

Legislative Council

Hansard

Wednesday 12 November 2025

The President, Mr Farrell, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[excerpt...]

MOTION

Noting - Budget Papers 2025-26 and Appropriation Bills (No. 1 and No. 2)

[12.38 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, well, here we are again. Take two in fact, the second time we've contemplated a state Budget this year.

Ms Forrest - Did you pull out your last speech?

Ms WEBB - Actually, what I can do right at the outset of my contribution is indicate how proud I am of this Chamber actually, and how edifying it's been to listen to budget reply speeches across yesterday and today. Particularly, I pay respect to my independent colleagues in this Chamber who have made excellent contributions on this Budget. Insightful, informed, passionate, clearly demonstrating their care for their community and their genuine desire to be electoral representatives of them in this place, this important house of review. I say that noting that there's still contributions yet to come from other members that I'm not able to reflect on yet, but I'm sure will be excellent.

It's really fantastic to see how engaged and forensic members have been in their reflections on this Budget and I appreciate the effort that's gone into that, particularly I'm noting here, the member for Murchison, who's just spoken on the Budget, but also from yesterday, the member for Elwick, the member for Montgomery and the member for Huon, who all provided very comprehensive contributions and really dug in to the detail of what we're looking at here, and it's not pretty, Madam Deputy President, it's not pretty at all.

We all know the whys and the wherefores of how we find ourselves in this position considering the second budget delivered for the 2025-26 financial year, this second iteration differentiated from its May counterpart by the designation of 'interim'. However, it's worthwhile to briefly place the current state Budget within the context of the analysis of and the concerns about that May version, that was given as a pivotal catalyst resulting in that snap election in July. A key criticism of the May Budget was its refusal, or just gross failure, to take on board and act on the Eslake Independent Review of Tasmania's State Finances, which was released in August 2024.

A good eight months between the release of that independent Eslake report and the presentation of the May state Budget one would think would provide sufficient time to consider the recommendations of that independent review of our financial system, and respond accordingly with a fit-for-purpose fiscal reform plan as outlined in the next state Budget. One would have thought that it did indeed provide the political cover to bring forward a genuine proposal for reform, back in that May Budget. If there was a moment that a pivot could have happened to actual action from this government on fiscal reform, that was it, and we didn't see

hide nor hair of it. We know that it was certainly not the case, that is what was presented in the May Budget, despite the clear articulation in the 2024 Eslake Independent Review that:

Tasmania's general government finances have deteriorated sharply over the past six years and will do so further over the next three years.

The range of recommendations required to address revenue and expenditure challenges to shift the state towards fiscal sustainability were largely ignored by the former treasurer, in that earlier May Budget. Further, the May Budget tried to blithely blame everyone else from the federal government, to previous state governments long in the past which were in existence well over a decade ago. It also tried to blame the bogeyman of the public sector for this government. By doing so, by throwing that blame around at all and sundry, that earlier budget attempt was roundly criticised for kicking the development of coherent fiscal reforms can down the road.

The reason why it's informative to briefly remind ourselves why it is we're dealing with an 'interim Budget' in November, the second for the financial year, is to test and evaluate to what extent were those key lessons learned by the government, from the disastrous May Budget to the current interim one now before us. The answer is resoundingly clear in terms of lessons learned - very little is the answer. Very few lessons learned, despite the interim Budget presenting 'a marginally less dire picture of Tasmania's public finances', which was the summary from economist Saul Eslake. The current Budget papers and the current Treasurer's speech on this Budget revealed that unfortunately, very little of long-term strategic substance was in fact learned.

One change, though, was evident, and that's the effort made to try to sugarcoat the reality is persisting. This interim 2025-26 Budget has been described in some quarters as 'a work of fiction', and I would have to agree. The Treasurer's formal budget speech and the interim Budget papers presented a fantastical presentation of sets of numbers, which do not add up, and a range of ideologically-driven policy approaches which threaten to entrench the fact those numbers will keep failing to add up, far into the future. Not only did the Treasurer present a work of fiction, it is, I would say, a dark fantasy of some kind, Tim Burton-esque, perhaps. Exaggeration, distortion and clearly disconnected from reality, the reality of the average Tasmanian. We were told of 'realistic optimism' and 'success of the past decade'. Absolute fantasy.

Further, Tasmanians were told of their 'bright future' amidst the promises of a 'self-sustaining Budget'. Sadly, I think what we will find is many Tasmanians are struggling to find secure housing, to keep their heads above the increasing costs of living and they may well have a different definition of realistic optimism, or a sense of when their future may be bright. Certainly, the approximately 2800 public sector employees facing unemployment in coming years may not be sharing such a bright vision of optimism for their future.

Another example of that glossing over or, 'gaslighting' may be another term, is the reliance upon Tasmania's apparently lowest unemployment rate of any state as an indicator of a growing and strong economy. However, what isn't said is the fact that a much smaller proportion of Tasmania's population is in work, or actively looking for it, compared to the rest of the nation. Tasmania is at 61.4 per cent as of September compared to the national figure of 67 per cent. That's just one example of selective use of data that this government uses to manipulate a narrative.

Selective use of data is a speciality of this Rockliff Liberal government. You only have to look at the much-trumpeted 10,000 new homes by 2032 to see another example. That rubbery

number of 'new homes' is going to include blocks of land, crisis accommodation beds - which are absolutely needed but by no means a secure, long-term affordable home - houses taken out of the existing private rental or property market which are not new additional supply, just repurposed, et cetera, et cetera. That 10,000 new homes is a flashy headline grab for media and social media, but in reality, it's nothing but manipulation and spin. There are many more examples like this, but I move on.

Others such as Mr Saul Eslake, as I mentioned before outside this place, and here in this place, including in these budget replies from members for Elwick, Huon, Montgomery, Murchison and Mersey have already placed granular critiques of this Budget on the public record, and I'm not going to be delving into the numbers in as much detail as those members in my contribution. However, I will point to the glaring common failure shared in both the May and the current interim Budget: their failure to even attempt to grapple with the financial structural challenges that our state faces, or provide a holistic plan to get from the current situation to a position of actual fiscal sustainability.

Bizarrely, the Treasurer has tried to describe this Budget as a glide path to surplus and a balanced budget. That's nothing less than deliberate obfuscation, an attempt to disguise the utter lack of any real plan for equitable budget repair. In fact, last Friday, the day after the Budget was brought down, the Treasurer said on ABC Mornings radio, 'and so with budget repair, and that's their language, I would say budget improvement.' That's a farcical degree of denial right there. These interim Budget papers present a doubling down as it were, a more deliberate and perverse kicking of that budget repair can down the road. A newspaper editorial in The Mercury put it pithily on Saturday:

The old saying goes that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second-best time is now. So too with budget repair.

And then further:

The nature of the problem should be well understood. The mounting debt problem facing the state Budget was laid out in Treasury's Fiscal Sustainability Report as far back as 2021. It was elegantly restated in Saul Eslake's Independent Review of Tasmania's State Finances in 2024, and yet the government seems determined to put off decisive action for as long as possible. Having ruled out tax increases and asset sales, spending cuts are the preferred method of balancing the books, with increasing numbers of public-sector job cuts on the cards.

