



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. Jane Howlett MP

Wednesday 19 November 2025

MEMBERS

Mr Rob Fairs (Chair)

Mr Dean Winter (Deputy Chair)

Mr Vica Bayley

Prof George Razay

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Butler

Mr Di Falco

Ms Dow

Ms Johnson

Mr Mitchell

Mr Shelton

Dr Woodruff

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. JANE HOWLETT MP

Minister for Tourism, Hospitality and Events; Minister for Women and Prevention of Family Violence; Minister for Racing

Minister for Racing portfolio

Minister's office

Vince Taskunas

Chief of Staff

Luke Gaetani

Senior Adviser

Deirdre Wilson

Acting Chief Operations Officer, NRE (Tas)

Anita Yan

Deputy Chief Operations Officer

Sofia Pashev

Senior Finance Analyst (Budget Services)

Sean Carrol

Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner

Women and the Prevention of Family Violence

Minister's office

Vince Taskunas

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Kate Gotowski

Adviser

Courtney Hurworth

Chief Reform Lead, Keeping Children Safe Reform Group, DPAC

Sam Gunner,

Executive Director, Keeping Children Safe Reform Group, DPAC

Sam Gunner

Executive Director, Keeping Children Safe Reform Group, DPAC

Tegan Dwyer

Assistant Director, Family and Sexual Safety Secretariat, DPAC

Pip Hankin

Assistant Director, Policy and Engagement, DPAC

Tourism, Hospitality and Events Portfolio

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Vince Taskunas

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Camilla Tomas

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James Temple

Senior Adviser

Events (Output 5.4)

Craig Limkin

Secretary, Department of State Growth

Brett Stewart

Deputy Secretary, Creative Industries, Sport and Visitor Economy, Department of State Growth

Kate Mackie

Acting Director Events Tasmania

Andrew Johnson

Director of the Secretary, Department of State Growth

Angela Conway

Deputy Secretary, Business Services, Department of State Growth

Visitor Economy Support (Output 5.5)

Craig Limkin

Secretary, Department of State Growth

Sarah Clark

Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Tasmania

Brett Stewart

Deputy Secretary, Creative Industries, Sport and Visitor Economy, Department of State Growth

Katrina Birchmeier

Acting Manager, Tourism and Hospitality, Department of State Growth

Andrew Johnson

Director Office of the Secretary, Department of State Growth

Angela Conway

Deputy Secretary, Business Services, Department of State Growth

Edwina Morris

Director Industry, Government and Communications, Tourism Tasmania

Mark Jones

Chief Operating Officer, Tourism Tasmania

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The committee met at 4.07 p.m.

DIVISION 9

Department

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

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Chair. To my right, I have Jason Jacobi, Secretary of NRE Tas; Deidre Wilson, Acting Chief Operations Officer of NRE, and Anita Yan, Deputy Chief Operations Officer of NRE. To my left, I have Sean Carroll, Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. The time schedule for the Estimates of the Minister for Racing is two hours. Would the minister like to make an opening statement?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes, thank you, Chair.

The Tasmanian government is a proud supporter of Tasmania's racing community and the passionate Tasmanians who are part of it. We have delivered on our strong plan for the biggest reforms to the racing industry in decades, following the passage of the *Racing Regulation and Integrity Bill (2024)* and the *Racing Regulation and Integrity (Consequential Amendments) Bill (2024)* late last year.

Chair, the changes in legislation are reflected in the make-up of the table at today's hearing. We have continued to strengthen racing through the state's first Racing Integrity Commissioner, Mr Sean Carroll, and the Racing Integrity Committee chaired by international legal practitioner, Ms Regina Weiss, now in place.

It should be noted that some questions that have previously been asked at budget Estimates are now more appropriate at GBE scrutiny next week. This reflects the closure of the Office of Racing Integrity with Tasracing, through the Tasracing Integrity Unit now responsible for many of these functions.

Chair, as you would be aware, the government introduced the *Greyhound Racing Legislation Amendments (Phasing Out Reform) Bill (2025)* on 6 November 2025. The draft bill will see the phasing out of greyhound racing in Tasmania through a staged and considered approach, with the code to cease. The interim budget includes an initial provision of \$500,000 to support implementation of this important legislation. The independent Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner, Mr Sean Carroll, is developing a comprehensive plan for the transition, and this will resource his work.

Under the *Racing Regulation and Integrity Act (2024)*, the commissioner has extensive powers to set integrity and animal welfare standards and comprehensive investigation functions across all three codes of racing in Tasmania: harness, thoroughbred, and greyhound. The commissioner has hit the ground running with the immediate establishment of a complaints management framework, and commencement and assessment of the code of practice for racehorse welfare, at my request.

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Animal welfare remains paramount, and I'm pleased to say that we have finalised the appointment of the Integrity and Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to support the Commissioner. That includes the RSPCA and veterinarian representatives.

Work has started on a new racing industry funding deed to ensure the financial sustainability of the Tasmanian racing industry. This is especially important to provide certainty to the industry following the government's announcement of a phase-out of greyhound racing. Importantly, this is not a review into whether it will be funding; it is a review of what the funding model looks like beyond 2029 for the thoroughbred and harness racing codes. I'm working closely with the Treasurer, a shareholder minister in Tasracing, to see a new deed finalised, and that work is under way. The government continues to honour the racing industry's 20-year funding deed, which expires on the 30 June 2029. That is reflected in the interim budget across the forward Estimates.

The government shares a strong interest in the racing industry's need for certainty, and we are getting on with the job.

Before I take any questions, I'd like to acknowledge the passing of Phillip Young last week. Phillip was well-known as 'Bruiser' and he was a long-serving committee member and life member of the Tasmanian Trotting Club. I give my sincere condolences to his friends and family.

Thank you, Chair.

Mr WINTER - Minister, can you confirm that two prominent participants in harness racing were arrested yesterday, Nathan and Mitch Ford?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Chair. I thank you for that question. I am not aware of that and I will pass, if the commissioner has any further information on that.

Mr CARROLL - Through you, minister. There were a number of people who were assisting police with their inquiries at this stage. To my knowledge, there are suppression orders made on the people that have been arrested at this stage and I am unable to -

Mr WINTER - If that's the case, then I will move straight on, commissioner.

Minister, I will move straight on from that given that answer. I would like to take you to the animal welfare issues, the Equine Code of Practice that was announced by former minister Ogilvie some years ago and then announced and then released by you on 30 October last year. During the harness racing inquiry, the harness racing inquiry heard evidence from the former director of racing that, despite that code of practice being put in place by Tasracing, he wasn't actually able to do anything about the Yole stable that was the actual reason that it existed.

Then, in March this year, you asked the commissioner to review that code of practice, which you had six months earlier described as being best practice. Can you explain to us why we still do not have a workable code of practice that's able to uphold animal welfare standards at places like Weona Park and at the Yole Yards at Sidmouth?

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, I thank the member for his question. Tasracing published the first Code of Practice for Racehorse Welfare in October in 2024. On 14 March 2025, the

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Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner announced that he would be assessing the code in its application with the assistance of Tasracing to ensure that it meets contemporary community expectations as they relate to racehorse accommodation and protection from weather extremes. I know that the commissioner invited submissions via his website. Commissioner, would you like to speak to that?

Mr CARROLL - Thank you and through you, minister, I am certainly well aware of the allegations made during the government administration's short inquiry into the Tasmanian government's response to the serious allegations within harness racing. I will be appearing before this inquiry in December this year and I look forward to that.

As the minister said, I was requested in March to conduct an assessment of the Tasracing's Code of Practice for Racehorse Welfare to ensure that its requirements for animal accommodation and the protection from weather extremes continue to meet the community standards. I understand that when the code was released in Tasmania, and at the time, Tasmania was and still is one of the only the few states to possess such a code of practice.

What I should say is, and I have been on record to say this, the code is not intended to be a certificate policy. Like any policy, its application and utility should be monitored and addressed to meet the current industry and community standards and clearly, they had shifted. In undertaking this assessment, I called for submissions and conducted interviews of racing participants and others, including animal welfare groups.

It's always important to listen to contemporary community expectations about animal welfare. This includes the expectations about accommodation and protection from weather extremes. I engaged Dr Kate Savage, an equine internal medicine specialist and past president of the World Equine Veterinary Association, to provide independent advice on animal welfare matters and equine medicine, and to provide advice on the assessment of the Tasracing Code of Practice for Racehorse Welfare. My assessment identified a number of areas in the code of practice where improvements have been identified to provide detail and clarity to the industry and to participants to ensure the code of practice can be enforced by Tasracing across its participants by way of mandatory standards.

My assessment was provided to Tasracing on 11 July. The assessment made seven key recommendations, as well as recommendations detailed in my 2025-26 annual report. In summary, these recommendations provide the following: that Tasracing review the code of practice in light of my assessment and address each of the improvement and recommendations made; the code of practice to specify penalties for breaches of safeguarding animal welfare; Tasracing to establish and roll out a compulsory training and education program to participants on all matters in the code of practice.

Tasracing is to consider extending powers to the Chief Racing Integrity Officer under the local rules of racing to ensure all stables are approved by the Chief Racing Integrity Officer as part of licencing.

The Chief Racing Integrity Officer is to have the power to revoke or vary any approval should conditions change; to issue notices for rectification of premises; and to impose a range of penalties to safeguard animal welfare.

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Tasracing review relevant and update rules of racing to explicitly address the code of practice. Any code of practice relating to greyhounds in the future should consider all matters raised in this assessment and be addressed in the greyhound code of practice, which will be developed, and to have regard to the Tasmanian racing integrity commission standard once it's produced to support the code of practice.

Tasracing is currently updating the code of practice for racehorse welfare in line with my assessment recommendations. I believe it's being produced before the board, and the recommendations have been approved and they're working towards a release on 1 January 2026.

Mr WINTER - Through you, minister. Commissioner, do you agree with Mr Thompson's evidence that he gave, I think it was on 17 February this year, he said, 'We've never found anything that is noncompliant with the code of practice, other than perhaps the level of fibre.' Do you agree with his assessment? To follow on, in that same question. Has any action been taken against any owner, trainer or participant in relation to breaches of a code of practice?

Mr CARROLL - It would be unfair for me to comment on Mr Thompson's comment, given that I don't know the background to that comment and the lead-up to those questions that were made and the substance that stands behind that.

Any person charged under the breach of the code of practice would be a question for Tasracing because they're responsible for laying charges or breaches under the code of practice.

Mr WINTER - Were you aware of any?

Mr CARROLL - There's been one infringement of the code of practice against the Yole property that was proceeded with after the inspection that I was present for. That matter proceeded before [inaudible], quite rightly, as I said the other day, given the fact that the current code of practice was being assessed by my office and having a total review. Quite rightly, mediation was sought by both parties to address the issues as far as the Sidmouth property was concerned and from those significant rectification work has been undertaken.

Mr WINTER - The horses still live without grass, without shelter on the site more than four years after the allegations.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, a question that we've asked all ministers. In the last 18 months, have you as an individual been subject of, or party to, any Supreme Court matters? And/or have you as an individual incurred any legal costs that have been covered by taxpayer dollars?

Ms HOWLETT - I thank the member for her question. I don't believe that that's relevant to the output in this budget, our portfolio.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you minister. The Premier and every single other minister has been asked these questions. Every single other minister has answered these questions and not made an excuse not to answer them. Could you please answer the question?

Ms HOWLETT - As I said, I don't believe the question is relevant to the budget output.

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Dr WOODRUFF - It really begs the question as to why you would be the only minister who wouldn't answer that question.

Ms HOWLETT - I don't believe it's relevant to the output.

Dr WOODRUFF - It's relevant to your role as a minister -

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff - asked and answered.

Dr WOODRUFF - I will ask another question that perhaps you'll answer in relation to the racing deed media release that you mentioned just then in your opening statement about the assessment for funding beyond 2029 being considered. Why should taxpayers be on the hook for decades more of funding to Tasracing to enable animal cruelty?

Ms HOWLETT - In 2009 the sale of the TOTE created - the funding deed was then created for 20 years. The funding deed runs out in June 2029. Treasury, Tasracing and the Department of NRE have been working on a new deed for the certainty of the industry. Both myself and the Premier have been very clear that we are very supportive of the broader racing community. And as I said, work has started on the new funding date.

Dr WOODRUFF - Do you recognise -

CHAIR - Sorry, Dr Woodruff, you've had three questions.

Ms JOHNSTON - Through you, minister, to the commissioner. Yesterday at the north west greyhound race meet there was a steward's inquiry. Mr Gerard Alford was found guilty of comments or a breach of rule 165-A, conduct detrimental to the interests of greyhound racing due to comments that he made on a Facebook group called Save Greyhound Racing Tasmania. Mr Alford earlier this year in March was found guilty of a similar offence where he had said, 'If my greyhounds continue not to get a start, I might as well shoot them.'

Commissioner, the government has announced that it intends to ban greyhound racing as of 1 July 2029 and has tabled legislation in the House to facilitate a transition to this. How important is it for the welfare of animals and protection of animals that this legislation is passed in time for 1 January 2026 commencement?

CHAIR - Sorry, before you answer, a reminder to members to please direct all questions to or through the minister.

Ms JOHNSTON - It was through the minister to the commissioner.

Ms HOWLETT - Before the commissioner adds any comments, I want to say on record that the comments made by Mr Alford are nothing but disgraceful. They are not reflective of the views of the overwhelming participants in the industry. Those comments are absolutely disgraceful.

Mr CARROLL - Through you, minister. What I would say is, it's not my role and certainly not within my legislative remit, to comment on the sanctions that are handed down to participants for breaches of the rules of racing. Any sanction that is handed down by the

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stewards, a person has the opportunity to either accept those or appeal those and appear before the Tasmanian Racing Appeals Board.

To any comments that are made regarding any animal welfare issues to the greyhounds in Tasmania, what I would say is, that when the announcement of the phase-out was made by the Premier, there was a substantial piece of work that was conducted by my office in relation to animal welfare issues, not only here in Australia but around the world. In being requested to develop the plan for the transition, one of the significant issues was the introduction of legislation that would provide strong protection to the greyhounds and the animal welfare of those greyhounds.

I'm confident that the bill that's been tabled by the government, addresses those animal welfare concerns and, whilst there are protections as far as the rules of racing is concerned, I have been on record to say that the rules of racing will diminish over a period of time. It's important that the legislation is introduced as soon as possible to put strong deterrents and provide guidelines and a framework to my working group to actually develop that transitional plan.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, what is the current injury rate for thoroughbreds and greyhounds? Can you provide the past five years of comparative data?

Ms HOWLETT - That is a question for Tasracing at GBE scrutiny next week to have those updated figures for you. I could provide some, but I would have far more accurate figures next week.

Mr CARROLL - Perhaps I can assist minister, through you, the current injury, euthanasia and decease rates have been published in Tasracing's annual report, and they detail the last, I think, five years' injury and fatality rates in that annual report. Perhaps that would be the best place for you to go. I'm sure that a copy of the report could be provided to you should you require one.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, can you please outline how the interim Budget supports the Racing portfolio and is helping support the implementation of the government's landmark racing reforms?

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, I thank the member for his question. The interim Budget supports improved integrity, animal welfare and the overall wellbeing of the industry. The government has delivered on its strong plan for the biggest reforms to the racing industry in decades, following the passage of the Racing Regulation and Integrity Bill 2024 and the Racing Regulation and Integrity (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2024 late last year.

The new legislation, which came into effect on 1 February this year, provides the Tasmanian racing industry with a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose model for regulation and integrity, abolishing the old framework. It also supports a transition plan to phase out greyhound racing in Tasmania by 30 June 2029. I tabled the legislation for the transition last week.

The new model is supported by the 2025-26 interim Budget and delivers on our previous election commitment, and it's working. The Budget also includes \$720,000 across four years to support the new Racing Integrity Committee, which is a critical entity to the new model. It

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also provides an initial provision of \$500,000 to support the greyhound racing phase-out implementation. The independent Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner, Mr Sean Carroll, is developing a comprehensive plan for the transition and this will resource his work.

The government continues to honour the racing industry's 20-year funding deed which expires on 30 June 2029, and this is reflected in the interim Budget across the forward Estimates in table 9.2, page 160 and budget paper 2, volume 1. I'm working closely with the Treasurer as shareholder minister in Tasracing to see a new deed finalised and that work is under way. Chair, we've got a strong interest in the racing industry and its need for certainty and we're getting on with the job. Thank you, Chair.

Mr WINTER - I'm back to the equine code of practice. So, 12 months ago you described the new code of practice as best practice. Since then we've heard there have been no successful sanctions laid against anyone. We still have the Yole yard that has no grass cover and no shade for the horses there. Then when it comes to the Weona Park Stud, we've seen pretty horrific vision from that site that I don't think anyone in racing wants to see. The first question is: do you accept that the equine code of practice has been a complete and utter failure; and secondly, does the code of practice currently apply to Weona Park? If so, will something be done about it from a racing point of view?

Ms HOWLETT - Animal welfare and integrity is paramount to the industry -

Mr WINTER - It doesn't feel that way. We've been waiting for something to happen with this for years.

Ms HOWLETT - Mr Winter, I was aware of the social media images and posts relating to Weona Park Stud and a breeding operation for race and performance horses across multiple properties. These matters were referred to the Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner. That Monday, 22 September 2025, the commissioner coordinated a multi-organisational inspection by Tasracing, the RSPCA and Biosecurity Tasmania of all properties accommodating horses managed by Weona Stud.

The owner and operator of the stud has fully cooperated and assisted with these inspections and is continuing to work with each of the agencies to ensure that the horses are fully supported from an animal welfare perspective. I know that we've removed quite a few horses from that property. I think it's around 40 horses that we've removed so far. Commissioner?

Mr CARROLL - Thank you for the question, Mr Winter. I'm certainly interested in your comments and your expertise in animal welfare.

Mr WINTER - I don't have any, to be honest. I don't know if that's a shot at me, but I don't have any except what I see.

CHAIR - Commissioner, you have the call.

Mr CARROLL - Thank you very much. What I would say is that in regard to the property at Sidmouth, and I don't know the last time that you've had photographs or been out to the property -

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Mr WINTER - I spoke to Janet Ainscow about half an hour ago - an hour ago I should say.

Mr CARROLL - Certainly the property has significant vegetation throughout the property. Stewards went out to the property last week and inspected, and whilst once again, I should clarify that I'm not in control of the stewards or the decisions that they make to prosecute matters under the rules of racing, or under the previous code of practice, or into the future - the renewed code of practice, what I would say is that the comments that were provided to me and the Tasracing Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Jenkins, from the Chief Racing Integrity Officer, Heidi Lester, there's been significant improvements to the property.

