forestry land manager to ensure that the land is managed for mixed use. That includes road access for a range of different pursuits including bushwalking, beekeeping, hunting and a range of other matters. Happy to take it on notice to

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next week when we've got more of the team at STT here and we'll be really happy to talk through that process.

**Mr Di FALCO** - Thank you, minister.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, Tasmania is well known for its iconic special species timbers and in particular our world-famous Huon Pine. Can you please provide the committee with an update on the government's commitment for a scoping study into the potential of heli-harvesting of salvage Huon Pine timbers?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'm advised that the second phase of our \$50,000 initiative to support the Tasmanian special species industry's future access to Huon Pine timber is underway. The scoping studies explore the feasibility of salvaging dead standing Huon Pine from remote locations, including the use of heli-harvesting methods.

Stage one of the project is complete with a preliminary scoping plan to explore the costs and challenges associated with this unique opportunity for heli harvesting. The Department of State Growth has continued to consult with the Special Species Working Group as this opportunity is developed. Stage two of the project involves exploring the feasibility of heli harvesting dead standing timber in remote areas. A comprehensive desktop analysis conducting preliminary research into potential salvage sites, collecting samples for analysis and developing qualitative tools to guide decision making for this unique operation.

Huon Pine is a treasured part of Tasmania's cultural heritage and it's important for our historic timber dependent industries, including wooden boat building and fine timber craftsmanship that we continue to have access to Huon Pine resources. The potential harvesting of dead standing timber represents a new source of supply for the sector as well as having other potential benefits such as reducing fire risk in remote areas and supporting regional jobs. We'll continue to back our strong sustainable evaluating special species timber. I will just declare that I finally got my timber bow tie out from the bottom drawer on Saturday night. Margot was most disappointed, but it did have Huon Pine, Myrtle and Sassafras for the record.

**Dr BROAD** - Just want to turn my attention to Group 6 Metals (G6M) on King Island. I'm just after some timelines. So, in the Group 6 Metals annual report, the last one from June 2025 highlights that the State of Tasmania had principal and interest converted to shares, so to the tune of \$10,491,000. It appears to me that - and it says that the interest on the State of Tasmania loan, also accrued. It's more than just the outstanding - it was the interest. When did the government become aware that Group 6 Metals was really struggling? Was it when the interest couldn't be paid?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Dr Broad. I'll pass over to the team at Department of State Growth, Office of the Coordinator-General shortly. For some background, in order to give the Dolphin Tungsten Mine on King Island the best chance of success, the Tasmanian government converted its existing \$10.49 million loan into an equity stake in Group 6 Metals in April 2025. The decision to convert the loan to equity was part of a comprehensive turn-around plan developed by the company and its senior leaders.

This recapitalisation and business transformation plan was approved by Group 6 Metal shareholders in April 2025 and the Tasmanian Development Resources Board were issued shares on 30 April 2025. The Tasmanian Government provided an additional \$7.5 million loan

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to G6M in May 2025, in line with the additional funding provided by other senior lenders to support G6M recapitalisation plan and business transformation plan. The participation of the Tasmanian government in the recapitalisation plan was essential to the participation of other senior lenders. If the recapitalisation plan had not progressed, G6M would almost certainly have entered administration and may not have continued operations. Many suppliers, many of whom are Tasmanian businesses, would not have been paid what they were owed. The mine employs around 109 full time workers, including 86 employees and 23 contractors. Most of these jobs are local, providing significant boost to the island's economy. I'll pass to the team at State Growth to talk through some further matters.

**Mr HENDRIKS** - Through the minister, the Tasmanian government was aware of the financial challenges that Group 6 was facing in the second half of 2024. As a secured lender to the company, the government had regular engagement with the company through the OCG. After the company failed to secure an investor by the end of the first quarter of the financial year, the government was approached by the existing senior members of the company with a proposed plan to recapitalise the company and to transform its operations. A detailed proposal was presented to the Tasmanian Development Board, who provided recommendations to the minister and Treasurer and those recommendations were subsequently approved. The relevant legal documentation was then reviewed by Crown Law and commercial lawyers, then those legal documents were executed.

**Mr ELLIS** - Probably also in terms of timeframe, why I say October 2024, the [inaudible] Group provided government with a copy of its proposal which included a plan. We've already mentioned this - sorry, I was looking at, I was thinking I was reading 2025. We have a matter that Mr Limkin can update the committee on, but I might just wait until your round of questions finished as well, Dr Broad.

**Dr BROAD** - When was the last time the government took a stake in a mining operation? As Sam Baker from Shadforth Financial highlighted, it's a bit unusual, to quote him, as a government has actually become a significant shareholder in an ASX listed company. We're what - 12 per cent shareholder now? When was the last time that actually happened?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Broad. Certainly, it is unusual. There are some reasons for that. Obviously the federal government's involvement in a range of different industrial matters around the country I think is demonstrating that it's becoming less unusual, particularly when it comes to areas of our critical sovereign capability. In terms of tungsten, tungsten is listed as a critical mineral, in fact, one of the most critical minerals in the world due to -

**Dr BROAD** - That wasn't the question.

**Mr ELLIS** - The reason why it's important, Dr Broad is because it's-

**Dr BROAD** - The question was about when was the last time the state government, well, indeed, Tasmania, took a stake in a mining company?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, thanks, Dr Broad. As I mentioned, there's a significant change that's happening around the economy around the country and particularly when it comes to critical minerals and sovereign manufacturing supply chain. Due to supply chain constraints as well as economic importance for defence, mining, energy and digital technology sectors, tungsten is critical. Tasmania holds over 25 per cent of Australia's economically demonstrated tungsten

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resource. It's a significant player in the tungsten market. Importantly, the Dolphin Mine is known for hosting the highest grade tungsten deposit of significant size in the western world.

Of course, much of the market is dominated by China and as such, this is a key strategic asset for the country. Noting, of course, that the federal government is now much more engaged on industry policy noting, of course, Whyalla. But look, I am happy to pass to the team from State Growth to add further.

**Mr HENDRIKS** - Through the minister, I'm not aware of where that's happened before in relation to a mine, although I believe historically it has happened in relation to some other enterprises. I probably would note that the mine itself employs around 109 full-time workers and this provides a significant boost to the King Island community. This was occurring at a similar time to a lot of the issues around the King Island Dairy. There were some significant issues at play that led to, I think, some of the reasoning behind what then followed.

**Dr BROAD** - So subsequent to the state taking a 12 per cent share in the tungsten mine, which I think means that each Tasmanian now owns about \$20 worth of - well, that was at the price - the price has declined since that point, but there was also subsequent to that a \$7.5 million additional loan to the company some months later. What was the process that occurred in approving an additional \$7.5 million loan to the company?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Broad. I will pass to the team from State Growth. Also, worth mentioning previously on the Avebury matter, you did propose that the state give \$10 million to those shareholders, that would have meant that all of that money would have been lost in the process. This has enabled the business to continue operating while also providing the Tasmanian people with an asset and a stake in it while we work through the transition to future viability. There is an irony in the question, but I will pass over to the team at State Growth regards the process for the loan.

**Mr HENDRIKS** - Thanks minister. The Tasmanian government provided the additional \$7.5 million loan as part of the overall package. That was in line with the additional funding that was provided by other senior lenders to support Group 6 recapitalisation plan and the business transformation plan and participation of the Tasmanian government at the time was essential to the participation of the other lenders and without that package of support the mine would have almost certainly have gone into administration and the thinking was that it was highly likely at that time that if that occurred that it may not come out.

**Dr BROAD** - I think I have one more. I've had two.

**CHAIR** - That was the third one on the mines.

**Ms BADGER** - Can I clarify, are you able to take questions regarding Forestry Tasmania now or next week?

**Mr ELLIS** - Next week if that works, I don't have the people available. I can do forestry in general.

**Ms BADGER** - I'm not the forestry spokesperson. Minister, have you or has anyone in your department been part of any conversations or investigations around the use of native forest residues for a methanol plant in Burnie? Minister Duigan in the Energy and Renewables

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committee indicated that it's his understanding that a memorandum of understanding has been entered into with HIF Global and other e-fuel proponents to use biomass for e-fuel plants. Can you tell us whether that's true, and if so, do these memorandums of understanding stipulate whether the timber comes solely from plantation sources?

**Mr ELLIS** - Firstly, importantly, biomass represents huge opportunities. We mentioned the Railton Plant before the cement and certainly there are major opportunities for the use of biomass for the energy there, which will displace coal. So, there are some significant environmental benefits in that process. I've met with the team from HIF over recent years and aware of their significant interest in investment in my electorate and there are some major opportunities for decarbonising the liquid fuel supply chain. That includes using biomass and I will pass to the team at State Growth regarding that engagement.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm not aware of anyone having conversations in relation to a direct MOU. The team at ReCFIT continue to work with HIF as part of that work. I can't speak about every conversation, but I'm not aware of any conversation.

**Ms BADGER** - OK, great. Thank you. Can you confirm, are there any plans for a wood supply agreement or equivalent entered into with any of the current e-fuel proponents?

**Mr ELLIS** - I think Ms Pinto has some further information.

**Ms PINTO** - Thank you, and through you, minister. I will couch this firstly by saying that any discussions that are occurring at the moment are commercial and confidence and what I'm stating are not privy to those matters, but what I can say are the standards that need to be met with contracts of this nature. I would anticipate that any term sheets that are associated with the production of green methanol need to come from sustainable certified plantations for the lifetime of the project. Further, that no old growth biomass from native forests can be used. Typically, the biomass is forest residues and waste from sawmills. That would, for example, include treetops, small branches and the like. You're not going to see wood chips or structural timber in that. The biomass in that regard then would be compliant with the current European Renewable Energy Directive, commonly known as RED III, such that it's independently certified because we have to realise the product produced here, such as green methanol, is probably going - in many instances would be going to Asian countries like Japan or Korea where those standards are required.