That paints a picture a little more realistic and a little starker than the Treasurer's preferred terminology of 'budget improvement'. But language semantics aside, the critical issue of, and the urgent need for meaningful structural fiscal reform of the state's finances is widely recognised outside the executive government. It has been for a long, long time: and no, Treasurer Abetz, it didn't just start with COVID, as other members have rightly pointed out.

This state and the nation received much earlier warning bells, for example, in the form of the global financial crisis (GFC) in 2009. And there have been other instances prior to that which threw into sharp relief our vulnerability to external global financial pressures and limited domestic capacity to mitigate those impacts. At the core of the growing cause for real structural reform is recognition for the need for greater and more equitable resilience to be hard-baked into those areas of our financial system which the state can control or mitigate.

During the COVID period, I and many other voices from the community sector warned that so-called corrective budgetary measures risked calcifying current social and economic inequities, that we risked entrenching the growing chasm between the haves and the have nots: those with hope and those without. As the Mercury editorial stated, there were calls as far back as 2021:

... to seize the opportunity and seriously assess and restructure how to disrupt intergenerational inequities and consciously rebuild our financial structures upon socially, economically equitable and sustainable foundations.

We were concerned then and we remain concerned now that debt-ridden budgets become the stalking horse to justify politically, ideologically-driven agendas under the guise of 'responsible' financial reforms, particularly budgets with such disparity between revenue capacity and spending levels. Instead of meaningful discussion about real reform, what have we seen since the COVID shock of 2020? Well, let's have a look.

We saw an early 2021 state election with more pork-barrelling than you could poke a stick at, and then again with the early 2024 state election, another festival of splurging from the Liberals as they blithely racked up massive debt in election commitments again, as others have noted. Three-quarters of the debt that we've added over the past decade has been the result of reckless election promises made by the Liberal government.

Let's be clear on what that means: this Liberal government has been prepared to max out our state credit card to the detriment of generations to come, to buy electoral outcomes for themselves, to keep their grip on power, and that's shameful, utterly shameful. In that same shameful vein, we're now seeing positioning in this interim Budget setting up public sector workers as the fiscal fall guy for this government's political self-interest. Let's be clear: nobody argues there is not scope for ongoing improvement and modernising in our public service, absolutely there is.

However, when the only flagged cost saving measure of consequence is to cut spending in one area, such as the public sector and those public services provided, rather than, oh, I don't know, maybe a proposed white elephant on the horizon - we know that the estimated costs have already blown out catastrophically for that white elephant before even the hypothetical sod is turned on it. That's an ideologically driven choice. How should we avoid the ideologically-driven budget 'improvements' over evidence-based, objective budget repair measures?

Well, I want to talk for a moment about budget repair measures to reiterate some of the ideas and proposals that have been previously discussed in this place by me and others and deserve to be reiterated. Maybe, if we keep putting it out there, at some stage the government's going to be desperate enough to pick them up, or we might have a change of government with a more receptive ear to some of these opportunities.

Some members would recall that I've previously proposed that the state establish an independent expert panel to undertake a review of our financial system, particularly including the current and potential revenue streams and how we develop an equitable path to a sustainable future by addressing our revenue issues. 'Equitable' is the key term in this context, and one I'm not hearing much in the context of the interim Budget, that's for sure. The cost and brunt of getting from here to there under this Budget and the projections of the next Budget are not going to be shared equitably or fairly.

For the benefit of new members, I believe it's worthwhile to reiterate my previous call for, for example, an independent expert fiscal reform panel, the purpose of which

would be to take the political self-interest and ideological blockages out of the equation to the greatest extent possible. I also think it's pertinent within the context of recent debates in this place of how to improve parliamentary oversight of the executive's budgetary decisions and implementation.

Ms Forrest - Budget oversight committee.

Ms WEBB - Yes, it didn't do the same thing, and I'm not going to get into that debate here, because it's an entirely different vehicle that I'm suggesting, and I will address some of that in my contribution. I will reiterate my call again here, that in the context of the economic challenges faced by our state, the growing inequality that's holding our communities back, and the stark realities of cuts that this and future budgets bode, we urgently need meaningful and effective structural reform of Tasmania's taxation and revenue system. This work becomes more imperative every year.

Enough with the inequitable tinkering. The state deserves comprehensive strategic review and reform. We know this. People will rightly point out that parliament has tried this previously, and some members here were recalling, in fact participated in, a tax review panel established back in 2010 under the power-sharing parliament that was in place at that time. That panel consisted of the then Labor treasurer, Lara Giddings MP, Liberal opposition treasury spokesperson, Peter Gutwein MP, the Greens treasury spokesperson, Tim Morris MP, and as an independent representing the upper House, the member for Murchison, Ms Forrest.

Some might be thinking this sounds a bit like the spurious multi-party panel the Treasurer has convened in the lower House to inform the next Budget, but a key distinction was the 2010 panel's terms of reference were public, they invited public submissions and hearings were also held publicly. However, it couldn't avoid the inevitable unfortunately self-interest of its political party membership with both Labor and Liberal representatives withdrawing from the panel as soon it was time to make hard decisions.

An experience which reinforces the need for such fiscal reform entities to be truly independent of, but also accountable to, the parliament. An independently appointed expert panel to undertake a fiscal review of the state's current taxation and revenue base and mechanisms to address the structural deficit, including how to diversify a progressive taxation and revenue base, purposeful transformative taxation review of the state's recognised narrow taxation and revenue base, should seek potential, modern, equitable and efficient means to broaden that base.

It should test whether the current mix and emphasis of the state tax and revenue base provides the stability and certainty necessary to deliver important community services. Crucially, it could test whether there are any current revenue foregone options presented within our current state tax and revenue mix.

Finally, it could identify any required transitional time frames and support, including funding to assist those most affected by any proposed reforms.

Obviously, and sadly, any suggestion of taxation reform presents considerable political risk to the government or the opposition proposing it. We do need to take the political sting out of it somehow. Hence, I can only ever see this necessary work occurring via an independent panel of experts or another mechanism to achieve similar ends, which would not be constrained by political ideology and should be able to provide rigorous and credible options brought back to this parliament for open debate.

In fact, it would then be on the shoulders of this parliament and this parliament in its makeup, with a minority in the lower house in the other place and a largely independent membership of an upper House should be well placed to be able to advocate for and put appropriate pressure on the executive to begin to adopt measures brought to us by a panel that was independent and was providing advice and recommendations.

The proposed expert panel on this kind of fiscal reform should be open and accountable too. It should invite stakeholder and community submissions and it would report to this parliament, not to the government of the day. As such, it could then inform parliamentary input and oversight of the government's implementation of any recommendations made by the expert panel or in fact parliament exerting its power and using the mechanisms available to it to push the government towards the implementation of those recommendations.

We already have a similar model in play with the commission of inquiry report and recommendations which we received and tabled in this parliament. We then established a joint sessional committee tasked with examining the implementation of the recommendations that came from that separate independent commission of inquiry via their report.