Whilst there is no physical shelter at this stage being prepared, there's significant vegetation on the ground and the dust that was previously present has been reduced significantly to a situation that, I've been advised, is an acceptable level and not dissimilar to other properties throughout Tasmania that are accommodating horses. With regards to how the property was previously, the requirement to update that property to meet the current requirements of the code of practice, the owners of the Valley Road, Sidmouth, property are working with Tasracing to make sure they meet the requirements.

The significant issue that was causing the damage to the property was the density levels of horses that were at the property - have been reduced significantly, almost by half. On the advice that I've been given and Tasracing has been given, the potential for future damage to the vegetation that has been grown has been reduced significantly.

As far as Weona Park is concerned, and I thank you for raising that, in August this year I became aware a report that was made to the RSPCA regarding Weona Park Stud. In conducting inquiries about the property and the operations of Weona Park Stud, it was identified that Weona Park Stud is a breeding business for all equine activities, including equestrian performance, showing, companion horses, and breeding horses for potential racing in the future. Weona Park Stud does not own or accommodate any horses that are registered under the rules of racing. Therefore, the property and horses were outside of the jurisdiction of Tasracing. While this is the case, some of the horses have previously been involved in racing, so come under my jurisdiction.

I should say at that stage, the matter was an animal welfare issue and fell within the scope of those who can prosecute under the *Animal Welfare Act*, whether that be the RSPCA or Biosecurity Tasmania. In late September I became aware of several more complaints regarding the welfare of horses and the management of Weona Park Stud, and actually phoned one of the people who had made a Facebook complaint on a Saturday to get further information, given the photographs that have been brought to my attention. The primary act responding, as I said, to the Weona Park Stud, is the *Animal Welfare Act*. At that stage, Biosecurity Tasmania and RSPCA are the responsible agencies. However, as I said, my office has the responsibility for providing oversight of the welfare of animals that are or have been involved in racing, and I take that very seriously.

Accordingly, I coordinated a multi-organisational inspection by Tasracing, RSPCA and Biosecurity Tasmania of all properties accommodating the horses. While there were significant issues of overstocking, which was visibly evident, each of the agencies reported to me they were satisfied that, following veterinary examinations of all the horses at the Weona Park Stud properties, there were no horses that required urgent medical veterinary attention. However,

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given the concerns that you've raised as far as overstocking is concerned, the owner of the stud and the agency identified approximately 100 horses that required rehoming.

I'm proud to say that my office along with Tasracing, whilst they had no jurisdiction over the matter, negotiated with the owner of Weona Park Stud in relocating to temporary accommodation almost 100 horses for a period of time. They are being managed either by adoption or sale through inquiries that are lodged through the RSPCA.

I must reiterate, and I feel very strongly about it, given that the animals are not registered under the rules of racing and therefore fall outside the jurisdiction of Tasracing, I've continued to liaise with Biosecurity Tasmania and the RSPCA - and Biosecurity Tasmania being the primary lead agency - regarding the properties and the health and condition of the animals.

CHAIR - I remind people, too, that I'm not invoking strict time limits. I'm being very lenient on that, but please don't abuse the system. Otherwise, I will have to implement it, which is not easy to manage, and I don't want to get to that stage. If we can keep as close to the guide marks as stated in the committee rules and regs.

Ms BUTLER - On a point of order, just to make sure everyone at the table does realise that it's meant to be around a three-minute response from what the guidelines are.

CHAIR - All this week I've been using that as a guide obviously. I know a lot of the questions have gone well over the minute framework as well so I'm being as lenient as I can. I just want all members from both sides to keep that in mind, please, moving forward so we can get as many questions and answers as possible in this hearing.

Dr WOODRUFF - I asked you at the start about if you had been subject to any Supreme Court matters or had any legal fees covered by the taxpayer in the last 18 months. You refused to answer both those questions and I want to give you one more chance to answer them. All your other colleagues have done that and I note that even minister Ogilvie admitted that she had had legal fees covered.

Minister, one more time: will you do what everyone else has done and let people know whether you've been subject to any Supreme Court matters, and if you've had any taxpayer-funded legal expenses covered?

Ms HOWLETT - As I said, I don't think this is relevant to the output group in budget Estimates. I made my answer perfectly clear before.

Dr WOODRUFF - I'll move on to a question then again about 2029 and the media release you put out about the racing assessment of funding options for the racing industry beyond 2029 for the two remaining codes. You would be well aware of the Greens position that there should be no public money going into supporting the racing industry. That's our position. However, would you at least commit to Tasmanians that there would be, after 2029, less money going to racing, or even better, that the proportion of funding that has previously been allocated to greyhound racing in the last financial year, that was at least \$7 million, would not go to harness and thoroughbred racing after 2029?

Ms HOWLETT - No, I certainly won't be making that commitment.

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Dr WOODRUFF - There could be a continuation of the same amount of funding that's been going to the three codes after 2029 that would go to maintaining two codes?

Ms HOWLETT - That is something Treasury will be working through while they're currently working on the deed.

Dr WOODRUFF - Even in a cost-of-living and budget crisis that we have?

Ms HOWLETT - We're looking at year 2029.

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes, it's going to be worse then.

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff, thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, can you outline to us the drug testing participants regime for across all three codes, please? I'm talking about human participants, not animal participants, in terms of trying to ensure integrity within racing.

Ms HOWLETT - That is something that is handled by Tasracing. I don't know, secretary, if you have any information that you'd like to share as to when ORI was still involved and how many tests were taken place?

Mr JACOBI - No, I don't have that information.

Ms HOWLETT - I will definitely have that information for you at the GBE scrutiny hearing.

Ms JOHNSTON - Is that something that the commissioner can perhaps speak to in terms of integrity within racing? It's critical. We've had a number of concerns raised across all three codes.

Ms HOWLETT - I know that the Tasracing integrity unit certainly does perform drug tests on the participants.

Mr CARROLL - I will get those numbers for you. What I would say regarding drug testing program across the board is that I'm invested in a clean Tasmanian racing industry program. I do not want people in the industry who are affected by drugs to be handling animals or putting themselves or others in danger, nor do I want animals affected by drugs. Drugs in any code of racing go to the heart of the integrity of the industry, and it is critical that Tasracing programs align with the current industry standards, including sports standards.

What I can tell you is that Tasracing is currently reviewing its drug testing program, involving drug testing at race meetings of animals and participants and updates to its policies and procedures with the existence of an external consultant at present, and I am supportive of this approach.

What I will also say is that the Tasracing integrity unit has submitted to my office, and to the Racing Integrity Committee, an integrity plan which outlines - and as the minister said, whilst the numbers are a clear issue that Tasracing should address - their drug testing program as such.

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If I can provide to you here, that the number of tests completed from July to September 2025 in the thoroughbred industry were 124. There were 410 standard-breed tests and 198 greyhound tests.

Ms JOHNSTON - That's of animals or of humans? Just to be clear.

Mr CARROLL - That is of animals.

Ms JOHNSTON - And human participants? You might not have -

Mr CARROLL - I don't have those presently.

Ms JOHNSTON - That's alright. So, to clarify your comment there, that the Tasracing integrity unit is updating its policies in relation to -

Mr CARROLL - Correct.

Ms JOHNSTON - So, that would be an enhancement of that, into more contemporary standards in terms of testing regimes, I'm assuming?

Mr CARROLL - I can't comment on what they will have in their policy. What I can say, with confidence, is that once they have updated their policy, that will go through a rigorous assessment process that will come through my office and the Racing Integrity Committee.

Ms HOWLETT - The information I have in front of me is, for the period 1 February 2025 to 31 August 2025 racing animals and humans participating across the three codes were tested for prohibited substances. During that period, eight tests were determined by the stewards and confirmed by the laboratory. Four of these positive tests related to the thoroughbred code, with one to the harness code and three to the greyhound code. Two of the positive thoroughbred tests were related to participants on medication that were cleared through medical advice.

I have the breakdown of the number of swabs taken by stewards from 2022 to 2025-26. The human one is what you were interested in: 2021-22, there were 39; 2022-23, there were 95; 2023-24, there was 67; 2024-25 there were 35; and 2024-25, 72.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, can you provide updated figures on the economic contribution of racing to regional Tasmania, including employment and tourism, and flow-on effects?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, honourable member. That's a very good question and that's something that Tasracing, in GBE scrutiny, will have a breakdown on. What I can tell you is that we are doing a desktop review of Tasracing and the three codes moving forward. That work starts tomorrow, actually. The duration of that work will take some time because we are doing a very thorough assessment of the codes and of the clubs as well. We will have a detailed report on that, but it will take some time to work out the economic impacts of all three codes.

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Mr CARROLL - One of the initial objectives that I had in the role of commissioner was to ensure that I had an understanding of the overall performance of the Tasmanian racing industry, which ensured that I was well equipped to make informed strategic decisions.

I engaged online support and media to actually provide me an assessment of the health industry to assist me in providing and determining what that future direction would look like. What I can say to probably provide assistance to you is that Tasracing has since engaged a line of sport media to conduct a feasibility study on the impact of the phase out of greyhound racing on Tasmania and the Tasmanian racing industry. That will be a significant piece of work that will undertake several months. I'd expect that we would see the results of that work sometime around mid-next year.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, can you please outline how complaints management processes have been strengthened under the government's reforms and the new best practice structure?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you very much, honourable member. I acknowledge a framework to appropriately handle complaints is a key pillar of our important reforms and the commissioner oversees all persons, processes and systems in the Tasmanian racing industry. Part of the commissioner's role is to handle information and to ensure that complaints are appropriately investigated. People are encouraged to report information and complaints to the commissioner in the first instance. You can make a complaint or provide information about an integrity-related matter involving Tasracing by making a report to the Racing Integrity Hotline and if you wish to remain anonymous your identity will then also be protected. The Racing Integrity Hotline is an independent, confidential and impartial disclosure-management service which allows individuals to report corrupt or improper conduct anonymously without fear of retribution.

It is tended by a team of independent investigators who receive information provided by the members of the public and the racing industry in the strictest of confidence. The commissioner has established a robust complaints management framework which sees all raising complaints and concerns received and overseen by his independent office. I now invite him to speak more to that.

Mr CARROLL - In support of what the minister said, and to provide this committee some detail of the complaints that have actually come in since I commenced in my role and the introduction of the new racing industry complaints framework, as the minister said. Previously there were various avenues that people could have made complaints. What was clear when I first started was that complaints were coming in to different locations and there was not one clear picture of what all the integrity and animal welfare issues were throughout Tasmania. In order to address that, I developed a clear complaint framework that provides for all complaints made, regardless of who they're made to, to come through my office.

They can be done in a number of ways, as the minister said: through telephone, e-mail, online portal, contacting the Racing Integrity Hotline, or contacting individuals like yourself who could then pass that information directly on to my office. Since my establishment, my office has received hundreds of individual complaints which have resulted in 117 registered complaints.

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I'm really pleased with that number. Some people would ask why should we be satisfied with a high level of complaints? Because what it does do, it tells us what we're not doing right and what we actually have to do. My office will now have a focus on addressing those issues, triaging those complaints, channelling those to the appropriate areas that need to address those, and holding those people to account in making sure that we get a timely response so we can provide a timely response to those individuals who make the complaints in the first instance.

Mr WINTER - First, to note that Dr Woodruff has said it is very impressive about the new role that you're playing, and I agree. It's a shame that the Greens and Independent member for Clark didn't vote for the integrity reforms that have been so important that have led to your role.

Minister, I want to ask about the evidence provided by Janet Ainscow to the Harness Racing Committee on the 14 March. She made a lot of allegations that day. Were any of the allegations that she made that day referred through, investigated and if so, what were the outcomes of that investigation?

Ms HOWLETT - I note that Standing Order 141, Proceedings of Committees, provides:

No reference shall be made to any proceedings of a committee of the whole House or any committee until the same have been reported to the House, unless the House, at the time of the appointment of the committee, shall otherwise direct.

Mr WINTER - So, you're not going to answer the question? I can phrase it another way if you prefer?

There's an allegation that's been made by a former steward and it's been reported publicly. She reported that there were stewards who were betting on races. The question I'd like to know, minister, is, was that allegation that stewards were betting on races investigated and what was the outcome?

Ms HOWLETT - I have given my answer. I'm not sure if anyone would like to add to your answer.

Mr CARROLL - Maybe I can assist in answering that question, Mr Winter.

Whilst I can't comment on the reasons, but on the 27 March this year Tasracing requested that my office undertake an audit of wager activity by stipendiary stewards employed by Tasracing. My office conducted an audit from the period of 1 January 2023 through to 30 June 2025 and was subsequently requested by Tasracing to conduct an investigation into the audit findings.

My investigation into wager activity by Tasracing stewards identified that five stewards - one full-time and four casual stewards had placed wagers during their employment at the Office of Racing Integrity and/or Tasracing as stewards. With the exception of one bet, all the wagering activity occurred while each of the stewards was employed at the Office of Racing Integrity.

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I found there was no evidence of criminal conduct, breaches of the law, collusion, race fixing or money laundering. I'm also satisfied that there was sufficient evidence available to make a finding that all five stewards breached the Racing Stewards Code of Conduct.

During the investigation, two stewards subsequently resigned from Tasracing. Tasracing took the appropriate action to dismiss the other three remaining stipendiary stewards. I'm satisfied with the action that was taken by Tasracing as a result of this investigation.

Mr WINTER - Minister, we've just heard that 13 days after Ms Ainscow provided evidence to the committee that Tasracing asked the commissioner to undertake an investigation which eventually found that Ms Ainscow's allegation that she made publicly was correct. Ms Ainscow was stood down from her position as a steward and is no longer working in the industry. Will there be any form of investigation by NRE Tasmania about why her allegations, which were very serious and proven to be correct, were not properly investigated at the time? Will she receive an apology at any point in time in her life?

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, the answer to the member's question proves that our new legislative reform is working.

Mr WINTER - It proves that under your watch and under NRE, Ms Ainscow's allegations were not taken seriously, they were not properly investigated, and she was right over and over again. She was right about the Yole property. She was right about the stewards. She was right about the lack of care in this industry. What's going to happen about it?

CHAIR - Mr Winter, you've asked the question. Please let the minister answer the question.

Ms HOWLETT - As I said, I believe this proves that our new legislative reforms are working. Having the commissioner appoint an Independent Racing Integrity Commissioner was vital and our new reforms are working.

Mr WINTER - Will you investigate why her allegations weren't taken seriously at the time?

Ms HOWLETT - That is a matter for NRE. Would you like to speak to that, secretary?

Mr JACOBI - I can confirm that NRE is supporting the commissioner fully in all of this investigation, providing all the information available to us at the commissioner's request. There's nothing further to add until the commissioner makes her determination.

Mr WINTER - Will Ms Ainscow ever get an apology from you, Mr Jacobi? Will you ever apologise to her?

CHAIR - Mr Winter, please, we are moving on.

Mr WINTER - Never.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, on the transition to winding up greyhound racing, and I note the comments of the Racing Integrity Commissioner earlier, talking about the strong

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deterrents that are needed and the guidelines that are needed for him to do his work starting on 1 January and the importance of the legislation passing this year.

However, in relation to funding, this year's Budget has \$500,000 in it for phasing out greyhound racing, there are 1037 greyhounds in the industry as we understand at the moment, and there will need to be money for rehoming organisations for additional money, for dogs that are coming out of the industry, for a promotion for adopting the dogs, for industry participants for their financial assistance and there's vet costs - at the moment \$154,000, but they will need to be substantially more. Are you advocating for more than that funding in the next Budget, to be able to do that big body of support?

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, I thank the member for her question. We don't actually know what things are going to look like yet, but we've got money in the initial output in this interim budget for the commissioner to commence his work, and have the resources that he needs. The Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commission has commenced work on establishing a comprehensive plan to support the phase-out has conveyed the working group, and the terms of reference for the working group has been established and is available on the website. That is something that we don't know what it looks like yet.

As the transition occurs, the commissioner and his working group will have more oversight of what that is going to look like into the future years, and how we best allocate resources. We really don't know how much that is going to look like yet and we need the working group to establish and communicate with participants in the industry and see what the needs are. Obviously there will be a need for rehoming, and we're hoping that at the end of 2029 we have a significant reduction of greyhounds in the state that are racing. We're certainly hoping not to have that number that you mentioned. Commissioner, would you like to speak to what the working group is doing?

Mr CARROLL - Thank you, minister, and thank you for the question. We're very thankful and appreciative of the finance through the budget that we've been given, \$500,000 for this current year. That primarily goes to audit inspectors, animal welfare officers and investigators to make sure that the key areas that we've already mentioned, specifically regarding animal welfare of greyhounds, are specifically addressed, and the traceability of greyhounds.

The working group will then work through the process as to the legislation and what issues - I'm in significant periods of consultation with various animal welfare groups and locations that are potential options for rehoming, as to what those costs will look like. In the New Year, I will work through what finances we need and make the appropriate budget application to operationalise the transition plan that we have put in place.

Dr WOODRUFF - Good. Thank you very much for that response. Through you minister to the commissioner, if that's appropriate. That's good to hear that you're making a plan because with the vet bills for example, the work that needs to be done on desexing, dentals and vaccinations of the 1037 - they won't all come at once, but just scaling up at the \$750 per which is what it costs this year, that will be in the order of something like \$780,000 just for that aspect of veterinary work to be done. Would you think that you'd be looking down into all those parts of the industry, and possibly doing some modelling about the time that the hump of when dogs will be being rehomed, and how that's going to happen over the next three-to-four years?

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Mr CARROLL - What I can say is that I've asked Tasracing to do some modelling in relation to the number of greyhounds that will come into the industry and leave the industry over the transition period. That's why it's so important, as you said before, that - and I made this comment last week to the parliamentary committee - we can't afford to have 1037 greyhounds come 30 June 2029. That's why the modelling that is being done by Tasracing is so important to work out how we have a manageable number come the end of 30 June 2029 over that period of time. I acknowledge the anguish that the greyhound participants are going through. However, it's important to understand that the significant animal welfare issues that may be incurred if we don't go through this phase-out period towards 30 June 2029 completely.

To your point, as far as the budget lines that are required across the board, veterinary care and adoption is one of the key areas that we're looking at. As I said, we've commenced those conversations with various groups to see what those costs will be.

Prof RAZAY - Thank you. I'm glad to hear that the government's making every effort to ensure animal welfare meets community standards and expectations. Appointing a commissioner, collaborating with RSPCA, and establishing a racing integrity hotline will enable the public to report any concern about animals and that's the best way to ensure animal welfare is respected. Last year, the RSPCA reported that it had seized 447 animals or had them surrendered as a result of inspection. They also laid 56 charges of animal cruelty. My question is, how many animals in the racing industry have been rescued or charges laid by government officers under the *Animal Welfare Act*?