The other point I would make is that a national level, there are standards that are set by the Australian Government under the Guarantee of Origin certificates that are set that also require biomass must be from land that was not cleared of native vegetation after 31 December 1989 to establish the plantation and must be within a code of practice approved under the export control woodchips rules.

I've outlined quite a bit of detail there, but there are quite strict standards. Again, - I've outlined them noting that I'm not privy to what is within those term sheets. I'm outlining what I understand the standards that would be needed for a developer such as Bell Bay Powerfuels or HIF, or any other that is seeking to export green methanol internationally.

**Mr ELLIS** - Chair, Mr Morton has a response regarding Tyndall Range exploration licences.

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**Mr MORTON** - Quickly minister, and through you. Just a response to Ms Badger's earlier question about exploration grants in the Tyndall Ranges. The Tyndall Range Walk was designed by the Parks and Wildlife Service and, obviously, MRT has been working closely with them. It's designed as an active mineral zone so the work with Parks has effectively embedded the message that mining is a critical part of our heritage. There have been two EDGI grants completed in the area of the iconic walk with a total of \$155,000. This was for two holes that were drilled that were nearly 800 m in length total and resulted in a total investment in exploration of around \$350,000.

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr Limkin has an update for Ms Johnston.

**Mr LILMKIN** - Ms Johnston, thank you for your patience. In relation to your advanced manufacturing grant question. By round:

Round 1, there were eight successful applications, eight acquittals processed, 100 per cent acquittal finalisation rate, 88.09 per cent projected FTE acquittal achieved, then at review 100.37 projected FTE at review achieved.

Round 2, there were 12 successful applicants, 12 acquittals processed, 100 per cent acquittals finalised, 59.01 projected FTEs at the acquittal, then 103.46 projected FTEs at final review.

Round 3, there were seven successful applications, six acquittals, one decided not to proceed, 100 per cent acquittals finalisation rate for those six projects - and we're only talking about those six projects now - 31.5 projected FTEs and 42.52 projected FTEs at review achieved. I will talk about why there's a lag in a second.

Round 4, 11 successful applications, 10 acquittals, one decided not to proceed, 100 per cent acquittals finalised, 24.15 projected FTEs at acquittals achieved, 27.55 projected FTEs at review achieved.

Round 5, 13 successful applications, 10 acquittals to date, two grantees are yet to complete their project, and one has decided not to proceed.

In relation to some of the timing in those later rounds, I am advised that employment outcomes generally are one-two years plus down the track and not immediately available, hence why the earlier rounds have a higher percentage. Those later rounds currently have a lower percentage. The team at State Growth will continue to monitor those lower percentage ones and we expect them to go over time. I am advised it takes time to ramp up production after equipment is installed, commissioned and staff are trained, tested and finding new staff with relevant skills and experiences, particularly in becoming a new market, so there is a lag, but the team continues to monitor those as we go on.

**Mr ELLIS** - Sorry, Chair, I have one from the first session today, and the answer was in relation to this session. Ms Badger was asking in regard to Supreme Court appearances. Over the last year or two, I'm only aware of one mining related matter that was appealed to the Supreme Court, which was Tas Mulch Pty Ltd as trustees of the Tas Mulch Trust versus Minister for Business, Industry and Resources - that's me now. As the matter is still afoot I have no further comment at this time. Crown Law is again representing the minister of the day

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in the normal way. I don't know if there's anything further that Mr Morton wants to provide as an update? I'm sorry to get in the way, that was a bit long.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Just to clarify the answer from previously, I also asked about those that haven't been acquitted, how many have repaid or didn't proceed. So there was, I think one, in round three, one in round four and three in round five?

**Mr LIMKIN** - One has decided not to proceed.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - So did they repaid that loan?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Sorry?

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Have they repaid that amount or - that was a question, have the grants been refunded or repaid?

**Mr LIMKIN** - I am advised the grant has been repaid. The grant was repaid in 30 days. In relation to the other two, the grants are not complete yet, they're still within their timeframes [inaudible], so I can't give you that information because the grants have not actually been executed.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - My question perhaps follows on from the answers you were giving about the stages of completion, whether the FTEs initially and then the FTEs later on. Obviously, the grant's frequently asked questions forms say that all successful applicants will be asked to report annually for a period of three years to allow assessment for long-term success of the program. Is that what you're talking about then - That was just the different figures - that was the yearly reporting back? So is that three years because there were only two figures you're gave me there.

**Mr LIMKIN** - In relation to rounds three, four and five, I am advised that they're the current figures, they will change as the years go on. They're as at 30 June 2025.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Okay. So you still have another year to go on those particular ones, is that correct?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Yes.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Those reports or assessments that are being done, where are they published? Anywhere publicly? How are they reported against? Where would you find that other than having to ask those questions every year in Estimates?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister. Reviews are conducted by a senior program manager in the DSG in accordance with section 7 of the guidelines, reviews are undertaken on the understanding that the project takes a considerable amount of time to realise. Data is gathered in developing new [inaudible] and we're also reviewing the outcomes and effectiveness of the the grants.

In relation to whether they're publicly - they're not publicly available, but I am happy to look at, whether we - I've just read this information into *Hansard*, this is publicly available. If I'm comfortable to provide this information to the parliament, we should be comfortable to

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provide it on the website. We will take this as an action to look at a more active disclosure mechanism.

**Mr ELLIS** - It makes sense. I mean, if there's information that we're holding that we can make public, you know - it'll work.

**Mr LIMKIN** - On that, if I may, minister, one of the things I've committed to the government as part of my performance agreement is to look at more active disclosure for the department. I do think we should be, where possible, actively disclosing that [inaudible] information. With a diverse Department of State Growth, that will take time, but we are committed to looking at how we continue to do that.

**CHAIR** - Committee, we'll just have a five-minute break, for a coffee or whatever, and be back at 4.39 p.m.

**The Committee suspended from 4.34 p.m. to 4.39 p.m.**

**The committee continued 4.41 p.m.**

**Dr BROAD** - In your last response, minister, you mentioned Avebury. I'm not exactly sure the point you were trying to make. We have a situation here where the Group 6 Metals is a company that lost - what was it - \$34 million last year. I'm just trying to find my place now. I have everything all mixed up. They lost, I think \$34 million, then the year before that they lost \$136 million. We have the situation at Liberty Bell Bay, where you have an owner whose businesses are falling over everywhere; you have security, but in the same instance, you didn't support Avebury. So Avebury was 200 jobs, it fell over and the government didn't deliver the support that they had promised when the mine restarted. So, why support Group 6 Metals and Liberty Bell Bay, but not Avebury?

**Mr ELLIS** - If we had taken your proposal, the state would have lost \$10 million and the mine would still be closed. That wouldn't be a good outcome. Obviously, the state's invested in the critical mineral mine there on King Island, and the mine remains open and, with a motivated shareholder group, and owner group, we're hopeful that it will get up and running. In terms of Liberty Bell Bay, it's a highly secured loan. We made that on the basis only that it provides ore, which is then saleable and provides other - or we have other securities and rights available through that. Avebury Mine, led by Hartree Capital, remains on care and maintenance.

I think anyone that followed closely the nickel market over those very difficult couple of years would have noted that even an operation of the scale and size of BHP's Nickel West operations, which were the largest in the country by a long way also closed. Even the West Australian government and federal government were unable to bail out that massive world-scale operation because of the long-term challenges that presented themselves with nickel pricing.

That being said, the government remains optimistic about Avebury's long-term prospects, while acknowledging the decision to restart operations rests with the company and recognising the current volatility in global metal markets. We'll continue to work through that, but it's important that where we're making these investments, they're being made so that the operations, where they happen, continue and there's strong protection for taxpayer funds.

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**Dr BROAD** - Just to refer back to the answer from Mr Hendriks around the \$7.5 million loan. He appeared to indicate that the \$7.5 million loan was part of that restructuring process. So, the government had a \$10 million loan plus interest, so \$10.4 million, that was converted to equity.

**Mr ELLIS** - Correct.

**Dr BROAD** - Now, was there a period of time between that process to when a subsequent \$7.5 million loan was activated?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass to the team at State Growth. I'm not sure why you're opposed.

**Dr BROAD** - I'm not opposed. This is scrutiny.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, your party is opposed to this.

**Dr BROAD** - No.

**Mr ELLIS** - Isn't it?

**Dr BROAD** - Just answer the question. If you don't like scrutiny, you're in the wrong place.

**Mr ELLIS** - Is it opposed to it or not?

**Dr BROAD** - I'm asking the questions, buddy.

**Mr ELLIS** - Well, I think you'll find that your party's position is opposed to this. The reason we're supportive of it is because it's important for King Island, it's important for Australia's critical minerals future. I mentioned it's the highest deposit commercial-scale tungsten resource of size anywhere in the western world. Some would argue it's the most critical mineral, particularly with its application in defence - armour piercing, armour plating - and the fact that it is a market that is dominated by China. With that, I will pass over to the team at State Growth to talk to you as well.

**Mr HENDRIKS** - As I understand it, both issues were considered by the Tasmanian Development Board at the same time, even though one followed the other, so it was all considered as a package.