I mentioned foregone potential revenue sources as needing review. This is a weakness in this interim budget, for sure. In fact, the bipartisan aversion to tackling this component of fiscal responsibility in a constructive manner is a broader weakness beyond just one particular budget or government.

However, in the context of this particular interim Budget, it's important to not just brush off the set of figures comprising the state's revenue base. As the Treasurer's speech details, the total revenue for the general government sector is estimated to be \$9.5 billion. And as we are all aware, the majority of that \$9.5 billion state income, two thirds in fact, is derived from federal grants.

The Treasurer goes to considerable pains to emphasise how our largest revenue source, the GST, is, and I quote:

Highly sensitive to national consumer spending population share and GST relativity determined by the Commonwealth Grants Commission.

Hence, Mr President, we have the periodic posturing and arguably between the states and the Commonwealth and between all states vying for larger slices of the GST pie. We've all witnessed that GST caper and I'm sure we'll continue to do so.

However, it's interesting to note the extent to which the government positions both our reliance upon and our vulnerability to variations in federal grants as the context framing the fiscal choices the government does have the power and flexibility to make.

Primarily, I mean the decision to rely almost exclusively on cutting spending with minimal focus, if any, on investigating additional or alternative revenue sources. This is despite the Treasurer's speech stating - and I quote:

Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Resumed from above.

[3.01 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I was speaking about the government's decision to rely almost exclusively on cutting spending with minimal focus, if any, on investigating

additional or alternative revenue sources, and this is despite the Treasurer's speech on the Budget stating, and I quote:

Just 1 per cent change in the GST pool of Tasmania's relativity could result in revenue shifts of about \$38 million to \$20 million, respectively.

With further warnings delivered that the consequences of any such shift are very real, the Treasurer then went on to say the following, and I quote:

Our fiscal strategy seeks to maintain a stable and diversified revenue base, ensuring that temporary fluctuations in one source, particularly federal government funding, do not undermine the delivery of essential services.

There we have it: a recognition of the need for a fiscal strategy focused on maintaining a stable and diversified revenue base. Imagine my surprise to hear the Treasurer on ABC Mornings radio last Friday, the day after the Budget was delivered, be dismissive of any talk of enhancing or diversifying locally raised income by stating, and again I quote from that radio interview:

Even if the government were to increase taxes by 10 per cent across the board, it would represent a 3 per cent increase in revenue. That is marginal at best.

The statement infers that 3 per cent is somehow not worth the effort, but let's be clear then about what is not worth the effort. As the Treasurer's speech details, the total revenue for the general government sector for 2025-26 is estimated to be \$9.5 billion dollars. Three per cent of \$9.5 billion is approximately \$284.9 million. Remember, the Treasurer's own speech warned that even a 1 per cent fluctuation in GST revenue presents real consequences. Therefore, surely, a potential 3 per cent increase in revenue could make as equally a real difference. Just to be very clear, I'm not advocating blindly for a blanket 10 per cent increase across our current state taxes. I hope my discussion point in this sense is not maliciously misrepresented somewhere else. Instead, I'm illustrating that if the state puts in the work and truly examined if our revenue base is sufficiently modern, equitable and diversified, even a small but sustainable revenue increase of a few percent can make a significant difference.

Try telling those young people still being abused at the Ashley Youth Detention Centre - because it remains open and in use, contrary to the commission of inquiry's explicit recommendation it be closed immediately - that the potential foregone, say \$284 million, is not worth the effort. Try telling the TasTAFE Lab Tech students and teachers who are seeing that invaluable course be priced out of existence that potential income is not worth the effort to achieve. Or try telling TasTAFE Arts and Creative Industries students and teachers also facing extinction on dubious prioritisation grounds, seeing their accessible subsidies dry up virtually overnight. That would be a pittance in a small increase of our revenue. Or the Tasmanian National Preventative Mechanism, a responsibility under our Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture legislation who's issued repeated warnings it cannot meet its statutory obligations due to being critically underfunded and under-resourced. Or our invaluable Neighbourhood Houses around the state. Particularly, I'm going to mention my Kingston Neighbourhood House in my electorate which delivers crucial services and provides important avenues for community connection and social inclusion, but which is struggling to maintain essential facilities. The list could go on and on.

Of course we can't do all of those things, but significant things can be done, even with a small percentage increase in our own revenue sources in this state. As Saul Eslake recently commented on the interim Budget:

If the government had actually made a start on a combination of revenue and expenditure measures in today's interim Budget, there would have been a better chance. The fruits of doing so, in terms of a more credible and sustainable trajectory for the key budget numbers presented in today's budget papers, would become apparent before the next election, whenever that might be.

In particular, whilst acknowledging that raising taxes is an especially difficult choice for a Liberal government, there would have been more time to explain the need for such choices to the electorate, and perhaps a greater opportunity to foreshadow some tax relief at the next election by getting Tasmania's finances on a more sustainable footing before then. These opportunities and others have been foregone.

To reiterate, meaningful fiscal structural reform and budget repair require both revenue and expenditure to be seriously and equitably reviewed and addressed. This is more than a missed opportunity in my book: it's an irresponsible refusal to seize the opportunity. This power-sharing parliament is potentially the best chance in decades to attempt to break the bipartisan fiscal structural reform inertia and to put paid to the inevitable, childish 'who will blink first', when it comes to modernising and diversifying our state taxation and revenue base. As Mr Eslake said, 'Those opportunities and others have been foregone.' It is the Tasmanian people, particularly the most vulnerable among us, who are going to pay the price big time.

I previously mentioned our recent discussions in this place regarding how to improve parliament scrutiny and input and input of the executive when it comes to financial management and budget. Given the Treasurer referred to his multi-party panel during his budget speech, I think it's appropriate to canvass other and more inclusive options for consideration in this response I'm giving today.

Some members here may recall that once upon a time this parliament used to have another joint committee, the Working Arrangements Committee. The principle role of that committee was to examine and recommend to both Houses measures which may improve the performance and efficiency of the parliament. That committee provided a transparent, accountable mechanism by which proposals to improve parliamentary workings were discussed, including breaking any legislative deadlocks between the two Chambers, for example. Advice from stakeholders was sought to inform those discussions and recommendations made and reported to parliament for consideration.

As an example of the fruits of that committee, in 1998 that committee tabled a report reviewing and recommending the permanent establishment of government business enterprise scrutiny committees, something that hadn't been present before and now is a part of our architecture of scrutiny here. It would be a useful move for this parliament to consider reconvening something like the Working Arrangements of Parliament Joint Committee, particularly to then examine the most appropriate and effective mechanisms available to our Westminster parliament to have input into and scrutinise fiscal and budgetary decisions made by the government of the day. It would be an appropriate parliamentary mechanism. For example, I'd like to see such a committee examine the proposal that I've spoken about at various times: that we could look at how to better improve our Estimates processes.