Ms HOWLETT - I actually don't have that information, Professor Razay, but I do believe it's zero. I will take that on notice. It's more of a bio security issue regarding the charges laid, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

Ms JOHNSTON - Following up on Dr Woodruff's question about the budget profile for the transition of greyhound racing moving forward, perhaps the commissioner, or the minister might be able to answer this question herself. Is it fair to say that the passage of the bill prior to 1 January allows the commissioner to refine the transition plan and perhaps model the budget implications for the 2026-27 financial year, and then moving that out into the forward Estimates better, rather than having a delay in trying to manage the 2026-27 allocation?

Ms HOWLETT - To your point, we've tabled the legislation, and it's important that it is debated as soon as possible from, not just an animal welfare reason, but also from the participants so that they can have security and they can plan for the future as far as looking into other workforces, et cetera, and transitioning out. It's pretty important and Mr Carroll stated in his evidence that it was really important that the government got on with the job in progressing the legislation -

Ms JOHNSTON - In terms of having the funding and the resources available to the commissioner to be able to make those milestones and meet those needs, the 2026-27 Budget process is already under way, obviously. The sooner you can have certainty around what that timeframe might look like, the more concrete the submission could be.

Ms HOWLETT - Yes. I take that on board and I'm sure the commissioner has a budget submission almost ready to go.

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Mr CARROLL - What I would say is, and I was on record last week of saying, that the legislation that's currently before parliament is an important piece of work that will provide guidance and direction to the working group as to what the transition plan will look like. If there is a delay in that legislation, then that will ultimately hold up the transition plan and any budget submission that I can make until there's clear guidance as to that.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, there's been some discussion around animal welfare. You just mentioned the welfare of the participants. My question is to say that you've been on record as saying that you want to focus the greyhound transition to focus on the participants' welfare and wellbeing. Can you please outline any support services available to the industry, including those that may be listening to this hearing?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, honourable member, and I really appreciate your question. I understand and appreciate that there will be many in the industry who are upset with the decision and the impact that this will have on them, their families and their communities.

The Tasracing Employee Assistance Provider, Positive Solutions, provides free services to racing employees, their families and industry participants who are experiencing challenges and there is no doubt that this is an incredibly challenging time for the industry. Industry participants have a 24-hour access to the EAP which provides greater flexibility and access to suit our industry's varied working hours. I can confirm that, at my request, details of this programme were sent out to all industry participants on the day that the legislation was tabled, and I know and appreciate that they are hurting.

The Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner website related to the transition also included links to welfare support and services that are also available to members of the greyhound industry. I'm advised that the commissioner will be looking to draw on his own experiences from his support and complaints process in the Victorian Racing Industry and I encourage any industry members who need to do so, to certainly use these services.

I don't know if the commissioner would like to add anything from the Victorian model.

Mr CARROLL - Thank you, minister. Thank you for the question. As I stated from the very first day when the greyhound phase-out was announced, participant and animal welfare will be the main priority through the period of the transition.

As I said before, I acknowledge and understand this will be an extremely difficult period for those in the Tasmanian greyhound industry. From my previous experience of working in sports integrity, as the minister said, as a previous Victorian Racing Integrity Commissioner, welfare is a critical component during these periods. I am significantly experienced in establishing these welfare and support programs for industry during such time. The strong focus of welfare is essential in ensuring the risk of mental health and psychological harm during what can be a highly stressful and public process.

My office has already commenced the process in identifying sourcing well-resourced support services to participants throughout this entire transition process, whilst we have provided the contact details as well of established support services, that have been published on my website, as the minister said.

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We have commenced the process of engaging a more tailored group of support professionals in all regions of the state that can provide welfare and support services to those who feel they're impacted and require assistance. What I would, to all of you, and certainly all members of parliament, as I've said previously, that if any of your constituents approach you with any concerns regarding the greyhound transition that I urge you to pass that information on so we can provide some level of assistance or provide some answers.

Mr WINTER - Minister, as you said in the previous answers, talking about providing mental health support to greyhound participants, you said that you understand many will be upset, a challenging time. What participants really want to know, with thousands of Tasmanians to support them, is why are you doing this? What is the policy reason that you and the Premier have decided to shut down greyhound racing?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Chair. We've been over this multiple times and I've stated in the House and I stated it last week and I will state it again here -

Mr WINTER - I understand that. I think you're about to tell me the timing and what happened. I understand that now, but I want to know why you're doing this?

Ms HOWLETT - The Premier made the decision. The decision was endorsed -

Mr WINTER - Why though, what's the purpose?

CHAIR - Mr Winter, please let the minister answer.

Ms HOWLETT - by Cabinet and we're getting on with the job, Mr Winter.

Mr WINTER - This is a big policy change, a significant change, and it impacts thousands of people. What they want to know is, why? Why is the government doing this? Why are you shutting down greyhound racing?

Ms HOWLETT - I am well aware of what you said, and I've stated it many times before. The decision was made and we're getting on with the job, with the decision.

Mr WINTER - But why was that decision made? What is the policy reason for doing this?

Ms HOWLETT - As I've stated and I will state it again, the Premier's made the decision and we're getting on with the job, Mr Winter.

Mr WINTER - If this -

Ms HOWLETT - We've got a lot of work to do.

Mr WINTER - You've just talked about people needing mental health support and providing it. You've just talked about the impact this is having on people's lives. Don't you think they deserve to hear from you, as minister, the reason why your government is doing this?

Ms HOWLETT - Mr Winter, I think you would understand why -

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Mr WINTER - I don't. I really don't understand. You're here agreeing and laughing with the Greens and Independent member for Clark about greyhound racing.

Ms HOWLETT - I think you would understand why I have not been to the greyhound races in the last couple of months. That is because of the significant amount of abuse that I have suffered online, through text messages, through Facebook and various other social media platforms and also death threats, Mr Winter. I think you would understand why I have backed down from that decision.

Mr Winter, would you like -

Mr WINTER - I'm not asking about that. I'm just asking about -

Ms HOWLETT - to explain to me why Labor -

CHAIR - I ask the member for Franklin to desist with interrupting proceedings.

Mr WINTER - Well, I think the minister's about to try to play some kind of role.

Ms HOWLETT - Your Young Labor supports the defunding of greyhound racing, Mr Winter. Would you like to explain that? Would you like to explain that to the committee?

Mr WINTER - On behalf of all those people, you're right, they are upset.

Ms HOWLETT - I think you owe them an explanation.

CHAIR - Order. Order. Let's move on, please.

Mr WINTER - Just on that one question, we still haven't had an answer, Chair.

Dr WOODRUFF - This is your second or third question.

Ms HOWLETT - I've answered that question multiple times. How about you answer the question to the greyhound industry?

Mr WINTER - You haven't answered it once, minister.

CHAIR - Order. Enough.

Mr WINTER - It is, why have you done this?

CHAIR - Mr Winter, enough, please. Dr Woodruff.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you, Chair. Tasracing annual report's racing animal welfare statistics for GAP have shown that there have been more dogs euthanised in the last year than in the five previous years put together. That is a shocking figure, and deeply concerning about what's going on at GAP. That's another story, which we will get to later.

The question is that there will be enormous pressure to push dogs through rehoming organisations, and this is, through you, minister, to the Racing Integrity Commissioner, about

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what plans you have, commissioner, to monitor rehoming organisations to make sure that dogs are not being inappropriately assessed as unre-homeable and killed. In particular, how will you be monitoring trainers who have very, very large numbers of dogs like Anthony Bullock during this period?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Chair, and I thank the member for her question. Would you like the figures that were actually re-homed from GAP? I do know that in the next couple of weeks GAP is expanding its kennels and there will be more re-homing facilities there as well. Commissioner, would you like to speak to that?

Dr WOODRUFF - Thanks, but the question was about the ones that were euthanised because they were considered to be not able to be re-homed. It's to that question.

Mr CARROLL - Thank you for the question. What I would say is that I don't have in front of me the reasons as to why those animals were euthanised. That could have been because of injuries, that could have been because they were unsuitable to be re-homed, and it would be remiss of me to comment on those before I actually saw the reasons for each of those individual dogs.

What I can say to the second part of your question is that, through the rehoming program that will be undertaken in the transition period, there will be significant oversight that will be undertaken by the working group as far as that is concerned. Other than my independent veterinary adviser, Kate Savage being on the working group, we also have the RSPCA on the working group as well. What will also be taken is there'll be an audit of all greyhounds that will be undertaken on at least a six-monthly basis so we can keep track. What will also be done is that Tasracing will be developing their own traceability program and have already engaged in the last week someone to be in that role, who will be responsible for tracking each of the greyhounds up until the end of the transition period and the rehoming of those greyhounds in that period post transition.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thank you. That's great to hear. Possibly to the commissioner, I'm glad you mentioned the RSPCA because GAP's not the only place where our dogs are rehomed, but GAP is the place which is recording the euthanising. I want to thank the volunteers and the carers at the RSPCA, Brightside, the Dogs Home, Big Ears and all the other organisations that do the work.

The question I have is about the specific change that's happened at GAP and would ask that the commissioner, through the working group pay particular attention to what has changed and why there's been this big increase. What's going on? We're concerned at the fact that dogs are still being sold on Gumtree, sometimes suffering and in a terrible condition. With the transitioning out of the industry, how are you going to deal with that not escalating and continuing and getting worse?

Mr CARROLL - I don't for one moment underestimate the challenge that the working group has before them over the next 3.5 years to develop this transition plan to effectively manage and rehome a significant number of greyhounds to a more than acceptable level as far as the community is concerned. As far as the greyhound rehoming is concerned, I've had a number of conversations with various groups, both within Tasmania and interstate regarding the potential for rehoming options and they'll be explored and continue to be explored.

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We are well aware of the issues about Gumtree that have been raised. I'm actively working on that as part of the greyhound transition to make sure there are appropriate avenues for rehoming as far as greyhounds are concerned. I said before, and I reiterate, it would be remiss of me to speak about the GAP program prior to my arrival as Tasmania's Racing Integrity Commissioner. What I can give is a commitment and I do that every day to the Tasmanian people to make sure that the processes that are put in place within Tasracing and GAP and any issue to do with Tasmanian racing will be given the highest attention by my office. If there's any concerns, I encourage you or any member of your team to contact my office directly.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, if you speak to any number of the community organisations and welfare organisations that are involved in rehoming of rescue greyhounds at the moment, and particularly those owners of rescue greyhounds, I will tell you that there is a very wide range of behavioural responses from greyhounds that have come from properties like Mr Bullock's where there's been a lot of dogs in enclosed spaces and poorly treated. It takes some time for those greyhounds to readjust a life outside racing.

Through you, perhaps to the commissioner, would you consider having someone whose expertise is as an animal behaviouralist on the working group to oversee the rehoming process? I appreciate you have veterinary experience on that particular working group, but someone in particular with animal behaviouralist experience in relation to rescue animals or animals that experience quite severe trauma? That's certainly been the experience from RSPCA and Dogs Home when they're looking to rehome dogs for their programs. It often takes a long time for those dogs to exhibit the normal behaviours of pets.

Ms HOWLETT - I note that that was of significant concern with the labradoodle issue that we had earlier on in the year, which was extremely distressing and very unfortunate.

Ms JOHNSTON - It has two elements: there's a veterinary element and the behaviour element. Is that something to consider?

Mr CARROLL - I can probably answer this quite easily. To any person who may be considered a technical expert or relevant to any area of the working group, and certainly in the terms of reference, it states that I can call upon any person at any stage and call them into the working group. You'll note that I don't have the CEO of Tasracing on the working group, but he has a standing invitation to attend the working group, either through his own request or at mine, to come and provide advice as to the impact this has on Tasracing as an organisation. As I said, that would essentially go the same for any expert or any advice that I require or the working group requires to make informed decisions moving forward.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, what are the key priorities you have personally set for the Racing portfolio this financial year, and how will progress be measured?

Ms HOWLETT - My priorities are, number one, finalising and working through the funding deed, securing the future for our breeding industry in both equine codes, and obviously making sure that participants' welfare is paramount through the transition of the phase-out of greyhound racing, and also the health check and review that we are conducting. They are our main priorities.

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Mr SHELTON - Minister, can you confirm that the government will continue to support the equine codes and that Tasracing has a long future? Can you please provide an update on the progress towards a new funding deed for the Tasmanian racing?

Ms HOWLETT - That is an important question for the industry, and both the Premier and I have been very clear on our support for the broader racing industry and its participants, and our support for our regional communities.

As we've stated, we've started work on a new racing funding deed to ensure the financial sustainability of the racing industry. Importantly, that is not a review into whether there will be a funding; that's a review of what the funding model looks like beyond 2029 for the thoroughbred and harness code. This is especially important to provide certainty to the industry, following the government's announcement of the phasing out of the greyhound code in 2029. This coincides with the expiration of the current funding deed. We'll continue to have a focus on funding requirements of the thoroughbred and harness code to ensure that Tasracing can thrive into the future.

The industry funding deed we know was implemented from 1 July 2009 and the deed had a term of 20 years, and the government will continue to honour that deed. That is reflected in last week's interim budget across the forward Estimates in table 9.2, page 160 of the budget paper 2, volume 1. I'm working closely with the Treasurer as a shareholder minister. We're getting on with the job to progress the very important funding deed.

Mr WINTER - Minister, you've just said that you and the Premier have been very clear on your support for the industry. I'll take you back less than a year ago. The headline in *The Advocate* newspaper was:

'I will not be banning greyhound racing or any other code in the industry.'

It's a direct quote from you.

Given that less than 12 months ago you said you would not be banning greyhound racing, how can anyone in thoroughbreds or harness racing believe anything you or the Premier say, given that you've just caved in and shut down greyhound racing less than a year after you promised you wouldn't?

Dr WOODRUFF - Let's talk about Labor's position on the stadium.

CHAIR - Dr Woodruff, please. Minister, you have the call.

Ms HOWLETT - Well, it looks like you have the same intention as well in the Young Labor movement to defund racing -

Mr WINTER - Minister, this is really important. There's a lot of greyhound and racing participants watching this.

Ms HOWLETT - You were pretty quick to make sure that they adapted their comments. I think it took you about an hour-and-a-half, an hour and 45 minutes, to have those comments. Are you going to provide -

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Mr WINTER - Chair, I'd like you bring the minister to the question.

CHAIR - Minister, please come to the question at hand.

Mr WINTER - Thank you, Chair.

Ms HOWLETT - I find this very interesting how things change very quickly -

Mr WINTER - You have been asked by the Chair of the committee to come to the question.

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, apologies. Yes, I did make that statement, Mr Winter, and obviously, the parliament has changed and society's expectations have changed. The Premier made the decision and I back the Premier on his decision, and we're getting on with the job.

Mr WINTER - You've just said that you've given the assurance to harness and thoroughbred codes today. How could they have confidence and trust in anything you or the Premier say when you made the same commitment to greyhound racing participants and then, less than a few weeks later, you did the complete opposite? How can anyone have trust or confidence in what you say?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you very much, Mr Winter. The Premier and I have stated that we will be funding, and are absolutely committed, to both equine codes. I think it's time you and Tasmanian Labor made an explanation to the greyhound industry on what your intentions are as well, Mr Winter.

Mr WINTER - Minister, you talked in your earlier contribution around the economic impact study that you are undertaking as part of this process. Given that the economic impact study hasn't yet commenced, how can parliament be asked to vote on the shutdown of greyhound racing when you don't really know what the impact is going to be on thoroughbred or harness racing?

Ms HOWLETT - As the commissioner stated, on Friday the work will commence, and we will have more details as that work progresses.

Mr WINTER - When will that be finished, though?

Ms HOWLETT - I don't know, and I'm not going to give you a date on when - I don't know, and I'm not going to answer that question or give you a date.

Mr WINTER -How can you assure harness and thoroughbred codes -

CHAIR - Mr Winter, please.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, do you acknowledge that racing horses are sentient beings, just like greyhounds?

Ms HOWLETT - Honourable member, I thank you for your question. I am deeply invested, and have been for a long time, in the equine code. What I will say is that animal

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welfare is paramount to the industry moving forward. We've raised the bar, and the bar is set high. That's why we've brought on the biggest reforms in decades.

Dr WOODRUFF - I want to talk about the funding that's gone from Tasracing, and the announcement on 26 August 2025 about an extra \$1 million to boost the breeding of racehorses through the Tasbred scheme. This is in the context that sales of Tasmanian racehorses have hit an all-time low. This year, Tasmania put fewer horses up for sale because they expected that fewer would be sold.

The 2025 Magic Millions Tasmania Yearling Sale catalogued 126 lots, down from 140 last year. They sold 83 horses, down from 93. It's the lowest sale price in Tasmania in 12 years. At the same time, Tasracing still doesn't have a retirement plan for horses. How does breeding more unsellable horses fix these issues when there's clearly not enough homes for the current numbers of horses in Tasmania?

Ms HOWLETT - I don't think it's about breeding more unsellable horses. I think it's about breeding better stock. One thing the funding deed will do is give certainty to the breeders, and the breeders are integral to our industry in both equine codes. We will continue to invest in the very important breeding sector. I acknowledge that the stock has been down, and the prices have been down at the yearling sales. That's something that we will endeavour to work through, and that's part of what this review will do.

We are totally committed to investing in the breeders - they are the backbone of our industry - and we have the best climate in Australia to breed incredible thoroughbreds and standardbreds for the racing industry. I'll pass over to you, commissioner, but we'll be continuing to invest in that very important sector.

Mr CARROLL - Through you, minister. You raise a very important question, and one that I pondered a lot before I took on this role as Tasmania's Racing Integrity Commissioner.

Everything that we do in my office day-to-day goes to improve the standard of Tasmanian racing across the board, and animal welfare standards. I've been really pleased with the feedback that my office has received as a result of the work we've done in the first 11 months not only here, but on the mainland. What we're seeing is a transition of confidence in Tasmanian racing across the board.

You're right in what you say - there has been a downturn in the number of sales that occurred and the prices that have been achieved through the sales. However, I'm confident that what we'll see through the measures put in place, as far as the integrity reforms are concerned, across the board - and that includes animal welfare - we'll see in upturn in relation to breeding and the sales that occur through Tasmanian racing.

Whilst we won't see those figures for a period of time, the feedback I've had across all stakeholders is that we've seen significant improvements in the integrity and animal welfare standards across the board in Tasmania.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, going to the issue around integrity and trying to enhance integrity within racing, it's been raised a number of times in this committee over a number of years, and more broadly, about participants who may have been suspended or had their licences revoked still being engaged in the industry and taking an active role. Others, perhaps, are

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perceived to be involved by proxy, by transferring the training of their horses or greyhounds to a related individual and still participating by proxy. Is that a concern that you share about the overall integrity of the industry, if those participants are still involved when they're suspended or have had their licences revoked?