**Dr BROAD** - Why wasn't it announced at the same time? There was an announcement about the conversion of the debt to equity, and you're saying now at the same time a loan was extended, but it wasn't actually disclosed by the government. From what I understand, it wasn't announced by the state government, it was announced in a Group 6 Metals update, their quarterly update some time after that process. What's gone on there? Why would a government say, 'Okay, we're converting \$10.4 million to equity' and then not mention the loan as well?

**Mr ELLIS** - We're obviously committed to the future of the mine, but I will pass over to Mr Hendriks, if there's anything further to add.

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**Mr HENDRIKS** - As I understand, it took a little bit longer to finalise loan agreements and documentation that was in place and was also subject to shareholder approval. As an ASX-listed company, there are all sorts of issues around how that timing works and when things were actually noted.

**Dr BROAD** - Who did the government seek advice from? Did the government seek advice from the department for example, on whether or not to proceed with this process of supporting Group 6 Metals?

**Mr ELLIS** - I think we've already mentioned the Tasmanian Development Board, but I will pass over to the team if there's anything further to add.

**Mr HENDRIKS** - The process in relation to the loan was essentially the same process in relation to the equity and all the information went through the Tasmanian Development Board for consideration, then a subsequent recommendation to the minister and Treasurer.

**Dr BROAD** - Who actually presented that?

**Mr HENDRIKS** - The office of the Coordinator-General, a board paper was prepared and provided to the Tasmanian Development Board for consideration.

**Dr BROAD** - With no input from the minister as such?

**CHAIR** - I will just remind people too that we refer to people on this committee by their titles and not by 'buddy' or anything like that, Dr Broad.

**Dr BROAD** - Noted.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, on the Forestry Tasmania's 2027 contracts, can you tell us what the current status of negotiations are for the long-term native wood supply contracts that are due to expire in 2027?

**Mr ELLIS** - When we've got the STT staff here at the table with us next week, I'm happy to go through that. What I can say at a high level is that they're working through those negotiations, and it's an important resource for the future as that wood supply comes online. We're also working to support our sawmillers through that process with the change in the nature of that resource, and potential change in the nature of the market. We can talk more about that, but any questions regarding Sustainable Timber Tasmania is probably best, when they're here at the table next week.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you. In regard to your policy decisions that will govern - your government's policy decisions that will govern any changes or not to those contracts, are you considering removing or making any changes to the legislated sawmill quota?

**Mr ELLIS** - We will be working through a process. It's a changing resource that's coming through and there will certainly need to be some consideration of the way that those logs are categorised under our existing regulatory structure, but we will be working through the process with STT. We will of course take all those matters into consideration. I will just look to the Secretary of State Growth, if there is anything further that we want to add.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - Is that a yes, no or maybe on considering making changes?

**Mr ELLIS** - We are working through it. Certainly, on its face, it's a different resource coming through and it's important that those regulatory categories take that into account.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - On the industry, the Forestry Tasmania's annual report and statement of corporate intent paints the picture of a native forest industry that's in decline. The 2025-26 statement of corporate intent says:

... references poor market conditions, reduced demand for domestic soil log and veneer log, subdued wood chip markets, supply chain pressures, challenges in maintaining workforce levels, and of course, a significant reduction in native forest resource volumes post 2027.

It also says that:

The sale of hardwood plantation logs will be critical to the organisation's long-term financial viability.

Minister, the markets are clearly changing and multinationals prefer to buy plantation products rather than native forests. You have an incredible opportunity in front of you to have a modern and sustainable industry into the future. Will you extend a viable, sustainable forest industry and provide something that is possible by ensuring that all future wood supply contracts from 2027 are plantation only?

**Mr ELLIS** - No, and there are good reasons for that, Dr Woodruff. The Tasmanian government continues to drive economic growth in the forest industry by implementing policy to create jobs and support regional communities across the state. We're strongly supportive of a sustainable and thriving local forestry industry and both government and industry are strongly focused on achieving the highest possible value from every tree in Tasmania's production forest. Well-managed working forests create jobs and investment opportunities, particularly in regional communities such as ours. There are over 5700 direct and indirect jobs in Tasmania because of the forest sector. Our forestry sectors already worth about \$1.2 billion annually to our economy, including \$712 million directly at point of sale. Our goal is to grow that even further.

We've spoken about the importance of ensuring that that growth happens through value adding and also unlocking opportunities in the private market. In terms of total wood production for 2023-24, that was just over 4.2 million tonnes across all forest types. Private forest accounted for about 3 million tonnes, public forest about 1.26 million tonnes and total wood production for 2025 was approximately 4.1 million tonnes across all those types.

I believe there are some excellent opportunities working through the value add, for example, the remaining volumes coming through Tasmanian ports, we often see sawn timber exports to domestic and international markets, and we're committed to working closely with our native foresters. It's also worth giving a shout out to our team at STT for their work during the west coast complex of bushfires over the summer. 70 per cent of STT staff are trained firefighters. They're one of our three key fire agencies and certainly I know many of our communities are very grateful for our forest firefighters, for the work that they do in protecting communities and assets and environmental values.

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**Ms JOHNSTON** - Minister, before making a decision regarding grants or loans, does the Tasmanian Development Board get advice from Treasury or inform them, or do both?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will pass to the team at State Growth on the process.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The department has a commercial and agricultural financing group as part of our department. We have some very talented individuals in there, normally ex-bankers. They provide advice to the board to consider, and that advice includes a range of different mechanisms, depending on whether it's a grant, loan or other matters. In addition, the office of the Coordinator-General, for any investment activities, prepares information for the board to consider.

We work very closely with Treasury as part of that advice. Following that consideration, depending on what it is, it will need to go to the minister and the Treasurer for approval under the TDR act. I understand that the Treasury provides independent advice to the Treasurer as part of that process but as I said earlier, we work very closely on those matters with Treasury as part of the department's advice to the board.

**CHAIR** - Minister, can you update the committee on the government's new Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy and how it will help future-proof Tasmania's economy and support long-term prosperity?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Chair. Tasmania has entered its strongest economic period in modern history with record-low unemployment, rising business investment and an economy now worth more than \$40 billion. To keep lifting living standards and ensure our regions remain resilient, we need to broaden our economic base and strengthen our long-term competitiveness. That's exactly why the government is developing a new Economic Diversification and Investment Strategy, a forward-looking plan to drive productivity, unlock private investment and ensure Tasmania is prepared for the global economic shifts already underway. The strategy will be developed by the Department of State Growth with leadership from the Tasmanian Development Board, informed by contributions from the Office of the Coordinator-General and supported by external expertise where required.

Key focus of the strategy will be helping Tasmanian businesses adopt advanced digital tools and artificial intelligence. These technologies are becoming core drivers of productivity worldwide and we want Tasmanian firms, small and large, even butchers, to be able to compete, innovate and grow in that environment. The Tasmanian Development Board will also consider how its own investment toolkit can support strategic opportunities in this space.

As part of this work, the government will also review the legislative and financial toolkit under the *Tasmanian Development Act 1983* to ensure the board has flexibility to deliver on its expanded role. We're also exploring non-financial levers that can accelerate private investment. The strategy will map our current economic structure, identify emerging priority sectors, assess our comparative advantages and recommend clear practical actions, including opportunities to partner with the Australian Government and leverage national investment programs.

A draft strategy will be delivered in the first half of 2026. This work is about future proofing Tasmania. It's also about building a more diverse, more productive and more resilient economy that can withstand global uncertainty and seize new opportunities. While others are

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intent to look in the rearview mirror, our government's doing the hard work now to secure Tasmania's economic future and create new pathways for Tasmanian jobs and industry.

**Dr BROAD** - Minister Duigan directed questions about Wilkinsons Point sale to you during the Legislative Council hearings. The divestment of Wilkinsons Point was a subject to a scathing Auditor-General's report which outlined serious concerns that amongst other things were about the sale process being inadequate, not an appropriate business case or community benefit test and the Department of State Growth shared the valuation report with the potential buyer despite the advice from the Valuer-General not to do so.

Can you outline to the committee why the valuation report was provided to the prospective buyer against the advice from the Valuer-General?

**Mr ELLIS** - The Tasmanian government remains committed to partnering with private enterprise to unlock investment, create jobs and drive economic growth in the state. The investment will unlock the economic potential of Hobart's northern suburbs and deliver over a billion dollars in economic activity in the region. The project will deliver new opportunities for local suppliers, create jobs during construction and operating phases and activate the northern suburbs corridor to expand the ferry network to further benefit the connectivity of the suburbs.

Important to note, the Crown land at Wilkinsons Point has not been sold. The parties have not yet agreed on a master plan, so it follows that the parties have not progressed beyond stage one of the land sale process. If the proposed sale was to proceed, it could potentially enable the development of a multi-use retail precinct, a family resort and a hotel complex. There are two key focus areas in relation to the negotiations of the land. One is to protect the interests of the crown by ensuring that sufficient land is retained in Crown ownership for my StateBank arena, a ferry terminal and associated access in car parking requirements and any required road upgrades.

The second is to ensure that to activate Wilkinsons Point, the minimum raise will, and necessary costs are incurred by the government. The proposed sale stems from 2020 during the COVID era, when the government entered an agreement to negotiate the sale of land and development of Wilkinsons Point as part of bringing the National Basketball League team, the Jack Jumpers, to Tasmania. As part of this process, the government is ensuring that any sale agreement ensures that sufficient Crown land remains available for the current and future needs of the MyState Bank arena, transport upgrades and provides public access and amenity. I want to say again, negotiations have not settled on the land available to be sold or the purchase price. This cannot occur until the master plan is agreed, which has not yet occurred.