I like the idea, and think it should be examined for value, of having two sets of Estimates sessions annually. For example: one set of Estimates linked to the state budget, focused narrowly on budget numbers and fiscal indicators, and at a separate time, timed to occur after the tabling of departmental annual reports, another set of estimates specifically focusing on examining policy positions, indicators and outcomes as reflected in those annual reports. That's

a model that has been adopted in New Zealand, and it would be worth considering its appropriateness for our jurisdiction.

It would give us two chances to scrutinise the government, both on their investment through the budget, but also on their policy outcomes that are being delivered and reported in annual reports. It's just an idea. My point is we should be setting up a mechanism that we can look at and examine a range of ideas about how we can strengthen our scrutiny in this place and be very active in doing so. I would hope to participate in that sort of process, certainly putting forward ideas for consideration.

Even as a more straightforward first step in relation to our current arrangements, I would argue that in the interests of more effective scrutiny, there's a case for each House to have separately scheduled budget Estimates scrutiny hearings on successive weeks, rather than have them held concurrently. I'm convinced that we should be looking at the scope and the powers also of our existing committees, especially our joint standing and sessional committees, and asking ourselves how they may be improved in their operation and potentially the strength and breadth of what they do.

One of our jobs here is to be considering how we can better undertake our key role of scrutiny of the executive on behalf of the Tasmanian people. Mechanisms for that consideration should be built into our parliamentary structures and should be an active matter of interest and endeavour for all members. I hope that in this place we see a further and ongoing, active consideration of opportunities to improve our capacity for effective scrutiny.

Something to add here, actually, is just to note the purpose of our scrutiny. It's not to be shouting into a void. We actually need an informed electorate so at crunch time when a government presents itself for re-election, an informed and educated citizenry can be making decisions about how well that government has done and whether they want to vote them back in or not. It's our job here to be constantly providing information and bringing it into the public domain so that the community can have the information they need to make that decision when they vote.

Our scrutiny has a purpose beyond just what happens in this place, but ripples out to the community to help our democracy function in the way it should, so voters can hold governments to account, ultimately, at the ballot box when they're placing their vote. That decision should be made on an informed assessment by the voter of how well the government has delivered on its mandate as an executive.

To move on from those potential budgetary oversight reforms and ways that we can think about improving our scrutiny, I'd now like to focus on some key areas that I regard as important to highlight in relation to our state budget. I will speak about things that I do typically talk about in terms of a normal budget, because although this is what the Treasurer called an 'interim Budget', that doesn't mean we shouldn't be looking at it as thoroughly as we would a 'normal budget'.

A policy area that I regularly speak about in relation to the state budget is that of housing and homelessness. I do that because having a secure, affordable long-term home is the essential basis to a decent life. The lack of that is not only what is holding so many Tasmanians back; it's holding our whole state back, and it will be a brake on budget repair.

I believe all members here will have received Anglicare's quarterly housing report for the July to September quarter this year. That report is grim reading. It tells us there has been a 34 per cent increase in the number of Tasmanians seeking housing support from the Housing

Connect Front Door in that quarter. There's been an 88 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough. There's been a 54 per cent increase in people living in inadequate or substandard dwellings.

Strikingly, it states that some Tasmanians are living in conditions more commonly seen in developing countries, for example: substandard dwellings, including sheds without running water, bathroom facilities or kitchens. The report speaks to the fact that the number of children in families seeking housing support has grown by 60 per cent. These are really striking and disturbing numbers: increases of 88 per cent for sleeping rough; 54 per cent for inadequate and substandard dwellings; and a 60 per cent increase in the number of children in families seeking support.

This is desperation. All the government does in response to these sorts of grim tidings from the sector is parrot a line that people should 'contact Housing Connect Front Door and she'll be right,' as if that's some sort of solution or end in itself, and we know full well it's not. Meanwhile, the Housing Connect staff, who I have the utmost respect for because they provide a caring and supporting service and they're professional about doing it, are simply unable to offer what most clients presenting to them need: a secure, stable, affordable home.

We've had 11 years of failure from this government on providing that most basic need to its citizens. SARC modelling (the Social Action and Research Centre at Anglicare) suggests that we will see approximately 14,000 Tasmanians waiting for social housing by 2032. That's not very far down the track. It's seven years from now. Seven years ago we were in 2018, and that's not very far behind us. 2032 is not very far ahead of us and 14,000 Tasmanians are projected to be on the social housing waiting list by that time, and that's calculating in the government's little litany of things that they're apparently attempting to do in this space.

So many people are being driven onto that social housing waiting list because they're falling out of the private rental market, as this housing crisis, which is what we called it in 2018, has now grown to a life-defining emergency in this state in 2025.

The private rental market is the housing tenure the government has utterly neglected to act on in any meaningful way. Our private rental market is in catastrophic market failure and, as Anglicare plainly says in its report, government intervention is urgently needed. With the critically low vacancy rates across the state, largely it's well below 1 per cent, and no meaningful brake that is able to be applied to rent increases in this state, we see rents outpacing wages by at least 15 per cent. It's virtually impossible for a young adult to move out of home in this state into a rental property, even a share house. It is impossible for a person or a family on welfare support to rent affordably in this state if they're trying to enter the private rental market.

People who are fortunate enough to be in rentals already are terrified they will be evicted at the end of their current lease, which can happen without any reason at all because we have failed to keep up with contemporary practise and prevent no fault evictions like every other state has. This terror stops tenants making maintenance requests or raising issues that might put them on their landlord's radar for eviction at the end of the lease.

And while we recently passed in this place the pets in rental legislation, which on paper expands the rights of tenants when it comes to having a pet, in the context of catastrophic market failure in the private rental market, all tenants' rights become much harder to assert and protect.

The Anglicare report asks the question - do we have the right response to reality? The answer has to be a resounding no. Indicators are all going in the wrong direction. We are running away from reality here and that's to the detriment of the most vulnerable amongst us in our community.

Housing is a foundation to all other aspects of a good life, health, education, family, community participation, employment and on and on. Because of the Liberal government's failure on housing, the challenges are greater, and the costs are higher in our health system, in education system, in community services system and our criminal justice system. The government response to this sort of assertion being made or put before them is to simply give us a laundry list of things that they're doing in the housing space. That's utterly meaningless. It's not delivering the results.

Half-hearted efforts like the Family Violence Rapid Rehousing Program and the Private Rental Incentive Scheme have failed to make any tangible difference. They have not achieved the outcomes needed. They are at best busy work from this government, not solutions.

The data doesn't lie, this is a situation that has radically deteriorated under their watch. It is this Liberal government's failure, and it is their responsibility. The story has always been the same when it comes to housing. The government can do more and it isn't.

Ms O'Connor - They choose not to.

Ms WEBB - That's exactly right. Not only are we not building enough housing of all tenure types, but importantly, the government are pulling none of the levers that would make a palpable difference in the private rental market.

No doubt, the siloed approach contributes to this because we have our Residential Tenancy Act, the primary legislation to address matters in the private rental market, under the responsibility of a different minister to the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, whose portfolio is feeling the most ferocious effects of the failure to act on private rental market reform.