Ms HOWLETT - It certainly is a concern to me, but we do have rules of racing. Whether it be in the thoroughbred, standardbred or greyhound racing code, the rules of racing apply to participants and they need to adhere to the rules of racing.

Commissioner, would you like to -

Mr CARROLL - Through you, minister, it's a very pertinent question that you ask. Whilst I can't comment on what occurred previously in the decision-making by the Office of Racing Integrity or Tasracing from a licensing point of view, you will probably be aware that, thankfully, the new *Racing Regulation Integrity Act* provides me the opportunity to develop standards. Those include, but are not limited to, integrity in animal welfare. My office has identified a first tranche of nine standards for preparation. These standards include:

- Complaints to management;
- Investigations and disciplinary action;
- Conflict of interest disclosures, including wagering;
- Fit and proper person assessment;
- Prohibited substances, including minimum testing requirements;
- Animal welfare, including traceability, code of practice and inspections;
- Licensing and regulation, including disqualifications and national police checks;
- Human welfare and wellbeing, including safeguarding, fatigue management and EAP; and
- The education framework - most important for the Tasmanian racing industry.

Further standards will follow based on identification and the need for them, and discussions with the stakeholders. What I can say is the first of those standards, in draft form, has gone to Tasracing for comment, which addresses fit and proper person, as you say, and we're awaiting feedback from Tasracing to that standard.

Ms JOHNSTON - Is that something that can be disclosed or tabled- the draft?

Mr CARROLL - Not until its final form.

Ms HOWLETT - You can certainly ask those questions at GBE scrutiny as well.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, can you please outline the consultation you have done since the government announced this policy on 10 August of the transition out of the greyhound racing industry? So, the consultation that's taken place since then?

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, I thank the member for his question. The government's been very clear since we announced a decision that we intended to introduce the legislation this year. We have done that, we have tabled the bill. As members of this committee would be aware,

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I have had a long-term family history and a close personal connection with the greyhound code. Since we made this announcement, I have had many conversations and phone calls with participants, industry and stakeholders. They have been robust and they have certainly been very challenging most of the time. I won't say some of the time - a lot of the time.

As the committee would be aware, the Premier and I requested that the Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner develop the comprehensive plan to deliver all operational animal welfare and integrity components of the transition. This includes a comprehensive consultation with all stakeholders, and that work is ongoing.

Commissioner Carroll wrote to all MPs, offering them a briefing on the work that he was undertaking. He also wrote an open letter encouraging any participants to contact his office with any concerns and feedback. I am further advised that this consultation has helped inform the process to date. My office has had conversations with representatives of Greyhounds Tasmania, and with the Chair and CEO of Greyhounds Australasia as well. Whilst these conversations have been robust, they've, at times, been respectful and are premised by my deep care for the participants and their families.

I would like to share a letter written to me by Mr Steve Lockley, the then chairperson of Hobart Greyhound Racing Club. He said:

I write on behalf of the Hobart Greyhound Racing Club committee who, collectively, were disgusted at the threats made on a Facebook page levelled at you. We recognise that, at this moment, we are at opposite ends of the debate in relation to the 2029 closure of greyhound racing, but we will treat you with respect during any of our contacts. And in your previous role as Racing minister, we had a very high level of interaction with you and acknowledge the good work that you did for the code.

Whilst I now ask the commissioner to outline the consultation that his office has undertaken, I reiterate that I and my office are happy to meet with any and all stakeholders, no matter what side of the debate that they are on. I encourage those members who have not yet accepted the invitation of the commissioner for a briefing to please do so.

Mr WINTER - In terms of consultation specifically in relation to the bill, as far as I am aware no member of the racing industry, at least that I have spoken to, was able to actually have any input into the bill. Given that we don't have a full understanding of the impacts from their point of view, you have just said that you are happy to meet with them. Would you sit down with industry members specifically in relation to the bill so you can understand why it is so flawed?

Ms HOWLETT - I am happy to sit down with industry participants. Of course I am, as I said in my statement. I have conversations continuously, and I have done so. Since we have made this announcement, I've had many. I couldn't tell you how many conversations I've had with industry participants and stakeholders. This is what the working group is all about, the transition working group, after the legislation was tabled. It's about inviting them to now join the working group and be part of that so they can advise the working group what is required during that phase-out period. We need to hear from the industry, we need to hear what's important to them, and how they want that transition and the phase-out to look like. That's why

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the commissioner has collaborated with this working group and is in contact with the industry, and asking them to participate.

Mr WINTER - In relation to turnover, for example, I believe the greyhound code is almost 40 per cent of turnover. What's the impact going to be on Tasracing specifically as a result of the shutdown of greyhound racing and its ongoing viability for the other two codes?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Mr Winter. That is part of the work that we are undertaking -

Mr WINTER - Do you know what it is, though?

Ms HOWLETT - How can we know what it is when the work is only just starting?

Mr WINTER - If you don't know what the impact is going to be on Tasracing, don't you think that going ahead and shutting down the greyhound racing industry with this bill is a bit premature, given you don't know what the impact is going to be on harness or thoroughbred codes?

Ms HOWLETT - I think it's very responsible that we have put together, or the commissioner has put together, this health check to look at both of the other codes so that we know how to invest in the future and what we need to do. What that looks like? We don't know yet.

Mr WINTER - Exactly. You have no idea what the impact is going to be on harness or thoroughbreds and their viability going forward, or Tasracing and yet you're shutting down greyhound racing anyway.

Ms HOWLETT - That is why we have commissioned this work, Mr Winter.

Mr WINTER - After the bill goes through, then you can find out.

Ms HOWLETT - We intended to do this work anyway.

Mr CARROLL - Mr Winter, what you'll find is that you're talking about two totally separate issues here. On one hand, we have the phase-out and transition of greyhounds that's been announced by the Premier. On the second hand, you're talking about the impact of that, but also the defunding and it's appropriate.

The transition and what that will look like will move ahead, depending on - and as I said, it's important for that transition for the legislation to be passed. But the impact of that, there's an important piece of work that needs to be undertaken to determine what Tasmanian racing, and racing looks like into the future. So, they're two totally separate pieces at work, and whilst they cross over, they need to be conducted in parallel to each other.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, back to the breeding of horses. Tasmania still doesn't have a retirement plan for the hundreds of horses that leave the industry in Tasmania this year. There just aren't enough homes for the 300 or more ex-racehorses each year, some of which are chronically injured and mentally traumatised and eat a lot of food.

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The figures in the annual report last year for thoroughbreds was 295, retired standardbreds, 188, 483 in all. Of those, 62 were euthanised. That is an incredibly high number. Tasracing has an extra \$1 million or more into the Tasbred program to breed racehorses. At the very least, minister, shouldn't an increase in breeding also be accompanied by an increase in funding to secure a safe retirement for every horse the industry needs?

Perhaps the racing commissioner could talk about - you're smiling? You love this question, I can see, before I even ask it: whether the tracing and the traceability at the end of life is something that you're looking into?

Ms HOWLETT - Absolutely. We're certainly looking into traceability of the thoroughbred code and that's through the Rules of Racing -

Dr WOODRUFF - Along with all the other work you're doing.

Ms HOWLETT - Yes.

Mr CARROLL - As I said earlier, just in relation to the greyhound numbers, without being armed with all the information as to the reasons as to the deaths or euthanasia of those particular horses, it would be negligent of me to comment on those. What I can say is, as I said before, there's significant investment being made into traceability across the board of all animals in Tasracing. We've seen significant increases and I compliment Tasracing on the increase in the number of animal welfare officers they're putting on and the work that they're doing.

The level of accountability now, not only on the racing industry but Tasracing, by the introduction of my office I think will ensure a level of confidence across the board within the Tasmanian racing industry and the public that all efforts are being made to make sure that, effectively, homing programs are introduced and put in place, but also that all horses are given the opportunity to maintain a thorough life post racing career.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, on a related matter of animal welfare, we have a court ruling determining that the whipping of a horse with a padded racing whip was an act of cruelty which inflicted pain and suffering on the horse. Will you now take action to amend the local rules of racing, accordingly, and ban the use of whips in training and racing?

Ms HOWLETT - No, I won't be doing that. That rule comes under the Australian Rules of Racing and that's a matter for Tasracing to comply with those rules under the Australian rules that govern and conduct races for the thoroughbred and harness codes, including the use of whips. That's not a matter for me. That is that is a matter that falls under the Australian Rules of Racing.

Dr WOODRUFF - Can we not make local rules?

Ms HOWLETT - No, I believe that the rules are nationally -

Mr CARROLL - Through you, minister. Tasracing can make local rules. That would be a question for Tasracing to determine whether they are going to introduce that local rule or not. I'd be surprised, as Racing Integrity Commissioner, if the minister actually put a proposal

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forward to Tasracing to introduce a local rule. That clearly is a decision for Tasracing and one that falls in their jurisdiction.

Dr WOODRUFF - Thanks, Sean, I'll ask it next week.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, or perhaps the commissioner through you. Just picking up on the commissioner's answer before about the development of standards. I'm pleased to hear that that work is being undertaken, amongst all the other work you're doing. In relation to the fit and proper person's standard, I'm interested to know, maybe it comes under a different standard, but how you see it going forward in terms of interaction with other agencies and other forms of regulation. I'm thinking local government, for instance, to ensure that, when people apply for training licences, owner licences, or whatever it might be are compliant not only with the racing regulations, but also comply with other regulations.

I'm thinking for instance, the instance of Mr Bullock where he didn't have a kennel licence for a decade, and no planning permit over his property. Will that fit into the fit and proper person standard or is that a different body of work?

Mr CARROLL - Through you, minister, in relation to that question, and it is a very important question, my office at this stage has entered into approximately 90 memoranda and letters of understanding for information exchanged with various authority bodies within Tasmania and interstate. This has enabled cooperation, the administration, regulation of rationing and the sharing information and issues. We've entered into those arrangements with the RSPCA Tasmania, Tasracing, other controlling bodies and commissions in other jurisdictions, and Tasmania Police. We have 29 MOUs that have been provided to local councils and four have been executed. We have 69 MOUs with wagering service providers for the purpose of monitoring suspicious wagering.

You're right in what you say. There is an important part to play there as far as local government is concerned and the role they play in as far as enforcement in areas that they can control that might sit outside the jurisdiction of Tasracing. That's an area that we need to explore further. I've held some discussions with the minister, Mr Vincent's office staff as to what that will look like. What I can say is, as far as the information that we are receiving - I can't comment on how Tasracing will address the information for a fit and proper person because, ultimately, that's their decision. What we can say is that they'll be armed with all the information moving forward to make those decisions.

Ms JOHNSTON -So, it's proactive disclosure between agencies rather than just relying necessarily on the participants self-disclosing?

Mr CARROLL - That's correct.

Ms HOWLETT - In relation to the usage of the whip. Can I just say the number of times that the whip can be used has drastically reduced since 2017 as well.

Mr SHELTON - My next question is, as far as the landmark legislation that was introduced back on 1 February, this year. Can you please outline some of the work that has been undertaken under the new reforms and how they have helped strengthen the Tasmanian racing industry?

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Ms HOWLETT - Integrity is a backbone on where the Tasmanian racing industry will grow and continue to make a positive contribution to the Tasmanian community and economy. The new legislation and reforms, which are some of the strongest in Australia, are based on evidence and industry best practice. They provide a solid platform on which to build the confidence of participants and the community in the Tasmanian racing industry and to support the long-term prosperity of the industry for the people of Tasmania.

The *Racing Regulation and Integrity Act 2024* commenced on 1 February this year, when the Tasmanian Racing Integrity Commissioner was vested with powers and functions in that act. I meet regularly, at least weekly, with the commissioner and he briefs me on his operations and I'm advised that the commissioner meets regularly with industry participants and stakeholders across Tasmania. He meets at least weekly with Tasracing and the Tasracing integrity unit and actively oversees the administration and regulation of racing. I'm further advised that he meets with members of parliament to discuss matters in the racing industry, in line with the independence of his office from the government of the day and detailed information about the commission's operations are in the commissioner's annual report, which was tabled in parliament.

I don't know if you'd like to add, or comment any further, commissioner.

Mr CARROLL - Thank you, minister and thank you for the question. I must state, if I haven't said it already, I feel extremely privileged to serve as Tasmania's inaugural Racing Integrity Commissioner. It's not lost on me the job that's before us and I thank this parliament for introducing that legislation.

What we have seen in that time is, as I said, the delivery of the integrity framework and what I would say to all members of parliament, and especially those sitting at this committee, that, if you are in receipt of any complaint that comes to your office about racing, then I urge you to contact my office and not read about it in the paper or hear about it in the news. I want to know what the complaints are so I can make a difference. It's really important that I can provide any one of you a briefing at any stage, about the integrity and animal welfare issues in the Tasmanian racing industry.

What we have also done is had consultation with the Tasmanian Racing Appeals Board and we've seen significant reductions in timelines as far as matters being heard. The judgments and findings that have been handed down are now delivered in a way that is easily digestible by those racing participants. As the minister said in her second reading speech, my office is committed to refer information investigations to Tasmania Police, the Tasmanian Integrity Commission, Tasracing and national racing bodies, enabling the Tasmanian racing industry to align and operate with the national racing integrity system. Whilst I can't detail the specifics of all those referrals, declarations and cases, what I can say is that this has already occurred and resulted in matters being resolved at a higher level.

I could keep going on, but I'm conscious of time.

Mr WINTER - Minister, can you break down for us the point of consumption tax revenue take for 2024-25 by code?

Ms HOWLETT - I'm not sure that I have those details. I may have to take that on notice, if it's by code. I will have to get that from Treasury.

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Mr WINTER - So, take it on notice?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes.

Mr WINTER - Thank you. Minister, in relation to the constitutionality of the bill that you've tabled in the House, section 92 I think it is, of the Australian Constitution talks about restraint of trade between states. Have you sought or gained advice about whether the bill is constitutional?

Ms HOWLETT - I know NRE drafted the bill together with OPC. I will hand over to the deputy secretary, Deidre Wilson, to speak to that.

Ms WILSON - Through you, minister. As you noted, the bill has been drafted by OPC and that's the appropriate body that assists with the development of legislation. The bill is robust and undertakes careful and measured approaches to the staged approach, that if it's accepted and passed by parliament, would be adopted. I would make the point that the bill is the staged approach and has appropriate controls to ensure appropriate animal welfare outcomes as the transition is progressed.

Mr WINTER - Minister, if this bill does go through the parliament, as you seem intended it will this year, greyhound owners and trainers, participants will need to make business decisions quickly and that will involve, in some cases, needing to sell equipment, investments that they've made over decades. Will Tasracing or the government be compensating people, given that only a few months ago you gave them full certainty that they had the government's support?

Ms HOWLETT - That is something that the working group will work through with industry participants. I'm not ruling anything in or out.

Mr WINTER - We're on 19 November; the bill, if it goes through in the time frame that you're talking about, will go through in less than a month and the phase out will start on 1 January, so less than two months away. Surely you have a better answer than that about compensation for participants, because they are going to start making business decisions from 1 January about their future, and they have made hundreds of thousands of dollars in investments in their dogs, in the care of their dogs, in the dogs themselves, and your bill is going to rip that away from them. What compensation will you provide?

Ms HOWLETT - The phase out is a staged phase out until 2029.

Mr WINTER - You know as well as I do if this bill goes through, they won't last till 2029.

Ms HOWLETT - As far as when the bill goes through, that's a matter for the Leader of the House as to when that is scheduled. But as far as compensation, et cetera, that is a matter for the working group to work through with the commissioner and participants in order as to what it will look like. We don't know what it's going to look like yet. We need to hear from industry participants.

Mr WINTER - If you don't have a plan for what it's going to look like, why are you rushing the bill through so quickly? You clearly haven't thought through the compensation.

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You haven't thought through the impacts on the industry, on Tasracing and what it does to the viability of harness and thoroughbreds going forward, so why the rush?

Ms HOWLETT - That's what the working group is for, to establish what is required from the industry participants.

CHAIR - We are moving on.

Dr WOODRUFF - Minister, I'd like you to explain to the committee why it is that you can't make a government policy position that whips and other instruments, that have been found to inflict cruelty and suffering, can't be used? Why there can't be a government policy about that; and why there can't be a government policy to have full-life tracing of horses as well as greyhounds which currently exists?

Ms HOWLETT - As far as traceability, we are working on a national code for traceability for the industry. As far as whips are concerned, that's a matter for Tasracing as to whether they were to introduce a local rule or not. You can see where you have jockeys moving from various jurisdictions to race at various meets it could become a little confusing as to what's legally allowed in one jurisdiction to another. That is something you could ask Tasracing at the GBE hearings, if they are prepared to develop a local rule, or not, as far as whip use is concerned. What I will say is since 2017, the use of the whip has certainly decreased significantly.

Dr WOODRUFF - On traceability, what is your plan? I am not sure when the ABC exposé on the horrific treatment of horses being basically shunted off to abattoirs, killed for pet food - it was horrific. Cassy O'Connor then asked you about traceability and you said the work is going on nationally. Nothing's happened. I think that was five years ago; still nothing's happening -

Ms HOWLETT - Yes. It's been incredibly slow.

Dr WOODRUFF - but meanwhile this year in Tasmania 62 horses, thoroughbred, standard bred, were euthanised. We don't know why. Owners are allowed to kill racing horses without any explanation. Yet for racing greyhounds, they're not allowed to do that; why do we have a different standard for horses than we do for greyhounds?

Ms HOWLETT - That's where we're lifting the bar higher and the work on the traceability is being conducted by TasRacing, I believe. Commissioner?

Mr CARROLL - As I've said before, the issue of animal welfare and traceability is certainly a priority. We will assess the issue of animal traceability and animal welfare in a standard that will be developed by my office. Whilst I'm certainly not trying to evade the question, I can't comment on the issues that occurred prior to my arrival in my particular role. What I can say is that the concerns that you have are ones that we will take notice of.

I invite your office to make an appointment to discuss those issues further with my office. I think there's a longer discussion that needs to take place outside of this committee regarding the traceability of horses. It's one that I had with various groups as the Victorian commissioner and certainly would, as I said, encourage you to have those further discussions with me at a later date.