**Dr BROAD** - You did not go anywhere near answering the actual question. Can you outline to the committee why the valuation report was provided to the prospective buyer against the advice from the Valuer-General?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will pass to the team at State Growth to add further.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I want to start by saying any future sale of any land at Wilkinsons Point will be subject to evaluation undertaken by the Office of the Valuer-General. The functions of public service activities are undertaken based on the authority exercised by them. These flow from the powers of the relevant minister in legislation or under appropriate delegation. As noted in the report, under our system of government, the minister can provide public servants to

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undertake a specific course of action. Ministers are to respect the apolitical nature role of the public servant, while, as the report notes, ministerial staff cannot direct a public servant in the conduct of their duties in their roles as advisors to ministers. Those staff are appropriately involved in discussions between ministers and public servants and a conduit for ministers' feedback to the department.

**Dr BROAD** - Again, that did not answer the question. Why was the valuation report provided to the prospective buyer? Are you hinting in your answer there that you were directed, that the department was directed by the minister to share that advice, or the minister or the minister's office to share that advice?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister, I am not hinting to anything. The Auditor-General has made comments in his report. I am reflecting on the report and also the response that the Head of the State Service and Secretary of DPAC provided in the report. I have accepted all recommendations from the Auditor-General. I also want to note that in relation to Wilkinsons Point, the Auditor-General has noted that improvements have been made in early to mid-2024. This has been a long transacting agreement and as I have indicated, we have improved our processes within relation to this and any future sale at any land at Wilkinsons Point will be subject to the valuation undertaken by the Office of the Valuer-General at the time of the appropriate sale. As the minister indicated, we are still at defining a master plan with the proponent and this has not gone beyond that stage.

**Dr BROAD** - And you still, again, didn't answer the question. I'll be very specific. Did the minister or the minister's office, direct the department to share the valuation with the prospective buyer?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister, I believe I have answered the question.

**Dr BROAD** - Well, no. That's a very short - you can say yes or no, but you have not answered that question, with due respect. Did the minister's office or the minister direct the department to share the valuation with the prospective buyer? You have not answered that.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - That's a pretty straight question.

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes, look, if there's further information that's needed from that time, I am happy to follow up and provide additional information in writing.

**Dr BROAD** - You'll take that on notice?

**Mr ELLIS** - I am happy to do that.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, in your previous answer to a question you talked about the money that the forestry industry brings to Tasmania. However, it is a fact that government subsidies over the last year have kept Forestry Tasmania afloat combined with a non-cash re-evaluation of the value of the forest estate based on its carbon value. Do you agree that without a government subsidy of \$12 million and a non-cash biological asset evaluation of \$7 million, Forestry Tasmania would have made negative \$15 million in the last financial year?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Dr Woodruff. Obviously, Sustainable Timber Tasmania GBE scrutiny is next week. We'll have people available at the table but I am happy to speak at a high

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level. If there wasn't any timber produced from STT they would also make a loss. Fortunately we manage the land for multiple use. That includes timber and carbon. That's why we've made a profit for the last eight years with Sustainable Timber Tasmania, including the most recent one of course, which we will be discussing. Like many of our GBEs, the STT provides a range of different community service obligation benefits that includes firefighting, road access for recreational purposes, beekeeping and a whole range of different opportunities.

That is one of the beautiful things about forestry. It captures carbon naturally; it creates beautiful timber products; it provides fibre for a plastic-free future. Certainly, because we manage land for multiple uses as part of the reason why we've been able to deliver a profit for Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT) for the last eight years, despite the many, many services that it provides to the community.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, thank you. That wasn't an honest answer because I talked about the fact -

**Mr ELLIS** - Well it certainly was, Dr Woodruff.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, I talked -

**Mr ELLIS** - I don't want to have to make you withdraw things around honesty and all that sort of stuff. But I think we can sort of work through that in a genuine way.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well, my question was about the subsidies that mean that - you've just talked about it as a profit and the only reason it can get there is because the government has subsidised it. As I said it would otherwise, without subsidies, without non-cash biological asset evaluations of \$7 million, it would have been in the red \$15 million.

So Forestry Tasmania's target for net cash flow from operations was an embarrassingly low \$3.5 million in 2024-25, but it failed to reach even that, and it only scrounged \$1.8 million with an underlying net profit of just \$800,000, that is with the subsidies I've already talked about. That's pretty dire, minister. Continuing to subsidise this industry is simply throwing good money after bad. Even if you won't end native forest logging, will you commit to ending government subsidies for Forestry Tasmania?

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Woodruff, again, I mean, we're clearly talking across purposes here on a range of different things, including the fact that STT hearings are next week. In terms of community service obligations, STT do fuel-reduction burning and bushfire management. 70 per cent of their staff are trained in that. Do you think that would be provided for free by any other company.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Well on community service obligations, we have a conversation about that every single year.

**Mr ELLIS** - We certainly do.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - So-called community service obligations and public services that that company performs are in exchange for government subsidies. Do you recognise that this is public land and those services would be performed by another public entity with subsidies with if Forestry Tasmania wasn't doing it? Wouldn't it be better for Tasmania to invest the

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\$12.13 million annually into Parks and Wildlife, or the TFS rather than into a loss-making entity like Forestry Tasmania.

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned before, STT continues to make a profit. I'm happy to talk about that next week. Part of the reason why we make a payment to the business to provide support for these important matters is because it's a highly efficient way of doing it -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Because it can't stand on its own two feet.

**Mr ELLIS** - Certainly we're seeing in other jurisdictions where they've made the very poor decision to end native forestry, the costs of delivering those services are much higher. I think it was in Victoria, they've recently announced that the cost of their native forest shutdown is so far \$1.5 billion, \$1.5 billion. That is enormously damaging to that state's economy and it hasn't stopped the demand for renewable resource like timber.

What it's done is meant that they're importing it from other locations. Whether it's Europe, which does a huge amount of native forestry, indeed there are very few countries that have significant plantation industry in Europe. Despite that, and despite being a relatively small land mass compared to Australia with many more consumers, they are exporting, or alternatively we could import timber from countries that don't manage their lands and environments at the same quality and degree that we do here in Tasmania.

So I think it's been widely acknowledged that native forestry is important. The Greens seem to support growing trees and cutting them down, but only if it's one kind of species. Through native forestry we do that through multiple species on any given part of land and they're a native species. I think that gets the balance right. It is pleasing that they've delivered another profit. It's also pleasing that many of our -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It's not a profit, don't be dishonest. It's subsidised.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Dr Woodruff, it's also pleasing -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - That's why you made it into the black.

**Mr ELLIS** - It's also pleasing that STT staff have received the Operational Service Medal from the Tasmania Fire Service for their work in the west coast complex of bushfires because these people go above and beyond to serve our community and this appropriate recognition of it.

**CHAIR** - Minister, the Green Hydrogen Price Reduction Scheme is an \$8 million scheme that the entire grant money for this scheme was awarded to Countrywide Hydrogen on 13 May 2024. Funding will be paid on a per-kilogram basis on the sale of hydrogen. The first phase of Countrywide's project is to construct a hydrogen production and heavy vehicle refuelling facility at the industrial hub in Brighton, which will produce apparently up to 800 tonnes per annum of green hydrogen. Over two years later, can you let us know what progress has been made?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Ms Johnston. I will pass to the team at State Growth to provide some further information.

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**Ms PINTO** - The program is continuing at a pace. They're still going through technical assessments at the moment. They're also looking at viable sites. The Bell Bay region is one of the sites that they're actively looking at the moment, which is fortuitous, seeing as we're seeking to inject further activity into that region.

That's currently the status on it at the moment. I would note that the purpose of the government scheme is to deliver a market that can go into the future. What it seeks to do is look at the difference between the cost of hydrogen production and what its substitute is on the market, such that you can bridge that gap. That's the intent of -

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Have they produced any hydrogen?

**Ms PINTO** - Not at this stage, but the Blue Economy CRC is actively producing at the moment. They've got an electrolysis site in the south of the state and currently the hydrogen output is being utilised through Metro for a handful of hydrogen buses.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - How long have they got to produce that hydrogen? Is this an indefinite period of time that they can try to produce hydrogen? When will we be recouping this grant as not successful? Is there a deadline they need to produce by?

**Ms PINTO** - I will need to look at some notes on that to come back to you, but there is a time-frame associated with that grant.

**Ms JOHNSTON** - Would you like to put that on notice, minister?

**Mr ELLIS** - That's fine. It's largely a matter that's being managed by minister Duigan, but yes, happy to take it on notice.

**Ms PINTO** - I will endeavour to get that information, thank you.

**CHAIR** - I will just put my question in before I change back over.

**Dr BROAD** - Why doesn't the minister just ask the questions?

**CHAIR** - Minister, can you update the committee on the current state of Tasmania's mineral sector and outline how the critical minerals fit into the future for the industry?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermey. Tasmania's mineral sector is strong, it's growing, and it continues to be one of the real engines of our economy. Over the past year, the sector has employed around 6000 Tasmanians, generated nearly two-thirds of our goods export value, and produced close to \$3 billion worth of product. This doesn't happen by accident; it happens because this government's proudly pro-mining and backs the sector every step of the way. We're seeing major investments right across the west coast, with mines like Rosebery, Renison and Savage River looking to extend their mine life, opening new resource areas and investing heavily in exploration and infrastructure. With billions of dollars worth of potential developments in the pipeline, the long-term future of the sector is looking incredibly strong.