We need to comprehensively reform our Residential Tenancy Act and as key priorities deliver stronger guardrails on rent increases and like every other state, get rid of no fault evictions at the end of leases. The continued failure to address these two things has been a key driver of the massive increase in homelessness in Tasmania over the terms of this Liberal government.

We also need to address the decimation of our private rental market by short stay accommodation with meaningful regulation and controls at a local government level. We see this government's failure writ large in the relentless rise in the number of Tasmanians on the waiting list for social and public housing. Every single one of those applicants is an indictment on this government.

Homes Tasmania is looking more and more like a failed experiment. It has confirmed the fears that were stated when the legislation came through this place to form it: that it would be less effective to take the responsibilities out of a government department and would be an exercise in keeping accountability at arm's length. The damning review of Homes Tasmania released in June, is an admission that it isn't working as planned. Already we've seen strategic housing policies shifted back into Department of State Growth.

Another area of particular interest and concern to me is the implementation of the commission of inquiry recommendations. In speaking on this topic here today, I'm going to

note that today is National Survivors Day, 12 November. This day recognises and commemorates the courage and journeys of survivors of sexual assault and institutional abuse, their supporters and whistleblowers across Australia. In that spirit, I state here my acknowledgement of those who are victim/survivors of sexual assault and institutional abuse; and those whistleblowers who have tirelessly and at great personal cost fought to see the truth brought to light. In particular, I honour those who, through their courage and commitment, caused the commission of inquiry to be established; and whose contributions made that commission of inquiry such a watershed moment in our state.

The implementation of recommendations from the commission of inquiry is an ongoing piece of work. One that is occupying a great deal of time and attention across various departments, and rightly so.

I will also take the opportunity to acknowledge there are many, many public servants across those departments who are working with care and conviction to deliver on both the letter and the spirit of the commission of inquiry recommendations. This is complex work, and when coupled with the significant cultural change that has been identified as necessary, to bring about real improvement in the safety of children in our state, it is a mountain we are all climbing together. Thank you, to those public servants who are driving and contributing to this shared task.

To speak in some detail on some matters from the Budget in relation to implementation of commission of inquiry recommendations. I will mention a few to put on the record. I note there is \$15.8 million over four years for independent statutory bodies like the Commission for Children and Young People, the Office of the Independent Regulator and the Office of the Independent Monitor. It's very positive to have oversight bodies in place, as a result of these recommendations. It's crucial for ensuring the recommendations are implemented and are effectively working to deliver the outcome of greater safety for Tasmanian children.

I do have to ask - which we will explore in more detail next week no doubt during Estimates - is the funding allocated enough for them to undertake their statutory roles? We do have a history and habit in this state, from this government, of underfunding oversight entities. That's something to be interrogated carefully. I note there's \$500,000 for the office of the Tasmanian National Preventative Mechanism, under our OPCAT obligations. I am yet to understand whether this is going to be enough to provide for them to actually do their job, this time around. Certainly, in May, they weren't provided with sufficient funding to actually do their role, just enough funding to exist on paper.

There is \$155.3 million allocated for the new youth detention facility at Pontville. This is such a controversial project. We've spoken here a lot - I'm not going to dwell on it in detail today - but we do need to be closing AYDC as a matter of urgency. It was a matter of urgency two years ago, when the commission of inquiry brought down their final report. It remains a matter of urgency now two years down the track.

It is still not clear what the new Pontville youth detention facility's final cost will be. It is going through the planning system, which is positive in terms of progress. There are still significant criticisms about the model of care. It's certainly a different facility and model of care to what was outlined in the commission of inquiry recommendations and more needs to be unpicked in that space.

I am concerned that with the brutal cuts we've had foreshadowed, that must come in the next state budget and onwards, under this government's approach to budget repair. I am quite afraid we will see 'savings' - I say that in inverted commas - made in the way the new facility

is put in place, developed, and then operated. That would be absolutely tragic to see. It would undermine the whole intent of a new model of youth detention and the therapeutic approach it's supposed to be taking. That's to be examined with eagle eyes and a continued, very active watching brief. I am pleased we have a committee that's tasked with particularly scrutinising these recommendations as they are rolled out.

I also note in the Budget \$4 million to support community youth justice, including \$1.5 million over two years to support new, local place-based initiatives targeting the root causes of youth offending. That's positive. It's optimistic, I believe, to focus on preventative measures in the community. It's what we need. My concern is that we must ensure that the investments are made in services and supports that are evidence-based and accountable and don't present risks in and of themselves. I will be carefully looking at the intention of how that money is to be spent.

I was pleased to not see more irresponsible election promises made about funding into this space in the most recent election. As we've seen in elections past, this is an area of public policy that should never be the subject of reckless election commitments and promises. It is always something that should be approached with absolute rigour and services designed, developed, tendered and then appointed through an absolutely rigorous process to get us the best services for the best outcomes, for the most accountability and greater safety of our children.

I note out-of-home care and foster and kinship carers have had some uplift in this Budget. That's positive. I am concerned though, and I know we had some discussion just in our Question Time today, about the uplift for foster and kinship carers. It's for one year, recognising that there's a process underway to more comprehensively assess where to from here in terms of support for foster and kinship carers, which is great to have that review process, but the assumption would have to be that it is going to tell us we need to pay them more than they're currently being paid.

While the Budget does indicate the one-year uplift while the review happens, the fact that there's nothing in the forward Estimates is just a little device to make the budget look better in the forward Estimates, because we do have to assume there will be more funding needed in this space across those forward Estimates as a result of the review. Otherwise, the government's basically admitting, no, it's a one-year, 15 per cent boost, and then we just go back to what we were doing before.

I was surprised and wondered about the particular mention in the budget papers about the Intensive Family Engagement Service. It is an important part of our child safety service. It provides support for families who are assessed as experiencing complex issues that directly impact on the safety of children, and the Budget points to funding of \$4 million a year for two years, which is apparently to continue the IFES services, up to 88 packages.

Again, I'm not sure why it's detailed there, if this is new funding or not. We will dig into that in Estimates. It looks to me like it's a continuation of existing funding, but again, in the forward Estimates: nothing. Two years' worth of funding and then blank, blank across the out years of the forward Estimates. I don't understand in the first place why it's an announcement, to be funding that service which is already funded. It doesn't seem to be that it's new funding or even necessarily additional funding, and it certainly drops away in the forward Estimates just so we get that better-looking bottom line in year 3 and 4. So that's one for looking at.

One of the things that I always look to after a budget is the comments that are provided by the representative bodies in different spaces of policy. I did look at the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) budget comments, and I'm going to read a quote from the comments they made about this Budget after it had been brought down last week. This is what YNOT partly said in their statement:

We welcome the continued investment in implementing the commission of inquiry recommendations, including the establishment of the new Commissioner for Children and Young People, the Office of the Implementation Monitor and the funding of out-of-home care and youth justice initiatives.

And it goes on to say:

Of particular concern in the budget papers is the consolidation of funding for the delivery of the commission of inquiry recommendations and the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. Without transparent allocation of these funds, it remains unclear how the government intends to meet its policy commitments to young Tasmanians. YNOT will be actively seeking clarification on these budget allocations to ensure that promises translate into real outcomes.