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Dr WOODRUFF - We will do that. Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you, Chair. Minister, I think it's important that we understand the context of what we're asking to do in terms of transition, and to understand the industry and the makeup of their industry. There are people in the industry who have one or two dogs that race; there are people who have 10, 20; people who have 30; people like Mr Bullock who has 90-odd dogs on his property. Do you have a breakdown of the different kind of categories, I suppose, of participants in the industry and those who actually derive substantial amount of income from the industry? Who are we looking to try to compensate adequately, in terms of who those who derive income from the industry?

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, I thank the member for her question. I know that recently the the commissioner has undertaken some kennel inspections.

Mr CARROLL - As you may well be aware, TasRacing at my instruction conducted an audit and I'm on record, and I do again congratulate TasRacing for the work that they did in conducting the audit of all greyhounds in Tasmania over such a short period of time. Whilst I'm not avoiding the direct question itself, what we have at this stage is a database of the number of greyhounds and we're working through that data to establish the specific number of greyhounds that each particular person owns or trains.

What makes it difficult - once again, I'm not trying to avoid the question - is that in some cases you have owner-trainers and, in some cases, you have owners that might have the greyhound at another location being trained by another person. We're working through that data; we expect to refine that data sometime in December. My understanding is in discussions with the Tasracing working group, they're looking at conducting another audit in either late January or early February. Once that information is provided, I'm happy to provide that.

Ms JOHNSTON - That's a huge amount of work. My understanding, though, is that there is only a small number of participants who are actually winning, I suppose, in terms of who receive wagering money. Do you have a percentage breakdown of that? My understanding is that there's only a very small number of people who are actually -

Mr CARROLL - What I can say is, and I don't have the percentage in front of me, but I think it's essentially the top 25 trainers take up about 75 per cent of the prize money, give or take a few cents.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Women and the Prevention of Family Violence. We now take a short break. As time taken for breaks must be made up, I encourage members to be as quick as they can. Stop the broadcast.

The Committee suspended from 6.06 p.m. to 6.13 p.m.

DIVISION 11.2 -

Minister for Women and the Prevention of Family Violence

CHAIR - The time now being 6.13 p.m., scrutiny of the Women and the Prevention of Family Violence portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the

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committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions for the benefit of Hansard, please.

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Chair. To my right, I have Courtney Hurworth, chief reform lead Keeping Children Safe Reform Group, DPAC, and to my left I have Sam Gunner, executive director of Keeping Children Safe Reform Group, DPAC.

CHAIR - The time scheduled for the estimates of the Minister for Women and Prevention of Family Violence is one hour. Would the minister like to make an opening statement?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Chair. I recognise the deep history and culture of this land acknowledge and pay my respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and their elders, past and present. I pay respect to and acknowledge the devastating impacts of family and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities and recognise the ongoing leadership role of Aboriginal communities to prevent and address this violence. I acknowledge the resilience and courage of victim-survivors of family and sexual violence. We pay our respects to those victims, their families and communities that all feel the devastating impacts.

Women and the Prevention of Family Violence is now combined under the one portfolio budget output. The two are fundamentally linked and we know that women disproportionately experience family violence and that improving gender equality fosters safer environments for women and girls. The government has made significant strides in advancing women's participation and I am pleased to announce we have met our target of 50 per cent of women on Tasmanian Government boards and committees.

We also continue to exceed our target of 50 per cent of women in the senior executive of the State Service as well. While we have made progress, persistent gaps in economic opportunity, leadership representation, safety and healthcare access remind us that our work is far from complete. Our priorities include strengthening response to gender-based violence, promoting women's leadership across sectors, and ensuring reproductive health services remain accessible and comprehensive. We recognise that women's experiences are diverse and our policies must acknowledge and respond to their unique challenges.

Eliminating family and sexual violence is a key priority of our government. The government's third family and sexual violence action plan 2022 to 2027, Survivors at the Centre, is supported by funding of \$140 million over five years to deliver actions, which include additional Arch Centres funding since the action plan commenced. In the short and medium term, we know that family and sexual violence reporting rates increase as more victim-survivors gain trust in formal support and response systems as well as increasingly understanding about the nature of family and sexual violence.

There are many examples of the innovative approaches the government is taking. Some include: we have a nation leading electronic monitoring program, not only holding perpetrators to account and addressing risk and safety but also providing victim-survivors with the option of a discreet monitoring device that alerts them when their family violence offender is nearby. The multidisciplinary Arch centres in the north and south of the state are delivering a survivor-centred holistic and integrated response to family and sexual violence.

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We are delivering a third Arch Centre in the north-west, which is expected to be operational in early-2026. We have established the Family and Sexual Violence Victim Survivor Advisory Council to enable an ongoing voice of victim-survivors to the Tasmanian Government. Our new peak body, the Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance, is now in operation to work towards strengthening the capacity of the community sector by improving coordination, and I thank the Alliance CEO, Bree Klerck, for her leadership.

The prevention of family and sexual violence team within the Department of Premier and Cabinet takes a highly collaborative and coordinated approach across the sector, the community sector and with the government agencies both here in Tasmania and in other jurisdictions. I also attend and advocate in my role on the Women and Women Safety Ministerial Council. In conclusion, to inform further work in this space, to drive long-term change, we will evaluate survivors at the centre and consult with the sector, including victim-survivors. We remain steadfast in creating a Tasmania that is free from violence, with a broad range of measures in place to prevent family and sexual violence, respond to and support victim-survivors, and hold perpetrators to account.

Thank you, Chair, and I thank the committee members for allowing me the opportunity to provide some opening remarks. I welcome questions from the committee.

Ms BROWN - Minister, I'm pleased to see in your opening address that you have family and sexual violence sprinkled through, but can you tell me why it wasn't originally part of your title?

Ms HOWLETT - This is something that we've had discussions about before and I've had these discussions with the Premier. When the opportunity does arise and, when there is a Cabinet reshuffle, I can assure you that that title will be included and will be 'Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence' in that title.

Ms BROWN - Did you advocate for that title prior to being sworn in?

Ms HOWLETT - No. I didn't actually know what the title would be. I didn't see that. But I've certainly been advocating for it now. I do know, as I said, that, when there is the opportunity, that certainly will be included in the title. Courtney, would you like to expand on that?

Ms HURWORTH - I can't make any comment about the government's deliberations about ministerial portfolio titles.

What I can say is that the government has had three action plans since 2014. In 2014, the focus was very much on family violence. In 2019, when we went to the second action plan, sexual violence was included. In this last action plan, sexual violence remained part of it, but then we also started looking at activity related to child sexual abuse.

As we look into the fourth action plan, what we'll be looking at is - given the government now has its own stand-alone child sexual abuse strategy, and, given the move to consider and treat sexual violence as a form of violence in its own right, we'll be looking at whether we need separate plans that look at all of those interrelated areas or we continue with one consolidated plan.

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I can talk about it in that sense, but I don't have a comment on the portfolios.

Ms HOWLETT - Each jurisdiction and territories are different, and that's where I'd like to see a little bit of national consistency as well, in use of the title. That is something we are committed to changing.

Ms BROWN - Excellent. So, you're absolutely 100 per cent committed to this?

Ms HOWLETT - Absolutely.

Ms BROWN - Excellent, thank you. Minister, I -

CHAIR - Oh, sorry. You get three.

Ms BROWN - I've had three. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR - You sure? Okay. Ms Badger. Apologies, carry on.

Ms BADGER - Minister, like you, I've read the latest Our Watch report that came out in the last couple of days and particularly how it talks about what more we can do in the primary prevention space. I'm wondering if you could outline for us what proportion of the state's total family, domestic and sexual violence funding is specifically going towards primary prevention of family and domestic violence, and what portion is going to primary prevention of sexual violence?

Ms HOWLETT - I thank the member for her question. Would you like me to table the report as well for the members?

Ms BROWN - That's a fantastic idea, yes.

Ms HOWLETT - Could I get the report tabled, please?

The Tasmanian government is firmly committed to the primary prevention of violence against women and children and recognises the critical role of Our Watch in advancing this work. Primary prevention is the foundation pillar of our national and state-level strategies to end violence against women and children, and we are committed to evidence-informed, whole-of-population approaches that deliver measurable long-term impacts.

Tasmania is proud to partner in a five-year agreement with Our Watch from 23 June 2022, which marks a significant milestone in our ongoing commitment to prevention. Through this unique partnership, a dedicated Our Watch senior adviser position is based in Tasmania, providing expert advice to the Department of Premier and Cabinet on family and sexual violence policy, and, of course, women's policy. The 2025-26 work plan included activities that contribute to the ongoing implementation of Survivors at the Centre actions and informs priorities related to the Our Watch partnership. The government continues to work in partnership with Our Watch to deliver on the commitments under Tasmania's Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan, which includes primary prevention across the key initiatives, and the collaboration essential to progressing current activities such as workplace equality, respectful relationships, education and community-based prevention. Through this sustained

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partnership, we're not only addressing immediate priorities, but we're also laying the foundations for lasting change.

We want to stop violence before it starts, and the key initiatives funded through the action plan are respectful relationships and consent education, an early-intervention program delivered in Tasmanian schools by the Department of Education, Children and Young People; MENS behavioural change, Men Engaging New Strategies programs for men who have hurt or abused their partners, ex-partners and are ready to take responsibility, and that's delivered by Relationships Australia; perpetrator programs operated through referral from magistrates as a condition on a family violence order; and mandated behavioural change programs delivered through community corrections as well. Then, of course, we have the Tasmanian Women's Strategy as well, and the government acknowledges that greater inequity is a key driver of family violence and considers the women's strategy to be a key part of the prevention approach for Tasmania as well.

Ms BADGER - I will draw you to the actual question, minister, which is around the funding stream. Specifically in dollar figures, how much is going towards prevention of family and domestic violence and, separately, sexual violence?

Ms HURWORTH - I can't provide a global figure because the way that prevention activity works is that it isn't all directly related to family and sexual violence. If I use RRE as an example, respectful relationships education, that covers family and sexual violence; it covers preconditions to prevent violent behaviour occurring in the first place like attitudes and gender attitudes. It's partly funded out of funding under our action plan. It also receives Commonwealth funding. It receives funding through curriculum. There are many different funding sources that are used in the prevention space.

In terms of what Our Watch says in its report about prevention, all states and territories and the Commonwealth are acknowledging that we have to do a lot more in the prevention space than we have done to date, and not only attitude-type prevention programs, but specifically looking at perpetration. Moving into the next phase of the government's action plans, we will be looking at perpetration as a key area.

CHAIR - Ms Johnston.

Ms BADGER - I've only asked one question which wasn't answered. My second question, which is not on the funding -

CHAIR - Sorry, Tabatha. No. Ms Johnston.

Ms JOHNSTON - I will continue around the prevention line that Ms Badger was going on. My question was specifically around that respectful relationships funding. SASS has raised concerns that their request for additional funding wasn't received and it wasn't in the 2025 Budget, the emergency Budget or the latest one. They are doing their best to try to stretch the funding that they do receive to as many children as possible. My question is: given Tasmania's commitment to change with children reforms and commission of inquiry recommendations, are you willing to consider a dedicated funding stream for accredited child sexual abuse prevention education delivered by specialist services, in schools in particular?

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Ms HOWLETT - I believe that that is very hard for me to answer as that comes under the Minister for Education, and Children and Youth. Respectful relationships and consent education is one of the most important tools we have to prevent family and sexual violence before it occurs. It helps young people build the skills for healthy, respectful and equal relationships, and respectful relationships and consent is also incorporated in the Australian Curriculum and is delivered in age-appropriate ways from early years right through to senior and secondary. Detailed program delivery and provider arrangement sits with the Minister for Education.

Ms JOHNSTON - Is that something you can advocate for, to the minister?

Ms HOWLETT - Absolutely.

Ms JOHNSTON - I mean, the minister has enormous pressure for a range of sources for education funding. It's really important that this is delivered in schools, that we get to young people early on. That's something you'd be willing to advocate, that there is additional funding specifically for specialist services?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes. Prevention is the key to to all of this and the holistic approach of this portfolio. That's something that I'm absolutely happy to advocate for.

Mr SHELTON - My question is about the Budget. Minister, the amount of funding for International Women's Day grants has increased in this interim Budget - a great thing, of course. Why is it, and what is the benefits of the grant program to all Tasmanians, not just women, if you could please explain?

Ms HOWLETT - Absolutely. All Tasmanians - and I know that we'd like to see far more men come to a lot of these functions, and our government is a proud supporter of International Women's Day. The grant program supports events and projects that celebrate women's achievements, strengthen connections between women and educate the broader community about the contributions of women. The grant program has grown steadily in demand and impact over recent years, and it's been heavily oversubscribed.

In 2024, the total amount requested was nearly four times the available budget in 2025, and this increase was over 4.5 times. In 2025, the program received 52 applications with a budget of \$50,000 for 15 events that were funded at a budget of \$20,000; 15 events were funded at 30 per cent. Events such as these, run by local councils and community groups to celebrate International Women's Day, are an important step towards our vision for agenda equal Tasmania, at the heart of Equal Means Equal Strategy.

They are an example of the commitment that we've made to deliver the right program support and opportunities for women to be the very best that they can be to fulfil their ambitions. Last year I attended a celebration in Sorell. We're pleased that the grants will be opened tomorrow, I believe, and they will close on 23 December. I encourage you to get your local councils around Tasmania to put in for a grant.

Ms BROWN - Minister, why was the Tasmanian Gender Budget Statement left out of this Budget and when were you consulted, if you were consulted?

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Ms HOWLETT - I was consulted, and the interim Budget process was a really compressed timeframe that simply didn't allow for a Gender Budget Statement to be produced at the quality to make that meaningful. That certainly isn't a shift in policy or commitment. It was timing, and it was only timing, that was the issue. It's important to note that a Gender Budget Statement was produced for the previous 2025-26 Budget in May, and there will certainly be a Gender Budget Statement in the May 2026 budget. The Premier and I have confirmed that there will be a Gender Budget Statement in the May 2026 Budget. I was certainly consulted when Treasury were doing the interim Budget. I can't remember that date.

Ms BROWN - Will you take that on notice?

Ms HOWLETT - Initially it was when Treasury was doing the interim Budget. As you would appreciate, that was an extremely busy time for the Treasury -

Ms BROWN - I can imagine; but it would be somewhere in your diary, surely, that the Treasurer met with you and discussed this with you?

Ms HOWLETT - I certainly did meet with the Treasurer and have discussions with him. I wanted the Gender Budget Statement to be meaningful and impactful and I certainly didn't want it to be a rushed statement. You can be assured that it will certainly be in the next Budget and it was certainly in the Budget that didn't get passed through the House of parliament.

Ms BROWN - Thanks for confirming that it was the Treasurer's decision not to have that. And so -

Ms HOWLETT - No, no, no, I didn't say that at all. I didn't say it was the Treasurer's decision not to have it. That's incorrect. Chair, I ask that the member withdraw that comment.

Treasury simply did not have the time to make the gender budget impactful. It was a very rushed timeframe and period. The Treasurer certainly didn't make that decision not to have the gender budget in the interim Budget. That's not fair.

Ms BROWN - Have you read the May gender budget?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes, of course, I have read the gender budget.

Ms BROWN - So you would have noticed there was a lot of data missing. What commitments have you made to make sure that data is going to be in the next budget?

Ms HOWLETT - The toolkit will support government agencies to design inclusive policies that reflect the diverse and intersectional needs of Tasmanian women and girls. It delivers on a key commitment under Equal Means Equal: Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27 and will align Tasmania with national best practice.

Following the election, IT hosting options were reviewed and a decision was made to integrate the toolkit prototype into existing government IT systems. This approach supports government efficiency and productivity measures as it's more cost-effective, avoids ongoing contractory fees and ensures long-term sustainability. Over the next 12 months, we will be working towards finalising and launching the toolkit within government systems. This will

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make the process to develop the gender budget statement more nimble and far more agile than has been in the past.

Ms BADGER - Minister, in the next gender budget, it has been asked by the sector a few times, I've written to you about this as well - and I appreciate and acknowledge that you have responded and been open to it. However, I draw you to the importance of having it set out. I appreciate your previous answer that it's not a clear figure but, setting out roughly what investment is going into the four pillars of the Family Violence Action Plan, will you commit to endeavouring to do that in the next budget? Will the department establish a separate prevention funding stream in the next budget, which would align with the Change for Children reforms and the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032?

Ms HOWLETT - I thank the member and I know Courtney would like to add to the comment. It will be a discussion I will be having when we next meet nationally, as ministers for Women and Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence.

Ms HURWORTH - We are about to enter into an evaluation period of the current plan but we are going to do it for all the plans, for the last 10 years. That will look both at program evaluation but it is also going to be looking at the total investment across government in family and sexual violence prevention, response, recovery and healing. So, aligned not with the pillars in our strategy, but with the public health streams in the national plan.

Some of you will be aware that Closing the Gap has a similar requirement for how the government funds services to Aboriginal people. We will be doing a similar forensic exercise, looking at direct and indirect funding under those streams of the national plan. That will form part of our evaluation which will then inform the new plan and investment into the new plan.

I'm not sure that it will be ready for the May budget. This plan goes to 2027, at which point we would look at all the investment across the current plan and whether the government wants to make changes to that investment. That evaluation, which includes the budgetary and investment component, will be a key feature of that.

Ms BADGER - Great. Just a point of clarity before I move on to my second question, are you ruling out any kind of more specific breakdown in this forthcoming budget? Or is there something, minister, that we could have? It is something the sector needs, and it's good to have that transparency for Tasmanians to see where the investment is going.

Ms HOWLETT - I'm happy to take that on notice and have that discussion with with Treasury and the Treasurer.

Ms BADGER - Thank you, minister. My second question is, after the 2024 election, it was within the 100-day plan, 200-day plan, 300-day plan, et cetera, for a review of the *Family Violence Act*. Are you progressing that? Or can you give us any update on what's happening in that space, if it is indeed still happening in this term?

Ms HOWLETT - That's a very important question. I believe the *Family Violence Act* has been updated again to reflect the new forms of harm, community expectations and the evidence on what keeps people safe. Recent reforms have improved evidence rules, court practices, stealthing protections, electronic monitoring and repeat offender accountability.

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The next phase of work focuses on accuracy and safety across the system, including better identification of the predominant aggressor and reducing misidentification.

Tasmania is fully engaged in the national reform agenda through our partnership with the Commonwealth and National Legal and Safety Framework. The Attorney-General leads the legislative program and my role is to make sure that those reforms translate into safer practices across police, courts and health. But I believe that the discussion paper was released.

Ms HURWORTH - The discussion paper was released yesterday or the day before, which is the first comprehensive review of the *Family Violence Act* in 23, 24 years.

Ms HOWLETT - It's a big step.