The key driver of that future is critical minerals and strategic minerals. Tasmania has what the world needs: high grade tin, tungsten and rare earth potential. That's why we've released the Critical Minerals Strategy, extending our Exploration Drilling Grant Initiative, and

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signed a funding agreement to process a common-user processing facility. This is the kind of infrastructure that can unlock new mines, downstream processing, and new Tasmanian jobs.

At the national level, the recent rare earths agreement between Australia and the United States is a huge opportunity for Tasmania. It backs in exactly the capabilities we've been building; capabilities essential for clean energy technology, advanced manufacturing and sovereign defence supply chains. We will soon release Tasmania's critical minerals prospectus to take that message to investors directly. The bottom line is this: while others talk Tasmania down, our government securing long-term investment, strengthening regional communities, and making sure Tasmania is front and centre in the global shift to critical minerals production.

**Dr BROAD** - Minister, does the department accept that it was a mistake to share the valuation report with the prospective buyer of Wilkinsons Point?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Dr Broad. I will pass over to the department, knowing that we've spoken about the department accepting the recommendations from the Auditor-General.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you, minister. As I said in my previous answer, the department is following the legislative framework and the department is still at the first step of the land process, being that there is no binding sale agreement in place, and negotiation continues.

Any future sale of any land at Wilkinsons Point will be subject to the valuation undertaken by the Office of Valuer-General.

I acknowledge the conclusion of the report, in particular, the need to ensure the State Service works together in relation to these matters. Steps have already been undertaken to ensure our state servants and our departments continue to strive to make a difference by faithfully delivering the government's commitment, while providing frank, impartial and timely advice, consistent with our obligations under the *State Service Act 2020*.

State Growth has agreed to the recommendations that relate to it, including ensuring comprehensive advice is given to government before implementation; developing a framework to reduce risk relating to similar transactions; and updating our conflict-of-interest policy, which has already been undertaken. Ultimately, I am accountable for the department and its processes, and we have put new processes in place to ensure that that does not happen again.

**Dr BROAD** - You talked about steps undertaken, does that include any performance management processes?

**Mr ELLIS** - I'll pass that to -

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister. I am not going to go into employment management matters in a committee, but -

**Dr BROAD** - To be fair, I'm not asking you to name anybody. I'm just asking you a question of: has there been any performance management processes triggered, in terms of the steps that you've talked about undertaking?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister. As part of my commitment when accepting the Auditor-General's recommendations, I committed to - let me get the exact wording - 'I commit

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to include in all of our senior executives in their 2025-26 performance agreements, a focus on recommendation 2.' My intention is to continue with that. My performance agreement has just been finalised and now I will be doing my direct reports and all other direct reports. We are, including the Auditor-General's findings in our 2025-26 performance reviews with all our senior executives.

**Dr BROAD** - Can you provide or table for the committee the exact land that is proposed to be disposed of, under this process at Wilkinsons Point?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister. Negotiations are still ongoing with the proponent. Part of the conversations are in relation to the placing of a car park, a placing of a ferry terminal at Wilkinson Point and associated land around there. Minister, if you're comfortable, we're happy to take on notice the footprint of the current master plan. Having said that, it will continue to change, Dr Broad, so it is not a finalised master plan, as I've indicated before, nothing has been sold, there is no final agreement and we are still at the first step of the Crown lands disposal process.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, the Wilderness Society of Tasmania has taken the Forest Practices Authority to court over their failure to protect the swift parrot, following a decision to not declare the Lonnvale forests a swift parrot important breeding area, due to potential impacts on Forestry Tasmania's bottom line.

How can the Tasmanian community have any faith in that industry to protect the environment, when decisions are made in the interests of Forestry Tasmania's bottom line, rather than in the protection of a critically endangered species?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Dr Woodruff. Obviously, the Forest Practices Authority is an independent statutory body, an independent regulator, and they are working through a process. You mentioned court proceedings, so I won't go too much into that. I will pass to the team of State Growth, to add further.

**Ms PINTO** - Thank you, minister, and through you. I might just make some opening comments in terms of the framework that is in place, then if the Chair and the minister are comfortable, we can also bring up the Chief Forest Practices Officer.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, through you minister, I do understand the framework that should be in place, but I'm concerned about the fact that the decision was made not to declare that swift parrot important breeding area because of the impacts on Forestry Tasmania's bottom line, essentially.

**Ms PINTO** - As I noted, and through you minister, I will just make some opening comments. I won't go through in detail the governing framework and then if anything further needs to be discussed, we have the opportunity to bring up the Chief Forest Practices Officer.

The objective of the forest practices system is to achieve sustainable management. It has provisions for the identification and maintenance of threatened species habitat which, of course, includes the swift parrot. It's based on a continuous improvement process where new and relevant information is taken into consideration and management approaches for threatened species are adapted as required. It's important to balance social, economic and environmental

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outcomes under the legislation, prior to making changes to threatened species management approaches.

In recent years, the approach to managing swift parrots has been adapted based on new information. This includes an interim instruction, as I am advised and as I noted, the Chief Forest Practices Officer is able to provide more detail, but I will repeat this. This includes an interim instruction from the Chief Forest Practices Officer in 2021 to seek case-by-case advice from the FPA for the management of swift parrot potential habitat in the Lonnvale forest area.

That's the most that I'd note at this stage.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Through you minister, if the FPA could provide any more information about that, I'd like to understand how it happened.

**Ms PINTO** - I will make a note that there is a current matter before the courts and, obviously, they would not be able to go into details of that particular matter. But, in this regard, through you minister, we could request the Chief Forest Practices Officer to talk in a little bit more detail the approach and mechanisms that the FPA goes through with regard to threatened species.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thanks.

**Mr ELLIS** - Chair, I would like to introduce Ms Anne Chuter, Chief Forest Practices Officer for the Forest Practices Authority.

**Ms CHUTER** - Thank you, and through you minister, as Ms Pinto alluded to, the forest practices system goes through an adaptive management process and we manage threatened species through the agreed procedures, which is agreed between the FPA and NRE Tasmania.

Through those agreed procedures, there are two pathways to managing threatened species, generally. It's either through endorsed management agreements that are delivered through online planning tools and that includes things like range boundaries, which is the SPIBA or the Swift Parrot Important Breeding Area that you're referring to. The other approach can be through case-by-case advice.

The instruction issued by the CFP at the time, back in, I think it was 2021, recognised the new information which was the increase in breeding records for the swift parrot in a lot of our forest area. That instruction had the effect of managing the risk to that species because it instructed the construction of forest practices plans in the planning phase to go back to the FPA for specialist advice through that case-by-case management approach, which is allowed for under the agreed procedures. Essentially, that's an alternative method for managing that threatened species and that risk of the forestry operation and that's allowed for under the agreed procedures.

In terms of the SPIBA itself, the FPA has not gone through the process of continual improvement to explicitly consider whether the Lonnvale forest block should be a SPIBA or not because the risk was managed through the case-by-case approach where specialist advice is sought for forestry operations where there may be an impact on swift parrot habitat within that area.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - Through you minister, you mentioned before the pathway including NRE Tasmania who are responsible for the swift parrot recovery plan process, I think. So, did you consult with NRE Tasmania and did they provide advice on this case-by-case assessment, as opposed to the proper or the normal assessment.

**Ms CHUTER** - Both processes, the endorsed management approaches delivered through the Threatened Species Adviser, as well as case-by-case management advice, are both proper pathways under the agreed procedures, which are procedures agreed between the FPA and NRE Tasmania and that provision is made front of the Forest Practices Code and in making that CFPO instruction, NRE Tasmania would have been consulted with in terms of an appropriate pathway for managing that species and that risk in that area, and through the case-by-case advice, that is the current process for that area of the stage.

Where required, NRE Tasmania would be consulted through a specialist process in terms of the management actions required for particular coupes and the consultation will happen as required.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you. We asked the Minister for the Environment what involvement NRET had had in the decision not to declare Lonnvale a Swift Parrot-important breeding area and the secretary said NRET had had no involvement in that. I do not understand. When you say there's a pathway that requires FPA and NRET, and NRET have said they did not provide advice, or were not consulted. I don't understand how you could have made an assessment, a case-by-case assessment - what's this specialist process you are talking about and can you table the conversation that you had with NRET about this area and this decision?

**Ms CHUTER** - It's a complicated system, so I am trying my best to explain it.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Sure.

**Ms CHUTER** - So, the SPIBA (swift parrot important breeding area) itself has not explicitly been considered. So, NRE's response is that they have not explicitly provided advice on that that would be true, so the construction of the SPIBA, which goes through a continual improvement process, itself has not been explicitly considered.

However, I think it was 2021, when CFPI instruction was issued, the issuing of that instruction was on the basis of new records for the swift parrot occurring in the Lonnvale forest area, and the CFPO issued instruction to essentially say, and this is layman's terms, I am not using the exact wording that was in the instruction, on receipt of this new information, this area appears to be being used for breeding events and habitat for swift parrot and, therefore, we are taking an approach to this area of the state, which is to require you to now seek case-by-case advice; because it was only recognised as the potential breeding range, the CFPO instruction had the effect of saying you need to come back to the FPA for case-by-case advice because it's likely you're going to have to do more habitat retention in this area of the state because of the recognition that it could support breeding habitat for the species.

Under the agreed procedures, that is an illegitimate pathway to managing threatened species in accordance with the standards under the forest practise system.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - In that situation, does that mean NRET does not have to provide any advice in this case-by-case situation? Is that a kind of mechanism where they do not provide any input about that? I still don't understand, if you could just enlighten me on that bit.