I will certainly be endeavouring to assist YNOT in that task of trying to make sense of these allocations and look for transparency that at the moment isn't apparent. I'm always going to have a keen interest in the health and sustainability of our community services industry in Tasmania. This is the industry I worked in prior to coming to this place, and it remains close to my heart. I hold it dear, not just out of a sense of nostalgia, though, but because I'm acutely aware of how fundamentally important it is to our state. The community services industry is the glue that holds our communities and our state together. The viability of this industry is a key determinant of health, employment and social cohesion across our state. I believe it's useful to have a clear picture of this industry and the magnitude of the task it faces, given the vastly inadequate funding it receives.

This industry has 28,000 workers; the community service industry is a huge employer in our state. It is doing work to support our community, and some of the challenges that it is endeavouring to assist us with in this state, and to solve the issues of, include the fact that 81,500 Tasmanians - I will just say that again: 81,500 Tasmanians are living below the poverty line, 14 per cent of us. This has risen 16 per cent in two years.

We also have 50,000 Tasmanians experiencing energy poverty. One in three Tasmanian households are food insecure. There is now an absolute record of 5336 applicants on the priority social housing wait list in September this year, and the average wait times for those applicants is more than 18 months. We've had the sector note a 34 per cent rise in people seeking housing support, and an 88 per cent rise in rough sleeping just in this last quarter's report. These are desperate numbers, and it is our community services industry that is on the frontline of addressing these needs and these challenges for us.

The community services industry went into this Budget, and the election that preceded it, with some really basic funding asks. It was seeking to be supported in this Budget by having funding certainty provided through five-year contracts, appropriate indexation and outcomes-based frameworks around funding. They were looking for an industry sustainability program with standard contracts, reduced reporting, streamlined processes and shared services. They were looking for a 10-year update, and funding for a 10-year update of the state of Tasmania's

community services industry report, and they're also looking for a midterm review of the Community Services Industry Plan 2021-31.

That's what they went into the Budget asking for. It's pretty modest, actually, for a peak body of the industry that employs 28,000 workers in this state and faces the challenges on our behalf that I've just described. What did they get out of the Budget? After having those very modest and basic funding asks presented, the key announcement for the community service industry was \$150,000 for a community services sustainability initiative. None of those other things were delivered on, effectively, for this industry, for our state. That's just shameful. I use that word a lot, and it probably loses its potency in overuse, but I just can't think of another way to describe it.

These are people who are working on the frontline. These are people who go above and beyond every single day with people who are in the most desperate of circumstances, and often it's at great personal cost to the 28,000 workers in this industry, and they have basically been given a slap in the face through this Budget, and we're looking ahead to horror in the next one coming. TasCOSS has said in response to Thursday's Budget:

We remain concerned at the level of debt we are taking on to fund infrastructure projects that could be deferred and the impact this has on the amount of funding available to deliver essential services to Tasmanians. Community services represent a small fraction of the state's total budget, but this investment prevents the need for higher expenditure across other portfolios such as Health, Justice and Education.

As we look to the budget next year, we urge the Treasurer to take a balanced approach to budget repair by considering a mix of revenue-raising and targeted investment that prevents costly crises, not through cuts that guarantee them. Community services are not a 'nice to have'. Government expenditure should be prioritised to deliver essential services and support to Tasmanians that will enable them to fully participate in our economy.

The community sector is already underfunded, with demand for support far outstripping what can be delivered by service providers. This is an industry already going above and beyond what they're funded to provide. It is guaranteed, absolute rock solid, guaranteed that cuts to other service areas, whether that's health, education, criminal justice, whatever we choose to cut, it will drive demand into our Community Services sector. That means that any cuts directly to the Community Services sector in coming budgets will be a false economy because this is a sector will need more in the future, not less. Now is the time for greater investment, not cuts to the Community Services industry.

Cuts will inevitably mean that the first things jettisoned will be long term prevention and early intervention programs. Those are what will be neglected. For example, in the area of family and sexual violence services and support, I did note the Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance said that the interim Budget does not meet the scale of the state's family and sexual violence crisis being experienced. They're warning that rising demand, growing wait lists and stagnant investment continue to leave women and children unsafe. In comments on the Budget, the Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Alliance said this, and I'll quote, it's a longish quote, Mr President, and I wanted it here on the record because it explains how, by failing to sufficiently fund, particularly prevention services, we are digging a hole for ourselves. That is just horrific. The quote from the alliance is this:

Reports of family violence have risen by nearly 70 per cent over the past five years and sexual violence by 180 per cent. Yet funding to specialist support services has not shifted to match that demand. This Budget doesn't meet the scale of the crisis. We're seeing demand rising and funding for specialist family and sexual violence services flat. Women and children are waiting months, sometimes years for support. Our frontline Family Violence Services report women are having to wait far too long. Sexual Violence Services report significant wait times for survivors to access much needed trauma counselling, including victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. Women experiencing family and sexual violence are increasingly self-representing in court because they cannot access specialised legal services.

We are also hearing from the sector that critical investment is needed in services to support children and young people impacted by family violence, in programs that educate children on respectful relationships, along with dedicated support for Aboriginal women, an investment in dedicated housing including crisis accommodation, transition, and long-term homes. This must be met with a sustainable and skilled workforce to meet rising demand. Tasmania has the chance to prevent harm and reduce demand, but that requires sustained investment, not only short-term crisis responses. Every Tasmanian deserves to live safely and with dignity and agency.

In this Budget, and looking ahead to the next Budget and the measures foreshadowed to be in it, we can see that those punished most severely will be Tasmanians doing it most tough. We all know the essential services, supports and community building done by Neighbourhood Houses in our local communities. Those same essential community supports are at risk with the peak body Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania commenting on this Budget:

The Tasmanian Government has maintained the same level of funding for Neighbourhood Houses in this Budget, but this level of funding is not safe or sustainable. Neighbourhood Houses are resilient but have their limits. Our houses, people and volunteers are being stretched to breaking point. We continue to work with Government to find solutions to ensure Tasmanians don't lose an essential community infrastructure. Neighbourhood Houses are the trusted local hubs at the heart of Tasmanian communities, open to everyone, always. Every week they provide connection, learning and vital support to over 28,000 Tasmanians.

We are taking our Neighbourhood Houses in this state for granted. This Budget takes our Neighbourhood Houses for granted. Politicians love nothing more than to turn up at Neighbourhood Houses for a feel-good photo opportunity to pop onto the socials, but when it comes to funding from this Government, they get scraps and window dressing. We've got Neighbourhood Houses closing services in all areas of our state. In some cases, they're falling apart at the seams. The Kingston Neighbourhood House in my patch, which leaks through the light fittings when it rains, and has to send staff home. This is the way we are taking our Neighbourhood Houses for granted. It's not good enough, and importantly, because we're talking about the Budget, it's false economy to be underfunding these supports in our community.