Ms HURWORTH - My team and the legislative and policy team in the Department of Justice worked on that discussion paper together. Consultation was also held with a range of other services in the sector. The minister and the Attorney-General released that discussion paper jointly. I encourage people to read that discussion paper. It's an outstanding discussion paper. It covers a lot of the key issues, things like deepfakes, online abuse, misidentification of the predominant aggressor, systems abuse - all of the really key emerging issues. We will be encouraging our partners in the community sector to make submissions to that review as well.

Ms HOWLETT - I believe that is open until March.

Ms HURWORTH - It is.

Ms HOWLETT - Yes. I'd certainly encourage as many people as possible to put submissions into that discussion paper.

Ms BADGER - Yes. Thank you for the generous timeframe.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, due to rising living costs and lack of affordable housing, women experiencing family violence in Tasmania are not seeking police assistance when they need it most and are choosing instead to remain living with their violent partner with their children, as they are unable to leave due to financial hardship and there being no secure and affordable housing. Can you please provide us with any government support for women who are experiencing family violence, particularly to find affordable housing and keep them safe from family violence?

Ms HOWLETT - I thank Professor Razay. That's a very important question. I understand how distressing it is for women and children when crisis accommodation is stretched. No one wants to see people turned away when when they need safety.

As the committee will be aware, housing, including crisis and transitional accommodation, sits with the minister for Housing, and Homes Tasmania leads the work on supplying capital investment and frontline housing support. From the family violence perspective, I'm in regular conversations with my colleagues, in particular with the Housing minister, to make sure safety risks, demand pressures and priority cohorts are visible across the system. We work closely with Homes Tas and funded services so that victim-survivors are prioritised, pathways are clear and information is shared really quickly when safety risks escalate, which they often do.

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The Women's Council, who provide me with strategic advice and help shape our direction and progress against the Equal Means Equal strategy, have also raised homelessness and housing as a topic of discussion at recent meetings. Also, engaging directly with Homes Tasmania to gain further insight into current support and future plans to address this critical issue. I'm reassured by the work under way in housing to expand crisis capacity and improve access for women and children experiencing violence, but the Minister for Housing is best placed to speak to these operational details, including the availability demand pressures and also any new projects. I will certainly raise that with him.

For many women, it prevents displacement and keeps children connected to schools and communities, and reduces trauma and disruption that comes with leaving home in the middle of a crisis. It also forms part of a broader safe-at-home system, so it aligns with police risk assessment and court orders to make sure that safety planning is consistent across all agencies. This is a program that we will continue to support and monitor closely for demand. The feedback from services as well is consistently that it makes a real difference. I don't know if you'd like to provide any more information, Courtney, but keeping women safe in their homes is one of the most important valued government programs that we have.

Prof RAZAY - Just a quick comment. After being involved with the homeless in Launceston, they don't want you to give any data about where they're staying in case their violent partner might find them. That's so -

Ms HOWLETT - It's really important and that's where I must commend the police for doing such a fantastic job.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you. Minister, one of my bugbears, I suppose, is how language matters and how we talk about women reflects how we treat them in society. I'm particularly mindful of what one of my constituents has raised with me recently. The way we talk about women in leadership roles, in particular in the media, and I'm sure you'd be aware, and I know I'm sure members of the committee would be aware, that in recent debates and in social media content and media content, there's been a lot of misogynistic, highly sexualised comments made about women in politics, for instance. That that has been allowed to go quite freely, particularly on media outlets, on comments, on articles online, and things like that.

It does matter, and it is a reflection of how we treat women and how we expect women to be treated if we allow this continue. We don't want to be bystanders around this. Was your government willing to make representations particularly to media outlets, to those who have online social media platforms, but also other online platforms, about the appropriateness of monitoring their comment sections so that we don't allow such misogynistic, highly sexualised language to proliferate throughout our community and allow our women to be treated like that?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes. I would absolutely be advocating for that, for myself and for my own personal experiences, from social media comments across various platforms. That is something that, regardless of whether it's derogatory towards a woman or a person, I think is an element that really does need to be looked at. From a social media platform, I really hope that people do. With this discussion paper that's released, I really hope we get some feedback about social media and the platforms. I've talked to women with some terrible social media stories that they've shared with me, with their abusers putting things online as well. That is a different topic and I'm really hoping that we get some good feedback to that discussion.

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Ms JOHNSTON - It's a leadership piece that government could take in terms of their role in dealing and liaising with media outlets in particular. Is that something you're willing to take up perhaps with the Premier, jointly, to ensure that the media is reminded of their responsibility in this space? They dedicate pages in the newspapers and stories all the time to issues around family violence and sexual violence, but then they allow this kind of language and we need to be respectful and recognise that language does matter.

Ms HOWLETT - It certainly does. I'm certainly happy to have those discussions with the Premier. I think it's something that a parliamentary discussion that we have as a whole, as to what is appropriate and what isn't appropriate for us to put in media releases as well and for social media, what comments they delete as far as media outlets. I think that's a commitment that we can all make to address.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, there is a line item in the Budget 'Women in Leadership Scholarships' can you enlighten the committee on the line item and what benefits this brings for women in Tasmania?

Ms HOWLETT - The Women's Leadership Scholarship Program is a really important component in delivering tangible outcomes that align with Equal Means Equal Strategy and the program is aimed at strengthening the leadership capacity of Tasmanian women. A minimum of 40 scholarships a year are available and the program was delivered this year, by Tas Leaders and was titled the I-LEAD Women in Industry program. The program provides opportunity for women to develop leadership skills, access mentors and establish networks. It aims to raise the profile of women in male-dominated industries and promotes pathways for women in those sectors. The program is a way to support goals of the Equal Means Equal - Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-27 and the Women on Boards Strategy 2020-25, giving women the skills to pursue board and executive leadership.

This year's cohort of participants herald from industries like forestry, communications, construction, maritime, and agriculture. They're already taking the skills that they've learned at their sessions and applying them in the workplace, which is absolutely fantastic. That is a really important program.

Mr SHELTON - I never quite heard the number. Did you say 40?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes, a minimum of 40 scholarships a year are available.

Ms BROWN - Minister, I want to quickly acknowledge your dedication to this portfolio. You wrote to me on 31 October and you said that you were aiming to keep a focus on putting a family and sexual violence lens across all government actions and programs. Can you tell the committee what advocacy you've made to date across other portfolios such as Health, Housing, Education and Police?

Ms HOWLETT - I'm in regular discussions with my colleagues. The aim is to have on all policy decisions, a family and sexual violence lens on government policies. I acknowledge your letter, and I take this portfolio incredibly seriously. My aim is that when we look at policies we look at it through a lens of having a family violence and sexual violence lens on policies.

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Ms BROWN - Minister, the question was what advocacy you've made in those portfolios? Can you advise?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes. The Treasurer released a policy today in relation to liquor licencing reform and that is something that we know that often plays out significantly in family violence and sexual violence. I'm aware that the national Cabinet and women and women's safety ministerial council have raised alcohol as a potential driver of gender-based violence. All jurisdictions have been asked to be part of the national rapid review program to review their licencing settings with harm minimisation in mind.

Tasmanian reforms are currently framed around business efficiency and reducing red tape, which is important, but at the same time it's essential that any changes also reflect our national commitment as well on safety and harm-reduction. Getting that balance right really matters. With that in mind, I wrote to the Treasurer on 31 October to support a balanced approach and to request a broad public consultation, including input from prevention of family violence experts and I understand that the Treasurer has since engaged directly with family violence stakeholders, which I welcome. Further details of that reform proposal will need to be referred to the Treasurer.

Ms BROWN - Minister, have you spoken about the six vacancies in the Arch command centre?

Ms HOWLETT - Have I spoken -

Ms BROWN - To the minister for Police about these vacancies?

Ms HOWLETT - Which vacancies in the community service sector are you referring to?

Ms BROWN - The Arch command centre.

Ms HOWLETT - I have regular conversations with the Police minister, and I had a meeting last week as well in relation to that, so we speak regularly. Is it Hobart? Which Arch are you referring to - Hobart or Launceston?

Ms BROWN - There are six vacancies in the command centre. Have you spoken to the minister, or has he advised you about these vacancies?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, member, for your question. The governance model and funding allocation sit with the Police minister, and I'm not sure where they're at, as far as recruitment is concerned. I will certainly raise that at my next meeting.

Ms BROWN - So he hasn't spoken to you about it?

Ms HOWLETT - We have discussions regularly, and I'm not sure. I will take that on notice and find out.

Ms BADGER - Minister, you made mention just before of the release of what is essentially red tape reduction for liquor licencing. The media release announcing that reform didn't make any reference to family violence, although I note it is now in the terms for it. As the

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minister responsible for the prevention of family violence, are you concerned that this red tape reduction seems to be the priority of the review over the impact of alcohol on family violence?

Ms HOWLETT - As I stated before, the Treasurer has already had or is having meetings with key stakeholders. I'm not sure of the outcome of when he's having those meetings, but the Treasurer has made a commitment to meet with those agencies and stakeholders and have discussions.

Ms BADGER - What are you going to do, as minister for the prevention of family violence, to advocate to the Treasurer and to ensure that the impacts of family violence are the priority of what's happening, not just further red tape reduction?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes, thank you. Courtney, I know you wanted to -

Ms HURWORTH - Through you, minister. Through the minister's department we've already engaged directly with Treasury, the Office of Liquor and Gaming, to make sure that the review terms of reference, and how to contribute, has been sent to all the key agencies, including to the CEO of the Family and Sexual Violence Alliance. My team has been heavily engaged in making sure that the review considers the impacts of liquor licensing and alcohol in relation to family violence.

Ms BADGER - To clarify, as a part of that advocacy that you've been doing with the Treasurer, have you been requesting that a focus is on the National Cabinet Agreement as a priority as well?

Ms HURWORTH - Yes.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, I'm sure you're aware of Dress for Success and the fantastic work they've been doing for a number of years now, but they are facing significant financial challenges. It's really impacting on women's ability to be able to gain employment, to feel confident when they go for job interviews, and all those kinds of things. What is the government doing to help secure the future of Dress for Success in Tasmania so they can continue this vital work and the impact that they have across our state.

Ms HOWLETT - Dress for Success do an absolutely incredible job and I was fortunate to be there - I think it was around three weeks ago. I met with them and I have met with them previously as well and attended some of their fundraising functions. They're certainly an incredible organisation that I will continue to advocate for funding for, and I know that they will be putting in a budget submission for the 2026-27 Budget.

Ms JOHNSTON - When you say you're advocating for that funding, will you be making representations, I'm assuming to the community services minister, who would be receiving funding about the kind of impacts it has for women in particular?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes, it is administered out of the Skills -

Ms JOHNSTON - Out of Skills? Thank you for that correction, so the Skills minister, who perhaps doesn't fully appreciate - and I don't know if Mr Ellis has visited Dress for Success. Perhaps you could take him to visit Dress for Success to see the impact that it has. I mean, as a man, I'm assuming he looks pretty confident in a suit, and I'm sure he wouldn't

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necessarily appreciate just how confidence can come through being able to look your best, particularly in the job market.

Ms HOWLETT - The work that they do is absolutely incredible. When I was there, there were a couple of participants preparing for their job interviews, and the success stories that they have to tell as well, it's invaluable, the service that they do.

Prof RAZAY - Minister, the budgets have shown there is an increase in workers' compensation claims. It's increased dramatically, partly due to claims for psychological injury, and that partly involves women. I feel this document is so important in raising people's awareness that what they say, what they do, is not acceptable anymore. We should push the message through, not just at workplaces, but also we need to raise awareness for the whole community. We need to change the way we look at our relationships and how we deal with each other.

Ms HOWLETT - I certainly agree with all your comments there, and that's something that we do need to advocate for and do need to do better.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, noting your opening remarks that we have met the Women on Boards Strategy target of 50 per cent in Tasmania, bearing that in mind can you give more details of that achievement?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, and that's a really important question. It was our government that first introduced a target of 50 per cent of women on boards and committees in 2015. Data from our last reporting period of 31 March 2025 indicates that women now hold 50.5 per cent of positions on Tasmanian government boards and committees. This is a significant milestone, of which we're very proud. When we came into government, the percentage of women on boards was sitting at just over 30 per cent, so we've come a long way.

Our government has invested in women's leadership and board diversity scholarship programs since 2015 to upskill Tasmanian women to apply for board positions and enhance their skills when working on government, commercial and non-for-profit boards. As part of the development of the next Women on Board strategy, consideration will be given to how we can further support flexible meeting arrangements to support full participation of women, and particularly in regional areas as well.

Ms BROWN - Minister, building on what Prof Razay has asked before about housing - and we know how important housing is when escaping family and sexual violence in dangerous situations - what advocacy have you made to the minister for Housing to increase the Rapid Rehousing program?

Ms HOWLETT - In discussions in the last few weeks with the minister for Housing, Mr Vincent, we've had lots of conversations about this. I know the government is strengthening the protection for women and children fleeing family violence with the expansion of the Family Violence Rapid Rehousing program, adding up to 100 more properties close to major urban centres, transport services, and amenities. I know the minister is extremely passionate about this and that's something that he certainly has a strong focus on.

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Ms BROWN - Great. The minister committed yesterday that he would have a strong focus in regional areas and the north-west when it comes to housing. Will you commit to keep him to that commitment and advocate?

Ms HOWLETT - Absolutely, and we know that there is a significant increase in family and sexual violence on the north-west coast. That's why I very much look forward to the Arch centre opening in January, but there is a significant increase on the north-west coast. I will absolutely be committed to having those discussions with him. I know he is adamant that he really wants to make a difference in this area. I welcome everyone around the table to continue to have conversations with minister Vincent about this very important issue, I certainly will be.

Ms BROWN - Minister, there is a backlog of forensic science services of 50 per cent. Are you aware of this and what are you doing to address it?

Ms HOWLETT - Yes, I am aware of that and I've had discussions about that and the Department of Health is continuing to identify and support staff to have the relative training to be able to assist in carrying out forensic examinations and access to these training courses is limited and requires ongoing discussions with other jurisdictions to see if access to specialist training can be secured through a service-level agreement for Tasmania and health service staff.

As you know, this training is highly specialised to ensure that the care provided is sensitive to the needs of the person following an incident of sexual assault or family violence incident while also ensuring the requirements are met and there is a plan to upskill staffing for forensic awareness, forensic process, advice and in providing the initial response to sexual assault across a Tasmanian health service and the emergency departments as well.

The Department of Health is exploring best practice models in other comparable jurisdictions to determine where appropriate changes can be made to the current service delivery model.

Ms BADGER - Minister, I had another question on the liquor licence streamlining. Among the 16 specific changes that are highlighted in the fact sheet is:

Strengthening controls on alcohol access and availability to address the role that alcohol may play in family and domestic violence.

Can you just, if you can, describe any specifics of what that means or sort of talk us through how you, as Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, see how that sits intertwined with the other amendments that are trying to be made here to make it easier for liquor licencing?

Ms HOWLETT - That that is a matter for the Treasurer. I know that he's having consultation with stakeholders, but I'll continue to view all future policies on alcohol licencing, legislative reform through a family violence and safety lens to ensure a balanced and sensible approach is made. We do need to have a balanced and a sensible approach.

Ms BADGER - Thank you, minister. There are a few, I guess, small, simple changes that are in some ways absent from Tasmania or there aren't enough of them in the toolkit that Tasmania has in responding to family, domestic and sexual violence. Some of them - like we have a lot of organisations that do some fantastic kits up for women who are perhaps having to

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move residence or go temporarily somewhere else so that they've got the dignity of having basic essential needs in place, but having kits like that for children is something that we need to be doing a lot more of.

Again, that's obviously something that's more prolific in regional areas, as much of these issues often are. Also, things like in the advocacy space. We've got some great organisations such as Agenda Equality immediately come to mind and they do some training for victim-survivors who want to use their experience to be able to speak out and how to train them and support them through reliving their experiences for that advocacy. But there's no set up network at the moment to be able to empower victim-survivors collectively and have that support there for them all together.

They're two examples of things that could be done relatively simply. What sort of meetings are you having between now and the next budget to set those things up? Will you host a much overdue roundtable with the sector to help start filling in some of these gaps ahead of the review and that sort of thing on the family violence act?

Ms HOWLETT - I have regular meetings with stakeholders, and I thank them for the incredible work that they do and the advocacy that they provide. As far as the next budget in 2026-27, that is something that we will start to have discussions on. We have had discussions on the needs that are out there in the community, in the urban and the regional communities, as well. I know Courtney has more to say on that as well.

Ms HURWORTH - I wanted to pick up - you were referring to Advocates for Change, which is Engender Equality's program. In setting up the minister's Victim-Survivor Advisory Council, we actually worked in partnership with Engender Equality, and they ran a version of the advocacy training that they do for Advocates for Change for that group. So, we've been very focused on that Victim-Survivor Advisory Council. It sounds like something simple to do but, in setting up councils like that, it has to be safe and trauma-informed. Engender has been a central component of working with us to do that.

Ms JOHNSTON - As I'm sure you appreciate, minister, SASS is overwhelmed with work and demand for their services continues to grow. This is SASS, sorry - Sexual Assault Support Services. Will you commit to funding SASS appropriately so that it can deliver two recommendations in particular within the commission of inquiry - that is recommendation 21.4, which would be to reduce wait times to a minimum of four weeks for victim-survivors by June 2026, and also recommendation 21.83(a), which is reduce wait times for children and young people who have engaged with harmful sexual behaviours and their families to a minimum of two weeks by June 2026.

Ms HOWLETT - Waitlists are certainly an issue and it's something that we take seriously. What we're seeing is waitlists are nationally an issue - it's not just our jurisdiction here - and we need to do better with our waitlists.

The government is not passive, and we're taking action across every part of our system to ensure that victims are supported. What we're seeing is more people recognising violence earlier and reaching out a lot sooner. This reflects a rising trust in the system, the reduced stigma, and stronger awareness as well. That's something that we've been working hard to achieve, and it's a positive achievement. Courtney, I don't know if you'd like to add to that.

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Ms HURWORTH - First, I want to put on record how amazing Shirleyann Varney is, and Kathryn Fordyce, who is the head of our north and north-west region service. They are incredible women and I feel really privileged - and I know that the minister meets with them and has the same level of uplift. They're amazing, inspiring leaders in our community. I just wanted to say that.

We're in weekly contact with SASS and Laurel House about what they're facing. The government has substantially increased funding to Laurel House and SASS for both core therapeutic services and harmful sexual behaviours. The funding has increased by about 200 per cent over the last three years. However, we recognise that to achieve what the commission of inquiry sets in terms of a two-week wait time is going to require looking further at how we deliver those services -

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Tourism, Hospitality and Events. Thank you, members. Thank you, minister.