**Ms CHUTER** - The agreed procedures, they are available to read on NRE Tasmania's website, and I think possibly the FPA's as well, but they are publicly available and the case-by-case advice is a mechanism where it's recognised that there is not an endorsed management approach for a particular species or a particular situation. Therefore, to be able to appropriately manage the conservation outcomes for that species within the forestry setting, the agreed procedures allows for the FPA, in consultation with NRE Tasmania where required, to deliver site-specific management recommendations, if you like.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - So, minister, can I summarise then, if I understand Ms Chuter's comments -

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff, it's your last question.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Yes, can I summarise then that the pathway for a case-by-case assessment, which it sounds like was followed here without declaring this area a swift parrot important breeding area doesn't necessarily require consultation with the NRE. They've said they weren't consulted with or did not provide advice. I guess just to close the loop, can you then confirm that that the FPA did not seek advice from NRE to declare the forest an important breeding area?

**Ms CHUTER** - The process to declare -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Hasn't happened yet?

**Ms CHUTER** - It hasn't happened.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Is it going to happen?

**MS CHUTER** - It's a process - so we have a continuing improvement adaptive management process which requires a number of steps. The Chief Forest Practices Officer instruction going through the case-by-case approach has the effect of managing that area of the forest quite carefully in terms of the impacts on the swift parrot. The habitat is required to be identified and management actions as required would be implemented.

Therefore, with all the threatened species that the FPA is required to do adaptive management for while it's in the in the program of works - at this stage we haven't gone through that process because other matters of taking precedent, because the case-by-case management pathway in a lot of our forest area is managing the risk to the species.

**CHAIR** - Mr Vermey. Dr Woodruff, you can come back to this question as well.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, I understand the government's on-island processing programme has been very successful in delivering an uplift in value added timber processing activity in Tasmania. Are you able to provide an update on how this program is tracking?

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**Mr ELLIS** - Thank you, Mr Vermeij. Our on-island processing program has been pivotal in driving new investment in timber processing activity in Tasmania. It's designed to grow Tasmania forest sector, increase the value of our wood, reduce imports from wood-based products and create jobs. Our government has committed \$15 million to the program since 2021, demonstrates commitment to the forestry industry and value adding processing in Tasmania.

This funding includes an additional \$5 million provided in the 2024-25 Tasmanian state budget. Round two of the programme was launched on 16 May 2025 and has a particular focus on the processing of the increasingly important Tasmanian hardwood plantation estate, while also continuing to provide funding support to new innovative uses of other types of timber. This round will make \$8.5 million of grant funding in total available, with applications now closed and being assessed.

Five million dollars of the total funding pool in is reserved for projects which are primarily focused on processing Tasmania's hardwood plantation resource, supporting the transition to this new sustainable resource as it enters the supply chain in increasing volumes to the timber processing sector. Some of the successful projects funded in round one of the project include:

- Timberlink Australia \$1.06 million to create a finger jointing and priming line to convert low-grade and short-length plantation pine [inaudible] high value boards, fascia and posts.
- Coppers Wood Products \$250,000 to upgrade its pine processing facility at Longford to reduce waste and significantly increase the efficiency and output of traded pine post-production processing.
- McKay Timber \$1.05 million to upgrade Trust Plant facilities for the manufacture of wall and roof trusses and install an upgraded finger jointing and laminating plant.
- Britain Timbers \$689,000 to upgrade the existing kiln drying facility and install timber moulding capability to produce sawn timber and byproducts from lower-grade logs.
- Barbers Sawmill \$250,000 to upgrade the existing kiln drying facility and install timber moulding capability.

This initiative has been strongly supported by industry and we look forward to announcing the next round of successful applications following assessment by the department.

**Dr BROAD** - Minister, how many mines are in arrears in terms of their royalties or payments to the government?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Mr Broad. I will just bring Mr Morton to the table and pass to him when he's ready.

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**Mr MORTON** - Thanks, minister. Dr Broad, can you just repeat the question, please?

**Dr BROAD** - So how many mines are in arrears in terms of their royalties or payments to the government?

**Mr MORTON** - What I might do for starters is just go back a little bit so, make the point that we've got 500 mining leases in the state, most of these pay royalties, the exception being category 3 construction minerals on private land. We've got the two-tiered system, so we've got the large mines paying the *ad valorem* or profit-based system and the remainder basically paying the fixed rate. Effectively, in terms of the large mines there, in terms of royalty, they're all up to date. I will make the note that Hellyer made some very recent payments within the last 24 hours.

**Dr BROAD** - That's good news.

**Mr MORTON** - In terms of other companies, so the smaller quarries, they're paying much smaller amounts of royalties on the fixed rate. As I mentioned, there are always a small number of companies that have a small amount outstanding, but it's pretty insubstantial in the scheme of things.

**Dr BROAD** - Thank you for that. Minister, your - I suppose you could call them 'coalition partners' in the Greens and the Independents have canvassed the idea of increasing mineral royalties.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - And Saul Eslake.

**Dr BROAD** - Are you or your government considering this?

**Mr ELLIS** - One thing I will say is that we're certainly seeing mining paying its way. In the last financial year, we've seen a significant uptick to the second-highest level ever; \$71 million, and that's really encouraging. Of course we always want to make sure that our royalty scheme is contemporary and fit for purpose. We perform well compared to other states. Royalty payment made from metallic minerals represents a return to the state of around 4.22 per cent as a proportion of net sales. This percentage compares favourably with other states, noting that varying royalty regimes make direct comparisons between jurisdictions challenging.

**Dr BROAD** - You didn't answer the question. Are you considering raising the royalties rate?

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned before, we've been very pleased with the royalties that have been coming through to the state, the second highest on record. It's important that we have a strong mining industry and we'll continue to work to make sure that our royalty scheme is fit for purpose and compares favourably with the other states.

**Dr BROAD** - Is that a yes?

**Mr ELLIS** - As I mentioned, Dr Broad, we're satisfied with where our royalties are at, at the moment, and we will always make sure that they're performing well.

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**Dr BROAD** - Do you rule it out?

**Mr ELLIS** - Dr Broad, you just asked the same question.

**Dr BROAD** - Well, you're not answering it.

**Mr ELLIS** - Before we move on, Chair, I think Ms Pinto has some answers to questions on those.

**Ms PINTO** - Yes, certainly. The honourable member has left, but the question with regards to the term of the contract for the green hydrogen price reduction scheme with Countrywide Hydrogen has a term through to 2030.

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, Chair. Minister, Ta Ann is a timber production company that is known to have engaged in environmental and human rights abuses in Malaysia, and they've profited from the destruction of precious forests in Takayna/Tarkine here in Tasmania. Recently images were made public of thousands of cubic metres of veneer from our native forests that have been rotting in the yards of Ta Ann's Smithton Mill.

It's an absolute disgrace that the government has allowed these beautiful, high-conservation-value forests to be clear-felled and then left to rot. Do you condemn this as a disgraceful waste, and will you condemn the practices of Ta Ann which do include deforestation and the degradation of indigenous lands in Sarawak?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Dr Broad - Dr Woodruff - too many doctors in the house at the moment, including some of our team over there. On Ta Ann, I understand that advice has been provided to the company with regards to some of the existing stockpiled inventory that occurred during COVID, and the capacity for the mill to reprocess that to provide future value-adding and resource. That is one of the amazing things about timber, of course, is that it can be reused in a range of different ways. It is ultimately a matter for the company, but certainly I'm advised that Ta Ann has written to other members of parliament regarding the situation that arose during some of the supply chain challenges during COVID. I will look to the team at State Growth, if there's anything further to add.

**Ms PINTO** - The only other comment I would make is that at the 26th UN Conference of Parties (COP) meeting, the Australian Government signed an agreement to end deforestation by 2030. In Tasmania, there is no deforestation within the public forest estate. Over 85 per cent of Tasmania's old growth forests are protected in our reserve system, and the clearance and conversion of native forested land must comply with the Tasmanian government's policy for the maintenance of permanent native forest estate.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, Ms Pinto. We've all seen the infamous photographs of single-rider, enormous logs that are ancient forest, and they are definitely being chopped down. As to whether they're being chopped down illegally, we've never heard of the government taking any enforcement or penalties against people who are chopping down such enormous trees.

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In regards to Ta Ann and the allegation that it was because of supply chains issues that led to the problem, we've got photographs that show that that pile of veneer was sitting there well before COVID.

It beggars belief that the company would be receiving veneer to continue to process, and have this massive area in Smithton that they're not moving on. Why are they getting stuff in before they've moved this stuff out? This is precious native forest veneer, just an enormous quantity of veneer that hasn't been moved on. Why have you allowed the mill to keep receiving publicly-subsidised native forests to make more veneer out of, when they haven't moved the stuff that's been sitting there for years?

**Mr ELLIS** - I think we've spoken about it already in terms of stock buying, but processors do stockpile timber in their yards for all kinds of reasons, including aged timber and optimised sale timing. I understand in this particular case of Ta Ann, they had experienced some veneer pack spoilage during storage. This product is not being wasted; as I mentioned, it's being blended with new product to manufacture plywood for the building and construction industry so we can build more homes. The latest BBF propaganda is just part of their long-running attack on our renewable and sustainable timber industry.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - When is all that wood going to be moved and made into ply?

**Mr ELLIS** - That is a matter for the company.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Don't you care? They're our native forests, and they got there because we paid for them to go there, because we subsidised Forestry Tasmania. Have you not asked any more questions about when they're going to do it?

**Mr ELLIS** - It's a private company stockpiling timber products that will reprocess them, and that's a matter for them.

**CHAIR** - Mr Vermey.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, Tasmania has just taken part in the Indo-Pacific International Maritime Exposition. Can you update the committee on how Tasmania's advanced manufacturing defence industries performed in Indo-Pac, and what this means for jobs, investments and our sovereign capability?