This has been described by TasCOSS as a 'treading-water budget'. My fear though, for the community sector, is that it will be 'treading water' in shark-infested oceans with an armada

of fins coming towards them in the May 2026 state Budget. I fear for the result in our communities.

Moving on, I take this opportunity once again to restate my very firm position that the Premier of this state should hold the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio. Reconciliation with the traditional owners of Lutruwita, this island home, should be an ongoing top priority as a state and as a community. It requires the gravitas of the elected leader of the state, in the form of the Premier, to take on that responsibility. I do not understand the reasoning behind removing Aboriginal Affairs from DPAC, when it was shifted in November 2024 to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. That sent a bad message, I believe.

While I welcome the commitment to establish a commissioner for aboriginal children and young people as was recommended by the commission of inquiry, we have learned the hard way here that it will take continual vigilance to ensure the new commissioner is adequately resourced and empowered to fulfil its role. Further, I note that the Budget papers pronounce the increase of funding to a select few important Aboriginal heritage programs and the long-awaited funding for the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania that it requires to ensure that entity can fulfil its mandated core administrative obligations - all of which are welcome and necessary. However, table 9.2 of Budget Paper Volume 1 shows that the Output Group 6's initial increase for 2025-26 then drops away over the forward Estimates.

We've got a familiar song we're singing here: an initial bit of funding in this Budget and perhaps for the following year, and then nothing in the forward Estimates. What are we to interpret by that? Is suddenly the need to do basic administration by, say, the Aboriginal Land Council, going to fall away in years three and four of this Budget? Not likely. We're either going to be cutting them to ribbons then with a drop in funding, or we're going to be putting more money into the Budget. No wonder we're not wanting to put it there now, because that would disrupt the very misleading narrative that the Treasurer is trying to paint about a pathway - a 'glide pathway' apparently, to better times.

It's a grave concern to see a similar drop-off in funding over the forward Estimates for the Closing the Gap and other Aboriginal projects, which is detailed in table 11.1 of Budget Paper 2 Volume 1. I'm deeply uncomfortable, actually, with the clustering of the Closing the Gap - which I regard as a fundamental human rights delivery program and an obligation on our state - the clustering of that with a line item summarised as 'other Aboriginal projects'. It's arguable that a government genuine about turning around its current poor track record on meeting Closing the Gap obligations would have a separate line item or even an output group dedicated to Closing the Gap. I recognise that not all benchmark obligations will translate into a financial or budgetary representation, but it would help this parliament and the community to track exactly what the government is investing in Closing the Gap if it was in fact in its own line item. Currently, the fact that it's rolled into a line item consisting of other Aboriginal projects conveniently muddies those financial waters.

However, the decrease in funding over the forward Estimates for that particular line item raises concerns that the Closing the Gap funding is set to decrease. That's the only thing we can interpret from that: absence of funding in years three and four. How on earth can the government even pretend it's trying to turn around our shameful failure to meet those agreed Closing the Gap obligations? The other inconvenient truth which I refuse to allow the government to conveniently forget is the commitment it made to progressing truth-telling and treaty. This has to happen. It will happen, eventually. The '2021 Pathway to Truth-Telling and Treaty report' should be a fixture in our annual budgets until its 24 recommendations are implemented and the treaty is signed and delivered. Imagine how far some additional raised

revenue could make - even a portion of the hypothetical 3 per cent the Treasurer was so scornful about on radio - if it was invested in the delivery of the 'Pathway to Truth-Telling and Treaty report' recommendations. It will be the government's decision as to which side of history it will find itself on. Sadly, from a position where it could have been a historic leader in genuine reconciliation of truth-telling and treaty, this government has instead now slunk into the shadows of spineless ignominy.

It's very telling that the week we see many political and community leaders heading to COP30 in Brazil and when international scientific and climate experts are warning of dire consequences should we fail to meet the climate challenge, we see significant cuts made to our climate change funding in this Budget.

It appears the output group 7.2 in Budget Paper 2 Volume 1, Climate Change, suffers a decrease it would appear of \$411,000 for the 2025-26 year, and then a further funding cut of 29 per cent in the forward Estimates for 2026-27. The paucity of detail here in the Budget makes it unclear as to what impact these cuts will have or where what exactly they're going to be doing. What does that mean for the Climate Change Office, for example? In 2024-25 statutory independent review of the Climate Change State Action Act 2008 is currently underway, with its final report expected by the end of this year. It would appear from these budget papers the government is either not expecting recommendations which have any degree of financial component, or does not intend to implement any recommendations made by the independent review?

Again, we're seeing the false juxtaposition of the green economy and climate ambition versus economic growth. In contrast, recent analysis from the OECD and the UN Development Program shows that stepping up and engaging consistently with public and private sectors and communities strengthens rather than weakens economic growth and prosperity. We should be acting on climate change. It will be to our financial detriment ultimately that we don't. Climate action is not just about setting lower emissions targets.

Ms O'Connor - Higher emissions reductions targets.

Ms WEBB - There you go, but also about weaving that necessary transition to all our economic and social strategies. This means aligning climate action with plans to expand opportunity, to improve health, to raise living standards, to build houses. The benefits can be substantial. The reality is that increased investment in clean technologies, improved energy efficiency and strategic reinvestment of carbon revenues needs to be at the centre of our economic policy development and planning.

Yet here we are with this interim budget taking our foot off the electric pedal. A proportion of that hypothetical 3 per cent of additional revenue could make a considerable difference to reprioritising the state's investment in positioning us as leaders in the climate change research, preparedness and climate justice areas.

Another key measure by which we should assess the state budget is what they tell us about the government of the day's approach to maintaining or even strengthening our democratic integrity and oversight mechanisms. These interim budget papers tell us a lot. A grudging we'll do the least necessary approach is very evident in these budget papers. A grudging minimal approach. The ombudsman, the role of many hats in this state received a minor but welcome operational line-item boost for 2025-26, but this is quickly eroded over the forward Estimates, which projects that vital oversight organ receives less than it's currently struggling to survive upon.

The Tasmanian NPM, our OPCAT obligation, despite having significant statutory responsibilities under the OPCAT laws, the national preventative mechanism is provided a measly financial boost for the 2025-26 year and the same the 2026-27 forward Estimates, after which that particular funding drops off a cliff. Surprise, surprise. We sing the same song again, despite it providing to government a detailed implementation plan identifying its operational needs in order to comply with its statutory obligations. That does not seem evident in this budget. The Integrity Commission, another independent oversight entity which has resorted to stating publicly its underfunding is impacting upon its capacity to fulfil its obligations and do its job, another minor boost for the 2025-26 year, but the forward Estimate projections have it receiving less than it does currently.

The Audit Office, an integral public probity office, most people would concur, an office that delivers more than just opinions. This is our statutory entity set up to do expert assessments and audits of our financial situations, the government entities and GBEs, et cetera. This is not an office that is just any Joe Blow out in the street offering an opinion and it should never be dismissed as such.

A member of parliament, whoever that member of parliament may be, should not be dismissive of a statutory entity like our Audit Office and the information provided by the audits that it does of our organs of government, our GBEs and our state-owned companies. To dismiss a very serious finding of our Audit Office is unparliamentary.