The Committee suspended from 7.13 p.m. to 7.19 p.m.

DIVISION 12 and 13

Department of State Growth and Tourism Tasmania

CHAIR - The time now being 7.19 p.m. the scrutiny of the Tourism, Hospitality and Events portfolio will now begin. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table, names and positions, please, for the benefit of Hansard.

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Chair. To my right I have Craig Limkin, Secretary, Department of State Growth, Brett Stewart, Deputy Secretary, Creative Industries, Sport and Visitor Economy, Department of State Growth, and to my left I have Sarah Kingston Clark, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism. Tasmania. Can I make some opening remarks?

CHAIR - Yes, please.

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you to the members of the committee for your time.

Chair, I feel privileged to take on the Tourism, Hospitality and Events portfolio. Tasmania's visitor economy is one of our state's success stories, contributing 10.8 per cent gross share of our state product. Results from the Tasmanian Visitor Survey showed there were 1.35 million visitors to Tasmania in the 12 months to June 2025, an increase of 3.6 per cent from the previous year. These visitors spend \$3.6 billion, which was also up 3.6 per cent on the previous year and up 41.7 per cent on 2029. It was Tasmania's second highest annual visitor spend.

Tourism supports 50,800, or one-in-six Tasmanian jobs, making it one of our most valuable sectors and drivers of our economy. Through Tourism Tasmania and the Department of State Growth, we are working collaboratively with government and industry partners across the visitor economy ecosystem to continue delivering actions in the 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy.

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Chair, the interim Budget is delivering for our tourism, hospitality and events sector. Our events strategy 2023-2027 continues to deliver a strong return on investment to the state and the Budget continues its support for events.

Events drive visitation to Tasmania, especially through the quieter months, building local community and culture and supporting our tourism and hospitality businesses. In the 2024-25 financial year, the government supported a total of 155 events. This support brought over 129,200 visitors to Tasmania and generated over 742,700 bed nights.

The Budget also provides funding over 2025-26 and 2026-27 for important major partnerships including the Hawthorn Football Club agreement renewal. This budget also includes ongoing support for the hard-working hospitality business operators across our state. In 2024, we committed \$8.4 million over three years to Hospitality Tasmania through the hospitality 2030 strategy to deliver initiatives to build and grow this job-rich sector. These include the great customer experience, HOSPO Health and programs focusing on business sustainability and workforce development like the women's leadership scholarship program. There is continued support for the Tasmanian Hospitality and Tourism Academy to address skills and labour shortages.

The Budget also includes \$10 million for tourism marketing for the next financial year. This provides Tourism Tasmania the certainty to secure critical media contracts to deliver the award-winning Come Down For Air and off-season campaigns.

The Budget also enables us to deliver on our tourism and hospitality support package. This package includes the successful Eat Local, Stay Local program. Since the program resumed, more than 19,000 voucher claims have been paid with recipients spending more than \$5.7 million on top of their voucher amounts.

Finally, Chair, the Macquarie Point Precinct project will generate huge opportunities for our visitor economy. This project has received ongoing support from the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania, Hospitality Tasmania and Business Events Tasmania and I thank them for their support and strong unwavering advocacy. I acknowledge Business Events Tasmania CEO, Marnie Craig, who is here at the back of the room today, for her support. This project will drive new investment and deliver flow-on benefits right across Tasmania's community, including, most importantly, in regional areas. Chair, I welcome the committee's questions.

Ms DOW - In the Tasmanian Liberals' media release from the Premier during the most recent election we had, the Premier said:

A re-elected Liberal government will also give our world-class industries the certainty and flexibility they need to grow and innovate by investing an additional \$38 million into tourism marketing funding over the next four years, as included in the 2025-26 Budget.

Why is there only \$10 million of funding in one financial year in the interim Budget?

Ms HOWLETT - As you know, this is an election that we didn't need to have. You took us to an election.

Ms DOW - You made this commitment, minister.

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Ms HOWLETT - It's important to note that this is being treated as an interim budget to provide supply at the expiration of the current supply arrangements. This Budget contains significant investment in our visitor economy -

Ms Dow - It's only \$10 million of marketing funding.

Ms HOWLETT - Are you going to allow me to finish, Ms Dow? Funding priorities across tourism, hospitality and events not in this Budget will be considered as part of the 2026-27 budget development process. Of course, I will continue to fight for investment in this industry - it's a very important industry, including through destination marketing, as the return on investment numbers speak for themselves.

Ms DOW - It's actually one of the state's most important industries.

Ms HOWLETT - It certainly is.

Ms DOW - Will you commit today, then, on the record, to ensuring that that funding commitment is maintained in the outer years of the next budget, in the May budget?

Ms HOWLETT - As I stated before, this is an interim budget.

Ms DOW - I'm talking about the next budget, which will be handed down in May next year. Will you maintain this commitment that the Premier made at the 2025 election to have that funding into the out years?

Ms HOWLETT - As I said, it is a very important industry. The Budget contains significant investment in the visitor economy. I will be advocating for the tourism, hospitality and event sectors in the next budget.

Ms DOW - Did you advocate for them in this Budget?

Ms HOWLETT - I certainly did. This was an interim budget.

Ms DOW - This isn't even the \$12 million that was committed in the last budget for that financial year.

Ms HOWLETT - As I said, I will continue to advocate for this very important sector.

Ms BADGER - Our tourism industry has a collective goal to be net zero in the coming years, which is a fantastic ambition to have. At the moment, we've got other goals that are not necessarily complementary to this, such as looking at the increase in caravanning tourism; we're still lacking EV charging infrastructure in regional areas; the number of cruise ships we currently have coming in: none of these are necessarily on the path to getting to the climate goals that the tourism sector wants.

When are we going to see a set plan that actually shows, goal by goal, how the tourism industry is going to achieve the carbon footprint it's aiming for?

Ms HOWLETT - I thank you for your question. I will pass you to Sarah, the CEO, in a moment. One thing I do want to put on record is that for every dollar spent in tourism, a further

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83 cents is generated to our visitor economy. In the year ending June 2025, visitors spent \$3 billion directly into Tasmania's economy. That is up more than \$1 billion from the same time in 2019. That's something we should be celebrating.

The government recognises the important role tourism has in all regions of our state. That's why we continue our commitment to work with industry through the T21 partnerships in delivering Tasmania's 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy. Sarah, I know you would like to speak to that.

Ms CLARK - Thank you for the question. It's a really important one. As outlined in the 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy, key direction 1 is to reduce emissions and improve environmental sustainability practices. In the publicly available report, which shows the things that we have done in the past two years, it does state that we have a program which has been delivered. We've funded the Tourism Industry Council to look at reducing emissions. We've had 101 businesses enrolled in that program to date and 44 tonnes of emissions offset so far. So, that's one of the important pieces.

We've also, in partnership, with Tourism Industry Council Tasmania (TICT), delivered 12 workshops to industries to promote electric vehicle tourism, and there has been an increase in electric vehicle chargers around the state. So, it's most definitely a focus as well for us.

There's definitely a number of initiatives outlined both in the 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy for future and also shows some of the things that we have delivered so far.

Ms BADGER - Thank you. I have read the publicly available documents. I guess we're after a bit more detail of how and where the emission reductions so far have come from and the trajectory of how they're going to continue coming down, be it on the same course or other initiatives that you're going to have. Is that data that's backing the high-level statistics in the report that you're talking about available? Are we able to take those on notice and get them tabled?

Ms CLARK - Yes, we can definitely provide the information around the emissions reduction program in more detail. We're also going through a process at the moment, as we go into the third year of the Visitor Economy Strategy, to reset the next three years as well so that we can look at those really important targets to focus on.

Ms HOWLETT - The TICT has also received funding. They've received \$1.56 million funding over three years through State Growth to deliver a greenhouse gas emission reduction program for businesses to help Tasmania become a leading destination for climate-conscious travellers and identify critical challenges for industry in delivering on strategy objectives, with a focus on the increasing cost of insurance and research. Possible statewide solutions as well. And to maintain and grow the Tourism Ambassador program. Also, to engage young and emerging tourism professionals to create awareness of career opportunities in tourism and ensure standards of tourism industry development and strategic planning continue to meet industry demands.

CHAIR - I remind members to please direct all questions to or through the minister.

Prof RAZAY - Minister, last summer was a wonderful summer in Tasmania because we had nearly half-a-million tourists in three months. The problem of having too many people

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overcrowding our natural parks and tourists' unawareness of our state's unpredictable weather has impacted our wilderness area and drone emergency service resources to rescue visitors.

I know we are focused on boosting tourist numbers. What is the government doing to ensure responsible tourism and better educate our visitors so that there is minimal impact on our national parks, wildlife and emergency service resources?

Ms HOWLETT - That's a really good question. I did go to Mt Field National Park the other week and took particular interest in the visitor notification they had and the different languages it was in, with the QR code. Unfortunately, we have had a couple of tragic incidences in our parks. I have certainly had those discussions.

We want walkers to get out and enjoy bushwalking in our national parks and reserves but we want them to do it safely. The Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) provides information in a range of ways to help walkers choose a walk that is suited to their knowledge, skills and ability so that they have a safe and enjoyable experience. Information accurately describing the walks, along with extensive safety information, is provided at the Parks and Wildlife website. This is also supported by information in our major parks provided by Parks and Wildlife staff in visitor centres, through signage that conveys safety information and hazard warnings, and through the walker registration program. Parks also run an annual winter walker safety campaign through its social media channels, which educates the public on winter walker safety information.

Summer walker safety communications are also prepared and is currently ongoing. Parks manage over 1800 kilometres of walking tracks in Tasmania ranging from easy walks to inexperienced walkers, to much more challenging multi-day walks suited to highly experienced, well-equipped and capable walkers. We recognise differing motivations that walkers have, with some choosing opportunities that will challenge their ability, but safety is a concern.

I know Tourism Tas has a focus and have been undertaking some comprehensive reviews of safety messaging across the Discover Tasmania website, the app and social media channels in collaboration with Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Services. This aims to ensure that visitor safety and emergency information, including guidance about the preparation required for bushwalking and outdoor activities in Tasmania, that needs to remain current and up-to-date.

As I said, Tourism Tasmania works closely with Tasmanian fire services to ensure tourism operators and peak bodies are provided with seasonal bushfire outlooks, and communicate important emergency information to operators and visitors in the event of a critical incident through the industry newsletter and communication channels. The agency has collaborated with the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management to produce bushfire safety posters for visitors in English and Mandarin to promote the TasALERT website app as well.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. We have to keep going. Mr Di Falco, do you have a question?

Mr Di FALCO - Thank you, Chair. Minister, I'm sure that you're familiar with the blue and gold tourism road signs. My understanding is that you are required to be a TICT member to receive one of these signs. If that's a case, how do you justify businesses struggling in this

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economic climate to maintain an elective membership to receive a sign that is paid for and maintained by the taxpayer.

Ms HOWLETT - That's a very good question, Mr Di Falco. I will refer to the secretary of the department to add more about that sign.

Mr LIMKIN - We do not have information today on this. I'm very happy to look into Mr Di Falco's question, if you're comfortable to take it on notice, for us to get an answer for you.

Ms HOWLETT - I'm happy to take it on notice.

CHAIR - Just a reminder, please give it to the secretary, and you have to put it in writing.

Ms HOWLETT - Neatly.

CHAIR - Yes, neatly. Ms Badger's writing is not too bad. It's a lot better than mine.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, my question is around business events (BET) and we know that business events are an important part of Tasmanian visitor economy. Can you explain the benefits associated with the continued support of this sector?

Ms HOWLETT - I thank Mr Shelton for the question. Business events generate a significant return on investment. They attract high-yield visitors and bring in almost \$200 million in direct total spend annually. At the same time, business events provide the opportunity to build our state's brand in high-end international corporate markets. That is why the Tasmanian government is committed to investing in and supporting a sustainable and successful events and business sector, as outlined in key direction 5 of the 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy.

Business events is a specialist business event marketing and business organisation and according to BET on average, business events attendees spend between \$820 to \$1347 per delegate per day in Tasmania. In addition to this, 28 per cent of these visitors bring family and friends to experience the state. Delegates often extend their stay on an average of 4.7 nights beyond the conference that they have attended.

Business Events Tasmania has estimated the proposed Macquarie Point Stadium could attract an additional 110 conferences to Hobart and an extra 140,000 visitors. These annual revenue possibilities for such growth were in excess of \$100 million. Currently, the largest conference centre is housed within the Hotel Grand Chancellor, which has a capacity of 1100 with Hobart hosting 150 conferences annually.

Recognising the key role BET plays in Tasmania's visitor economy, the Tasmanian government provides ongoing operational funding to support the organisation in securing business events for the state. Under grant funding arrangements, \$5 million has been allocated to BET for operational funding over five years to 2027-28, which includes a 2024 election commitment of \$1.2 million over two years.

In 2019-20, the Tasmanian government established the Business Event Attraction Fund (BEAF). BEAF is designed to help Tasmanian compete with other Australian jurisdictions

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when bidding for national and international business events has been managed by BET since 2021. Since 2019, the Tasmanian government has provided a total of \$8 billion to BEAF. Under the current grant funding arrangement for BEAF, \$6.3 million has been allocated until 2025-26, which includes the 2024 election commitment of \$3.8 million over two years.

In conclusion, I acknowledge the work done by the Business Events Tasmania Board and CEO Marnie Craig and her team. They're a shining light in the growth of our visitor economy and we certainly know how very important business events are to the Tasmanian visitor economy.

Ms DOW - I'm glad that we got to that. Minister, your government has created so much uncertainty for the tourism industry when it comes to the *Spirits* ferry fiasco and now you've cut funding to Tourism Tasmania's marketing budget. How do you think that they are going to maintain their relationships with the airlines, with their marketing partnerships, if there's uncertainty about their future funding? Doesn't it put our tourism industry at risk?

Ms HOWLETT - We are getting on with the job and we're backing our tourism and our hospitality industries. Despite your constant negativity, we're on track to deliver commitments under the tourism and hospitality support package, including the *Spirit* preparedness fund. We've delivered most of the components of the package. This includes subsidised passenger fares to boost demand and provide for additional day sailings, air and hire car packages.

Ms DOW - Point of order, Chair. My question was specifically about Tourism Tasmania's ability to continue its partnerships with its marketing partners and the airline industry. I will have other questions about the *Spirit* preparedness fund, but I'm pretty keen for the minister to answer this.

CHAIR - I believe the minister was getting to that, Ms Dow.

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you. It would be nice to see you talk up Tasmania in a positive way, Ms Dow.

A member - Just answer the question

Ms HOWLETT - Well it would be, and you too actually.

We have delivered on our election commitment to recommence Eat Local, Stay Local voucher program in the first week of the re-elected Liberal government. Eat Local, Stay Local is giving the Tasmanian tourism and hospitality industry a valuable boost while also helping with the cost of living with our families. Since the program resumed, more than 19,800 vouchers claims have been paid, and of the claims paid voucher recipients have spent more than \$5.7 million in addition to the voucher amounts. This proves that the vouchers work. They're helping to stimulate our economy and back in our businesses.

As a primer to the voucher scheme, Tourism Tasmania led an intrastate marketing campaign to showcase what's on offer and encourage more Tasmanians to enjoy what our state has to offer.

Ms DOW - The question was about their future funding and their ability to continue their partnerships in marketing and with the airlines. You haven't answered the question, minister.

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Ms HOWLETT - We've not cut destination marketing funding at all, Ms Dow. In fact, under the -

Ms DOW - You broke your election commitment.

Ms HOWLETT - Are you going to listen to me or are you going to continue to interject?

CHAIR - Minister, please.

Ms HOWLETT - In fact, under the Tasmanian Liberal government, funding for destination marketing has continued to increase. From financial year 2022-23 and 2023-24 we provided \$9 million in marketing funding per year. Last financial year we delivered \$10 million of marketing funding, and in this interim budget, we will deliver that same amount for 2025-26 and this is committed in 2026-27.

Ms DOW - The other commitment that your government reneged on, minister, was to have the Premier as the minister for tourism. Do you know why that changed?

Ms HOWLETT - Obviously the Premier is a very busy premier. I think it's wonderful and I feel very privileged to be the Minister for Tourism, Ms Dow, and I have more time to attend various functions right around the state and go to events that the Premier would not have had the time to do so. I feel I can support the industry incredibly well, and the industry certainly has the backing from the Premier.

Ms DOW - Thank you for clarifying that. Minister, the support package - which measures have been funded in this interim bill?

Ms BADGER - That's the fourth question, but I will take an extra when it's my turn.

CHAIR - Ms Dow.

Ms HOWLETT - Could you repeat the question?

Ms DOW - Which measures in the *Spirit* support package are funded - obviously they weren't funded in the supply bill that came to the parliament - but which are funded in this interim Budget?

Ms HOWLETT - As I stated before, most of the initiatives from the package announced have already been delivered. The line item amount partially reflects this, and the department has used existing resources and supply appropriation to continue delivering on the initiatives. We're working with the sector continue to thrive, with all sectors in the tourism industry. Secretary, would you like to add more to that?

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, minister. There were some supplementary appropriations in previous years that have been rolled over to enable us to continue the delivery of that package. There is also new money in this budget that's in the budget papers. A number of those supplementary appropriations that were delivered in the 2024-25 budget have been rolled forward into the future, so you're not going to see those in those numbers either.

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My view is that I have enough funds to deliver the commitments the government have made in the 2025-26 budget, which is what parliament appropriates each year.

Ms DOW - The *Spirit* preparedness fund is in there?

Mr LIMKIN - It is in there and it is currently still being assessed. We're on track to finalise that consistent with the government's commitments.

Ms BADGER - Minister, you made mentioned before of climate-conscious travellers and of course regenerative tourism and those sorts of opportunities taking off elsewhere around the world. Tasmania has ample opportunity for such things here through birding tourism and tall tree tourism. There are two pretty major proposals or market segments that are coming into the state, being low-impact and high-yielding. Are you across the bikepacking proposal, the Tasmanian traverse, have you been briefed on that? Also, have you been briefed on the southwest Dark Sky Sanctuary proposal?

Ms HOWLETT - I've certainly had discussions around dark sky tourism, and I know the CEO of Tourism Tasmania would like to speak to that.

Ms CLARK - Dark sky tourism is a really fast-growing visitor experience here and we've got a lot of those experiences around the state, both from our natural environment and also some that tourism operators have created as well. We are promoting Tasmania as a destination where you can experience a beautiful dark sky experience.

Ms BADGER - What about specific to that south-west sanctuary? Also noting you haven't yet touched on the bikepacking proposal, the Tasmania traverse. Are you across either of those specific proposals?