**Mr ELLIS** - Tasmania had a standout showing at this year's Indo-Pacific International Maritime Exposition, which again confirmed that our state is now recognised nationally and internationally as a hub of advanced maritime and defence capability. We had 12 Tasmanian organisations exhibiting on the Defence Tasmania stand and it was genuinely one of the busiest at the entire expo with senior naval officers and major buyers actively seeking out Tasmanian innovation. Our companies are producing world-leading systems that don't just meet defence requirements; they often exceed them.

Sentinel Boats showcased its HDPE Tactical RIB already in use by the ADF, Ukraine Special Forces and Queensland Police. Pivot Maritime demonstrated its world first trailer-mounted fast craft simulator developed in northern Tasmania. I have to admit I crashed a boat on that one, but that's the beauty of simulators. CBG systems displayed its structural fire protection systems now fitted to both Royal Australian Navy and US Navy platforms.

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The major outcome from the Indo-Pac was the announcement that UK-based Subsea Craft will establish a new maritime R&D facility at AMC's Beauty Point campus, strengthening our Defence and Maritime Innovation Precinct and giving Tasmanian students direct access to cutting-edge technology. This follows a period of enormous growth. More than 60 Tasmanian organisations are now operating in defence markets, triple what we had seven years ago, and more than \$550 million in defence contracts have been awarded to Tasmanian businesses in the past six years. Indo-Pacific has reinforced that Tasmanian advanced manufacturers are now central contributors to Australia's sovereign capability and will continue backing them through Defence Tasmania and targeted industry support.

**Dr BROAD** - Minister, during the 2024 election you announced a policy of allowing access to 39,000 hectares of FPPF land for logging. When was the decision made to change your government's position to appease the Greens?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Broad, your party also supports not progressing with that policy. I think it's probably something that we should acknowledge in this discussion. The future potential production forest land accounts for around 400,000 hectares of Tasmanian forest currently available for a range of uses including recreation and tourism, as well as special species timber harvesting under certain approved conditions.

The *Forestry (Rebuilding the Forest Industry) Act 2014* provides for exchange and conversion mechanisms for the future potential production forests, but under these mechanisms the decision to convert or exchange ultimately sits with the Parliament of Tasmania. Decision to not proceed regards opening up the FPPF, it was on the basis of listening to the community and the industry and we're no longer progressing earlier plans to convert or exchange FPPF land at this time. Instead, as I mentioned at the time, we'll focus on maximising value from our existing available resources on private land and supporting the future of the industry through innovative online processing.

**Dr BROAD** - Who made this decision? Was it you or was it the Premier?

**Mr ELLIS** - The Premier and I spoke and made the decision and put out a media release that day notifying the public.

**Dr BROAD** - Were you pleased with that position, given your previous comments from other elections?

**Mr ELLIS** - I don't know if you were pleased with that position, Dr Broad, given it matches your position.

**Dr BROAD** - I'm not the one who's out there promoting it one election before.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - It is your party's policy.

**CHAIR** - Have you another question, Dr Broad?

**Dr BROAD** - That was the question.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, the significant increase in forest valuation is a result of your so-called carbon mandate. This is part of the underlying budget, the way that you've

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managed to smoke and mirrors make it look as though for us that Tasmania is making money. It's a carbon mandate that you said to manage forest for carbon sequestration, which the Greens obviously support. We've always said that our forests are worth more standing. We're glad that you have irrefutable evidence of the type that you agree with it. There are a range of questions and concerns about Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) notwithstanding there's clearly a future in managing Tasmania's forest for carbon. Are you going to shift to this model away from the logging and burning of forests, which are terrible for the climate?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. We use carbon as part of a mixed strategy because the opportunities that carbon represent, being an incredible carbon sequestering medium is very exciting and the opportunity to produce more timber and do evaluating and receive carbon payments is very attractive. Certainly, it was in my first stint as Forestry minister, an area that I was very pleased to contribute to. In response to STT's business case to participate in carbon markets, the government updated and modernised STT's ministerial charter in 2024 to account for emerging opportunities in areas such as carbon.

The Australian Government Clean Energy Regulator (CER) administers the Australian Carbon Credit Unit scheme (ACCU scheme). To date, STT has five plantation forest projects registered with CER and two in development and has accumulated 36,165 ACCUs. Based on the current ACCU spot price value, this equates to over \$1.3 million. Now, the private sector in Tasmania has over 100 projects registered with the CER and often that is in a blended timber production and carbon or ACCU production process. Certainly, \$1.3 million is good. It's a small margin compared to the value of the timber products that we produce.

I suppose it makes the overall point that we manage our forest for mixed-use and that delivers the best outcome as part of the reason why we've been able to generate a profit again this year with STT.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you, minister. It's an interesting situation where on the one hand, from what you just said, you recognise the value of sequestering carbon and at the other you're actually destroying the carbon and the potential for sequestering from ancient forests which cannot be regrown in our lifetimes, unlike plantation timber.

What are your projections for Tasmania's native wood and native forests? Are you planning on moving more in this direction? Could you talk about any conversations, negotiations you've been having at the federal level about ACCUs?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. I'll make a couple of points. First, these are plantation schemes, so that's important to note. Second, harvesting doesn't destroy carbon. If you look all around this room, there is carbon that's sequestered in the timber products all around us. It's not destroyed.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Seventy per cent of it doesn't leave the floor; it gets burnt. So, it doesn't. About 1 per cent turns up into timber like this, of everything that gets taken out by Forestry Tasmania.

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. Of course, there's a whole range of different areas where carbon is stored through products and even some of the lowest value products.

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We were speaking with Ms Badger, your colleague, before about the exciting opportunities to displace some coal usage at the Railton Cement Australia facility by using forest residues and that's really encouraging because again -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - We're back to the federal schemes. Have you had any negotiations? Are you in discussions? Do you have any plans in terms of carbon credits for forests?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Woodruff. There's currently no Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) method that recognises carbon stored in managed native forestry. In 2024 CRE ran a proponent-led expression of interest process for new methods, including improvements to existing methods to broaden the applicability of the ACCU scheme. Two key proposals relating to native forestry were considered, the Improved Native Forest Management (INFM) method and the Enhancing Native Forest Resilience (ENFR) method. The INFM submitted by the New South Wales Government, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water was prioritised for development, noting the ENFR method required for the development.

The INFM offers conservation and carbon revenue opportunities but PDPZ is not suitable at ceasing or deferring. Harvesting actually conflicts with STT's wood supply responsibilities and the overall benefit that that would provide to our communities. The ENFR provides a more balanced approach, integrating carbon goals with ongoing timber supply, making it more suitable for Tasmania's industry and policy objectives.

A core requirement of any ACCU method is additionality and that is admissions reduction or carbon sequestration from a project above and beyond what would occur under business as usual conditions, meaning they're not legally required, not already common practice and only happen because of the ACCU incentive. The principle of additionality does need to be carefully considered in this context of these methods as they're being developed. Participation in the ACCU scheme is voluntary. Businesses can develop their own abatement projects and decide which methods to use.

**Mr VERMEY** - Minister, forestry is an important part of Tasmania's history and continues to support jobs and regional communities right across the state. Are you able to update the committee on the contribution of the forestry sector to the Tasmanian economy and the Tasmanian way of life.

**Mr ELLIS** - Mr Vermev, the Tasmanian government strongly supports the sustainable and thriving local forestry industry. In 2024-25, total wood production in Tasmania was approximately 4.1 million tonnes across all forest product types. This included 2.8 million tonnes from our valued private forest and 1.28 million tonnes from our valued public forests. This means that private forest made up more than 68 per cent by volume of total state wood production in 2024-25, including 1.6 million tonnes of hardwood logs and 972,000 tonnes of softwood logs from private plantations. There are over 5700 direct and indirect jobs in Tasmania because of our forest industry, with employment coming from every corner of the state, including the beautiful electorate of Clark. Both government and industry are focused on achieving the highest possible value from every tree in Tasmania's production forest.

Our forestry sector is already worth around \$1.2 billion annually to our economy including \$712 million directly at point of sale and this value is produced while ensuring that 59 per cent of our native forests, 99 per cent of our high-quality wilderness areas and 88 per cent of old growth forests are protected in the reserve network.

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Our forestry sector also provides other benefits through the maintenance of roadways and bridges that are used by locals and visitors alike, helping to control pests and disease in our forests and reducing the risk of bushfires.

Through active management of our forest sector, this helps to increase carbon storage. On productive land, every tree is replanted or regenerated and will sequester carbon as it grows. The carbon remains in the wood for the life of its use, proving that forestry is the ultimate renewable. Forestry is a key component of the economic and environmental success of Tasmania and the government continues to work with the sector to ensure it evolves and thrives.

**Dr BROAD** - On 16 July 2025, in a press release you stated that:

Traditional industries in Tasmania are under threat from radical left wing independents. Minister for Skills and Training, Felix Ellis, said these independents cannot be allowed to get in the way of Tasmania's traditional industries.

'Radical left-wing independents will destroy our economy, destroy jobs and take our state backwards,' Minister Ellis said.

'They want to end our traditional industries like building, agriculture, aquaculture, forestry and manufacturing.'

Do you stand by these comments?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Broad, I understand that you're disappointed that you lost the last election and had the worst performance in Labor's history.

As for us, as a government we're continuing to get on with the job. We're focused on delivering for our communities. Certainly I expect a strong and bright future under our government. We've been really clear and it will be through growth in the sector, through increased value-adding and unlocking private resource.