Back to the Audit Office in the Budget. A small office it is which routinely punches above its weight with professional advice and public financial accountability outputs. Yet again, it is to experience a decrease in funding immediately after this interim budget, followed by further cuts over the forward Estimates. At a time when there are growing calls for greater, clearer and more robust financial and property scrutiny, premier independent entities funding is being continually curtailed, it would seem. This deliberate policy implementation tells us a lot about the government's priorities and attitudes to scrutiny. While this government likes to claim that it is the most transparent and accountable government ever - which sounds quite like Monty Python to me - it certainly does not intend to have properly functioning independent entities if we go by what is in this Budget.

RTI reforms: moving on to other important scrutiny and transparency measures. Of further concern, is the lack of provision for the implementation of the significant recent Getting Back on Track, independent review of Tasmania's Right to Information framework undertaken by Professor Tim McCormack, and Adjunct Associate Professor Rick Snell. I don't see that in this Budget, we've done this sterling work with these two august professionals, and we don't seem to be intending to fund the implementation of its recommendations. It is yet to be interrogated in Estimates.

The Woolcott Review: we know that there are a range of recommendations forthcoming from the independent Woolcott Review, some of which will have budget implications. Such as, for example: its strategic recommendation 5.4 that a new Commissioner of the State Service be established. Yet, in the interim budget papers, there appears to be silence on any forward planning or provision to act on these significant recommendations coming out of the Woolcott Review.

I want to point out that these policy decisions to keep our integrity and oversight entities chained to a bare minimum financial drip feed, does have enormous fiscal ramifications. As budget paper vol. 1 states:

The scope of the state's abuse related liability may also be affected by the establishment or expansion of redress schemes, adding further uncertainty to long term fiscal impact and reinforcing the need for ongoing actuarial review and monitoring.

Basically, if the state finds itself in a position of having to take responsibility for wrongdoing which occurred on its watch, there is an economic and fiscal cost to our state down the track. Prevention, as we all know, is better than cure.

Fund our oversight entities so they can undertake their mandated statutory duties effectively and without fear or favour and they will assist in reducing the need for future redress schemes which will ultimately help the state's bottom line, and help avert trauma and harm to Tasmanians.

I already publicly called out the regressive step taken by this interim Budget, in the omission of a Gender Budget Impact Statement. I hope this mistake is an aberration, I really do. Ever since this Chamber voted in support of an earlier motion of mine on 8 March 2022, calling for an annual Gender Budget Impact Statement as part of the state budget papers, such a document has been included. However, I do need to note I was highly critical of the first attempt, but I have acknowledged in each subsequent year the improvements that have been made since were genuinely improving every single year. Yet here, we see an interim budget with no Gender Budget Impact Statement. Why is that? There's no explanation provided. I think it is a portent to potentially having this measure jettisoned in future budgets. There hasn't even been a commitment expressed - when this has been pointed out to the government - to make sure there will be one in next May's Budget.

Gender budget impact statements are recognised by other jurisdictions and economic institutions such as the OECD, as crucial economic and social policy tools. The tool recognises that every policy initiative in the budget has potential to impact men, women, non-binary and gender diverse people differently, even if the policy is designed to be gender neutral.

It further recognises these unintended consequences can mean a policy may result in inadvertently worsening the known gender gaps that other policy efforts are striving to close. For example: the failure to prioritise safe and accessible public transport, or housing, or education, or training impacts different genders differently. The failure to include a gender budget impact statement has been noted by other stakeholders. Shelter Tasmania's budget response on Friday 7 November included an observation about their disappointment that there was no gender budget impact statement. They pointed to the fact that:

It provides an important analysis as we seek to address the need for housing support for women facing homelessness.

This policy equity tool is not an optional extra. The gender budget impact statement should be hard-baked into the fiscal and budgetary process, and as stated by the Queensland Council of Social Service report on this matter:

Gender-responsive budgeting involves analysing all policy measures to identify the ways in which the policy can either advantage or potentially disadvantage different cohorts of the Queensland population on the basis of gender. These gender-based differences arise not necessarily by intent but because of different industries, different occupations and different roles in the household, organisations and wider community that men and women tend to take throughout their life path.

It's a really good little encapsulation from the Queensland Council of Social Service about why we look at gender-responsive budgeting and things like an analysis of a budget from a gender lens. A gender lens examination provided via that gender budget impact statement can help render the too-often-invisible ramifications of policy priorities visible so we can actively consider them and interrogate them. This non-discretionary, equity-focused tool is even more critical when we know the government's main attempt to balance the books looking ahead is to rely on cutting the public sector.

Of those earmarked 2800 jobs to go, what is the gender distribution going to be, I wonder. Has anyone in government asked the following policy impact questions and sought to answer them with evidence-based data, insights and analysis? For example, who's likely to benefit most from the policy? Who is at most risk of being disadvantaged or overlooked by a policy? How do particular cohorts of women stand to benefit from or potentially be disadvantaged by this policy, and ultimately, is the policy contributing towards closing gender gaps in the short, immediate or long term? It's not just the employment positions which should be scrutinised under a gender lens; it's also the impact those job cuts will have on service provision, on economic security, social inclusion and wellbeing, for example.

We have to assume in the absence of any indication otherwise, that no gender lens was used to scrutinise the policy deliverables of the interim Budget before us. I'm calling on the government to address this unacceptable omission as part of the formal response to the appropriation bills debate. Specifically, I'm urging the government to provide a reassurance that this omission was a mistaken oversight and to commit to continuing its automatic inclusion in future state budgets.

To conclude, the Treasurer claims interim budget is one that, 'avoids shock waves'. That may be true, but all that guarantees is future tsunamis. This government's wilful refusal to seriously engage in budget repair strategies now is a setup for dire, ideologically-driven cuts in the future - in fact, in the not too distant future with the May 2026-27 state Budget looming.

However, as I've noted during my contribution, there are steps this parliament can take to not only keep the pressure on for meaningful and equitable fiscal structural reform, but also to overhaul and modernise, where appropriate, our budgetary scrutiny and oversight mechanisms. I draw the Chamber's attention once more to a statement made by the Treasurer on last Friday's ABC Mornings radio program:

And so with 'budget repair', and that's their language, I would say 'budget improvement', but whatever our language is, the time for political rhetoric is over. The time for action is now.

Exactly. I agree with the Treasurer. The time for action is now. When it comes to budget repair, and I do consider that language to be the factual description of the challenge before us, I couldn't agree more that the time for political rhetoric is over. The time for action is most definitely now, but the question remains: what action? Most pertinently, will this to-date fiscally-irresponsible Rockliff Liberal government have both the intestinal fortitude and the intellect to take the required action?

As I note the deeply concerning interim state Budget 2025-26, I also reiterate the need for this parliament to seize the opportunity presented by the next five-month window before the May Budget to consider how its scrutiny mechanisms can be strengthened and/or extended. The call to action applies to all of us. I note the Budget.