Ms CLARK - From a dark sky sanctuary perspective, my understanding is it's quite expensive to create a dark sky sanctuary and to be accredited. Already we are able to offer those sorts of experiences with no additional investment.

Ms BADGER - That's not quite right. A lot of the initial expenditure, particularly on that south-west proposal, has already been done by volunteers in lieu of the government doing it; acknowledging that it's not a tourism portfolio, it's through Parks. Is Tourism Tasmania willing to endorse that, given that Tasmanian community members have gone out night after night to monitor dark skies to do the science to back this proposal up? Proper accreditation would give Tasmania the brand credibility and the accountability that we were properly protecting that night environment, which has incredible cultural significance to the Palawa people. It's their origin story that's told down there. Would you back that proposal to give Tasmania's brand credibility?

Ms CLARK - I definitely commend the advocacy work that's been done in that area and we would absolutely support promotion of dark-sky tourism and experience as well. I will leave the accreditation question to Parks and Wildlife.

Ms HOWLETT - It is a question for Parks and Wildlife. There are no plans to quarantine areas as dark-sky sanctuaries. I recognise that Tasmania's natural environment is one of our greatest assets and we want to welcome more interstate and overseas visitors to enjoy a unique world-class tourism experience that is compatible with the values of our natural areas. Our

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government believes tourism offerings are an excellent way to preserve, protect, and promote greater use and advocacy for these areas.

Through our tourism expressions of interest process, we invite submissions in and/or near our national parks, reserves, and Crown lands. We want to see creative and innovative ideas that help to deliver social, environmental, and economic benefits that were not previously considered possible in Tasmania. Our visitor experiences are, of course, the envy of the world.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, I wasn't going to talk about football, but you mentioned how the Macquarie Point stadium will boost tourism. I would like to say that one of the best investments in tourism has been the partnership with the Hawthorn Football Club, which brought in \$20 million to \$30 million to boost the economy of the north. That has helped hospitality, hotels, restaurants, and all that. What I am saying is that, unfortunately, the commitment of playing four games a year will expire at the end of next year. What I feel is that it has worked so well for 24 years. All we needed was an investment of \$4.5 million in four games to bring \$20 million to \$30 million a year. I feel this was the most successful investment. Can't we maintain it? I believe you can have two teams in Tasmania because the support of the fans has been enormous. It will surprise everyone.

Ms HOWLETT - I acknowledge the importance of your question. Chair, we know that once the Tasmania Devils take to the field, the landscape in Tasmania will be different from a football perspective. We recognise the valuable role Hawthorn plays not only in football in Tasmania, but more broadly in our local communities and especially the value to northern Tasmania. The government is committed to working with Hawthorn Football Club and discussing what the partnership looks like beyond 2028. Work has already started on that. Our election commitment is hosting a minimum of six AFL games per year post 2027 at UTAS Stadium. What it means is that UTAS Stadium will keep hosting matches and it will see more AFL content than ever before as the Devils take to the field.

As the Premier has said, we work collaboratively with the Devils, the AFL, and the City of Launceston to secure more AFL content in 2028 and 2029. Final outcomes around Hawthorn post-2027 will be subjected to the future negotiations between the Department of State Growth and key stakeholders.

As I said, preliminary discussions are under way. We always knew there would be some changes going forward as we transition to having our own Tasmania Devils football team. This is reflected, for example, in the removal of naming rights and the Tasmanian branding under the new agreement with Hawthorn in 2027. It's also part of the important transition to having our own football team. I'm not sure if the secretary would like to comment any further in relation to that?

Mr LIMKIN - No, apart from just saying, minister, that the conversations between Hawthorne, Stadiums Tas and the department and Launceston City Council continue, and they're productive. I look forward to seeing them completed for government consideration as quickly as possible.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, payroll tax is another major issue within the hospitality industry. It is often seen as a barrier to expand employment. The Treasurer outlined how crucial it is to the revenue for the state. What measures are you taking to represent the concerns of the industry with the Treasurer?

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Ms HOWLETT - Payroll tax is one that is often raised with me not from tourism, hospitality businesses, but from businesses as I travel around the state, and that is a discussion that I have ongoing with the Treasurer.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, Tasmania's 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy states that to manage future visit demands, we must attract and retain more people into our workforce across all levels of the industry. The strategy also commits to attracting a skilled workforce, creating jobs for Tasmanians and meeting the industry needs. Can you tell the committee how the Tasmanian government is investing in industry-led training and schools for our visitor economy sector?

Ms HOWLETT - Our workforce in Tasmania's visitor economy is our greatest asset and the Tasmanian government is investing in training and that is fit for purpose and informed by industry feedback, including from the Tourism and Hospitality Workforce Advisory Committee. This is helping to supply job-ready workers for our sector and we're also investing in a dynamic and responsive vocational training sector with public and private sector training organisations and this is ensuring that providers achieve outcomes that meet the industry needs. And I want to acknowledge my colleague, minister Felix Ellis, for establishing a school for the visitor economy through TasTAFE and I'm looking forward to delivering for the sector.

In addition to the work the school is delivering, I'm very proud of the work of Tasmanian Hospitality and Tourism Academy, formerly known as the Visitor Experience Training or VXT. Since 2021 the government has provided over \$4 million to support the academy for the establishment and operation of the organisation. The academy is an industry-led organisation that has been built for the purpose of training a hospitality and tourism workforce to deliver the Tasmanian experience that we all love. Training through the academy is delivered primarily through non-accreditation industry-designed short courses that reflect real-world hospitality and tourism skills. These are often hosted within partner businesses leveraging in-house facilities and expertise as a form of industry co-investment. This approach has enhanced both the fit-for-purpose nature of courses and cost-effectiveness of delivery. Courses are completed by targeted accredited training in core areas such as RSA and food safety which is supported by employer-engagement activities that provide participants with a direct link to potential job opportunities.

As of the 11 November, the academy has enrolled a total of 705 learners across 72 individual course offerings in 2025 with continued delivery plan for the remainder of the year and this data reflects strong regional reach and a clear demand in short, job-ready courses. The academy's model has sustained delivery momentum and exceeded its reach, particularly across regional areas, reinforcing its value as an industry-led solution to workforce development in Tasmania's visitor economy.

Mr MITCHELL - Minister, I understand 58,000 vouchers were issued under the Eat Local, Stay Local scheme and that of this week and, as you said today 38,200 remain unredeemed with just over a week remaining for eligibility. Over and above the \$100 per voucher face value, what has been the cost to the government of developing, marketing and rolling out this scheme?

Ms HOWLETT - I do note that in addition to the \$100 voucher spent, \$5.7 million has gone back into our economy -

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Mr MITCHELL - Minister, I didn't ask about the supposed economic impact. I've asked about the cost to the government of developing, marketing and rolling out the scheme.

Ms HOWLETT - I will see if the secretary has that information for you, Mr Mitchell.

Mr LIMKIN - We don't have that information here. We will try to get it before the end of the session. Otherwise, if you're comfortable, we're happy to take it on notice.

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

Ms HOWLETT - If we can't provide it by the end of the hearing, yes I will.

Mr STEWART - We haven't finished administering it yet.

Ms HOWLETT - No, that's the problem. Yes.

Mr MITCHELL - Hm? Sorry?

Mr STEWART - Minister, just to add, the scheme is still rolling out. We're still administering the scheme, and will be for some time. We won't be able to provide a total cost. We will be able to provide a cost up to a certain date.

Mr MITCHELL - Up to today? Can -

Ms HOWLETT - Do we have recent figures in real-time of redeemed vouchers?

Mr STEWART - We do.

Ms HOWLETT - We do? Excellent.

So, our claims are up. As of 17 November, vouchers issued were 58,271. Claims lodged are 24,604. They have increased since the number that I stated in my opening statement. What's interesting is the average spend per claim is \$388. That's important to our tourism hospitality businesses across the state.

Mr MITCHELL - Minister, I'm a little concerned. I must say that you've given information to the parliament that is incorrect. I mean, you've been given a document today by, I imagine, a department official which has a certain figure in it. However, you've given different information to the parliament, which has less than that. I'm concerned that you didn't have the full information in your opening statement to this committee.

Ms HOWLETT - Well, the vouchers - this is a point in time, and there will be a new figure tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that as well, as the claims are lodged. So, that's going to continue to change, Mr Mitchell. The amount that I provided in my opening statement was -

Mr MITCHELL - The amount hasn't changed since you gave your introductory statement.

Ms HOWLETT - Well, the claims lodged have.

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Mr MITCHELL - No?

Ms HOWLETT - The claims lodged certainly have. The total economic impact has changed as well to \$7.68 million. That's also increased.

Mr MITCHELL - I don't want to belabour the point, minister, but you gave your introductory statement less than an hour ago, and you stated a certain figure. That document has been sitting in that pile over there while you gave your statement. You gave one figure to the parliament, and there's a different figure in that document.

Ms HOWLETT - This is the current number and, as I said, this number will change tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that -

Mr MITCHELL - But that is not the number you gave in your introductory statement to the parliament. Do you think it's important that information you give the parliament should be as accurate as it can be?

CHAIR - Mr Mitchell, the minister has corrected the record.

Ms DOW - Minister, why does the events funding drop off in the out-years of this budget? Surely events tourism is an essential part of our economy, particularly across the regions. Why has funding dropped off in the out-years?

Ms HOWLETT - I will find that correct information from the deputy secretary.

This, as I've said multiple times before, is an interim Budget and does not provide funding for events into the future. As of 11 November 2025, the Tasmanian government will provide over \$25 million in 2025-26 to events with an existing agreement, and funding over the forward Estimates 2027-28 and 2028-29 will be worked through and revised according to government priorities, existing commitments, and the type of event and sponsorship arrangement in place.

I think it's important to understand that grant programs managed by the department are all competitive, and they're competitive by design to ensure that the best outcomes are delivered for our state. I will ask the department to comment further on this question.

Mr STEWART - Thank you, minister. The only additional information would be that we enter into a range of different grant deed arrangements with event providers. Some of those are one-off one-year arrangements; they're quite simple and easy to budget for. Others are multi-year arrangements with a schedule of payments through those years that can be quite long and complex. We provide that information to Treasury through our budgeting process. That is reflected somewhat in the numbers, albeit the minister's comments around this being an interim budget are relevant, and particularly for the last couple of years of those forward Estimates we do want to maintain a pretty significant competitive tension in the event space.

It's relatively common for governments to not signal how much money is going to be available in a competitive fund particularly in out-years where we want event providers to be innovative and to really think about their offering and how they run those events, but also how they fund them. So, that's the approach we take.

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Ms DOW - It's interesting in the other hearings that we've had today, for example, I've been in Infrastructure this morning, in the out-years of minister Vincent's interim Budget, he's got funding allocated across certain areas, across different line items. It would appear that in your budget, the explanation is that it's an interim Budget, but there's an interim Budget for every minister across each of the portfolios and others haven't had the same difficulties that you have, minister, in providing that information. I want you to rule out whether there's going to be cuts to the events budget in the out-years in the upcoming May budget please.

Ms HOWLETT - I think the deputy secretary has answered your question. As I said, funding over the forward Estimates 2027-28 and 2028-29 will be worked through and revised according to government priorities, existing commitments, the type of event and sponsorship agreements that are in place. It's important to understand that grant programs managed by the departments are all competitive by design to ensure that the best outcomes are delivered for the State of Tasmania. I think the deputy secretary outlined that before and answered your question.

Ms BADGER - Minister, how much of the Tourism Tasmania marketing budget was spent on influencers?

Ms HOWLETT - That's a really good question and I don't have those exact figures. I'm sure Sarah would like to speak about the influencers and the great impact they have to on our visitor economy. Thank you, Sarah.

Ms BADGER - If it's possible to have a breakdown - not necessarily now - but happy to take it on notice, in terms of what segments money for influencers was directed to. For example, social media, podcasts, lifestyle, that sort of thing.

CHAIR - We will confirm with the minister whether she's happy to take that last bit on notice.

Ms CLARK - We spend a very small amount - it would be less than 1 per cent of our budget - on influencers. We've definitely seen over the last couple of years the increase in influencer marketing and it's now being treated as a channel as such. I think consumers are used to seeing the influencer message and they're still connecting to that. Our target audience is around positive-impact travellers. We choose our influencer audience that we work with that aligns with our key customer base and you can see that information online around our key customer segments, but we spend very little on actual paid influencer activity.

Ms HOWLETT - Chair, can I add something to a further question?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms HOWLETT - Mr Mitchell, I was absolutely correct in what I stated earlier. Since the program resumed, more than 19,000 voucher claims have been paid, with recipients spending more than \$5.7 million on top of their vouchers claimed. The figure that I read out earlier is lodged. They have been lodged, but they are not yet to be claimed.

Mr MITCHELL - Thank you, minister.

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Ms BADGER - Just back to where we were, and to clarify on that question. Is the breakdown available online of how much funding goes to which one of those influencer segments, or can I take that on notice, just to confirm?

Ms CLARK - Yes, we're happy to provide that as long as the minister is happy with that.

Ms HOWLETT - I'm very happy to do that.

Ms BADGER - Excellent, thank you. My second question is, minister, Forestry Tasmania has about \$8 million in an annual line budget - I will confess that I haven't checked the interim budget to see how much is in that continuing on - but that's specifically for them to spend money on tourism and enabling community access to different places. That is, the land tenure is under their ownership, so, that's signage safe as far as possible, equitable access to these areas, but the Tasmanian community hasn't seen a lot of new spaces that have been opened up or shared. There hasn't been a lot of new signage put up in a lot of areas for a long time. There are roads particularly around the Styx Tall Trees area, which I'm sure you would appreciate as a growing area for tourism, particularly as we're seeing more people head to Mount Field.

What's your input to that as Tourism minister? What's your commitment to have input to make sure that that funding is being invested into key areas that align with Tourism Tasmania's values?

Ms HOWLETT - I thank the honourable member for her question. There are a number of iconic tourism venues, including the the Tahune Airwalk, Hollybank and Derby Mountain bike trails which are located on or adjacent to forestry land. In fact, for Tasmania to thrive, all industries need to work in harmony for the benefit of our community's economy and our environment. The Tasmanian government continues to support a balanced approach towards a management of our public forest and tourism.

Opportunities to visit the state's big trees are provided on the Discover Tasmania website as promoting commercial tourism experiences like the Tahune Airwalk, Giant Tree Expeditions and Hollybank Wilderness Adventures alongside protected areas like the Tarkine and the Tall Tree Walk at Mountfield National Park, Evercreech Forest Reserve, Styx Tall Trees Conservation Areas and Lily and Dip Falls. To cater for these visitors and manage sustainable visitation, Tourism Tasmania works closely with Parks and Wildlife Services and regional tourism organisations to promote safe and accessible wilderness experiences for travellers, including short national walks in our parks.

Sarah, I'm not sure if you've had any discussions, but it really is a question for minister Ellis as far as signage is concerned. I note that we have regular meetings on what we can and what we can't improve and I'm happy to take feedback.

Prof RAZAY - Honourable minister, northern Tasmania prides itself as a wine region and there has been a major boost of our tourism. Most of our vineyards are built by smaller families. Yet, over the last 10 to 15 years, there has been major changes in the wine industry. We saw how big wine industries come and take over some of our vineyards and many small vineyards couldn't survive, and some of them turn to only growing grapes. This is not healthy for the long-term future of the wine industry in Tasmania, partly because small vineyards lack resources to market themselves and attract tourists to their own vineyard. I feel governments

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can play a big part in bringing tourists to all the small vineyards and your marketing resources can be of a great help to them.

Ms HOWLETT - Professor Razay, I thank you for your important question. Our wine producers and our cellar doors are very important part of Tasmania and our visitor economy. We know just how well our Tasmanian brand sits, not just on the Australian market, but on the international market as far as wine is concerned.

I thank Sheralee Davies from Wine Tasmania and the incredible work that she does. We know that there is always more work that we can do to get people out there visiting our cellar doors and our vineyards, and experiencing our wonderful wine that Tasmania produces. Sarah, would you like to speak to what we're doing as far as tourism to our vineyard operators?

Ms CLARK - That's a great comment. It's such an important part of the visitor experience and there are some incredible wineries right across Tasmania where visitors can go to their cellar door and do wine tastings and understand the agricultural side of the wine experience. We work very closely with Wine Tasmania and I know they're doing some great work there.

We also promote the wine experience. We have content on our website, we push that through our social media channels, and we also have journalists from wine publications visit Tasmania and write about Tasmania as an amazing wine destination. We've seen the best Chardonnay in the world from Tolpuddle in the Coal River, which features in our our campaigns. We've also seen sparkling wine in Tasmania really be featured. I've recently been in the US and used those two examples through trade relationships as well. It's a really important part of our our marketing.

Ms HOWLETT - Not just our wine, of course, our gin and our whisky - we can't forget about our spirits as well.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, regional accommodation in our electorate of Lyons is a major concern, particularly for tourism operators finding staff. How has your proposed short-term levy been received by regional operators?

Ms HOWLETT - Thank you, Mr Di Falco. In regional Tasmania, there is a real shortage of accommodation, not only for our workers, but also for our visitors coming to Tasmania. Short-stay accommodation can play a critical role, particularly in regional Tasmania. I will say I've had discussions with our short-stay providers and a 5 per cent levy has not been applied yet. That is due to commence, I think, by 30 June.

We recognise the demands of the industry, particularly in the summer period through our visitors, and of course when, in our agricultural sector as well, it's a critical part. The levy's proposed design draws on proven models in Victoria and the ACT, which both utilise a levy. The approach ensures efficient use of existing legislation and framework to provide it that's necessarily compliant. Deputy secretary or secretary, would you like to add more to that?

Mr LIMKIN - No, minister.

Ms HOWLETT - The levy won't commence until 1 July 2026, but I want to say that from a tourism-agricultural perspective, short-term accommodation is critical, particularly in

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in regional and rural parts of Tasmania, and also in suburban areas as well, when we have a Hawthorn game on at UTAS.

Mr LIMKIN - I've got an answer to Mr Mitchell's question. The total cost of setting up the voucher project, excluding our internal staff costs, because obviously that's all captured here, is approximately \$128,000. Of that, \$40,000 relates to promotion, and that's split over two years; \$60,000 relates to bringing on some temporary labour to support, or temporary contracts for staff to help with the hump of the delivery of this program; and then \$26,000 relates to other matters such as office materials, ICT, stationery and office supplies for printing and those types of matters. That's what sits in the 'other'.

CHAIR - The time for scrutiny has expired. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for the Environment at 9.00 a.m. tomorrow. Thank you, minister.

The Committee adjourned at 8.19 p.m.