I think it's a bit of a sad state of affairs in the Labor Party at the moment. We're looking to work with everyone in parliament so that we can achieve the best outcomes for Tasmania.

**Dr BROAD** - Despite those comments. So, on June 25 you issued a media statement saying:

Make no mistake: accepting confidence and supply from the Greens is a deal.  
A very big deal.

Did you know when you issued that statement that your Premier was doing a deal - a very big deal - with the Greens?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Dr Broad, we actually were able to get the numbers to form government from the Independents on the crossbench, as is noted, and certainly your former leader's abysmal approach in the no-confidence motion that was held after the election showed just how isolated and damaged the Labor Party is after losing its worst election in its entire history.

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**Dr BROAD** - So are these Independents who helped the Liberals form government the same radical left wing independents that you warned will destroy our economy, destroy our jobs and take our state backwards?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks Dr Broad, as I mentioned, I think it's certainly our government's intention to make sure that we're working in the best interests of Tasmanians. Protecting our industries, making sure they have a bright future. We will get the balance right. The Premier's spoken about the fact that no one person in the parliament will get 100 per cent of what they want. We're working through that process. I understand that your party is sadly in disarray after the worst election result in its history.

I know that you supported Mr Winter, and that Mr Willie only got four votes. A leader who doesn't have the confidence of his own party room is not a particularly sustainable situation for you in the future.

As for us, we will get on with the job. We're committed to growing Tasmania's economy and seeing great outcomes for the Tasmanian community.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Minister, on 8 November last year and 1 May this year, the Bob Brown Foundation sent letters to Forestry Tasmania, the Forest Practices Authority, NRE and the Premier to provide them with scientific records of threatened species observations inside the CZ022A logging coupe boundary including the Tasmanian masked owl, the swift parrot and the blue-winged parrot.

On 29 November last year, the Acting Chief Forest Practices Officer, Willem Mulder, acknowledged receiving those scientific records and stated that Forestry Tasmania is required to follow up on this new scientific information.

What modifications to the Forest Practices Plan have been implemented based on that new scientific information?

**Mr ELLIS** - Thanks, Dr Woodruff, I might look to Ms Chuter to provide a further update on that

**Ms CHUTER** - Thank you. As far as I'm aware, the new information is being taken into account. I don't actually have to hand exactly what's happened with that Forest Practices Plan, so we might have to take it on notice to get back to you on exactly where that Forest Practices Plan is up to with respect to taking account of the new swift parrot records.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could I take that on notice, minister.

**Mr ELLIS** - That's fine.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Also, on 8 November last year and 1 May this year, the Bob Brown Foundation sent letters to Forestry Tasmania and FPA requesting the Forest Practices Plan for that CZ022A coupe, but they didn't receive it. This is the one that you're just talking about now. On 2 June this year, Forestry Tasmania employee, Grant Joseph, refused to provide the Forest Practices Plan to the Bob Brown Foundation, and on 2 June this year the Bob Brown Foundation requested the Forest Practices Plan on that coupe. The

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Forest Practices Plan was not available on the Forestry Tasmania website, and the Forest Practices Plan was not published on the Forestry Tasmania website until 25 August.

This is an ongoing problem that people have with getting access to forest practice plans. Why was that Forest Practices Plan not available for nearly nine months?

**Ms CHUTER** - Forest practices plans are owned by the applicant, in this case, Sustainable Timber Tasmania. So, Sustainable Timber Tasmania being the applicant, are the ones who are responsible for answering as to whether to provide the Forest Practices Plan.

**Mr ELLIS** - We can do that next week with STT GBE scrutiny.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - So there is no capacity for the Forest Practices Authority to compel the applicant to provide it in a timely fashion?

**Ms CHUTER** - Being the applicant, they are the owner, if you like, of the Forest Practices Plan, so we direct the inquiries for that Forest Practices Plan back to the applicant.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - What about when people directly ask the Forest Practices Authority? There was an RTI request by Senator Nick McKim to the FPA on 16 June this year about forest practice plans for coupe FPL1073. He got no response and sent a follow-up on 17 September the same year, that was 93 days later, and as of 20 November he still hasn't had a response from the Forest Practices Authority, which would be another 60 days.

Can you explain through your minister why the FPA is not providing information like this, and can you table the Forest Practices Plan for FPL1073 please?

**Ms CHUTER** - Unfortunately, I'm not aware of the RTI request that you're referring to, so I will have to get that information for you. I don't have the information to hand.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Could you go straight to the chase and provide the Forest Practices Plan which Senator McKim was requesting in the first place for FPL1073? Could I take that on notice?

**Mr ELLIS** - I think this question's already taken on notice, would that be fair to say?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Not on this one, no.

**Ms CHUTER** - I think there are two forest practices plans you're talking about.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - The one for Senator McKim -

**Ms CHUTER** - Which is an RTI, if I'm understanding -

**Dr WOODRUFF** - That's right, which hasn't been responded to for an incredibly long time at all.

**Ms CHUTER** - If that RTI is with us, as you say, we can go through the RTI process as required under the RTI legislation.

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**Dr WOODRUFF** - Or you could just provide the plan. Why wouldn't you just provide the plan, through you, minister? Why not just provide the plan? Isn't it meant to be a public document?

**Ms CHUTER** - Sorry, the document again is the applicant is the owner of the forest practices plan, so we defer to the applicant to release that forest practices plan. We can assess the RTI; I'm not aware of the RTI that you're referring to.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - In the RTI processes, is there usually a holdup at Forestry Tasmania? You said your RTI officers send a request in and get nothing; this is really outside the bounds of the time limit for RTIs. What's going on here? It seems like a problem with FPA's processes in responding to people in a timely fashion, I would suggest.

**CHAIR** - Dr Woodruff, can we take this on notice?

**Dr WOODRUFF** - I think that Ms Chuter has said that she will take on notice that she will respond to the RTI; is that right?

**Ms CHUTER** - I'm not aware of the RTI, but we can take on notice - in fact, I should make a note of the RTI you're referring to.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - FPL1073.

**Mr ELLIS** - We can certainly commit to following up, if you like.

**Dr WOODRUFF** - Thank you. The other one was CZO22A.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. We have five more minutes to go. Mr Vermey, do you have questions or do you want to forgo your question?

**Mr VERMEY** - No, it's okay. Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Dr Broad?

**Dr BROAD** - Thanks for that. Minister, what role -

**Mr ELLIS** - He's a gentleman and a scholar.

**Dr BROAD** - What roles have not been filled as part of your government's hiring freeze?

**Mr ELLIS** - I will pass to the Secretary of State Growth.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The department manages workbook bases on a department-wide basis. We've put in processes to meet the government's commitments. Those processes start with individual deputy secretaries making a decision against a variety of principles that we do. As part of that, Dr Broad, we look at whether there are opportunities to move our people around to the highest and best use. Following that, the matters are considered by our workforce committee. Then the workforce committee looks at it on a department basis, and that is me and also the Deputy Secretary of Business Services. We look at whether that is an opportunity to move people around or create new opportunities within our department.

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In relation to the specific matters, I've already taken on notice provision of how our workforce committee has considered this year. I will have to take on notice that specific question, and provide that information, similar to what I'm doing in a different committee. To clarify, it will be done on a department basis, not an output basis because we don't manage it on an output basis.

**CHAIR** - Are you happy to take that on notice, Mr Ellis?

**Mr ELLIS** - Yes.

**Dr BROAD** - What is the value of the efficiency dividend for your department over the Budget and forward Estimates? What's your share of that efficiency dividend?

**Mr LIMKIN** - The efficiency dividend to be achieved by the Department of State Growth is \$2.55 million in 2024-25; \$5.19 million in 2025-26; increasing to a structural reduction of \$7.78 million in the 2026-27 Budget. Additionally, savings requirements in the 2025-26 Budget are \$310,000 in 2025-26, increasing to \$619,000 per annum apparently from 2026-27. The additional savings measures relate to agency marketing and communication and expenditure improvement, office and leasing improvements and procurement processes.

**Dr BROAD** - What is the anticipated impact on service delivery of those combined measures of both the hiring freeze and the efficiency dividend?

**Mr LIMKIN** - The department has undertaken a number of strategies that will be used to meet the budget efficiency dividend. Generally they fit in the following categories: combining functions and service-delivery areas to implement a leaner and more efficient operating model, for example: in June 2024, I undertook a functional realignment of the department to look at how we functionally align the department to deliver services to the communities, so putting like-functions together to get better outcomes and better policy intent. This will by its very nature create a more operating and lean environment;

Reviewing how we administer programs, for example grants and our capital programs, to ensure that they deliver for the Tasmanian community and considering process improvements and systemisation processes to ensure they're efficient. For example, if we implement a digital system, it takes out forms, it takes our experience for you know, our customers and our Tasmanian community.

One of the examples I like to use is: currently everyone of our road licences and registration is done by postage, so if there's a way that we can make it easier, and a choice for people, because I also want to acknowledge some people in our community are not digitally literate and they will still want that option, what we want to do is move to those choices and look at how we reduce that over time. We are looking at reducing operational expenditures on supplies and consumables, including travel, postage, and that I've just talked about; managing our own workforce to ensure that resources are targeted to the areas of highest priority, including the suite of tools that are currently available under the State Service Employment Framework.

**Dr BROAD** - Thank you.

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**CHAIR** - That's your three? I'm waiting for the time to end. We're up to time on almost. The time for scrutiny has ended. I thank the minister, thank guests and thank you very much for the committee, to Henry and to staff for all they've done.

**The Committee adjourned at 6.12 p.m.**